

@MATTJHANNAN PRESENTS

The Tokyo Cheat Sheet

日本ガイド

Bars, local spots, manners, and zero tourist shit.

13+ BARS

20+ LOCAL SPOTS

FULL ETIQUETTE GUIDE

I personally hate when randos online just spew ChatGPT TripAdvisor recs without actually knowing anything. I'm literally ruining my favorite date spots in the spirit of anti-gatekeeping. I love Tokyo with all of my heart and I want all of you to enjoy it to the fullest.

— Matt

Your Japan Cheat Code

01

Japanese Manners

The 12 moves, eating etiquette, train rules, shrine basics, and the secret social cheat.

02

Tokyo Bar List

13 bars I actually go to. Date spots, speakeasies, natural wine, rooftop vibes, god-tier trios.

03

Tokyo Local Spots

Coffee, sentos, arcades, izakayas, thrift stores, kissaten, and the coolest neighborhood in Tokyo.

Intention and effort matter, no one expects perfection.

Study up a bit, try your best, and you'll be fine.

Y'all got this. — Matt

Japanese Manners

Cheat Sheet For Real Chillers Only

Don't think of these as some ten commandment-like, intense set of rules where you'll be deported if you make any errors. Just study up a bit, try your best, and you'll be fine. Thing is, there are levels to this shit — walking around with an iced coffee is 90000x less rude than talking on the phone in the train; not every rule and custom is equally and maximally offensive.

THE HOMIE-MAXXING STRATEGY

Become a Regular (the humble local gift)

If you like a place and want to come back: bring a small, humble treat next time. Small is key. Expensive gifts can make people uncomfortable. There's all these small local snacks/sweets stores around Japan, buy one in the same neighborhood as the izakaya or bar, and they'll give you extra points for being community-maxxing.

Good examples:

- Local cookies / small sweets (simple packaging)
- Something tiny from your home country (snack-sized)

What to say:

つまらないものですが...

tsumaranai mono desu kedo — "It's nothing special, but..."

Most humble line. 11/10 Japaneseness. Massive flex.

いつもありがとうございます

itsumo arigatō gozaimasu — "Thanks always."

Perfect for regulars.

THE 12 MOVES

Do These Everywhere

- 1 Hand important things with two hands**
Passport, money, cards, tickets. Offer + receive with two hands and a small nod.
- 2 Use the tray when paying**
If there's a little tray, put cash/card on the tray, not directly into someone's hand.
- 3 Point + angle the menu toward staff**
When ordering, tilt the menu toward them while pointing. Reads as "I'm helping you."
- 4 Wipe your "evidence" before you leave**
Crumbs, water ring, mess around your spot. A quick wipe = huge respect.
- 5 Shoes off? Line them up facing the door**
Toes toward the exit. Bonus: do it for your partner too.

THE 12 MOVES (CONTINUED)

- 6 Let people get off first**
Train doors: stand to the sides, then enter. This one is non-negotiable.
- 7 Backpack goes to the front before you board**
Not when you're already crushing someone.
- 8 Talk quieter than you think you need to**
Especially on trains, in small restaurants, in temples/shrines, and in Kyoto vibes.
- 9 Cheers lower than your guest**
When clinking glasses, your glass goes slightly lower. It's a humility signal.
- 10 Pour for others, let them pour for you**
Watch cups. If someone's cup is empty, pour. Also let them return the gesture.
- 11 Seat etiquette: give the best seat**
If you're with someone: offer the inside seat (away from aisle/door) when reasonable.
- 12 Finish your rice if you can**
Not "stuff yourself," but don't leave a bunch behind casually.

KEY PHRASES

Ordering without awkwardness + getting around:

お願いします

onegaishimasu = "please" (万能 = all-purpose)

ありがとうございます

arigatō gozaimasu = "thank you" (polite)

すみません

sumimasen = "excuse me / sorry" (also gets attention)

これ、お願いします

kore, onegaishimasu = "This, please."

おすすめは何ですか？

osusume wa nan desu ka? = "What do you recommend?"

EATING & DRINKING MICRO-MANNERS

- Before eating: say いただきます (itadakimasu). After: ごちそうさまでした (gochisōsama deshita). Instant respect.
- Pouring beer? Keep the label facing the other person. Don't aggressively top off if they're pacing.
- Shared plates: rotate so the best piece faces others. Add: どうぞ (dōzo) = "go ahead."
- Nigiri soy sauce move: dip the fish side, not the rice. Rice soaks and falls apart.

CHOPSTICK BASICS

- Don't stick chopsticks upright in rice (funeral association).
- Don't pass food chopstick-to-chopstick.
- Use the chopstick rest if it exists. If not, set them neatly across your bowl/plate.

TRAIN & STREET ETIQUETTE

- Line up at platforms. No cutting. Stand to the sides so people exit first.
- Phone on silent. Calls are a no-no. Don't block doors.
- Backpack to the front or down by your feet.
- Escalators: Tokyo stands on the left. Osaka on the right. Follow the flow.

SHOES / HOME / RYOKAN

- Shoes off? Turn them toward the door.
- Don't step on tatami with shoes. Even barefoot, avoid stepping on the borders between mats.
- Toilet slippers stay in the toilet area (don't walk them around).
- Keep bags off beds and futons when possible.

失礼します

shitsurei shimasu = "Excuse me (for entering / interrupting)." Use when entering a private space.

SHRINE / TEMPLE BASICS

- At the entrance: a small bow is normal.
- Cleansing fountain: rinse hands, then mouth (don't drink directly from the ladle).
- Don't be mad loud, dork. If unsure: copy the chilliest salaryman dude.

"ACTIVE LISTENING" (AIZUCHI) — THE SECRET SOCIAL CHEAT

In conversation, small verbal cues show you're engaged. Drop these naturally:

はい

hai
yes / I'm listening

そうですね

sō desu ne
that's right / I see

なるほど

naruhodo
I see / makes sense

タイプシット

type shit
(ok this one's a joke)

SECTION 02

Tokyo Bar List

No tourist shit. Real bars I hit all the time.

I'm not trying to give you a giant Google list. These are just spots I go to.

Grandfather's Shibuya · \$

Can Smoke

Group Seating

Good Lighting

Used to be big with models. Cheap drinks. Group-style seating so you end up talking to strangers. Both bar and table seats.

[Google Maps](#)

Music Bar Cave Shibuya · \$\$

Date Spot

Vinyl DJ

Reserve Ahead

Perfect date spot. Vinyl DJ always playing. Surprisingly good food. Free beef jerky. Gets busy, make a reservation. Order the AYB Sour.

[Google Maps](#)

Studio Mule Shibuya · \$\$\$

Natural Wine

Quiet

Tasteful

Holy grail for natural wine people. Even the snobby Europeans like it. Quiet. Tasteful.

[Google Maps](#)

Bar Benfiddich Shinjuku · \$\$

Cocktails

Absinthe

Wizard-Level

Herbal, wizard-level cocktails. Absinthe vibes. Just tell them what you like and they'll make something good.

[Google Maps](#)

Bar Trench Ebisu · \$\$

Tiny

Dark

Serious

Tiny, dark, serious bartending. They know what they're doing.

[Google Maps](#)

A-Bridge Sangenjaya · \$

Rooftop

Sunset

Indie

Rooftop spot with a chill, indie feel in a lowkey neighborhood. Go at sunset.

[Google Maps](#)

GOD TIER TRIO (ALL OWNED BY THE SAME PERSON)

Bar Nica Shinjuku · \$\$

Tiny

Vinyl

Cocktails

Tiny bar. Bartender is a vinyl and cocktail nerd. Played me a rare Ella Fitzgerald record when I mentioned her.

[Google Maps](#)

Bar Martha Ebisu · \$\$\$

Big Space

Records

Date Spot

Big space. Crazy record collection. Good food. Fancy area. Good date spot. Talking loud is banned.

[Google Maps](#)

Bar Track Ebisu · \$\$

Spirits

Well-Lit

For spirits nerds. Well-lit. Also in Ebisu. Same crew. Also slaps.

[Google Maps](#)

ALSO WORTH YOUR TIME

The Bellwood Shibuya · \$\$

Cocktails

English Staff

Social

Legit cocktails. English-speaking staff. Easy to meet people. Chill but sharp.

[Google Maps](#)

The SG Club Shibuya · \$\$

Speakeasy

Insane Cocktails

Dungeon Floor

Speakeasy feel. Insane cocktails. Dungeon floor downstairs. Popcorn is psychotically good.

[Google Maps](#)

Bar Stereo Takadanobaba · \$

Lowkey

Jazz Nearby

Intro to the Baba area. Lowkey vibe. Plenty of cool jazz bars nearby for round 2.

[Google Maps](#)

Tokyo Local Spots

No tourist shit. Real local spots I hit all the time.

If you end up going to any of these spots, DM me a pic and let me know how you liked it.

TAKADANOBABA

Tasse Coffee Roastery Takadanobaba · \$

[Google Maps](#)

Small, trendy, serious about beans.

Game Center Mikado Takadanobaba · \$

[Google Maps](#)

Retro arcade heaven. Street Fighter, all the classics. Worth an hour minimum.

Daichi no Udon Takadanobaba · \$

[Google Maps](#)

Best udon I've ever had. Cheap, hits hard.

Jazz Spot Intro Takadanobaba · \$

[Google Maps](#)

Basement jazz bar. Jam vibe. Students + killers on the same stage.

SENTOS & SAUNAS

Hiroo-yu Hiroo · \$

[Google Maps](#)

Clean, old-school, traditional fancy neighborhood bathhouse.

Spa LaQua Tokyo Dome · \$\$

[Google Maps](#)

Full-service, giant, solo or with friends.

Sauna Dojo Shibuya · \$\$

[Google Maps](#)

Solo sweat monk mode. Book in advance.

COFFEE SHOPS

Yoshida Coffee Sangubashi · \$

[Google Maps](#)

Small, banger coffee, neighborhood vibe, coolest owner of all time.

Little Darling Coffee Roasters Aoyama · \$

[Google Maps](#)

Dogs, plants, open space. Big chill energy. Great way to chat with strangers.

Coffee Swamp Shinjuku · \$

[Google Maps](#)

Very small, serious coffee, hand-selected vinyl.

KISSATEN

Cafe Brazil Nishi-Shinjuku · \$

[Google Maps](#)

Old school kissaten. Drip coffee and toast only. Smoking + non-smoking seats.

IZAKAYAS

Otoko Dojo Shibuya · \$

[Google Maps](#)

Loud, messy, chaotic, fun.

Torikizoku Anywhere · \$

[Google Maps](#)

Only valid if you order: French fries in butter, meat-filled green peppers, mega draft beer. Only then are you allowed to enjoy.

FOOD YOU'VE PROBABLY NEVER HEARD OF

Aburagami Sohonten Shimokitazawa · \$

[Google Maps](#)

Criminally underrated abura soba. Slaps.

NERDY STUFF

Super Potato Akihabara · \$

[Google Maps](#)

Dusty, retro, gamer's paradise.

THRIFT SPOTS

Second Street Kichijoji · \$\$

[Google Maps](#)

Vintage rings + watches, easy finds.

Ragtag Harajuku · \$\$

[Google Maps](#)

Designer + solid condition.

Higan Tokyo Koenji · \$\$

[Google Maps](#)

Minimalist and curated.

Anywhere in Koenji Koenji · \$\$

[Google Maps](#)

Walk around. Dig. You'll find gold.

WEIRD SHIT

Akiba Dental Clinic Akihabara · ??

[Google Maps](#)

Real clinic. Maid outfits. That's all I know. Brave soldiers only.

COOLEST NEIGHBORHOOD

Nakano

 ⌘

Best area in Tokyo. No debate.

Bar hop, thrift, eat, vibe out.

— **Matt's #1 Pick**

[Google Maps](#)

ありがとう

That's Everything.

Now go enjoy Japan. Be respectful, stay curious, and have the best trip of your life.

WANT THE FULL 132-PAGE GUIDE?

The Tokyo Bible

Every neighborhood, bar, restaurant, and local move I know.
It's almost ready. Get on the list.

[Get on the Waitlist](#)

DM me a pic if you hit any of these spots

Or tell me about one I don't know yet

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@mattjhannan's Tokyo Cheat Sheet

From Tokyo. No ChatGPT TripAdvisor recs. Just real spots.

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