

Nihonbashi Guide



Nihonbashi: The Starting Point of Tokyo



It is where it all began. Nihonbashi – the neighbourhood the Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo calls home – is not only a key financial and commercial hub in a hyper-modern capital. It is also the birthplace of Tokyo.

It was in 1604 that a shogun named Iyasu Tokugawa changed the course of Japanese history by shifting the capital from west to east – where he promptly set about creating a brand new city that would eventually become Tokyo.

The first thing he did was build Nihonbashi Bridge. The iconic structure – from which Mount Fuji could be seen in the distance – was declared the centre of Japan and the starting point of five key routes across the country (even today, seven national roads are measured from here).

The bridge was just the beginning. A steady flow of entrepreneurial merchants from across the country swept into the fast-growing city – then known as

Edo – to set up businesses (from kimono making to seaweed shops) on reclaimed land surrounded by a network of canals.

Fast-forward more than four centuries and modern-day Nihonbashi is no less lively.

Today, the neat Kyoto-inspired layout is still lined with countless generations-old family businesses which sit alongside contemporary skyscrapers, financial institutions and historic department stores.

This guide showcases the very best of Nihonbashi. There are the unique culinary specialties that have been produced for centuries (Food); the artisan craftsmen who create exquisite handcrafted products (Culture); and a string of activities for visitors to try out (Experience).

Not to forget, of course, the bridge: it may have been rebuilt over the centuries and be partially hidden by the highway, but it's still standing and remains today a proud symbol of the very heart of Tokyo.

Timeline

1603

Nihonbashi Bridge is constructed in wood as ordered by Shogun Tokugawa.



1604

The bridge is declared the starting point of five key routes across Japan. Canal networks grow, merchants set up shop and a fish market opens.



1896

Opening of Bank of Japan HQ, built in an iconic Neo-Baroque building designed by Tatsuno Kingo.



1911

Nihonbashi Bridge is built for the 19th time – and on this occasion, it's made of stone.

1914

Mitsukoshi, Japan's oldest department store, opens its flagship building.



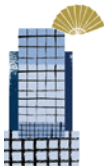
1929

Mitsui Honkan, the historic HQ of the Mitsui family, is completed in Neoclassical style.



2005

Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo – with its Japanese design aesthetic, nature-inspired themes and expansive 38th floor lobby views – opens.



2014

Renovation of Fukutoku Shrine completed.



Food

Culinary specialties from food stores

F 01

Eitaro Sohonpo

Traditional sweets

It began life in Nihonbashi as a portable sweets stall inside the local fish market in 1857. Today, the confectioners sell a cornucopia of traditional treats in its shop and tearoom, including Nihonbashi *mochi* - sticky seaweed rice cakes – and, its most famed signature creation, *kintsuba*, delicious flour-coated rolls of sweet bean paste.



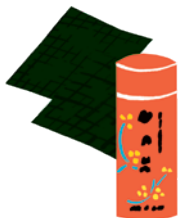
1-2-5 Nihonbashi / eitaro.com / 9.30am-6pm, closed Sun, public holidays

F 02

Yamamoto Noriten

Seaweed

This store has sold *nori* seaweed – a vital ingredient in Japanese cuisine – for over 160 years. Nirvana for seaweed-lovers, Yamamoto Noriten is filled with an assortment of seaweed – from signature orange tins of roasted *nori* to Hello Kitty themed *yuzu*-flecked snacks. Don't miss white-gloved staff preparing seaweed at a demonstration counter.



1-6-3 Nihonbashi Muromachi / yamamoto-noriten.co.jp / 9.30am-6pm, open daily

F 03

Nihonbashi Kanmo

Fish cakes



One famed Nihonbashi treat is *hanpen* - a feathery-light white fish paste cake, often served in hot soupy dishes such as *oden* winter hotpots. Friendly staff in headscarves stand behind a glass counter at Nihonbashi Kanmo – experts since 1688 – and serve a steady stream of customers *hanpen* (delicious with a little fresh ginger) plus a colourful array of fish paste creations.

1-11-8 Nihonbashi Muromachi / hanpen.co.jp / Mon-Fri 10am-6pm, Sat 10am-5pm, closed Sun, public holidays

F 05

Ninben

Dried bonito and dashi

Ninben may be housed in the modern COREDO complex, but its roots date back to 1699. The establishment pioneered selling Japan's first packages of dried fish flakes (*katsuobushi*) – a vital ingredient in *dashi* stock, the basis of countless Japanese dishes. Visitors can watch staff expertly shave fish flakes before sipping takeaway cups of hot broth from its Nihonbashi Dashi Bar.



COREDO Muromachi 1, 1F,
2-2-1 Nihonbashi Muromachi
/ ninben.co.jp / 10am-8pm,
open daily

F 06

Nihonbashi Sembikiya

Premium fruit



There are perhaps few more perfect fruits in the world than those displayed in Sembikiya (in the same building as the hotel). Japan's oldest fruit shop, it was opened by a *samurai* in 1834 and showcases an array of premium fruits from across Japan. A highlight? Perfectly spherical and aromatic muskmelons from sun-kissed Shizuoka.

Nihonbashi Mitsui Tower 1F,
2-1-2 Nihonbashi Muromachi
/ sembikiya.co.jp / 10am-
7pm, open daily

Culture

Artisan crafts and traditional goods

C 01

Nihombashi Mitsukoshi Main Store

Department store

Two bronze lions mark the Renaissance-style entrance of Japan's oldest department store. With its roots in 17th century *kimono* shop Echigoya, it has since evolved into a major retail landmark. Highlights include its *kimono* department on the 4th – and largest – floor plus a basement *depachika* food hall.



1-4-1 Nihonbashi Muromachi
/ mitsukoshi.mistore.jp /
10am-7pm (hours may vary
by season), open daily

C 02

Kiya

Knives

Another generations-old Nihonbashi gem in COREDO Muromachi 1, Kiya has been perfecting the art of handcrafting exquisite kitchen knives since 1792. Friendly staff guide visitors through a medley of knives fusing technology with craftsmanship, many with the name of its artisan creator engraved in Japanese onto the blade. General Japanese kitchen tools, from steamers to ginger graters, are also on sale.

COREDO Muromachi 1, 1F,
2-2-1 Nihonbashi Muromachi
/ kiya-hamono.co.jp / 10am-
8pm, open daily

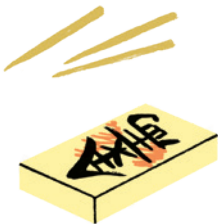


C 04

Nihonbashi Saruya

Toothpicks

An unlikely claim to fame, this is Japan's only surviving specialist toothpick shop dating back over 300 years. A small, serene space on a tiny Nihonbashi lane, the store is packed with toothpick treasures, including a rainbow-bright selection of painted boxes containing handcrafted toothpicks.



1-12-5 Nihonbashi
Muromachi / nihonbashi-
saruya.co.jp / 10am-6pm,
closed Sun, public holidays

C 05

Chikusen

Kimono and fabrics

It's easy to miss with its low-key façade and Japanese signage (it's just next to Eneos petrol station). But it's worth tracking down: Chikusen, founded in 1842, is one of Tokyo's most revered *kimono* makers – both formal creations in silks and lighter cotton summer *yukata*. Textile-lovers can also buy fabrics.

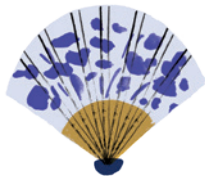
2-3 Nihonbashi Kofune-cho
/ chikusen.co.jp / 9am-5pm,
closed Sat, Sun, public
holidays



C 06

Ibasen

Fans



It was 400 years ago that Ibasen came to life, first dealing in *washi* paper and bamboo goods – before evolving into fan-makers. Today, it is famed for its painstakingly handcrafted creations (it made the hotel's signature fan). The store is filled with examples of fan artistry – from woodblock prints of Mount Fuji to delicate seasonal motifs. Custom-made fans – with the owner's name engraved on the handle – can also be ordered.

Ibasen Building 1F / 4-1
Nihonbashi Kofune-cho /
ibasen.co.jp / 10am-6pm,
closed Sun, public holidays

Experience

Activities, classes
and entertainment

E 01

Ozu Washi

Washi paper-making

Ozu Washi has specialised in Japanese-style *washi* paper since 1653. The store brims with colourful papers, alongside inks and calligraphy tools, plus a gallery with *washi*-related crafts. Best of all? A fun workshop for visitors to handcraft their own *washi* paper – one of several cultural classes on offer.



Ozu Honkan Bldg, 3-6-2
Nihonbashi Honcho /
ozuwashi.net / 10am-6pm,
closed Sun

E 02

Edokiriko Shop Hanashyo

Glass engraving

In a serene white gallery-style space, this store showcases *Edo Kiriko*, a traditional glass engraving technique. Shelves display colourful glassware with intricate geometric engravings – while visitors can also have a go at engraving their own *guinomi sake* glass to take home in a private workshop on-site.



3-6-5 Nihonbashi Honcho
/ edokiriko.co.jp / Tues-Fri
10.30am-6pm, Sat-Sun
11.30am-5pm, closed Mon

E 03

Sushi Shin by Miyakawa at Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo

Edomae-style sushi



The hotel's 38th floor restaurant – the Tokyo sister of three Michelin-starred Sushi Miyakawa in Hokkaido, north Japan. – offers a memorable sushi experience with stunning city views. Visitors sit at an intimate nine-seat cypress wood counter as master chefs expertly prepare Edomae-style sushi, using the freshest ingredients from Tokyo and Hokkaido.

38th floor, Mandarin Oriental,
Tokyo / lunch at 12pm, dinner
at 6pm and 8pm, open daily.
Reservations only.

E 05

Suimoukai

Martial arts

Those with *samurai* aspirations should head to martial arts school Suimoukai, where visitors dress in dark robes, pick up a sword and step back in time. Private classes in *iai* – the ancient art of swiftly withdrawing a sword and responding to attack – can be arranged with charismatic martial arts maestro Shoun Uetsubara.



Honcho Bldg 5F, 1-3-2
Nihonbashi-Honcho / iai.
gr.jp / by appointment

E 06

The Spa at Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo

Relaxation



A restorative take on the area's heritage is Totally Tokyo, 'Five' Journeys from Nihonbashi, a treatment offered in the hotel's serene 37th floor spa. Five Japanese elements – green tea, pine, bamboo, rice hulls and plum – are fused with a calming foot ritual plus full body shiatsu-style massage. Not enough time? Try an express treatment (lasting only 20 to 30 minutes) while soaking up city views in the Spa Studio.

37th floor, Mandarin Oriental,
Tokyo / 9am-10pm, open
daily

Facts and tips

from the concierge

01

The Japanese symbols for “Nihonbashi” 日本橋 mean either “Japan bridge”, an allusion to its location at the heart of old Tokyo – or “two bridges”, a possible reference to the bridge’s extra wide form when first built.

02

There is a free shuttle bus in the area called the “Metro Link Nihonbashi”, which is partly powered by used cooking oils donated from local restaurants.

03

The Bank of Japan HQ, as seen from above at the hotel, is shaped like a yen sign (円) – a coincidence, as an older yen symbol was in use when it was built in 1896.

04

It is said that Japan’s first gift certificate system was established at Ninben in 1830: customers exchanged thin silver plates for bonito fish flakes.

05

To view the city from the water, follow in the footsteps of early Edo business pilgrims and take a 60- minute boat tour from Nihonbashi to the Sumida River.

06

For English and Chinese shopping assistance at Nihombashi Mitsukoshi Main Store, head to the second floor of its Annex building.

07

Yamamoto Noriten launched Japan’s first “drive through” service in 1965, with customers able, for a limited period, to purchase seaweed while sitting in their car.

08

Take a stroll along Edo Sakura Dori – a narrow lane between Mitsui Honkan and Nihombashi Mitsukoshi Main Store – a springtime mecca lined with cherry blossom trees.

09

For a taste – quite literally – of old Tokyo, order a Nihonbashi Cocktail at the hotel’s Mandarin Bar. A heady mix of vodka, yuzu and grapefruit juice, the vivid blue-green hues represent the river and its willow trees while a twist of lime symbolises the bridge.

10

One legendary business is real estate company Mitsui Fudosan (its roots – like Mitsukoshi Department Store – lie in the 1673 *kimono* store Echigoya). It’s behind countless Nihonbashi developments forming part of a major revitalisation project.

A Spirit of Community



Nihonbashi is not just about the bridge, the history, the Mount Fuji views. Perhaps its most important characteristic is something less tangible: a thriving sense of community.

Since its earliest days – when entrepreneurial merchants flocked into Nihonbashi more than 400 years ago – the community was brought together not only in work, but also in play.

It's perhaps no surprise that both *kabuki* theatre and *joruri* puppet plays came to life in Nihonbashi's early years, as did printed picture books known as *ezoshi* and *ukiyo-e* wood block prints.

Today, in spite of its location in the heart of a sprawling contemporary metropolis, its community spirit still thrives, from the smallest teashop owners to the largest department store corporations.

In addition to countless collaborations (it's not rare for a sweet shop to create a product with a nearby seaweed shop), there is a

great sense of pride in its heritage – as reflected in an annual Nihonbashi Bridge clean-up which brings together residents, young and old, to wash the iconic structure.

Then there are its festivities: from the lively street dancing and drumming of October's Nihonbashi-Kyobashi Festival to the springtime celebrations that go hand in hand with the arrival of the cherry blossoms.



Nihonbashi Landmarks

Nihonbashi Bridge*

Under the highway is the famed stone bridge, decorated auspiciously with statues of mythical *kirin* creatures.



Zero km mark

A metal plate in the road, under the bridge, marks the exact spot from where all distances are measured (there's a more accessible replica on the pavement nearby).



Mount Fuji

Nihonbashi's iconic Mount Fuji views are immortalised in countless woodblock prints (and can be seen from the hotel on clear days).



Fukutoku Shrine

An immaculately restored ancient shrine with 9th century roots sitting among Nihonbashi's skyscrapers.



Mitsui Honkan*

The regal stone HQ for the leading industrialist Mitsui family – also home to Mitsui Memorial Museum on the 7th floor.



Bank of Japan*

The bank's 19th century granite and brick building – an important cultural property – confirms the area's status as a financial hub.



Mitsukoshi*

Japan's oldest department store, its iconic flagship is just minutes from the hotel.



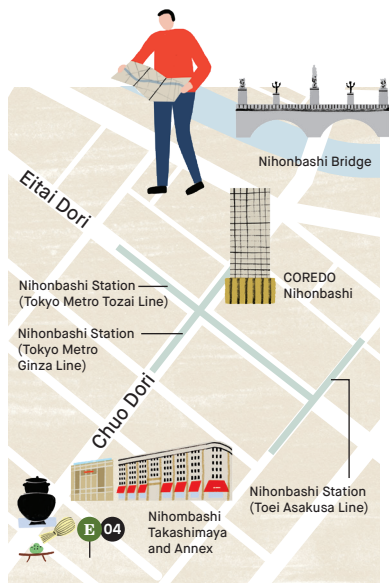
Takashimaya*

A historic Nihonbashi department store, with its roots in a Kyoto *kimono* store dating back to 1831.



Map

Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo is housed in Nihonbashi Mitsui Tower, a landmark structure and a celebrated symbol of regeneration in the old Tokyo neighbourhood. The easy grid-like structure of Nihonbashi's main streets makes it an easy area for visitors to navigate.





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Traditional sweets

F 02

Yamamoto Noriten

Seaweed

F 03

Nihonbashi Kanmo

Fish cakes

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Ninben

Dried bonito and dashi

F 06

Nihonbashi Sembikiya

Premium fruit

C 01

Nihombashi Mitsukoshi Main Store

Department store

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Kiya

Knives

C 04

Nihonbashi Saruya

Toothpicks

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Suimoukai

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The Spa at Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo

Relaxation





MANDARIN ORIENTAL
TOKYO

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