

Tokyo, Japan



Report made by

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- **Accessibility related:** Power wheelchair user.
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General information of the city

- **Name of the city and country:** Tokyo, Japan
- **Description:** The capital of Japan, busy and tidy alike, it is home to neon light streets, eclectic districts and to the Shibuya scramble, the busiest zebra crossing in the world. Originally a fishing village named Edo, it has hosted the Paralympics twice and has grown into one of the largest metropolises in the planet.

Transportation accessibility

- For trains and subways, the Japanese law requires that any station with more than 3000 daily users must have an accessible route to use it. Due to the vast number of people living in or commuting to the capital almost every station meets the 3000 daily user requirement and has an accessible route, indicated with tactile pavement.
- Therefore, a nice tip is to follow the tactile pavement to find elevators and accessible exits, as in bigger station it may be difficult to find them.
- Keep in mind that sometimes elevators to access a station are located inside nearby buildings.
- For wheelchair users or people that may need assistance, no previous arrangements need to be made to ride trains and subways and you can just show up.
- There is a gap on almost every station, but the staff will provide a ramp upon request. Simply ask the staff for the ramp and tell them where you want to go and they will help you on and call ahead to your destination so someone will be waiting to help you off.
- The same system is in place for the Shinkansen (the bullet train), but booking the accessible seating will require booking the seats in advance at a “Midori no Madoguchi” (Green information points where you can buy tickets) found at most JR train stations.
- As for buses, all of the buses in Tokyo are accessible. A ramp is available at the middle door, but you should wait at the front of the bus to signal you want to ride. The ramp is not automatic, but the bus driver will set it up for you.
- While the buses do get crowded during commuting hours, unlike Kyoto, the buses are not really used by tourists and generally there should be no issue riding it when you want.
- Long distance buses and sight seeing buses, by contrast, are not usually accessible.
- Regarding taxis, before the Tokyo 2020 Games, Toyota created a "JapanTaxi" styled after London's famous black cabs. In theory it was to be wheelchair accessible but the compact size makes it difficult for most power wheelchairs (if not impossible).
- Larger taxis with lifts are available but they tend to be run by small companies without English websites (if they have a website at all).
- **Score: 4/5.** Once you get used to the winding subway lines and to the fact that many times elevators are located in nearby buildings, Tokyo is one of the easiest cities to get around using public transportation, even for wheelchair users. Just prepare to avoid commuting times, if you don't want to get squished.

Streets accessibility

- With exception of a few areas, Tokyo is generally flat.

- All curbs are cut and there is tactile pavement on most areas along all sidewalks.
 - Traffic lights in most major areas have audio signals.
 - Bicycles sometimes share the sidewalks as there are few bicycle lanes.
 - Further from the stations, in residential areas, there are typically no sidewalks and pedestrians share the street with cars, motorbikes and bicycles.
 - Accessible toilets can be found in parks and at stations.
- **Score: 4.5/5.** Streets are generally narrower than in many other cities in Japan and are often very busy, but they are usually smooth and safe for travelers of all needs. Tactile pavement, as well as curb cuts, are widespread. Accessible toilets are also easy to find at department stores, parks or stations.

Restaurants & shops

- This is the biggest disappointment for visitors and residents alike.
 - Tokyo is the city with the most Michelin Star restaurants at a total of 212 (Paris is the second city with the most Michelin Star restaurants with a total of 113). But star or no star, far too many restaurants and shops are not wheelchair accessible.
 - Many are in small buildings with steps inside or are too small for wheelchairs to enter. Some, unfortunately, even add steps for atmosphere as traditionally, restaurants and inns have a step at the entrance.
 - Some accessible places do exist and, in general, shopping malls and department stores have floors dedicated to restaurants and they tend to be accessible (and always have accessible toilets on said floor).
 - Shops have the same problem, as many of them have a step or two to access.
- **Score: 3/5.** There are so many places to choose from, but way too many are inaccessible due to lack of space or steps. If you fancy a specific place, it is best to research in advance using tools like Google Street View. Otherwise, shopping malls or department stores near stations are a safe bet.

Hotels & accommodation

- Any hotel with over 50 rooms is required to have an accessible room, but often there is just one even in bigger hotels.
- Lack of clear standards for an accessible room (aside from door width and "enough room for a wheelchair") means that there is a lot of variety in the rooms and you cannot make assumptions about the facilities.
- Be sure to ask for pictures of the facilities you need.

- Roll-in showers are extremely rare and most rooms have a single-unit toilet and bath tub. The unit tends to be waterproof, so it is possible to put a shower chair next to the tub and shower there.
 - Larger, western hotel chains tend to be a safe bet, or Toyoko Inn for budget travelers is a good option as they have a cookie-cutter version of an accessible room that is surprisingly large.
 - Traditional, or even hotels aiming to appear traditional, tend to be even less accessible due to steps at the entrance of the building and to each room as well as tatami-mat flooring.
 - Booking can be another challenge as many hotels do not let you book the accessible room online, but only by phone - difficult when you live in another timezone and the night desk manager may not speak English.
 - AirBnB apartments, which are not common in Japan due to strict laws, have similar problems to hotels.
 - Here is a [list of accessible hotels in Kyoto from Accessible Japan's website](#).
- **Score: 2/5.** If you need an accessible room, be sure to start looking far in advance and don't hesitate to ask for pictures, as hotel accessibility has no clear standards in Japan. The Toyoko Inn or larger western hotel chains are good options.

Tourist attractions accessibility

- Many of the larger popular tourist attractions have become increasingly accessible.
 - Even historic buildings like Meiji Jingu and Sensoji have added ramps, smooth pathways, and in the case of Sensoji, an elevator into the temple.
 - Smaller shrines and temples are starting to follow, but some still prove to be difficult to access all areas due to gravel and steps.
 - Tall buildings like Tokyo Skytree and Shibuya Scramble Square are accessible. Though the rooftop of the Mori Building requires an escalator to get to the top.
 - Many of the tourist attractions in Tokyo tend to be neighbourhoods (like Shibuya, Akihabara, etc), and, as mentioned earlier, many restaurants and shops will leave visitors disappointed, although streets are really accessible.
 - Some of the traditional Japanese gardens in Tokyo are accessible or at least have a partially accessible route.
 - Most attractions have one, or several, accessible toilets available to visitors.
- **Score: 4/5.** Tokyo has many sights and sounds to enjoy, such as skyscrapers, vibrant neighbourhoods and temples. Most of them are wheelchair accessible, even the traditional ones like Asakusa and Meiji Jingu. Some inaccessible areas in smaller

temples and the issues with shop entrances in areas like Shinjuku or Akihabara are the only downside.

Getting there

- Tokyo is served by two larger international airports (Narita and Haneda). Both have multiple options for connecting to the city including taxis, subways/trains, and buses. Unfortunately, the buses are mostly not accessible (though a few left-equipped buses are joining the fleet). Trains and subways are the better option.
- Narita is technically not in Tokyo and takes nearly an hour to get to by train. Taxi rides to/from the airport are very expensive. If possible, try to use Haneda.
- The Shinkansen and other express trains use Tokyo as a major hub and it is easy to arrive from or depart to many other cities in Japan.
- For information on long distance trains accessibility see the [Transportation section](#).
- **Score: 4.5/5.** Getting in and out of Tokyo is fairly smooth and both its airports have accessible transportation to get to the city center. Haneda is the closer option. Besides, the Shinkansen, Japan's famous bullet train, conveniently connects the city to the rest of the country.

Overall accessibility score

- **Score:** 22/30. Overall **3.7/5 stars**.
- **Summary:** Tokyo's score takes a dip due to poor accessibility on restaurants, shops and, specially, accommodation. On the other hand, transportation and streets should not be a problem and tourist attractions can be mostly enjoyed too, so, if you plan your stay in advance, you'll be good to go.