

6 Tokyo

Ahead of its hosting duties for the 2020 Olympic Games, Japan's capital is endeavoring to shift its reputation from megacity to one that's more human-focused.
By Danielle Demetriou

Tokyo: The statistics are as dizzying as its cloud-brushing towers. The Japanese city is home to 13 million residents, 40 million daily commuters, 139 skyscrapers, 216 Michelin-starred restaurants—and an ever-shifting skyline that changes with high-speed regularity.

The city has long been known as one of the largest and most densely packed on the planet, with an urban patchwork of distinctive neighborhoods, from teen fashion mecca Harajuku and the upmarket Ginza to electronics hub Akihabara. It also excels at mixing the futuristic with the traditional, as Kengo Kuma, the architect behind the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Stadium, explains: “What makes it unique is the clear contrast of townscape in Tokyo, where narrow passages among old wooden houses still exist along with big roads and buildings constructed in the 20th century.”

Not to forget how well it works. Despite its vastness, crime rates are low, the streets are clean, the trains are punctual, and the atmosphere is often surprisingly calm. In contrast to many Western cities, its architecture is also defined by a sense of disposability,

a culturally ingrained legacy of Japan's exposure to natural disasters and war-time destruction.

“Traditionally buildings are not seen as permanent structures in Japan,” says Mark Dytham, of Tokyo-based Klein Dytham Architecture. “In the past, all buildings were made of wood and tended to burn down, rot, or be destroyed by typhoons or earthquakes—as opposed to in the West, where buildings are made of brick or stone and are built for 400 years.”

On a less positive note, the city often feels more like jigsaw puzzle sprawl than a premeditated urban blueprint, with its disposable skyline resulting in an at-times jarring lack of architectural or aesthetic consistency among buildings (picture a neon-lit 7-Eleven, an old wooden shrine, a glass skyscraper, and a dated 1980s apartment block sitting in a row). Navigating the public transport network can also be a daunting task for those not familiar with the city.

And then there is the issue of overhead cables: Despite Tokyo's reputation for being futuristic and progressive, a quick skyward glance reveals how the vast majority of the city's power cables still lie in messy tangles above the streets, with critics regularly condemning them as unsightly.

Demographics are also a concern. Its rapidly aging population and declining birthrate are growing issues for politicians and architects alike. Sugamo—a neighborhood often dubbed Harajuku for old ladies—provides an innovative urban template for a “silver” population, from the widened wheelchair-friendly pavements to the green man flashing for longer periods at traffic lights.

There is a countdown under way, however, for an upcoming event that Tokyoites hope will give the city a major boost—the 2020 Olympics. A raft of major regeneration projects, shiny new developments, hotels, and infrastructure upgrades (including plans to move at least some of those overhead power cables underground) are in the works. New constructions include the Shinbashi No. 29 Mori Building, a 15-story multi-use retail and office space in Shinbashi, a prime redevelopment area for the Olympics. This project, to be completed in 2018, will be linked via the newly upgraded street Shintora-Dori—dubbed



Tokyo's Champs-Élysées—to the Olympic Village and Stadium.

So how will Tokyo look in 2020? According to Kuma, there will be a shift from “a city of highways and shinkansens,” as was the case during the high-economic-growth era of the 1964 Games, toward something more grounded: “a human-friendly, walkable town.” **M**

Right: In an attempt to tackle Tokyo's problem of a lack of burial space, Rurikoin Byakurengedo, a Buddhist temple, opened in neon-lit Shinjuku in 2014. The architecture, by Kiyoshi Sey Takeyama of Amorphe, is clean-lined, minimal, and unabashedly contemporary with a futuristic edge—complete with high-tech basement vaults able to accommodate the cremated remains of 7,000. Opposite: the Shinbashi No. 29 Mori Building.



Despite being the world's most populous megacity, with a population density of 4,400 people per square kilometer, Tokyo is also the most affordable.

7 Oslo

Blending architecture and culture via an ambitious urban revitalization project, Oslo's waterfront is experiencing a rebirth. By Dorthe Smeby

Oslo has one of the highest rates of registered electric vehicles (EVs) per capita of almost any city. Drivers who own EVs enjoy perks like free tolls and parking, as well as complimentary charging at municipal stations.

Location has always been an important asset for Oslo. Characterized by hillsides and forests, its natural landscape has made it a popular destination for nature-seeking tourists. But new and modern architectural projects like the Astrup Fearnley Museum by Renzo Piano and Snøhetta's glacierlike Opera House have also positioned Norway's capital city as a cultural cityscape.

Oslo's shifting urban policies have spurred the design of several cultural landmarks by world-renowned architects. Part of this involved transforming its waterfront over the past decade and a half in an attempt to attract multinational companies and the creative class. By 2020, the city's seaside will be an entirely new urban space.

Bjørsvika, the old port area where the water meets the city, began developing in 2005, giving Oslo its very own Manhattanesque skyline. Dubbed the Barcode Project and slated for completion later this year, the 2.4-million-square-foot mixed-use development boasts a number of new high-rise buildings by both Norwegian and international prizewinning architects.



The Oslo Public Library and the new Edvard Munch Museum are two other big projects that will alter the Bjørsvika area. The library, by Lund Hagem Architects and Atelier Oslo, will consist of five floors with a full-height atrium at its core, while the Munch Museum—called the Lambda—will house 28,000 items and works donated by the famed Norwegian painter. Together, they represent the city's focus

on creating new cultural experiences for its 600,000 inhabitants. But like most large-scale projects, they are not without their detractors.

The Lambda, designed and currently under construction by Spanish firm estudio Herreros, has been embroiled in controversy since it was approved by Oslo's city council in 2008. Critics argue the building's tall and domineering



In 1944, artist Edvard Munch bequeathed a large portion of his work, including thousands of prints, sketches, and manuscripts, to the city of Oslo on his death. Described as “looking more like a postwar municipal building than an art gallery” by the *Wall Street Journal*, the collection’s current home is severely outdated and in a state of disrepair. The new \$314 million museum (left) is expected to attract up to half a million visitors each year.

Built on piles in the Oslofjord, the Oslo Opera House (bottom right) appears to rise from the water and create a visual connection between downtown and the Bjørvika harbor. It functions partly as workspace for 600 members of the National Opera and Ballet and a public space for more than a million visitors each year. Both the building’s lobby and sloped roof (which can be reached from the outside) are accessible to the public 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

stature, characterized by a large rectangular volume with a tilt on the top, starkly contrasts with Bjørvika’s natural landscape. The 12-story museum, located a few feet away from the Opera House, will likely be a looming presence over the Oslofjord when it’s completed in 2019.

Following the shoreline west from Bjørvika, the construction site for the new National Museum emerges. Designed by Kleihues + Schwerk Gesellschaft von Architekten, the project will be among the largest of its kind in Europe. The museum’s new building will double its current exhibition space and feature handpicked artworks from Norwegian billionaire Stein Erik Hagen’s \$120 million collection. Topped by an illuminated hall of transparent walls, it will be a glowing landmark of lights along the waterfront when it opens in 2020.

A majority of the city’s new cultural buildings under construction will be eco-lighthouse certified—in accordance with a national scheme that certifies projects that meet eco-friendly criteria such as energy efficiency and reduced

carbon emissions. Over the next three years, Oslo’s city center will be completely car-free, making it the first European capital to permanently ban automobiles. The city government plans to divest pension funds from fossil fuels, while also devoting \$923 million to “super cycleways” throughout the country’s 10 largest cities. These initiatives all play into

Norway’s goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2050.

The new blend of urbanism and nature will make Oslo even more appealing to creatives. Coupled with the city’s remarkable growth in its standard of living over the past few decades, Oslo’s new urban expansion is further reshaping its image as a modern city. ■

