



## NEIGHBORHOOD

# Yanaka

In the eastern part of the city, an older, gentler way of life coexists with thoroughly modern galleries and shops.

**W**hen Koichiro Osaka, a young Tokyo art curator, is asked to share his favorite neighborhood spot, he doesn't cite an artisanal coffee bar, ceramics shop, or design store. Instead, he says: "The cemetery. It's beautiful, especially at night."

His answer is typical of people living and working in Yanaka, a time capsule of a neighborhood (having been spared destruction by the air raids of World War II) that refreshingly subverts city stereotypes. Forget skyscrapers, salarymen, neon skies, and round-the-clock karaoke. The scenery in this east Tokyo locale is low-rise wooden houses with flowerpots in front of the doors, cycling grannies, cotton *noren* (curtains) marking the entrance of tiny soba restaurants, temples and shrines, lots of cats—and a slow pace of life that is drawing a new generation of creative people.

The transition from mega-metropolis to urban village takes only minutes from the west exit of busy Nippori station,

with a path crossing the 25-acre cemetery—famed for its picturesque promenade of cherry trees cutting through *more* than 7,000 graves—into the heart of Yanaka.

A small lane leads to **Ueno Sakuragi Atari** (2-15-6 Uenosakuragi, Taito-ku), a trio of restored wooden houses, dating to 1938, that today accommodate a string of local businesses. One is **Yanaka Beer Hall**, with its traditional interior, craft beers on tap (an original Yanaka brew among them), and a 1950s atmosphere. A narrow staircase leads up to a sun-drenched tatami space called **But I'm Only 5 Hours Yusuke** (*demo-ore.com*), a cross between a boutique and a granny's sitting room. Center stage is a micro-selection of vintage clothing in a gentle gradient of hues, from white to yellow, alongside a wall of hanging birdcages. Visitors slip off their shoes at the threshold.

Downstairs, across a courtyard in the second house, an unusual concoction is being rustled up by **Salt & Olive**, a shop specializing in, yes, salt and olives:

namely, an olive latte. "What do you think?" asks the proprietress with a smile, presenting the light-green drink. It is unexpectedly tasty, with a fresh, earthy sweetness—the perfect accompaniment to just made rosemary-and-potato bread or green tea pain de mie from **Kayaba Bakery** next door.

A short walk from here is Yanaka's cultural heartbeat: **SCAI the Bathhouse** (6-1-23 Yanaka, Taito-ku; *scaithebathhouse.com*), a leading independent gallery. (See "The Gallery Guide," page 000.) Masami Shiraishi, its charismatic founder, has pioneered numerous community projects—Atari and Kayaba Bakery among them. He is also behind **Kayaba Coffee** (6-1-29 Yanaka, Taito-ku), a family-run coffee shop opened in 1938 and beloved until its closing after the death of Mr. Kabaya's wife in 2005. Shiraishi revived it a year later, and today people line up for egg sandwiches, curry lunches, and ginger cocktails.

If temple fatigue hasn't set in, or even if it has, it's worth giving five minutes to 13th-century **Tennoji Temple** (7-14-8 Yanaka, Taito-ku), with its flawless green grass, ancient trees, and large Buddha statue. (Fun fact: Yanaka has the most concentrated number of temples of any Tokyo neighborhood.)

Equally impressive is standing before **Temple Kannonji** (near Kannon Temple, 5-8-28 Yanaka, Taito-ku), an expanse of gray clay tile topped with a slate roof that is believed to be Tokyo's only surviving wall of its kind, built in the 1600s.

Minutes away is the **Asakura Museum of Sculpture** (7-18-10 Yanaka, Taito-ku), a fantastical three-story house mixing Japanese and Western influences that formerly belonged to Fumio Asakura, who has been called the father of modern Japanese sculpture. Today, it exhibits his paintings and bronzes along with the works of leading Asian sculptors.

For a city in which many neighborhoods feel overwhelmed by tourists, Yanaka is a quiet world away.

—Danielle Demetriou



The Asakura Museum of Sculpture, once the home and studio of artist Fumio Asakura