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Tokyo Sugoi! - Episode 11 by Steve Gillick

Ichi-go Ichi-e: **Tokyo Neighbourhoods - Mini Worlds of Wonder, Part Two**

The Japanese idiom "***Ichi-go ichi-e***," meaning "one time, one meeting," is said to have originated in the 16th century as an expression of appreciation for the tea ceremony. The ideal was to treat the ceremony as if it were a once-in-a-lifetime experience; something to be cherished and respected.

In modern times, the concept of *Ichi-go ichi-e* can be used to reflect the importance of treasuring each moment of discovery. It's a unique way for travelers to connect with Tokyo's neighborhoods, each of which is a mini World of Wonder, comprising shops, restaurants, bars, shrines, temples, parks, attractions, and a sense of community.

Part One of this article (**Tokyo Pulse, August 2025, Vol 1**) explored five of my favourite Tokyo neighbourhoods. Part Two covers three historic neighbourhoods and explains why they are ripe for visitors to embrace.

Monzen Nakacho

Seafood and Sake are responsible for my discovery of this historic district, which dates back to the early 17th century. The name literally means "the town in front of the gate", referring to the entrance of the original Eitai-ji temple. "Mon-Naka" is part of "shitamachi", the old downtown area of Edo (now Tokyo), and vestiges of that atmosphere exist in the Tomioka Hachimangu-Fukugawa Hachiman Shrine, dedicated to the Shinto deity Hachiman, the protector of Japan. The Shrine is considered to be the birthplace of Sumo in Tokyo.

Several notable izakayas are located within a very short walk from the Metro Station.



Sake (Otokoyama Kimoto Junmaishu, and Kamikawa Taisetsu) at Otaruya Tomiokacho in Monzen Nakacho.

Uosan Sakaba is a very popular local seafood Izakaya. Clients are seated at one of the counters, and their orders are taken quickly. If you're unsure about what to eat,

glance over at one of your counter-mates and point to their dish.

Kaisen Tachinomi Dokoro Taiyo ("Taiyo", for short) is a standing-only restaurant with a delicious reputation for nigiri sushi (bite-size pieces of raw fish or seafood on top of vinegared rice) prepared by the affable chef.

Otaruya Tomiokacho features mouth-watering dishes and sakes from Hokkaido. Specialties include deep-fried oysters, grilled Hokke, salmon jaw, sardines, scallops, ankimo (monkfish liver), and cumin chicken wings. The sakes were equally lip-smacking: Kamikawa Taisetsu and Otokoyama Kimoto Junmaishu.



Deep-fried Oysters, Otaruya Tomiokacho in Monzen Nakacho.



Hamachi and Salmon sashimi, Otaruya Tomiokacho in Monzen Nakacho.



Shrimp Tatsuta Age deep fried in soy sauce and ginger and coated in potato starch, Otaruya Tomiokacho in Monzen Nakacho.

Ningyocho

Sake again led us to this historic neighbourhood, whose name translates to "Doll Town." Ningyocho was one of the principal entertainment districts in Edo. The first Kabuki Theatre in Edo was established here in 1624, but it was also known for puppet shows and the home of puppeteers and dollmakers, hence the name. Take a stroll along Hamacho Green Road, especially during Cherry Blossom season. Relax and enjoy the sweets and snacks you purchased along Amazake Yokocho Shopping Street, just a few steps away. Specialties include dorayaki (pancakes filled with Azuki beans), Ningyocho pudding (custard with a caramel topping), and Ningyo-yaki (sweets in the shape of the faces of the Seven Lucky Gods).



Statue of Benkei, a Kabuki character in Ningyocho.

The houses and shops along Amazake Yokocho are a blend of old and new, in perfect harmony with the Tokyo brand of "Old meets New". However, the shop, Sasaki Saketen, holds personal memories for me, tied to my first visit in 2014 to the annual Nihonbashi Area Sake Tasting Walk, which takes place in the early spring. You purchase a pass, follow the neighbourhood map, and discover all the tiny sake and wine bars in Nihonbashi and neighbouring Ningyocho. For lunch, drop by Nakayama Tendon for the delicious black tendon (tempura rice bowl). So good!



(left) Craft Store along Amazake Yokochō in Ningyocho.
(Above) Amazake Yokochō street sign. The Main shopping street in Ningyocho.

Scene from the Nihonbashi Area Sake Tasting Walk. Sake Tasting in Sasaki Saketen.

Kappabashi

Located between Ueno and Asakusa, Kappabashi is known as “kitchenware town”. Professional chefs, home cooks, and curious visitors can find a wide range of items, including cooking utensils, cutlery, and dishes. For those seeking a whole new ball of wax, take a “sampuru” class and learn to create the plastic/wax food models that many restaurants use to showcase menu items. We had a blast making a head of lettuce, pumpkin tempura, and shrimp tempura!

Ramble along Kappabashi's main street to discover the golden statue of a Kappa (a river deity) in a small park near the Seisuiji Temple. And stop to enjoy the excellent seafood and warm hospitality at Shibata Wasuke.

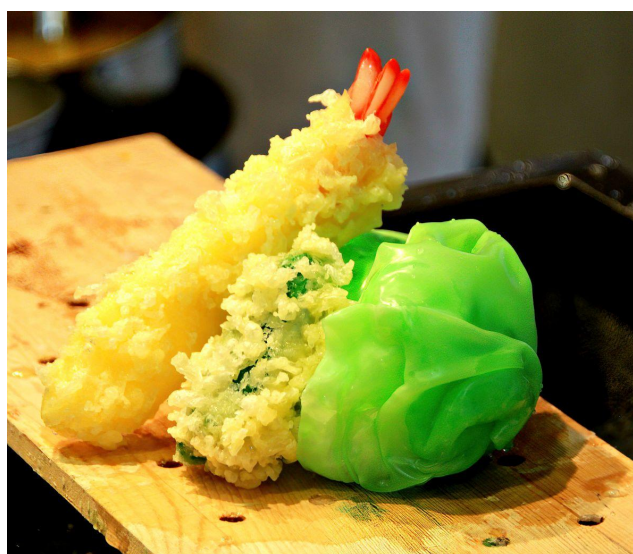
Discovering neighbourhoods, in the spirit of *Ichigo ichi-e*, is a great way to connect with Tokyo in a meaningful way.



Statue of a Kappa (A River Diety) in Kappabashi



Steve Gillick showing off his Wax Lettuce at the Sampuru workshop in Kappabashi. Photo by Mitsuru Sasaki, *Talking Travel*



Proudly showing off my wax tempura and lettuce after the sampuru workshop in Kappabashi.



Assorted sashimi at Shibata Wasuke in Kappabashi.



Grilled Herring (Nishin) with Yuzu and Daikon, at Shibata Wasuke in Kappabashi



Assorted sashimi platter at Shibata Wasuke in Kappabashi

*All photos are taken by Steve Gillick and Mitsuru Sasaki (as noted), *Talking Travel*



Steve Gillick loves to travel and loves to talk to people who love to talk about travel. He's been at it since 1967 when he visited nine European destinations on a school trip. Steve has had over 370 articles published in consumer and travel trade publications. To date he has explored 85 countries and over 770 destinations. He recently returned from his 22nd trip to Japan. Steve is the author of *A Symphony of Camels: Travel Adventures & Conversations Around the World*, available on Amazon.com

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