

CELEBRATIONS OR BUSINESS, JAPAN OPENS FOR ALL

JAPAN'S TOURISM BOOM IS PROVIDING NEW PATHWAYS FOR INBOUND VISITORS, WHETHER FOR THE PERFECT WEDDING OR A BUSINESS TRIP TO REMEMBER. *By Daniel de Bomford, Anudari Erdenebulgan and Cian O'Neill*

Few days in a person's life are as special or memorable as their wedding. From the moment the groom first lays eyes on the bride, to the heartfelt speeches and the dancing, the moments are anchored by the place.

Japan's inbound tourism boom amazes visitors with its vibrant, colorful seasons and breathtaking scenery, making many couples choose Japan as the backdrop for one of the most important days of their lives. "Japan provides a beautiful setting where couples can create meaningful memories," Yoko Yamashiro, creative director of Treat, said.

Treat specializes in weddings, providing expert advice on wedding dresses, guest attire and jewelry.

But the beauty of the scenery is only one part of the story. La-Vie Factory's photographers go the extra mile to ensure that

every moment captured conveys the beauty and emotion of the celebration. "Technical skill is essential, of course, but our photographers must also excel in communication and hospitality," President Eiji Umehara says.

For an unforgettable trip, WAS Tours leverages local knowledge and a carefully curated itinerary designed to support local economies, not take from them. "We believe that a trip is a story that we build together with the guest, from beginning to end," President Yosuke Kikuma says.

Japan isn't just a destination for leisure; it is increasingly attracting business travelers and conferences. HAPPO-EN curates

spaces for events that bring long-term value for regions. "Happo-en contributes cultural depth through our heritage and environment, creating an integrated experience that blends world-class event capability with authentic Japanese culture," President Yoshinori Inoue says.

Travelers looking for the ideal place to begin their Japanese journey should look no further than the Keio Plaza Hotel in centrally located Shinjuku. "Every guest has different plans, and from Shinjuku, they can reach them all very easily," President and CEO Katsumasa Wakabayashi says. Keio Plaza's central location positions it ideally for all guests, whether for business or leisure.



Image: AirX's eVTOL aircraft offer quiet, eco-friendly and affordable flight options.

EXPERIENCE SKY TRAVEL BY AirX

AIRX'S ONLINE-BASED CHARTER FLIGHTS, DELIVERING FLEXIBLE ROUTES AND SEAMLESS TRAVEL ACROSS JAPAN. *By Bernard Thompson*

From above, Japan looks different. Geography begins to make sense. What once required hours of ground travel can now be completed in minutes. That shift in perspective sits at the center of what AirX is building to redefine how time is used.

Inbound tourism to Japan has surpassed 40 million visitors annually, and travelers are moving beyond familiar urban routes in search of regional experiences that offer a deeper connection to Japanese

culture. Yet time remains the most powerful constraint. While Japan's ground transportation network is efficient, access to many regional destinations is still limited. AirX addresses this challenge by offering a new way to move—reshaping how travel time is experienced.

AirX's helicopter charter services are delivered as a software-based service through an online booking platform, making air travel a practical option. From Mount Fuji to coastal resorts and regional cities, AirX reframes movement as something to enjoy rather than endure.

To date, the company has flown approximately 50,000 passengers, with charter prices starting from the tens of thousands of yen. Beyond point-to-point transportation, AirX also designs curated luxury experiences for international

VIP guests. One such offering includes a round-trip helicopter flight from Tokyo to a Mount Fuji-area winery, a journey that takes around three hours by ground transportation but can be completed in approximately 40 minutes by helicopter. Guests can then enjoy private wine tastings, conversations with winemakers and locally produced caviar.

While many air mobility companies remain in experimental or demonstration phases, AirX operates within existing aviation and regulatory frameworks, generating revenue today. This operational foundation positions the company as a bridge between conventional helicopter services and next-generation eVTOL aircraft. In partnership with Eve Air Mobility and EHang, AirX is preparing for the commercialization of advanced air mobility.

Founder & CEO Kiwamu Tezuka summarized the mission simply: "By integrating the sky into everyday life, we aim to redefine time and expand the possibilities of life."



Kiwamu Tezuka
Founder & CEO, AirX INC.



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KEIO PLAZA HOTEL ANCHORS MODERN TOKYO

IN SHINJUKU'S VIBRANT HUB, KEIO PLAZA BLENDS ACCESS, JAPANESE CULTURE AND HUMAN-CENTERED HOSPITALITY FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVELERS EXPLORING TOKYO WITH CONFIDENCE. *By Daniel de Bomford and Paul Mannion*

In a city defined by motion, Keio Plaza Hotel offers travelers something enduring in Tokyo's ever-changing cityscape: a sense of orientation. Rising above Nishi-Shinjuku since 1971, when it opened as Japan's first skyscraper hotel, the property sits at the crossroads of Tokyo's energy, culture and connectivity.

"Shinjuku is an important hub not only for Tokyo, but for Japan as a whole," President and CEO Katsuyoshi Wakabayashi said. From here, guests can reach districts such as Ginza, Shibuya and Nihonbashi with ease, and travel beyond the city to destinations like Hakone, Takayama and Mount Fuji. Whether for business or leisure, for international visitors navigating Japan for the first time, that access alone is a decisive reason to choose the hotel.

Yet Keio Plaza's appeal extends well beyond logistics. Shinjuku itself is a city of contrasts: neon-lit entertainment streets, quiet temple neighborhoods, major department stores and green spaces such as Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden all coexist within walking distance. "All these elements, old and new, modern and traditional, coexist in one place," Wakabayashi said. "That mixture is what makes Shinjuku unique."

The guest experience is similarly balanced. For more than five decades, Keio Plaza has positioned itself as a cultural ambassador, introducing international travelers to regional Japanese traditions through rotating exhibitions, cuisine and hands-on workshops. Tea ceremonies, seasonal festivals and artisan collaborations allow guests to experience Japan's heritage from their home base. "Inside the hotel, for more



"The most important part of a hotel is service; our greatest asset is our people."

Katsuyoshi Wakabayashi

President and CEO,
Keio Plaza Hotel Co., Ltd.

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than 50 years, we have showcased Japanese culture," Wakabayashi said.

Keio Plaza Hotel isn't just for leisure; it can also accommodate a wide range of business and meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) activities.

Service, however, remains the hotel's defining feature. While technology supports efficiency behind the scenes, human connection is central. "Omotenashi is inherently human," Wakabayashi said. "It relies on sensing guests' feelings and responding with empathy." With most guests arriving from overseas, staff are trained to engage proactively, ensuring that comfort, clarity and warmth transcend language barriers.



For travelers seeking a Tokyo base that combines access, authenticity and attentive hospitality, Keio Plaza Hotel continues to stand apart—anchored in Shinjuku, and open to the world.

DISCOVER AUTHENTIC JAPAN WITH WAS TOURS



“We want to promote tourism that does not just consume.”

Yosuke Kikuma

President,
WAS Tours
<https://jpn.wastours.jp>



WAS Tours headquarters, opposite the Imperial Palace in central Tokyo

CURATED JOURNEYS REVEALING JAPAN’S REGIONS, TRADITIONS, AND LIVING CULTURE THROUGH THOUGHTFUL, SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL EXPERIENCES DESIGNED.

By Daniel de Bomford, Cian O’Neill, Paul Mannion and Bernard Thompson

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or more than half a century, WAS Tours has approached travel with a rare philosophy: journeys should deepen understanding, not simply accumulate experiences.

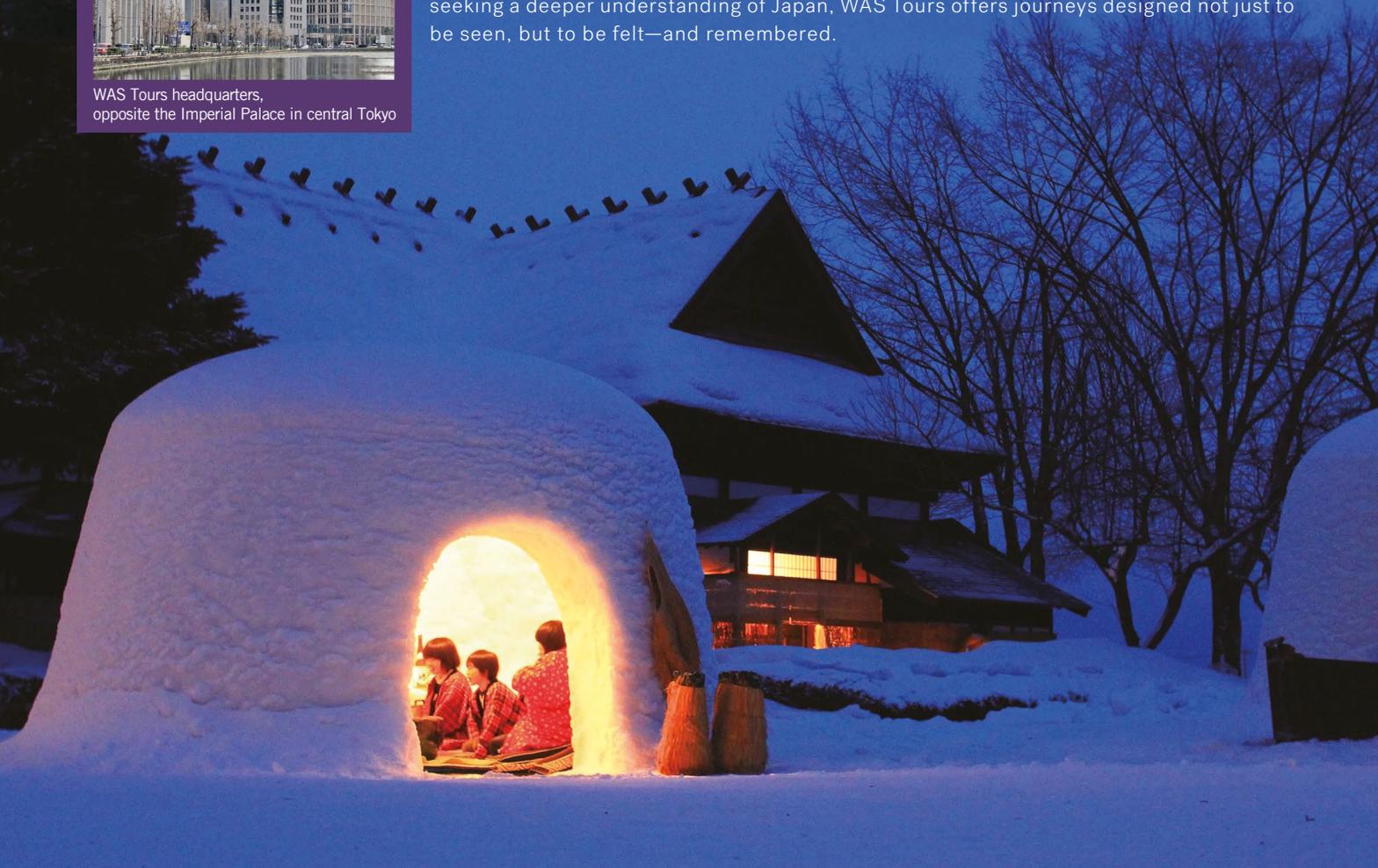
“We are not simply a travel agency,” said President Yosuke Kikuma. “We define ourselves as a company that provides culture.” From its earliest days, WAS Tours pioneered cultural tourism, introducing Japanese travelers to regions of Europe and Eastern Europe during the Cold War, focusing on places where everyday life reveals a country’s true character. That approach now underpins its inbound travel programs across Japan.

Rather than rushing guests through a checklist of landmarks, the company curates journeys that unfold as a narrative. “A trip is a story that we build together with the guest, from beginning to end,” Kikuma said. “It is not just about saying, come here, take your picture, eat this, and then go home.”

This philosophy translates into slow, regionally grounded travel. Guests might explore local gastronomy by meeting chefs who cook with ingredients grown and hunted nearby, or walk lesser-known pilgrimage routes where traditions remain part of daily life. The aim is not consumption, but connection. “We want to promote tourism that does not just consume a destination and then leave it depleted,” Kikuma said.

As Japan faces the challenges of over-tourism, WAS Tours advocates thoughtful dispersion and timing. Early-morning temple visits, rural stays, and small group sizes help protect local communities whilst offering visitors a quieter, more authentic experience.

“Our goal,” Kikuma said, “is to raise the cultural level of travel.” For international travelers seeking a deeper understanding of Japan, WAS Tours offers journeys designed not just to be seen, but to be felt—and remembered.



HAPPO-EN BRINGS JAPANESE CULTURE TO WEDDINGS AND EVENTS

FROM GARDEN WEDDINGS TO GLOBAL CONFERENCES, THE TOKYO VENUE BLENDS HERITAGE, HOSPITALITY AND DESIGN INTO MEANINGFUL, MODERN EXPERIENCES FOR GUESTS.

By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson and Anudari Erdenebulgan

For more than eight decades, HAPPO-EN has occupied a rare position in Tokyo's event landscape. Its signature Shirokane Venue in Tokyo is a centuries-old garden that is known as a place where Japanese beauty is carefully composed into moments whose memories endure for a lifetime. With experience managing seasonal gardens, traditional architecture and masterful Japanese craftsmanship, the company is expanding into events, from corporate conferences to diplomatic engagements.

That sensibility has made HAPPO-EN a leading name in luxury weddings, even as Japan's wedding market contracts. President and CEO Yoshinori Inoue said the company focuses on the luxury segment of the market, which has attracted international couples who prefer highly curated weddings. "Other companies pursue volume through casual offerings, but we concentrate on depth, artistry and cultural significance," he said.

Today, the company is maintaining its ceremonial roots while growing its presence in the meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) sector, serving global corporations and institutions seeking more than a conventional venue. With its new restaurant KAPPO BUTAI and HAPPO-EN Confectionery Shop, located in the rapidly redeveloping Shinagawa-Takanawa area, HAPPO-EN is expanding its culinary offerings while maintaining its cultural depth.

Inoue said hospitality is built on three essential elements: beautiful experiences, meaningful experiences and collaboration with local communities. In 2023, HAPPO-EN hosted then-presidents Biden and Kishida, carefully selecting meaningful cultural elements, such as gelato from Miyagi Prefecture, which received disaster relief from the U.S. in 2011. Dubbed "Biden Gelato," the product experienced a surge in popularity.

Inoue said that business events and conferences can bring long-term growth and revitalization to Japan's regions. "HAPPO-EN contributes cultural depth through our heritage and environment, creating an integrated experience that blends world-class event capability with authentic Japanese culture," he said.

Japan's future depends on district-level economic revitalization that attracts tourists, workers and residents alike, and HAPPO-EN is restoring cultural assets and nurturing a community around them.



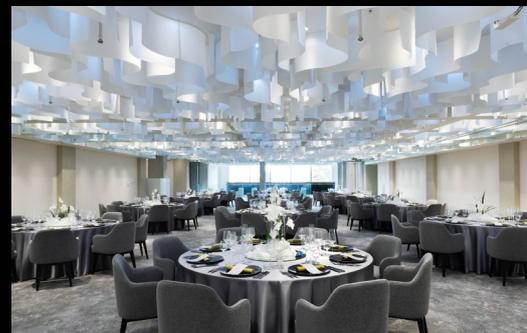
"We concentrate on depth, artistry and cultural significance."

Yoshinori Inoue

President and CEO, HAPPO-EN



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LA VIE FACTORY'S GLOBAL VISION FOR LIFE EVENT PHOTOGRAPHY

From intimate weddings to global destinations, a Japanese company reshapes how life's milestones are photographed.

By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson, Kyann Edouard and Anudari Erdenebulgan

In Japan, tradition and modern life intersect day to day, in quiet moments and once-in-a-lifetime celebrations. To capture those moments and preserve their meaning, photography needs to be more than a visual journal; the photographer must understand and empathize with all involved to capture both the minutiae and the vibrant energy of the grand spectacle. LEC Co., Ltd. / La-vie Factory, a photography-led life events company, has spent three decades mastering the art of capturing personal moments.

Since launching its business in 1995, La Vie Factory has upheld a simple but unconventional idea: wedding photography should feel natural. Instead of rigid poses, its photographers focused on unscripted emotion, movement and atmosphere. That philosophy proved prescient. As Japan's demographic shifts reduced the number of traditional weddings, couples began seeking smaller, more personal ceremonies and photography that reflected who they truly were.

"Only about half of married couples in Japan actually hold a wedding ceremony," said Eiji Umehara, president of La Vie Factory. "So we created ways for people to celebrate meaningfully, even on a small scale."

That thinking led to the early launch of affordable, intimate ceremonies and to La Vie Factory's strength in photography-driven weddings. Today, the company operates across Japan with hundreds of domestic shooting locations and an international footprint spanning more than 50 overseas regions. Paris remains a favorite, but clients have also chosen places as varied as Bolivia's Uyuni Salt Flats and Cambodia's Angkor Wat.

Inbound tourism has become another pillar. Long before the current surge in international travel, La Vie Factory began offering photography experiences for visitors seeking something deeper than sightseeing. In Kyoto, its kimono-focused concept allows guests to wear authentic ceremonial garments and shoot in refined settings, often within wedding venues during off-hours.

Quality, he insists, begins with people. All photographers are trained under unified standards that emphasize communication as much as technical skill. "We do not say 'no,'" he says. "If customers want more shots, we take them. If they want to see their photos, we show them." Guided by its belief in lifelong relationships, the company aims to support customers through many of life's milestones.

For an international audience drawn to Japan's sense of care and craftsmanship, La Vie Factory offers more than photography.

"We are a company dedicated to serving and supporting as many people as possible. We strive to embody the essence of Japanese *omotenashi* and continually refine it. That commitment defines who we are."

Eiji Umehara

President, LEC Co., Ltd. / La-vie Factory



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INSIDE TREAT'S VISION FOR TIMELESS BRIDAL LUXURY AND MEANINGFUL WEDDINGS

As Japan's wedding market contracts, Treat builds enduring bridal luxury through craftsmanship, human-centered service and an editorial approach to weddings that values time, meaning and experience over scale.

By Daniel de Bomford, Bernard Thompson, Kyann Edouard and Anudari Erdenebulgan

Choosing a wedding dress is part of a deeply emotional journey. Finding the right one is less about chasing perfection than about recognizing yourself in the fabric and knowing the day will deliver exactly what you want. Yoko Yamashiro, creative director of Treat, said that the wedding dress could be the most expensive item a woman wears in her lifetime. "Our goal is to make that process as precious and enjoyable as possible," she said. "We focus on making every moment meaningful — on providing true *omotenashi*, or heartfelt hospitality."

For Treat, the answer has never been volume. Founded in Kobe, Japan, in 2005, Treat emerged as a rebuttal to the conventions of Japan's bridal market, where rental systems and venue commissions long dictated both design and quality. "When we started, the quality of Japanese wedding dresses was quite poor," Yamashiro said. "The only way to make money was to cut costs on the product itself."

That reality ran counter to what Yamashiro believed brides deserved. Having worked as a wedding planner, she was acutely aware of how removed the system was from the experience many women imagined for themselves. "If I were a bride, I wouldn't want a synthetic dress that everyone else had worn before, or one that didn't fit me properly," she said. "I admired Vera Wang and dreamed of wearing silk, couture-quality gowns. But those kinds of dresses were almost impossible to find in Japan."

Treat's response was structural as much as aesthetic. The company invested early in in-house ateliers, authentic materials



"Choosing a wedding dress is part of a deeply emotional journey, and it should be fun."

Yoko Yamashiro

Creative Director, Treat

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such as silk, and a workforce trained not simply to style, but to listen. "Without skilled staff, expensive dresses would never sell," Yamashiro said. "But with the right training and dedication, we can maintain both quality and profitability."

That emphasis on people remains central. In an era obsessed with efficiency, Treat has resisted the urge to streamline the emotional complexity of choosing a wedding dress. Brides in Japan typically try on between four and

seven gowns, a process often described as stressful. Treat sees it differently. "To us, that process is not a problem—it's a joy," Yamashiro said. "Choosing a wedding dress is part of a deeply emotional journey, and it should be fun."

Rather than rushing decisions, stylists are trained in *omotenashi*, the Japanese ethos of heartfelt hospitality. "I often tell our staff: 'Treat each bride as if she were your own family,'" she said. The goal is not to shorten the experience, but to make it meaningful.

This philosophy has found resonance beyond Japan. As inbound wedding tourism grows, international couples are increasingly drawn to ceremonies rooted in place and culture. Yamashiro sees Japan's appeal as both visual and spiritual. "Japan provides a beautiful setting where couples can create meaningful memories," she said. "There's also the spiritual aspect—a unique connection to nature and to the divine."

Treat's growth has followed this worldview outward, expanding into guest attire, jewelry and sustainability-focused initiatives such as lab-grown diamonds. The intention, Yamashiro said, is coherence rather than scale. "I want Treat to offer a full spectrum of luxury bridal experiences—not just dresses, but every aspect that completes the wedding journey."

In a contracting market, that restraint has become a form of strength. Fewer weddings mean fewer chances to get it right. Treat's bet is that when moments become rarer, care matters more—and that luxury, at its core, is still defined by time, craft and human attention.

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