



The awe-inspiring domes of Tokyo's iconic station have been restored with great attention to detail, including the statuary.

Gateway to the City: the Many Facets of Tokyo Station

Tokyo's iconic landmark has itself become a destination, as visitors flock there to dine, shop and lodge. Now it's even having an effect on its surrounding environs.

by Julian Ryall

Tokyo Station handles well over 4,000 trains every day, has 14 above-ground railway lines operated by the East Japan Railway Company (JR East) and sees 430,000 people pass through its doors on an average day. It is the starting point for the famed Shinkansen bullet trains that set out like clockwork to destinations all over the country.

But it is developing into so much more: on one hand it is becoming a tourist target on its own, finding original ways to attract visitors, first-timers and repeaters, to its many facilities. On the other hand, the station is increasingly playing an important role as a gateway to Tokyo, offering visitors easy access to the surrounding areas. This is the goal of the Tokyo Station City vision, as its slogan suggests: "Station to city and city to station."

"The role of this station is no longer only about providing trains for passengers," says Kunihiko Koike, managing director and the 25th station master of Tokyo Station. "Although we take our role as the hub of the network very seriously, we have also become a destination for tourists and shoppers."

Tokyo Station has served as the hub of both the capital and the nation ever since it first opened in 1914. Within easy walking distance to the Imperial Palace and the bustling Marunouchi business district, the building was the focus of a redevelopment project started in 2007 and completed in 2012 that returned the landmark to its early glory.



The lobby lounge of The Tokyo Station Hotel features high molded ceilings and contemporary European design.

The GRANSTA shopping area inside the ticket gates features a wide variety of shopping choices and broad hallways.



The signage is easy to understand and placed in prominent locations to enhance access.



The iconic red brick exterior was restored along with the matching domes at either end of the structure, and the detailed reliefs that previously decorated the interior halls are seen once again. Koike, who joined JR East in 1978, has overseen a number of service improvements as well. He points to signage in four languages—Japanese, English, Chinese and Korean—and a recently launched app that provides translations. "We have a number of university student translators to help foreign visitors," says Koike, "and we've increased foreign language announcements within the station and on our trains."

With the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 on the horizon, new initiatives are also being introduced—including more barrier-free facilities, staff education programs and luggage storage areas—to smooth the way for the hundreds of thousands of visitors who are expected to attend the sporting extravaganza.

JR East also teamed up with retail outlets and service providers to create one of the largest *eki naka* areas in the country. The term literally means "inside the station" and the concept behind it is to provide every facility that a traveler, tourist or passing commuter could ever need. These range from cafes to bookshops, bakeries, convenience stores, restaurants, grocery stores and more.

A key partner in that development has been the company that has operated the GRANSTA retail area since 2007 and recently completed a major expansion of its retail area to 5,440

square meters. "We felt this was a good opportunity and set ourselves the challenge of introducing facilities that are helpful and convenient for anyone who uses the station," says the president of the company.

The station building, recognized as an Important Cultural Property of Japan, is also home to The Tokyo Station Hotel, superbly renovated with 150 guestrooms, which first opened in 1915. "When we set about the redevelopment, the objective was to recreate the value of the landmark and then hand that on to future generations," says Managing Director and General Manager Hitoshi Fujisaki of the historic property.

Today, a broad cross-section of guests—including many foreign visitors—stay at the hotel. Its convenience for travelers is an obvious plus, as are its proximity to famous business districts, its impressive facilities and eye-catching design elements. But Fujisaki believes that the hotel's heritage also plays a part in its popularity. "There are so many luxury hotel brands in and around the Marunouchi district, the best way we can be distinctive is by being independently minded," he says.

As for the station's role as a gateway? Just last December, an expansive people- and traffic-friendly plaza opened on the Marunouchi side of the station, highlighting the station's architecture while creating a transparent transition between the hub and the city it serves. It is clear that the Tokyo Station City concept has already spread beyond the immediate station area into the business district and the broader community.