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Press Release

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Film Director, Photographer, Tourism Expert, Governing Mayor Speak of Tokyo's Draw

Tourists are back in Tokyo with the number of international visitors to Japan in 2024 hitting record highs, steadily recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic. Amid re-emerging interest in the Japanese capital, four prominent figures—a film director, local photographer, tourism expert and Berlin's Governing Mayor—spoke about Tokyo's appeal in recent issues of TOKYO UPDATES (*), a popular online magazine run by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG).



Cherry blossom tree at night in Nihonbashi ©Junya Watanabe

Ever-Changing Tokyo: Photographer Captures City of Night and Rain

Junya Watanabe is a street photographer who takes photos of Tokyo at night and in the rain, unveiling unfamiliar and unusual places in the city.

“It may have been nice traveling to places full of nature while living in Tokyo, but if given the choice, I wanted to photograph the best moments of the city I was living in,” Watanabe told TOKYO UPDATES.

“And if I was going to photograph Tokyo, I wanted to do it at night. That was my line of thought,” he said.

Watanabe began to walk around the city every night, exploring areas like Shibuya, Shinjuku, Ikebukuro, Nihonbashi and Akihabara. He became particularly absorbed in Akihabara, an area famous for its electronic and subculture stores, close to where he lived.

Around a year after Watanabe started photographing Akihabara, he had a unique experience on a night of heavy rain, in a place he had shot many times before.

“It was pouring, but the raindrops were scattered and so fine they almost looked like lines,” Watanabe said. “Although I was drenched, I took photos fervently all night long and was able to capture an indescribably surreal shot. It both looked like Akihabara and felt like an alternate universe.”

The Back Streets Supporting the City

A shrine stands quietly in a narrow alleyway between multi-purpose buildings, just a little bit inside from one of Akihabara's boulevards. The shrine is said to have been established in the Edo Period (1603-1868) and rebuilt in the 20th century.

“The moment you take a road to the side and enter the back streets, the mood changes instantly,” said Watanabe. “It's very quiet in contrast to the lively and bustling main street. The true colors of this neighborhood are perhaps here, in the back streets as opposed to the main boulevards.”

When Watanabe travels abroad, he often visits well-known streets. "But then I walk down a side street a little and I'm able to see a different side of the city. I hope people visiting Japan from overseas also take a moment to explore the back streets here," he added.

<https://www.tokyoupdates.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/en/post-1302/>

Tokyo Vice Director Talks About the Gravity of Tokyo

Since first visiting Japan as an exchange student over half a century ago, Alan Poul has since built a distinguished career as a producer and a director in Hollywood, while maintaining close ties with Japan. His latest project was the hit crime drama series, *Tokyo Vice*, filmed entirely in and around Tokyo, with Poul praising the Japanese capital as an ideal filming location.

Asked about what makes Tokyo unique, Poul said: "I think the easiest thing to say is that Tokyo works. The city works in a way like no other city that I have ever lived in or visited. It is a very chaotic city, but somehow things function smoothly and on time, which is amazing."

Poul, who also worked on other films shot in Japan, including the 1989 action movie *Black Rain*, says the key to an ideal filming location is an unspoken agreement between people that they will respect each other, and everybody knows that there are lines that should not be crossed.

"Although it's a city where most people are private and would not want to have much interaction with strangers, there is a level of courtesy and commitment to service that is way far beyond that of any other city that I have visited," he said.

According to Poul, filming the second season was a smooth experience, thanks to close cooperation with local governments and police in Japan, along with the support of the Governor of Tokyo, Koike Yuriko.

"We have big scenes taking place at places like the inside of a Buddhist temple, so we

were able to show more of the ceremonial aspects of Tokyo life,” he said.

“I know our American and European viewers felt they were getting an amazing look into the city, but season 2 will be double that. We really show a much bigger canvas of the city.”

<https://www.tokyoupdates.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/en/post-1187/>

People are Tokyo’s Most Important Asset, Tourism Expert says

David Atkinson, CEO of Konishi Decorative Arts & Crafts and author of the bestselling “The New Tourism Nation,” notes that Tokyo offers “an unparalleled diversity of attractions” for overseas visitors.

“Taking food as one example, obviously Tokyo offers the widest range of Japanese food from exquisite and expensive kaiseki cuisine or sushi to the delights of the everyday food enjoyed by so many Japanese at local eateries in the downtown areas of the city,” he wrote in an article contributed to TOKYO UPDATES.

In addition, Tokyo offers a huge range of international eateries, and “many of these present an interesting twist on the original cuisine as they have been adapted to Japanese tastes,” noted Atkinson, who has served on several government committees related to growth strategy, tourism and administrative reform.

“In architecture, there is the ultra modern right next door to traditional Japanese wooden buildings, as well as the fascinating fusion of the two that was so popular in the 19th and early 20th centuries,” he pointed out.

Visitors can enjoy shopping for traditional Japanese products, such as pottery, porcelain, knives, kimono and antiques, while just a few train stops away they can delve into the subcultures of anime, manga, otaku and the other unique niche experiences for which the city is so famous.

But Atkinson also noted that “it is important to realize that everyday life can be at least as important as high culture or an impressive palace or castle,” adding that Tokyo’s

people are the city's most important asset.

“It is just a question of making communication between the people of Tokyo and the rest of the world easier and enjoyable for all parties involved,” he stressed. “Tokyo is naturally a very attractive place to visit, since it is home to so many people. The key is how to make that sustainable.”

<https://www.tokyoupdates.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/en/post-1071/>

Berlin Governing Mayor Praises Tokyo's Subway System

Kai Wegner, Governing Mayor of Berlin, made his first visit to Japan in May and participated in the SusHi Tech Tokyo 2024 (* *) City Leaders Program, organized by the TMG. During his stay, Wegner told TOKYO UPDATES that he was impressed by Tokyo's advanced subway system.

“Tokyo has a wonderful subway system. I would like something similar in Berlin,” Wegner said.

“We have a good subway network, but it is still small and needs to be developed further,” he said. “I rode the subway yesterday and found it an interesting experience. We can learn a lot from the system's punctuality and cleanliness.”

Wegner said he was also impressed by the kindness of Tokyoites and promised to revisit the capital in the future, saying: “This won't be my last visit.”

<https://www.tokyoupdates.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/en/post-1306/>

* **TOKYO UPDATES**, an online magazine, features the latest fresh perspectives on Tokyo developments, with contributions from prominent figures, journalists, and independent writers of diverse nationalities, which focus on daily life, leading SDG initiatives, and urban challenges.

<https://www.tokyoupdates.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/en>

* *SusHi Tech Tokyo, short for Sustainable High City Tech Tokyo, is a Tokyo-based concept that aims to create sustainable new value by overcoming global urban challenges through cutting-edge technology, diverse ideas, and digital expertise.

<https://www.sushi-tech-tokyo2024.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/>

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Media



Cherry blossom tree at night in Nihonbashi ©Junya Watanabe.jpg



Kabukicho in Shinjuku ©Junya Watanabe.jpg



A building that symbolizes Akihabara ©Junya Watanabe.JPG



A side street off so-called "Bira Bira Dori" (Leaflet Street) in Akihabara
©Junya Watanabe.jpg



Hanabusa Inari Shrine ©Junya Watanabe.jpg



Kabukiza_Tokyo ©AFP.jpg



Sensoji_Asakusa_Tokyo ©AFP.jpg



The Governing Mayor of Berlin, Kai Wegner ©Tokyo Metropolitan Government.jpg