

PRIME TRAVELER

Osaka, Off the Menu

大阪

Japan's food capital, its funniest city, and the one place
where the rules you learned in Tokyo and Kyoto stop
applying.

PRIME TRAVELER · INSIDER TRAVEL INTELLIGENCE



CONTENTS

01 Osaka Isn't Tokyo or Kyoto, and It Knows It

02 Getting Around

03 Eating Like You Mean It

04 Shinsekai: The Retro Side of the City

05 Dotonbori After Dark, Done Right

06 The Comedy City

07 Day Trips Worth the Train Ticket

08 The Tells That Peg You As a Tourist

09 Quick Reference Cheat Sheet

Osaka Isn't Tokyo or Kyoto, and It Knows It

If Tokyo is precise and Kyoto is quiet, Osaka is neither, and it will tell you so, loudly, with a joke attached. This is a city built around food, humor, and a much more direct, talkative way of dealing with strangers than the rest of the country. Visitors who expect Tokyo's reserve or Kyoto's formality often misread Osaka as rough. It isn't. It's warm in a completely different register.

The Local Phrase Worth Knowing

Osaka has a well known local expression that roughly translates to eating until you go broke, and it says everything about the city's priorities. Food here isn't a stop between sights. For a lot of visitors, and most locals, it's the actual point of being here.

People Talk to You Here

Small talk with shopkeepers, street vendors, and strangers on the street is far more common in Osaka than in Tokyo or Kyoto, and it's genuinely part of the experience rather than an inconvenience. Shopkeepers bantering with customers, a bit of good natured teasing, a joke at your expense that isn't unkind, this is normal here and worth leaning into rather than being thrown by.

Tokyo shows you Japan's future. Kyoto shows you its past. Osaka just wants to feed you and make you laugh.

Getting Around

Osaka's transit is simpler to grasp than Tokyo's once you know the two main spines to look for.

The Loop Line, Osaka's Version

Like Tokyo's famous loop train, Osaka has its own circular line touching most of the areas visitors care about. It's a smaller, simpler loop than Tokyo's version, and a good first thing to orient yourself around on day one.

The North-South Subway Spine

A single subway line running north to south connects the two biggest hub areas in the city, the northern business and shopping district and the southern entertainment and nightlife district. Most first-time visitors end up riding this line constantly, more than any other single piece of the network.

Your IC Card Works Here Too

The same national transit card used in Tokyo and Kyoto works across Osaka's trains, subway, and buses without any changes needed.

Walk the Two Big Districts

Both the northern and southern hub areas are dense enough that walking between nearby points is often faster than taking a train for a short hop. Save the subway for crossing between the two districts, not for getting around inside either one.

ESCALATOR ETIQUETTE IS REVERSED HERE

Tokyo and most of Japan stand on the left side of an escalator and walk on the right. Osaka famously does the opposite, standing on the right and walking on the left. It's a small thing, but standing on the wrong side here gets you noticed immediately, and it genuinely differs from what you may have just gotten used to in Tokyo.