

Source: Compiled by Harunoya Ikuhisa; Illustrated by Ikkeisai Yoshiiku. *Spring Colors: Three-Topic Tales*, Frontispiece: *Venue of a Shunshoku-sandai-banashi Gathering* (Detail). Collection of the Tokyo Metropolitan Library.

Edo Rakugo Tourist Guide

— The Spirit of Tokyo —



Rakugo is a traditional Edo-period storytelling art that has endured to the present day, transcending mere entertainment or comedy. Seated on a single cushion, a storyteller skillfully manipulates props like a **folding fan** and **tenugui hand towel** to evoke objects, emotions, and movement. Through highly polished narrative skills, the storyteller vividly depicts the **streets of Edo** and the lives of the people who called them home. From these stories, one can absorb the spirited sensibilities and lifestyles of the people of Edo, finding a touch of **poignant humanity** amidst the laughter.

Rakugo Features the Ordinary Townsfolk of Edo

The origins of paid professional rakugo are traced back to three figures active during the Genroku period (1688-1704): Tsuyuno Gorobe of Kyoto, Yonezawa Hikohachi of Osaka, and Shikano Buzaemon of Edo. Shikano Buzaemon was particularly famous for his *zashiki-banashi*, intimate rakugo performances given in the *tatami* rooms of private residences. The rise of dedicated rakugo and *manzai yose* theaters soon followed, and rakugo rapidly developed as a popular form of entertainment for the common people. There were said to be over 125 *yose* in Edo during the golden age of rakugo in the Bunka-Bunsei periods (1804–1830s). A hallmark of rakugo is its vivid portrayal of the lives of **historically undocumented commoners**, such as artisans or self-employed



vegetable vendors, who lived in cramped, vibrant, side-by-side *nagaya* row houses. For audiences at that time, no other stories were more familiar and relatable, and today they offer us a **perfect glimpse** into old Edo.

Portraying the Joys and Sorrows of Daily Life



Discovering the Lives of Edo Locals Through Rakugo

Source: Illustrated by Kunisada. *Ancient Tales of Edo: New Stories with Illustrations of Traditional First-Rate Storytelling from Generation to Generation* (Detail). Collection of the Tokyo Metropolitan Library.

Edo, a metropolis of one million, was split into samurai, temple, and commoner districts, with the latter squeezed into just 20% of the land, as main streets were reserved for grand estates and shops. Life for commoners centered on the *ura-nagaya*, the row houses tucked behind these main streets. In these tight-knit communities, the rakugo per-

formed at the yose was a welcome break from the daily grind, offering a chance to laugh and cry to their hearts' content. These yose theaters remain active today, offering visitors to Tokyo a unique opportunity to experience the authentic flavor of old Edo through classical rakugo.

1

Oji no Kitsune

While foxes are known to trick humans, in the rakugo story *Oji no Kitsune* (The Fox of Oji), a person out-foxes a fox. The setting is **Oji Inari Shrine**, the head of Kanto's Inari shrines and a site of fox legends. Long a center of popular worship, the area also features **Oji Ogiya**, a historic shop from the story that still sells its famous *atsuyaki tamago* (thick, rolled omelet) today.



2

Horinouchi

In *Horinouchi*, the scatterbrained Kumagoro goes to pray at **Myo-ho-ji Temple** to mend his ways at his wife's urging. Though Myo-ho-ji Temple is a historic temple renowned for warding off misfortune, he repeatedly blunders en route. His humorous yet sincere devotion embodying the quintessential Edokko spirit (the sincere, lively nature of native Edoites) of reverence for Shinto and Buddhism.



3

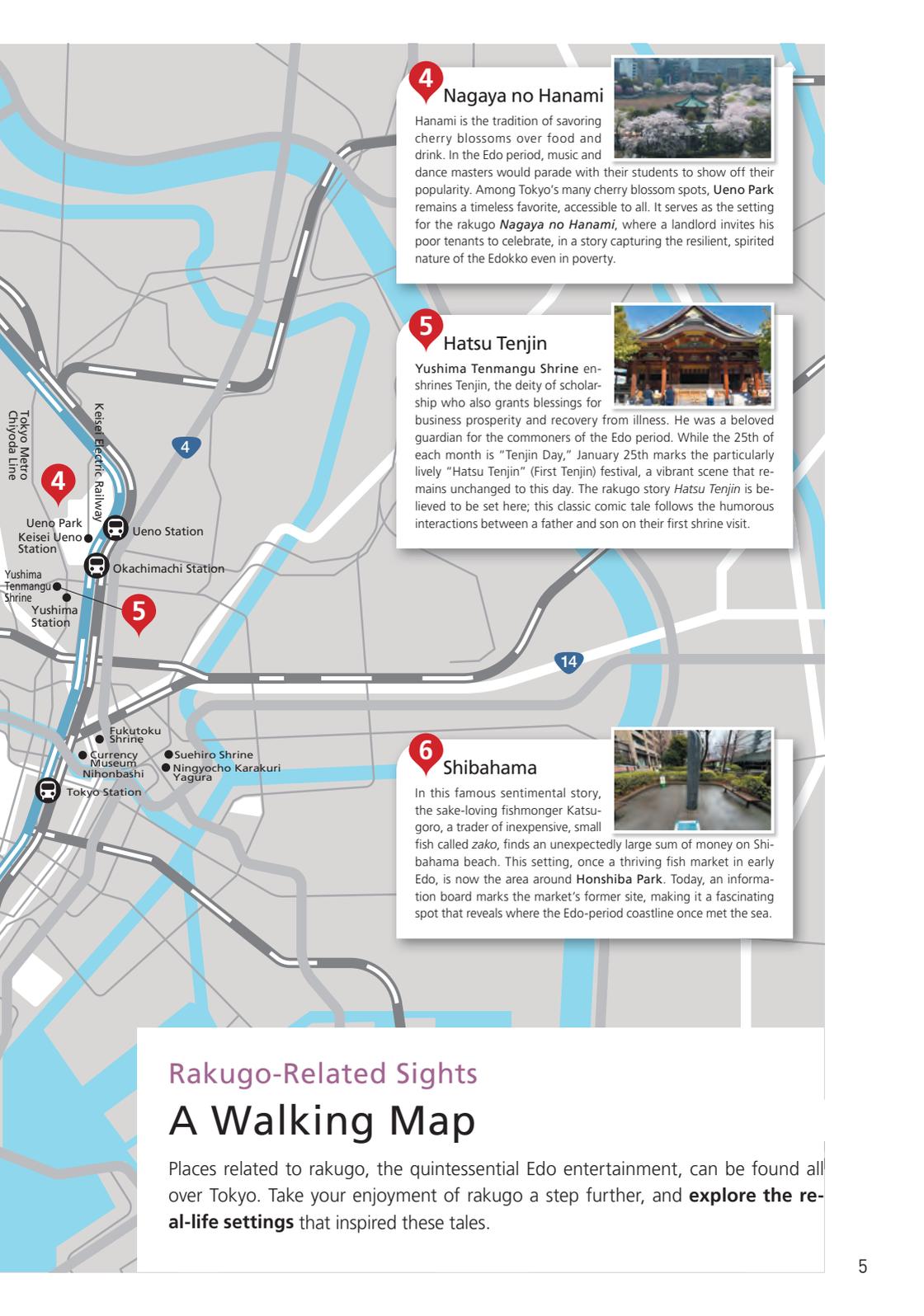
Meguro no Sanma

A Lord longs for the delicious "commoner's" saury (sanma) he once tasted in landlocked Meguro. Served a saury of refined preparation at the palace, he delivers the famous punchline: "When it comes to saury, it must be from Meguro." The Lord (modeled on Tokugawa Iemitsu) visited the area around **Meguro Fudosen Ryusenji Temple**. Today, this historic landmark, one of Japan's "Three Great Fudo" and Tokyo's "Five-Colored Fudo," celebrates this heritage with an annual autumn Sanma Festival.



*Three Great Fudo: Kihara Fudosen (Kumamoto), Narita Fudosen (Chiba), and Meguro Fudosen (Tokyo).
*Five-Colored Fudo: Five Tokyo temples named by color: Meguro (Black), Mejiro (White), Meaka (Red), Meki (Yellow), and Meao (Blue).





4

Nagaya no Hanami

Hanami is the tradition of savoring cherry blossoms over food and drink. In the Edo period, music and dance masters would parade with their students to show off their popularity. Among Tokyo's many cherry blossom spots, **Ueno Park** remains a timeless favorite, accessible to all. It serves as the setting for the rakugo *Nagaya no Hanami*, where a landlord invites his poor tenants to celebrate, in a story capturing the resilient, spirited nature of the Edokko even in poverty.



5

Hatsu Tenjin

Yushima Tenmangu Shrine enshrines Tenjin, the deity of scholarship who also grants blessings for business prosperity and recovery from illness. He was a beloved guardian for the commoners of the Edo period. While the 25th of each month is "Tenjin Day," January 25th marks the particularly lively "Hatsu Tenjin" (First Tenjin) festival, a vibrant scene that remains unchanged to this day. The rakugo story *Hatsu Tenjin* is believed to be set here; this classic comic tale follows the humorous interactions between a father and son on their first shrine visit.



6

Shibahama

In this famous sentimental story, the sake-loving fishmonger Katsugoro, a trader of inexpensive, small fish called *zako*, finds an unexpectedly large sum of money on Shibahama beach. This setting, once a thriving fish market in early Edo, is now the area around **Honshiba Park**. Today, an information board marks the market's former site, making it a fascinating spot that reveals where the Edo-period coastline once met the sea.



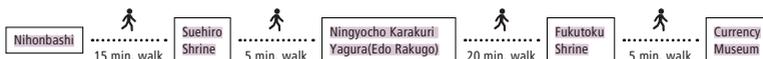
Rakugo-Related Sights A Walking Map

Places related to rakugo, the quintessential Edo entertainment, can be found all over Tokyo. Take your enjoyment of rakugo a step further, and **explore the real-life settings** that inspired these tales.



Nihonbashi: Savor the sophisticated spirit of Edo

Completed in 1603, Nihonbashi was designated the following year as the starting point of the Five Routes (Tokaido, Nakasendo, Nikko Kaido, Oshu Kaido, and Koshu Kaido). The area flourished as a premier hub for finance, logistics, commerce, and entertainment, becoming the epicenter for the latest trends. Various cultures and the **Edokko spirit** (the sincere, lively nature of native Edoites) were fostered here, and it was also where rakugo, the comic storytelling beloved by the townspeople, flourished.



 1:20 PM

Nihonbashi

Located near Ginza and Tokyo Station, Nihonbashi is where Edo heritage meets modern Tokyo. The name refers to both the district and its iconic bridge. Visitors are captivated by the bridge's beauty and the area's unique charm—a “crossroads of eras” where century-old shops stand alongside sophisticated modern boutiques.



1:35 PM-1:45 PM 

Suehiro Shrine

Renowned for granting victory and warding off disaster, this shrine was the **guardian of the original Yoshiwara district** (1617–1657). It still houses a stone monument to the “Ha-gumi,” one of Edo’s legendary firefighting brigades. As a frequent setting for Rakugo storytelling, Yoshiwara was a place of both **familiarity and aspiration** for the people of old Tokyo.

Facility Information

03-3667-4250

2-25-20 Nihonbashi Ningyocho, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 103-0013

Photo credit: Chuo City Tourism Association



1:50 PM-2:05 PM 

Ningyocho Karakuri Yagura* (Edo Rakugo)

Ningyocho's Retro Clock Towers perform a 2–3 minute karakuri (mechanical puppet) show every hour from 11:00 AM to 7:00 PM. The “Edo Rakugo” brings old Tokyo to life through short stories and scenes of townspeople. If you don't have time for a full Rakugo performance, these towers offer a charming glimpse into the spirit of Edo.

Facility Information
2-2 Ningyocho, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 103-0013



 2:25 PM-2:50 PM

Fukutoku Shrine

An Inari shrine said to have been visited by Tokugawa Ieyasu, founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate, and revered by military commanders and locals alike. Authorized to hold **tomikuji (lotteries)** by the shogunate it was a hub of lively energy. In Rakugo stories centered on these lotteries, storytellers vividly capture the human desire for sudden wealth and the mix of joy and sorrow that follows.

Facility Information
03-3276-3550
2-4-14 Nihonbashi Muromachi, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 103-0022
*Amulet Sales & Goshuin Stamps 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM



Photo credit: Bank of Japan Currency Museum



2:55 PM-4:00 PM 

Currency Museum

You can view authentic Edo-period gold coins (*oban*) and even experience their actual weight for yourself. The museum offers a practical look at daily life, showing exactly what small-change coins (*zeni*) could buy at the time. With a **vast collection of rare currency**, the museum preserves the history of money for future generations. Understanding the real-world value of a ryo (gold coin) or a mon (copper coin) might just bring the world of Rakugo storytelling to life.

Facility Information
03-3277-3037 / 1-3-1 Nihonbashi Hongokucho, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 103-0021 (in the Bank of Japan Annex) / Closed: Mondays (Open if Monday is a holiday), New Year Holidays (Dec 29 – Jan 4). *Temporarily closed for maintenance or exhibit changes. / 9:30 AM – 4:30 PM (Last admission 4:00 PM)



* **Yagura** (Turret): A traditional Japanese structure used since ancient times for defense and observation within castle grounds.



GO TOKYO: The Official Tokyo Travel Guide
You can find the latest tourism information here. Check it out!
<https://www.gotokyo.org/en/>



GO TOKYO: The Official Tokyo Travel Guide
Discover more about Edo
<https://www.gotokyo.org/en/see-and-do/history/>



「Journey Through Edo's Legacy」
100 Selected sites to explore Edo history and culture across Japan
<https://edolegacytravel.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/>



Go Tokyo
(Tokyo Fan Club)



@TokyoTokyoOldmeetsNew



@tokyo_kankou



tokyotokyoldmeetsnew