

## Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building



Designed by the architect Tange Kenzo, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building complex is home to the offices of Tokyo's local government. The 400,000-square-metre complex includes twin 48-storey towers, an adjacent tower block, the Metropolitan Assembly Hall, and a sweeping, statue-lined and colonnaded plaza.

The 243 meter tall twin towers and the adjacent building have government offices. The towers are known for their extraordinary design, said to have been inspired by Gothic churches, and their observation rooms. The observation rooms are located on the 45<sup>th</sup> floors of the towers. These identical rooms give panoramic views of the city. The smaller building takes the form of a cluster of buildings, and is connected to the main building (the towers) by means of a multi-story portico which appears throughout the complex as its unifying feature.

The Metropolitan Assembly Hall is where the city's councilors meet. This circular metal-clad structure looms over the plaza from above the portico. The Assembly Hall is separated from the main buildings by a semi-circular plaza. Surrounding the plaza is a portico lined with sculptures.

The size and the facade of the complex are overwhelming, which is what attracts visitors in large numbers.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building (東京都庁, Tōkyō Tochō) in Shinjuku is often visited by tourists for its free observation decks which provide good panoramic views of Tokyo and beyond. The 243 meter tall building has two towers, and each houses an observatory at a height of 202 meters. It had been the tallest building in Tokyo until it was overtaken by the Midtown Tower in 2007.

With favorable weather conditions, famous landmarks such as Mount Fuji, the Tokyo Skytree, Tokyo Tower, Meiji Shrine and the Tokyo Dome can be seen from the observatories. Each observatory has a cafe and a souvenir shop. The North Observatory remains open later at night, making it a popular spot to catch night views of the city.



*View from the Southern Observatory*

The towers and the surrounding buildings contain the offices and the assembly hall of the metropolitan government of Tokyo. Visitors are therefore subjected to bag checks prior to boarding the elevators as part of the security measures.

On the second story of the building, there is a tourist information center with lots of information about Tokyo, but also about various other tourist destinations across Japan. Periodically, the center holds fairs during which local products from selected regions are being introduced and put on sale.

## IMPRESSIONS ABOUT THE BUILDING

### Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building

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The **Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building** (東京都庁舎 *Tōkyō-to Chōsha*?), also referred to as **Tokyo City Hall** or **Tochō** (都庁) for short, houses the headquarters of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, which governs not only the 23 wards, but also the cities, towns and villages that make up Tokyo as a whole.

Located in Shinjuku, the building consists of a complex of three structures, each taking up a city block. The tallest and most prominent of the three is Tokyo Metropolitan Main building No.1, a tower 48 stories tall that splits into two sections at the 33rd floor. The building also has three levels below ground. The design of the building (which was meant to resemble a computer chip), by architect Kenzo Tange (and associates), has many symbolic touches, most notably the aforementioned split which re-creates the look of a Gothic cathedral.

The other two buildings in the complex are the eight-story Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly Building (including one underground floor) and Tokyo Metropolitan Main Building No.2, which has 37 stories including three below ground.

The two panoramic observation decks, one in each tower on floor 45 (202 meters [663 ft] high), are free of charge to the public and contain gift shops and cafes. They are open till 23:00 on weekdays. Use of cameras is permitted, but tripods are forbidden.

| General information     |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Status                  | Complete   |
| Type                    | Prefecture building  |
| Location                | Shinjuku, Tokyo, Japan   |
| Coordinates             | <span><span><span><span><span>35°</span> <span>41′</span> <span>23″</span> N</span> <span>139°</span> <span>41′</span> <span>32″</span> E</span></span></span> |
| Construction started    | 1988   |
| Completed               | 1991   |
| Opening                 | 1991   |
| Cost                    | ¥157 billion   |
| Height                  |  |
| Roof                    | 242.9 meters [797 ft]  |
| Technical details       |  |
| Floor count             | 48   |
| Floor area              | 195,764 m <sup>2</sup> [2,107,190 sq ft]   |
| Design and construction |  |
| Owner                   | Tokyo Metropolitan Government  |
| Architect               | Kenzo Tange  |



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## History

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The building was finished in 1991 at the expense of ¥157 billion (about US\$ 1 billion) of public money. It replaced the former Tokyo City Hall at Yūrakuchō which was built in 1957 and designed by Kenzo Tange (who also designed the said successor building). The former Tokyo City Hall is now the site of the Tokyo International Forum.

The building held the title of the tallest building (by roof height) in Tokyo, at 243 meters [797 ft],<sup>[2]</sup> from 1991 to late 2006, when it surrendered its title upon the completion of Midtown Tower.



## In popular culture

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Though it has not gained the same degree of worldwide recognition as Tokyo Tower, the Metropolitan Government Building has come to represent the city in its own right. It frequently appears in Japanese science fiction as a symbol of authority or, often, serving as the basis of type scenes depicting a futuristic or post-apocalyptic Shinjuku.

### TOKYO METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT BUILDING



**Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building**

**Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building is probably the best observation deck in Tokyo. Best of all the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building observation deck is free.**

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building (東京都庁舎 Tōkyō Tochōsha), "**Tocho**" for short, or Tokyo City Hall is the location of the headquarters of the government of not only the 23 wards that people think of as the "city" of Tokyo, but also the cities, towns and villages that comprise Tokyo as a whole.

Located in Nishi-Shinjuku, it is the tallest building in Tokyo at 248 meters (814 feet) from base to top, and the second-tallest structure after Tokyo Tower. The two top-floor observation decks are free of charge to the public. It is only a short walk from Shinjuku Station. Given that it is free to use the observation decks and has fewer tall buildings built around, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building is the best observation deck in Tokyo to use.

**Viewing Tips - Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building**

I strongly recommend visiting the observation when it opens in the morning as this is the time when you will have the best opportunity of viewing Mount Fuji. At this time of day the sun will be behind you, the air will be colder and thus there will be less dust and smog in the air to block your view of Mount Fuji and the other mountains in the range.



**Tokyo Skyline**

**Structure - Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building**

The building consists of a complex of three structures each taking up a city block. The tallest and most prominent of the three is Tokyo Metropolitan Main building No.1, a tower 45 stories tall that splits into two sections at the 33rd floor. The building also has three levels below ground. The design of the building (which was supposed to look like a computer chip), by architect Kenzo Tange (and associates), has many symbolic touches, most notably the aforementioned split which re-creates the look of a Gothic cathedral.

Finished in 1991 at the expense of 157 billion yen (about \$US 1 billion) of public money, a popular nickname for Tocho is "Tax Tower."



## Tokyo Metropolitan Government building, or 'Tocho'



The area just west of Shinjuku station, West Shinjuku, has Japan's most concentrated cluster of skyscrapers. The massive earthquake that rocked Tokyo in 1923 established West Shinjuku's geological credibility when, being bedrock, virtually none of the buildings on it were damaged. The skyscraper-building boom began in the early 1970s with the construction of the 170m high Keio Plaza Hotel. Since then the Keio has been dwarfed by dozens of other highrises, the mother of them being the Tokyo Metropolitan Government building. Completed in 1991 at a cost the equivalent of over US1 billion, at 243 meters (797 feet) it is Tokyo's tallest building.

The 'Tocho', as it is known for short, was designed by the Japanese architect Kenzo Tange and, according to him, was inspired by the Notre Dame. Compared with the sparer lines of most of the skyscrapers that surround it, the traditional grandeur of

the cathedral is certainly apparent in its complexity of structure and surface, not to mention its equally grandiose sprawl. The complex also incorporates the 37-storey Tokyo Metropolitan Main Building No.2, and the eight-storey Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly Building. Taking up as much land as it does, the whole Tocho complex is like a town unto itself, and, walking around and through it, with its heights, depths and multiple levels, unless you take great care to ascertain your bearings, you are likely to get lost.

There is a free observation deck on each of the No.1 building's twin towers on the 45th floor. Unlike Tokyo on the ground, however, Tokyo from a quarter of a kilometer up is not a beautiful city. The parks, tree-lined avenues, rivers, temple groves and shrubbery that amply decorate the city on the ground are completely lost in the angles of the concrete jungle. The sheer expanse of the metropolis is breathtaking, though, and there is an added 'ooh aah' factor in being able to catch Mt Fuji on a clear enough day. I have only visited the northern of the two No.1 building towers. As you can see from the photos, it was definitely not a Mt Fuji day. There is a tawdry piano bar there with fake antiquarian plinths and plastic ivy completely out of keeping with the crisp modernity of the structure (a common failing, it must be said, in Japan), and once you've done the piecemeal 360 degrees, gazing out at more and more and more endless urban acreage stretching further than the eye can see, there's nothing for it but to go back down.



The northern No.1 Tower has a Tourist Information Center on the ground floor that is packed with useful guides to and maps of Tokyo in numerous languages including, of course, English. English speaking staff are also on hand.

## Hours

North Observatory open 9:30a.m.-11:00p.m. Closed on the 2nd and 4th Monday of each month.  
South Observatory open 9:30a.m.-5:30p.m (till 11pm when North Observatory closed.) Closed on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of each month.

The scheduled day off is postponed to the next day if it falls on a national holiday.

Both observatories are closed between December 29 and 31, and January 2 and 3, as well as on occasional building inspection days.

Last admittance is 30 minutes before closing time. Entry is free. There is a security check before boarding the ground floor elevator.

## Tokyo Metropolitan Government Office



The Tokyo Metropolitan government administers the 23 special wards of Tokyo in the eastern part, 39 cities in the western part of the prefecture, and also two island groups.

About 13 million people lives in the prefecture of Tokyo, which means 1 of 10 people lives in Tokyo! Also, Tokyo has the largest metropolitan economy in the world, and its GDP is about the same with Mexico's GDP.

The Metropolitan Buildings consist of three main buildings. Tokyo Metropolitan Main Building No.1 is 243 meters (797 ft) high, Tokyo Metropolitan Main Building No.2 is 163 meters (535 ft) high, and Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly Building is 41 meters (135 ft) high.

The best part of this building is its observatory. You can enjoy the view of Tokyo from 202 meters high for free. The elevator takes you to the 45th floor after 55 seconds.





# Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building



The Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, located in the Shinjuku ward, is one of the most easily recognizable buildings in Tokyo. The first time I saw it was outside my hotel window while staying across the street at the Keio Plaza Hotel on my first trip to Japan. I've since seen it innumerable times in different anime and it makes a brief appearance on the episode of The Simpsons where the family takes a vacation to Tokyo. The building is essentially Tokyo City Hall and houses the offices that govern all 23 wards, towns, and villages, that make up greater Tokyo.

Why is this cool? Well, just look at the building. Not only is it one of those buildings that you just can't seem to stop taking pictures of, but you can head inside and go to the top of one of the 48 story towers, for free. You would think that a building that cost about one billion dollars in tax payer money might want to recoup some of that by at least charging tourists to take the elevator, but you'd be wrong. Free.

When you reach the observatory you'll find a wide open space with unbelievable views of Tokyo, a



cafe, and of course, a souvenir shop. If you come early in the morning on a clear day you can sometimes see Mt Fuji in the distance. I've only ever seen the outline, or shadowy shape, of Mt Fuji from here, but I'll keep trying. If you've been lucky enough to get a shot of Mt Fuji from one of the observation decks, please leave a link to your shot in the comments, I'd love to see it.



Another nice thing about the observation decks is that they're open late, really late, try 11:00PM late, so you can get great shots of Tokyo at night as well. So if you're putting together an itinerary for your first, or next, trip to Tokyo, make sure you add the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, it's free and it's worth it.



## Tokyo Metropolitan Government Office Building

Looking more like the home of a global corporate giant than the local city council, this office complex reflects the modern Asian architectural sensibility. In some ways its twin 48-story towers even mirror the famed Petronas Towers in Malaysia.

The building's towering height is the result of Japan's late 20th century economic boom when land values soared and it seemed like the money would never stop flowing. Tokyo wanted to demonstrate a measure of autonomy, and building its own grand city hall away from the Japanese government offices was the first step.

The new complex pays homage to its heritage and its people through its granite facade which is covered in a geometric pattern the architect says was inspired by traditional Japanese homes. Inspiration for the towers is said to come from the churches of Germany, and its great plaza is a distant cousin to the Campo in Siena. It is this plaza that separates the politicians from the workers. The towers house offices for the 13,000 workers in the city's various departments. The city council meets in a separate building on the other side of the public square enclosed with a portico.

Any building in Japan is subject to the whims of nature. From typhoons to earthquakes, they have to be ready for the worst. This building has a unique superstructure that disperses the energy inflicted on it by violent natural acts. Instead of swaying with a quake or wind, the building twists, allowing more energy to be absorbed and expended while at the same time minimizing actual linear movement.

### Tokyo Tocho travel tip

I have to say that Nishi-Shinjuku is still a place where I return on every trip. And the main attraction here is the Tokyo City Hall complex, also known as the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building - or **Tochō**, a short of the official Japanese name *Tōkyō-to Chōsha* 「東京都庁舎」.

The complex includes three buildings, the Main building Number One, the building Number Two and the Metropolitan Assembly Building, all built between 1988 and 1991, designed by the famous Japanese architect Kenzo Tange. Among them, the most spectacular (and the main tourist attraction) is the Main building Number One, the two towers skyscraper (243 meters tall, 48 floors, 2nd place in the Top 10 Tokyo Skyscrapers).

Its design combines old and new architectural concepts: the two towers are said to make the building look like a Gothic cathedral, while the facade is decorated with motifs suggesting the microchips which, at the time of construction, were defining the electronics industry.

Travel tip: Regarding the touristic aspect, I think that Tochō is a must visit in Tokyo. Not only because it is an impressive architectural complex, and not only because from its towers you will enjoy some of the most beautiful views over Tokyo.

There's something much more interesting inside Tokyo Tochō: at its first floor, a discerning traveler will find an amazing **travel information center**, a wealth of information with literally hundreds of possible destinations in Japan, with maps, explanations and more. Plus, depending on current promotions, you may find there some souvenir shops unlike any other in the city...

Defying time and geology, the Kenzo Tange-designed Tokyo Metropolitan Building (Tocho) stands in the middle of a grove of skyscrapers that have been described as everything from a mini-Manhattan to a row of grave markers. The building's twin 48-story towers have observation rooms. High-speed elevators carry visitors to the sky lounges in less than a minute. The 360-degree views from the top are superlative.

*Naar de fotogallerij van de Tocho*