NEWSLETTER

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Tokyo Sugoi! - Episode 18 by Steve Gillick

Jisha Meguri: The Tokyo Pagoda Trail



Entsukaku Pagoda

Rising skyward, pagodas are often seen as symbolic links between earth and heaven. *Jisha Meguri* is the Japanese practice of visiting shrines and temples in search of spiritual peace. Along the way, many travellers also admire the pagodas that grace temple precincts. Those who undertake this journey are known as *Jisha Meguribito*. And that spiritual peace means something different to every traveller, whether they seek quiet reflection, inspiration, architecture, history, photography, or simply the pleasure of wandering through beautiful surroundings.

Among Tokyo's religious sites, pagodas hold a particular fascination. Originating in India, the pagoda spread with Buddhism through China before reaching Japan in the sixth century. Initially built as reliquaries for the Buddha's relics, pagodas later came to enshrine important scriptures as well.

Five-story pagodas symbolize the five Buddhist elements—Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, and Space. They stand within spacious temple precincts designed for strolling and quiet reflection. Three-story pagodas represent Buddhism's Three Jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma (teachings), and the Sangha (the community of monks and practitioners). They are generally found in smaller, more intimate settings, where they naturally become the visual focus.

There are approximately 210 extant wooden pagodas throughout Japan, with Tokyo home to several notable three-story and five-story pagodas. Although most cannot be entered, all invite visual contemplation through their architecture and surroundings.

The Tokyo Pagoda Trail: A Spiritual Journey from East to West

Senso-ji Temple, Asakusa
Tokyo's best-known temple welcomes more than 30 million visitors each year. Its five-story pagoda, originally built in 942 CE to house the Buddha's ashes and reconstructed in 1973, stands 53.3 metres tall. Although bustling with crowds during the day, the temple takes on a peaceful atmosphere after sunset, when the illuminated pagoda becomes the focal point.

Kyu Kan'ei-ji Pagoda, Ueno Park
Standing 36 metres high, this five-story pagoda dates from 1639 and is one of the few Edo-period pagodas to survive intact. Located within Ueno Zoo, this structure was part of the original Kan'ei-ji Temple, established to protect the Tokugawa Shogunate. Six Tokugawa shoguns are buried nearby.

Entsukaku Pagoda, Hotel Chinzanso Tokyo, Bunkyo
Originally built in Hiroshima during the 12th century, this three-story pagoda was relocated to the Hotel Chinzanso Tokyo in 1925. Set amid lush, beautifully landscaped gardens, it appears especially magical, emerging through the hotel's famous "sea of clouds" mist or illuminated after dark.



Tozen-ji Temple

Tozen-ji Temple, Takanawa, Minato

Founded in 1610 and later relocated to its present site, Tozen-ji is one of Edo's four great Zen temples. It is also remembered as the location of Britain's first diplomatic legation in Japan in 1859 and several violent encounters between samurai and foreigners. The temple's three-story pagoda, completed in 1992, harmonizes with the nationally designated historic grounds.



Ikegami Honmon-ji Pagoda

Ikegami Honmon-ji Temple, Ota City
Dedicated to the Buddhist monk Nichiren, this hilltop temple contains the Kanto region's oldest five-story pagoda, completed in 1608. The spacious grounds include historic buildings, scenic views over Tokyo, and a traditional rest house where visitors can enjoy a bowl of refreshing *zaru soba* after exploring the temple.

Takahata Fudoson Kongo-ji Temple, Hino City
Although the temple dates back more than a thousand years, its five-story pagoda was completed in 1980 in the architectural style of Japan's early Heian period (794-1185). Rising 45 metres, it blends traditional craftsmanship with a modern reconstruction of a classic design.

Whether your journey is spiritual, historical, or aesthetic, Tokyo's pagoda trail offers an opportunity to experience *Jisha Meguri* at your own pace. It reveals a quieter side

of Tokyo, inviting visitors to slow down, observe, and appreciate Japanese culture through its shrines, temples, and awe-inspiring three-story and five-story pagodas.

*All the photos in this article were taken by Steve Gillick, *Talking Travel.*



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Steve Gillick loves to travel and loves to talk to people who love to talk about travel. He's been at it since 1967 when he visited nine European destinations on a school trip. Steve has had over 400 articles published in consumer and travel trade publications. To date he has explored 85 countries and over 770 destinations. He recently returned from his 23rd trip to Japan. Steve is the author of *A Symphony of Camels: Travel Adventures & Conversations Around the World*, available on Amazon.com

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