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Japan enters a bold new era of hospitality

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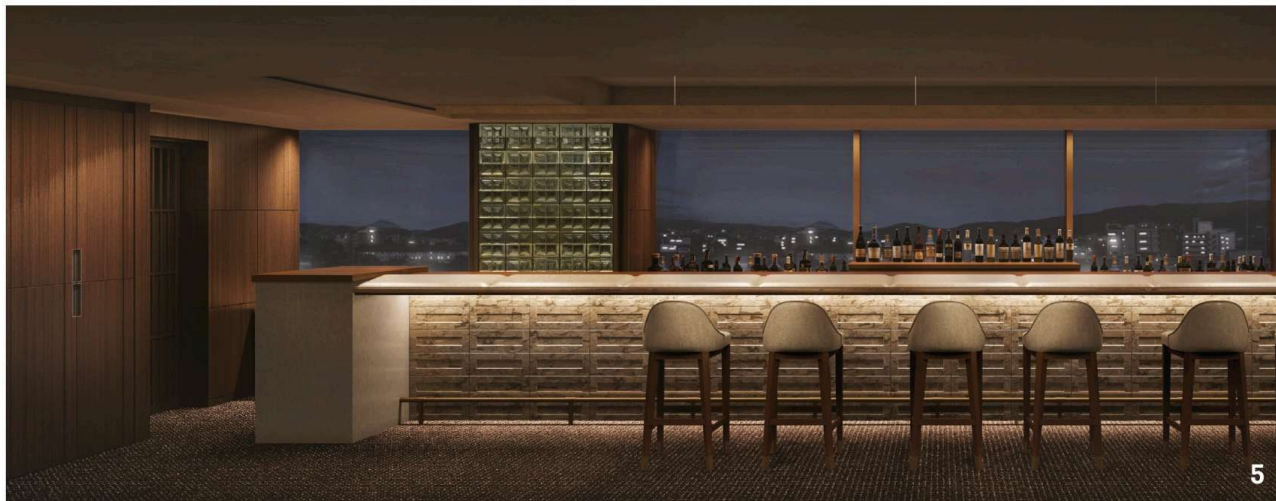
Between its peaceful landscape, vibrant streetscapes, and riveting cultural heritage, Japan has long hypnotized travelers. But the weakening yen has allowed more Americans to plan the Far East trip of their dreams, a prospect sweetened by an influx of design-forward hotel options.

“Travel to Japan continues to gain strong momentum, with more than 3.3 million visitors arriving from the U.S. in 2025,” says Taichi Sano, director at the Japan National Tourism Organization’s New York office. “While Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka remain highly popular, demand for travel to regional areas is also on the rise. Improved transportation networks and expanded access to information are encouraging visitors to explore beyond the major cities in search of nature, culinary traditions, and local crafts that reflect the character of each destination.”

Because Japan has 78 hotels with 12,877 rooms under construction (10,855 rooms are expected to come online in the next two years, according to Lodging Econometrics), travelers are keen to dive deeper into Japan, and hotel brands are responding to this surging interest. For example, the 149-room **InterContinental Sapporo**, designed by Nikken Sekkei, opened in 2025 on the upper floors of a building located between Nakajima Park and the Toyohira River. This year, Hoshino Resorts ramps up its portfolio with the debuts of **KAI Kusatsu**, a 94-key inn from Tatsuro Sasaki Architects overlooking Mount Kusatsu-Shirane that leads guests to Kusatsu Onsen town via a private tunnel, as well as the 276-room **OMO7 Yokohama**. Part of the greater Yokohama City Hall redevelopment project, it sports interiors from Naruse & Inokuma Architects. Most notably, in Q3, the former Meiji-era Nara Prison will be transformed into the 48-room **Hoshinoya Nara Prison** by Azuma Architect & Associates, its brick-adorned guestrooms formed from linked prison cells.

Beachy Okinawa was graced with the **Rosewood Miyakojima** in 2025, where Studio Piet Boon embraced a narrative of “quiet confidence,” as Olivier Brinckman, lead designer of the 55-villa retreat, puts it. Here, concrete plays with Ryuku limestone against a backdrop of sand, clay, and misty green hues. “We wanted the architecture and interiors to feel grounded, elemental, and deeply connected to the island’s rhythm,” says Brinckman. “The goal was not to design a resort, but to create a place that feels as though it belongs there, almost inevitable.”

Here, we take a look at some of the recently opened and forthcoming properties widening Japan’s appeal.



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Tokyo

Fairmont planted its flag in Tokyo with a 217-room hotel, complete with indoor infinity pool and vinyl bar, in 2025. Designed by Melbourne- and Madrid-based BAR Studio, the hotel resides in Blue Front Shibaura Tower South, its 35th-floor lobby welcoming guests with panoramic vistas of the city's skyline.

2025 also marked the debut of the 200-key **JW Marriott Hotel Tokyo** in the Takanawa Gateway City development. It showcases the world's first JW Mindfulness Floor, decked out with a tranquil palette, natural materials, and "small touches that encourage guests to unwind, reflect, and care for their wellbeing throughout their stay," explains Bruce Rohr, vice president

and global brand leader of JW Marriott. "What makes this hotel stand out is its intentionality. Every space is crafted to help guests reconnect—with themselves, with others, and with the city."

Throughout, New York- and Toronto-based design firm Yabu Pushelberg reinforced this narrative "not through spectacle and ornament but atmosphere and emotional sequencing," points out founding partner Glenn Pushelberg. Just off the porte-cochère, for instance, an inverted Mount Fuji installation by Studio Sawada Design hangs overhead, pulling visitors in with its mirrored interior. Even in guestroom corridors, the bespoke carpeting takes cues from karesansui gardens, "subtly resembling raked gravel through asymmetrical patterning,"

Opening page:

1. The tranquil courtyard at the forthcoming Capella Kyoto, as seen in a rendering.

2+3. At Capella Kyoto, the airy living room-style lobby complements serene guestrooms, heightened by views of the Miyagawa-cho neighborhood, shown in renderings.

4. Art Deco spirit meets contemporary elegance at the entrance of Waldorf Astoria Osaka.

5+6. At the soon-to-open Imperial Hotel, Kyoto, guests unwind in the moody Old Imperial Bar and light-filled restaurant Yasaka, captured in renderings.



7+8. At JW Marriott Hotel Tokyo, the stone- and glass-clad spiral staircase ascends to the grand ballroom, while tranquil moments abound at the spa pool.

10+11. Greenery is woven into NiNi, the Mediterranean-Japanese restaurant at 1 Hotel Tokyo, as well as the indoor pool found on the 38th floor.

9. A rendering of SoNoMa by SingleThread, a sleek restaurant with a 12-seat counter that sparks a dialogue between Japan and Northern California at Capella Kyoto.

12. Meandering villas at Rosewood Miyakojima anchor guests in the Okinawa island lifestyle.



adds founding partner George Yabu. “It’s not something you immediately recognize, but you feel it.”

Soho House Tokyo, expected to open in an Aoyama district Tadao Ando-designed building this spring, signals a fresh, fashionable direction for the city. The 42-room hotel and private members club was designed in-house as an homage to Japanese arts and crafts.

A fashionable aura also permeates the 211-key **1 Hotel Tokyo** in Akasaka, which Starwood Hotels’ in-house team and Brooklyn-based Crème conceived as a refuge, “bringing nature into a dense urban setting in a way that feels restorative,” says Raul Leal, CEO of Starwood Hotels. “Oya stone anchors key spaces and carries a strong local identity, while wood and textured surfaces echo natural forms. Rather than literal references, the design reflects principles like reverence for craft.”

Osaka

In 2025, the 221-key **Patina Osaka**, courtesy of Tokyo firms Jun Mitsui Associates and Strickland, sprouted across from Osaka Castle with organic interiors that nod to the Japanese concept of *kisetsukan*, an appreciation for ever-shifting seasons.





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The André Fu Studio-designed **Waldorf Astoria Osaka**, part of a new development in front of Osaka Station, also turned heads last year with its arcade lined in timber archways and bronze frames, a circular water feature, and details like washi paper headboards in the 252 guestrooms. “I sought to capture the city’s unique persona—the urban energy of Tokyo blended with the poetic serenity of Kyoto,” points out André Fu, founder of the Hong Kong-based firm.

Kyoto

The 2026 arrival of two distinct properties is infusing historic, temple-laden Kyoto with a new sense of luxury. At the 89-room **Capella Kyoto** in Gion, Brewin Design Office, out of Hong Kong and Singapore, interpreted the city’s soulful spirit through natural timbers, earthy

textiles, and handcrafted lighting and screens that complement Kengo Kuma’s architecture. Restrained public spaces give way to moodier guestrooms that reference machiyas, traditional Japanese wooden townhouses.

“We approached the hotel as a journey of discovery, much like Kyoto itself. Spaces unfold gradually: thresholds soften transitions, views are framed rather than revealed all at once, and moments of pause are built into the guest experience,” says Robert Cheng, founder and principal of Brewin Design Office. “The intention is for guests to slow down and become more aware of light, texture, sound, and proportion.”

Designed as an extension of the Gion neighborhood by Tokyo-based New Material Research Laboratory, the 55-key **Imperial Hotel**, situated within the landmark Yasaka Kaikan,

joins sister properties in Tokyo, Kamikochi, and Osaka. Yasaka Kaikan’s original Art Deco elements spawned linear geometry, polygonal designs, and generations-old craftsmanship that is celebrated through Japanese wood and stone.

“Inspired by the treatment of wood seen in places such as the Japan Folk Crafts Museum and the Mashiko Sankokan Museum, we chose zelkova (keyaki) as a principal finish to evoke warmth and nostalgia,” says Tomoyuki Sakakida, cofounder of New Material Research Laboratory. Embellished with sliding fusuma panels featuring pine and bamboo motifs designed by Hiroshi Sugimoto, the lounge—reminiscent of a grand ritsurei-style tearoom—is buoyed by a north-facing garden. “We created a composition that reflects the Japanese architectural principle of continuity between inside and outside.” **hd**