

Japan, Live!

Step into a busy Tokyo fabric-shopping district

BY ERIN MCKEAN

Now that you can buy anything on the Internet, you might feel that your time in foreign countries is better spent sightseeing than shopping. But local fabric stores still have interesting and different fabrics—and, best of all, you get to touch them.

Tokyo has a fabric district called “Nippori Textile Town.” Like the Garment District in New York or Goldhawk Road in London, Nippori Textile Town is a recognized tourist draw, so there are plenty of signs—in English—to help you get around.

It’s easy to get there by train: take the JR Yamanote line to Nippori, and follow the signs (or the string of little fabric stores). If you get turned around coming out of the station, you can ask for directions, or hail a cab to take you the few blocks to Tomato—one of the district’s largest fabric stores.

Ask your hotel clerk to write “Nippori Textile Town” on a card for you, so you can use it with cabdrivers or clerks to get directions. A map is available at www.Netlaputa.ne.jp/~nippori/map/map.html. It’s labeled in Japanese, but it does show the train station and other landmarks.

INSIDE THE STORE

On entering a store in Japan, you will often be greeted by the store

staff calling out “Irasshaimase!”—a welcome to you. Just smile and nod back; they aren’t really expecting a response from you.

Once you’ve entered, prepare to be overwhelmed. Expect to see many kinds of fabrics, including traditional kimono-type material (for everyday wear and special occasions), Western-style silks and polyesters, and especially vibrant cotton prints.

Adorable animal motifs are very popular; look for lots of birds, bunnies, and hedgehogs often on natural or linen-look backgrounds. Hello Kitty® is everywhere in abundance and in multiple fabric weights and colors. If you’re an *Anne of Green Gables* fan, check for Anne fabric; she’s popular in Japan. Some shops even carry American quilting fabrics, although you would be better off buying those at home.

VISIT THE TOMATO

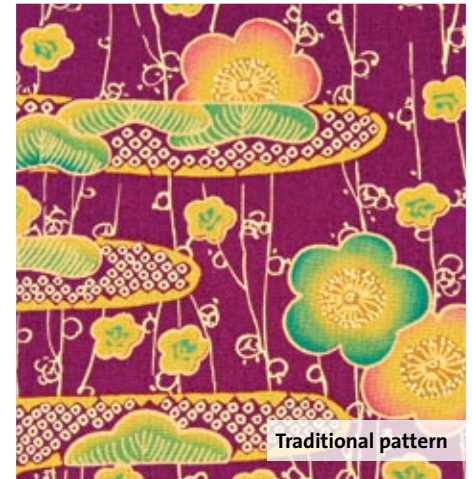
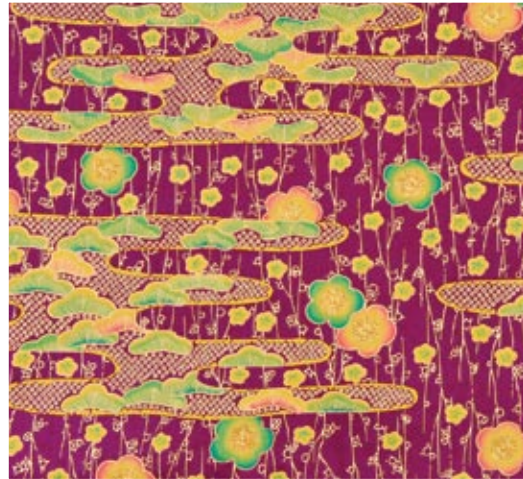
The most famous fabric shop in Nippori is Tomato; it has an entire wall of fabrics that are 100 yen (about eighty cents) a meter (some of these have flaws; check them carefully). Tomato isn’t open on Sundays, so plan accordingly. As you walk from the train station to Tomato, you’ll find other little fabric stores. Be sure to check them out, too, but bring plenty of yen, as many don’t take credit cards.

If you can't get to Nippori Fabric Town, be on the lookout for branches of Yuzawaya—a large Japanese craft, yarn, and fabric store. There's a large one located right in the Kichijoji train station: follow the signs showing a knitting sheep! And if you can't get to Japan for the Tokyo excitement, you can at least enjoy their comfortable, casual cotton fabrics from online sources.

Because it's easier to get online than go to Japan, Erin McKean buys most of her fabric on the Internet. She lives in Chicago where she edits dictionaries. She blogs about dresses and sewing at DressADay.com.



Anne of Green Gables pattern



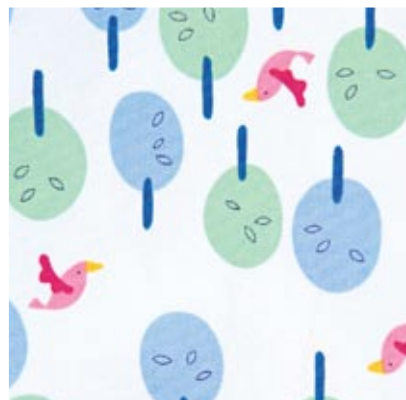
Traditional pattern

SOURCES

Find delightful Japanese cottons online at:
Kitty-Craft.com
PurlSoHo.com
ReproDepot.com
SuperBuzzy.com



Contemporary florals



Novelty prints

Contemporary designs and traditional motifs grace modern fabrics. Fabrics inspired by Anne of Green Gables such as the one shown at the top of this page are popular in Japan. Traditional patterns and more youthful designs are included in the mix of lighthearted print cottons.