



Detail of the Senso-ji compound.

precisely for 'home of the common people' – a plebeian area synonymous in Japanese minds with hard work and equally hard play, a bustling mercantile mentality, libertine pleasures, Bohemianism and a strong sense of community. Fortunately, all these characteristics are still very much alive today.

### Sumida Park

As you exit Asakusa subway station, the district's temple area lies northwest, while the **Sumida River** (see page 190) and **Azuma Bridge** (Azuma-bashi) is to the east. On the Asakusa side of the river, just north of Azuma Bridge, is **Sumida Park** (Sumida Koen), a pleasant place for a stroll, especially in spring when cherry trees are in bloom. It is also one of the best spots from which to take in a view of the Philippe Starck-designed **Super Dry Hall** (see page 191) – the futuristic building of Asahi Breweries, topped by a giant gilded sculpture that is known as the 'Golden Turd' for obvious reasons – and, further away, the soaring Tokyo Skytree (see page 192), the city's communication tower across the river, which opened to the public in 2012.



The Hozo-mon gate at the Asakusa Kannon.

### Gallery éf

Address: 2-19-18 Kaminarimon, Taito-ku; www.gallery-ef.com

Tel: 03-3841-0442

Opening Hours: Wed–Mon noon–7pm  
Entrance Fee: free

Transport: Asakusa

Before or after exploring Asakusa it's worth dropping by **Gallery éf** (2). The exhibition space that hides behind this hip café and bar (open until midnight) is inside a stonewalled *kurui* (traditional storehouse) dating from 1868, which is just as interesting to view up close as is the contemporary artwork.

### Senso-ji

The central compound of **Senso-ji** (free) Asakusa's spiritual centre, is best approached through the **Kaminari-mon** (3) (meaning 'Thunder Gate') facing onto Kaminarimon-dori, a minute's walk from the subway exit. This impressive, red-painted wooden entrance is flanked by leering, twin meteorological deities (Fujin, god of wind, on the right, and Raijin, god of thunder, on the left), and a magnificent 4-metre (13ft)-tall red

paper lantern with the character for 'thunder' emblazoned across it.

### Nakamise-dori

Stretching for about 250 metres/yds from Kaminari-mon to Senso-ji's main hall of worship is **Nakamise-dori** (4); a perpetually thronged avenue of around 100 colourful stalls selling an amazing variety of products from the traditional (rice crackers and paper fans) to the bizarre (clothes for dogs). If you come at night you'll see that the stall shutters are all decorated with paintings of traditional scenes.

### Denbo-in

To the left where Nakamise-dori crossed Denboin-dori sits **Denbo-in** (5), the residence of the Senso-ji's head priest. This monastic buildings date back to 1777 but its 12,200-sq-metre (131,320-sq-ft) garden, created by the Zen landscape gardener Kobori Enshu, is around a

century older. The complex is currently closed to the public.

### Hozo-mon

At the end of Nakamise-dori, pass under the grand **Hozo-mon** (6) (Treasury Gate), with its ensemble of protective statues, to enter the main temple grounds. The upper storey of the gate contains Chinese sutras dating from the 14th century. A large bronze incense burner stands beyond the Hozo-mon where a steady stream of visitors place lighted incense sticks in the burner before offering a brief prayer. Japanese also consider it good luck to waft the incense smoke over their clothing with their hands.

### Kannon Hall

The legendary golden image fished out of the Sumida River all those centuries ago is supposed to be hidden from view inside the **Kannon Hall** (7) (Kannon-do), the main building of the temple complex

Fan shop on Nakamise.

