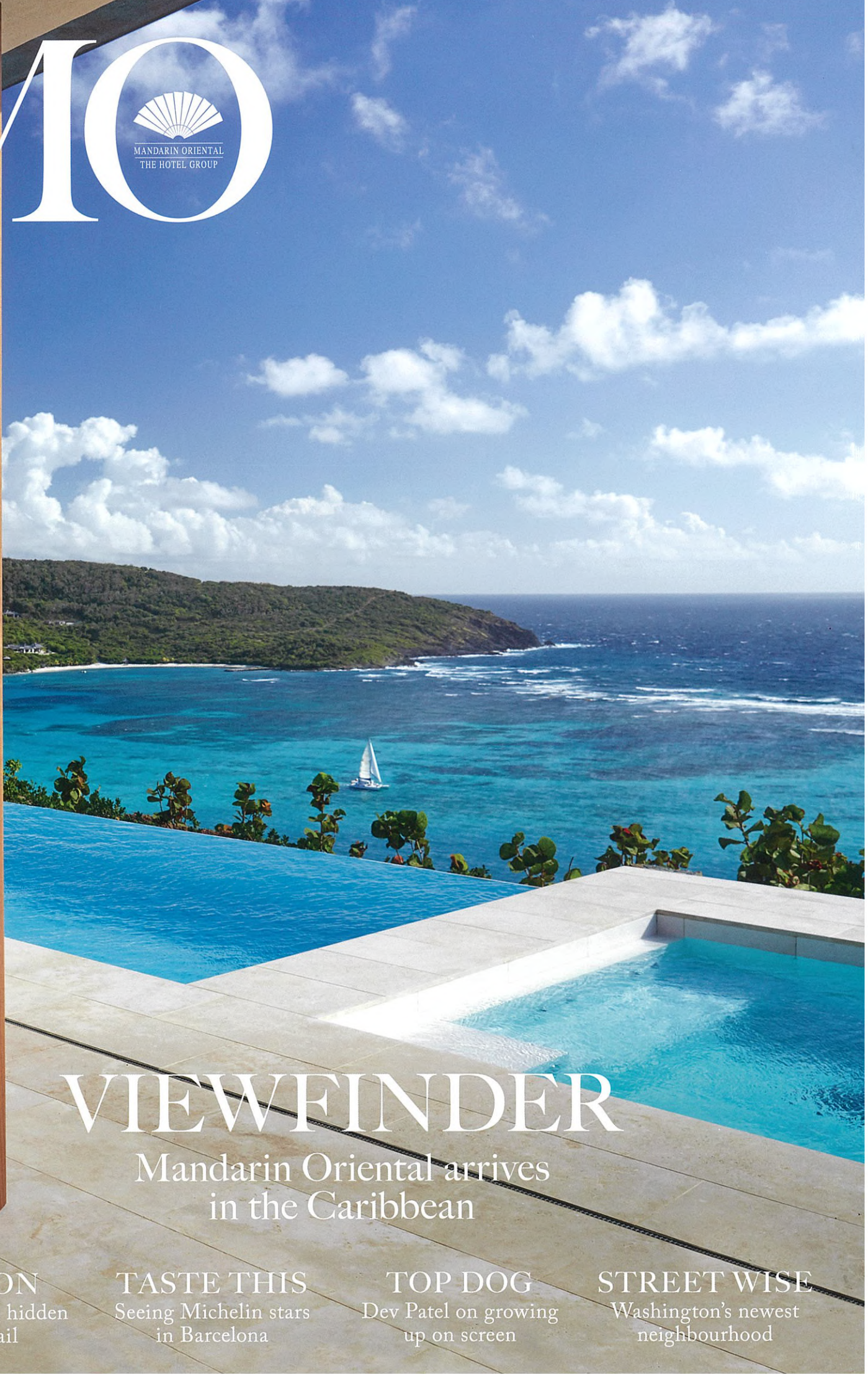


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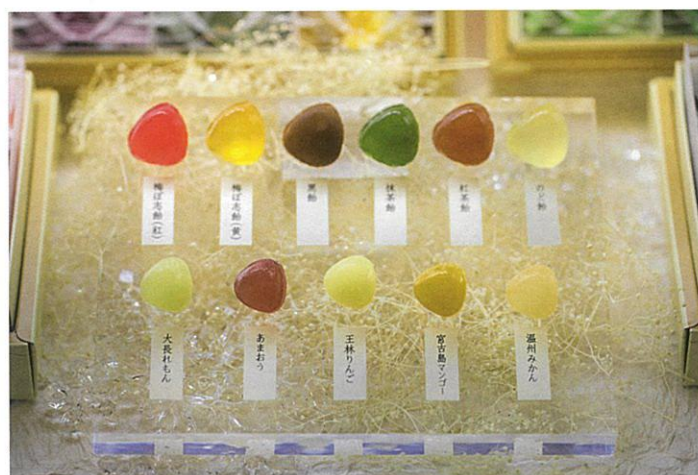
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MORE IN STORE

In Tokyo's gleaming financial district of Nihonbashi, **Danielle Demetriou** is your guide to a hidden shopping trail of unique centuries-old, family-run shops



Opposite page: Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo sits in Nihonbashi. This page, clockwise from top left: glassware from Edokiriko Shop Hanashyo; Ninben sells *katsubushi* fish flakes; seaweed for sale at Yamamoto Noriten; traditional sweet shop Eitaro Sohonpo

It's morning in the heart of a megalopolis. In the Japanese capital's financial district of Nihonbashi, skyscrapers glint against a movie-perfect backdrop of clear blue skies, as suited office workers rush along wide streets. Unlike the flagship-store-heavy district of Ginza, at first glance few would guess that Nihonbashi is also a world-class shopping destination, with a discreet but flourishing network of centuries-old, family-run stores. Visitors who take time to look more closely will find hidden shopping trails – from homeware goods to foodie souvenirs – are theirs for the taking. There are tiny emporia selling items from Edo Kiriko glassware to fans, washi paper and kitchen knives, as well as artfully packaged seaweed and sweets.

The district's story began in the early 16th century, when a legendary shogun launched ambitious plans to switch the focal point of the country from West to East and create a new city where Nihonbashi sits today.

The move attracted a rush of innovative merchant families who transformed the riverside area into a bustling entrepreneurial hub – then called Edo. Within a century it had become the world's biggest city, with one million residents. Today, few traces remain of the district's early wooden architecture, but the enterprising spirit of Nihonbashi is alive and well. Here are some of the must-see shops. The concierge at

**'AT FIRST GLANCE,
FEW WOULD GUESS
THIS IS A WORLD
CLASS SHOPPING
DESTINATION'**

Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo can provide a Nihonbashi walking map and even help you book hands-on workshops to get you started.

THE STORY OF NORI

Brimming with suitably Japanese souvenirs for discerning travellers, Yamamoto Noriten, which opened in 1849, sells seaweed nori of every form and flavour. Behind a glass counter sit its iconic orange tins of roasted seaweed, as well as Hello Kitty-themed boxes of nori flavoured with everything from blueberry to brown rice and – for the brave – curry. Takahiro Yamamoto, its charismatic 30-something executive director, is the seventh generation family member to take the helm. "In Nihonbashi, there are still more than 200 shops with a history of more than 100 years," he says. "There used to be a big fish market here so there's a seafood theme to many of the shops. Sushi was actually invented as a sort of fast food for busy market workers." >>

PHOTOGRAPHS: GEORGE APOSTOLIDIS (LEFT PAGE); MARTIN HOLT/KAMP (THIS PAGE)



HEART OF GLASS

You'll find a new example of Nihonbashi innovation and artisanship at its best in the Edokiriko's Shop Hanashyo. Housed in a bright white space resembling gallery more than shop, the store opened in 2016 and sells specialist glasses made using the 170-year-old technique of Edo Kiriko. The skill, which originated in Nihonbashi and takes ten years to master, is practised by around 30 surviving craftspeople today. The shop showcases a modern take on the craft – with glass and vases cut in contemporary motifs (the rice-inspired *kometsunagi* design is a highlight) in contemporary hues such as smoky greys and mauves, plus an array of Edo Kiriko-inspired lifestyle products, including iPhone cases, stationery and scarves. The craftspeople behind them include the father and brother of the company's director, Chisato Kumakura. "There are still so many traditional shops in Nihonbashi, you can feel the culture just by being here," says Kumakura. "There aren't many places in Tokyo where you can find that."

'EDO KIRIKO TAKES TEN YEARS TO MASTER AND IS PRACTICED BY AROUND 30 CRAFTSPEOPLE TODAY'

PAPER TRAIL

Ozu Washi is a multi-storey emporium that has celebrated all things related to traditional washi paper since 1653. In addition to wooden drawers filled with hundreds of washi papers of every texture, colour and pattern imaginable, there are covetable stationery products, plus a small museum and a studio for washi-making workshops. On the day we

visit, it's packed with shoppers – among them Aya Hasunuma, a 59-year-old prop stylist examining a pile of papers. "Nihonbashi looks new on the surface because of the shopping malls, yet there are very old traditional shops selling all sorts of things – nori seaweed, traditional sweets, knives – and that's why I love it. It's quite unique for Tokyo," she says.

FAN CLUB

A Nihonbashi landmark, Ibasen is a Japanese paper-fan shop that dates back to 1590. Its diminutive dimensions belie its legendary reputation. The space offers a feast of fans – and staff will happily wax lyrical about the dizzying array of categories available, which relate to gender, season and activity. A tiny fan is what you need for a tea ceremony, for example, while dancing requires a large fan with images on both sides.

A FRUITFUL TRIP

"In the Edo era, Nihonbashi was an area bustling with commerce and culture. The uniqueness of Nihonbashi today is that it has



Opposite page, clockwise from top left: knives and more at Kiya; tempting pastries at Nihonbashi Sembikiya, Japan's oldest fruit shop; fans at Ibasen; buy traditional paper at Ozu Washi. This page: Nihonbashi bridge has a rich and interesting history. It dates back to 1603

preserved tradition and also embraced innovation," says Hiroshi Oshima, company president of high-end fruit sellers, Nihonbashi Sembikiya – a business that's more than 180 years old. Its elegant store on the ground floor of Nihonbashi Mitsui Tower (the building that's also home to Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo) is a museum-like showcase of impossibly flawless fruit. With cartoon-red strawberries and perfectly spherical muskmelons, and transportable souvenirs such as jams and fruit jellies, this, as the prices will attest, is no ordinary grocer's.

THE KNIVES ARE OUT

In a stylish, modern space, Kiya is a famed purveyor of high-quality handcrafted Japanese knives, and attracts chefs and foodies from around the world. Staff in denim aprons expertly guide visitors through the hundreds of knives on display, each with a specialist use, be it for cutting fish, meat or vegetables. The store is also home to a distractingly time-consuming cornucopia of inventive 'Only In Japan' kitchen tools – from

animal-shaped vegetable cutters and tiny bamboo brushes, to specialist ginger graters. The brand's inventive flair is highlighted further by its small but expertly curated contemporary gallery space showcasing monthly lifestyle items – from Japanese textiles to pottery.

FLAKE OUT

In the gleaming confines of the smart Coredo shopping complex is Ninben. Its minimal, light wood décor brings to mind a contemporary lifestyle store, but the star product is again surprisingly specialist: *katsuobushi* – pale pink dried fish flakes that form the basis of Japanese cuisine, either boiled to make dashi stock or sprinkled on dishes. It has become a dietary staple and an ideal culinary souvenir. "Nihonbashi has always been an area for creativity and adventurous spirits," says Katsuyuki Takatsu, the 13th-generation president of Ninben, which was founded in 1699. You can purchase the sleekly packaged fish flakes here alongside countless specialist condiments

and dressings. Or try before you buy at the in-house Dashi Bar – a takeaway counter for warming cups of soups.

THE SWEETEST FEELING

An expansive counter is at the heart of traditional sweet shop, Eitaro Sohonpo, but look down and markings on the floor show where the brand's tiny 1857 stall once stood. Try the signature round, red bean *kintsuba* cakes, rainbow-bright candies and – testimony to the area's community spirit – delicious Nihonbashi *Mochi*, rice sweets made collaboratively with the shops Yamamoto Noriten and Ninben.

"Ginza, Shibuya and Shinjuku are better known as locations for shopping," says the store's president, Makoto Hosoda. "But we always say that here in Nihonbashi we have the best quality products, certainly in terms of artisanship."

> Stay in the heart of historic Nihonbashi in style at Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo. mandarinoriental.com/tokyo