

BIG IN JAPAN

Tokyo is home to 13-million people and a whole lot of fashion. New to the capital, **Annemarie Luck** shares the *cool Tokyoite style* she's *grown to love* – quirks and all



Shibuya, one of Tokyo's top fashion districts, is trendy 24/7



My mother loves telling me that I have a J.Lo bum. Of course she's grossly exaggerating, as moms are prone

to do. But I see her point. Although I like to think of it as more cute than curvy, the fact is it sticks out. Now, the first thing you need to accept when shopping in Tokyo is that any sort of rotundity is going to count against you. Especially if

you fall in love with the local style and are brave enough to try it out. I say 'brave' because the second thing you need to accept is that a lot of the fashion here is in a world of its own – it requires dedication to embracing and expressing your alternative/daring/quirky side.

So what to do when you're shopping in this Asian fashion mecca but you've been blessed with a South African butt that's made for making blue jeans talk? Well, like any style-hungry woman would do, you go forth and keep shopping. With

everything from edgy streetwear to chic haute couture to traditional kimonos on offer, there's bound to be something that'll work for your shape and budget.

Here are my top tips for making sure you return from Tokyo having had your fashion fill (with no buyer's remorse). And if you can't make it here in person, then this should at least help you gather a little Eastern edge at home: perfect for the upcoming season since word on the street is that designers are looking East for inspiration. ▶

STREET CRED

When I moved from Cape Town to Tokyo five months ago I had to get rid of 90 per cent of my beloved wardrobe. It was a ruthless affair and one I thought I'd never fully recover from. Now, however, I'm pretty pleased because I have an excuse to build up a brand-new collection. Everywhere you look there's fashion, but my inspiration comes from the street. Not a day goes by without me spotting someone who's managed to throw together all sorts of seemingly

SOCKS 'N FRILLS

One of the combinations I've fallen head over heels for is wearing socks with stilettos. Not just any old pair of socks; they have to have lace or frills or a pattern (the length is up to you). You can wear them with any shoes you like – wedges or peep-toes – but I think they work best with elegant courts.

As for the rest of the outfit, Japanese style includes high-waisted, flared miniskirts, floaty ankle-grazing maxi-skirts (great for hiding hips and thighs)

of bats, coffins and crucifixes. It's a look that most of us would reserve for dress-up parties. But come away with some frilly lingerie, strawberry-pink rouge and extravagant gel nail art (there's a salon on every corner just waiting to glue tiny flowers on your tips), and you'll have captured the wearable side of the trend.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

If, like me, you're a sucker for vintage then Tokyo is your paradise. I expected big brand names and exclusive boutiques



In Tokyo, eclectic fashion is the order of the day, from Lolita-inspired cosplay to grungy street style. Just add socks

spare items and make them look cool and cohesive. This is easier said than done. I've tried it on numerous occasions but cannot seem to master this inherent Tokyoite knack.

Here's an example: a loose grey track top tossed over a *Grease*-style midi-skirt, paired with brogues or high-tops. The look is wonderful in theory but has the potential to look frumpy in Western reality – unless you've got killer legs. So until my insatiable appetite for Japanese dumplings calms itself, I'm sticking to a loose tee tucked into said flared skirt, and ditching the flats for leg-slimming strappy wedges.

or even a pair of boyfriend denim dungarees with rolled-up hems.

LOLITA LOVE

In 2004, singer Gwen Stefani famously employed a group of Japanese back-up dancers called The Harajuku Girls. Their name derives from a subculture born in the Tokyo suburb of Harajuku that sees girls dressing up in all sorts of 'cosplay' (costume play), with one of the most popular styles being Lolita-esque fashion. The result? Young, doll-like women in pastels, bows, bonnets and corsets, and feminine Goths with dark make-up and accessories in the shape

but I've also been pleasantly surprised by the number of secondhand stores here – with equal amounts, if not more, of fashion available for men. I've happily spent many hours in these shops, successfully working on my quest to replenish my diminished wardrobe.

So far I've found many treasures, among them a gorgeous dusky pink lamb-skin jacket, a denim maxi-skirt, a pair of green Italian leather heels and the softest, lightest, most beautiful leather tote that's perfect for traipsing those trendsetting Tokyo pavements. And the best bit? None of them beg the question: 'Do I look like J.Lo in this?'