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few times while daydreaming in front of baskets of undulating squid. I even fall into a vendor's tower of tiny, wriggling fish and incur her wrath. I struggle to keep my balance amid shoving onlookers and skate helplessly across the floor on a river of discarded fish heads, scales and other icky parts. I so wish I would have opted for a rain slicker and Wellington boots instead of flip-flops.

To survive the mini lorries racing through the narrow lanes of the market, I take refuge at a fish stall, where the owner and his wife adopt me. As regal as a samurai, the husband brandishes a clamshell and thrusts it into the immense body of a prize yellowfin tuna that takes up the better part of his stall. He digs into its rosy flesh and scoops out a gelatinous chunk of raw meat. His wife drizzles it with wasabi, then hands it to me. Urged on by their enthusiastic gesturing, I have no choice but to suck from the clamshell. My reward is the sweetest sashimi, punctuated by the most explosive condiment notes I have ever tasted. But as I bid them goodbye and depart from that spontaneous culinary adventure, my inner food-hygiene fanatic freaks out; who knows where that clamshell has been? Don't think I'll do that again. Sashimi can stay in Tokyo, too.

Then there's the sushi-for-breakfast adventure at **Sushi-Zanmai**. No way will I ever again sit on a stool and stare across a counter as sushi magicians artfully make my breakfast. Never again will I plunge into my personal platter of 20 beautifully rolled sushi at 6 in the morning. Nor will I plop utterly unrecognizable sushi, some resembling eyeballs, into my mouth with glee, trusting them to go down easy with the beer I sip alongside my Japanese friends (yes, beer at 6 in the morning). When I get full and slow down, my sushi master shakes his finger in disdain. He mimics eating and guilt-trips me into gobbling up the rest of my plate. I'd like to emulate this culinary adventure elsewhere, but it's too extreme—it'll have to stay in Tokyo, too.

But the most uncharacteristic thing I do in Japan is give a stranger my handbag. I watch him carry it across a temple and wave it through the flames of a fire. This bag has my funds and passport, but I sit tranquilly on the floor and wait for him to return. He's so far away that I can't even see him from where I sit. He could be in Timbuktu by now. Here at the **Naritasan Shinshoji Temple**, which dates back to the 10th century, I participate like the locals in the mystical, colorful pageantry of the fire ritual, and passing your purse to a Buddhist monk is part of the tradition. Like others around me, I remove my shoes, sit cross-legged on the floor, then



ABOVE: Fish at the Tsukiji Market
BELOW: Lobby of the Ritz Carlton Tokyo



hold my handbag high in the air. When my turn comes, a canary-robed monk gently reaches out his hand. Without hesitating, I hand over my heavy purse. He looks me straight in the eyes. I trust him with my life—well, my handbag. While I watch, he takes it to the fire, mutters prayers and blessings, then returns it. The Japanese woman next to me smiles and nods, affirming I've done the right thing. In broken English, she says, "Now you will have good fortune." It's one more thing I add to my list of things I do in Tokyo that stay in Tokyo. That's fine, because it will all be there when I return.

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