

## Tokyo Junkie: 60 Years of Bright Lights and Back Alleys ... and Baseball

**Robert Whiting**

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Robert Whiting's memoir *Tokyo Junkie* details his long-standing relationship with Japan's populous, quirky capital.

Whiting first arrived in Japan as a US Air Force soldier; he watched Tokyo emerge from its post-war malaise to become a global economic force. Though his story begins when he was a "callow young man" from rural California who spoke little Japanese and did not blend in with Tokyo's near-homogeneous crowds, he nonetheless expresses growing fascination with the city. His arrival coincided with Tokyo's massive preparations to host the 1964 Summer Olympics—represented by a "constant cacophony" of noise, as new buildings, roads, and subway lines were built to modernize the city. Tokyo welcomed the event with success, rebranding itself as a peaceful yet powerful metropolis.

Whiting's initial interest in Tokyo developed into a lifetime vocation; he also wrote *The Chrysanthemum and the Bat*, *You Gotta Have Wa*, and *Tokyo Underworld*. His keen, journalistic observations of Tokyo's "bright lights" and "back alleys" feature Japanese baseball players, sumo wrestlers, *yakuza* gangsters, businessmen, sex workers, and other unique characters. His personal experiences enhance the narrative, including of his early days in a tiny, drafty apartment; his marriage to a Japanese United Nations officer; and the more recent celebration of his seventy-seventh birthday with gifts of sake and chocolate. He praises Tokyo's distinct style, cleanliness, and politeness, as well as the delights of Japanese food, cinema, and literature. He also elaborates on issues of racism and conformity in Japan, and on Tokyo's surprising political corruption.

Whiting's love for his adopted home is enduring and accepting. A self-proclaimed Tokyo "junkie," his addiction results in a complex, captivating portrait of a city that is both insular and welcoming, and is now one of the world's top tourist destinations.

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