

# Audio tours take tourists beyond the surface of Tokyo's top sites

By TAKAKO USAMI

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For first-time foreign visitors, Tokyo can be an overwhelming proposition—an exciting but bamboozling megalopolis difficult to properly appreciate on a short trip, even with the help of a good guidebook.

But a new range of English-language audio tours is intended to clear the sensory overload and provide a more penetrating insight into the local culture and history, says their American expatriate creator, Patrick Lovell.

The service, launched in December by his design and editorial production company Alphatext Co., is provided through audio files and maps that can be played by travelers on their MP3 players as they peruse attractions in the city.

Included among the 14 audio tours in the capital are a guide to the Edo Castle, which is the current site of the Imperial Palace; a trip through Asakusa; Yanaka, Nezu and Sendagi—an area called “Little Kyoto in Tokyo”; the Botanical Gardens belonging to the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Science; and Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden.

A Kyoto tour audio file is also available.

Lovell left his native Seattle to come to Japan to study Japanese history about 40 years ago.

The 59-year-old president of Alphatext, based in Tokyo's Katsushika Ward, produced the audio tour files with two Japanese employees, Toru Shioya and



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Masaru Ito, left, Patrick Lovell, center, and Toru Shioya at their office in Tokyo's Katsushika Ward. The three-man team produced English-language audio tour files for foreign tourists.

Masaru Ito. He wrote most of the text and narrated for several.

The audio files, he says, are intended to give foreign tourists a deeper historical background of sightseeing spots, which he finds missing from most guidebooks.

“Many foreign tourists don't have background or information about Japanese daily foods or custom,” Lovell said. “So one of the things we're trying to do is to introduce Japanese food and custom as they relate to history.”

The MP3 audio files, which range in price from 900 yen (nearly \$10) to 1,500 yen if downloaded in Japan, work like audio tours used at many museums.

When travelers arrive at a location marked by a number on an accompany-

ing map, they play the audio file of the same number to listen to a discussion of the historical significance of the site. A tour takes an hour and a half to three hours.

The audio files are available through Alphatext's Japan Walk-Caster (<http://walk-caster.com>) site and at Amazon.com's English-language site.

Alphatext plans to expand the list of audio tours by including ancient capitals like Kamakura, Kanagawa Prefecture, and Nara.

The company also produced two Japanese-language audio files for foreign destinations—one for the City of London and the other for London's Westminster area—and is working to add more.