

Tokyo's Calamities

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Tokyo has been the site of immense calamities throughout history. Fires destroyed huge sections of Edo numerous times, so often that fires became to be known as the "flowers of Edo." A 1657 fire burned down two-thirds of the city and killed 100,000 residents. In 1923, another disaster occurred, the Great Kanto Earthquake. Most of the city was obliterated by the tremors and the huge fires that followed, and 70,000 people died. Almost all of what was left of Edo was either leveled or consumed, which is among the reasons why Tokyo has fewer historical landmarks than expected in a city of its importance and size. Tokyo endured another demolition toward the end of World War II, when it was the target of 102 bombing raids. The most destructive was the raid on 10 March 1945, which ignited a firestorm that killed 100,000. As a consequence of this history, Tokyo spares no effort in its disaster-prevention programs.

Excerpted from *Japan, Eyes on the Country*, Foreign Press Center, Tokyo, 1997, p. 130-131.

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