



PANORAMIC PERCH. Visitors are silhouetted against a floor-to-ceiling window while viewing Tokyo's skyline from an observation deck located on the top floor of Roppongi Hills Mori Tower in Tokyo. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

Top of Tokyo: Observation decks offer panoramic city views

By Jae C. Hong
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Tokyo is a gigantic concrete jungle built on layers of tradition and culture. It's difficult to grasp the enormity of Japan's capital in just a few days.

One way to gain some perspective on the complex city is to get above it — way above it.

Skip the sidewalks and subways and take an elevator to any one of the observation decks that dot the cityscape for a stunning vista. No two perches offer the same view, but they are all spectacular.

Greeted with a bow by the elevator operator, one can take a ride up to the top of some structures for as much as \$30 a

trip. But the Tokyo Metropolitan Government building's observation deck is free. The 48-story office is surrounded by Shinjuku district's skyscrapers. The view is more intimate than from most other observatories.

Try the panoramic views from Tokyo Tower — an homage to the Eiffel Tower that was built in 1958 to signify Japan's economic revival — where visitors can take a selfie with Mt. Fuji in the background on a clear day. Then lean in and look down on the traffic patterns of the famed Shibuya crossing from the 46th floor of the East Tower of the slick new Shibuya Scramble Square.

Or just pick a spot and watch one of Japan's spectacular sunsets beyond the glass, steel, and concrete horizon.

Afghan capital's air pollution may be even deadlier than war

By Rahim Faiez
The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — Yousuf fled with his family from his home in eastern Afghanistan eight years ago to escape the war, but he couldn't escape tragedy. In the capital, Kabul, five of his children died, not from violence or bombings, but from air pollution, worsened by bitter cold and poverty.

At the camp for displaced people they live in, they and other families keep warm and cook by burning the garbage that surrounds them. One by one over the years, each of the children got chest infections and other maladies from the pollution and never made it to age seven, he told The Associated Press. The 60-year-old has nine surviving children.

"We didn't have enough money for the doctor and medicine ... I can barely feed my children," said Yousuf, who works as a porter in a vegetable market earning barely a dollar a day. Like many Afghans he uses only one name.

Afghanistan's pollution may be even deadlier than its war, now 18 years long.

There are no official statistics on how many Afghans die of pollution-related illnesses, but the research group State of Global Air said more than 26,000 deaths could be attributed to it in 2017. In contrast, 3,483 civilians were killed that year in the Afghan war, according to the United Nations.

Kabul, a city of some 6 million, has become one of the most polluted cities in the world — ranking in the top of the list among other polluted capitals such as India's New Delhi or China's Beijing. Decades of war have wrecked the city's infrastructure and caused waves of displaced people.

On most days, a pall of smog and smoke lies over the city. Old vehicles pump toxins

into the air, as do electrical generators using poor quality fuel. Coal, garbage, plastic, and rubber are burned by poor people at home, as well as at the many brick kilns, public baths, and bakeries. Many apartment buildings have no proper sanitation system, and garbage is piled on roadsides and sidewalks.

The large majority of victims are poisoned by the air in their own homes, as families burn whatever they can to keep warm in Kabul's winters, with frequent sub-zero temperatures and snow. Children and the elderly are particularly vulnerable. At least 19,400 of the 2017 deaths were attributable to household pollution, which also contributed to a loss of two years and two months of life expectancy at birth, according to the State of Global Air survey.

Yousuf's camp, home to more than a hundred families, has no proper water or sanitation system and is surrounded by garbage dumps. His and other families' children search through the garbage for paper, cloth, sticks, or plastic, anything that can be burned for fuel.

"We are so poor, and we have lots of problems, we don't have enough money for medicine, wood, or coal for heating, so this is our life, my children collect garbage from dump yards and we use it for cooking and heating to keep the kids warm," he added.

Decades of war have worsened the damage to Afghanistan's environment and have made it a huge challenge to address them. Environmental issues are far down the list of priorities for a government struggling with basic security issues, rampant corruption, and a plunging economy.

Three or four decades ago, "it was a wish for people to come to Kabul and breathe this air," said Ezatullah Sediqi, deputy director for the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA). But in the

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