



A Journey North

14 Days / 13 Nights

Day 1: Tokyo

Arrive in Tokyo, where you will be welcomed by our airport representative who will assist you with transferring by either direct train or limousine bus to your hotel. The rest of the day is at your leisure.

Overnight in Tokyo

Day 2: Tokyo

(B)

An early start today as you head with a local guide to Tsukiji Fish Market. Best known as one of the world's largest fish markets, Tsukiji handles about 2,888 tons of marine products a day worth about 2.8 billion yen (US\$30million). Some 450 kinds of fish are received; from penny-per-piece sardines to golden brown dried sea slug caviar, a bargain at US\$473 a pound. Some of the giant tuna go for well over 2,000,000yen each (US \$24,000)

After checking all the market's wares, we take a short walk to Hama-Rikyu Teien, a former private garden of an *Edo* Period lord. After strolling through the garden, break up your walk with a stop in a tea house on a small island on the park's lake. Here we can witness a short tea ceremony, and sip our *macha* (green tea) whilst enjoying the views.

From the park's pier, we take a boat cruise along the Sumida River, discovering a very different side of the city.

We disembark from the boat in Asakusa, part of Tokyo's *Shitamachi*, or old town. Asakusa is home to Sensoji Temple, Tokyo's oldest Buddhist temple, and is also the city's oldest *Geisha* district. The streets around Sensoji have many traditional shops selling Japanese crafts and souvenirs and are a delight to wander through.

Back across the river is the Edo-Tokyo Museum; a fascinating glimpse into Tokyo's past and present. The museum is located in the Ryogoku area, home to Tokyo's sumo stadium and stables. If you are lucky, you may see a sumo walking or cycling around (they are forbidden to drive cars).

Overnight in Tokyo

Day 3: Tokyo - Kamakura Day Trip

(B)

Today is a free today for you to explore this amazing city. Visit Meiji Shrine, dedicated to the spirit of the late Emperor Meiji. The surrounding park that is a forest of some 120,000 trees of 365 different species, making you forget you are in the world's largest city.

Or, mix with the *otaku* (anime fans) and visit maid cafes in the electronics district of Akihabara, discover Tokyo's latest fashions in Harajuku and Shibuya, explore Tokyo's world class museums and art galleries in Ueno and Roppongi, or get a glimpse of the future at Tokyo Bay's Odaiba development.

Our included PASMO transport pass will help get you around Tokyo like a local.

If you need a break from Tokyo's hectic pace you can choose to make an excursion outside of Tokyo to the delightful seaside town of Kamakura.

One of Japan's former capitals, Kamakura is a home to many ancient temples and the Daibutsu, a giant bronze Buddha. Located just 1 hour by train from Tokyo, Tokyoites flock to the beaches here in the summertime.

We will provide you with detailed information of all the options available to you.

Overnight in Tokyo

Day 4: Tokyo - Sado Island

(B,D)

Say sayonara to Tokyo as you take Japan's world famous Shinkansen to Niigata. Capable of speeds of up to 300km/h (188mph), the Shinkansen Toki (Japanese Crested Ibis) reached the port town of Niigata in 2 hours.

From Niigata port, it takes just 1 hour by hydrofoil to Sado Island.

With a population of just 70,000, this remote island has long been a destination for political exiles, Japan's version of Siberia.

Many ended up working in Sado's prosperous gold mine, in its heyday it was the most productive in Japan and a major source of revenue for the government.

In current times, Sado is still largely unpopulated island with beautiful coastlines and quaint fishing villages; a great place to explore.

On arrival in Sado port, we have arranged a hire car for your 2 day stay on the island.

Tonight you will stay in a Japanese style *ryokan* accommodation. With tatami flooring and comfy futon beds this is the quintessential Japanese experience.

A multi course *kaiseiki* meal will be served to you tonight, you are sure to be served some delicious crab, the local specialty.

Overnight in Sado

Day 5: Sado Island

(B,D)

You have a whole day to further explore Sado Island by hire car.

We would recommend visiting the Sado Island Taiko Centre - Sado is home to the famous Kodo drummers. You can take a tour of the Taiko Centre which was built by the Kodo to give visitors an insight into Taiko. You can then have a lesson by an ex Kodo drummer!

You can also take a spin in a taraibune, wooden tub-shaped boats, that were originally used for collecting seaweed, shellfish and other things from the waters around Sado.

The Sado Kinzan Gold Mine is open to the public with a good museum showing displays and models about its operation. However, the mine's main attractions are the two

walking courses that lead through the mining tunnels.

As the island does not receive a lot of foreign tourists, simply stopping in the small towns and fishing villages dotted around the island and talking to the friendly locals will be the highlight of your trip to Sado.

Diner tonight will be served in your ryokan.

Overnight in Sado

Day 6: Sado - Haguro-san (B,D)

Head back to the mainland by ferry, then take a train and finally bus to the sacred Haguro-san, one of the Dewa Sanzan (three mountains of Dewa). Dewa Sanzan is a center of Shugendo, a folk religion based on mountain worship, blending Buddhist and Shinto traditions.

Tonight you will stay in a *shukubo*, Buddhist temple lodging, and feast on *shoujin ryori*, traditional vegetarian Buddhist cuisine.

Overnight in Haguro-san

Day 7: Haguro-san - Akita (B)

An early start today as you walk to the top of Mt Haguro. The well-marked trail from the base of Hagurosan winds its way through the forest for a while, passing the beautiful wooden Gojū-no-tō (Five-Story Pagoda) along the way. Built some 600 years ago, the pagoda is registered as a National Treasure.

Soon the ascent of 2446 stone steps starts. Easy to walk and not particularly steep, don't forget to rest at the teahouse halfway up for refreshments and get a certificate of climbing up the hard way. You can also visit the place where Japanese Poet Bashō wrote one of his many famous poems.

After climbing back down, it's time to venture on by bus and train to Akita. A large modern city in the far north of the Tohoku region, Akita is famous for its *sake*, yearly festival and *bijin* (beautiful women). However, Akita's biggest draw is the lack of foreign visitors it receives, making it a great place for some interaction with the friendly locals.

Overnight in Akita.

Day 8: Akita - Hiraizumi (B,D)

This morning you may want to visit one of Akita's many museums and art galleries before departing to Hiraizumi.

Or, you may want to stop off on the way to Lake Tazawa, Japan's deepest lake, where you can take a boat ride on, or cycle around the lake.

Depending on the season and on the depth of light penetrating into the water, the color changes from jade green to indigo blue, a sure attraction for visitors any time of year.

Hiraizumi is a small town with a impressive history - during the Heian Period (866-1144), it was the Northern seat of the Fujiwara , the most powerful clan in Japan. Whilst the town's fortunes faded in the following years, Hiraizumi is one of the nicest towns in Japan's north and there has been a concerted campaign in the area for recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Overnight in Hiraizumi

Day 9: Hiraizumi

(B,D)

A full day to explore Hiraizumi and surrounding areas.

Chusonji Temple was established in 850 as a temple of the Tendai sect of Buddhism. The temple came to prominence when the northern branch of the Fujiwara clan moved their base to Hiraizumi. At its peak, the temple consisted of a large network of dozens of buildings.

Motsuji temple is best known for its garden, one of the few remaining pure land gardens in Japan. Pure land gardens were a popular garden style during the Heian Period, attempting to recreate the Buddhist concept of the pure land or "Buddhist paradise".

You can also take a boat trip on the nearby Geibikei Gorge. With its steep 100m walls and abundance of native fauna, the gorge is stunning in all seasons. The boat trip is a lot of fun; as well as poling you along the boatmen find the energy to belt out local songs and regale you with legends. At the halfway point everyone gets out to throw stones in the opposite cliff (for good luck).

Overnight in Hiraizumi

Day 10: Hiraizumi - Sendai

(B)

A short train ride takes you to Sendai, Tohoku's largest and most cosmopolitan city. All Sendai's main attractions are connected by a convenient loop bus, making getting around town a breeze.

Zuihoden Mausoleum is the site of entombment of one of the most powerful feudal lords of the Edo Period, Date Masamune. Masamune was the first in a long line of Date lords to rule over Sendai from Aoba Castle.

Zuihoden was designed in the ornate style of the Momoyama Period. It features intricate woodwork and a rich variety of vivid colors.

Sendai City Museum, featuring relics of the Date clan, and the Miyagi Museum of Art are also well worth visiting.

Day 11: Sendai - Nikko

(B,D)

The highlight of any visit to Sendai is Matsushima Bay.

For hundreds of years, Matsushima Bay has been celebrated as one of Japan's three most scenic views. The bay is dotted by over 200 small islands covered by pine trees, taking a boat trip on the bay is highly recommended.

The island itself has many small temples and walking paths, and also restaurants specializing in the regions specialties, seafood and *gyutan* (cow tongue).

This afternoon, continue on by train to Nikko (2h 30m). A sumptuous dinner will be waiting for you in your ryokan.

Overnight in Nikko.

Day 12: Nikko**(B,D)**

Time to heading out to explore the Toshugu-shrine complex.

Built as a mausoleum for Tokugawa Ieyasu, founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate which ruled Japan for over 250 years, this lavishly decorated shrine complex consists of more than a dozen Shinto and Buddhist buildings in a beautiful forest setting and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In the afternoon, you can make the 50min journey by bus to Lake Chuzenji-ko, a scenic lake in the mountains above Nikko. It is located at the foot of Mount Nantai, Nikko's sacred volcano, whose eruption blocked the valley below, thereby creating Lake Chuzenji about 20,000 years ago.

The area's attractions include the 100 meter tall Kegon Falls, Futarasan Shrine and Chuzenji Temple. You can also take a sightseeing boat cruise around the lake, or enjoy some of the great walks and hikes in the area.

Day 13: Nikko - Tokyo**(B)**

Make the 2 hour journey by train to Tokyo at any time. You have the day free in Tokyo for any last minute sightseeing or shopping.

Day 14: Depart Tokyo**(B)**

You are free to depart at anytime, your included transfer to Tokyo airport will be by limousine bus or direct airport train.

*******END OF SERVICES*******

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