



Across the Roof of Japan

12 Days / 11 Nights

Day 1: Tokyo Arrival

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)

This morning your guide will meet you at your hotel for a full day sightseeing utilizing Tokyo's super-efficient metro system.

Begin the day you with an early morning visit to Meiji Shrine; perfectly timed to avoid the crowds. Tokyo's most famous shrine is dedicated to the spirit of the late Emperor Meiji and the park that surrounds the shrine is a forest of some 120,000 trees of 365 different species, making your forget you are in the world's largest city.

Next to Meiji Shrine is Harajuku - Tokyo's youth fashion mecca. Whether you are a goth, punk or anything in between, there is a shop in Harajuku that caters for you.

Neighboring Harajuku is Omotesando, commonly referred to as Tokyo's Champs-Elysee. This broad, tree lined avenue features a multitude of fashion flagship stores designed by internationally renowned architects within a short distance of each other. Feel free to stop for a coffee in one of the area's many stylish cafes and watch the beautiful people walk by.

From Omotesando, take the metro to Ginza. Named after the silver coin mint established there in 1612, Ginza is Tokyo's famous upmarket shopping, dining and entertainment district. One square meter of land is worth over 10 million yen!

Adjoining Ginza lies the Imperial Palace, the main residence of the Emperor. Whilst the Palace itself is not open to the public, you can take a stroll through the Palace East Gardens.

Our last stop for the day is 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.

Overnight in Tokyo

Day 3: Tokyo - Optional Day Trip

(B)

Today is a free day for you to explore this amazing city. Make an early start to visit the world famous Tsukiji Fish Market, visit the electronics district of Akihabara or discover Tokyo's world class museums and art galleries.

Or choose to make an excursion outside of Tokyo to one of the following:

Kamakura

One of Japan's former capitals, Kamakura is a delightful seaside town home to many ancient temples and the Daibutsu, a giant bronze Buddha.

Nikko

Sitting high in the mountains of Nikko National Park, Nikko houses the Toshogu Shrine complex and mausoleum, Japan's most extravagant display of religious architecture and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

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

Overnight in Tokyo.

Day 4: Tokyo - Matsumoto

(B)

Today you will leave Tokyo behind and head into the Japanese Alps.

Located 3 hours from Tokyo, Matsumoto has flourished as a castle town since the 16th century. In addition to its historical and cultural heritage Matsumoto is surrounded by mountains and is acclaimed for its beautiful views. Hiking and climbing locations in the mountains are readily accessible by local bus transportation. To the west the Japan Alps rise to heights of 3,000 meters, and are known as "The Roof of Japan".

This afternoon you can visit Matsumoto Castle one of the most complete and beautiful among Japan's original castles. It is a good example of a so called "hirajiro", a castle built on the plain rather than on a hill or mountain.

The castle is also called Crow Castle because of its black walls and spreading wings.

Overnight in Matsumoto

Day 5: Matsumoto/Nagano

(B)

This morning you will head to Nagano to visit historic Zenkoji temple.

One of the most visited temples in Japan, Zenkoji was founded 1400 years ago and stores, what many believe to be the first Buddhist statue ever brought to Japan.

Most recently rebuilt in 1707, Zenkoji's main hall has a tunnel in its basement in which visitors are trying to find and touch the "key to paradise" in complete darkness. The key is attached to the wall and grants enlightenment to anybody who touches it.

After visiting Zenkoji, continue on by train and bus to visit Jigokudani Park to see the famous Snow Monkeys.

Jigokudani literally means 'hell's valley' due to the steam and boiling water that bubbles out of small crevices in the frozen ground, and it is in the baths of this boiling water that the resident Japanese Macaques like to soak in on.

The monkeys live in large social groups, and it can be quite entertaining to watch their interactions. Accustomed to humans, they can be observed from very close and almost completely ignore their human guests. Whilst the monkeys are most numerous during the colder months, they can be observed all year round.

Overnight in Matsumoto

Day 6: Matsumoto to Takayama

(B,D)

Make your way by limousine bus further up the Roof of Japan to the mountain village of Takayama.

Due to its previously inaccessible location nestled high in the mountainous Hida alpine region, this beautifully preserved old town was cut off from the rest of Japan, allowing it to develop its own unique culture.

Take a step back in time as you wander through the town's old streets, and make sure you visit one of the many sake breweries for a taste of the local drop, its high quality due to the area's clean water sources.

In Takayama you will be staying in traditional Japanese-style *ryokan* accommodation, complete with tatami mats, *shoji* rice paper sliding doors and *onsen* baths.

Tonight, relax in your yukata, or lightweight kimono, and dine on a sumptuous *kaiseki* multi course meal.

Dinner will be sure to include some of Takayama's famous cuisine, including Hida Beef, said to be the second best in Japan after the world famous Kobe beef, *sansai* local vegetables and miso.

An *onsen* after dinner is highly recommended before you bed down on your futon.

Overnight in Takayama

Day 7: Takayama-Shirakawago

(B,D)

This morning you may want to make a half day trip to the UNESCO World Heritage Listed Shirakawago, famous for its traditional gasshozukuri farmhouses, some of which are more than 250 years old.

Gassho-zukuri translates as 'Praying Hands', as the farmhouses' steep thatched roofs resemble the hands of Buddhist monks pressed together in prayer, and are designed to withstand the heavy snows which fall in the region.

In the afternoon you can continue sightseeing in Takayama. Dinner will once again be served in your ryokan.

Overnight in Takayama.

Day 8: Takayama-Kyoto

(B)

Time for one last soak in the onsen before undertaking the 2 hour journey to Japan's cultural capital, Kyoto.

The first leg will be on the Limited Express Hida Wideview , one of the most scenic train journeys in Japan, winding its way through tall mountains and stunning gorges.

You will then change on to the world famous *Shinkansen* bullet train which can reach speeds of up to 300km/h.

Kyoto is home to an astonishing 2000 Shrines and Temples, including 17 UNESCO World Heritage Sights.

This afternoon you can start your exploration of this fascinating city.

Overnight in Kyoto

Day 9: Kyoto

(B,L)

Today you will see some of the amazing sights Kyoto has to offer, getting around as the locals do - by bike.

Kyoto is the perfect city for cycling, no hills and very little traffic, so today's ride is suitable for everyone.

After meeting your Guide at Kyoto Station and picking up your bike for the day, head to Toji temple, whose pagoda is the tallest wooden building in Japan, and then visit Nishi Hongaji Temple.

Last stop before lunch is the ornamental Nijo castle, famous for its Momoyama architecture, decorated sliding doors and 'chirping' nightingale floors.

After lunch, bike to Kinkakuji, the Golden Pavilion. Originally built as a retirement villa for the *Shogun*, after his death it became a Buddhist Temple at his request, and is now one of Kyoto's most famous temples.

In the afternoon, you can choose the course. Head west, and visit Ryoanji and its famous Zen rock garden, then explore the Arashiyama district.

Or, head east to Ginkakuji temple, the Silver Pavillion, then Kiyomizu (Pure Water) Temple. From the 13m high veranda jutting out from the Main Hall you can enjoy amazing views of the whole of Kyoto, whilst pondering the fact that both the Main Hall and Veranda were built without the use of nails or any kind of joiners.

Overnight in Kyoto

Day 10: Kyoto-Hakone/Mt Fuji

(B,D)

Say sayonara to Kyoto as you make the 2 hour journey to Hakone, the gateway to Mt Fuji and surrounding national park. This small town is famous for its *onsen*, or natural hot springs, and has natural beauty in abundance.

Located less than 100 kilometers from Tokyo, this hilly hot-spring town's attractions are both cultural and natural. Wedged between Mt. Fuji and Izu Peninsula, it is a large region encircled by several forested mountains and has a beauty dramatically accented by deep glens and ravines.

Popular as a resort since the 19th century, Hakone makes an idyllic break from the mayhem of Tokyo. On clear days there are stunning views of Mount Fuji, one of the many reasons why Hakone attracts almost 20 million visitors a year.

This afternoon we recommend visiting the Hakone Open Air Museum. Established in 1969, the museum showcases a huge array of sculptures including one of the world's largest collections of works by the English master sculptor Henry Moore. The museum creates a harmonic balance of nature and art by exhibiting sculptures on its spacious grounds in combination with beautiful views of the surrounding valley and mountains.

Tonight you will stay in a traditional Japanese-style *ryokan* accommodation.
Overnight in Hakone

Day 11: Hakone/Mt Fuji-Tokyo (B)

A full day to explore all that the Fuji Hakone National Park has to offer. Armed with your included Transport Pass, you can take advantage of the numerous forms of transport on offer throughout the Park. Ride the world's second longest cable car up Mt Owakudani, passing over sulfurous fumes, hot springs and hot rivers in this volcanic area, where you can eat an egg hard boiled in the sulfuric hot springs which make Hakone famous. If you do, it will add seven years to your life!

A majestic replica pirate ship will sweep you across the Lake Ashinoko, a lake formed by a volcanic eruption 3000 years ago, and the Hakone Tozan 'switchback train' zig zags though the mountains, giving amazing views of the surrounding valleys.

Throughout the day you will have the chance to get a glimpse of Mt Fuji, however please keep in mind that she is a notoriously shy mountain and it needs to be a clear day.

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

In the afternoon, take the Romance Car train to Tokyo (90m).

Overnight in Tokyo

Day 12: Depart Tokyo (B)

Today is free until your included limousine bus or direct airport train to the airport.

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

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