



Culture and Cuisine

12 Days / 11 Nights

Day 1: Arrive 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 over 2,000 tons of marine products per day.

After exploring the outer market, you can 'sample the wares' at your included sushi breakfast in one of the market's fresh sushi bars.

Following breakfast, stroll through nearby Hama-Rikyu Teien, a former private garden of an *Edo* Period lord.

Break up your walk with a stop in a tea house on a small island on the park's lake, where you will have the opportunity to witness a short tea ceremony.

You will then have a chance to view Tokyo from a different angle as you take a boat cruise along the Sumida River.

Next stop will be 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.

From Asakusa, it is a short walk to Kappabashi, otherwise known as 'Kitchenware Town', which is lined with dozens of stores selling everything needed by Tokyo's restaurants. You will find specialized stores for dishes, pots, pans, cooking utensils, stoves, tables, chairs, signs, lanterns and more. This is also the place where you will find for sale the plastic food models you can see in restaurants.

Last stop for the day is Ueno's Ameyoko-cho, a busy market street underneath the train

lines. Originally the site of a black market after World War Two, this bustling market is filled with shops and stalls selling various products such as fresh fish, dried food and spices, and is a great place to try some local snacks.

Overnight in Tokyo.

Day 3: Tokyo

(B,L)

Discover the secret of the Japanese soba (buckwheat) noodle in a half day lesson with Master Chef Akira Inouye, founder and president of the Tsukiji Soba Academy, or one of the Academies' graduate soba specialists, as they show you how to correctly prepare and make this Japanese staple.

The afternoon is then free for you to continue your sightseeing in Tokyo. We will provide information on all the available options in our information pack.

Overnight in Tokyo.

Day 4: Tokyo - Takayama

(B,D)

Leave bustling Tokyo behind as you take Japan's world famous *Shinkansen* bullet train to 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 thus allowing it to develop its own unique culture.

This afternoon we recommend visiting one of the town's many sake breweries for a taste of the local drop, its high quality owing 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 5: Takayama

(B,D)

After breakfast head up to the Miyagawa morning market with stalls selling local crafts and produce, a good opportunity to try some of the local fruit and vegetables.

A short bus ride will take you to Hida No Sato Folk Village, an open air museum exhibiting over 30 typical farmhouses and other traditional buildings from the Hida region. There is also a workshop in the village illustrating how many of Japan's famous handicrafts are made, including wood carving, tie-dyeing, weaving, and lacquering.

In the afternoon you can visit the Takayama Festival Floats museum, displaying floats from the famous Takayama festival, or simply wander through the beautifully preserved old town.

Dinner will be again served in your ryokan.

Overnight in Takayama.

Day 6: Takayama to Osaka

(B,D)

Back on the *Shinkansen* today as you make the 4 hour journey to the city of Osaka, widely regarded as “Japan’s kitchen”. Your afternoon is free to explore this lively and friendly city.

Tonight you will dine in the Dotonbouri entertainment district at the President Chibo restaurant. Your set meal will include Japanese *wagyu* steak, local specialty *Okonomiyaki* (Japanese savory pancake) as well as seasonal dishes.

Overnight in Osaka.

Day 7: Nara Day Trip

(B)

For 74 years during the 8th century Nara was Japan’s capital and many of the temples and shrines built at that time still remain.

Located just 45min from Osaka, this small town it makes for an easy excursion from Osaka.

We recommend visiting Todaiji Temple, the world’s largest wooden building and home to Japan’s largest Buddha, and Kasuga Taisha, Nara’s most celebrated shrine.

You will also have time to wander through Nara Park, called Deer Park by locals due to the large population of tame deer living there.

The afternoon is free for you to continue your sightseeing in Nara or Osaka.

Overnight in Osaka.

Day 8: Osaka - Koya-san

(B,D)

This morning you make scenic journey to holy Mt Koya (Koya-san).

The 2 hour train journey is one of the best in Japan, as the local train winds its way up into the mountains of Wakayama Prefecture. The final ascent to the top of Koya is made by cable car.

Mount Koya is the center of Shingon Buddhism, an important Buddhist sect which was introduced to Japan in 805 by Kobo Daishi.

Since then over one hundred temples have sprung up along the streets of Koyasan. The most important among them are Kongobuji, the head temple of Shingon Buddhism, and Okunoin, the site of Kobo Daishi’s mausoleum.

Koya-san and its surrounds is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Your knowledgeable local guide will be waiting for you on arrival to show you Koya-san’s sights and explain about Japanese buddhism.

Tonight you will be staying at a *shukubo*, Japanese temple lodging. Dinner will be *shojin ryori*, traditional Buddhist cuisine. This vegetarian meal is not only healthy but delicious as well!

Overnight in Koya-san.

Day 9: Koya-san - Kyoto

(B)

An early start today as you will be able to witness the monks chanting their morning prayers. This amazing experience is followed by a *shojin ryori* breakfast.

The rest of the day is free to further explore Koya-san before taking the train to Kyoto.

Overnight in Kyoto.

Day 10: Kyoto

(B)

Today you explore the former imperial capital with a knowledgeable local guide, utilizing Kyoto's comprehensive bus system to visit some of Kyoto's World Heritage Sites.

You will start your day with a visit to Nijo Castle.

This ornamental castle was built by the founder of the Edo Shogunate as his Kyoto residence and is surrounded by stunning surrounding gardens.

The main building was completed in 1603, and is famous for its Momoyama architecture, decorated sliding doors and 'chirping' nightingale floors.

Continue on 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.

The final stop of the morning is Daitoku-ji Zen temple complex, which consists of a main temple and 22 sub-temples. You will visit Daisen-in sub temple, which was founded in 1464 and has one of Japan's best Zen rock gardens, perfect for a spot of Zazen meditation after a busy morning.

After lunch, visit 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.

Finish off the day with a stroll through the atmospheric Higashiyama district, whose busy lanes lead up to Kiyomizu and are filled with quaint shops selling souvenirs including Kiyomizu-yaki pottery, sweets and pickles.

Overnight in Kyoto.

Day 11: Kyoto

(B,D)

You have the morning free in Kyoto to further explore some of the 2000 temples and shrines. After lunch, we have arranged a very special cooking experience for you.

Together with a local guide you will walk the mile-long Nishiki covered food markets, where there are many interesting food stores to explore as you help your guide buy the ingredients for your Japanese cooking class. This is a great opportunity to learn about local Japanese produce.

After visiting the markets, you'll travel through the back streets and lanes of Kyoto, visit to former sake brewery for the tour of the house with sake tasting, and then finally to a

traditional wooden townhouse for your Japanese cooking class. (Note: In case the brewery is closed, the admission ticket to the brewery is offered so that clients can visit on other days during their stay in Kyoto.)

Cooking your own Japanese evening meal, you'll learn how to make rolled sushi, miso soup and cooked salad with seasonal fruit for dessert.

After the meal the evening is free for you to explore Kyoto, or your local guide can assist you in returning to your hotel.

Overnight in Kyoto.

Day 12: Depart Kyoto

(B)

Departure day. At leisure until your included transfer by direct train to Kansai Airport. If departing from Tokyo Narita airport, we can arrange a return ticket to Narita Airport (4 hours) as well as an additional night in Tokyo if required.

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

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