



Enlightenment Japan

10 Days / 9 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)

This morning your guide will meet you at your hotel.

The day will begin with a peaceful stroll through Hama-Rikyu Teien, a former private garden of an *Edo* Period lord.

Take the chance to break up your walk with a stop in a tea house on a small island on the park's lake, where we 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.

In the afternoon, head across Tokyo to 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.

At the end of the day you will have time to explore Meiji Shrine; Tokyo's most famous, dedicated to the spirit of the late Emperor Meiji and the spiritual heart of Tokyo.

Overnight in Tokyo.

Day 3: Tokyo - Yudanaka/Shibu Onsen

(B,D)

This morning we have organised a Shiatsu Massage lesson. Shiatsu is a Japanese 'finger pressure' massage that can help in a wide range of conditions from specific injuries to more general symptoms of poor health. Shiatsu is a deeply relaxing experience and helps to prevent the build-up of stress in our daily lives.

Your Shiatsu Master has over 20 years experience and will help you understand both the physical and mental aspects of Shiatsu.

After your lesson, you will board Japan's world famous Shinkansen bullet train. With a top speed of 300km/h (186 mph), the Shinkansen takes 100 minutes to reach Nagano.

Historic Zenkoji temple is a short bus ride from Nagano station.

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.

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.

From Nagano, you will then take a local train to Yudanaka (45min), and then it is a short ride in the shuttle bus to your ryokan.

Your traditional style accommodation has tatami mat flooring, futon beds and hot spring *onsen* baths.

As well as in your ryokan, there are many which has public *onsens* around town you can try as well, and you will see local people in kimono strolling down the street in *yukata* (light robes) as they head for a soak.

Dinner tonight will be a Japanese traditional *kaiseki* meal, comprised of 9 or more dishes. The meal is made up of seasonal dishes using only the freshest of local Nagano ingredients.

Overnight in Yudanaka/Shibu Onsen

Day 4: Yudanaka/Shibu Onsen

(B,D)

This morning you can head to the Jigokudani Yaen Koen 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.

In the afternoon we recommend a visit to the nearby charming town of Obuse, with traditional houses, stores and streets.

Obuse is known for its delicious chestnuts and as the home of Hokusai, the famous painter and printmaker from Japan's Edo period, and a visit to his museum here is a must.

No visit to Obuse is complete without stopping in at the Masuichi sake brewery for a taste of their delicious sake made from the high quality local rice.

Relax before dinner with an included hour massage at Zen Massage. The total Zen experience together with Shibu Onsen hot springs improves circulation, releases pain, stimulates the immune system and promotes an overall feeling of wellbeing.

You can choose from Pain Release, Stress Release or Shiatsu Massage.

Another amazing dinner will be served at your ryokan.

Overnight in Yudanaka-Shibu Onsen

Day 5: Yudanaka-Shibu Onsen - Kyoto

(B)

Time for one last soak in the onsen before undertaking the 4 hour journey by the world famous *Shinkansen* bullet train to Japan's cultural capital, Kyoto.

Founded in 794 as Heian-kyo (capital of peace and tranquility), the city site was selected by the Emperor's geomancer and modeled on the Tang Chinese city of Xi'an.

Kyoto culture comes from an amalgam of several influences - the imperial court and nobility, the samurai, patrons of Zen Buddhism and the tea ceremony.

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

The afternoon is free for you to start your explorations of this fascinating city.

Overnight in Kyoto

Day 6: Kyoto

(B)

This morning you will experience the quintessential Japanese enlightenment experience - *Zazen* (Zen meditation).

Your guide will meet you in the morning and take you to a Kyoto Zen temple. The Zen sects of Japanese Buddhism are essential to understanding Japanese culture as a whole, for much of the austere simplicity associated with the Japanese way sprang from the powerful Zen temples in Kyoto. The best way to come to an understanding of Kyoto's Zen traditions is to try meditation yourself.

You can learn the basics of the same sitting meditation that led the Buddha to Enlightenment: folded legs, erect posture, half-closed eyes and a focus on measured breathing that leads to awareness of the way the mind works.

After Zazen, head to Chion-in temple. Chion-in is the head temple of the Jodo (Pure Land) sect of Japanese Buddhism, which has millions of followers and is one the most popular Buddhist sects in Japan.

The Sanmon Gate, Chionin's main entrance gate, stands 24 meters tall and 50 meters wide, making it the largest wooden gate in Japan and dates back to the early 1600s.

From Chion-in, walk through Maruyama Park and Yasaka Shrine, one of Kyoto's most popular Shinto Shrines.

Your spiritual day finishes with a Tea Ceremony in a Gion tea house. Your Tea Master will give you a full explanation of Japanese tea as well as the tea ceremony itself, its long history and relationship with Zen Buddhism. The Master will also tell you the meaning behind each movement involved in the making and serving of the tea, as well as the equipment involved.

Overnight in Kyoto

Day 7: Kyoto & Nara

(B)

This morning you will make the short 45min trip by train to Nara.

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.

We would 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 Kyoto.

Overnight in Kyoto

Day 8: Kyoto to Koya-san

(B)

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

The 2 hour train ride 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 to Osaka

(B)

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

The rest of the morning is free to further explore Koya-san, before making the 2 hour trip by train to Osaka.

Japan's third biggest city, what Osaka lacks in sightseeing draw cards it makes up for with its flamboyance, fun loving people, and amazing food.

Known as 'Japan's kitchen', take a wander down Dotonbori, a former pleasure district turned restaurant mecca where amongst other things you can sample *fugu* (poisonous puffer fish) and *tacoyaki* (octopus balls).

This afternoon is free for you to catch up on any last minute shopping, and have one more delicious Japanese meal before heading home.

Day 10: Depart Osaka

(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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