



Highlights of Japan

14 Days / 13 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.

Day 2: Tokyo

(B)

Today you will spend a full day taking in some of the many highlights Tokyo has to offer with a local guide by public transport.

First stop is nearby Meiji Jinja, Tokyo's most famous shrine, dedicated to the spirit of the late Emperor Meiji. The shrine is a popular site for Japanese Weddings' if you are lucky you may see a bride and groom dressed in traditional *Shinto* wedding attire.

From old to new Tokyo as we then take a walk down 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.

A short subway ride will then take us to 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.

We will then see Tokyo from a different angle as we take a cruise down the Sumida Gawa River by boat to Hamarikyū-tien. This stunning former private garden of an *Edo* Period lord is an oasis surrounded by a sea of skyscrapers.

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.

Note: The order of this itinerary may change according to the location of your hotel.

Overnight in Tokyo.

Day 3: Tokyo - Optional Kamakura 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, 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. Kamakura is 1 hour by train from Tokyo.

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

Overnight in Tokyo.

Day 4: Tokyo - Hakone/Mt Fuji

(B,D)

An early start today as you leave Tokyo behind and make the 2 hour journey to Hakone, the gateway to Mt Fuji and surrounding national park. This small town is famous for its *onsen* natural hot springs, and has natural beauty in abundance.

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 through 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.

Hakone offers many other options as well, including the Hakone Open Air Museum, featuring sculptures from world renowned artists set against the back drop of Hakone's picturesque mountains. Of course, there are hundreds of *onsen* to try as well.

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

Tonight you stay in a traditional Japanese-style *ryokan* accommodation, complete with tatami mats, *shoji* rice paper sliding doors and *onsen* baths.

This evening, relax in your *yukata* (lightweight kimono), and dine on a sumptuous *kaiseki* multi course meal, served by kimono clad waitresses.

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

Overnight in Hakone.

Day 5: Hakone/Mt Fuji - Takayama

(B,D)

Time for one last soak in the *onsen* before undertaking the 4 hour train journey to Takayama. The first leg will be on the world famous *Shinkansen* bullet train, which

reaches speeds of up to 300km/h. You will then change onto the Limited Express Hida Wideview for the one of the most scenic train journeys in Japan, winding your way through tall mountains and stunning gorges.

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.

This afternoon we recommend visiting one of the town's many sake breweries for a taste of the local drop, its high quality due to the area's clean water sources.

Tonight you will stay in Japanese style *ryokan* accommodation with hot spring *onsen* bath.

Overnight in Takayama.

Day 6: Takayama

(B)

After breakfast head up to the Miyagawa morning market with stalls selling local crafts and produce. This is a great opportunity to try some of the region's delicious 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-dying, 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.

Overnight in Takayama.

Day 7: Takayama - Kanazawa

(B)

Another stunning journey today as you continue your train journey alongside the Sea of Japan to Kanazawa.

In the 17th century this beautifully preserved castle town was Japan's wealthiest, and it became a thriving center for culture and arts.

This afternoon we would recommend visiting the Nagamachi Samurai district, including a visit to the Saihitsu-an Yuzen Silk Center, offering demonstrations of the centuries-old Yuzen silk painting technique as well as the Nomura Samurai House, a traditional Japanese home with tea-ceremony room, an interior courtyard garden and artifacts from the Edo period

Overnight in Kanazawa.

Day 8: Kanazawa

(B)

The highlight of any visit to Kanazawa is Kenroku-en garden.

Ranked one of the top three in Japan, its breathtaking beauty shines through in any season. A visit to the imposing Kanazawa Castle next door is also a must do.

There are several Kanazawa lacquer ware and pottery galleries near the Park, as well as the impressive Museum of Contemporary Art.

Kanazawa is also home to many interesting temples as well as a bustling seafood market. We can arrange for a volunteer guide to join you today.

Overnight in Kanazawa.

Day 9: Kanazawa - Hiroshima

(B)

Back on the train for the 4 hour journey to Hiroshima.

Perhaps more than any city in the world, Hiroshima is famous for one moment in history. On 6 August 1945, it became the first target of an atomic bomb.

However, Hiroshima has risen phoenix-like from the ashes, and rebuilt itself as one of Japan's most laid back, vibrant cities full of wide boulevards and Art Museums, great food and friendly, welcoming people.

This afternoon you will have time to visit your exploration of Hiroshima.

Overnight in Hiroshima.

Day 10: Hiroshima

(B)

This morning head to the Peace Park and Museum for a sobering reminder of the events 65 years ago.

However, far from being a depressing experience the overriding theme of the Museum is one of hope and peace.

In the afternoon, you can take a short ferry ride to Miyajima Island, a famous wooded island located in the Inland Sea near Hiroshima. Here you will find perhaps the most photographed site in Japan - The Floating Torii Gate.

Designated as one of Japan's '3 Most Beautiful Views', the shrine itself dates back to the 6th century and is designed in a pier like structure. Mere 'commoners' were not allowed to set foot on this holy place.

You will have time to explore the island and its many shrines and temples, sample local goodies like maple leaf shaped cakes, and have the option to hike up to the peak of the island, Mt. Misen, to see spectacular views of the surrounding islands.

Overnight in Hiroshima.

Day 11: Hiroshima - Kyoto

(B)

Time for one last ride on the Shinkansen as you undertake the 2 hour journey by *Shinkansen* to Japan's cultural capital, Kyoto.

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

This afternoon you will have the opportunity to visit the home of an instructor of one of Japan's Traditional Arts.

One of our assistants will meet at your hotel and escort you to the instructor's house. You may choose from Tea Ceremony, Flower Arrangement, Calligraphy or Origami. Enjoy learning these hands-on traditional arts with the support/advice from the professional instructor and interpretation from our assistant.

Overnight in Kyoto.

Day 12: 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.

Day 13: Kyoto and 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 14: Depart Kyoto

(B)

Departure day. At leisure until your included transfer by direct train or limousine bus 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*******

E&OE