



Japan's Capitals

7 Days / 6 Nights

Day 1: Tokyo

Arrive in Tokyo, the capital of Japan since 1868. 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 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.

Overnight in Tokyo

Day 3: Tokyo - Kamakura Day Trip

(B)

Today you will make a day trip to Kamakura, the former *de facto* capital of Japan as the seat of the Shogunate during the Kamakura Period (1185 - 1333).

At that time Kamakura was the largest city in the world, however the Kamakura of today is a small, sleepy seaside town with numerous temples, shrines and other attractions.

On arrival at Kamkura station, you will be met by your guide who will take you on a Zen temple morning tour. First you will visit Hokokuji Temple, known as 'Bamboo Temple' due to its stunning garden featuring over 2000 bamboo trees.

Jomyoji is one of the Five Great Zen Temples in Kamakura, and in the tea room here you can be take a break, drinking matcha (green tea) whilst enjoying the dry landscape garden where rocks and well-trimmed trees are set out superbly.

Final stop of the morning is Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine, Kamkaura's most important shrine dedicated to Hachiman, the patron god of Samurai.

After the tour is finished, you have the afternoon free to further explore Kamakura's attractions, including the Daibutsu, a large 13.5m outdoor bronze Buddha. Kamakura is 1 hour from Tokyo by train.

Overnight in Tokyo

Day 4: Tokyo - Kyoto

(B,D)

Time to say sayonara to Tokyo before undertaking the 2 hour journey by the world famous *Shinkansen* bullet train to Kyoto.

You will be taking the top of the line *Nozomi* super express Shinkansen, which is capable of speeds of up to 330km/h.

Kyoto was Japan's longest reigning capital, from 794 - 1868, before it transferred to Edo (current day Tokyo).

It is home to an astonishing 2000 Shrines and Temples, including 17 UNESCO World Heritage Sights, and still considered to be Japan's Cultural Capital.

This afternoon, 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 5: 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.

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 6: Kyoto - Nara

(B,D)

This morning, make the 45min train ride to Nara. Nara was the capital of Japan from 710 -784, before the capital was moved to Heian-kyo (present day Kyoto) and many of the temples and shrines built at that time still remain.

Nara is a small town and most of its main sights are gathered around Nara Park, which is inhabited by tame deer considered to be 'Messengers of the Gods' in the *Shinto* religion.

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. Nara's National Museum has a huge collection of Japanese Buddhist Art.

Tonight you will be staying in a *ryokan*, a traditional Japanese inn. Your room has *tatami* mat flooring, *shoji* rice paper screens and comfy futon beds.

A sumptuous multi course Japanese *kaiseki* meal will be served for dinner, comprised of the freshest seasonal ingredients.

After dinner, a soak in the *onsen* hot spring bath is highly recommended.

Overnight in Nara.

Day 7: Depart Nara

(B)

Free time until your included departure by airport bus to Kansai Airport (1.5hr)

We can also arrange for a return train to Tokyo Narita Airport (4.5hr), as well as an additional night in Tokyo if required.

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

E&OE