



Kyushu & Shikoku Explorer

17 Days / 16 Nights

Day 1: Kyoto

Arrive at Kansai International Airport, built on a man-made island in Japan's Inland Sea. You will be welcomed by our airport representative who will assist you with transferring by either train or limousine bus to your hotel (1.5hr). The rest of the day is at your leisure.

Overnight in Kyoto

Day 2: 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 3: Kyoto - Nara Half Day trip

(B)

This morning you can choose 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 Nara

Day 4: Kyoto - Nagasaki

(B)

Today's destination is Nagasaki, located on Kyushu Island, Japan's third biggest island and most south westerly. Journey time is just over 5 hours.

Nagasaki is best known as the second city the US destroyed with atomic weapons in August 1945, however many people in Japan consider this city one of the country's most beautiful.

Whilst it doesn't have a castle or a famous landscaped garden, rather, its charm is much more subtle. It is a place of hills rising from the deep, U-shaped harbor, of houses perched on terraced slopes, of small streets and distinctive neighborhoods, and of people extremely proud of their hometown.

Nagasaki is also perhaps Japan's most cosmopolitan city with a unique blend of outside cultures interwoven into its history, architecture, food, and festivals.

Overnight in Nagasaki

Day 5: Nagasaki

(B)

A full day of sightseeing in Nagasaki.

Nagasaki played an important role in Japan's history of international relations; Asian and European culture and science poured into Japan through the city which flourished both as a trading port and center for Christian missionaries. Many of Nagasaki's sights are tied to this history, from Christian churches to Confucian Temples and one of Japan's liveliest Chinatowns.

Of course, the Peace Park and Museum here are a must see.

You can also take the ropeway to the top of Inusa-yama (333m) which offers a spectacular panorama of Nagasaki, especially at night.

Overnight in Nagasaki

Day 6: Nagasaki - Kumamoto

(B)

Today you head further south as you ride the Limited Express train to Kumamoto, whose main attraction is the imposing Kumamoto castle, ranked one of Japan's 3 premier castles.

Another highlight of this pleasant city is Suizenji-Jojuen, a spacious Japanese style

landscape garden in Kumamoto.

The garden reproduces the 53 post stations of the Tokaido, the important road, which connected Edo with Kyoto during the Edo Period, in miniature form, including a small Mt. Fuji.

Overnight in Kumamoto

Day 7: Kumamoto - Mt Aso

(B,D)

A short 70min train ride takes us into the center of Kyushu, an area dominated by sparsely populated grasslands and mountain peaks, offering some of the country's best scenery. Amid this is Aso caldera, the world's largest crater. The floor of the caldera is a patchwork of fields, but the central peaks of Aso-san are a constant reminder that the volcano remains very much alive.

On arrival, check into your hotel and then take the time to explore this small time. There are many *onsens* in the area you can visit, full of volcanic hot spring water.

Tonight you will be staying in a modern ryokan. Your rooms will be Japanese style, and an included *kaiseki* multi course meal is included.

Overnight in Aso

Day 8: Mt Aso

(B,D)

Today you will have the chance to head up to the top of the Aso Caldera. The ancient crater measures 18kms east-west and 24kms north-south giving it a circumference of over 120kms. It was formed about 100,000 years ago when a volcano collapsed. Subsequent eruptions formed the 5 lesser cones within the crater, known collectively as Aso-san.

A ropeway runs to the crater or it is a 20-30 minute walk. Within, the crater is a seething grey lake emitting turbulent, sulphurous clouds of steam.

A visit to the Aso Volcano Museum is also recommended. Satellite photos reveal Japan's major fault lines in awesome clarity and there are films and photos of recent eruptions around the world. You can also take a visual tour inside Naka-dake due to cameras inserted in the mountain wall.

There are many great hiking routes in the area as well - your hotel can provide full instructions.

Don't forget to make it back in time for your gorgeous included dinner.

Overnight in Aso

Day 9: Mt Aso - Beppu

(B,D)

Another amazing train journey today as your train rides the Caldera wall on it's way to Beppu (2hr) on Kyushu's East Coast.

Beppu is one of Japan's most famous hot spring resorts, producing more hot spring water than any other resort in the country.

It offers an unmatched range of baths to be enjoyed, including ordinary hot water baths, mud baths, sand baths and steam baths.

The "hells" (jigoku) of Beppu are nine spectacular hot springs for viewing rather than bathing. They include the 'sea hell', 'golden dragon hell' and 'monster mountain hell'. While unashamedly touristy, they are interesting in a kitsch kind of way. Or, you can choose to simply spend your day soaking in one of the many onsen in town or at your hotel.

Dinner tonight is included in your hotel.

Day 10: Beppu - Miyajima Island

(B,D)

Time to say sayonara to Kyushu as you take the train back to the main island of Honshu - temporarily.

On arrival at Hiroshima (2h), a short ferry ride will take you to Miyajima Island, a small wooded island located in the Inland Sea. 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 it belongs to dates back to the 6th century and is designed in a pier like structure.

Take time to explore the island, and its many shrines and temples. Miyajima is small enough to walk around, or you can hire a bike.

You can also use your included Free Pass to take the cable car up to the top of Mt Misen for sweeping views of the island and surrounding Inland Sea.

Tonight you will be staying in *ryokan* style accommodation. Your room is in traditional Japanese style, with tatami mats and comfy futons to sleep on.

You will be served a magnificent multi course *kaiseki* dinner consisting of seasonal produce as well as local delicacies in your room. Your ryokan also has natural hot springs (*onsen*) baths, the perfect way to relax after a hard day sightseeing!

Overnight in Miyajima

Day 11: Miyajima & Hiroshima

(B,D)

Make your way back to the mainland to explore Hiroshima. Perhaps more than any other 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, great food and friendly, welcoming people.

First stop should be the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park in central Hiroshima.

The area where the park now lies was ground zero for the Atomic Bomb on 6th August 1945. After the bombing the Memorial Park was created and dedicated to those who lost their lives in the attack.

Stroll through the park and discover the many memorials, monuments and statues in the park before heading into the Museum itself.

In the afternoon, you can choose to explore some of Hiroshima's world class museums, the beautiful Shukkeien Garden or Hiroshima castle.

Or, you can head back to Miyajima to continue your sightseeing there.

Dinner again is served at your *ryokan*.

Overnight in Miyajima

Day 12: Miyajima - Matsuyama (B)

This morning you will be making your way again by ferry to Shikoku Island. The smallest of Japan's main islands and the least visited by tourists, Shikoku charms lie in its amazing scenery and hidden treasures.

At the heart of the city stands Matsuyama-jo, a beautiful, original castle. The castle's hilltop vantage point offers a view of the city and a glimpse of the Seto Inland Sea.

The city is also famed for being the setting of Natsume Soseki's popular novel, entitled "Botchan". Often read as part of the Japanese school curriculum, the novel describes Matsuyama during the turbulent Meiji Restoration. Natsume's novel helped make the city renowned throughout Japan.

Dogo Onsen is frequently mentioned in "Botchan" and is one of Matsuyama's main tourist attractions. Referring to both a district northeast of the city center and a specific bath house, Dogo Onsen is one of Japan's oldest hot spring resorts. We highly recommend a visit and bath here!

Overnight in Matsuyama

Day 13: Matsuyama - Kotohira (B,D)

You have time to continue sightseeing in Matsuyama before taking the afternoon train to Kotohira (2h)

Kotohira is a small town in Kagawa Prefecture, which is famous for Kompirasan, Shikoku's most popular shrine. Kompirasan is dedicated to seafaring, and is said to have one of the most difficult shrine approaches in Japan.

Tonight you will be staying in *ryokan* style accommodation with included dinner. Your *ryokan* has some of the most amazing baths in Japan, its outdoor baths offer views of Kompira.

Overnight in Kotohira

Day 14: Kotohira (B)

Kompirasan, is located on the wooded slope of Mount Zozu in Kotohira, the approach to Kompirasan is an arduous series of 1,368 stone steps.

Over many centuries, Kompirasan had been revered as a mixture between Shinto shrine and Buddhist temple, until it was officially declared a shrine in the beginning of the Meiji Period during government efforts to separate the two religions. Nevertheless, the former symbiosis is still visible in Kompirasan's architecture which displays both Shinto and Buddhist elements.

Despite being one of the most difficult shrine approaches in Japan, Kompirasan is a highly popular site visited by pilgrims from across the country.

Most visitors only make it up to the main hall; however, for the adventurous it is an additional 583 steps (an additional 45 minutes) along a paved, forested path to the inner shrine (Okusha) of the complex. Definitely worth the extra effort!

Overnight in Kotohira

Day 15: Kotohira - Tokushima (B,D)

On to Tokushima, located on the eastern tip of Shikoku.

Tonight is a very special experience as you stay in traditional temple lodgings. Tatsue-ji is temple number 19 of the 88 Temple Pilgrimage of Shikoku, and you will be sharing your lodgings with 'henro', or pilgrims who are walking the 1,200 km course, which can take up to 2 months to complete.

Dinner tonight is traditional buddhist cuisine, eaten together with you new pilgrim friends.

Overnight in Tokushima

Day 16: Tokushima - Osaka (B)

Back onto Honshu one last time as you travel by train to Osaka (3h).

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.

This afternoon is free for you to finish any last minute shopping or taking in some of Osaka's sights, including Osaka Castle and Osaka Aquarium.

For dinner, discover why Osaka is known as 'Japan's kitchen', by taking a wander down Dotonbori, a former pleasure district turned restaurant mecca where amongst other things you can sample fugu (poisonous puffer fish) and takoyaki (octopus balls).

Day 17: Depart Osaka (B)

Free until your included transfer by train to Kansai Airport (1h).

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

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