



## **World Heritage Japan**

14 Days / 13 Nights

### **Day 1: 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 for a full day sightseeing utilizing Tokyo's super-efficient metro system.

Begin the day you with an early morning visit to Meiji Shrine; perfectly timed to avoid the crowds. Tokyo's most famous shrine is dedicated to the spirit of the late Emperor Meiji and the park that surrounds the shrine is a forest of some 120,000 trees of 365 different species, making your forget you are in the world's largest city.

Next to Meiji Shrine is Harajuku - Tokyo's youth fashion mecca. Whether you are a Goth, punk or anything in between, there is a shop in Harajuku that caters for you.

Neighboring Harajuku is 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. Feel free to stop for a coffee in one of the area's many stylish cafes and watch the beautiful people walk by.

From Omotesando, take the metro to Ginza. Named after the silver coin

mint established there in 1612, Ginza is Tokyo's most famous upmarket shopping, dining and entertainment district. One square meter of land is worth over 10 million yen (€ 90,000)

Adjoining Ginza lies the Imperial Palace, the main residence of the Emperor. Whilst the Palace itself is not open to the public, you can take a stroll through the Palace East Gardens.

Our last stop for the day is 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.

### Day 3: Nikko Day Trip

(B)

A 2 hour journey by train takes you high into the mountains of the Nikko National Park in Tochigi Prefecture and the UNESCO World Heritage listed Toshogu-shrine complex.

Built as a mausoleum for Tokugawa Ieyasu, founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate which ruled Japan for over 250 years, this lavishly decorated shrine complex consists of more than a dozen Shinto and Buddhist buildings in a beautiful forest setting.

A local guide will meet you at the station and spend the morning with you, taking you around some of the numerous temples and shrines.

In the afternoon, if time permits, you can also choose to make the 50min journey by bus to Lake Chuzenji-ko, a scenic lake in the mountains above Nikko. It is located at the foot of Mount Nantai, Nikko's sacred volcano, whose eruption blocked the valley below, thereby creating Lake Chuzenji about 20,000 years ago.

Overnight in Tokyo

### Day 4: Tokyo - Takayama

(B,D)

Time to say sayonara to Tokyo before undertaking the 4 hour train journey to Takayama. The first leg will be on the world famous *Shinkansen* bullet train, which can reach speeds of up to 300km/h. 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.

In Takayama you will be staying in traditional Japanese-style *ryokan* accommodation, complete with tatami mats, *shoji* rice paper sliding doors and *onsen* baths.

This evening, 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 and a good 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-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.

Another delicious dinner awaits you on your return to your ryokan.

Overnight in Takayama

### **Day 6: Takayama - Shirakawago**

**(B,D)**

This morning you will travel by bus (1hr) to Shirakawago.

The Shirakawa-go and neighboring Gokayama regions line the Shogawa River Valley in the remote mountains that span from Gifu to Toyama Prefectures. Declared a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1995, they are famous for their

traditional gassho-zukuri farmhouses, some of which are more than 250 years old.

Gassho-zukuri means "constructed like hands in prayer", as the farmhouses' steep thatched roofs resemble the hands of Buddhist monks pressed together in prayer. The architectural style developed over many generations and is designed to withstand the large amounts of heavy snow that falls in the region during winter. The roofs, made without nails, provided a large attic space used for cultivating silkworms.

Tonight, you will have the opportunity to stay in one of these farmhouses, a great way to experience a traditional Japanese family home and get more intimate with gassho-zukuri buildings.

Dinner is included tonight at your accommodation.

### **Day 7: Shirakawago - Kyoto**

**(B)**

Continue on by bus 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.

You will have time to visit Kenroku-en garden, ranked one of Japan's top 3 Gardens. The name Kenrokuen means 'Six Attributes Garden' and it is said that a garden is perfect if it has these six attributes - spaciousness, seclusion, artifice, antiquity, water-courses and panoramas.

After visiting Kenroku-en, it is 2 hours by train to Kyoto, Japan's cultural capital. Home to over 2,000 temples and shrines, including 17 UNESCO World Heritage Sites, one could spend years in Kyoto and never run out of things to see and do.

Overnight in Kyoto

### **Day 8: 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 Ryoan-ji Zen, the site of Japan's most famous rock garden. Originally an aristocrat's villa during the Heian Period, the site was converted into a Zen temple in 1450 and belongs to the Myoshinji school of the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism. 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 9: Kyoto

(B)

This morning, we have in store a truly amazing experience as you learn about Japanese culture in a beautifully restored *machiya* (traditional wooden townhouse).

First, you will have the opportunity to wear a traditional *kimono*. You will be dressed by a professional kimono dresser and be able to take pictures afterwards.

Next, you will participate in a *chanoyu*, or Tea Ceremony. Your instructor will give insight into the history behind all the intricate movements of the ceremony, and you will also be able to try your hand at making your own tea.

The rest of the day is at your disposal to take in some more of Kyoto's UNESCO World Heritage sites.

We recommend Kamigamo, one of Japan's oldest Shrines; Ginkakuji, the Silver Pavillion; and Tenryu-ji and nearby bamboo forest in the stunning Arashiyama area.

Of course, Kyoto is also a great place for shopping, particularly traditional souvenirs.

Overnight in Kyoto

## Day 10: Kyoto - Koya-san

(B,D)

Make the 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 11: Koya-san - Miyajima

(B,D)

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.

You have a long but interesting travel day ahead of you, as you take cable cars, trains, bullet trains, and finally a ferry to get to your destination - Miyajima, a small sacred island located in the Inland Sea, has been a holy place of Shintoism since the earliest times.

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 with the present structure dating back to the 12th century. The harmoniously arranged buildings reveal great artistic and technical skill, and have been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Mere 'commoners' were not allowed to set foot on this holy place, and even now it is forbidden to give birth or die on the island!

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 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 12: Miyajima & Hiroshima**

**(B,D)**

Today 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 chose 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*.

### **Day 13: Miyajima - Nara**

**(B)**

Back on the Shinkansen one last time as you head to one of Japan's former capitals, Nara (3hr).

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

You have this afternoon free to explore this small town. Most Nara's attractions are located in Nara Park, called Deer Park by locals due to the

large population of tame deer living there.

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.

Overnight in Nara

**Day 14: Depart Nara**

**(B)**

Today is free for you to continue your sightseeing in Nara until your included transfer to Osaka Kansai Airport (90min).

If you are departing from Tokyo Narita airport, we can also arrange for a return transfer and extra night's accommodation if necessary.

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

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