

JAPAN 2020

≡ *Your Summer Guide* ≡



CONTENTS

Japan in summer:
Highlights and lowlights 3

Travel Inspiration 4

Summer 2020 summer itineraries 5

Theme parks vs festivals 7

Hiking the Shin-Etsu 8

Summer Games 2020 9

High hopes 10

Innovation 11

New events 12

Helpful Travel Tips 13

Food in Japan 14

Beat the heat & packing list 15

How to onsen 16

About us 17

Click title to jump sections



Why Japan?

It's hard to think of any country that's obsessed over quite like Japan. People don't merely visit, they become completely immersed. They get lost in it.

What causes so many visitors to fall under Japan's spell?

There's no single answer. Japan is host to more twists, turns, delights and contradictions than seems possible, a culture so densely layered it forms its own gravitational pull. Old and new, introverted and extroverted, natural and synthetic; they intertwine effortlessly, merging on every street, and this dichotomy generates a special energy, one

that runs throughout the country like electricity.

This vitality beams up streetlights in crowded markets, crackles around the manicured gardens of ancient temples, soars up skyscraper elevator shafts and thunders back to earth atop vertical screaming rollercoasters. From tea houses to singing toilets, from bamboo forests to sweaty karaoke bars, from the whisper of a calligraphic ink brush to the fizz of a gleaming robot, from the past to the future, back and forth, without any sign of an end in sight.

If you think a visit to Japan will be a mere tick off your bucket list, think again. You're about to start a love affair that never ends.

JAPAN IN SUMMER: Highlights



Watch the Summer Games

The big one: in 2020 the world's most famous sporting event will make its way to Japan, some 56 years after it last swept the country and wowed the millions watching around the globe. It will be a once-in-a-lifetime chance to experience Tokyo transformed. Spectators will be treated to the opening of a brand-new bullet train and even – get this – *robotic staff*. The clash of sporting wunderkinds coupled with the adrenaline of Tokyo in the summer makes this one way too tempting to miss out on.



Climb Mount Fuji at sunrise

Hiking to the summit of Mount Fuji to watch the morning sun splash across the land is an experience like no other. It's only during summer that this feat is achievable – the mountain is far harder to climb in the colder months – so if you'd like to add 'climbed one of the earth's most iconic mountains' to your list of achievements, you know what to do.



Snorkel the world's largest coral reef

The azure waters surrounding Ishigaki are teeming with bright, tropical fish who make their homes among hundreds of different kinds of coral. The reef that surrounds Ishigaki is much-loved by locals and visitors alike, with its excellent visibility and warm temperatures making it a great spot to experience scuba, whether you're a seasoned pro or a first-timer.



Party in the streets at Nebuta Matsuri

Nebuta Matsuri is one of Japan's most famous festivals. Each night, huge illuminated floats are pulled through the streets followed by hundreds of dancers along with a cacophony of bells, flutes and drums. On the last night of the festival the floats are loaded onto boats and sailed out to sea against the backdrop of a spectacular firework finale!



Go firefly spotting

Early June to mid-July is Japan's rainy season and the humidity and sporadic showers bring a magical surprise. Wait until nightfall and leave the city behind. Get out into nature, far from electric light, and there, with a little luck, you'll find skies full of fireflies. These hypnotising creatures hold a special place in Japanese culture, with legend stating that they are the souls of samurai who have died in battle.

Lowlights

Japan in the summer is overwhelmingly positive. However, we want to be honest with you about *everything* you may experience – so here's the flipside of the summer coin:



The heat

Japan gets *hot*. This year temperatures have been pushing 40°C (104F) in Tokyo, though highs and lows can vary a lot.



The humidity

Give any hopes of looking stylish the boot now: any hair in your possession will be an unruly mess for the duration of your stay.



The showers

Rain will often come in the form of one quick blast mid-afternoon. Simply wait for that wet-air warning smell, take shelter, wait out the deluge, and then continue about your business.



The, er, typhoons

Japan is next to the Pacific; typhoons roll in sometimes, and it gets a bit windy. They turn a few umbrellas inside out, give the trees a good tussle, and they move on. You'll be fine.*

*your meticulously coiffured hair may not.



TRAVEL INSPIRATION



Osaka

SUMMER 2020

travel itineraries

We're not licensed to sell tickets to the summer games - that part is down to you - but we are remarkably well-equipped to take you on the Japanese tour of a lifetime while you're over there to see the games. Here are a couple of juicy examples...

LOVE THIS?

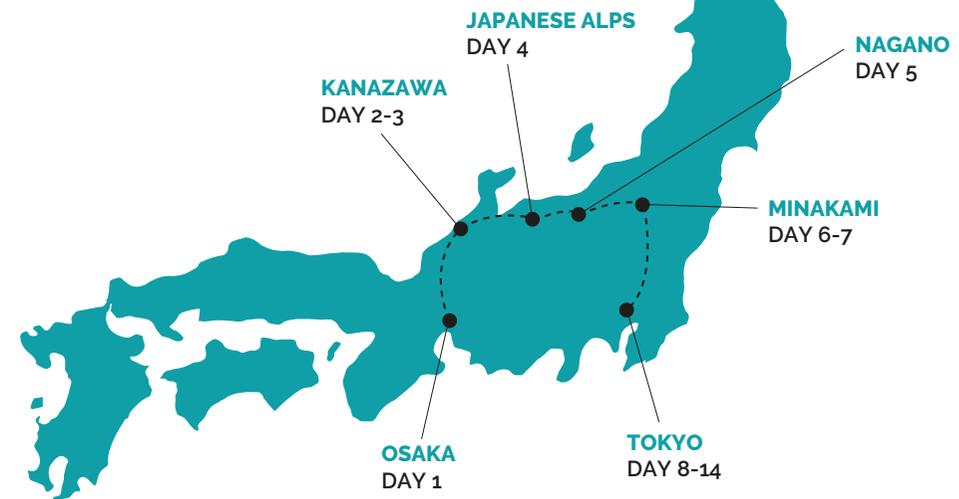
Find out more here

Medals & Mountains 12 nights

As well as catching all the sporting drama in the capital, extend your trip to scale the dizzy heights of the Japanese Alps.

Tour highlights

- Experience canyoning & river rafting in Minakami
- Explore Kenrokuen, one of Japan's most beautiful gardens
- Relax in a luxury hot springs ryokan
- Traverse the Japanese Alps by cable car & funicular train
- Wish for sporting success at Nagano's Zenko-ji Temple
- Spend six nights in the capital to soak up all the sporting action



LOVE THIS?

Find out
more here

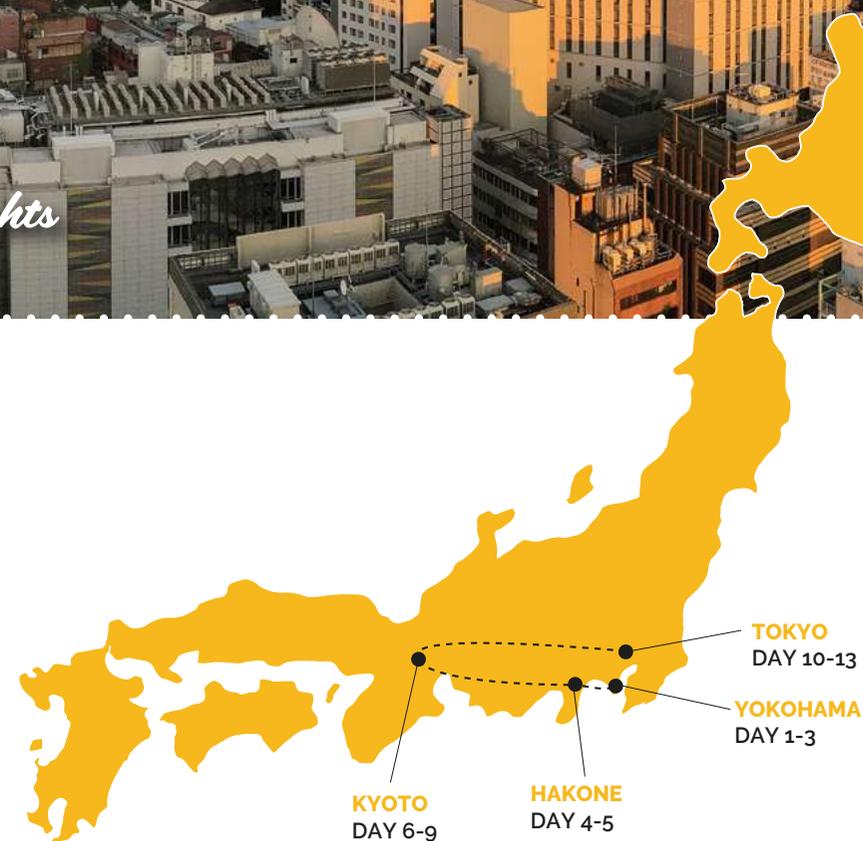
Golden Route

13 nights

The Golden Route showcases the very best of Japan, combining the fascinating and disparate cities of Tokyo and Kyoto with the beautiful countryside of Hakone National Park near Mount Fuji. Both Yokohama and Tokyo provide a handy base to get your summer games fill.

Tour highlights

- Explore Tokyo and Kyoto with an expert guide
- Relax in hot springs at a traditional *ryokan* inn
- Wander the atmospheric streets of the Gion geisha district
- Speed across Japan on the Shinkansen bullet train
- Tuck into Tokyo's food scene on a sociable evening tour



Summer in Japan isn't just about panoramic views and the tranquillity of nature – it's also famed for celebrations and adrenaline.

Theme Parks

DISNEYLAND & DISNEYSEA Tokyo

While Disneyland is based on the American original parks, DisneySea is the only one of its kind, with faster, scarier rides aimed at older kids and adults.

FUJI-Q HIGHLAND Kawaguchiko

Japan's premier rollercoaster theme park, boasting world-record smashing rides, anime attractions, one of the scariest haunted houses ever made. There's plenty for younger kids, too!

NAGASHIMA SPA LAND Nagoya

In addition to the world's fastest descending rollercoaster (one of forty rides), the site is also home to one of Japan's largest complex of hot spring baths and, for some reason, a flower park.

Festivals

GION FESTIVAL Kyoto

When? July

What? Taking place throughout July, Gion Festival is one of Japan's most famous events, held annually for over a thousand years. Part religious ceremony, part wild street party, revellers can expect huge parades, extravagant floats, music, dancing and a dizzying blend of ancient and modern Japanese culture.

FUJI ROCK

 Naeba

When? Late July

What? A truly world-class music festival, Fuji Rock is famous for being packed with international household names alongside acts little known outside of Japan. Previous events have hosted *The Cure*, *Björk*, *Radiohead*, *Elvis Costello*, *Arctic Monkeys*.

SUMMER SONIC

 Tokyo

When? Mid-August

What? Summer Sonic Festival has taken place in Osaka and Chiba simultaneously since it began in 2000. The festival is a heady mix of acts from major and independent record labels. Recent headliners have included *Red Hot Chili Peppers*, *Black Eyed Peas* and *Calvin Harris*.

5 REASONS FOR HIKING

the Shin-Etsu Trail in Summer



Summer in Japan is all about pulling your boots on and marching off to bask in the splendour of nature. The 70km (44 mile) Shin-Etsu Trail is one of our favourite undiscovered hikes, and the perfect place to blow away any cobwebs.

The six sections take you through various terrains, from dense cedar woods to peaceful beech forests, across fertile marshland, and along narrow ridge paths with panoramic views. Whether you've only got a few hours or you want to spend six days enjoying the entire route, the Shin-Etsu Trail is a must-do Japanese hike.

1

Outrageous views

The Shin-Etsu Trail runs along the ridge of the Sekida Mountains that separate the prefectures of Niigata and Nagano. As you make your way along the trail you're treated to views out over both prefectures; Nagano, with the Chikuma River snaking along the valley floor and the mountains behind, and Niigata with the Sea of Japan and distant Sado Island.

2

Chipper guides

While it's easy to hike the trail solo, we recommend a guide for your first day. The guides know the area like the back of their hand, and are full of fun anecdotes and fascinating nuggets of information.

3

Scrumptious food

Each day you're provided with a hearty, home-made bento lunchbox – packed with rice balls, vegetables, and yummy snacks – and meals at the accommodation have course after course of unfussy yet delicious local food. Itadakimasu (bon appetit)!

4

Oodles of history

The passes that cross the trail were used as trade routes between the ancient Shinano and Echigo provinces. People from Shinano would trade precious washi paper and rapeseed oil for salt and seafood; meanwhile, the folk from Echigo would trek over the mountains to Shinano simply to enjoy the onsen hot spring baths. That's dedication.

5

Total tranquility

The Shin-Etsu Trail attracts a number of Japanese visitors during the autumn season, but in summer you can enjoy the hike without hordes of other people. This is a blissful contrast to other popular hiking routes in Japan which can sometimes feel like a traffic jam...





2020 IS GOING
TO BE *THE* SUMMER
FOR SPORT IN JAPAN.

Why? Where to begin

SUMMER
GAMES 2020



Tokyo



High Hopes

Fifty six years since the flame was last jogged around a Tokyo running track, the event to end all sporting events is back in Japan. The Japanese Committee for the games announced last year that they are shooting to win a whopping 30 golds this time around, which would bag them around a third place overall. Officials are hoping that this barrage of wins will come mostly from:



Judo



Wrestling



Gymnastics



Swimming

However, Japan also has its collective eye on a few less sure-fire winners, including:



Badminton



Fencing



Sailing



Weightlifting



Table tennis

The last time the games were hosted by Japan, they came away with

**16 GOLD
MEDALS**

Will they manage to double it this time around?

Innovation

Robots!

Semi-sentient automatons guiding pedestrians around Tokyo: a sign of a technological golden age, a hollow gimmick, or the beginning of the end for humankind's reign as top dog on planet earth? Who knows! Who cares?! They're cool!

.....

Drones

Early reports indicate there will be two kinds of drone present: bog-standard surveillance drones, which will hover around throughout the day to check that nobody is up to mischief, and murderous drones, which will zip about shooting other, unauthorised drones out of the sky. Which, frankly, sounds fantastic.

An artificial meteor shower?!

Fireworks are so 2016. Tokyo has foregone the traditional opening firework display and instead opted for – get this – launching a series of microsatellites around the planet, then having them disintegrate over Tokyo in a multi-coloured explosion. Looks like sparklers and Catherine wheels just won't cut it from now on.

Sustainability

In keeping with the recent realisation that we should probably all look after our environment, the summer games will feature medals made from recycled metals. In addition, plans are underway to have buses and even jet planes powered by – wait for it – algae biofuel. Far out.

Language

Real-time translation apps have been around for a while – with varying degrees of success – but the summer of 2020 will bring with it a great wave of new-fangled apps and devices designed to help visitors to Tokyo navigate the foreign metropolis.





New Events

BMX Park

Certain to be one of the most adrenaline-inducing events added, riders will perform as many bewildering tricks as possible within a time limit.

.....

Karate

A fitting addition, given the sport originated in Japan. Karate is split into two disciplines: forms and sparring. Both disciplines will be present at the games for the first time. Expect plenty of chopping and 'hi-yah'ing.

Skateboarding

The introduction of skateboarding at the games will keep audiences suitably wowed, with events in both park and street, and more ramps and rails than you can shake a stick at.

Sport Climbing

The games debut of climbing will feature speed climbing (go fast), bouldering (no ropes), and lead climbing (get high).

Surfing

On Shidashita in Chiba, 40 miles outside Tokyo, the world's greatest surfers will duke it out to decide who is worthy of the sport's first ever gold medal at the games.



HELPFUL TRAVEL TIPS



Hakone

8 DISHES YOU NEED TO TRY



1. Mochi

Mochi are small rice balls which have been repeatedly pounded, shaped, and then topped with a flavoured powder or sauce. They can be found all over Japan and are usually served sweet. The texture of *mochi* is unlike anything found in the West. They make for the perfect sightseeing snack.



2. Soba

Soba (buckwheat) noodles are the perfect dish in any season. In summer you can slurp down a cold bowl, and in winter the warm clear broth will heat you up.

The buckwheat flour means that the noodles are light, so they're great for a second lunch or a sightseeing pit-stop. Although *soba* can be found all over Japan, Matsumoto is particularly famous for it.



3. Ramen

Many hours, if not days, go into creating the broth for a solid bowl of *ramen*. This warming dish comes in hundreds of varieties, from lighter, clear soups, to thick heavy broths that pack a meaty punch.

The noodles are often handmade, and the best are cooked al dente. Best of all, a standard serving only costs around 700 yen (\$8/£5). *Ramen* is hugely regional, so try it everywhere you visit!



4. Japanese curry

Japanese food doesn't tend to be spicy and their curries aren't any different. The slightly sweet, rich sauce matches Japanese rice perfectly.

Curries are usually topped with a lightly breaded pork cutlet (*katsu*) and pickled ginger. We recommend that you get a cheese topping too (don't knock it until you try it!). It may not look like much, but Japanese curry has great depth of flavour. It can be a welcome break from more conventional Japanese food.



5. Yakitori

Literally meaning grilled chicken, *yakitori* highlights Japan's mastery of simple, yet delicious food. *Yakitori* makes the produce the star of the show; whether you're eating Japanese beef or regional vegetables. The only seasoning is usually a sweet sauce or just some salt and pepper. We always recommend eating *yakitori* at the counter and watching the masters of the skewers at work.



6. Takoyaki

Takoyaki, or octopus dumplings, may not sound like the most appealing dish in the world. But once you bite through the crisp batter and into the tender centre you'll be wolfing them down in no time. *Takoyaki* are most famous in Osaka and can be bought from many of the city's street stalls.

They are topped with a slightly sweet sauce, mayonnaise and fish flakes, and make a great snack to have on the go.



7. Gyoza

Gyoza, or Japanese dumplings, are a cheap countryside staple. Usually filled with pork, a little ginger, and cabbage, these potstickers can be dangerously addictive. In many restaurants you'll have the option of making your own dipping sauce from soy sauce, vinegar and chilli oil.

Gyoza are the perfect accompaniment to a cold beer, and a nice reward from a hard day's exploration.



8. Shabu shabu

The name *shabu shabu* comes from the Japanese onomatopoeic word of dipping food in and out of a hotpot. You're given a plate of meat and local vegetables. You cook them in a pot of boiling water, adding any of the dipping sauces and other tasty accompaniments as you go. After you've cooked everything, you will have a flavoursome broth that you can finish with an extra order of noodles.



Japanese Ice Cream: A guide

Most of us consider ice cream as a treat, something you enjoy on a hot day or after a nice meal. In Japan, however, ice cream is elevated to an (often traumatic) experience. The result of mad food scientists locked away performing reckless flavour experiments, so intent on finding out if they could that they never stopped to ask whether they should so expect a tricky minefield of misleading colour/flavour combinations. Do you dare indulge?

♥ **Our faves:**
Blueberry
Soda
Matcha
Black sesame
Plum wine

★ **For the brave:**
Wasabi
Cherry blossom
Squid ink
Horse
Cactus

Beat the heat

We've established that summer in Japan is hot, humid, and things can get a tad stifling - especially in the cities. There is genuine risk of sunburn and heatstroke for those who fail to prepare adequately, so...prepare adequately!

Plan your day

From midday until 3pm is the hottest part of the day, so to escape the most intense heat, plan any indoor activities for this time. Early mornings and late afternoons are the most pleasant times of day for outdoor pursuits.

Booze mindfully

Japanese summer means a host of fabulous beer gardens. If you're planning to have a drink or five, make sure that you drink plenty of water both before and during to avoid creeping dehydration.

Wet your clothes

Wet your top, then wring it out before wearing. You'll get a couple of hours of cool against your skin before it dries out - just make sure it's not see-through before you venture outside!

Carry a paper fan

Either a folding one, or a big flat fan - you'll see men not at all afraid to use the latter. Widely available in convenience stores or you may even get one for free - fans are often given out for promotional purposes on street corners.

Swig non-stop

Dehydration can creep up on you, along with all the headaches, lethargy and nausea it causes. Carry a water bottle, fill it up whenever you get the chance, and never stop a-guzzlin'. The tap water is safe to drink in Japan.

Rock shorts

You will find that short-wearing is fairly uncommon amongst older Japanese people, even in the heat, but it is perfectly acceptable - not to mention sensible.

Top up your sodium

Sweating causes you to lose sodium, which can lead to a condition called hyponatremia. You can replenish your sodium levels with sports drinks, such as the tantalisingly named "Pocari Sweat".

Dodge the rays

Wear sun cream, wear a hat, cover your shoulders, seek out shady areas - or do as the Japanese do and carry a parasol. Whatever your preferred method, just be sure to protect against that beaming sun.

JAPAN PACKING LIST: THE WARMER MONTHS

#1 Foldable fan

A cool breeze and a fashion statement in one.

#4 Rain mac



For those pesky "passing typhoons" September is the tail end of the season but if it rains, it can *really* rain. Packing your umbrella means you'll have rain cover and sun shade.

#8 Presentable socks



They're going to get seen and you will be judged. Holes are considered rude. Bare feet aren't OK. Don't be that guy.

#10 Cash

There's a perception that Japan is super high-tech but a surprising number of places don't take cards.

#2 Slip on shoes



Your footwear will be on and off, so laces can be a drag.

#5 Day bag

Street litter bins aren't much of a thing in Japan. You'll have to carry any rubbish to a convenience store.

#9 Mosquito repellent



Asian Tiger Mosquitoes are big, silent and active during the day. If you do get stung - buy the Japanese sting relief. It's unbelievably good. You're welcome.

#3 Loose, breathable layers



You might have fierce heat, fiercer aircon and evening chill all in 24 hours. Think "variable". AIRism from Uniqlo gets our vote.

#6 A flat 2 pin adapter



The standard voltage is 100V across the country, but the frequencies vary: 60Hz in Western Japan and 50Hz in Tokyo and the east so a US plug converter will work but might be sluggish.

#11 Some choice phrases

While the language barrier is going to be a thing, Japanese people are incredibly welcoming and even the smallest effort will be hugely appreciated.

#7

Refillable water bottle



There's a serious single use plastic issue across the board in Japan. Do what you can to be part of the solution.

HOW TO ONSEN

Experiencing a traditional hot spring bath, or onsen, is an essential part of visiting Japan – but be sure to brush up on your etiquette beforehand

Hot spring bathing isn't just a popular pastime in Japan; it's a hallowed cultural institution. Until you've tried it, you can't even begin to call yourself a true Japanophile.

Hot springs, known as onsen in Japanese, are created wherever volcanically heated water emerges from the ground – which is all over the country. The baths can be indoors or outdoors, private or public, housed in city

bathhouses or in beautiful natural locations. Although they're for communal use, they're nearly always segregated by gender, unless you rent a *kashikiri* (private) bath.

You're most likely to come across an onsen at a *ryokan*, or traditional Japanese inn – but before you soak your cares away, be sure to familiarise yourself with onsen etiquette!

1



Bring two towels with you to the onsen (at *ryokan* inns, these are usually provided at the baths). The big one is for drying yourself, and the small one is for washing. Shampoo and soap are usually provided too, but bring your own if you like.

2



Get undressed in the changing room and leave your clothes and belongings in the baskets or lockers provided. Leave your large towel with your clothes, but take the small towel with you. Be warned – it's strictly birthday suits only once you leave the changing room!

3



Enter the bathroom and find a shower that's free. There are small stools and buckets provided. Sit down on a stool, fill the bucket with water and use your small towel to wash yourself thoroughly with soap and water. It's rude to stand up, in case you splash your neighbour.

4



Once you've rinsed yourself clean of soap, get into the bath for a soak. Be careful not to dip your hair or your small towel in the water; do as the Japanese do and place your towel on your head while you bathe.

6



Get dry, get dressed and go!
Most onsen provide hairdryers, and some provide all kinds of fancy products too. If you've borrowed towels, deposit them in the indicated bins before heading out to conclude with a nice cold drink.

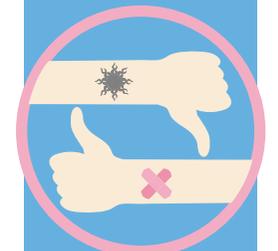
5



When you've finished bathing, get out and wash yourself at the showers. Wipe any excess water away with your small towel before heading into the changing room, so that you don't make the floor slippery for others.

A REMINDER

Those with tattoos might be refused entry to onsen. In Japan, tattoos are closely associated with organised crime and gang membership, so it's something of a social taboo. If you have a tattoo, you can use private baths, or (if it's small enough) cover it with a plaster to visit the public baths.



Who are we?

We're the cream of the crop when it comes to Japan holidays.

For 20 years, what has set us apart is the fact that every single one of our travel consultants has spent years living, working and travelling in Japan. We're also unique in that we have spent two decades building a host of close contacts across the country, which means that we have agents on the ground offering support at every stage of your trip.

Our holidays give you the chance to experience both the popular and little-known aspects of Japanese culture, giving you an insight into the diverse character of the country. That's why so many clients travel with us again and again; no matter how many times you've been to Japan - there's always something else to leave you speechless, and we're the ones who can show you it.

Why us?



We plan your Japan tour in person

Don't you find that booking a trip is far more gratifying when you're chatting to a human being, rather than a set of ones and zeros? We believe for your trip to be as perfect as possible, it's important to get to know you. We find out your interests, hobbies, budget and bucket-list places over the phone then craft you a completely bespoke itinerary. We've got the know-how and can-do at our disposal to answer every query you can throw our way. Try us!



When we say we're experts on Japan travel, we mean it

Nobody can nerd-out over Japan like us. You're looking for a bar in Shibuya that stays open until 6 in the morning and serves vegan bar snacks? We've got you covered. You want to see the cherry blossoms and avoid the crowds? Done. You'd love an audience with a geisha, but you've read that it's not possible? Hoho, do we have a surprise for you.



We're only interested in ethical Japan tours

Somebody smart once said that if you love a flower and you pick it, it dies and ceases to be what you love. Travel is no different. We love Japan, and we don't believe in the kind of travel that turns once-gorgeous locales into tourist traps. When you travel with us, you'll not only see the truest face of Japan, you'll also support the local economy and meet local people from all walks of life.



FANCY A CHAT?

Get in touch - there's no time like the present

 0117 244 3380  info@insidejapantours.com