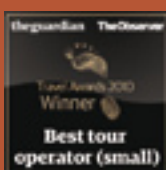




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**Japan**  
Specialists in travel to Japan

-  Small Group Tours
-  Self-Guided Adventures
-  Fully Tailored Packages



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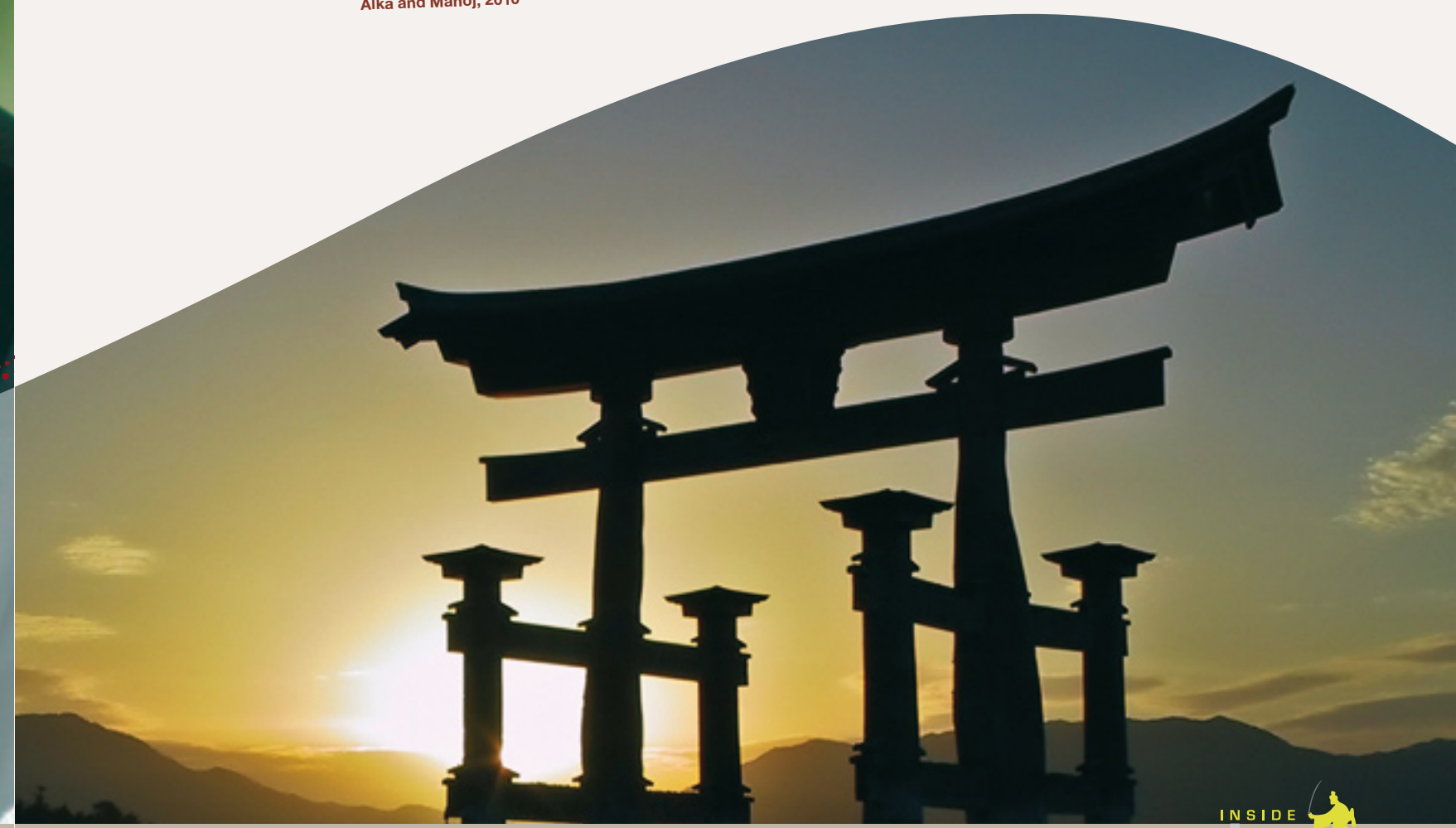
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“We had an absolutely AMAZING, AWESOME FANTASTIC time in Japan, never have we been to a country so hospitable! The experience was just out of this world”

Alka and Manoj, 2010



# About InsideJapan Tours

**InsideJapan Tours is a select team of Japan experts dedicated to offering the very best travel experience to our customers. Founded in 2000, we pride ourselves on opening Japan up to anyone who wants to explore this fascinating country, and on creating the perfect travel experience, whatever your interests and whatever your budget.**

As Japan-only specialists we focus purely on one country, giving us a greater depth of knowledge and expertise than you will find anywhere else. In the last 10 years we have sent thousands of happy customers on a huge variety of Japan holidays, and are proud of their feedback, which gives testament to the quality of service we offer. Many of our customers have returned for a second visit and a few are on their fourth or fifth, showing the lasting appeal of Japan and the wealth of sights and experiences on offer.

Our brochure is a collection of inspirational itineraries drawn from 10 years of experience and designed to showcase the wonderful diversity of Japan; perhaps the world's most advanced and futuristic society, yet one with a rich and ancient culture. With so much on offer, you can be sure that whatever your likes and interests, Japan will provide you with a myriad of experiences to remember.

Within these pages you will find details of our **Small Group Tours** and our **Self-Guided Adventures**, as well as numerous **experiences and ideas** to create the perfect holiday.

If you are keen to know more about one of our itineraries or our services in general, please get in touch, or take a look at our website where you can find in-depth information on each trip, as well as lots of further information about travelling in Japan.

Whatever style of holiday you choose, we hope that you will enjoy travelling through our brochure as you journey from the wild open expanses of Hokkaido to the hidden gorges and valleys of Shikoku, via Tokyo, the world's largest metropolis and Kyoto, Japan's cultural and historical heart.

All this and much more awaits you. Contact us directly or talk to your local travel agent and make your first steps towards realising your Japan holiday dreams.

## Our Staff

**InsideJapan Tours** prides itself on our team of dedicated Japan travel experts. Each member of our team has lived and worked in Japan, sharing a passion for the country as well as a commitment to excellent service, quality and attention to detail. Between us we have travelled almost every inch of Japan, allowing you to benefit from our in-depth knowledge and understanding, both of the country itself, but also of what goes into making the best possible travel experience, individually tailored to your preferences. Between us we have climbed Mount Fuji, watched sumo wrestlers train, relaxed in hot-spring baths, sampled the freshest sushi in the world, been scuba diving with manta rays and even run the Tokyo Marathon! We look forward to helping you experience the very best of Japan, whatever your interests.

From your very first phone call or email you can be safe in the knowledge that you are dealing with a Japan expert. We will listen to your needs, answer your questions, provide the very best advice and deliver a holiday that will exceed your expectations.

“I've travelled to the Far East over ten times and InsideJapan had the best documentation I've ever seen. The detail and accuracy of the transport information was stunning. Your ability for me to customise my trip made it memorable... The itinerary and information packs were stupendous”

M. Lanigan, August 2010



### Award winning quality

We are committed to providing top level customer service both before your departure and throughout your stay in Japan. Our quality service and care has been recognised with the **Best Small Tour Operator** award at the Guardian and Observer travel awards 2010 and a silver medal in the British Travel Awards **Small Tour Operator of the Year** category in 2009. We are also proud to be a member of AITO (The Association of Independent Tour Operators); the hallmark of superb holidays from specialist tour operators.

### At home and away

Our service to you does not end when you land in Japan. More than just another agent, InsideJapan Tours has offices in the UK, the US and in Japan. Our Japan office is staffed by English speakers who are just a phone call away and our tour leaders and guides are highly trained and skilled: We will always ensure that your welfare and enjoyment are never left to chance.

### Your Info-Pack

All of our services include a detailed Info-Pack which contains the essential information you need to make your transfers and get to your hotels. Alongside this we provide sightseeing guides and maps, help with language and customs and details of some of our favourite restaurants. The Info-Pack is your personalised travel companion and an essential part of your trip.

### Full financial protection & guaranteed prices

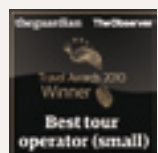
All AITO member companies are fully bonded and governed by an independent dispute settlement service, which means you are in safe hands. Land-only arrangements are bonded with AITO Trust Ltd (1130), while flight-inclusive packages are protected by our ATOL Licence (9419). In the extremely unlikely event of our financial failure your money is safe and secure. All latest prices are available on our website or by contacting us or your local travel agent. We do NOT surcharge; prices are guaranteed once a deposit has been paid.

### How to book

We have offices in the UK and the US and are happy to take bookings through travel agents worldwide. Contact us direct by telephone or email, or book through your local travel agent. We will need to know your full names, address and a contact telephone number and email as well as your intended dates of travel and any dietary requirements that you may have.

### Contact us

☎ UK: 0117 314 4620  
☎ USA: 1 303 952 0184  
@ info@insidejapantours.com



# Introducing Japan

**Japan: The very name conjures images of Mount Fuji, the 'Bullet Train', conveyor belt sushi, sumo, raked gravel gardens, scarlet temples and doll-like geisha. Japan is all these things and much more. Once a country isolated from the West, today Japan's ancient traditions meet the rush of globalisation head-on to create a culture like nowhere else on earth.**

The geography is staggering. Ranging over 3,000 kilometres across more than 6,000 islands, Japan stretches from the northern tip of Hokkaido, where Siberian winds bring heavy snowfall, to the sub-tropical islands of Okinawa in the south. 75 percent of the land is mountainous and includes one tenth of the world's active volcanoes.

Yet this country is an economic powerhouse and home to over 120 million people who have the world's longest life expectancy. They are also some of the friendliest, most welcoming people you will ever meet. And we can't wait to introduce Japan and the Japanese people to you.

All of our holidays, whether you travel on a **Small Group Tour**, follow a **Self-Guided Adventure** or go for a **Fully Tailored Package**, endeavour to take you beneath the surface to discover what makes Japan such an interesting country. You'll explore futuristic cities where millions of people work and play beneath neon-spangled skyscrapers. We'll also show you traditional villages where time has stopped still; rice is still planted by hand, *kimono* still worn with pride and festivals play out exactly as they have for generations.

Often Japan's greatest charm lies in the tiny details: a quirky Hello Kitty! key ring; toilets with enough buttons to rival a small aircraft; an orange-robed monk on a subway train. This country is a photographer's dream. That said, we don't just want you to see Japan, but to touch and feel it as well. We offer the chance to get involved and try your hand at **taiko drumming**, **origami** or **tea ceremony** to name just a few experiences.

Finally, there's the food. Japan boasts surely the most delicate, exquisite and varied of the world's cuisines. From the freshest sushi at Tokyo's Tsukiji fish market, to bowls of steaming *udon* slurped at noodle bars with legions of Osaka's *salarymen*, to the refined *kaiseki* banquets in Kyoto; we'll ensure you get the perfect flavour of Japan.

Go on, take a holiday to Japan. The only danger is that this is a country sure to draw you back time and time again.

## Chugoku

More relaxed and laid back than the areas to the east, the Chugoku region of west Japan is a delight to explore. For lovers of art, Kurashiki's fabulous Ohara Museum and Naoshima 'art island' in the Inland Sea offer a wealth of works to enjoy, from Western masters to conceptual pieces by Japanese artists. On the Japan Sea Coast, Matsue boasts the Adachi Museum, an unrivalled collection of Japanese modern art exhibited with the backdrop of a splendid Japanese garden. The most famous city in this region is Hiroshima, where the events surrounding the dropping of the atomic bomb are commemorated at the moving Peace Park and A-Bomb Museum. A short distance from the Hiroshima coast you will find Miyajima, a charming island and one of Japan's most beautiful sights – sunset behind the 'floating' *torii* of Itsukushima Shrine.



## Kyushu

As you head west and cross into Kyushu, the landscapes begin to change. Kyushu is an island of the elements; bubbling, sulphurous waters rise up from the ground, heated by the volcanic lava which lies just below the surface of this living, breathing landmass. In its centre you will find Mount Aso, the world's largest volcanic caldera; to the west, Yakushima, a small island covered with dense rainforest and the inspiration of Miyazaki's animated masterpiece, Princess Mononoke; on the south coast is Nagasaki where for nearly three hundred years the Dutch factory at Dejima functioned as Japan's sole contact point with the West. Kyushu's capital, Fukuoka, is a sleek modern city but best known for the *yatai* food stands serving some of the most delicious *ramen* noodles to be found anywhere in Japan.



## Okinawa

With deserted white sandy beaches framing crystal clear, warm sea waters teeming with tropical fish of all shapes, sizes and colours, the Okinawan islands are an idyllic haven; a place to go and unwind and tune into the slower pace of life that characterises these far flung regions of Japan. The flashing neon and packed commuter trains of Tokyo a surreal image from a very distant world. There are hundreds of islands here, some inhabited, others little more than a rocky outcrop in the ocean. Ishigaki, to the south of the main island is the perfect island break – great beaches, snorkelling, diving, accommodation to suit all budgets and a wide range of day trips. On nearby Taketomi, water buffalo pull carts of farm produce; on Iriomote you can canoe through the mango groves, hike to the top of waterfalls and keep your eyes peeled for a glimpse of the allusive Iriomote Lynx. Okinawa provides an island break to savour.



▶ Ishigaki Island

## Hokkaido

With its rolling hills, wide open spaces, lakes, rivers and nature reserves, Hokkaido is a haven for wildlife and offers spectacular scenery. Whether visiting in the middle of summer for walking and hiking, or the depths of winter to see the breathtaking ice floes and the huge sea eagles which make this rugged landscape their own, Hokkaido offers those who make the journey north a unique experience of Japan. Sapporo, the island's capital, is a cosmopolitan city of two million residents, with a vibrant cultural and economic life and of course, delicious local dishes of the best locally caught seafood, Hokkaido cheeses and the famous *Genghis Khan* lamb barbecue.



## Central Japan

Offering the most diversity of any region, Central Japan stretches west along the Pacific coast as far as Kyoto, and north across the imposing mountains of the Japanese Alps to the Sea of Japan. The industrial power-house of Nagoya forms the economic backbone of the region, Toyota cars rolling off the production lines by the hundreds of thousands. But it is perhaps the bustling market towns such as Takayama, the smaller cities like Matsumoto and Kanazawa, and the awe inspiring peaks of the Alps that truly characterise Central Japan – an area that encapsulates so much of the endless diversity of the country.



## Tohoku

Stretching nearly 700 miles north from Tokyo, the Tohoku region offers visitors a very different experience to the hustle and bustle of the Tokaido seaboard; this is an area in which to lose yourself in the romance of a rural Japan where samurai once fought to win control of the nation for their warlord masters. Tiny *onsen* towns such as Naruko and Nyuto are liberally scattered throughout Tohoku, offering revitalization for the body, whilst the sacred mountains of Dewa Sanzen allow visitors to connect with the quiet spirituality and mysticism of the Japanese spirit.

## Kanto

With the Tokyo metropolis at its heart, the Kanto region is in turn an urban phenomenon of striking modernity, whilst at the same time offering rural retreats, soaring mountains, rugged coastlines and sandy beaches. The Tokyo Metropolitan area is a mega-city, home to some 35 million people and the driving force of Japan's economy and rapidly shifting cultural trends. However, less than 90 minutes away you will find Mount Takao, a peaceful retreat for walking and quiet reflection with spectacular views of the distant urban landscapes. To the south east in Chiba prefecture, lie hidden beaches whilst to the north in Nikko you will discover the spectacularly ornate temples and shrines of Toshogu, the resting place of the first Tokugawa Shogun; the man who began the transformation of Tokyo into the city you will find today.

## Kansai

No two cities could sum up the contrast of urban Japan better than the two giants of the Kansai region – Osaka and Kyoto. Reduced to little more than rubble at the end of World War Two, Osaka has risen again to be one of the world's economic wonders, with a staggering output emanating from this concrete jungle of factories, shops, apartments, flashing lights and catchy jingles. True to its mercantile history, Osaka to this day maintains its rivalry with Kyoto, capital for over 1,000 years, former home of the Emperor and his household and the spiritual and cultural heart of the nation. Kyoto constantly surprises; the 17 Unesco World Heritage sites are just the beginning of what Kyoto offers - truly a must-see destination. In addition to these major cities, Kansai has the beautiful rural pilgrimage trail of the Kumano Kodo, Nara, the birth place of Japanese Buddhism, the *onsen* hot springs of Kinosaki and much more besides.

## Shikoku

The smallest and least populated of the four major islands, Shikoku is a glimpse of Japan before the Meiji restoration ushered in the industrial age at the end of the nineteenth century. Much of the inland area is impenetrable; steep-sided, densely forested mountains soar skywards, their bases disappearing into bottomless ravines, whilst white-water rivers twist and turn along the valley floor. Amidst the mountains you will find hamlets of old farm houses, vine bridges and ancient temples. The Pacific coast offers opportunities for whale watching and diving, whilst on the coast of the Inland Sea you will find the castle city of Matsuyama, home to Japan's oldest bath house, Dogo Onsen. Linking this formerly isolated island to the mainland is the Shimanami Kaido, an extraordinary construction of interconnected bridges which offer an ideal route for cycling enthusiasts.



# Fully Tailored Packages

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# Fully Tailored Packages

“Perfect trip - the whole thing was just wonderful. InsideJapan made everything very easy”

L. Wisely, 2009

Whether for a family holiday, a romantic getaway or a solo adventure, our Fully Tailored Packages allow you the freedom to set your own itinerary and budget.

Our services cover the whole country: We can expertly advise on everything from hiking in the national parks of Hokkaido to the best beaches in Okinawa. We can also arrange special activities such as pottery classes or *ikebana* flower arranging as well as provide tickets for everything from sumo to *kabuki* theatre.

For some initial ideas, read through the **Self-Guided Adventures** and **Small Group Tours** itineraries as well as the suggestions and experiences on the following pages. Then simply give us a call or contact your local travel agent and make the first step towards your dream Japan holiday.

We will ask you about your ideas, interests, accommodation preferences and the places you wish to visit. Our travel consultants are also happy to offer advice and make suggestions. We can design a trip at almost any budget; whether you are looking for simple traditional inns or the exclusive service of Japan's finest hotels, we are always striving to provide the best value for money and top quality customer care.

As with our Self-Guided Adventures, we will take care of all your transport and accommodation arrangements. This leaves you free to enjoy your holiday without the hassle of working out which train to catch or how to get to your next hotel.

You will also have the full support of our Japan office staff who can help should any difficulties arise. Your personalised Info-Pack includes full details of all your accommodation and transport plans, as well as general information on Japan and sightseeing guides for all the places on your itinerary.



## Optional Inclusions

### Private guiding

We can include a full or half day with a private guide in the major cities, using the efficient public transport system, or by private car if you prefer. Your guide will have sightseeing suggestions but will also allow you the flexibility to decide your own itinerary if you wish. If you are keen to visit Kyoto's Golden Temple or have a special interest in Japanese gardens for example, the guide can incorporate this into your day. Of course, if you prefer to arrange your itinerary in advance, this is also possible.

We can also arrange a guide to accompany you on day trips out of Tokyo. Options include the World Heritage town of Nikko or the ancient capital Kamakura. From Kyoto you may like to head to the pretty, riverside district of Arashiyama or Nara, home of the Great Buddha statue.

### Fully escorted private tours

In addition to full day private guiding services, should you wish, we are delighted to be able to offer the services of a professional guide for the full duration of your stay in Japan. On a fully escorted private journey, your guide will handle all the logistics for you, as well as ensuring that you receive the full benefit of their knowledge of Japan and insight into Japanese culture and society.

### Coach tours

If, as many Japanese do, you prefer the comfort of an air conditioned coach for your sightseeing, then we are more than happy to arrange coach tours for you. There are a wide range of programmes available for sightseeing in both Tokyo and Kyoto. As well as city day tours visiting the major sights, coach tours are available from Tokyo to Hakone National Park and Nikko, and from Kyoto to nearby Nara. All coach tours are accompanied by an expert English speaking professional guide with a range of alternative languages available via a headset. Pick-ups are available from most major hotels and lunch is usually included.

### Private transfer & exclusive tours

We can arrange private transfers by car (including executive and luxury vehicles), fully escorted private tours, helicopter cruises, zeppelin rides and much more. Please ask us for details.

### Car hire

The Japanese transport system may be the best developed in the world, but if you really want to get off the beaten track and explore the countryside, we highly recommend getting hold of an International Driving Permit and hiring a car. We can organise a range of Toyota cars and people carriers, including the hybrid Prius, across most areas of the country. Larger vehicles can take up to 10 people - ideal for small groups of friends and families. For those who prefer an executive vehicle, we are usually able to arrange Lexus, BMW or Mercedes. This is a relaxing and fun way to explore and means that you are not restricted by public transport timetables and fixed routes.



# Honeymoons

**Japan is a dream honeymoon destination. Whether you yearn for action-packed sightseeing or tropical beaches, cultural exploration or pampering, Japan makes the perfect honeymoon for you and your partner. It is a wonderfully romantic destination, with vibrant cities, stunning scenery, fascinating culture and heart-warming hospitality.**

Accommodation options include deluxe skyscraper hotels, relaxing *onsen* hot spring spa resorts, *ryokan* traditional inns and boutique hideaways. Whatever experience you are looking for, we can ensure you get the very best.

The key word for any honeymoon is relaxation. Our packages ensure that the complicated matters are all taken care of, leaving you free to relax and enjoy 100 percent of your precious holiday time. We have staff members who have honeymooned in Japan themselves, so can offer a personal approach to arranging your holiday-of-a-lifetime.

On these pages you will find some of our suggestions for honeymoons, including some of our favourite accommodation options and some additional services we feel can really help to make your trip extra special. However, the whole brochure is full of fabulous itinerary ideas and options and our expert consultants are on hand to help you plan the trip that is right for you.

## Special places to stay

### Gora Tensui, Hakone

Hakone's Gora Tensui is a fabulous oasis of luxury, offering the best in traditional Japanese design and luxurious modern facilities. Rooms, many with a private hot spring bath and veranda, are beautifully decorated, the cuisine is top-class and staff will ensure that you have your every need attended to. The Gora Tensui has a wide range of *onsen* for you to enjoy from baths soaked in medicinal herbs to open-air pools with a flow of negatively charged ions, reputed to detoxify the body. Set in Fuji Hakone National Park, the Gora Tensui is a fabulous base for exploring the stunning surrounds of Japan's iconic mountain.



Gora Tensui

### The Peninsula Hotel, Tokyo

The Peninsula Tokyo is a relatively recent addition to Tokyo's growing count of super-deluxe five star hotels and offers the ultimate in luxury accommodation. Superbly located in the prestigious Marunouchi district – opposite the Imperial Palace and Hibiya Park and within minutes' walk of the Ginza – The Peninsula offers luxurious comfort, sophisticated facilities, fabulous dining options and the legendary Peninsula service. Guestrooms are among the largest in Tokyo and have stunning views from the floor to ceiling windows. The hotel offers a wide range of gourmet options with authentic *kaiseki* cuisine as well as international dining. For relaxation, the hotel features a fitness centre, spa and indoor pool overlooking the Imperial Gardens.



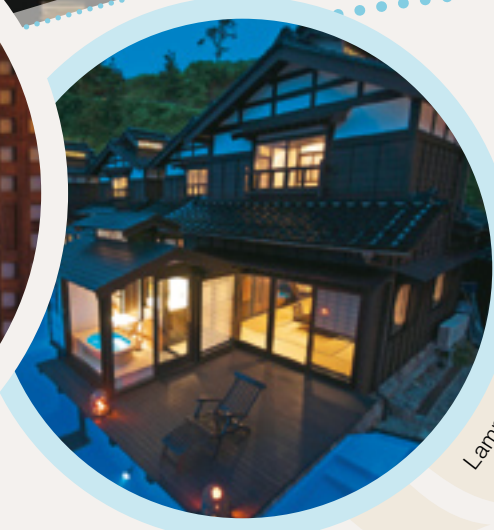
The Peninsula



Club Med Kabira Resort

### Club Med Kabira Resort, Ishigaki Island

Just around the corner from stunning Kabira Bay and with its own private sandy beach, the Club Med Kabira Resort on sub-tropical Ishigaki Island is a fantastic getaway. A stay here includes breakfast, lunch and dinner, and all house drinks. Set within lush gardens, the traditionally-styled, low-rise bungalows feature modern guestrooms all with sea views. The resort has its own swimming pool and spa while for the more energetic, snorkelling, scuba diving, tennis, windsurfing and even the flying trapeze are available as optional extras. The old villages of Taketomi Island and the wilderness of Iriomote Island are easy day trips, or alternatively, just relax with cocktails on the pristine white beach just footsteps from your room!



Lamp no Yado

### Lamp no Yado, Noto Hanto

The Lamp no Yado is a haven of tranquility and relaxation tucked away in a small cove at the top of the Noto Peninsula in Ishikawa Prefecture. The secluded nature of the *ryokan* - surrounded by cliffs and hemmed in by the sea with access from just a single winding coastal road – means it is something of a hidden gem; a secret *onsen* away from the rush of modern life, offering a luxurious, private getaway in unforgettable surroundings. With only 14 rooms, the focus is on individuality. Each room enjoys a view of the ocean and some have a private, outdoor hot spring bath attached. The *ryokan* offers exquisitely prepared food, including fresh shellfish and the Lamp no Yado's own wine and sake.

“We got exactly what we asked for, a honeymoon we would never forget. We have had the time of our lives.”

R. Roche, 2010



### Champagne & flowers

For that special touch we are delighted to be able to arrange flowers and champagne, personalised if you wish, and delivered to your room. The perfect start to your honeymoon.

### Sunset helicopter cruise

Few places in the world have as dramatic a skyline as Tokyo. As the sun descends in the west and falls behind Mount Fuji's towering peak, neon lights illuminate the city bringing the Tokyo night to life. A helicopter cruise allows you to experience Tokyo in a totally unique and spectacular fashion. The sunset flight will take you across much of the city, flying out over the Rainbow Bridge and skirting past Tokyo Tower, before passing over the Ginza district in the heart of the city.

### Wedding kimono experience

Get dressed as a Japanese bride in an exquisite traditional *kimono*. Professional photographs are included and the dressing service takes place at an authentic Kyoto *machiya* town house, with lunch and a tour of the house provided.

### Japanese wedding ceremony package

This is the ultimate way to celebrate your marriage whilst in Japan. We can arrange a traditional Shinto wedding ceremony at a Japanese shrine. Professional Japanese hair styling, make-up for the bride and *kimono* hire are all included.

When thinking of Japan, a trip to the beach does not, perhaps, immediately spring to mind, especially when compared to other Asian destinations. However, the Japanese archipelago is made up of more than a staggering 6,000 islands, providing plenty of beaches and coves in which to experience a relaxing slice of Japanese life!

## Ryukyu Islands

A flight south of Tokyo takes you to the sub-tropical **Ryukyu Islands**, stretching over 1,000 kilometres from the south west of Kyushu to the tiny island of **Yonaguni**, Japan's most westerly point, located a mere 68 miles from the coast of Taiwan. These islands were once part of the Ryukyu Kingdom, which ruled from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. Independent and culturally different from mainland Japan, it played a central role in maritime trade between Japan, China and Southeast Asia. Though now fully incorporated into Japan, evidence of this differentiation can still be seen in the food, music, architecture, language and traditions of these islands. Throw in a perfect year-round climate, white sandy beaches, crystal clear seas, tropical jungles and an incredibly friendly people and you can see how the Ryukyu Islands really do offer the perfect Japanese beach break!

Just a short boat ride from Okinawa main island (one of the major entry and exit points to the region) lie the quiet islands of **Zamami** and **Tokashiki**, part of the sub-chain of Kerama Islands. Here you will encounter a snorkeller's paradise in the clear warm waters with beautiful coral and abundant marine life.

Towards the southern tip of Ryukyu chain, you will find our favourite island destination, **Ishigaki**. Perfect sandy beaches and laid-back, welcoming locals make this a wonderfully relaxing destination. No wonder it is one of the favourite stops of our honeymooning couples! The surrounding waters are also a haven for the majestic manta ray and offer some of the best scuba-diving in Asia. Ishigaki is also a fantastic base for island-hopping; short boat rides will take you to the jungle island of **Iriomote** perhaps for a kayaking trip down the mangrove rivers, while **Taketomi Island** reveals a much slower pace of life; let water buffalo taxis take you to terracotta-tiled villages or walk the length of the island in an afternoon.

Island accommodation ranges from family-run pensions to five star, all-inclusive resorts. Whatever your budget you're sure to enjoy the excellent local food and hospitality.



## Mainland Japan

Back on mainland Japan, the beaches of the **Izu Peninsula** are easily reached from Tokyo in just under three hours via a scenic train ride; be sure to watch out for frolicking dolphins as you roll southward! The peninsula as a whole is extremely scenic. The mountains tumble into the sea in rugged and spectacular stretches of coastline. **Shimoda**, at the southern tip of the peninsula is a great base with a number of beaches close at hand. It is also a place etched in the nation's history books, as it was here that in 1854 Commodore Perry landed with his 'black ships', changing the shape of Japan forever.

For a beach stay from Kyoto, try the lively but laid-back resort of **Shirahama Onsen**, located on the southern coast of Wakayama prefecture. Here you can enjoy both hot spring baths and Pacific Ocean waves in one destination.

A smaller and quieter off-the-beaten track beach destination is **Goza**, a sleepy fishing village located at the very tip of the beautiful Shima Peninsula in Mie prefecture. The secluded location with just a single access road helps ensure that the beach at Goza is spared the crowds of more developed resorts. Rather than driving, perhaps the best way to reach the beach here is via a relaxing 25 minute boat ride from nearby Kashikojima, the island-studded bay making for an extremely scenic journey. Goza is great for swimming with offshore pontoons, plenty of space and clean, calm, emerald green waters.

*We can include a stay at any beach resort in Japan as part of a Self-Guided or Fully Tailored package. A range of accommodation from simple family-run inns to five star resort hotels is available. The recommended beach season for mainland Japan is July and August, whilst Okinawa and islands such as Ishigaki can be visited for a beach break year round.*

Japanese winters, coupled with the overwhelmingly mountainous topography, provide a perfect platform for winter sports. Frigid Siberian air sweeps east, picking up moisture from the Sea of Japan. As this reaches land, the heavily laden clouds dispatch huge snow falls, especially on the western slopes. From the northern island of Hokkaido down the spine of the country to the Japanese Alps, the landscape transforms into a winter paradise. Japan boasts some of the very best powder snow in the world across a huge variety of ski resorts, from large international hubs to tiny traditional villages. It also has the distinction of being the first Asian country to hold both the Winter Olympics and the Winter Asian Games and has repeated these honours once and twice respectively.

## Hokkaido

Vast and wild, Hokkaido is blessed with soft and fluffy powder that adorns a number of world class ski resorts. **Niseko** is the island's crown jewel; home to a huge variety of ski runs across four resorts set against the backdrop of the majestic Mount Yotei volcano. Niseko offers great night life and a proper village atmosphere to enjoy right on your doorstep, and, if you are here in early February, then it is an easy day trip to **Sapporo** for the Snow Festival's fantastic ice sculptures.

In central Hokkaido, the resort of **Furano** has not only skiing and snowboarding but also a full range of winter sports activities from four wheel drive motor biking to snow rafting, ice fishing and hot air ballooning. From late December through to mid-March the Snow Dome festival features ice bars and a range of snow-themed activities to take part in.



On the mainland, the jagged, dramatic terrain of the Japanese Alps provides a vast range of ski areas from which to choose. The most famous is **Hakuba**, near Nagano, home of the 1998 Winter Olympics, an event which really put Japan on the world map as a premier winter sports destination. The seven resorts that make up Hakuba have skiing and snowboarding for everyone, from beginners to advanced level. Hakuba is easy to reach from Tokyo and a great place in which to be based.

The Japanese Alps also offer a wealth of more traditional experiences. Try skiing in the village of **Nozawa Onsen**, seemingly a million miles away from neon Tokyo. The village is one of Japan's oldest skiing areas, with the ski hill fully established in 1924 just a few years after skiing as a sport and recreation was introduced to Japan by the Austrian, Theodor von Lerch.

An easy day trip from either Nozawa Onsen or Hakuba and a small ski resort in its own right is **Yudanaka Onsen**, part of **Shiga Kogen**, Japan's largest ski resort area and home to the world famous and incredibly photogenic 'Snow Monkeys', who like nothing better than fighting off the winter chills by bathing in the *onsen* hot springs all day long!

*We can create tailor-made itineraries to any ski resort in Japan and can include transfers and lift passes, ski and snowboarding lessons and day trips to nearby places of interest. Accommodation is available at hotels, ryokan, apartments or cabins and visits to Tokyo, Kyoto and beyond can also be incorporated into your holiday plan. The recommended ski season in Japan is late December through to early March, and this can be a great time to see the cultural side of Japan too. This is generally a quiet time for tourists so you will have many of the famous places largely to yourself.*

And to finish up your day on slopes? Follow the cue of the monkeys and enjoy a relaxing hot spring bath, unquestionably the best way to ease away any aches and pains from the piste. Top this off with a hearty bowl of steaming Japanese *nabe* stew and a glass or two of local *sake* and you have all the ingredients for a perfect winter's day.

Japan is a riot of sights, sounds, colours and tastes that appeal to people both young and old and from all walks of life. Children will love the theme parks, from Universal Studios to Studio Ghibli, home of Miyazaki's magical *anime* creations, as well as the aquariums and monkey parks. Cartoon characters such as 'Hello Kitty' are everywhere, alongside robots, outlandish teenage fashions and all manner of food, from all-you-can-eat ice-cream parlours, to fishing restaurants where you can reel in your own meal!

Away from the cities, samurai castles, boat rides, bicycle tours and cable car rides will enchant the entire family. Traditional Japanese culture also offers plenty of opportunities for hands-on activities: *taiko* drumming, pottery and paper-making or dressing-up in a *kimono* are just a few of the fun experiences we can include in your holiday package.

At first glance, Japan can appear baffling and bizarre, yet children are the ones who truly 'get' it. Much of the Japanese adult world is about hanging on to youth and retaining a childlike sense of wonder, which in turn makes the country an accessible place for Western kids. What's more, travel in Japan can reduce everyone to a somewhat childlike state; things at first can be hard to fully comprehend and this is strangely liberating, meaning that the whole family can share in each and every fantastic new discovery that comes their way!

Japan is also one of the world's most child-friendly countries. It is clean and safe, with spotless toilets and changing facilities and very low rates of crime. The super-efficient public transport system ensures that travelling around is stress free. If ever you do need assistance, you can be sure of many a friendly helping hand. Visitors report their children having celebrity-like status, attracting care and attention from the Japanese wherever they go.

Family rooms are available in both Western-style hotels and traditional Japanese *ryokan*. In the latter, most places provide child futons and meals, and families can often book *onsen* hot spring baths for private use. Itineraries can be multi-centred or you might want to stay in just one or two places and take day trips, in which case we can also arrange weekly self-catering apartment rentals. All in all we are sure your family will have a fantastic holiday in Japan!



“A flawless trip, which is pretty remarkable when you consider we had both my children (ages 8 and 10) and my parents (ages 69 and 71) along for the entire visit.”

P White, 2010

## Ghibli Museum

Founded in June 1985, Studio Ghibli has brought Japanese *anime* to the world scene with acclaimed films including *Spirited Away* and *Princess Mononoke*, and cute characters such as *Totoro*, the cuddly and quirky spirit of the forests. The Ghibli Museum, located in a leafy suburb of Tokyo, gives the chance to get up close to these characters, see some of the animation process and watch original films – great fun and a lovely day out.

## Toei Eiga Mura

Classic Japanese movie fun awaits at the Eiga Mura film village in Kyoto which is run by Toei, one of Japan's largest studios and a big producer of samurai films. Dress up as a geisha or samurai, check out the haunted house and watch out for ninjas jumping out of the undergrowth! The entire site is also still a working studio so you may even see a film shoot taking place, though just in case, there is always a live action show to enjoy.

## Tokyo Disney

For a Japanese take on a very Western institution head to Tokyo bay where two Mickey-inspired resorts await, the traditional Tokyo Disney and the maritime themed Disney Sea. There are rides galore, lots of cute and kitsch, incredibly enthusiastic staff and all of your favourite characters. Enjoy the parades and meet the only Japanese speaking Donald Duck in the world!

## Osaka Kaiyukan Aquarium

Japan has numerous aquariums including the world's third largest in Okinawa, the 1.98 million gallon Churaumi aquarium. But our favourite is the Kaiyukan located in Osaka harbour. This walk-through aquarium showcases the marine habitats of the Ring of Fire area of the Pacific Ocean and features manta rays and whale sharks as well as penguins, sea lions, dolphins and incredibly cute sea otters!

## Taiko Drums

Energy to burn? A 90 minute session learning how to bang the famous Japanese *taiko* drums is sure to exhaust even the most energetic youngster! With a bit of luck things will even get musical. We can arrange lessons in Tokyo and Kyoto and on Sado Island, which is featured on our **A Northern Soul** Small Group Tour and **Northern Highlights** Self-Guided itinerary and is home to the world famous Kodo drummers.

## Roketsu Cloth Dyeing

Create your own tie-dye style creations and get a little messy in the process! This fun activity is available at a studio in Kyoto overseen by craftspeople with over 50 years experience. *Roketsu* dyeing is unique to Kyoto, a traditional way of cloth dyeing in which wax is used to block dyes in an area finely drawn by hand onto the cloth. You can choose to create a handkerchief, bandanna, t-shirt, or *noren* curtain, the best bit being you get to take your creation home with you!

*Children aged six years or older are welcome on any of our Small Group Tours nearly all of which visit Tokyo and Kyoto giving easy access to the attractions featured here – be sure to add extra nights in Tokyo to fit in all these activities and visits. For independent travel we can include the best family-friendly accommodation in our Self-Guided Adventures and can tailor-make packages to suit whatever your particular requirements may be.*

**Japanese cuisine is inextricably bound to the cultural heart of Japan and the people are as fascinated by their own food as any traveller. Combining the tenets of freshness, variety and appearance, Japanese cooking delights the senses like nothing else.**

Imagine the vibrant colour, sheen and melt-in-the-mouth texture of tuna sushi made seconds ago from a fish bought at the Tsukiji fish market just hours before. Or how about the creamy, sweet pumpkin *tempura* pulled hot and crisp from the chef's wok and placed at your counter; a work of culinary art only in existence for the short time it takes to be eaten. You may even want to cook your food yourself, grilling thinly sliced cuts of marbled beef at a *yakiniku* restaurant, or dipping bread crumbed morsels in the fryer at *kushiage*.

Consider a range of dishes so wide that one could dine for weeks without encountering the same dish twice. The most tender of Japanese Kobe beef, dumpling stews fit to satisfy a sumo wrestler and the most delicate of pickles presented in a rainbow of colour. And all this in just one meal! Even the humble noodle is cool, light and refreshing *soba* in summer but rich, hot and spicy *ramen* in winter. Acutely aware of the importance of seasonal produce, the Japanese chef will change his menu monthly to use ingredients at their very peak.

Picture a restaurant, where the subtle and elegant décor, even the garden view, compliment the presentation of your meal. A banquet, where every bowl and plate has been chosen to harmonise with the single morsel it contains. Presentation of Japanese cuisine is truly an art in itself. The Japanese are known for their refined aesthetic sense and nothing escapes the eye of the chef.

Every traveller to Japan, be they gourmet or gourmand, aficionado or wide-eyed new comer, big spender or bargain hunter, cannot fail to be tantalised by the dishes on offer. Every meal in Japan is truly an occasion to remember.

We will make sure you are well armed for your culinary exploration, with food guides, menu decoders and plenty of our favourite restaurant recommendations provided in your Info-Pack. We can even show you a sushi bar where your dinner arrives by *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train'!



## Food Experiences

**The Japanese are incredibly enthusiastic about food so it is hardly surprising that there are a wide range of culinary and food experiences to be enjoyed during your stay. From farm, to market, to kitchen to plate – whatever your interest in food we will have an experience to match.**

### Cookery classes

We can arrange cookery classes in both Tokyo and Kyoto, featuring a variety of Japanese cuisine. Cooking classes can be combined with a visit to Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo or Kyoto's Nishiki food arcade.

### Home cooking

Visit a typical Japanese home and enjoy the company of a local family while learning all about home cooking in Japan. On this fascinating programme you will first go shopping at a local supermarket to buy fresh, seasonal ingredients

for lunch. Your host will then teach you how to prepare a traditional Japanese meal. After lunch you can relax over Japanese green tea.

### Professional class

Learn from the master at an exclusive, by reservation only, Japanese restaurant. The chefs at Hifumi-an will teach you about the rich culture behind Japanese cuisine and show you how to prepare dishes like a professional. Using only the choicest ingredients, the chefs create delicious dishes that are tied to the seasons. Before you take a seat to savour this delicious meal, you will be introduced to the finer points of Japanese table etiquette so that you can appreciate the food's aesthetics, aroma and taste like never before.

### Izakaya experience

Eat out at an *izakaya*, Japan's unique take on pub dining. These lively restaurants are the preferred after work dinner spot for Japan's legions of *salarymen*. In Tokyo or Kyoto, you will be accompanied to an *izakaya* by one of our tour leaders who will help translate the menu. With generous amounts of both Japanese and Asian-Western fusion dishes included, this is a fantastic way to enjoy this mainstay of the Japanese eating-out experience.

### Restaurant Reservations

For those of you who have been reading the Michelin Guide to Tokyo, you may have your eye on dinner at one of Tokyo's premier restaurants. Whether it be Kyubei sushi in the Ginza, Chef Nonaga's amazing Nihonbashi Yukari, or any other fine dining experience, we would be delighted to assist you in securing a reservation at these exclusive establishments.

Though many people flock to Japan to see its gleaming cities and the ancient temples and shrines woven within this modern framework, Japan is undoubtedly a land intrinsically linked to nature and the outdoors. Forces of the earth have forged the landscape, the history and indeed the cultural fabric of the Japanese, and there exists an acute appreciation for the spiritual essences abound in the woods, rivers and mountains. The varied seasons, each beautiful in their own way, create wonderful arenas in which to explore and appreciate all that outdoor Japan has to offer, from the pretty blossoms of spring and the fiery colours of autumn leaves, to the verdant greens of summer rice fields and the snowy white slopes of winter.

## Climbing Mt. Fuji

Mountains make up about 73 percent of the total land mass, and for any outdoor enthusiast, no trip is complete without a foray to the peaks. By far the most famous, is of course, the iconic and revered **Mount Fuji**. Immortalized in art and literature, the majestic *Fuji-san* climbs to 12,388 feet, the highest point in Japan. Though notoriously shy, one never tires of its beauty, especially in the winter months when coated in snow.

For those with the drive and energy, July and August are the official months to attempt the long and winding pilgrimage to the summit. This can be worked into any Self-Guided Adventure, or if you prefer the encouragement of others, be sure to check out the summer departures of our **Essential Honshu** and **Tokaido Trail** Small Group Tours.

## Winter

In the winter months the glorious mountains become blanketed in snow and provide world class skiing conditions both on the main island of Honshu, and the powder plentiful northern island of Hokkaido. Both have been proud hosts of the Winter Olympic Games. See pages 72-73 for more details of winter sports options.

Winter also offers fabulous opportunities for getting close to nature. The wilderness of Hokkaido is home to a vast array of birdlife, the most famous being the regal red-crowned cranes, illuminating the winter sunsets with their graceful dances. However, arguably more spectacular are the enormous Steller's sea eagles, magnificent birds of prey that adorn the icy shores. Our varied **Winter Highlights** Small Group Tour provides chances to see both.



## Bears

Japan is home to a wide range of fauna, from deer and monkey to the more exotic black and brown bears. The Asiatic black bear lives mainly on Honshu, though small populations are also found on Shikoku and Kyushu. InsideJapan Tours have teamed up with wildlife biologist Oscar Huygens, a specialist in the conservation of these great creatures. He leads our **Nature and Culture** Small Group Tour which includes a number of days hiking through bear territory, greatly increasing chances of a sighting. Self-Guided Adventures can also be designed around a few days with the companionable Oscar.

## Hiking

The spectacular mountains of the Japanese Alps also offer many opportunities for hiking. For those looking for relatively easy one day hikes, the areas of **Kamikochi** and **Norikura Kogen** have both charming walks along level ground as well as more energetic hikes to nearby peaks, offering spectacular views along the way. However, if you are a serious hiker then you may be interested in a hike of five or six nights through the Alps. Please contact us and we would be delighted to help with the arrangements.

Kyushu offers a different hiking terrain. The scenery is spectacular from the volcanic, martian landscapes of Mount Aso to the lush green forests of Yakushima. The Kirishima National park, which straddles Kagoshima and Miyazaki prefectures, offers the most spectacular volcanic landscape hiking in Japan, the Kirishima ridge trail perhaps being the essential hike in this region.

## Out on the ocean

Japan's surrounding waters teem with marine life (and not all of it ends up on your plate!). The southern islands of **Okinawa** provide the best opportunity for diving, particularly around **Ishigaki** and **Iriomote** islands. Aside from the crystal clear waters and beautiful coral, the biggest draw is large numbers of other-worldly manta ray which congregate here en masse between spring and autumn. A surprise for many, Japan also has great opportunities for whale watching. This can be done in numerous locations but perhaps the most interesting are the remote and largely uninhabited **Ogasawara Islands**, only accessible by overnight ferry from Tokyo.

We can arrange trips to all the main islands in Okinawa as well as visits to Ogasawara. Diving is available for both beginners and experienced divers. Please contact us for details.



# Geisha and traditional arts

For many people, one of the quintessential images of Japan is that of a geisha, exquisitely robed in a gorgeous *kimono*, hurrying along a lantern lit street to her next appointment. As an alluring symbol of mystery, tradition and beauty, the geisha and the largely hidden world through which they move is part of Japan's history and legend, but is also an example of how the seam of tradition runs through this society even today. Often misunderstood in the West, geisha are essentially performing artists, trained in a plethora of skills and arts and tasked to charm and entertain. This role has changed little over time, and this perpetuity of art and craft is seen throughout Japan as a whole.

Despite the roar of modernisation, the nation fiercely clings to its cultural traditions. Every Japanese child can fold an *origami* crane, while older school children practice *kendo* and fan-dancing and write essays in English to proudly explain traditional Japanese culture to foreign visitors.

Adults take up the cultural challenge too, relishing the opportunity to don traditional *kimono* and perform in time-honoured festivals or re-enact historical parades dating back to the samurai days. The Japanese work incredibly long hours, but actively find time to practice *ikebana* flower arranging, attend a tea ceremony or watch a *kabuki* performance. The preparation of amazing culinary dishes is another art form all to itself. There exists an immense sense of pride in the traditional arts and an acknowledgement that (though coated in typical Japanese reserve) these are what help to make the country so unique, interesting and appealing.

The famed city of Kyoto is the beating heart of culture and tradition, the place where the Japanese go to learn more about themselves and their past. Awash with temples, shrines, gardens and UNESCO World Heritage sites, it is the perfect place in which to learn about and perhaps try your hand at a traditional art or cultural activity. A range of such things can be woven into most itineraries, and will really help to enhance the overall experience of Japan. It is also in Kyoto that the vast majority of geisha still live and work; their mission and identity dependant on preserving the traditions of the past.

We are able to arrange a number of geisha related experiences, providing a brief window into their secret world.



## Cultural Experiences

### Drinks with a *maiko*

This is an exclusive opportunity to meet and spend some time with a Kyoto *maiko* (apprentice geisha). Enjoy a walking tour of the geisha area followed by drinks and snacks with a *maiko* at a local traditional house. There will also be the chance to watch a performance of traditional geisha dance. A guide and local expert will be on hand to translate and provide explanations.

### Geisha dress-up

Why not transform into a geisha, with full make-up, geisha wig, choice of *kimono* and several photo options - a fantastic souvenir of your stay in Kyoto. Men can join in too, and wear a men's *kimono* for that full samurai look!

### Geisha dance tickets

In April, May and November the geisha districts of Kyoto hold their annual dances; a rare chance to see the geisha perform traditional dances in their priceless *kimono*. The performances celebrate the geisha's skill and grace, combining lavish costumes and intricate dance movements with a unique style of music and song.

### Pottery lesson

Housengama is a well known pottery studio located near Sanjusangendo Temple, just a short taxi ride from Kyoto Station. Here you can experience a hands-on pottery lesson led by Housengama's expert staff that speak a little English and offer a number of pottery programs. Finished items can be glazed and shipped internationally if you wish.

### Tea ceremony

The order, art and simplicity of the Japanese tea ceremony began during the medieval period in Japan between the eleventh and sixteenth century. Initially, and unsurprisingly, the tea ceremony was an activity indulged by the nobility, as tea itself was primarily the elixir of the upper class. However, it soon became popular with Zen Buddhist monks who discovered that drinking tea contributed to their health and increased their ability to meditate. Samurai warriors, practised in cultural arts to heighten their awareness and bring them closer to enlightenment, also embraced the elaborate ritual of the ceremony.

At our tea ceremony experience, your *kimono*-wearing instructor will take you through all facets of the *cha no yu* - literally meaning hot water for tea - and its four principles: harmony, respect, purity and tranquility. You will be able to ask questions, take photos and try your hand at preparing tea.

### Tondaya *machiya* house

Tondaya silk wholesaler is a *machiya* town house built in 1885 and now a registered National Cultural Asset preserving traditional customs. We can organise for you to take a tour of the house and its beautiful antiques, participate in a tea ceremony and try on a *kimono*.

### Martial arts - *aikido* and *tate-do*

We have teamed up with Osaka's TOHO entertainment school to offer lessons in *aikido* and *tate-do* sword fighting. You will learn choreographed moves from the experts behind many of Japan's best loved action films. This experience can be incorporated into any Self-Guided Adventure of Fully Tailored itinerary.

**Sport plays a significant part in the fabric of modern day Japanese life. From a young age children join school teams, instilling a sense of camaraderie, pride, hard work and dedication. This continues throughout school and often perpetuates into adulthood with clubs such as badminton or tennis being as popular in Japan as in the UK or the US.**

Spectator sport is also incredibly popular with huge crowds heading to the baseball each evening and sumo attracting large television audiences. In recent years, football (or soccer as the Japanese prefer so say) has increased its profile. Given a significant boost by the staging of the FIFA World Cup in 2002, the fortunes of the Blue Samurai Japanese national side are now a hot topic of conversation in offices and bars up and down the country.

## Sumo

Japan's official national sport is the enthralling and at times bewildering spectacle that is sumo. Deeply rooted in Japanese culture, it has a history of over 1,500 years. Legend has it that the very survival of the Japanese people balanced on the outcome of a sumo match between the gods, and indeed sumo originated as a form of Shinto ritual. Though it has developed into a professional sport, elements of these rituals are still apparent, from the use of salt to purify the ring, to the shrine like roof hanging above.

Sumo tournaments, or 'basho' take place every two months in Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya and Fukuoka and are a truly fantastic way to spend the day. Though the pre-bout antics are strict and formalised, the fights are a spectacular blur of flesh, noise and power as the two man-mountains attempt to push, pull or slap each other out of the ring, or onto any part of their body other than the soles of their super-sized feet. Take a *bento* lunch box, grab a beer and cheer on with the crowd as they rally their favourite 'rikishi' to victory!

Seeing Japan's number one traditional sport in the flesh is a real highlight of any trip to Japan. We can arrange seats at any tournament throughout the year, so if you are a keen sumo fan or just want to experience a truly Japanese event, be sure to time your trip to coincide with one of the main *basho*; if possible, the final week of the tournament when the action really hots up!

Please check out the 2011 / 12 tournament schedules below.



### Basho Schedule 2011

Tournament	Venue	Dates
New Year	Tokyo Kokugikan	9th to 23rd January
Spring	Osaka Gymnasium	13th to 27th March
May	Tokyo Kokugikan	8th to 22nd May
Summer	Nagoya Aichi Gymnasium	10th to 24th July
September	Tokyo Kokugikan	11th to 25th September
Autumn	Fukuoka Kokusai Center	13th to 27th November

### Basho Schedule 2012

Tournament	Venue	Dates
New Year	Tokyo Kokugikan	8th to 22nd January
Spring	Osaka Gymnasium	11th to 25th March
May	Tokyo Kokugikan	6th to 20th May
Summer	Nagoya Aichi Gymnasium	8th to 22nd July
September	Tokyo Kokugikan	9th to 23rd September
Autumn	Fukuoka Kokusai Center	11th to 25th November

## Sumo stable visits

If you can't make it to a tournament, then you will be pleased to know that we can also arrange visits to a sumo stable in Tokyo to see the *rikishi* or wrestlers at *asa geiko*, the morning practice session. A professional guide will accompany you throughout to make sure that you get the most out of this unique experience. Please be aware that this service is dependent on the schedule of the sumo stables and may not always be available.

## Baseball

Sumo may be the national sport, but baseball is by far the most popular. Introduced in 1873 by Horace Wilson, an American teacher at a Tokyo school, its popularity grew, with the first professional teams springing up in the 1930s. Japanese start playing from an early age, and the annual High School Baseball Championship is televised nationally and is the source of much discussion during its progress.

The baseball season runs from April to October, culminating in the 'Japan Series' as the two best teams from Central and Pacific leagues battle it out. Devoted crowd support borders

on the feverish and is an assault on the senses as the highly choreographed songs reverberate throughout the stadiums. If you are lucky enough to go to a game you may find yourself humming these tunes for days to come!

The biggest teams are Osaka Hanshin Tigers and the Tokyo Giants, but we encourage you to cheer on the Nagoya Chunichi Dragons, InsideJapan Tours' hometown team!

*During the baseball season, tickets can easily be included in your Japan holiday package. Please ask us for more details.*

## Motor racing

Globally renowned as a producer of world class cars, Japan also hosts what is often one of the most exciting, unpredictable and nerve jangling races of the Formula One (F1) calendar. F1 first came to Japan in 1976, though after two years there was a hiatus until 1987 when a race at Suzuka, Mie Prefecture (just south of Nagoya), became an annual fixture. Races have also been held at the Fuji Speedway in Shizuoka and for the time being this glamorous, lucrative event will alternate between the two circuits. For all the petrol heads out there we will be happy to work in a day at the races.

Japan also hosts a Moto Grand Prix which is held at Motegi Twin Ring in April. So if bikes are more your thing than cars, we would be happy to arrange tickets.

## Tokyo Marathon

The Tokyo marathon has only been running since 2007 but we have already had our own staff member Harry Sargant take part!

The race takes place at the end of February or beginning of March starting from the Shinjuku government building and taking in historic Asakusa, the Rainbow Bridge, Tokyo Tower and Meiji Shrine en route. There is also a shorter 10 kilometre course.

With only 30,000 places up for grabs, the marathon is always over-subscribed and participation is on a lottery basis. However, we can bypass this with a guaranteed registration and accommodation package. Please contact us for more details.

*Please let us know if you are interested in attending any of the sports events detailed above or any others not listed here. Perhaps a J-League game is top of your list; or an evening visit to the keibajou for some horse racing. Whatever it is that takes your fancy, just let us know and we will do our best to obtain the tickets you are looking for.*

# Sustainable tourism

All of our itineraries have elements of sustainable tourism in them - you will travel by public transport, visit places beyond the classic tourist hotspots and have the opportunity to interact with the Japanese locals - so you can be sure that your holiday will have a positive impact on the country and its people.

From autumn 2010 we started providing all of our Small Group Tour clients with their very own InsideJapan Tours' chopsticks; a great memento of your visit to Japan, but also a convenient way to avoid using numerous disposable chopsticks when eating at a local restaurant, or tucking into a *bento* lunch box.

In addition to this we have selected some experiences that offer an in depth exploration of Japan's wildlife, nature and local communities.

## Bear watching in the Japanese Alps

Japan's dwindling bear population faces ever increasing pressure from urban growth, as more and more of its natural habitat is taken over by infrastructure and engineering projects. However, there remain pockets of wilderness where these amazing creatures can still be seen in the wild.

Run in association with the most active bear conservation group in Japan, the Shinshu Asiatic Black Bear Conservation Group, our bear watching hikes are an ideal way for nature lovers to spend a fun weekend learning more about bear conservation issues with an expert guide.

The two day group tour will begin in the castle town of **Matsumoto** before travelling up into the mountains, first by car and then hiking on foot. Accommodation is at a mountain lodge and in the evening there will be a one hour presentation on bear ecology and bear-human conflicts in this area of Japan.

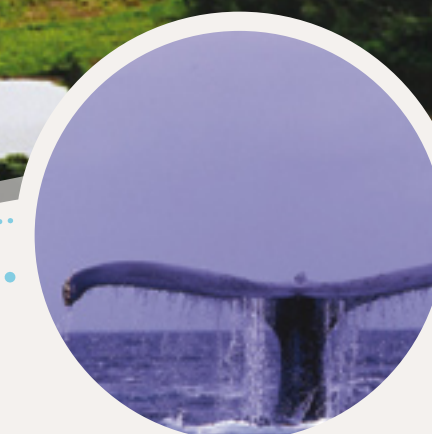
The following day, the group will have breakfast at the mountain lodge before hiking down to the valley. On the way you will stop for *bento* lunch box, all the while taking in the breathtaking sights of the alpine region. Throughout the hike you will be able to see how, where and why bear-human conflicts take place. The group will return to Matsumoto by the early evening.



## Local communities

Enjoy the stunning scenery and unique history of **Hirado Island** and give vital support to the local economy. The island of Hirado lies off the north-west coast of Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four major islands. Hirado has a rich history, and played a vital role in early links with Europe as the home of the Portuguese traders in the seventeenth century. Today it depends on local farming and fishing for survival. However, with no university on the island and few job prospects outside a field or boat, more and more young people are leaving Hirado. As a result the local economy is suffering and many businesses struggle to survive.

Local organisations have recently turned their efforts to tourism in an attempt to bring money to the island, and to provide job opportunities for those who would otherwise leave in search of work. This tourism is almost exclusively domestic, but at InsideJapan Tours we work closely with a local volunteer guide service and a traditional *ryokan* Japanese-style inn to arrange relaxing stays on this beautiful island. Visiting Hirado is the very essence of responsible tourism: You will visit a part of Japan that the guidebooks don't cover and have the chance to enjoy the natural beauty and culture of the island, all in the company of a knowledgeable local. By doing so you will provide vital support for the local economy, thus helping to ensure a more prosperous future for the island and its people, and the survival of local customs and culture.



## Whale watching

We all know the story; the whole world does. Japan has been unmoving in its defiance of the International Whaling Committee's ban on the whaling of certain species, and staying within allocated quotas for others. There have been a series of high profile clashes between Japanese whaling boats and environmental protestors with seemingly little progress towards a resolution of the issue.

However, away from the headlines and publicity stunts, some coastal communities in Japan are bucking the trend by running whale watching tours. There is a great diversity of whales and dolphins to be spotted in Japanese coastal waters: humpbacks, sperm whales, bottle-nose and spinner dolphins to name but a few. Destinations with whale watching opportunities include **Chiba and Shizuoka**, both within easy reach of Tokyo, **Kushimoto** on the south coast of Wakayama Prefecture (convenient from Kyoto or Osaka), **Kochi** on the south coast of Shikoku and the **Okinawa** chain of islands. On Honshu and Shikoku the best time to see whales is mid-April to October while in Okinawa the winter months are recommended, December to April.

The longest established organisation and our recommended choice is the *Ogasawara Whale Watching Association* (OWA). **Ogasawara** is a cluster of 30 small islands (only two of which are inhabited) 1,000 kilometres south of Tokyo and accessible only by a 25 hour ferry journey from the mainland. But the little visited 'Galapagos of the East' is well worth the journey for its unspoilt ecology and wildlife. The OWA has been operating for nearly 20 years, and has its own code of good practice to minimise disruption to the animals. Dolphins can be seen in these waters all year round, while humpback whales are present from mid-December to the end of April.

Please ask us to incorporate whale watching into a Self-Guided Adventure or Fully Tailored Package.

## Farm stays and volunteering

Although you may be on holiday there is nothing quite like the feeling of helping out local people and organisations while travelling in a foreign land. We are pleased to offer the chance to spend a small part of your Japan trip working as a volunteer. In recent years there has been a steady increase in domestic volunteer numbers, as many of Japan's urban-dwellers seek an opportunity to remind themselves of - or in some cases, discover for the first time - the nature and ways of Japan's rural areas. You could find yourself involved in environmental preservation, learning traditional building techniques, tree planting or a host of other activities. We have links with local organisations, so if you are interested, just let us know and we will do our best to find something suitable during your time in Japan.

### 'My hashi' - InsideJapan Tours' chopsticks

Each and every year, Japan gets through around 24 billion pairs of *waribashi* disposable chopsticks, the majority of which are thrown away 10 minutes after use and end up incinerated or as landfill. This is not to mention the deforestation caused by making the chopsticks in the first place. To be fair, this does go against the grain, as in other fields recycling and reduction of waste are a way of life in Japan. While the full debate is too much for these pages, in autumn 2010 we started to provide all of our Small Group Tour clients with their own chopsticks for use in Japan. We calculate that on an average tour this could save up to 24 pairs of disposable chopsticks per person, and in a year, well, we will leave the maths to you, but we are confident it adds up to a lot saved of wood!

Think London, Paris or New York and immediately some of the great art museums of the world will spring to mind; the Tate, the Louvre, the Guggenheim. Japan, however, has not enjoyed such a high profile. Yet the Japanese are passionate about art and across the country are to be found museums large and small, where art lovers can discover classic works from the great masters such as Monet, Matisse and Picasso alongside pieces from contemporary Japanese artists such as Yoshitomo Nara and Kenji Yanobe.

The contemporary art scene in Japan is vibrant and interest in modern art is continuously growing. The Japan Art Association, founded immediately following the end of World War Two as a democratic art organization, held its first exhibition in 1947 as young artists attempted to create a new vision of reality from the ashes of defeat. This is a theme to which Japanese artists return to time and again, still searching for meaning in the destruction of nuclear holocaust.

Japanese artists produce some of the most compelling and innovative work to be found anywhere. This is perhaps all the more intriguing to Western eyes for the mirror it holds up to a very different culture and society to that found in the West.

## Featured galleries and museums

### Tokyo

**Tomio Koyama Gallery** located in Kiyosumi just a short distance from Tokyo Station, is one of the stand-out institutions and plays a leading role in the Japanese modern art scene. With 50 member artists exhibiting their paintings, drawings, installations and photography, this is the best place to experience the work that is shaping creative thinking in Japan.

The **Tokyo Museum of Contemporary Art** showcases art from both Japanese and international artists, combining its collection of over 4,000 works with visiting exhibitions. Finally, located on the 52nd and 53rd floors of

the Mori Tower at Roppongi Hills, the Mori Art Museum and Arts Centre Gallery lay claim to the title of the world's highest art museums. Set against the backdrop of the Tokyo skyline, the museum exhibitions showcase some of the most challenging work from Japan and around the world.

*Nearly all our Self-Guided Adventures and Small Group Tours start and end in Tokyo. Extra nights can be added to any trip to allow extra time for museum visits.*



Niki de Saint Phalle Le Banc  
Photo:Osamu Watanabe

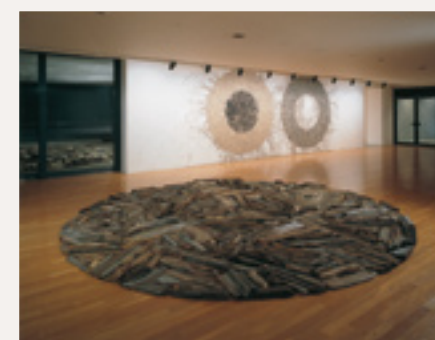


Yayoi Kusama Pumpkin  
Photo:Shigeo Anzai

### Hakone

Set amidst spectacular mountain scenery, the **Chokoku no Mori** sculpture park is a wonderful place to see sculpture by the likes of Rodin, Bourdelle, Miro and Moore. As Henry Moore famously proclaimed, "sculpture is an art of the open air" and this museum brings his vision spectacularly to life. Opened in 1969, the 70,000 m2 grounds provide a permanent home to around 120 works with something to appeal to all, young and old alike. Alongside these stands the Picasso building where you will find more than 300 pieces, mainly centred on his ceramic work.

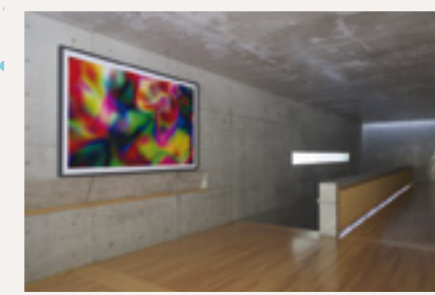
*The Tokaido Trail, Spring Elegance, Japan Enchantment and Essential Honshu Small Group Tours all include two night stays in Hakone with a chance to visit Chokoku no Mori. Hakone appears on many of our Self-Guided Adventures and can also be included in any Fully Tailored trip.*



Richard Long Inland Sea Driftwood Circle / River Avon Mud Circles by the Inland Sea  
Photo:Tadasu Yamamoto



Benesse House Park  
Photo:Osamu Watanabe



Benesse House Park  
Photo:Osamu Watanabe

### Benesse Art Site, Naoshima

Recently attracting the international attention it deserves, Naoshima is a small island located in Japan's Inland Sea renowned for its collection of contemporary art galleries and exhibits.

**Benesse House** opened in 1992 as a hotel and gallery for modern art, with the buildings designed by world renowned architect, Tadao Ando. Today the collection includes work by Andy Warhol, Bruce Nauman, David Hockney, Jasper Jones as well as many other international and Japanese artists.

In addition to the museum at Benesse House, in 2004 **Chichu Art Museum**, also designed by Ando, opened as a striking collaboration of art and architecture. The museum features permanent installations by Walter De Maria and James Turrell alongside a room dedicated to Monet's Water Lilies.

Alongside the flagship galleries visitors can find the **Art House Project** where old Japanese houses in the main town area of the island have been restored and exhibition spaces created.

In recent years, the importance of artistic projects in the area has continued to grow and 2010 saw the inaugural Setouchi International Arts Festival with works displayed across the seven islands of the Seto Inland Sea and in the city of Takamatsu. The festival is due to be held again in 2013.

*A stay on Naoshima is included as part of the Paths Less Travelled Self-Guided Adventure. Naoshima can also be incorporated into any Fully Tailored holiday including stays at the exclusive Benesse House.*

### The Adachi Museum, Matsue

With one of Japan's most beautiful gardens as its backdrop, the **Adachi Museum** showcases 1,300 of the country's most highly regarded paintings produced after the Meiji period. The Meiji Restoration represented the beginning of the modern era in Japan and the Adachi museum's galleries provide a fascinating insight into how artists have interpreted the sweeping cultural and societal changes brought about by rapid industrialisation, militarisation, war, the crushing defeat of World War Two, and then the economic rebuilding, boom and dramatic bust that followed.

For those interested in art history, the Adachi provides an ideal reference point to the key movements in Japanese art during this period, as Western techniques were assimilated into traditional Japanese styles.

*Matsue features on the Spas of Japan and Gardens of Japan Self-Guided itineraries and can be included as part of any tailored trip.*

# Nagoya - Our Home in Japan

Our base in Japan is the port city of Nagoya, historic home of the Tokugawa Shogun and modern-day headquarters for the Toyota Motor Corporation. Conveniently located on the Tokaido Shinkansen line between Tokyo and Kyoto and with its own modern international airport, Nagoya has a wealth of sights and experiences to offer. We are currently celebrating Nagoya's 400th anniversary and would be delighted for you to visit!

On this page are some Nagoya highlights, all of which can easily be incorporated into your Japan visit.

## Toyota factory visit

Take the opportunity to visit the biggest of Japan's car manufacturers, Toyota. The company's headquarters are located in Toyota City just outside Nagoya. There are free English language tours of the high-tech plants on most days and we can make a reservation for you. Next to the headquarters is the Toyota *Kaikan* Exhibition Hall, where Toyota's brand new models and technologies are displayed, which means you will get the chance to see them before anyone else; a must for all car fanatics!

## Nagoya Castle

Originally completed in 1612, **Nagoya Castle** was home of the Owari Tokugawa clan until the Meiji restoration ended Shogunate rule in 1868. The castle was destroyed during World War Two but the *donjon* main keep has now been reconstructed, complete with the iconic

*kinshachi* golden fish perched on the top. The castle features good English language explanations as well as a computerised 3D reconstruction of the Honmaru Palace, the entrance way to which has recently been rebuilt in advance of a full rebuilding due for completion in 2017.

## Tokugawa Art Museum

The Nagoya area was home of the powerful Edo Shogun Tokugawa Iyasu and **Tokugawa Art** museum houses a fascinating collection of artefacts associated with his clan. Swords, armour, *noh* theatre costumes, lacquer furniture and ceramics provide an insight into the flourishing arts of this period of relative stability. The most precious exhibit is the original scroll from the epic twelfth century poem 'The Tale of Genji'.

JR Towers, Nagoya Station



Meiji Mura



Kuragari Gorge



Nagashima Spa Land



## Nagashima Spa Land

For something completely different, **Nagashima Spa Land** just outside of Nagoya offers theme park rides, a water park and a beautiful *onsen* hot spring, all within the same complex. Steel Dragon 2000 is the world's longest roller-coaster, while the outdoor seawater pool features 18 different water slides.

## Kuragari Gorge

The Nagoya region is home to many natural wonders including the impressive **Kuragari Gorge**, a forested area with some fantastic walks and great views. The valley follows the scenic Otoko River as it winds its way through Hongusan nature reserve.

## Modern Nagoya

Spurred on by a booming economy and the 2005 World Expo, Nagoya's skyline is now peppered with modern buildings including the fantastic **JR Towers** and the brand new **Toyota Motor Company headquarters**. **Oasis 21** in the centre of town meanwhile, is a low rise but equally spectacular exhibition space (and bus terminus) while the granddaddy of them all, **Nagoya TV Tower**, has been given a silver facelift and commands great views over the city. An artificial island outside the city is home to Nagoya's international airport, **Centrair**, which opened in 2005 and provides an impressive gateway to the city.

## Meiji Mura

The opening of Japan's borders during the Meiji period (1867-1912) saw the country change dramatically as Western thinking influenced architecture, industry and society. **Meiji Mura** is an open air museum showcasing the styles of those heady days. Some sixty historical buildings have been moved and reconstructed in this 247 acre park; the most significant is the main entrance and lobby of Frank Lloyd Wright's landmark Imperial Hotel. The museum includes its own steam railway and is set against the rolling hills of Lake Iruka.

## Atsuta Shrine & Osu Kannon Temple

Nagoya's principle religious sites are **Atsuta Shrine** and **Osu Kannon Temple**. The former is one of the most important shrines in Japan. It enshrines the sun goddess, Amaterasu, and keeps hidden in its precincts the 'sacred sword', one of three sacred Imperial regalia in Japan. Osu Kannon is a bustling Buddhist temple known as much for the surrounding market streets as the temple building itself.



Nagoya Castle



Tokugawa Art Museum



Toyota Factory Visit

## Holiday descriptions & inclusions

Every effort will be made to deliver your holiday exactly as described in this brochure. Occasionally however, changes have to be made and in this case we will endeavour to inform you as soon as possible.

## Our packages include:

- Accommodation in Japan as detailed
- Most transport between destinations in Japan
- Airport transfers on arrival and departure
- Meals as detailed
- Accommodation taxes and service charges
- Info-Pack with full instructions, maps, sightseeing and eating out advice

## Our packages generally do NOT include:

- International flights (these can be included for UK departures if you wish; please ask)
- Entrance fees and meals other than those detailed
- Local transport (e.g. taxis, subways, local buses)
- Drinks with any included meals
- Incidental costs at your accommodation (telephone calls, drinks, etc)

If you are unsure of the exact inclusions, please ask your booking agent or contact us for further details.

## International flights

If you are departing from the UK, we would be delighted to make flight arrangements for you (please ask for details) or alternatively, you can arrange flights through your travel agent or by yourself. Once your flights are confirmed, please make sure that your booking agent is aware of the full flight details. We are unable to arrange international flights originating outside the UK.

All packages are for arrival and departure at Tokyo Narita Airport (NRT) or Tokyo Haneda Airport (HND). The only exceptions are for the 'Paths Less Travelled' Self-Guided Package which is designed for arrival and departure at Osaka Kansai Airport (KIX) or Osaka Itami Airport (ITM) and for the 'Nature and Culture' Small Group Tour which is designed for arrival at Tokyo Narita Airport (NRT) or Tokyo Haneda Airport (HND) and departure from Osaka Kansai Airport (KIX) or Osaka Itami Airport (ITM).

## Meals

A number of meals are included in most packages. Please advise your booking agent of any dietary requirements and we will do our best to accommodate them.

## Prices

Due to the volatility of currency exchange rates and the flexibility of our itineraries we have not printed any prices in our brochure. For the latest prices please contact us or your local travel agent or check our website: [www.insidejapantours.com](http://www.insidejapantours.com)

When planning your trip please keep in mind that during certain Japanese holiday periods, prices can be a lot higher than usual. The main holiday periods are as follows:

29th December to 4th January - New Year  
29th April to 5th May - Golden Week  
9th August to 17th August - Obon Festival

## How to book, payment & travel documents

You can book by contacting InsideJapan Tours or through your local travel agent. If you are booking through a travel agency, all subsequent correspondence should be made through that agency. For all bookings, please use an InsideJapan Tours' booking form. You will need to read the terms and conditions and sign the booking form to confirm, on behalf of all those in your party, that you accept and understand the terms and conditions.

Your booking agent will advise payment terms at the time of booking. InsideJapan Tours asks for a deposit upon booking and then full payment two months prior to your package start date. Please check with your travel agent for their payment terms as these vary from agent to agent.

After we have processed your booking, we will issue you or your travel agent with a confirmation document which will show exactly what is included in your holiday. Please check all the details carefully and advise your booking agent if there are any mistakes or if there is anything that you do not understand.

Your Info-Pack and other travel documents will be sent to you approximately four weeks before departure. Some tickets may be sent to your first hotel in Japan. Full details of which tickets and documents will be sent and where they will be sent will be shown in your final documentation.

## Late bookings

Bookings made less than four weeks before your planned departure date will be accepted on a case by case basis. In most situations we will be able to confirm your holiday at the current price (as shown on our website or available by contacting us or your travel agent). However, there may be situations where we will have to change the price, inclusions or itinerary. For late bookings we will endeavour to confirm your holiday arrangements and the price within three working days.

## Passports & visas, health advice

It is your responsibility to ensure that you and all members of your party have the correct passports and, if appropriate, visas to enter Japan. At the time of print, citizens of the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand do not need a visa to visit Japan. If you are unsure, please ask the Japanese Embassy in your home country. You can find a full list of embassies at [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp)

Vaccinations are generally not needed for visiting Japan, but if you suffer from any health problems please consult your doctor before booking. Health care in Japan is usually very good but can be expensive. Your own government will be able to supply the latest health advice regarding a visit to Japan. You may also want to contact the Japan National Tourist Organisation (JNTO) for advice.

## UK: [www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad](http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad)

## USA: [www.usa.gov/Topics/Usresponse/Travel\\_Safely.shtml](http://www.usa.gov/Topics/Usresponse/Travel_Safely.shtml)

## JNTO UK: [www.seejapan.co.uk](http://www.seejapan.co.uk)

## JNTO USA: [www.japantravelinfo.com](http://www.japantravelinfo.com)

## JNTO Worldwide: [www.jnto.go.jp](http://www.jnto.go.jp)

## Travel insurance

It is a condition of booking with us that you and all members of your party have adequate travel insurance to cover medical costs and repatriation. You will be asked to sign a booking form to show that you have, or will have, this insurance in place for the duration of your trip. Although not compulsory, we recommend that you also take out cancellation insurance.

## Money & debit / credit cards

Japan is still in many ways a cash society and many shops and restaurants do not accept debit or credit cards. Therefore, you will need to carry Japanese yen in cash while in Japan. You can get Japanese yen cash in advance of your trip or you can exchange US dollar, GB pound or Euro cash and travellers cheques, as well as cash in most other currencies, on arrival at any airport. You can do the same at some banks and post offices during your trip. Please note that bank and post office opening hours are often shorter than in the UK or the US and that they are closed on Saturday afternoons, Sundays and national holidays.

You can also use Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus or Maestro branded credit and debit cards to take money out of ATMs at Japan Post Office branches and Seven Eleven convenience stores; you will need a four digit PIN number to do this. If you plan to do this, please inform your card issuer before departure that you will be using your card abroad, take the card issuer's contact telephone number with you and have a back-up in case of any problems (e.g. take some travellers cheques as well).

## Children

Children aged 12 years or older are treated as adults in terms of accommodation and transport costs. For younger children we can sometimes offer discounts on the published prices; please ask your booking agent for further details. Any children aged 17 years or younger at the time of travel must be accompanied by a parent, guardian or another adult who will assume legal responsibility for them for the duration of the trip.

## Rooms & check-in

Check-in and check-out times vary from hotel to hotel. Check-in can be any time from 13.00 to 16.00 and check-out from 9.00 to 12.00. Please note that in Japan check-in times are strictly adhered to and early check-in requests may well be refused. You can, however, always leave your suitcases with the front desk before check-in time.

Please advise your booking agent if you wish to have smoking or non-smoking hotel rooms and we will do our best to accommodate your wishes. Triple or quad-share rooms may be available upon request; please ask for further details.

## Car hire

If your package includes car hire, the named driver must be in possession of a full and valid driving license from their home country as well as a full and valid International Driving Permit (issued in accordance with the Geneva Convention 1949). Cars drive on the left and most road signs are in English as well as Japanese. Swiss and German driving licence holders need to obtain a Japanese translation of their home country driving licence before departure and cannot use an International Driving Permit.

## Luggage

Porterage is not included as standard in any of our packages although the top hotels in Japan (such as those on our Gourmet Deluxe Small Group Tour) will provide porterage between the front desk and your guest room at their discretion. For all packages you are responsible for carrying your own luggage from place to place. Most train stations have escalators but a few do not. Some trains only have limited luggage space. Please pack as lightly as possible and make sure that you are able to handle your own luggage comfortably. We recommend packing a small, light suitcase with good wheels. Japan does have an excellent luggage forwarding service, *takuhaibin*, which is available from the front desk of most hotels. You can send your luggage from hotel to hotel on an overnight basis. This service is included at pertinent times on our Small Group Tours. Please see the inclusions list on each tour page for details. For the Self-Guided Packages and Fully Tailored Packages you can use this service at a small additional cost (payable in yen at the time of sending) and full instructions will be in your Info-Pack. If you plan to take advantage of this service, it will be useful to have an overnight bag as well as your main bag.

If you have any questions or queries please contact us. If booking through a travel agent, please contact them direct:

## W: [www.insidejapantours.com](http://www.insidejapantours.com)

## E: [info@insidejapantours.com](mailto:info@insidejapantours.com)

## Tel. UK: 0117 314 4620 Tel. USA: 1 303 952 0184

## For your local AiTO Specialist Travel Agent see: [www.aitoagents.com](http://www.aitoagents.com)

## Image credits

Please see [www.insidejapantours.com/brochure-images](http://www.insidejapantours.com/brochure-images) for full details of all the images used in our brochure.

## Average weather conditions

Japan is a fantastic destination all year round and the Japanese are very proud of their distinctive seasons. Traditionally, the most popular times of year to visit are spring (March/April) and autumn (October/November), when the weather is warm but not too humid and there is a good chance of seeing cherry blossom and the autumn leaves respectively (see opposite page for more details). However, every season has its unique charms and visiting out of season has many benefits, not least being the vastly smaller number of tourists at key sightseeing spots. Winter is characterised by crisp, clear days, with the mountains and the northern regions experiencing heavy snow fall. Summer is hot and more humid in the cities, but is the perfect time to explore the higher altitudes of the Japanese countryside.

## Average start of cherry blossom

The springtime cherry blossom is a fantastic time to be in Japan. The beauty of the blossoms aside, picnicking and partying under the sakura is a national institution. Below are the average start dates for cherry blossom. Note that full bloom is usually reached a few days after the start date and then lasts for a week or so.

City	Average Date	2007	2006	2005
Sapporo	5th May	4th May	8th May	10th May
Hakodate	3rd May	30th Apr	7th May	1st May
Sendai	12th Apr	6th Apr	13th Apr	14th Apr
Tokyo	28th Mar	20th Mar	21st Mar	31st Mar
Kanazawa	6th Apr	29th Mar	6th Apr	7th Apr
Kyoto	31st Mar	25th Mar	27th Mar	2nd Apr
Hiroshima	29th Mar	22nd Mar	22nd Mar	3rd Apr
Matsuyama	28th Mar	23rd Mar	24th Mar	1st Apr
Kumamoto	24th Mar	23rd Mar	20th Mar	1st Apr
Kagoshima	26th Mar	30th Mar	20th Mar	3rd Apr
Ishigaki	19th Jan	23rd Jan	13th Jan	19th Jan

## Average start of autumn leaves

The *koyo* leaf viewing season is the highlight of autumnal Japan and makes for some beautiful vistas especially in the national parks. On average you can see leaves at their best as follows:

Region	Autumn Leaves
Hokkaido	mid September to late October
Tokyo	mid November to early December
Nikko	mid October to mid November
Hakone	early to mid November
Kawaguchi-ko	late October to early November
Kyoto	mid November to early December
Shikoku	mid October to late November
Kyushu	mid October to early November

## Rainy season

From June to mid-July much of Japan experiences a mild rainy season while Okinawa is affected approximately one month earlier. Average start and finish dates are as follows:

Region	Start	End
Ishigaki	8th May	23rd Jun
Kagoshima	29th May	13th Jul
Osaka, Kyoto, Nara	6th Jun	19th Jul
Tokyo	8th Jun	20th Jul

Source: Japan Meteorological Agency

During the rainy season it does not rain every day and it is not always torrential. Hokkaido does not have a rainy season. Some sights are enhanced by the rain and are much quieter than during peak seasons. Cheap umbrellas are available from every convenience store should you be caught in a downpour.

City	Max. Temp	Min. Temp	Rainy Days	Rainfall	Sunshine
January					
Sapporo	-1 C (30F)	-8 C (18F)	18 d	111 mm	97 h
Tokyo	10 C (50F)	2 C (34F)	5 d	49 mm	181 h
Kyoto	9 C (49F)	3 C (37F)	5 d	44 mm	142 h
Fukuoka	10 C (50F)	3 C (38F)	9 d	72 mm	100 h
Ishigaki	19 C (66F)	14 C (58F)	11 d	115 mm	95 h
February					
Sapporo	0 C (32F)	-7 C (19F)	16 d	96 mm	110 h
Tokyo	10 C (50F)	2 C (36F)	6 d	60 mm	161 h
Kyoto	9 C (49F)	3 C (37F)	6 d	59 mm	131 h
Fukuoka	11 C (51F)	4 C (38F)	9 d	71 mm	114 h
Ishigaki	19 C (67F)	14 C (58F)	11 d	125 mm	85 h
March					
Sapporo	4 C (38F)	-4 C (26F)	14 d	80 mm	157 h
Tokyo	13 C (55F)	5 C (41F)	10 d	115 mm	160 h
Kyoto	13 C (56F)	5 C (41F)	9 d	100 mm	158 h
Fukuoka	14 C (57F)	6 C (43F)	11 d	109 mm	150 h
Ishigaki	21 C (70F)	16 C (61F)	12 d	160 mm	109 h
April					
Sapporo	11 C (52F)	3 C (37F)	9 d	61 mm	178 h
Tokyo	18 C (65F)	11 C (51F)	10 d	130 mm	165 h
Kyoto	20 C (67F)	11 C (51F)	10 d	121 mm	184 h
Fukuoka	19 C (67F)	11 C (51F)	10 d	125 mm	177 h
Ishigaki	24 C (75F)	19 C (66F)	11 d	181 mm	134 h
City	Max. Temp	Min. Temp	Rainy Days	Rainfall	Sunshine
May					
Sapporo	17 C (63F)	8 C (46F)	9 d	55 mm	197 h
Tokyo	23 C (73F)	15 C (59F)	10 d	128 mm	181 h
Kyoto	24 C (76F)	15 C (60F)	10 d	140 mm	200 h
Fukuoka	24 C (74F)	15 C (59F)	9 d	139 mm	181 h
Ishigaki	26 C (80F)	22 C (71F)	12 d	234 mm	150 h
June					
Sapporo	21 C (70F)	12 C (54F)	7 d	51 mm	187 h
Tokyo	25 C (77F)	19 C (66F)	12 d	165 mm	120 h
Kyoto	27 C (81F)	20 C (68F)	12 d	201 mm	150 h
Fukuoka	27 C (80F)	19 C (67F)	12 d	272 mm	148 h
Ishigaki	29 C (85F)	25 C (76F)	11 d	212 mm	182 h
July					
Sapporo	25 C (77F)	17 C (63F)	8 d	67 mm	176 h
Tokyo	29 C (84F)	23 C (73F)	10 d	162 mm	148 h
Kyoto	31 C (89F)	24 C (75F)	10 d	155 mm	186 h
Fukuoka	31 C (87F)	24 C (75F)	11 d	266 mm	183 h
Ishigaki	31 C (88F)	26 C (80F)	9 d	176 mm	243 h
August					
Sapporo	26 C (79F)	19 C (65F)	9 d	137 mm	174 h
Tokyo	31 C (87F)	24 C (76F)	8 d	155 mm	178 h
Kyoto	33 C (91F)	25 C (77F)	7 d	99 mm	211 h
Fukuoka	32 C (89F)	25 C (76F)	9 d	188 mm	199 h
Ishigaki	31 C (88F)	26 C (79F)	12 d	247 mm	223 h
City	Max. Temp	Min. Temp	Rainy Days	Rainfall	Sunshine
September					
Sapporo	22 C (79F)	14 C (65F)	10 d	138 mm	160 h
Tokyo	27 C (80F)	21 C (69F)	11 d	209 mm	113 h
Kyoto	29 C (84F)	21 C (70F)	10 d	175 mm	149 h
Fukuoka	28 C (82F)	21 C (69F)	10 d	175 mm	158 h
Ishigaki	30 C (88F)	25 C (79F)	10 d	200 mm	197 h
October					
Sapporo	16 C (60F)	7 C (44F)	12 d	124 mm	153 h
Tokyo	22 C (71F)	15 C (59F)	9 d	163 mm	130 h
Kyoto	23 C (73F)	15 C (59F)	8 d	109 mm	162 h
Fukuoka	23 C (73F)	15 C (59F)	7 d	81 mm	175 h
Ishigaki	28 C (82F)	23 C (73F)	8 d	163 mm	169 h
November					
Sapporo	8 C (47F)	1 C (34F)	14 d	103 mm	100 h
Tokyo	17 C (62F)	10 C (49F)	6 d	93 mm	141 h
Kyoto	17 C (63F)	10 C (49F)	6 d	66 mm	147 h
Fukuoka	18 C (64F)	10 C (49F)	8 d	81 mm	133 h
Ishigaki	24 C (76F)	20 C (67F)	9 d	124 mm	121 h
December					
Sapporo	2 C (36F)	-4 C (24F)	16 d	105 mm	87 h
Tokyo	12 C (54F)	5 C (40F)	4 d	40 mm	171 h
Kyoto	12 C (54F)	5 C (41F)	5 d	38 mm	149 h
Fukuoka	13 C (55F)	5 C (41F)	8 d	54 mm	117 h
Ishigaki	21 C (70F)	16 C (61F)	8 d	101 mm	114 h





INSIDE  
**Japan**  
get beneath the surface

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