



INSIDE
Japan

Get beneath the surface



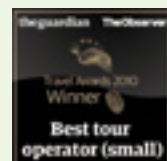
Small Group Tours



Fully Tailored Packages



Experiences & Inspiration



BEST TOUR OPERATOR TO EAST & CENTRAL ASIA



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“We would highly recommend InsideJapan Tours to anyone considering a visit to Japan. Quite frankly our 3 week trip was the best holiday ever”

G. Arbez, 2012



About InsideJapan Tours

InsideJapan Tours is a team of Japan experts dedicated to offering the very best travel experience to anyone who wants to explore this fascinating country - 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. Founded in 2000, we have since sent thousands of happy customers on a huge variety of Japan holidays. 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 over a decade of experience and each 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 Japan will provide you with a multitude of experiences to remember.

Within these pages you will find our range of **Small Group Tours**, all led by expert IJT tour leaders, and **Fully Tailored Packages**, a collection of itineraries which can be crafted into your perfect trip either as a *Self-Guided Adventure* or an *Escorted Journey*. For ideas and themes on how to create the perfect itinerary look no further than our **Experiences & Inspiration** section.

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, guideline pricing 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.

“Amazing attention to detail and service. The tailor-made information books given to us were invaluable and made everything on the self guided trip go extremely smoothly. 5 stars.”

G. Douris, 2012



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 a **Best Tour Operator** award at the British Travel Awards in 2011 and a **Best Small Tour Operator** award at the Guardian and Observer travel awards 2010. 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. Our tour leaders and guides are highly trained and skilled. We'll 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, as well as sightseeing guides, help with language and customs and our favourite restaurant recommendations. The Info-Pack is your personalised, printed travel companion and an essential part of your trip.

Full financial protection & guaranteed prices

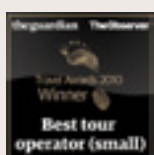
All AITO member companies are fully bonded and governed by an independent dispute settlement service, which means you are in safe hands. Our land-only arrangements are bonded with ABTOT Ltd (5233) while flight-inclusive packages are protected by our ATOL Licence (9419). In the extremely unlikely event 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 is paid.

How to book

We have offices in the UK and the USA and we have a direct dial sales number for Australian clients. We are also 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 dates of travel and any dietary requirements that you may have.

Contact us

☎ UK: 0117 370 9730
☎ USA: 1 303 952 0379
☎ AUS: 028 011 3229
@ 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** or 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 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 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 a slower pace of life. 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.



Ishigaki Island

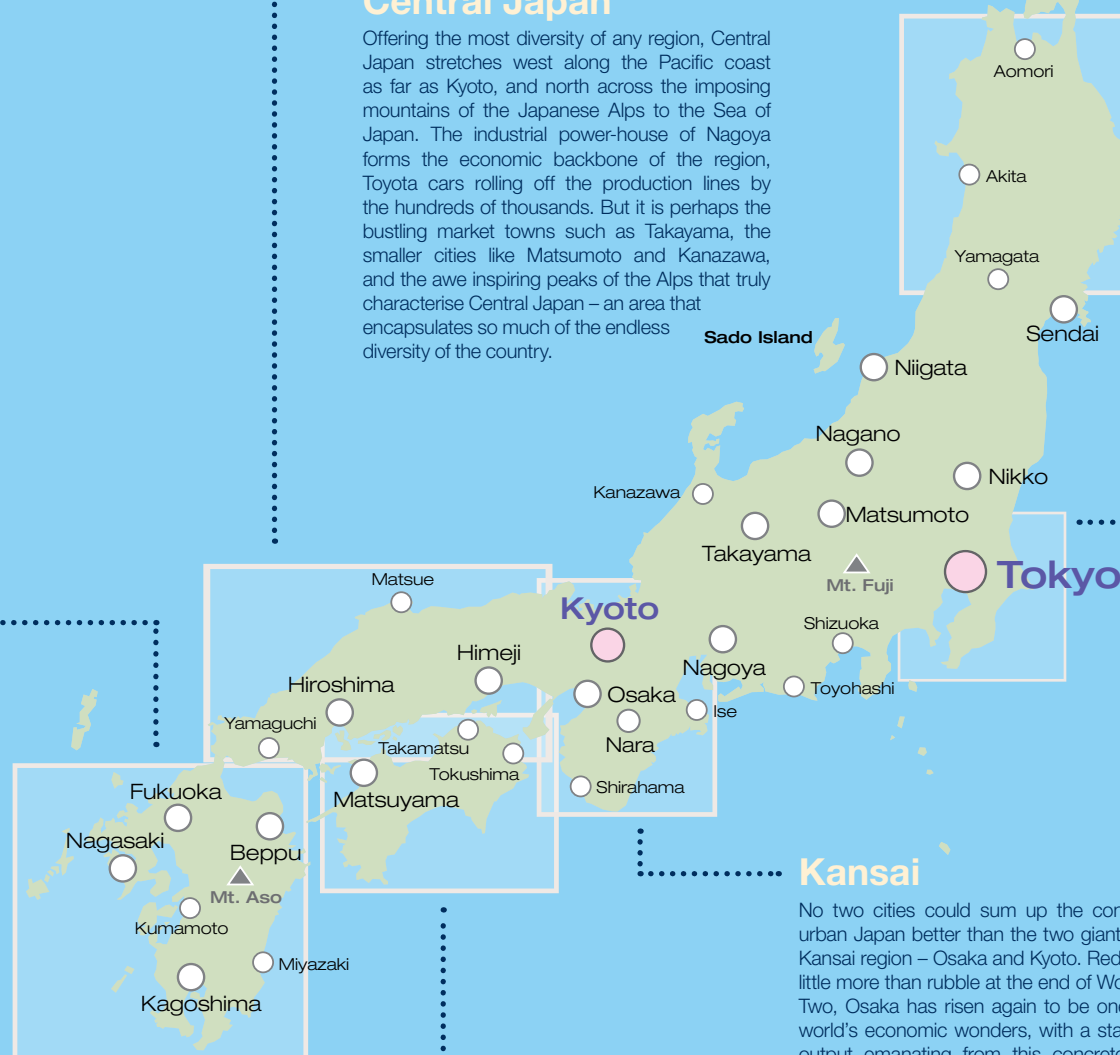
Hokkaido

With its rolling hills, wide open spaces, lakes, rivers and nature reserves, Hokkaido is a haven for wildlife and natural 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 hot spring towns 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 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 Kinokasa 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. 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 this 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.

Choose your holiday

Small Group Tours

With a relaxed and friendly style, our accompanied tours are perfect for anyone who enjoys travelling in a small group. You will have the benefit of an expert tour leader on hand throughout your trip to introduce you to the very best sights, sounds, tastes and experiences that Japan has to offer. Our four styles of Small Group Tour ensure there is an itinerary for every visitor.

7

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Fully Tailored Packages

Japan is a wonderful place to explore independently; some of the friendliest, most helpful people you will meet anywhere, world-class transport infrastructure, fabulous restaurants from budget eateries to Michelin starred refinement and a myriad of discoveries to be had round every corner. Here we present some of our tried and tested itineraries which take all the logistical worries from your shoulders, allowing you to get the most from every minute of your trip. These itineraries can all be taken as Self-Guided Adventures or Escorted Journeys and tailored by our expert consultants to be exactly the trip you are looking for.

Experiences & Inspiration

Looking for inspiration? Whether it is the best of Japan's gardens, the high-tech Toyota production lines, traditional arts and crafts, or remote mountain spas that interest you, our brochure showcases just a few of the many options and experiences available; a little something to whet your appetite for planning the perfect trip.

Small Group Tours

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Our tour concept

Travelling through Japan as part of a small group is a fantastic way to see the country while learning about its history and culture, meeting fellow travellers and indulging in some delicious and beautifully prepared meals.

Our award winning Small Group Tours have a maximum group size of just 14 people and are led by expert, enthusiastic tour leaders. Our tours are very flexible, enabling you to see and do everything you want. Each day you can decide to stay with the tour group or head off and explore independently; the choice is yours.

When booking on a Small Group Tour you can be assured that we have made every effort to ensure you experience the best of Japan in the time available. Whether it is a first time visit or a second or third repeat trip to Japan, we are sure that you will enjoy the group tour experience.

We have four different styles of tours to choose from ensuring that there is something for all budgets and tastes.

Prices and booking

To ensure that you never have out of date information, we do not include any prices, departure dates or availability information in the brochure. For the latest details contact us or your local travel agent or check our website. We have many repeat travellers and tours sell out fast, so be sure to plan your trip well in advance.

Your tour leader

Your expert IJT tour leader will accompany the group throughout, stay in the same hotels and *ryokan* and travel with you from destination to destination. A Japanese speaker who has experience of living and working in Japan, your tour leader will be able to give personal insights into Japanese culture and society. Your tour leader is there to make sure that you get the absolute most from your holiday. Our small team of tour leaders are passionate about Japan and by the end of the tour you will be too!

“The whole experience was perfect, in no small part due to the tour leader who was really brilliant at his job. Preparatory paperwork and service, hotels and restaurants all great”

C. Peters, 2012



As standard on all our tours

Full time expert IJT Tour Leader

No local payment or requirement to bring your own rail pass

All transport between destinations in Japan

Excellent selection of quality Western-style hotels and Japanese-style *ryokan* and *minshuku*

Breakfast every day

At least 1 evening meal (most tours have 3 or more)

Maximum group size of 14

For detailed day-by-day itineraries and full pricing, contact us, see www.insidejapantours.com or ask your local travel agent.

International flights

International flights are not included in our tour prices, giving you the freedom to source your own flights. However, we are more than happy to arrange flights for UK clients if required. Please let us know if you would like us to provide a quote.

Extra nights

We always suggest that an extra night (or even two) at the start of the tour is a good option to help you settle in and get over jet-lag before the tour gets underway. We can also add extra nights after the tour, or put together a fully tailored add-on if you would like to explore Japan further. Please let us know if this would be of interest to you.

Families and children

Families and children aged 6 years or older are also welcome on our tours. Children aged under 12 can be booked on at a reduced price – please ask for details.

Luggage

All of our tours use public transport at some stage and this does of course mean that it is best to travel light as you will be carrying your own bags. On our IJT Classic, IJT Superior and IJT eXplorer tours, however, we take advantage of next day luggage forwarding and the occasional minibus where expeditious to make things as easy as possible. Moderately sized suitcases with wheels are ideal and you will need an overnight bag for when luggage forwarding is included. Extra luggage forwarding can easily be arranged locally.

Meals

One thing we're sure you'll look forward to is the local cuisine. All our tours include breakfast every day as well as at least one evening meal (most tours have three or more). At InsideJapan Tours we love Japanese food and strive to include Japan's amazing range of culinary styles on our tours. Your tour leader will of course give their personal recommendations for the best sushi or extra delicious *yakitori* chicken skewers. Given the vast array of culinary delights on offer, we want you to enjoy all the meals provided on tour, therefore if you have any specific dietary requirements please let us know in advance and we will do our best to ensure that we cater for your needs.

Solo travellers

We have many people travelling solo on our tours and we are dedicated to having a fair and transparent pricing policy for solo travellers. On our IJT Essential tours we give a single room free of charge to solo travellers at the Western-style hotels and only ask you to share at the Japanese-style inns (usually only 2 or 3 nights). The IJT Classic and IJT Superior tours have a mandatory but very fairly priced single supplement which guarantees a single room throughout. On our IJT eXplorer tours single rooms are usually available at all Western-style night stops with a single supplement applicable to some tours.



Choose your style

All of our tours are led by one of our own **highly skilled tour leaders** who accompany the group throughout. You'll be getting a very personal insight into Japan's culture, history and cuisine from a local who is just as passionate about Japan as we are! We endeavour to 'get beneath the surface', travelling mainly by public transport including rides on the **Shinkansen 'Bullet Train'** and staying at locally owned hotels and Japanese-style *ryokan*. Whichever of our four tour styles you choose, you will find we've built plenty of flexibility in to each trip enabling you to spend as much or as little time with the group as you wish. And of course your tour leader is on hand at all times to look after any special interests.

IJT: SUPERIOR



4 to 5-star cultural tours characterised by **high quality** Western and Japanese-style accommodation with expert local guides at select destinations and many included entrance fees, experiences and meals. Ideal for people looking for more **luxurious accommodation** and a relaxed yet in-depth sightseeing and cultural experience.

- ✓ Local guides in selected destinations (in addition to your full time tour leader)
- ✓ All transport between destinations included (by mini-bus where suitable)
- ✓ 4 to 5-star Western-style hotels and Japanese-style *ryokan*
- ✓ Airport meet-and-greet and transfers included
- ✓ Breakfast each day plus a number of evening meals
- ✓ Most entrance fees included
- ✓ Selected luggage forwarding included and portage often available
- ✓ For solo travellers a single room throughout on payment of a fair supplement

IJT: ESSENTIAL



Flexible, well-paced, value for money cultural tours allowing you to experience **Japan in-depth** but with maximum flexibility. Great for **first time visitors** to Japan travelling on a budget.

- ✓ Great mix of 2 to 3-star Western and Japanese-style accommodation
- ✓ Fully en-suite at Western-style hotels, shared facilities at Japanese-style inns
- ✓ Breakfast each day plus 1 or 2 evening meals included
- ✓ Travel by public transport including *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train'
- ✓ Entrance fees and most local transport not included
- ✓ No airport meet-and-greet (detailed instructions provided)
- ✓ Carry your own luggage
- ✓ For solo travellers a single room for free at all Western-style hotels

IJT: CLASSIC



Mid-range cultural tours at a moderate pace. Soak up the sights, sounds and atmosphere of **our very favourite destinations**. Ideal for travellers wanting a bit of extra comfort and a range of carefully thought out **included experiences** and meals.

- ✓ Mix of comfortable 3-star Western and Japanese-style accommodation
- ✓ Fully en-suite rooms at all stops except temple lodgings
- ✓ Airport meet-and-greet and transfers included
- ✓ Breakfast each day plus a number of evening meals
- ✓ Selected entrance fees included
- ✓ Selected luggage forwarding included
- ✓ For solo travellers a single room throughout on payment of a fair supplement

IJT: EXPLORER



Experience led in-depth tours. **Get off the beaten track** and immerse yourself in Japan. 'IJT eXplorer' tours concentrate on an area of the country, an activity, or a particular cultural or historical theme. Packed with unusual experiences and rarely visited locations these tours are perfect for a second time visitor or the more adventurous traveller. We usually only offer **one departure a year** so be sure to book early!

- ✓ Local guides in selected destinations (in addition to your full time tour leader)
- ✓ All transport between destinations included
- ✓ Usually 3-star Western and Japanese-style accommodation
- ✓ Airport meet-and-greet and transfers included
- ✓ Breakfast each day plus a number of evening meals
- ✓ Selected entrance fees & luggage forwarding included
- ✓ For solo travellers a single room at most night stops on payment of a fair supplement



“ This was an AMAZING trip! We had the time of our lives, from start to finish. Everything from the service prior to the trip, to our tour leader, accommodation, transportation and meals, exceeded our expectations ”

J Collins, 2011

Read more feedback and tour reviews on the live reviews section on our website: www.insidejapantours.com/customer-reviews

Japan Enchantment

14 nights

IJT: SUPERIOR

TOKYO (2) – NIKKO (1) – KARUIZAWA (2) – NAGANO (1) – KANAZAWA (2) – KYOTO (3) – HAKONE (2) – TOKYO (1)

From the high-tech wonders of Tokyo, to the old streets of Kyoto with its must-see temples and shrines, the gardens of Kanazawa and the beautiful Japanese Alps, this comprehensive 14 night IJT Superior tour will give you a great insight into the diversity of modern Japan and allow you to take in the best of Japan's seasonal colours.

Led by an expert tour leader, the tour starts and finishes in Tokyo, Japan's capital city and the most densely populated area on the planet. This city is a phenomenon and we will explore the contrasts of both the historic side of the city in Asakusa and the excitement of modern Shinjuku with its soaring skyscrapers and bright neon lights; the beating heart of the city.

Japan Enchantment takes in the 'Golden Route' sights of Japan with a three night stay in Kyoto, Japan's capital of history and culture, and two night's in the mountainous hot spring resort of Hakone affording views of majestic Mount Fuji.

We'll also head off the beaten track and up into the Japanese Alps, travelling along the 'Romantic Road' from Nikko to Karuizawa, a classic mountain resort town. A longtime favourite of wealthy Tokyoites, here you will stay at a hotel with its own hot spring baths to enjoy. Some optional light walking or hiking is the best way to take in the dramatic, volcanic landscape or you may prefer to sit back and admire the views from the comfort of the hot spring baths.

In Nikko we'll explore the wonderfully ornate temples and shrines which since 1999 have been designated a World Heritage site. Accommodation in Nikko is at a high-grade *ryokan* (Japanese-style inn) with a sumptuous evening meal included. All other stays on this IJT Superior tour are at well located, tried and tested 4-star or higher hotels.

We head to the Japan Sea Coast for a stay in Kanazawa where we have the opportunity to see one of the very best Japanese gardens, to tour the old samurai and geisha districts and to experience the intriguing 'Ninja Temple'. This is a beautiful city and also offers a number of craft and cultural experiences.

A trip to Kyoto allows you to enjoy the seasonal geisha dance festivals, tickets for which are included in the tour. We have a private minibus in Kyoto for a day, allowing us to easily get around the very best of the many World Heritage sites – similar touring arrangements are included in Karuizawa and Nikko.

Breakfast everyday and 7 sumptuous evening meals are all included. This cultural tour of Japan is set against the backdrop of the beautiful pink *sakura* in spring, verdant fresh greens in May and the fiery reds, golds and oranges of the changing leaves in autumn.

Capturing the country in all its glory, from the skyscrapers of Tokyo to the natural landscapes of the Japanese Alps, this is a journey to savour.



“Inside Japan Tours provided an excellent service from start to finish. Our tour was everything we had anticipated and much, much more. We left the country enriched by our experiences having found Japan to be fascinating, beautiful and full of surprises”

R. Slater, 2011



What's included

- Full time services of your expert IJT Tour Leader
- 14 nights' accommodation
- Expert local Japanese guide in Nikko and Kanazawa
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- 7 Day Japan Rail Pass - a flexible pass allows you to make optional day trips at no extra cost
- Meet & greet at Tokyo Narita Airport & airport transfers
- Breakfast every day
- 7 evening meals
- Sumida River boat cruise and entrance to Hamarikyu Gardens in Tokyo
- Tokyo transport card
- 'Miyako Odori', 'Kamogawa Odori' or 'Gion Odori' geisha dance tickets
- Selected entrance fees & local transport in all destinations
- Luggage forwarding between Tokyo & Karuizawa, Kyoto & Tokyo
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Geisha dances

Every April, May and November, the usually secretive geisha world throws open its doors for mesmerising Odori Matsuri dance festivals. The performances celebrate the geisha's skill and grace, combining lavish costumes and intricate dance movements with a unique style of music and song.

The mainly Japanese audience get the rare opportunity to enjoy these traditional geisha arts usually only seen within the walls of invitation-only tea houses. Each of the highly stylised dances tells a story. Set against vibrantly painted changing backdrops of the four seasons, these echo the ebb and flow of life. A true celebration of the season.

The Odori Matsuri offers the chance to lose yourself in the romanticism and mystery of Japan's past and to gain a small insight into the esoteric geisha arts. Dance tickets are included on **Japan Enchantment** and **Spring Elegance** tours and are an optional extra on any tour travelling during festival dates.

Spirit of Honshu

7 nights

IJT: SUPERIOR

TOKYO (3) – IZU PENINSULA (1) – KYOTO (3)

Tokyo and Kyoto are the must see cities of Japan and with an overnight stay in off the beaten track Izu Peninsula in between, our IJT Superior 'Spirit of Honshu' tour is the perfect trip for anyone looking for a short group tour packed with inclusions.

Led by retired businessman and experienced IJT tour leader Mr Yasuhiko Ota, the tour opens with a three night stay in Tokyo with accommodation in the heart of old town Asakusa. You'll have plenty of time to explore its lively backstreets packed with open-fronted restaurants and traditional stores as well as the impressive Sensoji Temple – perhaps pick up an *omikujii* fortune and learn what your future has in store!

A full day seeing the sights of the capital will be followed by a day trip to Nikko, home of the vast Toshogu complex of temples and shrines. Constructed over 21 years following the death of the first Tokugawa Shogun in 1616, this elaborate collection of buildings set amidst towering Japanese cypress trees, showcases the finest craftsmanship of the period. Look out for the dazzling carvings of dragons, lions and elephants and of course the iconic, "see-no-evil, speak-no-evil, hear-no-evil" monkeys.

Day 4 will see you leaving the city for the mountains and jagged coastline of the Izu Peninsula. Travelling by private microbus our itinerary will take in some of the best sites with possible stops including the Jigosaki volcanic coast line, historic Shuzenji Onsen, Kawazu in March for its early blooming cherry blossom, Shimoda in May for the *kurofune* "black ships" festival and the Jukkoku Pass which on clear days offers dramatic views of Mount Fuji. If we miss Fuji-san today do not worry; on Day 5 we'll be taking a ferry journey across Suruga Bay from where, weather depending, Japan's most famous icon can be seen towering over the coast - the sight that met sailors of old approaching Japan for the first time.

Our journey through Japan concludes with a three night stay in Kyoto, capital of Japanese history and culture. Here, you'll have the chance to enjoy the company of a geisha at a private appointment in the Gion District, as well as being introduced by an expert local guide to a few of the World Heritage sites, gardens and traditional arts of the city. A day trip to nearby Nara with its giant statue of Buddha and friendly sacred deer will round off your stay in Japan.

Accommodation has been carefully chosen to be of a very good 4-star grade in Tokyo and Kyoto whilst on the Izu Peninsula we stay in a lovely beachside Japanese-style inn with a top class *kaiseki* meal included - choose your fish fresh on arrival! Take a walk on the sands or enjoy a treatment in the spa before relaxing in a soothing natural hot spring bath – a quintessential Japanese experience.

With high quality accommodation throughout and first class rail travel on the famous *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train', Spirit of Honshu brings you the very best sights of Japan whilst travelling in style.



“ The best of Tokyo and Kyoto combined with a stay in a luxury hot springs ryokan on the scenic Izu coastline – the perfect way to experience Japan ”

InsideJapan Tours



What's included

- Full time services of your expert IJT Tour Leader
- 7 nights' accommodation including a superior *ryokan* stay
- All transport between destinations in Japan including first-class 'Bullet Train' ride
- Tokyo transport card
- Meet & greet and airport transfers on arrival & departure
- Breakfast everyday
- 4 sumptuous evening meals
- Sumida River boat cruise & Hamarikyū gardens in Tokyo
- Day trips to Nikko and Nara
- Kyoto geisha event with local expert
- Selected entrance fees
- Luggage forwarding between Tokyo & Kyoto
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Izu Peninsula

Protruding from the eastern seaboard into the Pacific Ocean like the tail of an enormous fish, Izu Peninsula is a sleepy rural region made up of small fishing towns along the coast and forest covered mountains inland. A favourite weekend retreat for Tokyoites weary of the frenetic pace of life in the city, Izu is one of the country's premier hot spring areas with onsen proliferating throughout the region. Year round surfers head to the unspoilt beaches and the rich marine life of the coastal waters also attracts divers and fishing enthusiasts.

Izu has a rich history. The temple at Shuzenji Onsen was established in 807 by Kobo Daishi, founder of the Shingon school of Buddhism. It was later to find notoriety as the scene of the assassination of the second Shogun of the Kamakura Era and can still be visited today. More famously, Shimoda on the southern tip of Izu was in 1854, the landing place for the American Admiral Perry's "black ships" as he forced the signing of a treaty which for the first time opened up Japanese ports to American trade – an event which had a huge impact on the development of Japan as a modern nation. From mid-February, visitors to Izu are treated to the earliest blooming cherry blossom in Japan and in March the unique celebrations for girls day or Hina Matsuri (literally Dolls Festival) see the display of beautiful hand-made hanging decorations.

Few foreign tourists make the journey to Izu but those who do are richly rewarded. On our Spirit of Honshu tour we will choose the most interesting sights depending on the season as well as spending a night on the southern coast in a beautiful modern hot spring *ryokan* with a wonderful seafood dinner included.



Spring Elegance

13 nights

IJT: CLASSIC

TOKYO (3) – MATSUMOTO (1) – TAKAYAMA (2) – KANAZAWA (1) –
KYOTO (3) – EXCURSION DAY - HAKONE (2) – TOKYO (1)

As Japan unwraps itself from the blanket of winter, it bursts into life and reaches full bloom in spring. Cherry blossom fever sweeps the nation and your journey will capture the heart of Japan swathed in pink. Join the viewing parties in Tokyo or stroll amongst the petals in Kyoto; the *sakura* cherry blossom are never far away.

Our IJT Classic 'Spring Elegance' tour shows the best of Japan in all its glory, from the skyscrapers of Tokyo to the high peaks of the Japanese Alps. Relive the samurai battles of old through the windows of Matsumoto Castle, take a stroll through the immaculate gardens of Kanazawa, then travel high into the stunning mountains and on to the market town of Takayama. Here the experiences of the day will be matched by tempting local delicacies and impeccable service during your stay in a beautiful traditional *ryokan* (Japanese-style inn).

A ride on the famous *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train' delivers you to the imperial city of Kyoto, the epicentre of Japan's history and culture. Ancient temples lie hidden around every corner waiting to be discovered, while doll-like geisha totter gracefully between appointments. In Hakone, take in the magnificent views of Mount Fuji then lie back in one of the mineral rich *onsen* hot springs, relax and soak up all that Japan has to offer.

Using your included seven day Japan Rail Pass, an excursion day allows you to speed by *Shinkansen* to Hiroshima or visit the historic city of Nara to stroll through the deer park and marvel at the Big Buddha sitting serenely within his huge wooden temple.

You may just wish to stay in Kyoto and enjoy the attractive Arashiyama district sitting on the banks of the Hozu river; or perhaps stroll along the Path of Philosophy and enjoy the blossoms as generations of Kyoto residents have done before you.

Blooming date for the *sakura* is different every year, but the Spring Elegance tour is designed to make sure that you will be able to see the cherry blossom somewhere along the route, whether it be at its peak in Tokyo, just starting to appear in the Japanese Alps or gently falling to the ground in Kyoto. With four delicious evening meals included and some accommodation treats along the way, Spring Elegance is a great way to enjoy this beautiful season.

“The tour was superb - and the timing (with regards cherry blossom) couldn't have been better”

J. Hall, 2012



Hanami

Cherry blossom or *sakura* is considered by many to be Japan's national flower. In early spring when these flowers bloom, Japan is awash with pink; a spectacular backdrop to your sightseeing. The unpredictability of nature makes the exact blooming date an issue of keen discussion in early spring and the 'cherry blossom front' is a daily feature on the national news.

The arrival of the blossom brings men, women and children out into the parks, setting out picnics beneath the trees for *hanami* or flower viewing. The usually reserved Japanese really let their hair down at this time of year, using the blossom as a good excuse to eat, drink *sake* and sing *karaoke*!

Hanami is a ritual that has been observed for centuries. In the days of the samurai, cherry blossom symbolised the death of a soldier at his physical peak. *Sakura* came to represent the samurai way of life and *hanami* parties became a popular event within the warrior class.

For modern Japanese, the brief life span of *sakura* petals is a reminder of the fleeting nature of life itself and taking part in *hanami* celebrations is a fantastic way to get to the heart of Japanese tradition and culture.

Hanami parties are enjoyed all over Japan during cherry blossom season. Even in the big cities venues such as Ueno Park in central Tokyo and Maruyama Park in Kyoto provide beautiful backdrops for *hanami* celebrations attracting huge crowds every year.

For our tours that coincide with the cherry blossom season, our tour leaders are always keen to join in the celebrations and will often arrange a *hanami* party for the group. This is a great way to get to know fellow tour members and take part in a truly Japanese tradition.

What's included

- Full time services of your expert IJT Tour Leader
- 13 nights' accommodation in Japan
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- 7 Day Japan Rail Pass
- Meet & greet at Narita Airport & airport transfers
- Breakfast every day
- 4 evening meals
- Tokyo transport card
- Selected entrance fees and local transport at all destinations
- Hakone Freepass to cover local transport in Hakone region
- Geisha district evening walking tour in Kyoto
- Tickets for spring geisha dance performance
- Luggage forwarding between Tokyo & Takayama, Takayama & Kyoto, Kyoto & Tokyo
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Hidden Japan

12 nights **IJT: CLASSIC**

KYOTO (2) – MOUNT KOYA (1) – TOKUSHIMA (1) – TAKAMATSU & NAOSHIMA (2) – KOTOHIRA (2) – MATSUYAMA (1) – HIROSHIMA (2) – KYOTO (1)

Japan is a nation shrouded in mystery; folklore full of tales of beautiful geisha, fearless samurai and ruthless warlords; a nation of ghosts and spirits. On our IJT Classic 'Hidden Japan' tour you will venture from the temples, shrines and gardens of Kyoto to the dramatic valleys and ravines of Shikoku Island, the spectacular artworks of Naoshima Island and the spiritual retreat of Mount Koya.

Set against the backdrop of the cherry blossom in Spring, the lush green of summer and the fiery reds and oranges of the leaves in Autumn, Hidden Japan is a voyage of discovery. Kyoto makes for an ideal starting point, a modern city but one where the rich heritage of Japan's history reveals itself like no other. With 17 UNESCO World Heritage sights to explore this treasure trove of a city bookends the tour and provides fantastic opportunities for cultural immersion.

At Mount Koya, reached by private minibus from Kyoto, a temple lodging provides your accommodation for the night, allowing you to experience the ceremony and ritual that has been a part of this sacred mountaintop Buddhist retreat for over a thousand years.

We traverse the scenic Seto Inland Sea by short but relaxing ferry journeys as we travel from the main island of Honshu to rural Shikoku and then back again on to Hiroshima. First stop on Shikoku is Tokushima where you will be able to see and experience the Awa Odori dances as well as traditional *bunraku* Japanese puppetry. From here we travel on to Takamatsu, home to Ritsurin gardens which are considered some of Japan's best and also the staging post for a day trip to Naoshima 'art island'.

In Kotohira we join the ranks of the *junreisha* pilgrims, making the climb to the top of Kotohira's Kōpira-san with its 900 steps. In the evening your efforts will be rewarded with a dinner of elaborate *kaiseki* cuisine at a beautiful traditional inn. On the following day we have a day trip by minibus through the scenic Iya Valley.

Japan's oldest *onsen* hot spring baths await you in Matsuyama, a chance to relax in soothing waters after visiting the impressive (and large) samurai castle that this town is also famous for.

With additional stops in Hiroshima, to visit the A-Bomb museum and Peace Park, and Miyajima where we explore the vermilion Itsukushima shrine famous for its floating *torii* gate (as well as feeding the sacred deer and taking the cable car up Mt. Misen to see the monkeys!), the Hidden Japan tour takes you from the present to show you a glimpse of the past. A truly unforgettable experience of a unique country.



“The Hidden Japan Tour was excellent, very well planned, organised and led and we thoroughly enjoyed Japan.”

H Sheppard, 2011



Samurai Japan

From the ninth to the nineteenth century, samurai dominated Japan. These highly skilled warriors lived by the sword, following a strict moral code known as *bushido* (way of the warrior), heavily influenced by Zen Buddhism. To prove honour, the samurai would commit ritualized acts of suicide known as *seppuku*. The samurai were also highly trained in the arts; calligraphy and tea ceremony were just as important as battle skills and swordsmanship.

Today the spirit of the samurai lives on; loyalty, respect and self-discipline are the pillars of Japanese society. The importance of the samurai in Japanese popular culture is evidenced by the numerous period dramas shown on Japanese TV. You can see samurai film sets and enjoy acrobatic displays by samurai actors at the Toei Eiga Mura theme park and studios in Kyoto where you can also dress in traditional samurai gear. For a more hands-on experience, we can even arrange for you to be tutored in the art of tatedo sword fighting at the Toho studio school in Osaka.

For anyone with an interest in the samurai, a visit to a Japanese castle is essential. While many castles were destroyed by bombing and fire or were razed to the ground at the end of the feudal era, Hidden Japan presents the opportunity to visit one of the eight remaining originals with the impressive Matsuyama Castle commanding spectacular views of the surrounding area.

What's included

- Full time services of your expert IJT Tour Leader
- 12 nights' accommodation
- Expert local guide in Mount Koya
- Selected entrance fees and local transport at all destinations
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- Local transport pass for Hiroshima and Miyajima
- Meet & greet and airport transfers from Osaka Kansai Airport
- Breakfast every day
- 5 evening meals & 2 lunches
- Full day touring by private minibus in the Iya Valley
- Day trip to Naoshima 'Art Island'
- Luggage forwarding between Kyoto & Tokushima, Kotohira & Hiroshima
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Essential Honshu

13 nights

IJT: ESSENTIAL

TOKYO (2) – HAKONE (2) – OSAKA (2) – EXCURSION DAY -
KYOTO (2) – TAKAYAMA (2) – KAMIKOCHI (2) – TOKYO (1)

Japan has myriad sights and experiences and you will be amazed at how many of these we have managed to fit into our action packed Essential Honshu tour. From the dazzling neon-lit districts of Tokyo we will journey to the star-filled skies of Kamikochi National Park, deep in the heart of the Japanese Alps.

The Essential Honshu tour offers something for every visitor to Japan, whether you wish to marvel at the aesthetic beauty of Kyoto's Zen gardens, play pachinko alongside rows of salarymen in Osaka, or hike to the highest peaks of the Japanese Alps. This IJT Essential tour takes you from the extremes of the bright lights and down-to-earth vibe of Osaka high into the fresh mountain air and stunning natural scenery of Kamikochi. Along the way we will enjoy a walking tour of the Geisha district in Kyoto and feast on two included dinners at our Japanese-style inn in Kamikochi national park.

Each season is full of different images and opportunities. Our July and August departures bring the opportunity to climb to the summit of Mount Fuji, Japan's most sacred mountain. Our overnight ascent to the top of Japan is timed to see the sun rise over the distant horizon, lighting up the world to reveal the lakes, mountains and rivers below. Outside of the climbing season or for those who do not wish to climb, we explore Hakone National Park, riding a boat across Lake Ashi and taking a gentle walk along one of the old samurai trading routes. Whatever course you take, mineral-rich hot spring onsen waters await you in Hakone to soak away any aches and pains.

A thrilling chance encounter with a geisha scurrying to her evening appointment in historic Kyoto contrasting with a visit to the fashion and food capital of Osaka sums up the unique eccentricities of Honshu, Japan's largest and most diverse island. An excursion day from Osaka allows you to use the included Japan Rail Pass to visit Hiroshima or Nara for no extra cost.

With accommodation in quality business hotels and simple, family-run traditional inns, Essential Honshu provides a remarkably diverse tour at an affordable price; the perfect trip for anyone wanting to see the best of Japan's urban and rural extremes.



“I was really impressed with the service of Inside Japan Tours. Having wanted to go to Japan for such a long time I had high expectations but I can honestly say the tour was everything I could have hoped for and so much more.”

E Atkinson, 2011



What's included

- Full time services of your expert IJT Tour Leader
- 13 nights' accommodation
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- 7 Day Japan Rail pass
- Tokyo transport card
- Hakone Freepass
- Breakfast every day
- 2 evening meals
- Geisha district walking tour in Kyoto
- Luggage forwarding between Tokyo & Osaka, Takayama & Tokyo
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Climbing Mt. Fuji

Our July and August Essential Honshu and Tokaido Trail departures give you the opportunity to climb all 3,776 metres (12,388 feet) of Japan's most iconic symbol, sacred Fuji-san. The classic time to ascend the mountain is at night, climbing through the darkness to reach the summit as the sun gradually appears over the horizon. The distant twinkling lights of Tokyo are replaced by the lakes, mountains and valleys below as the rays of the sun warm the weary limbs of the pilgrims who have struggled to the top. During the climbing season, like fireflies on a hillside, a trail of glowing headlamps can be seen for miles ascending in a long winding trail all the way to the summit. For those climbing in the dark, the end is always in sight!

A famous Japanese proverb says you're a fool not to climb Mount Fuji, but only a fool does it twice! This is certainly no easy walk in the park. You will need to be fully prepared with good hiking shoes, waterproofs (in case of rain), hat, gloves and layers of clothing to keep out the cold once you reach the summit, where temperatures often drop below zero degrees. For those making the climb in the early hours to see the sunrise, there are several huts along the way that serve hot food and drinks to keep up your strength.

Don't be fooled by the descent which from the top looks like a leisurely stroll back to the fifth station. In reality the descent is as tough on the knees as the ascent is on the calves, giving you an all-round lower body work-out! This really is not a mountain to be taken lightly.

The reward of reaching the summit and seeing sunrise far outweighs the hardships. After a tough climb we recommend easing away the aches and pains by relaxing in a hot spring bath back at your traditional inn.

Japan Unmasked

13 nights

IJT: ESSENTIAL

TOKYO (2) – NAGANO (1) – MATSUMOTO (1) – TAKAYAMA (2) – KANAZAWA (1) – HIROSHIMA (2) – KURASHIKI (1) – KYOTO (2) – YOKOHAMA (1)

On our Japan Unmasked tour we unveil Japan as one of the most exotic, exciting and intriguing destinations in the world. Your expert tour leader will not only take you to some of the best places Japan has to offer but will show you a side of the country that rarely makes it into the guidebooks.

This IJT Essential small group tour starts in Tokyo among neon lights and costumed teenagers, before heading to the mountains; a peek at a world that few foreigners ever see. In wintertime, in the heart of rural Nagano, the famous snow monkeys come out to play and we'll also make a stop at Matsumoto's imposing yet elegant 'Black Crow' castle.

Step back in time as you wander through the back streets and markets of old town Takayama before dodging trap doors and secret passageways at Kanazawa's 'Ninja Temple'. Also in Kanazawa, we'll soak up the classic beauty of Kenrokuen, regarded as one of the three best gardens in the country.

Travelling by *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train' and streetcar, next stop is historic Hiroshima where we visit the moving A-Bomb Museum. A day trip by ferry across the bay brings us to the floating *torii* gate of sacred Miyajima Island. In Kurashiki meanwhile, an optional bike ride through the countryside will take you past pagodas and rice paddies.

Japan Unmasked also takes in Kyoto, the centre of Japanese history and culture. Round every corner lie hidden oases of tranquil calm. We'll venture to the more traditional districts to discover what hides behind those sliding doors. We will experience Japanese-style stays in Takayama at a family-run *minshuku* with an evening meal included and in Nagano we'll stay in a *shukubo*, sharing lodgings with other pilgrims at Zenko-ji Buddhist temple.

As with all of our IJT Essential tours, Japan Unmasked is a great value tour, allowing you to spend as much or as little as you like on eating, shopping and sightseeing. With departures throughout the year, this flexible trip caters to everyone's travel needs.



“The tour was incredible... we were continually surprised and delighted by the itinerary, the scenery, the people, the food and our tour leader, Tom”

P. Cornforth, 2012



What's included

- Full time services of your expert IJT Tour Leader
- 13 nights' accommodation
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- 14 day Japan Rail Pass
- Tokyo transport card
- Breakfast every day
- 1 evening meal
- Luggage forwarding between Tokyo & Matsumoto
- Entrance to Nagano Zenko-ji Temple
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Kanazawa

Until 150 years ago, Kanazawa was the fourth largest city in Japan, its wealth built on rice production and long periods of peace. The city has retained its charm with elegant, winding backstreets, the beautiful gardens of Kenrokuen, and the domineering, recently rebuilt, Kanazawa Castle.

From the mid-sixteenth century, Kanazawa was the seat of the Maeda Clan who ruled the city for nearly three centuries. The story of the Maeda Clan is one of wealth, excess and violence alongside extensive patronage of the arts. Their period of rule became known as the Hyakumangoku Period, meaning 'one million bushels of rice': the way their wealth was measured and in anyone's book, an awful lot of rice! The samurai are long gone but the legacy of the Maeda clan's generosity can still be seen in modern day Kanazawa.

The city prides itself on its refined heritage. Wandering into Higashiyama, the city's geisha district, will transport you into another world where you can slip into a tea shop and enjoy a few moments' rest and relaxation. In Nagamachi, visitors can reflect on the honour and dignity of the samurai, while at the 'Ninja Temple' you'll taste the treachery and espionage rife in Kanazawa's past. Numerous traditional crafts such as *kutani* pottery, *kaga yuzen* silk dying, and gold leaf work are still practised in small family-run workshops.

The Japanese appreciation for the four seasons is no more evident than in Kenrokuen Garden. A profusion of soft pink blossom in spring is fast followed by summer irises. In autumn, the Japanese maples take centre stage and in winter the trees are protected with *yuki zura*, ropes tied to the trees to protect the branches from heavy snowfall.



Tokaido Trail

9 nights

IJT: ESSENTIAL

TOKYO (2) – KAMAKURA (1) – HAKONE (2) – KYOTO (3) – EXCURSION DAY - TOKYO (1)

From the high-tech thrills of super sleek Tokyo to serene Zen gardens and hidden temples in ancient Kyoto, this journey along the ancient Tokaido highway is a fantastic introduction to Japan's unique and vibrant culture.

Take your time wandering through exquisite temples and gardens in Kamakura, relax in the velvety-soft volcanic waters of Hakone's hot spring *onsen* baths, see geisha glide through the streets of Kyoto's Gion district, and experience the sound of the *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train' thundering past at breathtaking speeds.

The IJT Essential Tokaido Trail allows you to get a taste of two of Japan's most famous cities; on the one hand, the ultra-modern Tokyo Metropolis and on the other, Kyoto, with its traditional architecture and cultural heritage. From Tokyo, the tour whisks you away from the city to the coast and the temple town of Kamakura where you can fill your lungs with Pacific sea air. Wash your yen at the money shrine and legend says it will double in value!

Follow this by heading deep into the mountains of the Hakone National Park with its steaming volcanoes and picturesque Lake Ashi, the ideal view point for the majestic but notoriously shy, Mount Fuji.

Combining modern, centrally-located business hotels with a friendly traditional Japanese inn stay in Hakone and transfers by public transport throughout, the Tokaido Trail provides a slice of everyday Japanese life. You'll have the chance to enjoy breakfast alongside suited *salarymen*, experience the ordered chaos of the Tokyo subway and slurp steaming hot *ramen* noodles in a stand up bar under the railway tracks. Japan is a sensory experience like nowhere else. A feast for the eyes, ears and of course, the taste buds.

The included excursion day is an opportunity to visit any one of a number of fascinating destinations: the giant Buddha and sacred deer of Nara; Hikone's magnificent original samurai castle; the haunting A-Bomb Museum and Peace Park in Hiroshima; or Kanazawa, home to the beautiful classical garden Kenrokuen. The hardest part is deciding where to go. Of course you may want to use your day to stay in Kyoto. With its 17 World Heritage sites, thousands of temples, shrines and gardens alongside plenty of artisan shops, you will find it hard not to be impressed by the old Imperial capital.

The Tokaido Trail is the perfect tour for anyone wanting to discover this inspiring country for the first time. This great value IJT Essential nine night cultural adventure brings you a menagerie of new sights, sounds, tastes and experiences at every turn and a collection of memories that will last a lifetime.



“The service from InsideJapan Tours was excellent, from the moment I first telephoned for information. The tour itself was fantastic - a real trip of a lifetime.”

S Taylor, 2012



What's included

- Full time services of your expert IJT Tour Leader
- 9 nights' accommodation
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- 7 Day Japan Rail Pass
- Tokyo transport card
- Hakone Freepass for local transport in Hakone
- Breakfast every day
- 1 evening meal
- Geisha district evening walking tour in Kyoto
- Luggage forwarding between Kamakura & Kyoto
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Kyoto, Japan's Imperial Capital

There is simply nowhere more special than Kyoto. It is home to everything that you associate with traditional Japan: vermilion temples, mysterious geisha, tea ceremony, Zen rock gardens, three imperial palaces, sumptuous cuisine, glittering *kimono*, bamboo groves, street-corner shrines, ancient festivals and much, much more.

Kyoto was founded in 794 as Japan's capital and the home of Emperor Kanmu. Situated in a flat plateau surrounded by mountains on three sides and bisected by the River Kamo, the city was laid out as a grid system in the tradition of Tang China. However, overcrowding, plagues and natural disasters soon befell the city and a series of rituals and festivals came into being to placate the spirit world. Kyoto is now home to more than 2,000 temples and shrines including 17 UNESCO World Heritage sites.

As the epicentre of Japanese culture and history, Kyoto attracts more than 40 million visitors a year. And while Kinkaku-ji, the stunning golden pavilion, and the impressive wooden stage at Kiyomizu-dera are must-see sites, you won't escape the tour buses in peak season. However, the real Kyoto heartbeat is lurking just around the corner for those who make the effort to get off the main tourist trail and seek it out. You can flee the crowds at Fushimi Inari where thousands of *torii* shrine gates make a labyrinth of bright red tunnels along the mountain paths. Then there are the real, working sites of Kyoto; Nishiki market where old ladies in *kimono* barter for mysterious ingredients; city centre *senjo* baths; or the tiny lantern lit temples set right amongst the shops in the Sanjo arcades.

Kyoto is there to be uncovered and discovered, and once you have scratched the surface, it is a city sure to draw you back time and time again.

Hands on Japan

14 nights

IJT: EXPLORER

TOKYO (3) - TOGARI NOZAWA ONSEN (2) - MATSUMOTO (2) - KYOTO (4) - TAKEFU (2) - TOKYO (1)

Experience life on a small Japanese farm, cheer with the crowds at live Sumo, hone your blade sharpening skills, make noodles for your new tour friends and rouse the locals to your taiko drum beat on the tour which lets you make your own mark on Japan.

What better way to learn about this fascinating culture than to be part of it? With many included experiences, this tour presents Japan through its crafts, sports, industry, music and, perhaps most notably, its food. Hands on Japan is an IJT eXplorer tour *par excellence* – in-depth and full of amazing experiences.

Tokyo and Kyoto are two contrasting, must-see cities and we'll be diving-in at the deep-end of both. We will experience the frenetic energy of Tokyo aboard our party boat as we eat, drink and sing along with the Tokyoite revelers down the Sumida River. We can match the beat of the city at our *taiko* drumming lesson: allow your senses to be carried away by the hypnotic rhythm. A day at a sumo tournament is an unforgettable experience as this is a captivating sport of theatrical build-up and frenzied action.

The rarefied culture of Kyoto is better absorbed through the graceful art of the tea ceremony and *kaiseki ryouri* (Japanese fine-dining). We will be enjoying both with expert guidance to better appreciate the subtleties. And a tour of the renowned and richly charming Geisha district will cap the experience.

Of course, we will be paying a visit to Kyoto's fabulous shrines, a favourite being Fushimi Inari; a vast complex of hill side paths entirely lined with orange *torii* gates. But it is not all high-culture in Kyoto. We will be spending one night in a space station-esque capsule hotel in the city centre, exploring the myriad food stalls at Nishiki market and taking in views of the city

from the ultra-modern Kyoto station building. We also visit the slightly kitsch Eigamura Movie Land where you can see reproduced scenes from some of those old fashioned samurai epics. You certainly won't be alone if you have the urge to grab a ninja sword! Kyoto is also renowned for its textiles and is the home to traditional *roketsu* cloth dying which we will try our hands at.

We will acquaint ourselves with a traditional inn, a guest house and a farm lodge. Our hosts will put us to work on the farm, teach us how to make sushi and even dress us up in *kimono*. We will discover beautiful mountain vistas, quaint watermills, the striking 'Black Crow' castle, groves with hidden Buddhist statues and even a *wasabi* farm where everything is horseradish flavoured - including the ice cream!



“The tour was spectacular! Hands On Japan is the way to see Japan, and only Inside Japan offered anything like it. It was amazing!”

H. Al Mousa, 2012



Soba noodles

A staple of Japanese cuisine, the humble *soba* noodle is sure to become your friend in any tour around Japan. Made from buckwheat flour, *soba* noodles can be served chilled with a dipping sauce or in a hot broth as a soup.

Extra toppings such as *tempura* shrimps, *nori* seaweed, *yamaimo* mountain potato, radish or okra can all be added. The cold variety should always be served with some *wasabi* (a kind of horseradish) preferably freshly grated from a root.

Soba dishes can be a cheap snack and are often found at temple restaurants or train stations or they can be an expensive delicacy, prepared by world class chefs at high class establishments.

Soba is typically eaten with chopsticks and slurping is encouraged. This is both to demonstrate your enjoyment of the noodles to the chef and for hot noodles to draw up the noodles quickly into the mouth with plenty of air thus helping to cool them down.

The best way to really appreciate this fantastic cuisine though is to make your own! *Soba* noodle making is included in our Hands on Japan tour and is both easy and great fun. You will get to mix up the dough, cut it into noodles using the special large *soba* knife, cook the noodles, prepare and season the dish and of course, eat your creation afterwards.

What's included

- Full time services of your expert IJT Tour Leader
- 14 nights' accommodation
- All transport between destinations in Japan including 'Bullet Train' rides
- Airport transfers on arrival and departure
- Meet and Greet upon arrival at Narita Airport
- Breakfast everyday
- 9 evening meals, 2 lunches and sushi breakfast
- Tokyo transport card
- 14 Day Japan Rail Pass
- Luggage forwarding between Tokyo & Matsumoto, Kyoto & Tokyo
- Numerous experiences covering Japan's culture, crafts and food
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

A Northern Soul

14 nights

IJT: EXPLORER

TOKYO (2) – NIKKO (2) – SENDAI (2) – HIRAIZUMI (2) –
NARUKO ONSEN (1) – MOUNT HAGURO (1) – NIIGATA (1) –
SADO ISLAND (2) – TOKYO (1)

To the north-east of Tokyo the Tohoku region stretches out for some 700 miles, a gentler Japan than that of the western coast; one characterised by its paddy fields, ancient mountaintop monasteries, friendly rural towns and villages. Our IJT Explorer 'A Northern Soul' tour will connect you to a Japan few tourists experience.

Following two days exploring the huge futuristic megalopolis that is Tokyo, we'll head to the World Heritage site of Nikko. Here the lakes, mountains, waterfalls and hot springs of the national park contrast and complement the lavish religious architecture of Toshogu Shrine, the final resting place of the first Tokugawa Shogun.

Whisked further north by *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train', the regional capital Sendai is a city with a rich history which can be experienced through visits to the restored castle and the ornate mausoleum of the region's most powerful warlord, Masamune Date. A short distance down the coast, the island-studded Matsushima bay offers relaxation and a chance to sample the fabulous local oysters!

The elaborate temples and gardens of rural Hiraizumi echo the former glory of its samurai past before a short train journey takes you through the valleys and ravines of the sleepy Tohoku countryside to Naruko Onsen. Here you'll soak in the hot spring waters and experience the geothermal phenomena of the area. After cleansing your body, cleanse your soul at temple lodgings at the base of Mount Haguro, one of Japanese Buddhism's most sacred mountains.

Our next stop is Niigata, the country's sake capital owing to high quality rice and the purity of the local water, before taking a ferry to remote Sado Island. Formerly a place of harsh exile for poets, priests and feudal lords, Sado is now famous for its *taiko* drumming and natural coastal scenery. As the sun slips beneath the horizon creating spectacular ocean sunsets, this is a fitting climax to this voyage of discovery.

Staying at a variety of traditional Japanese ryokan, exquisite cuisine is a highlight of this journey into rural Japan. With a wealth of traditional Japanese culture, picture-perfect countryside and warm-hearted locals, A Northern Soul offers a unique insight to this little-visited corner of Japan.



“Excellent service. All my questions promptly answered. Had a fantastic time in Japan with a mixed group of people and Liam was great fun”

M Ianson, 2011

What's included

- Full time services of your expert IJT Tour Leader
- 14 nights' accommodation
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- 4 Day flexi Japan Rail Pass
- Meet & greet at Narita Airport & airport transfers
- Breakfast every day
- 8 evening meals
- Selected entrance fees and experiences in Tokyo, Nikko, Sendai and Naruko Onsen
- Tokyo & Nikko transport cards
- Private bus & selected entrance fees on Sado Island
- Luggage forwarding between Naruko Onsen & Niigata, Niigata & Tokyo
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Sado Island

Sado Island is the sixth largest island in the Japanese archipelago, lying across the water from the city of Niigata on the Japan Sea coast.

In the middle ages, Sado was the final destination for political dissidents and criminals who were subjected to years of hard labour in the gold mines. Among the exiles were Emperor Juntoku, the Buddhist priest Nichinen Shonin and the famous Noh dramatist Zeami. Despite the hardships endured by the prisoners, many arts flourished on the island leaving a rich cultural heritage which still thrives.

Today the 855 km² island is sparsely populated. As a result the island offers mountainous countryside, rugged coastlines, hidden beaches and grottos. Ancient tradition lives on in tiny coastal villages and you may witness fisherwomen setting sail in small round tubs to catch seafood in the shallow waters. Often tourists are invited to join them; go ahead and see what the day's catch brings!

Sado's remote wilderness is nowhere more apparent than on the Skyline Road which climbs in a series of steep curves and switchbacks to the top of Kinpoku-san, the island's highest point. The dramatic views across fields of wild azaleas and the open sea beyond confirm Sado's status as the perfect Japanese getaway. Once in a while, however, the quiet is shattered when the Ondeko Drummers unleash their hypnotic rhythms. Japanese drumming is something to be seen as well as heard, as costumed performers use stylised choreography to beat huge barrel shaped drums.

A Northern Soul spends days 12 and 13 on Sado Island. Highlights of your stay include a drive along the Skyline road and a visit to the fascinating gold mine, which in its day was one of the most productive in the world.

Kyushu Elements

14 nights

IJT: EXPLORER

TOKYO (2) – NAGASAKI (2) – UNZEN (1) – MOUNT ASO (2) –
BEPPU (2) – KAGOSHIMA (2) – YAKUSHIMA (2) – TOKYO (1)

Kyushu is the birthplace of Japanese civilization; an island of bubbling hot springs, steaming volcanoes, sandy beaches and lush green rain forests. 700 miles west of Tokyo, this little visited island is a world away from the non-stop hustle and bustle of the capital. Our IJT Explorer 'Kyushu Elements' tour will get you beneath the surface of this fascinating area of Japan.

For centuries, Kyushu was Japan's only gateway to Asia and the rest of the world and as a result it has developed a unique character. From the laid back historic port city of Nagasaki, to the steaming hot spring town of Beppu and the ancient World Heritage forests of Yakushima Island, Kyushu showcases Japan's stunning natural and cultural diversity.

Travelling by plane, ferry and train, we'll also ride the Kyushu *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train' straight down the western side of the island to Kagoshima. Accommodation is similarly varied; a mix of Western-style hotels and traditional Japanese inns with many great evening meals included.

Having prayed for good fortune at Tokyo's Senso-ji Temple and explored the neon lit district of Shinjuku, we'll fly westward to stroll the streets of Nagasaki where four hundred years ago Dutch traders first brought such wonders as coffee and measuring scales to Japan. We'll then swap Nagasaki's stunning natural harbour for the volcanic martian landscapes of Unzen Onsen and steaming slopes of Mount Aso; a close up reminder of the powerful forces of nature lying just beneath Japan's surface.

For aficionados of bathing, Kyushu Elements provides chances aplenty to experience what the Japanese call *hadaka no tomadachi* or 'naked kinship' with *onsen* baths available at most destination stops. Beppu offers not just great hot springs, but sand baths on the beach, mud baths and steam baths, for rest and relaxation Japanese-style.

From the city of Kagoshima that sits in the shadow of the steaming Sakurajima volcano, the trip heads over to Yakushima Island for the finale. The island is referred to as 'the Alps of the Sea' with Mount Miyanoura soaring almost 2,000 metres from beneath the ocean to present beautiful sandy beaches encircled by century old forests of wizened Japanese cedar trees and rare wildlife; a place that is sure to enchant you.

Before the tour disbands and we head our separate ways, we will be flying back to Tokyo for a final night in the capital. Kyushu Elements offers an experience of Japan like no other and the bubbling waters, steaming volcanoes, ancient forests and warm welcome are sure to live long in the memory.



“Tom was brilliant and everything was organised extremely well. One of the tour highlights was Tom joining in the festival at Aso-ji-ja, helping carry a shrine”

H. Stevenson, 2010



What's included

- Full time services of your expert IJT Tour Leader
- 14 nights' accommodation
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- Meet & greet at Narita Airport & airport transfers
- Breakfast every day
- 7 evening meals
- Tokyo transport card
- Sumida River boat cruise in Tokyo
- Selected entrance fees in Mount Aso & Beppu
- Local Guide in Yakushima
- Private Bus in Mount Aso & Yakushima
- Luggage forwarding between Nagasaki & Aso, Kagoshima & Tokyo
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Ryokan & minshuku

All of our Small Group Tours include stays in Japanese-style inns, known as *ryokan* or *minshuku* and we also recommend this experience for anyone travelling independently on a Fully Tailored Package. A Japanese style stay is hugely enjoyable especially when combined with *onsen* hot spring baths and included evening meals prepared using the freshest local and seasonal produce. It is at these traditional inns where you will experience the ethos of Japanese hospitality known as *omotenashi* - anticipating the needs of the guest in advance.

Minshuku are small, family-run establishments where a warm welcome is all part of the service. Eating in the traditional Japanese style dining room emphasises the homely feel and hosts often go out of their way to make you feel part of the family. The Japanese-style rooms are simply decorated with sliding doors, wood-framed paper screens and calligraphy on hanging scrolls. You will sleep on thick futons laid out on soft *tatami* mat flooring. During the day the futons are put away and you can sit around a traditional *kotatsu* table to enjoy tea and Japanese sweets.

Deluxe *ryokan* have fully en suite rooms, often with an attached *rotenburo* outdoor hot spring bath for your own private use. These high class establishments employ the best chefs and pride themselves on their elaborate multi-course *kaiseki* meals often served by a *kimono*-clad maid in the comfort of your own room. Leave your shoes in the *genkan* entranceway and you will step into the world of Japanese hospitality, service and style.

On our Kyushu Elements itinerary you will spend several night's in Japanese-style accommodation, with fabulous evening meals included. As befits the 'land of fire', the inns also have their own *onsen* hot spring baths for you to sit back and relax in after a day seeing the sights.

Winter Highlights

14 nights

IJT: EXPLORER

TOKYO (2) – TSURUI (1) – RAUSU (1) – ABASHIRI (1) – SAPPORO (3) – KYOTO (3) – YUDANAKA (2) – TOKYO (1)

The IJT eXplorer 'Winter Highlights' tour is your chance to see a unique country in a very different light; to combine the urban hustle and bustle of modern Tokyo with bird watching and ocean ice-breaking in the snowy wilderness of Hokkaido; to explore the beautiful temples and shrines of Kyoto, free from the crowds of high season, before reaching the small village of Yudanaka, deep in the mountains of Nagano and home not only to skiers and hot spring aficionados, but also to the famous Japanese 'snow monkeys'.

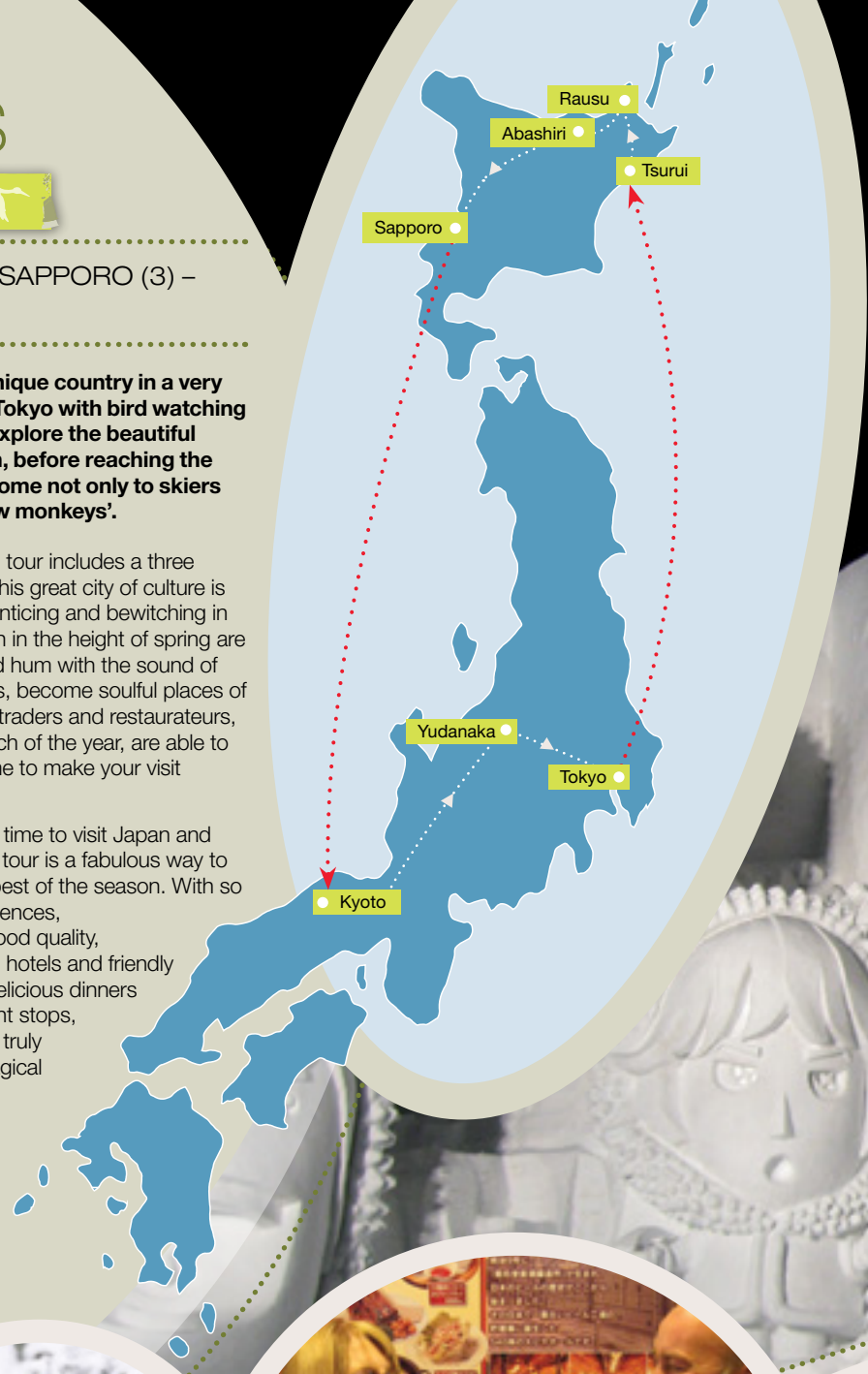
In the far north, the island of Hokkaido is a winter paradise. You will be visiting Sapporo during the famous Snow Festival where glistening ice sculptures turn central park into a magical winter wonderland. A fantastic tour for nature lovers, we will also take you out into Hokkaido's wide, snow-covered plains and across serene lakes.

Opportunities abound for seeing rare birdlife. In Tsurui you will visit the nesting grounds of the elegant red-crowned crane and have a unique opportunity to photograph their ritual mating dances. The tour also visits Rausu, a small fishing town on the remote Shiretoko Peninsula. Boarding a small ice-breaking boat, you will be sailing into the ice floes of the Sea of Okhotsk, where vast numbers of Steller's sea eagle gather on the ice; a spectacular and breathtaking sight.

With temperatures well below zero the perfect way to end your day will be a long soak in the outdoor *onsen* hot spring baths followed by a large pot of steaming *nabe* stew, before tucking up under a *kotatsu* heated table in your *ryokan* traditional inn. A flask of hot *sake* will top it all off!

Our Winter Highlights tour includes a three night stay in Kyoto. This great city of culture is perhaps at its most enticing and bewitching in winter. Temples which in the height of spring are full to overflowing and hum with the sound of the chattering crowds, become soulful places of quiet reflection; local traders and restaurateurs, so rushed during much of the year, are able to relax and take the time to make your visit truly special.

Winter is a wonderful time to visit Japan and our Winter Highlights tour is a fabulous way to experience the very best of the season. With so many fantastic experiences, accommodation in good quality, well located business hotels and friendly traditional inns and delicious dinners included at many night stops, Winter Highlights is a truly magical tour for a magical time of year



“ The guiding, as mentioned before, was superior to any expectation, and really added an extra special touch to the whole tour experience ”

S. Morris, 2009



What's included

- Full time services of your expert IJT Tour Leader
- 14 nights' accommodation
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- Meet & greet at Narita Airport & airport transfers
- Tokyo transport card
- Sumida River boat cruise in Tokyo
- Breakfast every day
- 7 evening meals
- Ice-breaker cruise in Rausu
- Private minibus transport & local guide in Tsurui
- Guided walking tour of the Gion Geisha district in Kyoto
- Entrance to the 'snow monkey' park in Yudanaka
- Luggage forwarding between Tsurui & Sapporo Kyoto & Tokyo
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Tancho red-crowned cranes

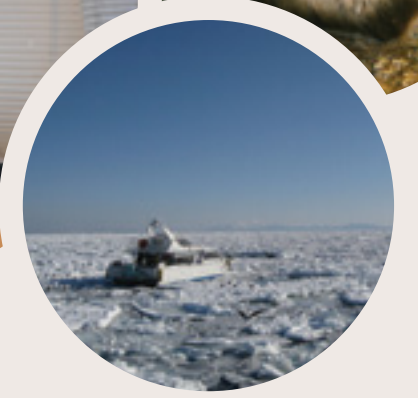
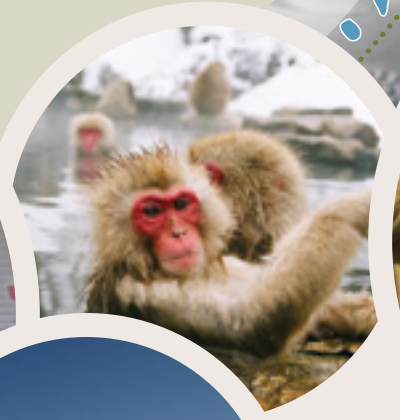
The red-crowned crane, *grus jaonensis* or *tancho* as it's known in Japanese is undoubtedly a beautiful bird; the largest and most distinctive species in the crane family. The average *tancho* stands 1.5 metres tall, weighs 8 kg and has a 2.5 metre wing span. Its body is snow-white while the black head has a brilliant white stripe crowned with a patch of red skin.

Tancho dance more than any other crane. In an elaborate mating ritual, the male birds throw their backs, beaks and wings skywards during a unison call to females who cry back in response. A coordinated dance follows involving bowing, jumping, running, throwing grass in the air and flapping wings; an amazing spectacle to watch.

Tancho have long been important to the Japanese. According to folklore they live for one thousand years making them a symbol of longevity. Because *tancho* mate for life, they also represent fidelity and are a popular symbol in wedding ceremonies. In 1952 the *tancho* was designated the national bird of Japan.

Devastated by World War Two and after the severe winter of 1950, the *tancho* population dropped to just 25 birds. After a careful conservation programme, world numbers now stand at 1,500, of which 900 are currently to be found in Hokkaido. However, *tancho* continue to be threatened by loss of habitat. Agricultural expansion, reed harvesting, deforestation, road building and poisoning from pesticides are just some of the ways that humans have impacted on the *tancho*'s natural environment.

The Winter Highlights tour includes a visit to the crane sanctuary at Tsurui which is at the forefront of the conservation efforts to increase *tancho* numbers



Fully Tailored Packages

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Fully Tailored Packages

Our Fully Tailored Packages are for those who wish to travel privately but with the knowledge that the itinerary has been designed by experts, accommodation carefully chosen and pre-booked, transport tickets organised and fully explained, and with back-up available every step of the way.

The itineraries shown on the following pages combine our favourite destinations and experiences to create a range of plans showcasing the diversity of Japan.

Each itinerary can be taken either as a Self-Guided Adventure where you will be travelling mainly independently but with a professional local guide in one or two key destinations, or as an Escorted Journey where we provide a guide to accompany you throughout.

Prices & booking

Because your holiday is one of the most important events of the year, we prefer to discuss your travel plans with you in depth. This way we can provide the most up-to-date information and the keenest prices. That's why you won't find any prices printed in our brochure.

For detailed day-by-day itineraries and example pricing see www.insidejapantours.com

Your style of holiday

Self-Guided Adventures

Take our itineraries as Self-Guided Adventures to travel independently but with local professional guides in key destinations, usually including Tokyo and Kyoto.

- ✓ Flexible, independent travel
- ✓ Expert advice, planning & on the ground support
- ✓ Detailed, personalised travel instructions
- ✓ Local professional guides in key destinations
- ✓ Options to suit all budgets and tastes

Your detailed Info-Pack contains full instructions for your trip, sightseeing advice and restaurant recommendations too. You also have the services of the English speaking staff in our Japan office just a telephone call away.

Transport between destinations is all included except where the extra flexibility of being able to make arrangements on the day is a benefit.

The itineraries can be tailored to suit exactly what you want to see. Take a look at our 'Experiences and Inspiration' section for lots of ideas.

Using our 12 years experience, we have selected a great range of accommodation from tradition Japanese *ryokan* to boutique Western-style hotels.

Self-Guided Adventures are a flexible and great value way discover Japan.

Escorted Journeys

If you like to stay in the finest accommodation and travel with a professional guide then our Escorted Journeys are for you.

- ✓ Travel with a professional guide
- ✓ Stay at the finest hotels and *ryokan*
- ✓ Reservations at the best restaurants
- ✓ Meet local artisans and experts
- ✓ Local transfers by private car
- ✓ Green Car first class rail travel

Your guide will meet you on arrival and be on hand throughout your trip providing expert insights into each destination. Whether it is reservations for the best restaurant in town or a tea ceremony in a Kyoto temple we will go the extra mile to make it happen.

For special destinations, experiences or interests we can arrange for you to meet local experts; perhaps that once-in-a-lifetime chance to talk in person with a renowned authority on the lives of the geisha, Japanese pottery or sumo wrestling.

In this style of travel, all transport is included meaning that you can sit back and enjoy your holiday without worrying about extra costs. You can rest assured that the logistics are all taken care off and you won't miss a thing.

Our 'Escorted Journeys' are a great way to get beneath the surface of Japan with expert guiding and unique insights creating the perfect experience.



The Golden Route

9 nights

TOKYO (3) – HAKONE (2) – KYOTO (3) – TOKYO (1)

The Golden Route showcases the very best of Japan combining the fascinating and contrasting cities of Tokyo and Kyoto with the beautiful countryside of Hakone National Park near Mount Fuji. With an optional excursion day from Kyoto enabling you to visit a destination of your choice at no extra cost, this flexible, classic Japan itinerary is ideal for the first time visitor.

Tokyo is a phenomenon; a city that rose like a phoenix from the ashes of World War Two to become an economic powerhouse, home to 35 million people carried along on a sweeping tide of energy from the suburbs to the offices, department stores and back again. Yet amidst all this activity sit tranquil gardens; havens of quiet away from the unceasing activity of the city. The sights, sounds, and tastes of the capital are yours to discover as you begin your adventure in Japan.

A world away from the modern capital, Hakone National Park in the foothills of Mount Fuji immerses you in the natural beauty of Japan. Famous for its bubbling volcanic hot springs and spectacular views of the surrounding mountains, you will follow in the footsteps of the first Shogun who rested his troops in Hakone in preparation for battle. Relaxing in the *onsen* after a hard day's sightseeing is an experience not to be missed.

After sweeping down the coast on the world famous *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train', you will glide into Kyoto, a modern city of over one million people. Despite its modern façade, this city offers a window to the majesty of old Imperial Japan. Here you will find the country's most famous temples, exquisite gardens and mysterious geisha; around every corner cultural treasures awaiting your discovery.

Kyoto is a great base from which to make a day trip to one of many destinations. Whilst the city of Hiroshima is a poignant reminder of the barbarities of war, it is also a powerful symbol of the resilience of the human spirit. Nearby

Miyajima Island, on the other hand, is a haven of tranquillity, where you can survey stunning views of the Inland Sea before watching the sun set behind the floating *torii* gate of Itsukushima shrine – one of the most iconic images of Japan.

Closer to Kyoto lies Nara, home of the giant Buddha at Todai-ji Temple as well as a lively resident population of sacred deer. Alternatively, you could spend an afternoon visiting Uji. Here, in the home of Japanese green tea, you will find Byodo-in Temple, a World Heritage site which appears on the 10 yen coin.

Whether you travel for the sweet smelling cherry blossoms of spring, the buzzing festivals of the hot summer, the blazing reds, oranges and golds of autumn, or the crisp clear skies of winter, the Golden Route is a trip to savour.



“ We were able to relax in the knowledge that you had taken care of everything - top class and really, really impressed - thank you ”

A. Vowles, 2012



The Shinkansen

A visit to Japan is not complete without a ride on the world famous *Shinkansen*, which literally and rather prosaically means “new trunk line”. In English it is of course known more romantically as the ‘Bullet Train’. What not many people know (including the Japanese) is that this derives from the original code name, *dangan rensha* – literally “bullet train” - which was used for the first development project in the early 1940s.

The first *Shinkansen* line opened on 1st October 1964 just ten days before the start of the Olympics and cut the journey time between the host city Tokyo and Japan's second city Osaka from six hours to just four. Today the fastest Nozomi *Shinkansen* covers the 552 kilometres in two hours and 35 minutes at a top operational speed of 300 kilometres per hour.

Impressive statistics surround the *Shinkansen*: the double-decker Max Yamabiko train on the line north of Tokyo carries an impressive 1,634 passengers, while during peak holiday periods over 1 million passengers are carried each day over the *Shinkansen* network. From Tokyo 15 departures an hour speed west towards Osaka.

Today's *Shinkansen* trains are sleek, comfortable and spacious making for a relaxing and pleasurable journey. As with all trains in Japan you can rely on precision punctuality, helpful and friendly service from station staff and impeccable levels of cleanliness. And with announcements on the *Shinkansen* made in both English and Japanese, you never have to worry about missing your stop.

As well as being reliably on time, *Shinkansen* trains are also exceptionally user-friendly. The trains effortlessly glide into the station and slowly pull up (with perfect precision) alongside markers on the station platforms indicating the carriage numbers so passengers know exactly where to wait to board the train. Once seated it is even possible for groups of 4 or more people to rotate the seats to face each other!

The Golden Route itinerary includes a 7 day Japan Rail Pass and you will be making several rides on the *Shinkansen* including travelling on the original Tokaido *Shinkansen* line down the east coast between Tokyo and Kyoto. On clear days, keep your eyes peeled for the stunning views of Mount Fuji which can be seen as you speed towards Shizuoka. Journeys across the *Shinkansen* network can be found on most of our Fully Tailored Packages and Small Group Tours.

Package Highlights

- Views of Mount Fuji from Hakone National Park
- Bright lights of Tokyo's Shinjuku district
- Kyoto's temples and gardens
- Optional hot springs *ryokan* stay
- Ride the superfast *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train'

Best of Japan

14 nights

TOKYO (3) – HAKONE (2) – KYOTO (3) – MIYAJIMA & HIROSHIMA (2) – OSAKA (1) – TAKAYAMA (2) – TOKYO (1)

This two week itinerary features the cream of Japan's classic sights. Japan truly is a land of contrasts and this holiday takes you from vibrant modern cities, to charming market towns, up into mountainous rural countryside and through the varied coastal regions.

Your journey starts and ends in Tokyo, an immense, futuristic city, but one made up of a host of distinct neighbourhoods each with a unique character. With a wonderful abundance of street level detail, Tokyo is a city which never fails to impress and amaze.

Although Tokyo has only been the capital since 1868, when the Emperor Meiji left Kyoto to move to the true centre of political power, the city's history stretches back through the era of the Shoguns and beyond. The city's oldest temple, Senso-ji, located in the Asakusa district, dates back to the eighth century and throughout Tokyo you will experience the layers of tradition that have created the modern city.

The perfect counterpoint to Tokyo is Kyoto, capital of Japan for over one thousand years and home to Japan's traditional arts, along with many of the country's finest temples, shrines and gardens, including a remarkable 17 World Heritage sites. Just down the railway tracks you will also have the chance to enjoy some of Japan's best food and drink in Kyoto's lively neighbour, Osaka. Heading down the western seaboard, you will reach Hiroshima, a city which manages to simultaneously recognise its past whilst always striving to create a better world for future generations.

Carefully woven between your urban stays are visits to more rural parts of Japan. In the shadow of Mount Fuji, you will experience the steaming, volcanic hot springs and natural beauty of Hakone National Park. High in the Japanese Alps, in the well preserved historic quarter of Takayama, you will find traditional crafts, sake breweries and

morning markets. Be sure to try the local speciality beef and *miso* for which the town is renowned.

Finally, beautiful coastal scenery on sacred Miyajima Island awaits. And if you still want to see more, why not take a day trip from Tokyo to the ornate temples and shrines of Nikko or visit Nara's Great Buddha statue and resident deer population, just a short hop from Kyoto.

Japan is all about experiences and this trip is packed with them; riding the famous *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train' and enjoying traditional Japanese hospitality at a *ryokan* are musts for any Japan trip. Kyoto offers the chance to glimpse a geisha scurrying between tea houses and Tokyo's famous working fish market, Tsukiji, makes for an interesting visit. Of course, you will also have endless opportunities to sample the local Japanese cuisine, explore the fantastic array of shopping and perhaps even test your vocal cords at *karaoke*!

With two weeks to see the best of Japan's classic sights you can't beat this fantastic itinerary. Packed with contrast, you're sure to get an insight into every aspect of Japan and its culture: Past, present and future.



“First class service. Really helpful. Took all the stress out of travelling and organising. Really got the most from our trip. Will go again”

G. Atfield, 2012

Package Highlights

- World Heritage temples and shrines of Kyoto
- The floating *torii* gate on Miyajima Island
- Traditional *ryokan* stay in Takayama
- Tokyo's historic Asakusa district
- Hot spring baths in Hakone

Miyajima Island

Our Best of Japan itinerary includes a two night stay on the beautiful and sacred island of Miyajima. Sitting just across the water from Hiroshima City, it is one of the most scenic places in all Japan.

Miyajima literally means 'shrine island' and historically, commoners were not allowed to set foot here. Fortunately this is not the case today! The focus of the island and its main attraction is Itsukushima Shrine. Originally constructed in 1168 its distinctive red *torii* gate stands out in the bay, appearing to float magically on the water at high tide.

Miyajima is a popular place to visit during the day and with only a handful of hotels and *ryokan* on the island, most visitors head home by late afternoon. This creates a wonderful after-dark atmosphere for the lucky few who stay overnight. A stroll down to the shrine and the illuminated *torii* gate in the early evening is essential.

Away from the shrine, there are some excellent walking routes on Miyajima, including the hike (or cable car ride) to the summit of Mount Misen, the small mountain at the centre of the island. Here you can take in a stunning panoramic view of the surrounding Inland Sea and perhaps catch a glimpse of the resident monkey population. There are also a number of smaller shrines and temples on the island as well as a small but bustling shopping street, full of local crafts.

Hiroshima with its Peace Park and A-Bomb Museum is an easy day trip away by boat and tram. Best of all though is to do as little as possible; Miyajima is a wonderful place for a bit of rest and relaxation during the Best of Japan trip. So take your time and let the magic of this island enchant you.



Traditional Japan

14 nights

TOKYO (3) – KANAZAWA (2) – SHIRAKAWAGO (1) – TAKAYAMA (2) – MATSUMOTO (1) – TSUMAGO (1) – KYOTO (3) – TOKYO (1)

Leave the bright lights and fast living behind and immerse yourself in a more traditional and laidback side of Japan. Whilst also including Japan's best known cities, Tokyo and Kyoto, this trip will take you away from the usual tourist haunts and show you the rugged beauty of the mountains, charming rural towns and bustling provincial cities.

After three nights in Tokyo's most traditional district of Asakusa, you will swap skyscrapers for mountain vistas and escape the city crowds for rural villages and family-run inns. The preserved villages, World Heritage sites, mountain scenery and folk museums will introduce you to a more traditional, quieter face of Japan. Along the way you will experience fantastic gardens, explore samurai residences and have the opportunity to shop for local arts and crafts.

Shirakawago and Tsumago are two rural villages, the latter an early post town on the Nakasendo route, the former a collection of thatched farm houses deep in the countryside. Both have leisurely walks along trails and offer tiny Japanese-style inns with a genuine warm welcome and home cooked food. Travelling by local train, bus and even on foot, discovering the tiny towns tucked into valleys and wandering along misty pilgrim routes will reveal a side of Japan so often lost to the busyness of modern life.

On Day 11 your journey will bring you to the ancient capital of Kyoto, a city bursting with culture, history and art; a chance to experience Japan's religious and cultural traditions. An evening visit to the famous entertainment district of Gion brings with it the chance to glimpse a geisha rushing between appointments – a fleeting moment that will live long in the memory.

The 'Black Crow' castle in Matsumoto, so called because of its unusual black painted walls, is one of best surviving examples of an original castle construction, whilst the beautifully manicured Kenrokuen gardens in Kanazawa are rated

amongst Japan's top three. Takayama's morning market and preserved heritage streets on the other hand, give you the chance to see a little bit of small town life.

For a cultural experience in a beautiful setting, we will include a visit to the Tondaya *machiya* town house in Kyoto. Here you can experience tea ceremony, try on a *kimono* and enjoy a guided tour of this historic old town house.

Your three nights in Kyoto provides the opportunity to make a day trip with possible destinations including the rejuvenated city of Hiroshima and the emotional Peace Memorial Park; Nara, the ancient capital of Japan and home to the world's largest wooden structure, Todai-ji Temple; and the bright lights of modern Osaka, with contemporary culture and some of the country's finest cuisine.

Connecting the past with the present, Traditional Japan will captivate you with the hidden secrets of this ancient land.



“We found the directions in the info pack a marvel of clarity and completeness and were highly impressed by the level of detail at every point of your service.”

M. Stein, 2012



Package Highlights

- Traditional thatched cottage stay in Shirakawago
- Walking the Nakasendo way
- Matsumoto's 'Black Crow' castle
- Kenrokuen gardens in Kanazawa
- Cultural experiences at Tondaya in Kyoto

Traditional villages

Despite the rapid modernisation of Japan the past still lives on in a number of old villages in mountainous countryside.

Our Traditional Japan itinerary includes stays in the historic villages of Shirakawago and Tsumago. Both destinations offer some lovely walks and scenic views with accommodation in *minshuku*, family-run inns. Delicious, homemade meals are also included.

Shirakawago is famous for its thatched roof farm houses and is a designated UNESCO World Heritage destination. Re-thatched periodically by community groups, the wooden houses, known as *gassho-zukuri*, literally meaning 'praying-hands', are named after their distinctive sloping roofs. The valley itself has some beautiful vistas to enjoy whether verdant green in summer or a deep blanket of snow in the winter months.

The village of Tsumago is an important link on the ancient Nakasendo trading route. You can follow in the footsteps of samurai along the easy walking trail leading to the neighbouring hamlet of Magome. Much of the surrounding farmland is still worked by traditional means and local produce is a feature of meals served here.

Their value now recognised, these heritage destinations are, of late, much better cared for. Improved transport links have made them more accessible but still remote enough to remain very special indeed.



World Heritage

15 nights

TOKYO (3) – NIKKO (2) – HIRAIZUMI (1) – HIROSAKI (2) – KYOTO (3) – MOUNT KOYA (2) – NARA (1) – TOKYO (1)

Japan is rightly proud of its unique sights both natural and man-made, many of which have been recognised by UNESCO as being of 'outstanding value to humanity'. This journey combines 10 World Heritage sites, including ancient pilgrimage routes, beautiful shrines and temples and mountain-top settlements, to create a comprehensive experience of Japan's long history and beautiful natural countryside.

You will begin in Tokyo, the neon-lit beating heart of Japan, home of the 200mph 'Bullet Train' and a city racing headlong into the future. You'll then speed north on one of Japan's newest *Shinkansen* lines to the ancient temples in Hiraizumi, and the stunning Shirakami mountain range, perched on the top of Japan's main island and an easy day trip from the attractive town of Hirosaki.

No World Heritage trip to Japan would be complete without a trip to Kyoto, Japan's cultural heart. This is a city where the legacy of the past is all around. Temples and shrines lie hidden down romantic backstreets and sliding wooden doors open to reveal exquisite gardens.

Whilst in Kyoto, we highly recommend taking a day trip to Hiroshima and Miyajima. Hiroshima is a city which has blossomed in the sixty years since the devastation caused by the atomic bomb. The skeleton of the A-bomb dome stands as a poignant reminder of the horrors of war. Just off the coast on Miyajima, the tranquil 'floating' torii gate of Itsukushima Shrine is a place of quiet reflection and timeless beauty.

In the mountains of Tochigi you will find the town of Nikko; set in stunning natural surroundings, the sacred shrines and temples of the World Heritage Toshogu complex are a world apart. The retreat of Mount Koya in the Kii Mountains of Wakayama Prefecture gives a chance to stay in atmospheric Buddhist temple lodgings. Here you'll participate in a timeless, religious way of life that has spanned the centuries.

Your odyssey also takes in Nara, a capital city even older than Kyoto and famed for the giant Todai-ji Temple and statue of Buddha as well as its deer park.

Shirakami-Sanchi is one of Japan's four natural history UNESCO World Heritage sites. Situated in the mountains of northern Honshu and comprised of a maze of steep-sided hills and summits, this area includes one of the last natural beech forests left in East Asia. The 87 bird species currently identified from the area include black woodpecker, Japanese serow and golden eagles. Whether you take the easy hike around the Anmon falls or a more challenging climbing course to the mountain summit of Shirakami-dake this beautiful national park will take your breath away.

The World Heritage itinerary emphasises the modern and historic diversity of Japan. The trip will enable you to experience the places that have shaped the Japanese nation, exploring the history and culture of this ancient land alongside its spectacular natural beauty.



“The Tokyo guide was frankly brilliant, a full 9 to 5 tour that showed us more than we could have done in 2-3 days on our own”

S. Wardle, 2012

Package Highlights

- Temple lodgings stay in Mount Koya
- The Shirakami Sanchi mountain range
- Nara's giant Buddha
- Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu's mausoleum in Nikko
- Hiraizumi's Golden Temple

Mount Koya & Kobo Daishi

Located on a mountain top plateau deep in the countryside of Wakayama prefecture, Koya-san is considered to be the spiritual home of Shingon Esoteric Buddhism. In 806, at the age of 32, the non-conformist priest Kukai (later known as Kobo Daishi) returned from his religious training in China, charged by his master Hui-Kuo to "promulgate this teaching in order to increase the happiness of the people and promote peace in the land".

Kukai first came to Mount Koya in 816 and received permission from the Emperor Saga to establish an isolated retreat from worldly affairs. Later in 823, Kukai was also entrusted with To-ji Temple in Kyoto where today the 57 metre, five story pagoda is Japan's highest wooden tower.

The circumstances surrounding Kukai's death are the stuff of legend. In 835, having suffered with a long illness, Kukai retreated to meditate, taking neither food nor water. He died a short time afterwards and in accordance with his will, was entombed on the eastern peak of Mount Koya where today you will find the huge Okuno-in cemetery. Rumour spread that his body failed to decay giving rise to the legend that he had not died but was in an eternal meditative state. To this day the monks of Mount Koya bring meals to Kobo Daishi and his clothes are changed daily.

During the World Heritage trip you will follow in the footsteps of Kukai and over one thousand years of history with a temple stay at Mount Koya – the perfect place to escape the worries of the modern world and perhaps see a glimpse of enlightenment!

“To be enlightened is simply to understand fully the true nature of your own mind. Understanding fully the true nature of your own mind is equal to understanding everything”

Extract from Dainichi-kyo

Secrets of Shikoku

14 nights

KYOTO (3) – TAKAMATSU (1) – KOTOHIRA (1) – MATSUYAMA (1) –
EKAWASAKI (2) – KOCHI (2) – IYA VALLEY (1) – TOKUSHIMA (1) – OSAKA (2)

Shikoku is the land that Japan forgot. A world apart from the frenetic highways, crowded pavements and neon-spangled skyscrapers of the big cities, Shikoku boasts stunning natural beauty: hidden valleys, untouched rivers, mountains and jagged coastlines as well as a unique rural culture.

Venturing off the beaten track, you'll experience a side of the country those who simply skim over the classic sites in a week will never see. In Kotohira, you'll follow the pilgrims skywards as you climb the steep steps of Kompirasan, Shikoku's most famous shrine, while in Matsuyama you can soak in the hot spring waters of historic Dogo Onsen, Japan's oldest.

From your base in Ekawasaki, cycling along or canoeing down the Shimantogawa, Japan's last free flowing river, you will truly feel at the heart of rural Japan. Inland, head into the Iya Valley where hidden gorges and traditional vine bridges await exploration.

Shikoku is home to many original samurai castles ensuring that the days of the feudal warlords who ruled this island never feel far away. There's a chance to see wildlife too; from May to October whale watching boats run regularly from Kochi; an eco-friendly alternative to Japan's usual whale related headlines.

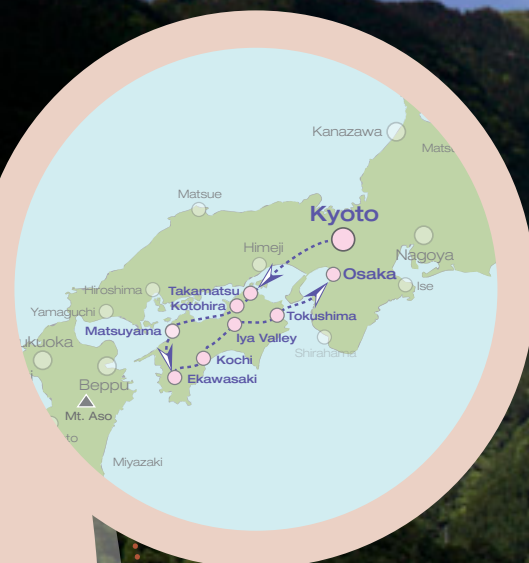
The itinerary also includes a day trip from Takamatsu across the Inland Sea to unique Naoshima. The tiny island has a global reputation due to its large collection of contemporary art galleries, exhibits and outdoor installations; a *tour de force* of architectural expression integrating art and the natural environment.

In Tokushima you will stay at an atmospheric Buddhist temple, number nineteen on the famous eighty-eight temple circuit, with dinners of traditional vegetarian cuisine.

We always look to include a range of other evening meals to make your trip a culinary treat of locally sourced, traditional specialities. Stays at small family-run inns will give you fantastic opportunities to meet Japanese people, while making sure your trip benefits the local community.

Your adventure starts in Kyoto, with its famous temples, gardens and geisha and ends in vibrant Osaka; bookending a trip that really showcases the contrasts that Japan has to offer.

Secrets of Shikoku is a fascinating voyage of discovery that will reward you for journeying into the rural heart of hidden Japan.



“ Everything about our trip was great. Our accommodation was excellent, the trip was well planned, the information provided was step by step and easy to follow and the guides went above and beyond duty ”

L. Weston, 2007



Package Highlights

- Kotohira's mountain top temple
- Vine bridges of the Iya Valley
- Buddhist temple stay in Tokushima
- Soaking in Matsuyama's Dogo hot springs
- Exploring the Shimanto-gawa river

Tastes of Shikoku

The four provinces of Shikoku each have their own deep-rooted food culture and eating here is all about sampling local food in local settings. A home cooked feast comes as part of any *minshuku* stay, *shojin-ryori* vegetarian meals are served by monks at the temple lodgings or a simple bowl of noodles makes for a great lunch at a local restaurant.

Particularly famous are Shikoku's noodle dishes such as thick and lightly seasoned Iya soba (buckwheat) noodles, or perhaps you can try the stronger flavoured Tokushima *ramen*. As you might expect from an island, there is an abundance of delicious, fresh seafood. From autumn to spring, the island's *kaki*, fresh grilled oysters, are a must. While enjoying the atmosphere of a traditional, family run *minshuku* in southern Shikoku, you can expect to be served freshly caught sea bream. *Katsuo no tataki*, a dish of Japanese tuna fish held over a fire and seared on the outside is found in restaurants all over the prefecture and makes for a delicious summer dinner.

Food lovers will enjoy exploring Kochi City's market on a Sunday where come rain or shine, Kochi's local farmers and fisherman will be out displaying their produce. Alternatively, try the Hirome market where you can take in the atmosphere sitting along the communal wooden tables with the locals eating and drinking into the night. *Sake* enthusiasts may be interested in the 88 *sake* brewery pilgrimage while *gokkun-umajimura*, a non-alcoholic drink made from the citrus fruit, *yuzu*, has an interesting sweet and sour taste. Ehime's sweet *mikan* mandarin oranges make the perfect ending to any Shikoku meal.



Japan Arts Trail

15 nights

TOKYO (3) – HAKONE (2) – NAGOYA (2) – KYOTO (3) – MATSUE (2) – NAOSHIMA (2) – TOKYO (1)

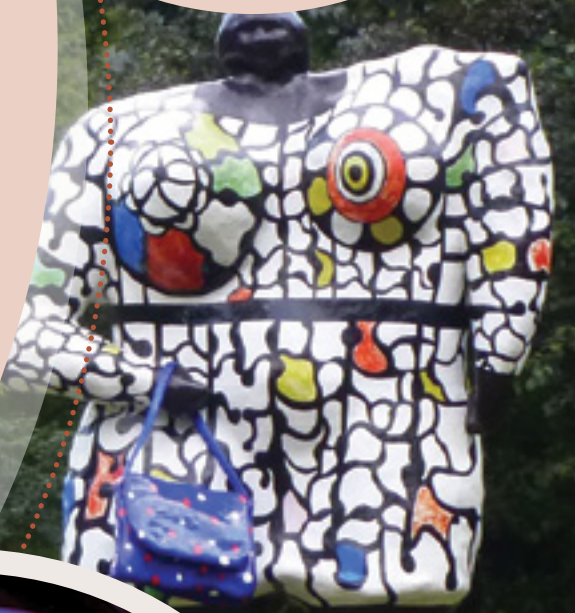
Although it may at first seem unlikely, for those with a passion for the visual arts Japan is one of the best countries in which to travel. World class museums proliferate across the country, situated not only in the metropolitan centres such as Tokyo and Nagoya but also in rural areas where art has both added a unique vibrancy and excitement to otherwise forgotten places and enhanced traditional tourist destinations.

Our 15 night Arts Trail gives you the opportunity to explore some of the best museums and art experiences available, travelling from Tokyo in the east to Matsue on the Japan Sea coast before returning to the capital. Through visits to galleries and museums large and small, you will see Japan through the eyes of its artists whilst exploring each destination will allow you to see how changes to Japan have shaped their work and vision of the country.

Tokyo encapsulates the diversity of the Japanese art world and your exploration will begin with three nights in the capital city. Japan has for centuries placed a very high value on the visual aesthetic and a visit to the National Museum in Ueno Park is a journey through the ages of Japanese art. The Ukiyoe collection is particularly noteworthy. Pick up the Tokyo Art Map and continue your journey with visits to the Mori Gallery, located 240 metres above the city in the Mori Tower at Roppongi Hills where the constantly changing exhibitions showcase some of the boldest work from both Japanese and non-Japanese contemporary artists. The Museum of Contemporary Art will then take you through the 20th century, with vivid expressions of the dramatic changes undergone by Japanese society during this era. Of course, don't forget to visit the classic sites; Senso-ji Temple in Asakusa, Meiji Shrine in Harajuku and a trip to the Ginza are all a must.

Travel on to Hakone by *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train'. Famous for its hot spring *onsen* baths, sulphurous volcanic 'hells' and spectacular views of Mount Fuji, the stand-out museum is the Chokoku no Mori outdoor sculpture park where works of Henry Moore, Anthony Gormley and many others are set against a lush green mountain backdrop. Take the chance to stay in a traditional *ryokan*, or perhaps in the historic Fujiya, one of Japan's first Western-style hotels.

On Day 11 when you reach Matsue, the Adachi Museum also incorporates the natural world into your experience with its beautiful collection of Japanese modern art framed by an award winning landscape garden. Here, in Japan's city of water, you can also take a sunset cruise out into Lake Shinji and visit one of Japan's best preserved original *samurai* castles.



Yodogawa Technique "Black Porgy in Uno"
Photo: Osamu Nakamura



Pirolotti Rist "Your First Colour (Solution In My Head) Solution In My Stomach" Photo: Osamu Nakamura

Package Highlights

- Tokyo's Mori Gallery and Contemporary Museum of Art
- Chokoku no Mori sculpture park in Hakone
- The best of Tokugawa Art in Nagoya
- Adachi Museum & award-winning gardens in Matsue
- Monet's Water Lillies on Naoshima
- Kyoto's World Heritage shrines and temples

On Days 6 and 7, Nagoya's Tokugawa Art Museum will introduce you to the finest arts of the Shogun Era (1603-1868) whereas the Nagoya/Boston Museum of Fine Art, presents some of the best works from the collection of its sister museum, the MFA in Boston – a chance to immerse yourself in a very different artistic lineage. An interesting half day trip to Toyota City's Municipal Art Museum, constructed by Yoshio Taniguchi, (who also renovated MoMA in New York City) is rewarded with works by Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Edvard Munch amongst those of modern Japanese artists. Add to this Nagoya's fantastic cuisine with *miso katsu* fried pork, *kushimen* noodles and the irresistible *tebasaki* chicken wings and you have all the ingredients for a fabulously enjoyable stay.

Perhaps the highlight of your art exploration of Japan comes towards the end. Naoshima, a tiny island in the Inland Sea, has over the past 10 years acquired a world-wide reputation for its innovative approach to art. Your two night stay will afford the opportunity to explore all the museums and Art House projects. Our favourite is the Chichu, where Monet's Water Lillies will take your breath away before James Turrell's ethereal works using light create a surreal immersive experience. Choose from simple Japanese *minshuku* accommodation or the unique, Tadao Ando designed Benesse House hotel.

No Japan arts itinerary would be complete without a stay in Kyoto and during your three days in the city you can visit the highlight temples and shrines as well as make visits to artisan workshops, small galleries and sample Kyoto's own culinary art, *kaiseki* cuisine.

With the option to include expert guides at key destinations, choose accommodation to suit your taste and budget and tailor the itinerary exactly to meet your interests, your Arts Trail tour of Japan is guaranteed to be a hugely enjoyable journey and will satisfy even the most voracious of art lovers.

This itinerary highlights some of our favourite destinations but be sure to let us know what your interests are. Your Arts Trail can take in the museums, galleries and destinations that really capture your imagination.

If photography is more your interest let us know and we will make sure you get to see some of the best works with the option to meet local professionals.

For ceramicists Japan has a long and distinguished history. Travel to key destinations, visit kilns and meet local artisans.

Pilgrim's Path – Mount Koya and the Kumano Way

14 nights

TOKYO (3) – ISE (2) – YUNOMINE (2) – CHIKATSUYU-OJI (1) –
MOUNT KOYA (2) – KYOTO (3) – TOKYO (1)

Japan has a long and rich tradition of pilgrimage. Since ancient times pilgrims young and old, rich and poor have followed sacred routes through forests, over mountains and across rivers to find peace, enlightenment and spiritual rebirth. Our Pilgrim's Paths itinerary showcases a selection of the stunning natural environments in which these routes are found, whilst juxtaposing this with two of the nation's most iconic cities.

Your journey starts and ends in Tokyo, Japan's remarkable capital city. Here a visit to bustling Senso-ji Temple, where the smell of incense permeates the air and young and old alike queue to purchase their fortunes, gives a glimpse of a bygone Tokyo seemingly lost today in the steel, glass and neon of a skyscraper world. Contrast this with the über-modern, energy filled districts of Shinjuku and Shibuya where the pace never slows, and new and ever crazier trends spring forth.

A ride on Japan's *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train' followed by a scenic local train ride hugging the coastline brings you to the pilgrimage Mecca of Ise. Millions of Japanese come here every year to see the outer and inner shrines, the latter dedicated to Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess. Stroll through the extensive grounds before a traditional lunch in the restored old quarters.

A stay in Yunomine begins your exploration of the Kumano Kodo, a designated World Heritage route. This tiny village is a hidden gem tucked in a steep, wooded valley and home to one of the most unique onsen in Japan. We recommend an expert guide for a day to provide a local's introduction and lead you on a choice of nearby hiking trails. For the journey on to Chikatsuyu-oji you can choose to follow in the steps of the *junreisha* (pilgrims) and take on the challenging 24km hike through stunning scenery or alternatively, local buses can do some of the work for you!

A full day traversing the valleys and peaks on foot and by bus and you arrive at the mountain top sacred site of Koya-san. Here you'll stay in traditional temple lodgings, surrounded by thick forests and serving meals of *shoujin ryori*, traditional Buddhist cuisine. The early morning meditation ceremony is a unique experience and we also recommend a twilight walk through the vast Okunoin Cemetery.

Before returning to Tokyo by *Shinkansen*, the penultimate stop on your pilgrimage across Japan will be a true highlight: Kyoto. Here you will find the very best in arts, crafts, gardens and cuisine, as well as 17 World Heritage sites.

Historic cities, ancient forest paths, the most venerated of Shinto shrines and healing volcanic hot spring waters make this a very special spiritual journey through Japan.



“Everything about our trip, from planning to the actual trip was great. Every detail was addressed, our itinerary was perfect, and we want to go back.”

P. Leib, 2012



Package Highlights

- Hiking the Kumano Kodo
- Temple lodgings stay at Mount Koya
- Hot springs at Yunomine Onsen
- Temples and gardens in Kyoto
- The Grand Shrines of Ise

The Kumano Kodo

The World Heritage Kumano Kodo is a collection of ancient pilgrim trails providing access to the sacred Sanzan shrines of the Kii Peninsula: Hongu Taisha, Hayatama Taisha and Nachi Taisha. The well kept trails also connect the important shrines of Ise and the venerated mountain top temple complex of Mount Koya.

These routes have been in use for over 1,000 years but reached a zenith of popularity in the 12th century when thousands of pilgrims a year from Kyoto, Osaka and beyond tested their religious beliefs by making the then arduous journey. The whole area is highly volcanic and villages soon developed their hot springs to welcome pilgrims with soothing baths and local cuisine.

Today five main paths remain and although well known in Japan and now easy to access thanks to good transport links, they are free from crowds and make for a wonderfully peaceful escape.

The well marked paths of the Kumano Kodo offer one day or half day walks as well as more challenging multi-day hikes through verdant forests, past beautiful rivers and over stunning mountain passes.



Island Hopping

12 nights

TOKYO (2) – ISHIGAKI (3) – TAKETOMI (1) – IRIOMOTE (2) – NAHA (1) – ZAMAMI (2) – TOKYO (1)

Offering the perfect romantic getaway or a unique alternative to the classic mainland cultural tour, our Island Hopping itinerary discovers a Japan over 1500km from the capital city in the subtropical islands of Okinawa. This is the chance to get away from it all; discover beautiful white sand beaches, translucent warm blue sea, rare wildlife, jungle adventure and a rich culture all of its own.

The Island Hopping itinerary begins and ends in the Tokyo metropolis providing a striking introduction and finale to contrast with the rest of your Japanese island adventure. Flying more than 2000 km south of the capital, Ishigaki is the gateway to the Yaeyama subtropical island chain. With palm tree lined sandy beaches to relax on, a mountainous interior to discover and diverse coral and marine life including huge majestic Manta to snorkel and dive with, Ishigaki is a world away from the distant capital city.

20 minutes on a ferry transports you back in time as you visit the tiny island of Taketomi where the main transport across the island's five square kilometres is water-buffalo drawn cart. Preserved traditional Ryukyu-style villas are dotted across the island with distinctive red tile roofs, garden walls made of coral and *Shisa* lion-like statues protecting from evil spirits – a common sight across the Okinawa region.

The largest but least developed island in the chain is Iriomote. Covered in wild jungle and mangrove forests, the island boasts a rich diversity of flora and fauna including the Iriomote Lynx, an extremely rare (and rarely seen) mountain cat. Easy kayaking up the rivers cutting into the dense jungle and trekking to the top of waterfalls for views across this stunning national park are great ways to appreciate this subtropical gem. Less strenuous options include taking a water buffalo ride across a shallow sand bar to visit Yubu Island's botanical gardens, whereas Fanauki, one of the most remote villages in the country, offers the chance to soak in Japan's most westerly hot spring bath overlooking the jungle.

Your stop in Naha, the capital of Okinawa main island, brings you back to the modern world. Formally the centre of the ancient Ryukyu Kingdom, Naha is now a city of 700,000 people with bustling markets, restaurants and a lively night life. We recommend a visit to see the impressive Chinese influenced architecture of Shuri Castle and perhaps even a cooking class learning to prepare Okinawa's ubiquitous goya, a bitter green gourd.

Before you return to Tokyo you'll make a final island stop on Zamami. Part of the 22 island Kerama Island chain, Zamami is the quintessential tropical paradise known for its stunning beaches, warm waters and laid back life. The waters around the island provide world class snorkelling with visibility of 30 metres. Humpback Whales return to these waters between January and April every year providing an impressive natural spectacle. With a cold glass of Okinawa's *awamori* in hand and a plate of fresh *sashimi* you couldn't ask for a better end to your island hopping trip.



“Very well organised tour from a company who knows the country well & was able to fulfil all our expectations. We had a great holiday and could not recommend them highly enough”

D. Hood, 2012



The Magnificent Ryukyu Kingdom

Japan is made up of more than 6,000 islands with the Okinawa islands being the most southern group. Closer to Taiwan and mainland China than Tokyo, the former sovereign state of the Ryukyu Kingdom owes much of its cultural heritage to mainland Asian influences. The 17th century, however, saw the powerful Shimazu Clan from Kagoshima take control of the islands and of course in more recent times the aftermath of the Second World War saw a period of American control. This unique history all contributes to a rich and diverse culture with influences spanning the world.

Wherever you head amongst the Okinawa islands you will see the rich fabric of Ryukyu culture woven into your surroundings. The impressive Shuri Castle in Naha stands out as the symbol of Ryukyu, architecturally very different to that of castles on mainland Japan with its bold vermilion colour. Across the islands you will find shrines and temples with the same classic sloping red tiled roofs on display at Shuri.

One of the symbols of Ryukyu life is the *Shisa* found throughout the islands. These lion like statues are found in front of shrines, on roofs and on garden walls protecting from evil spirits. The *Shisa* originates from the Chinese guardian lion 'fu' dog but is quintessentially Okinawan. The *sanshin* is another symbol of the islands; a three stringed version of the Japanese *shamisen*. This banjo-like instrument can be heard throughout the islands and adds to the laid back atmosphere you will meet everywhere you go.

The Japanese Okinawa islands have a strong identity of their own which only adds to the atmosphere and experiences to be had in the old Ryukyu Kingdom with its white sandy beaches, clear blue seas, dense jungle, rare wildlife and wonderful people.

Package Highlights

- Beautiful sandy beaches
- Riding water buffalo
- Canoe trips amongst the mangroves
- World class snorkelling and diving
- Exploring Japan's wilderness island of Iriomote

Northern Highlights

14 nights

TOKYO (3) – NIKKO (2) – SENDAI (2) – NYUTO ONSEN (2) – KAKUNODATE (1) – MOUNT HAGURO (1) – SADO ISLAND (2) – TOKYO (1)

Head north from Tokyo and you are already moving away from the crowds. Tohoku (the northern half of Japan's main island) is considered off the beaten track even to the Japanese; something of a land that time forgot, where the pace of life is slower, the culture richer and the hospitality warmer. Our Northern Highlights itinerary takes you deep into the mountains and along the wild coasts of this beautiful part of Japan, introducing you to a side of the country that most foreign visitors never get to see.

Your journey starts and ends in Tokyo. You will begin in the traditional Asakusa district with its echoes of pre-War Tokyo, before you head off on your northern adventure. From the ornate temples and shrines of Nikko National Park, to the rugged seascapes and unique culture of remote Sado Island; an atmospheric overnight stay at a pilgrims' lodgings in Haguro-san to the rustic ramshackle buildings of Nyuto Onsen with its tiny onsen villages high in the mountains of Akita prefecture. Northern Highlights will transport you to a world far away from the sleek modernity of the cities.

The past is very much present in Tohoku and Japanese history comes alive as you tour Kakunodate's preserved samurai district and explore the temples atop Mt. Haguro. Though mainly rural, this trip also includes city stays in Sendai and Tokyo, enabling you to experience the contrasts of Japan and enjoy a few fun nights out during your journey. Possible day trips from Sendai include the temple complex of Yamadera clinging to the side of a cliff, or a visit to Matsushima Bay, a collection of scenic islands considered to be one of the top three views of Japan.

Japan effortlessly blends the traditional with the modern and by speeding between sights on the famous *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train' you will experience this first hand. We have also included car hire for the most rural destinations, allowing you to get out on the open road and explore even the most hidden parts of Tohoku. Accommodation will include several nights of traditional Japanese-style inns, where you can experience some of the best hearty Tohoku cuisine.

When the famous *haiku* poet Matsuo Basho set off on his seventeenth century pilgrimage to the north, he was to discover rural Japan; a land of lush landscapes, rich in legend. As you journey through the traditional towns and stunning scenery of Tohoku, you will experience much of the same Japan as the great poet himself.



“ Ruth was delightful to work with. Even though I gave her a very short time to pull my trip together, she did a phenomenal job and included all my requests ”

A. Williams, 2010



Package Highlights

- Traditional hot spring baths in Nyuto Onsen
- Pilgrim's stay in Mount Haguro
- Spectacular scenery of Sado Island
- Nikko's World Heritage Toshogu shrine
- Matsushima Bay day trip from Sendai

Nyuto Onsen

A relaxing soak in natural *onsen* hot spring waters is one the many rewards of a trip to Japan. *Onsen* come in all shapes and sizes, from simple outdoor pools tucked away in the mountains to enormous modern spa resorts catering to hundreds of people at a time. Our Northern Highlights itinerary shows you one of the very best of Japan's traditional *onsen*.

Nyuto Onsen is a collection of half a dozen tiny *onsen* villages in the mountains of Akita Prefecture. An overnight stay in one of these tucked away spots will make you wonder if you didn't just step into a time machine on your way from Tokyo; ramshackle old wooden buildings surrounded by woodland, steaming pools of milky white water, locals quietly making their way from bath to bath or taking a stroll in their *yukata*, a lightweight cotton *kimono*, and *geta*, traditional wooden sandals.

This is the ultimate *onsen* experience, and if you left the big cities alarmed at the pace of modern Japanese life, a visit to Nyuto Onsen will reassure you that tradition is very much alive and well.



Kyushu Adventure

16 nights

TOKYO (3) – NAGASAKI (2) – UNZEN (1) – KUMAMOTO (1) – ASO (2) – BEPPU (1) – YUFUIN (1) – KAGOSHIMA (2) – YAKUSHIMA (2) – TOKYO (1)

Head west from the capital and you will eventually arrive in Kyushu, an island characterised by its friendly residents' laid back approach to life and the beautiful natural landscapes to be found at every stop along the way. From the historic port city of Nagasaki, to the steaming hot spring town of Beppu, via the green slopes of Mount Aso's huge caldera, there are many treasures waiting to be discovered.

World Heritage Yakushima Island is sure to be a highlight of this trip, possessing one of Japan's natural wonders: a stunning ancient forest that dates back thousands of years and contains 1900 species of flora.

Staging point for your Yakushima stay is the city of Kagoshima, often referred to as the Naples of Japan due to its proximity to Mount Sakurajima volcano, Kagoshima's Vesuvius. Mount Aso also provides awe-inspiring natural landscapes; the lush green slopes of the world's largest volcanic caldera framing the harsh fiery void at its centre.

To the west, the port of Nagasaki was the only place in Japan open to the outside world during more than two centuries of national isolation. As a result, influences from China, Holland and Portugal can be seen throughout the city, particularly in the reconstructed Dutch factory of Dejima and the Meiji period colonial style homes. Nagasaki is perhaps most famous for being the victim of the second nuclear bomb at the end of World War Two. You may like to take a tram over to the Peace Memorial Park.

The small but lively city of Kumamoto, with its rich samurai history, makes for an interesting overnight stay. Here you can visit what is considered to be one of Japan's best castles, with its signature curved stone construction known as *musha-gaeshi*, designed to hinder attackers attempting to scale the walls. Although the main keep is a reconstruction, unusually, several original wooden buildings dating to the seventeenth century remain intact.

On the eastern side of Kyushu, Yufuin is dominated by Mount Yufu which can be climbed via a well marked and reasonably easy trail for some fantastic views over rural Kyushu. In Beppu more opportunities for hot spring bathing and even sand baths await, whereas Unzen is a much more rural, hot spring resort set amongst a Martian landscape of reddish colours and billowing clouds of sulphuric gas. Take a walk alongside the bubbling waters of Jigokudani 'Hell Valley', or soak in a mineral-rich bath – the choice is yours.

Your discovery of Kyushu is neatly framed by stays in Tokyo, with time in the historic Asakusa district at the start and among the bright lights and excitement of Shinjuku at the end of your journey. The Kyushu Adventure will leave you in awe of the diverse beauty of Japan's southern island and of the sincere hospitality of which the locals are so proud.



“In summary we had a great time, and liked the semi-independent style of travelling on our own but with all the travel and hotel details already handled by you. Kyushu is definitely off the beaten track for Westerners and we enjoyed that fact. And the volcanoes, mountains, trees and wildlife did not disappoint”

K. Dunn, 2010



Package Highlights

- Glover Gardens in Nagasaki
- Unzen's volcanic 'hell valley'
- Magnificent Kumamoto castle
- Hot springs and sand baths in Beppu
- Giant cedar trees on Yakushima Island

Yakushima Island

Designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1993, the little island of Yakushima, located just off the tip of Kyushu, is well loved for its giant Japanese cedar trees, the oldest of which, Jomon Sugi, has withstood the ravages of time for over 7,000 years.

Isolated from the Japanese mainland and with a unique terrain and climate, Yakushima is truly one of Japan's natural wonders. The best way to reach the ancient cedar trees is on foot along one of the many wonderful hiking trails. There's a good chance you will be joined by indigenous monkeys and deer on your way.

Walking through these very forests inspired the famous animator Hayao Miyazaki to create his epic masterpiece, 'Princess Mononoke'. With its complex plot, weaving Japanese myth and legend into a moving story of the relationship between people and the natural world, we highly recommend watching the film in advance of your visit.

The dramatic coastline of this island should also be explored for its sandy beaches, *onsen* hot spring baths and interesting sea life, including turtles that lay their eggs here during the summer months. Flying fish makes for a delicious lunch, perfectly topped off by some locally grown sweet satsuma oranges. And if you're feeling bold, the local brew *shochu* or "fire-water" is well worth a taste!

Little visited by foreign tourists, Yakushima is a world away from the bustle of city life and remains a very special and unspoilt area of Japan.



Hokkaido Fly-Drive

15 nights

TOKYO (2) – HAKODATE (1) – TOYA ONSEN (2) – SAPPORO (2) – BIEI (3) – KUSSHARO LAKE (2) – TSURUI or RAUSU (2) – TOKYO (1)

The huge and sparsely populated island of Hokkaido is the focus of this unique rural road trip. Here in the national parks you will find rolling fields of lavender, crystal clear lakes and natural hot springs surrounded by soaring mountain landscapes.

Your first foray into Hokkaido is Hakodate, where you will pick up your hire car. One of the first ports to open up to foreign visitors, Hakodate enjoys a lasting legacy of churches and European buildings. At night, the views from the top of Mount Hakodate are spectacular. Take a cable car or drive to the top and survey the stunning night time panorama, with the city lights twinkling to the very edge of the Katedama peninsula as it disappears into the sea.

With smoking Shinzan Volcano setting the scene, Toya Onsen offers the chance to relax in natural hot springs, or to get out and about on foot or by bike. Before you cross the breadth of the country, there's time to stop in the island's cosmopolitan capital, Sapporo, for the best beer in Japan and fabulous ramen noodles! With the annual snow festival in winter, beer festival in summer and plenty of sake breweries, the island's capital is a great destination at any time of year.

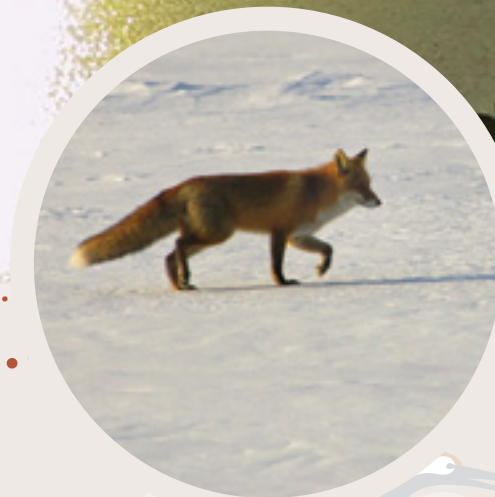
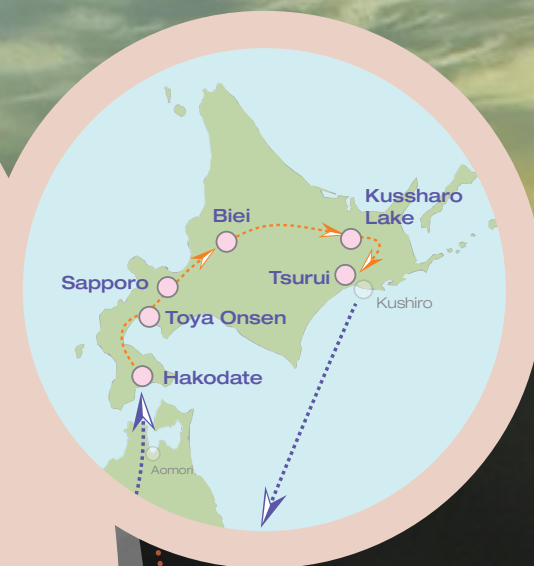
For centuries Hokkaido (or Ezochi as it was formerly known) was largely separate from mainland Japan providing a home to the indigenous Ainu people who had a distinct language and culture to that of the Japanese. Although much Ainu culture has been lost since the Japanese assumed direct control in the 1850's, small pockets remain. You can discover more at the Ainu Culture Centre outside of Sapporo or the Ainu Museum near Toya Onsen.

Central Hokkaido, home to the Daisetsuzan National Park, is famous for its lavender and poppy fields alongside vast farmlands. This is a great base whenever you happen to be travelling, with stunning views of Mount Asahidake

enhancing the flora of summer, the brightly coloured leaves of autumn and the snow-capped peaks of winter. Conquer the 16 volcanic peaks, admire the 24-km-long precipitous Sounkyo Gorge, trek through densely forested woodland or simply enjoy the hot springs and dramatic views of Japan's largest national park.

As you head east along the gently winding open roads of the Hokkaido countryside, the population dwindles and the land stretches far, from the hot springs of Kawayu Onsen and lakes of Akan National Park to Shiretoko Peninsula and the fertile Kushiro marshlands. Here nature is in the ascendancy and you may spot bears, red-crowned cranes, whales, seals, deer, eagles and the famous Blakiston's fish owl.

Whether you choose to visit Hokkaido to experience the snowy depths of winter, or escape the muggy mainland summers, this area of Japan always has something to offer. Our Hokkaido Fly-Drive is a fabulous motoring holiday, combining natural wonders, small towns and exciting cities, to offer an alternative vision of Japan.



“We were extremely impressed with every aspect of your service. It was all first class. We wouldn't hesitate to give InsideJapan a massive recommendation.”

R. Haynes, 2010

Package Highlights

- Hakodate night view
- The smoking Shinzan Volcano
- Crane sanctuaries in Tsurui
- Nightly fireworks illuminating the lake at Toya Onsen
- Hiking Mount Asahi Dake

Biei's Patchwork Road

The flower fields of Biei are made up of myriad different colours creating a beautiful patchwork effect that draws Japanese visitors from far and wide. The 'Patchwork Road' area north-west of the small main town is particularly impressive and makes for a lovely place for gentle strolls or bicycle rides.

Within this picturesque landscape you will also find the Hokusei Hill Observatory which offers spectacular views of Biei's flower fields and famous trees. Patchwork Road is also home to Zerebu Park where you can see all sorts of flowers depending on the time of year; lavender, *iris germanica*, spider flowers, sunflowers and Japanese roses. You can explore this park on foot or by taking a cart ride.

Not only does Biei boast some of the most stunning flower fields Japan has to offer, there are also some very interesting and well known trees to be found here. Look out for the 'Ken and Mary Tree', you will probably find some Japanese car enthusiasts seeing if they can recreate the famous 1970s Nissan Skyline advertisement which starred the very same tree!

With its rural hills and wide fields evoking something of a rural idyll, it is of little surprise that Biei also has some great art galleries. At the Takushinkan you can see some beautiful landscape photography by renowned photographer Maeda Shinzo. The photographs show Biei's rural landscapes around the year; green and colourful in the spring, summer and autumn and snow-covered during winter.

Experiences & Inspiration

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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

Hoshinoya Karuizawa

Located in the mountains of Nagano Prefecture, the Hoshinoya Karuizawa is a luxury spa resort offering the ultimate romantic getaway. Accommodation is in riverside villas or on the mountainside behind with each room combining the best in modern comfort with a Japanese aesthetic.

Dining options are first class; The Japanese restaurant offers *kaiseki* cuisine with an impressive selection of *sake*, whilst the French restaurant is fine dining at its very best. Casual options include Italian and rustic Japanese. As well as a traditional *onsen* you can experience the unique meditation hot spring where '*hikari*' (light) and '*yami*' (dark) rooms combine to help soothe the mind as well as the body. The resort offers a first class spa with a full range of Zen-inspired treatments and for the more active guest, eco tours to the nearby wild bird sanctuary. A truly magical experience.



Hoshinoya Karuizawa



The Palace Hotel

The Palace Hotel

Re-opened in May 2012 in a brand new building, The Palace is perhaps the finest super-deluxe hotel in Tokyo. With the Imperial Palace moat running alongside the property, the rooms – many with balconies – look out through floor-to-ceiling windows over the palace gardens, with the natural greens being reflected and complemented in the stylish and contemporary interiors.

The dining options are excellent with Japanese, Chinese, French, and Italian available to name just a few. The hotel's Evian Spa is the first of its kind in Japan, blending French influences and Asian therapies to create an exceptional experience with panoramic views of Tokyo's skyline. The Palace Hotel makes a splendid base from which to begin or end your Japan honeymoon adventures.

“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.



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*.



Japanese Wedding Ceremony

Japan for families

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

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** Fully Tailored Package 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 as part of any Fully Tailored Package.

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!

Contemporary Arts

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. See the Japan Arts Trail itinerary on pages 48 & 49 for a comprehensive art inspired journey through Japan.

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 Small Group Tours start and end in Tokyo as can any Fully Tailored Package. Extra nights can be added to any trip to allow extra time for museum visits.



Niki de Saint Phalle Le Banc
Photo:Osamu Watanabe

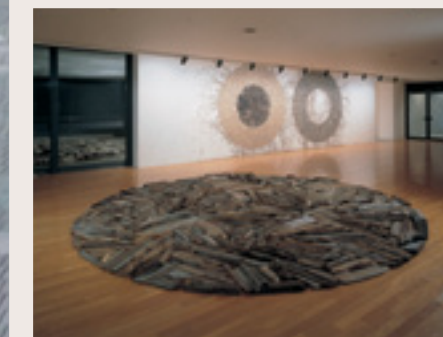
Hakone

Set amidst spectacular mountain scenery, the **Chokoku no Mori** sculpture park is a wonderful place to see sculpture by the likes of Rodin, Bourdelle, Miró 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 can also be included on any Fully Tailored Package.



Yayoi Kusama Pumpkin
Photo:Shigeo Anzai



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 on the Japan Arts Trail itinerary and also features as a day trip on the Hidden Japan Small Group Tour. Naoshima can also be incorporated into any Fully Tailored Package 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.

Gardens

A single rock afloat a sea of meticulously raked gravel; colourful *koi* carp gliding serenely beneath the surface of a lotus pond; the gentle curves of a teahouse roof set against a crimson flash of autumn maple. Such classic images of Japanese gardens have found deserved fame in the West.

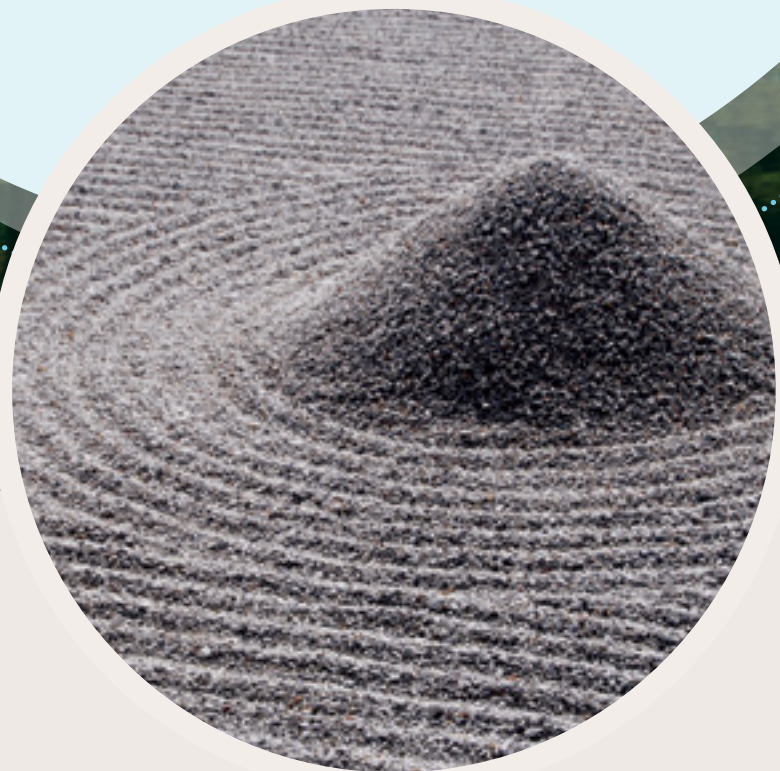
Garden design has long been considered an art form by the Japanese on a par with other disciplines, sharing the Japanese appreciation of, and emphasis on, abstract conceptions. The Japanese word *niwa*, meaning garden, once referred to an area cleansed and purified in preparation for the arrival of the Shinto deities or *kami*, believed to be present in the essential natural elements of rock, water and wood. Given this link between nature, Japanese culture and religious belief, it is no surprise that the historic capital of Kyoto is home to some of the best gardens Japan has to offer: simple Zen gardens, lovingly kept stroll gardens and borrowed scenery gardens where the mountains surrounding the city form a dramatic backdrop.

Take in Japan's most famous gardens or seek out your own little corner of peace and tranquility at some wonderful lesser-known locations. Each offers its own unique beauty, and together they provide a wonderfully rich experience of the breadth of this revered art.

Zen Gardens, Kyoto

Originating during the Muromachi Period (1336-1573), *karesansui* rock gardens were created at temples of Zen Buddhism in Kyoto as an aid to meditation and were intended to intimate the true essence of nature. The most famous is Ryoan-ji, visited daily by hundreds of people. The rectangular garden consists of raked pebbles with fifteen rocks positioned in small groups on patches of moss. The garden's meaning is a mystery leaving viewers to ponder this for themselves.

Less crowded but equally impressive, Daitoku-ji is one of the best places in Japan to see a wide variety of Zen gardens in its various sub-temples. Daisenin's rock garden resembles scenes from landscape paintings of towering mountains, islands, waterfalls, and rivers. Ryogenin features various dry landscape gardens around its main building. The largest is a field of raked white pebbles that symbolises the universe, with islands of rocks and moss representing a crane and a turtle, symbols of longevity and health commonly found in Japanese gardens. Zuihoin's main garden features pebbles raked in curving, high-peaked patterns, which portray the waves of a rough sea surrounding islands of jagged stones and moss.



Omiya Bonsai Village, Saitama

Just outside Tokyo, Omiya is a peaceful Saitama neighbourhood that is home to gardens in miniature. Omiya Bonsai Village holds perhaps the largest collection of these stunningly sculpted, living art forms in all of Japan. The village was formed after the devastating effects of the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, when *bonsai* nurseries and the garden industry workforce in Tokyo were forced to relocate. They chose Omiya for its good soil, available land, and clean water supply. *Bonsai* nurseries are dotted across the village and welcome visitors. To help you appreciate the art of *bonsai*, visit the Omiya Bonsai Art Museum, which explains the various aspects and styles of *bonsai*.



Kenrokuen, Kanazawa

For many Japan's most beautiful garden is Kenrokuen. The garden incorporates all the classic elements of a landscape garden such as ponds, streams, waterfalls, bridges, teahouses, trees, and stones. Once the outer garden of Kanazawa Castle, Kenrokuen was constructed by the ruling Maeda clan from the 17th century until the 19th century when it was opened to the public. The garden's attributes are based on Chinese landscape theory which includes open space, abundant water and panoramic views.

Korakuen, Okayama

Along with Kenrokuen and Kairakuen in Mito, Korakuen is one of Japan's designated "Top 3" landscape gardens. Having suffered severe damage in the floods of 1934 and during World War Two bombings in 1945, the garden has since been restored based on Edo Period paintings and diagrams. The local *daimyo* (feudal lord) ordered the garden to be constructed in 1687 as a place to entertain the ruling family and receive important guests. The garden was opened to the public in 1884 and showcases unique features such as spacious lawns, tea and rice fields, a crane aviary, and a hill that serves as a viewing point. It also has abundant plum, cherry and maple trees, making it ideal for a spring or autumn visit.



Ritsurin Koen, Takamatsu

Our contender for best garden in Japan, this stunning landscape garden has been cultivated for centuries since its creation by local feudal lords in the early Edo Period. It was completed in 1745 and has six ponds and thirteen small hills strategically placed to use Mt Shiun as a "borrowed" background. Different flowers bloom all year round, changing the scenery across the seasons. The garden also has a folk museum, a tea house, and shops selling various folk art and craft items. The various ponds and streams are full of *koi* carp, and visitors can sit and feed the fish from breadsticks purchased at the tea house.

Saiho-ji temple, Kyoto

Originally laid out in the eighth century, the garden was redesigned in 1339 by the renowned landscaper, Muso Kokushi, with two halves – a classic 'circling pond' shaped as the *kanji* 'kokoro', meaning heart; and a *karesansui* raked gravel garden, considered to be the first of its type and the inspiration for the world famous gravel garden at Ryoan-ji. Visitors are drawn to Saiho-ji by the velvety green carpet of moss that covers the ground under the trees, creating an atmosphere of still calm. Today the temple is viewable by appointment only. We provide a visit that includes a 30-minute session of chanting and copying Buddhist scriptures, called *sutra* - a ceremony designed to enable a true appreciation of the gardens.

Adachi Museum Gardens, Matsue

On the Japan Sea Coast, the Adachi Museum of Art is not only famous for its contemporary collection of Japanese paintings; its stunning gardens have won accolades from around the world and are an absolute must-see. The museum's founder, Adachi Zenko, collected various trees and rocks from all over Japan to create the gardens, which are composed of six garden sections: a moss, pond, dry landscape, white gravel and pine, *juryu-an*, and *kikaku-no-taki* waterfall garden. Each season changes the scenery of the gardens, which are lovely throughout the year. The art museum is top class as well and Matsue itself is an attractive castle town.

Onsen

To the Japanese, hot springs, known as *onsen*, are an essential part of any holiday experience and we're sure you'll love them as well. Part of a culture stretching back more than a thousand years, *onsen* spas dot the volcanic islands of Japan. Whilst travelling around the country, you will find that every region has its share of unique hot springs and resort towns.

Japanese use their baths not only to get clean but to maintain their health by warming themselves up and stimulating their circulation. The water is full of minerals such as sulphur, calcium and sodium, whose medicinal powers were recorded as far back as the eighth century and are efficacious against rheumatism, high blood pressure, diabetes and assorted other ailments. Buddhist priests even used hot springs as part of a ceremony of purification.

Because the body is washed outside the bath, everybody bathes in the same water, creating an unclothed companionship that facilitates amiable communication, summed up by the Japanese phrase *hadaka no tsukiai*. In a bath, you can relax, recover from exhaustion, and rid yourself of stress. No wonder Japanese love their baths.

The *onsen* experience is one that every visitor to Japan should try with bathing being very much a part of Japanese culture. From indoor to outdoor, traditional to modern, public to private, you will be sure to enjoy a relaxing experience for your mind and body.



Hot spring resorts

You will find hot spring resorts all over Japan, a welcome break from city life for Japanese and Westerners alike. South of Mount Fuji and only a short train ride from central Tokyo, **Hakone** has been a popular resting post since the Japanese warrior Toyotomi Hideyoshi ordered a natural bath to be built here in 1590 enabling his battle-weary men to relax in the natural hot spring waters of this volcanic area. More than a dozen springs provide water to numerous public bathhouses and Japanese inns. Staying in one of Hakone's traditional *ryokan*, you will have plenty of opportunity for relaxing in the revitalising waters. You can even try a green tea, coffee or red wine spa!

In northern Hyogo prefecture, the charming small town of **Kinosaki** welcomes many visitors to its traditional hot springs that were first discovered in the eighth century. Strolling around the streets, you will encounter Japanese in their *yukata* and wooden clogs wandering between bath houses.

Onsen in the big city

For those making a quick trip to Japan without time to venture further afield, there is no need to miss out of the *onsen* experience. Over on the artificial island of **Odaiba** in Tokyo bay, you can relax in a large *onsen* complex complete with Japanese restaurants, relaxation and massage rooms, shops and a variety of different tubs, all set in a building designed to look like an Edo era town. Named '*Onsen Monogatari*' - literally "The Story of Onsen" this is a great option for a rainy day or an evening excursion with a difference.

Snow monkey onsen

Venturing out of the cities to **Yudanaka** in the Japanese Alps, you will find a very unusual *onsen* whose patrons are not people but monkeys! A visit here to watch the snow monkeys bathing in the hot waters of the *onsen* pools during the winter months is an unforgettable experience, topped off with a great selection of *ryokan* with their own private (and monkey free!) baths.

Outdoor baths

Rotenburo, outdoor hot spring baths, are often situated in spectacular mountain areas, valleys or along rivers and lakesides, offering fantastic views while you bathe. Enjoying the comforting heat in an outdoor *onsen* in **Hokkaido** during the winter months at the end of a hard day of skiing or exploring can be the perfect way to relax. Why not choose a room at a *ryokan* with its own *rotenburo* attached for the perfect, private hot spring experience.

Sand baths

If none of these are unusual enough for you, try a sand bath *onsen*, known as *sunamushi* in Japanese. Wearing a cotton bathrobe or *yukata*, you will lie down in the steaming sand and be buried up to your neck. After 10 to 15 minutes, you will clean off and head for the regular spa bath. Great for your circulation, a sand bath is a truly unique experience that is sure to have you as excited as the local bathers. Head for the Meiji era Takegawara Onsen in **Beppu** for an indoor variety or **Ibusuki** in Kagoshima Prefecture where you can be buried outside on the beach front.

Traditional onsen

When it comes to historic *onsen*, they don't come better than **Matsuyama's Dogo** hot spring. One of Japan's oldest *onsen*, Dogo dates back over 1000 years and to this day has a bathroom specially reserved for the Imperial Family. The current building is said to have inspired the bathhouse in Miyazaki's famous animation, Spirited Away. Relaxing in the hot spring here is sure to be a memorable experience.

Culinary Japan

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 varies from cool, light and refreshing *soba* to rich, hot and spicy *ramen*. Acutely aware of the importance of seasonal produce, the Japanese chef will change his menu monthly.

Picture a restaurant where the subtle and elegant décor and 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 experienced gourmand 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 'Bullet Train'!



Food Experiences

The Japanese are incredibly enthusiastic about food so it is hardly surprising that there is 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.

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.

Cookery classes

We can arrange cookery classes in both Tokyo and Kyoto, that feature 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 a master at an exclusive, by reservation only, Japanese restaurant in Tokyo. 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.

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 its dramatic 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. It 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 tranquillity. 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.

Festivals

A visit to Japan is all about embracing the culture and immersing oneself in the experience and there is no better way to both enjoy and celebrate Japanese culture - the food, the traditional dances and songs, and the people - than by going to a festival. Japanese festivals, or “*matsuri*”, range from the sacred to the comical, from the very local to the very large, but are always unforgettable and a fun way to meet the locals.

Festivals are common throughout the year, but if you want to see the biggest and the best, summer is the time to go. Summer festivals are carefree and merry affairs as friends and families gather in their lightweight *yukata kimono* to have fun and eat their way through food stalls selling tasty *yakisoba* noodles and *takoyaki* dumplings. You might also see the portable *mikoshi* shrine of the local god paraded through the streets with much gaiety and hard work, often the only time of the year the god leaves his “home”, to join in the festivities. At the end of the night, no summer festival is complete until fireworks light up the night sky.

Whether they are rooted in ancient Shinto rites to ensure a bountiful rice harvest or are a more recent addition to the calendar (an excuse to get dressed up and enjoy a few drinks), Japan's festivals are definitely a hands-on experience and guaranteed to make your trip extra special.

Here is just a very small selection of Japan's festivals; our travel consultants will be able to advise you of any festivals you might see during your travels!

Festival Calendar

| | |
|-----------|--|
| January | Archery at Sanjusangendo (<i>Kyoto</i>) |
| February | Sapporo Snow Festival |
| March | Omizutori (<i>Nara</i>) |
| April | Takayama Spring Festival |
| May | Aoi Matsuri (<i>Kyoto</i>) Sanja Matsuri (<i>Tokyo</i>) |
| June | Hyakumangoku Festival (<i>Kanazawa</i>) |
| July | Gion Matsuri (<i>Kyoto</i>) Tenjin (<i>Osaka</i>) |
| August | Kanto (<i>Akita</i>) Awa Odori (<i>Tokushima</i>) |
| September | Tsurugaoka Hachiman (<i>Kamakura</i>) |
| October | Jidai Matsuri (<i>Kyoto</i>) Kunchi Festival (<i>Nagasaki</i>) |
| November | Becha Matsuri (<i>Onomichi</i>) Ohara Festival (<i>Kagoshima</i>) |
| December | Chichibu Yomatsuri (<i>Saitama</i>) |



Sapporo Snow Festival

Winter: Sapporo Snow Festival Hokkaido (early February)

What started as just a few snow statues in Odori Park is now one of the great winter festivals of the world, every February drawing up to 2 million visitors from across the globe to the northernmost island of Japan. The Sapporo Snow Festival, or Yuki Matsuri, has something for everyone ready to brave the cold of Hokkaido's winter. The main attractions of course are the enormous snow sculptures in Odori Park that are entered in the international contest—they have to be seen to be believed! Other sites include a family-friendly area with snow slides, snow-rafting and a snow maze, and one with intricate ice sculptures and bars made entirely of ice serving a variety of drinks to keep of the chill. Sapporo Snow Festival is featured on the 'Winter Highlights' Small Group Tour (pg 32-33)



Takayama Festival

Spring: Aoi Festival Kyoto (May 15)

One of Kyoto's “Big Three” *matsuri*, the Aoi Festival is the major festival for the Shimogamo and Kamigamo shrines which is why the event is known formally as the Kamo Festival. In the days leading up to the festival's main event there are purification rites and many events at the shrines such as *yabusame* horseback archery. On May 15th over 500 Kyoto-ites dressed in Heian-period garb march in a magnificent procession from the Imperial Palace, first to Shimogamo Shrine and then on to Kamigamo Shrine. The festival is impressive both in its elegant pageantry of by-gone days with its giant bouquets of flowers and ox-drawn carts, and in its size: watching the entire procession go by takes at least an hour!



Nebuta Matsuri

Summer: Nebuta Festival Aomori (August 2~7)

One of the Three Great Festivals of Tohoku, Aomori's Nebuta Matsuri is one of the most famous and popular festivals in Japan for good reason. Held the first week of August, the stars of this festival are the giant lantern floats built by local teams. Depicting anything from gods to historical figures to characters from NHK TV dramas, the floats make their grandest appearance during the last 3 days when all are paraded down the streets weaving and spinning to the beat of the escorting *taiko* drums, musicians, and dancers. The atmosphere is like no other as both parade-marchers and the crowds get into the action, and participation is open to all-comers with a traditional *haneto* costume!



Hachimangu Festival, Kamakura

Autumn: Nada Fighting Festival Hyogo (October 15)

For a festival that's a bit unconventional with high-energy excitement, consider visiting the town of Shirahama for the thrill of watching large teams of men carry their portable *mikoshi* shrines into battle against other *mikoshi*! There are no rules as these shrines collide and crash into each other in a hard, unpredictable fight for supremacy in one of the largest 'fighting festivals' in Japan. It is believed that the gods enjoy the men's fighting spirit and so the bigger and more violent the crashes the more pleased they will be. The battle gets even more hectic when men of all ages join in with large bamboo poles to defend and attack.

Sports

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 heats up!

Please check out the 2013 / 14 tournament schedules below.

Basho Schedule 2013

| Tournament | Venue | Dates |
|------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| New Year | Tokyo Kokugikan | 13th to 27th January |
| Spring | Osaka Gymnasium | 10th to 24th March |
| May | Tokyo Kokugikan | 12th to 26th May |
| Summer | Nagoya Aichi Gymnasium | 7th to 21st July |
| September | Tokyo Kokugikan | 15th to 29th September |
| Autumn | Fukuoka Kokusai Center | 10th to 24th November |

Basho Schedule 2014

| Tournament | Venue | Dates |
|------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| New Year | Tokyo Kokugikan | 12th to 26th January |
| Spring | Osaka Gymnasium | 9th to 23rd March |
| May | Tokyo Kokugikan | 11th to 25th May |
| Summer | Nagoya Aichi Gymnasium | 13th to 27th July |
| September | Tokyo Kokugikan | 14th to 28th September |
| Autumn | Fukuoka Kokusai Center | 9th to 23rd November |



Baseball

Sumo may be the national sport, but baseball is by far the most popular. 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 and our tour leaders have been known to take their groups to a game. 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.

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.

Tokyo Marathon

The Tokyo Marathon has been running since 2007 and 2008 saw 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 priority 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.



Walking & hiking

In a land of verdant wooded hills, magnificent mountains and steaming volcanoes, there is no better way to appreciate the outdoors than strapping on a pair of boots and venturing out onto the winding pathways and mountain trails. Understandably popular, you will rarely be alone, but this only adds to the enjoyment; through the internationally recognised subtle nod as you pass shoulder to shoulder, an encouraging word or the beaming smiles and mutual appreciation of a stunning view, cultural and language barriers dissolve in the universal world of the great outdoors.

Though lowland hikes are possible all year round as long as you are prepared for the elements, the higher mountains and Alpine peaks are generally accessible from early summer to early autumn.

Kamikochi National Park

Kamikochi is truly one of Japan's most beautiful places. Towering, craggy mountains rise up from a rich, verdant plateau fed by the glacial Azusa River. Surrounding this are virgin forests of birch, larch and hemlock, haven to a wealth of flora and fauna including cute looking monkeys and even the occasional bear! Private cars are banned from Kamikochi with access only possible by bus or taxi, and the area is only moderately developed, preserving the sense of picturesque tranquillity.

Staying in one of the varied accommodations, from simple cabins to the grandeur of the Imperial Hotel, Kamikochi acts as a gateway to a number of wonderful hikes. The trails along the Azusa River provide relatively flat and easy options to bask in the beauty and spot the local wildlife. For those with loftier aspirations, you can strike out for one of the challenging 3000m peaks that loom like stepladders to the heavens above the valley floor.

The 'Essential Honshu' Small Group Tour (pg 20-21) includes a 2 night stay in Kamikochi.

Climbing Mount Fuji

By far the most famous Japanese peak is of course the iconic and revered Mount Fuji. Immortalized in art and literature, the majestic Fuji-san climbs to 12,388ft, the highest point in Japan. Though notoriously shy, it is best viewed 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, traditionally reached at the break of dawn to witness a marvellous sunrise.

Travellers on the summer departures of our 'Tokaido Trail' and 'Essential Honshu' Small Group Tours have the option of climbing with the group.



Tsumago-Magome Nakasendo Way

Deep in the magnificent Kiso Valley sit the small, rustic villages of Tsumago and Magome. In a land where you sometimes need to push past the curtain of modernity to discover the ancient within, these two places offer a window on what Japan was like a hundred years ago.

Both Tsumago and Magome flourished as post towns on the Nakasendo, a route connecting Kyoto and Edo (now Tokyo) that cut through the mountains rather than following the eastern seaboard. One of the joys of visiting this area today is the splendid hike between these two villages that follows this historic route. Through tiny rice paddies clinging to the hillside, along cobbled trails deep in the woods, and over a mountain pass, this gorgeous walk evokes the Japan of yesteryear. Only about 5 miles long and of moderate intensity, it is an option for almost all travellers and there is a local bus system that will shuttle you back to your start pointing point.

Kii Peninsula and the Kumano Kodo

Jutting out into the Pacific Ocean, the Kii Peninsula sits below the heavily populated areas of Kyoto and Osaka, beckoning intrepid individuals with tales of sacred paths and routes untold. This is the land of steep-sided valleys, tumbling waterfalls, powerful rivers, hidden hot springs and rugged coastlines.

Woven within is the Kumano Kodo, an ancient network of pilgrimage routes linking the mountains and valleys with the three grand shrines: Kumano Hongu Taisha, Kumano Hayatama Taisha and Kumano Nachi Taisha. Formally plied by both emperors and commoners alike, these routes are a hiker's paradise, quiet and pristine, allowing you to feel like a true pioneer in a foreign land. Staying here is also quite the treat as you experience kind hospitality, soothing baths and delicious local food that reinvigorates both your body and soul. The traditional way to hike in the Kii Peninsula is a challenging multi-day plan, but fantastic day walks are also possible from a base such as Yunomine Onsen.

Cycling

From a multi-day cycling challenge across Shikoku Island to a laid-back afternoon exploring Kyoto on two wheels, Japan has numerous opportunities to explore by bike.

Discovering Japan by bike will enable you to see the country at a slower pace, to stop at those less frequently visited temples and shrines, take in the countryside and meet local people. The Japanese love to cycle and good quality bike hire is easily arranged throughout the country. On these pages you will find some of our favourite cycle routes.

Full Day Cycling Tours

Getting out and about for a day on a bicycle can be the perfect way to explore. In Tokyo, Kyoto and Takayama we can arrange one day guided cycle tours as part of a group or if you prefer, we can arrange a guide just for you. You'll be provided with a decent quality hybrid bicycle, a helmet and full insurance coverage for the day. With an English speaking guide to accompany you, this is one of the best ways to get off the regular tourist trail and really experience the local area.

Bicycle hire is available in nearly all destinations across Japan so if heading out for a day on two wheels is something you fancy just let us know.



Kyoto and Nara

Located within the flat lands of the Yamashiro basin, Kyoto is perfect for bike exploration. Cycle from Kyoto station along the bike path that follows the Kamogawa River to the Philosopher's path and see Ginkakuji, the striking Silver Pavilion. Venture out to Arashiyama and take in Tenryuji Temple and its bamboo forest. Once you have explored Kyoto, for more of a challenge cycle to Nara on a 50km route following the Katsura and Kizu rivers. This pleasant full day cycle is almost entirely on bike paths and is great way of seeing the Japanese countryside whilst making your way to Japan's ancient capital city.

Lake Biwa

Biwa-ko, Japan's largest lake, has a circumference of about 230km and is one of the great bike rides in Japan. The southern tip of the lake is located just 11km from Kyoto making it easily accessible and there are options here for day rides or longer adventures.

Cycling the full circumference will take around 3 days and will see you taking in the full range of sights Japan has to offer. We recommend checking out Hikone Castle, the 8th century Ishiyama Temple, the Sagawa Museum of Art and the Azuchi Castle Archaeology Museum. There are good beaches at Oni Maiko whilst the Nagahama Beer Factory makes for a great stop at the end of a day's cycling.

Rural Shikoku

Shikoku Island presents multiple challenging climbs that will take several days to explore fully. You will need to be a reasonably strong and determined cyclist. However, put in the effort and the rewards are fantastic. You can explore the soaring mountains of the Iya Valley with 1000 metre climbs followed by long sweeping descents. The area is famous for its clear running rivers, dramatic steep-sided gorges, vine bridges and of course, *onsen* hot springs - the perfect way to round off a hard day in the saddle. A ride through Shikoku will be a unique experience of a part of Japan few tourists ever reach and will leave you with a true sense of accomplishment.

The Shimanami-Kaido

The Shimanami-Kaido is Japan's most famous cycle route comprising 70km of paths and roads linking the island of Shikoku to Japan's main island, Honshu. The route passes over 6 small islands in the Seto Inland Sea and is comprised of a series of huge bridges. The paths are well maintained and signed and there is an excellent and flexible bike rental service. The views are stunning and there are no large inclines meaning the full route can be completed in one day. This route makes for a great one day cycle or a highlight inclusion in a multi-day cycling itinerary.

Diving

Japan is arguably the dive world's best kept secret. Consisting of literally thousands of islands covering a landmass similar to the size of Germany, ranging from the almost subarctic Hokkaido in the north to the subtropics of Okinawa in the far south, Japan's coastline stretches a staggering 21,000 miles. It is then perhaps unsurprising that the country is blessed with some stunning and truly unique dive sites.

The subtropical Okinawa islands present white sand beaches, palm trees, jungle, a huge diversity of coral and marine life, amazing visibility and at Yonaguni, breathtaking mysterious underwater structures. Mainland Japan also offers some surprisingly good diving. A short train ride from the lights of Tokyo, the temperate waters off the Izu Peninsula offer coral, diverse marine life and some great wreck diving. For those divers looking for something a bit more extreme, the remote Ogasawara islands offer the chance to see beautifully preserved, coral-covered World War Two shipwrecks as well as diving alongside dolphins and whales. When combined with the country's rich culture, friendly people, great food and drink and a huge amount of things to see and do, Japan is guaranteed to surprise and inspire divers both above and below the water.

Yonaguni Island

The subtropical island of Yonaguni is a rugged rocky outcrop just 67 miles off the coast of Taiwan and a 30 minute flight from Ishigaki Island. There is one big reason for heading to Yonaguni as a diver – an ancient and mysterious underwater monument. The 'Iseki' stones were discovered in the 1980s and are thought to be an ancient monument modified by man in the last ice age around 10,000 years ago. If they are manmade, the stones would be the oldest man-made monument on earth predating the Egyptian Pyramids. The Iseki provide for a unique and awe inspiring dive. The stones are there all year round, but one of the other attractions to these waters is the opportunity to see schooling hammerheads through the winter and spring months (November-May).

Ishigaki

The gateway to the Yaeyama Islands, Ishigaki has plenty of white sand beaches and a jungle covered mountainous interior. The coral rich waters around the island are frequented by magnificent giant manta ray which glide around cleaning stations at Manta Point. These wonderful ocean beasts can be seen throughout the year but spring through until autumn are the best for manta fans. Ishigaki is also one of the most diverse sites outside of the Great Barrier Reef in terms of coral, with over 300 species in Yonehara Arch alone.



“ I have dived all over the world, but nothing prepared me for the magic of Yonaguni ”

M.Wells, 2012

Whether you are diving in the islands or from mainland Japan, we can tailor an itinerary to suit you as an expert or a beginner. We can arrange everything for you from reef diving to wreck dives and enchanting cave dives. If you prefer to travel light, we can arrange hired gear for you in advance in nearly all dive locations. For an immersive holiday in the cultural sense we can combine your underwater experiences with an above-water adventure across Japan. Accommodation options range from simple family-run pensions to beach cottages and all-inclusive resorts. The subtropical islands have something to offer all year round for divers but can be prone to typhoons in September. Please take a look at the diving calendars on our website and contact us for further details.

Okinawa and the Kerama Islands

A short ferry hop from mainland Okinawa, the waters around Zamami and Aka in the Kerama Islands are extremely calm and translucent blue with visibility almost guaranteed at 30 metres and above. The Kerama Islands have an abundance of coral and macro marine life, sea turtles and reef sharks. The waters offer great snorkelling as well as dives for the more experienced from sandy bottomed dive sites to huge coral walls, caves and more.

Izu Peninsula

Just a couple of hours from Tokyo by train brings you to the temperate waters off the Izu Peninsula. There are wreck, cave and coral dives all around the Peninsula but some of the best diving is to be had off the south coast. Mikimoto is the most famous site, renowned for hammerheads in the warmer summer months along with a huge variety of unusual tropical marine life and coral. Izu is also a great dive for those wanting to appreciate the more traditional side of Japanese culture once back on land.

Ogasawara

Otherwise known as the remote Bonin Islands (and sometimes the Galapagos of the East), Ogasawara is rich in rare flora and fauna. For divers willing to make the 25 hour trek by ferry to these small islands will be rewarded with some of the amazing diving. World War Two wrecks, beautiful coral and an array of big fish such as dogtooth tuna, various sharks, dolphin and humpback whale. The World Heritage Ogasawara islands are a natural and cultural adventure.

Manga & Anime

Manga and anime are famous throughout the world but you really have to visit Japan to fully understand them and experience first hand the culture behind these modern phenomena. As manga (Japanese comics) and anime (Japanese animation) have become integral parts of modern Japanese life and culture, there is no way of escaping their influence wherever you go in the country. Without either of them, Japan would definitely not be the colourful and intriguing country that it is.

The modern forms of manga and anime date back to drawing styles and techniques that emerged after World War Two. Whilst the country has modernised and changed significantly since, many aspects of Japanese culture and values have remained the same, meaning that the characters and stories are still very much relevant to audiences of all ages today. Manga and anime characters can be found literally everywhere: advertising, fashion, souvenirs, stationery and mobile phone accessories are just a few examples.

You don't need to be an *otaku* (the Japanese word for "geek") to dip your toe into this side of Japanese culture. Most visitors to Japan simply skim the surface of manga and anime by visually appreciating the characters which pop up wherever, with no real knowledge of who they are. However, by delving deeper into this fantasy world your whole experience of Japan will be enriched.

The heart of manga and anime culture is the buzzing capital Tokyo. Here you can explore the electronics and manga district of Akihabara and check out the latest in technology, visit a maid café, and buy new or retro games and manga. For true aficionados, a wander through Nakano Broadway shopping centre is a must. This *otaku* heaven offers music, DVDs, costumes, figurines, manga, games, and a plethora of rare second-hand collectibles.

To see the latest fashion, stroll around Harajuku and watch the kids showing off their ultra trendy styles and the cosplayers displaying their elaborate costumes based on their favourite fictional characters. You are sure to see a lot of Gaga-esque fashion here! Anime fans should visit the fabulous Ghibli Museum just outside Tokyo where you can learn all about the genius that is Hayao Miyazaki, creator of *Spirited Away* and *Princess Mononoke*.

In Kyoto you can visit the International Manga Museum and spend a full afternoon at the Toei Movie Park, where you can dress as a geisha, samurai or ninja and explore authentic film sets. Another idea is a trip to Takarazuka just outside of Osaka, where you can visit the Osamu Tezuka Manga Museum and watch the quirky Takarazuka Revue musical performance.

See our website for full details of our 'Manga & Anime' Fully Tailored Package

Anime drawing class

As a special experience we can arrange an anime and manga drawing class at the Yoyogi Animation Studio. Use the inspiration gained from your adventures by creating your very own anime during the 3 hour lesson. Starting from learning how to hold a pencil correctly, you will be able to learn about the unique techniques needed to draw anime cells and moving images under expert instruction. Discover how to create multiple frames and start your own anime story. Concentrate on aspects of manga drawing such as 'dip-pen' technique, 'screen-tone' technique or colour drawing. The teachers are happy to review previous work if you wish as well.

Tokyo fairs and conventions

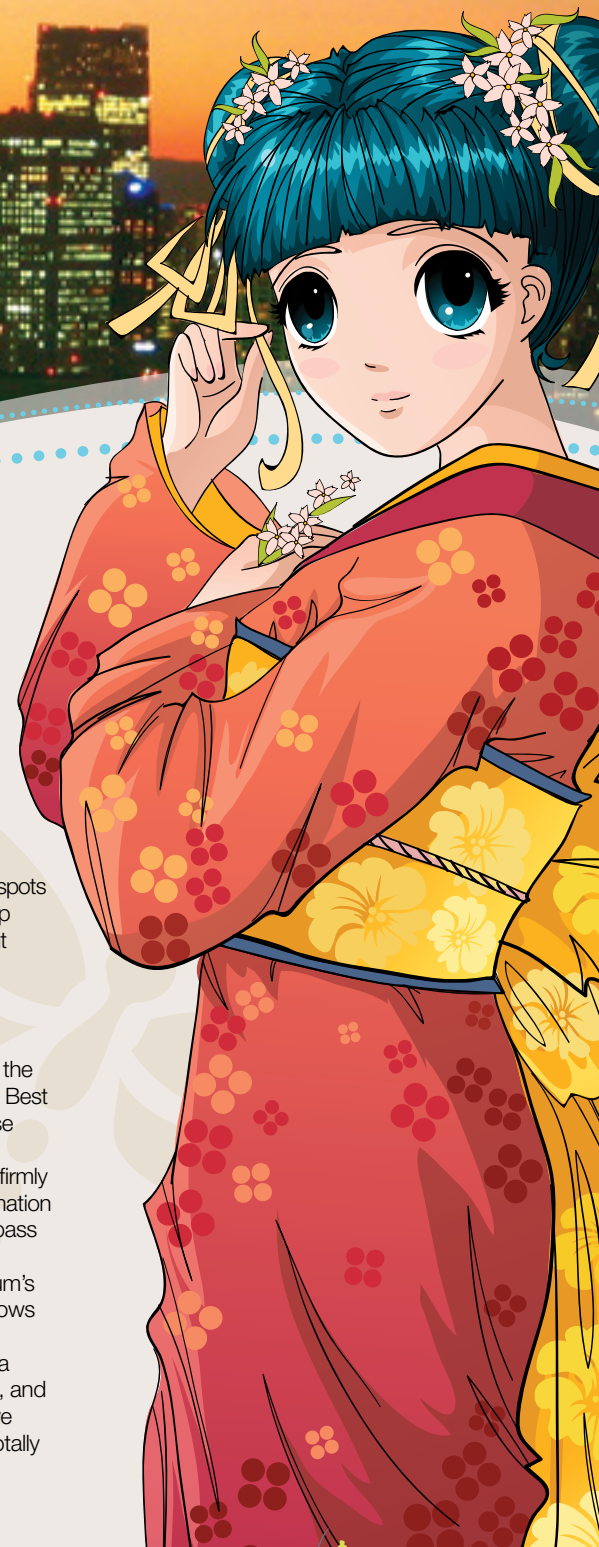
Why not combine your trip with a visit to one of the famous annual fairs or conventions that take place in Tokyo? Key events include the Tokyo International Anime Fair (March, dates vary), the Tokyo Game Show (September, dates vary), and the "Comiket" Comic Market (August and December, dates vary). These will give you the opportunity to see the best cosplay on display and experience manga and gaming culture like no where else. We can get you tickets in advance and will provide these free of charge with your trip package.

Yakushima 'Princess Mononoke Island'

Add enchantment to your time in Japan with a stay on the World Heritage Yakushima Island off the southern tip of Kyushu. This remote island, famous for its giant cedar trees and dramatic landscapes, was the inspiration for Studio Ghibli's Hayao Miyazaki and Oga Kazuo when creating the forest scenes for *Princess Mononoke*. It is often referred to as the "Alps of the Sea" for its mountains covered in ancient forest and unique flora and fauna. We can include a Japanese-style *ryokan* stay with a scrumptious dinner as a highlight at this very special and off-the-beaten-track destination.

“ This wasn't so much a holiday as a cultural immersion! A totally amazing experience ”

Alison, 2009



Manga and anime tour

Include a day of guiding in Tokyo with one of our experienced tour leaders who will show you the top spots for manga and anime culture, the best places to shop along with taking you to a maid café and amusement arcades.

Studio Ghibli

Japan's Studio Ghibli first came to the attention of the West when *Spirited Away* picked up the Oscar for Best Animated Film in 2003, the first time for a Japanese anime to win the award. Ghibli films such as *My Neighbour Totoro* and *Kiki's Delivery Service* have firmly established them not only as the pre-eminent animation film studio in Japan, but also one whose films surpass language and cultural barriers to be embraced by people all over the world. The Studio Ghibli Museum's motto is "Let's Get Lost Together", and the visit allows you to wonder through Miyazaki's imagination in a world where anything is possible. The museum is a must-see for fans of *Spirited Away* and other films, and will open up a whole new world for those who have yet to be introduced to the surreal, sublime, and totally amazing world of Studio Ghibli.

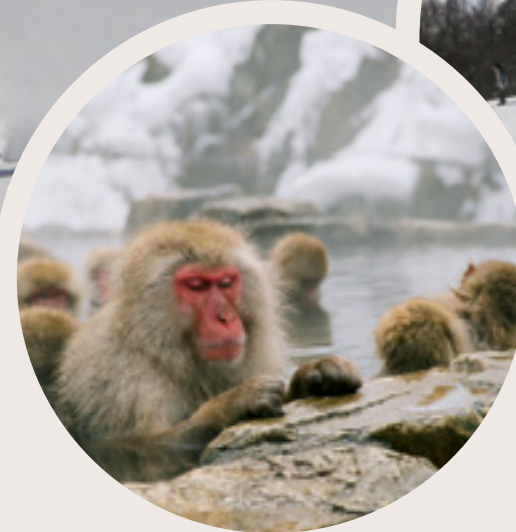
Winter Sports

Japanese winters, coupled with the 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.

Sustainable tourism

All of our itineraries have elements of sustainable tourism in them: you'll travel by public transport, visit places beyond the classic tourist hotspots and have the opportunity to interact with the Japanese. We also provide cultural tips and recommendation for local restaurants and experiences in our Info-Pack. This way you can be sure that your holiday will have a positive impact on Japan, the country we love.

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

The Tohoku Earthquake & Tsunami

On 11th March 2011 Japan was struck by the fifth largest earthquake ever recorded. Measuring 9 on the Richter scale, the earthquake unleashed huge tsunami waves the height of a 14 storey building that swept up to 10km inland. Japan's north-east coast, the same distance as London to Newcastle, was devastated. Over 15,000 people lost their lives, 6,000 were seriously injured and another 3,000 never found. 130,000 homes and buildings were destroyed.

In 2011, InsideJapan Tours raised over £25,000 for Civic Force, a Japanese NGO at the forefront of the tsunami relief effort, setting up temporary shelters and distributing food. Many thanks to our clients, friends and family.

Volunteering & It's Not Just Mud

In 2012 we began supporting It's Not Just Mud (INJM), a small grassroots charity working alongside the local community in Ishinomaki, a fishing town on the coast of Miyagi Prefecture that received the full force of the tsunami. Set up by a young Brit, Jamie El-Banna, INJM are a collection of Japanese and Western volunteers whose work involves shovelling mud, repairing houses, cleaning shrines, building play areas and organising community events.

InsideJapan Tours can arrange for you to spend part of your Japan holiday volunteering with INJM in Ishinomaki. Please note that volunteer placements can often only be confirmed around 2 months in advance, and you'll be able to assist a lot more if you have DIY skills, Japanese ability and/or an International Driving Permit.

If you would like to make a donation to It's Not Just Mud, please visit our JustGiving page: www.justgiving.com/insidejapantours-ishinomaki



Local communities

Lying off the north-west coast of Kyushu, Hirado was once the access point for Portuguese trade with Japan in the 17th Century. Today the island's fortunes have turned as job prospects outside a field or boat have waned.

That's why a visit to Hirado Island is sustainable tourism at it's best. Stepping away from the guidebooks, you'll visit a beautiful, unspoilt island known for it's tiered rice paddies and pretty fishing villages. InsideJapan Tours works closely with a local volunteer guide service and traditional ryokan on the island, so your tourist money will go directly to the community. This way you'll help to ensure a more prosperous future for the island and its people, and the survival of local customs and culture.



Farm stays

While Japan's rural areas have suffered massive depopulation over recent years, there are still people working hard to keep traditional farming techniques alive. A fantastic way to appreciate Japan's beautiful countryside is to spend a few days on a farm. As well as taking in the scenery, we recommend donating a little time to help out with daily farm chores. You could be harvesting rice, planting trees or digging in the radish patch. Brown's Field, just 2 hours from Tokyo yet a world apart, is a family-run organic farm. Here visitors can stay in a simple tree house room or in a beautifully restored old house and join the family for a very healthy dinner of home-grown food. Other opportunities for farm stays include the Chiiori Project on Shikoku Island and the Shikisai no Yado Kanoë Ryokan at Togarinozawa Onsen in the Japanese Alps.

'My hashi' – InsideJapan Tours' chopsticks

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, we provide all clients with their own chopsticks for use in Japan. We calculate that on an average trip this could save up to 24 pairs of disposable chopsticks per person, and in a year, well, we'll leave the maths to you but we are pretty confident it adds up to a whole lot saved of wood!

Whale watching

Japan and the issues surrounding whaling have long been documented; there have been many 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, some coastal communities in Japan are moving away from whaling to focus on whale watching tours. There is a great diversity of whales and dolphins in Japanese coastal waters including humpbacks, sperm whales, bottle-nose and spinner dolphins. Opportunities for whale watching tours can be found on the coast in easy distance of Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka as well as Shikoku and the Okinawa Islands.

InsideJapan Tours highly recommends the Ogasawara Whale Watching Association (OWA). Ogasawara is a cluster of 30 small islands (only two of which are inhabited) 1,000 km south of Tokyo and accessible only by a 25 hour ferry journey. 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.

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 Ieyasu 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'.

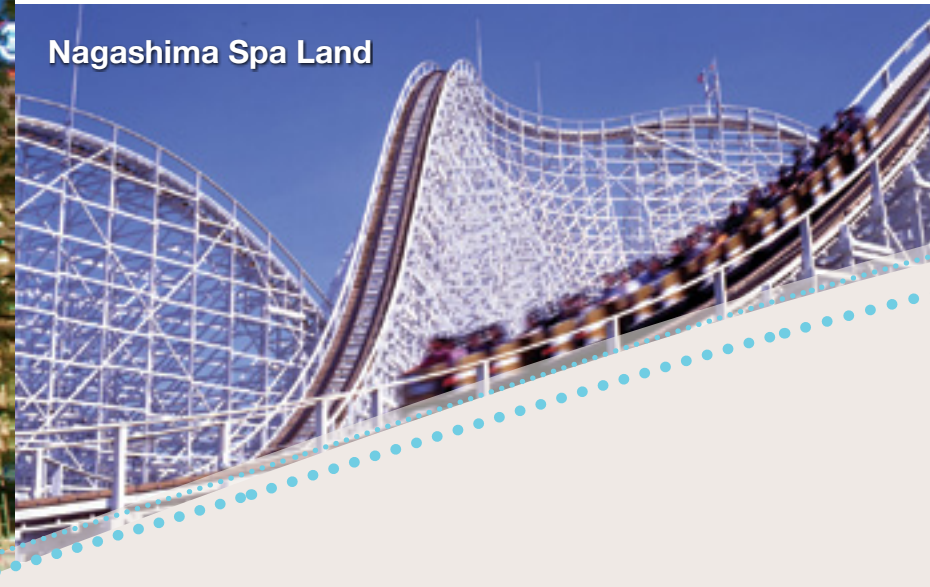
JR Towers, Nagoya Station

Meiji Mura



Nagoya Office team

Nagashima Spa Land



Kuragari Gorge



Nagoya Castle



Tokugawa Art Museum



Toyota Factory Visit

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Important Information

Holiday descriptions & inclusions

Full details of the inclusions and day-by-day itineraries of the holidays described in this brochure can be found on our website or by contacting us.

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

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

International flights

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' Fully Tailored Package and our 'Hidden Japan' and 'Kyushu Elements' Small Group Tours which are all designed for arrival and departure at Osaka Kansai Airport (KIX) or Osaka Itami Airport (ITM). Our 'Spirit of Honshu' Small Group Tour 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).

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.

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.

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

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

USA: www.usa.gov/Topics/Usresponse/Travel_Safety.shtml

JNTO UK: www.seejapan.co.uk

JNTO USA: www.japantravelinfo.com

JNTO Worldwide: 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 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, Citi Bank 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 offer discounts; 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. We are happy for children aged 6 years or older at time of travel to join our Small Group Tours.

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 checkout 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. Please ask if you need assistance with obtaining a translation.

Luggage

Porterage is not included as standard in any of our packages although the top hotels in Japan 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. For our Self-Guided style 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. For those travelling on a Fully Escorted Journey these arrangements will be handled by your guide. 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.

UK: 0117 370 9730

USA: 1 303 952 0379

AUS: 028 011 3229

info@insidejapantours.com

www.insidejapantours.com

For your local AITO Specialist Travel Agent see:

www.aitoagents.com

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Weather Facts & Figures

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 below 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 |





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