



INSIDE
Japan

Specialists in travel to Japan



Small Group Tours



Self-Guided Adventures



Fully Tailored Packages



www.insidejapantours.com

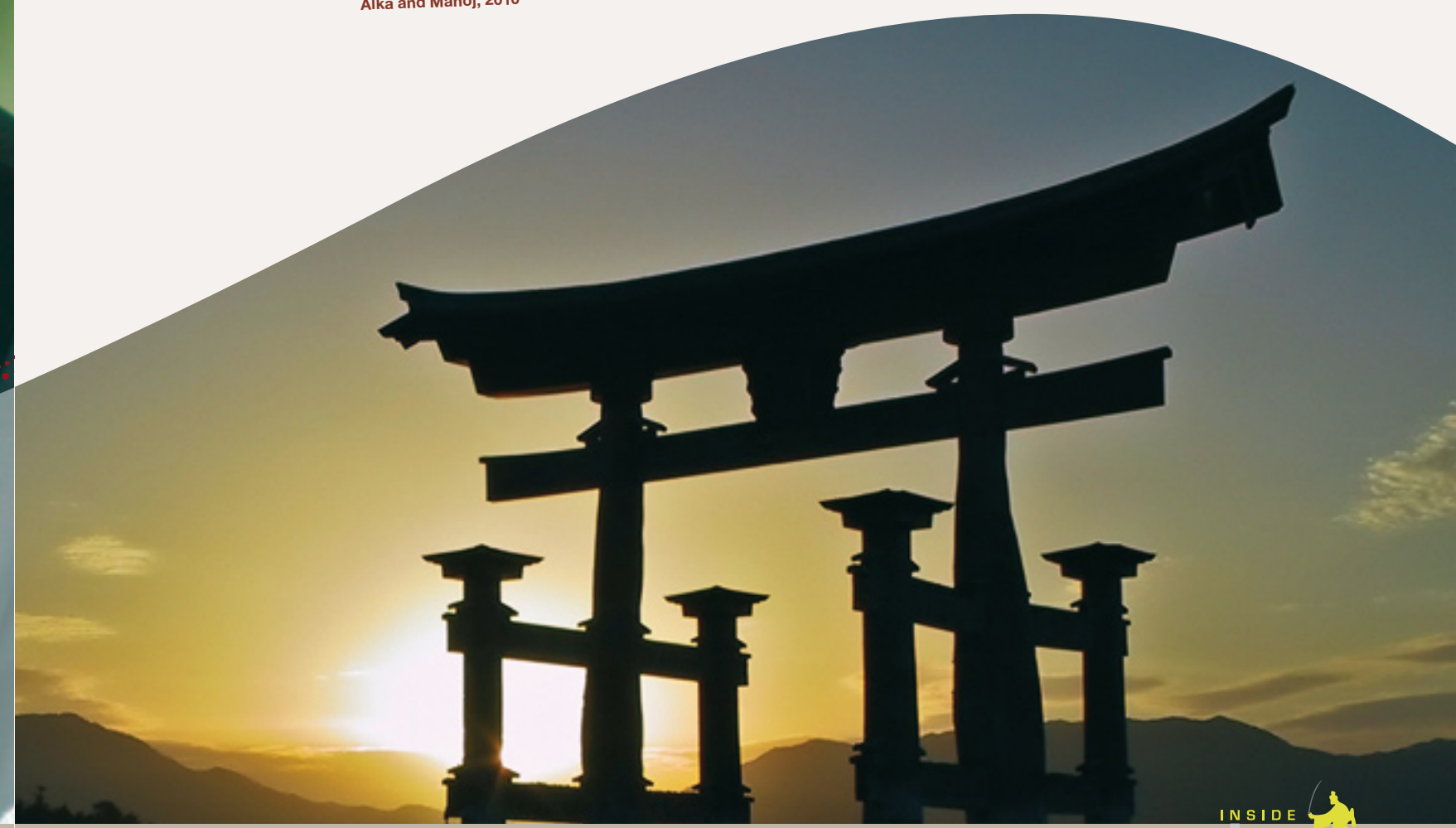


Contents

About InsideJapan Tours	2-3
Introducing Japan	4-5
Choose your type of holiday	6
Small Group Tours	7-31
Self-Guided Adventures	33-63
Fully Tailored Packages	65-87
Nagoya - our home in Japan	88-89
Important information	90
Weather facts and figures	91

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

Alka and Manoj, 2010



About InsideJapan Tours

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our Staff

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

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

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

M. Lanigan, August 2010



Award winning quality

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

At home and away

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

Your Info-Pack

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

Full financial protection & guaranteed prices

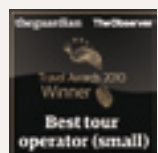
All AITO member companies are fully bonded and governed by an independent dispute settlement service, which means you are in safe hands. Land-only arrangements are bonded with AITO Trust Ltd (1130), while flight-inclusive packages are protected by our ATOL Licence (9419). In the extremely unlikely event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

How to book

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

Contact us

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



Introducing Japan

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chugoku

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



Kyushu

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



Okinawa

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



Ishigaki Island

Hokkaido

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



Central Japan

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



Tohoku

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

Kanto

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

Kansai

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

Shikoku

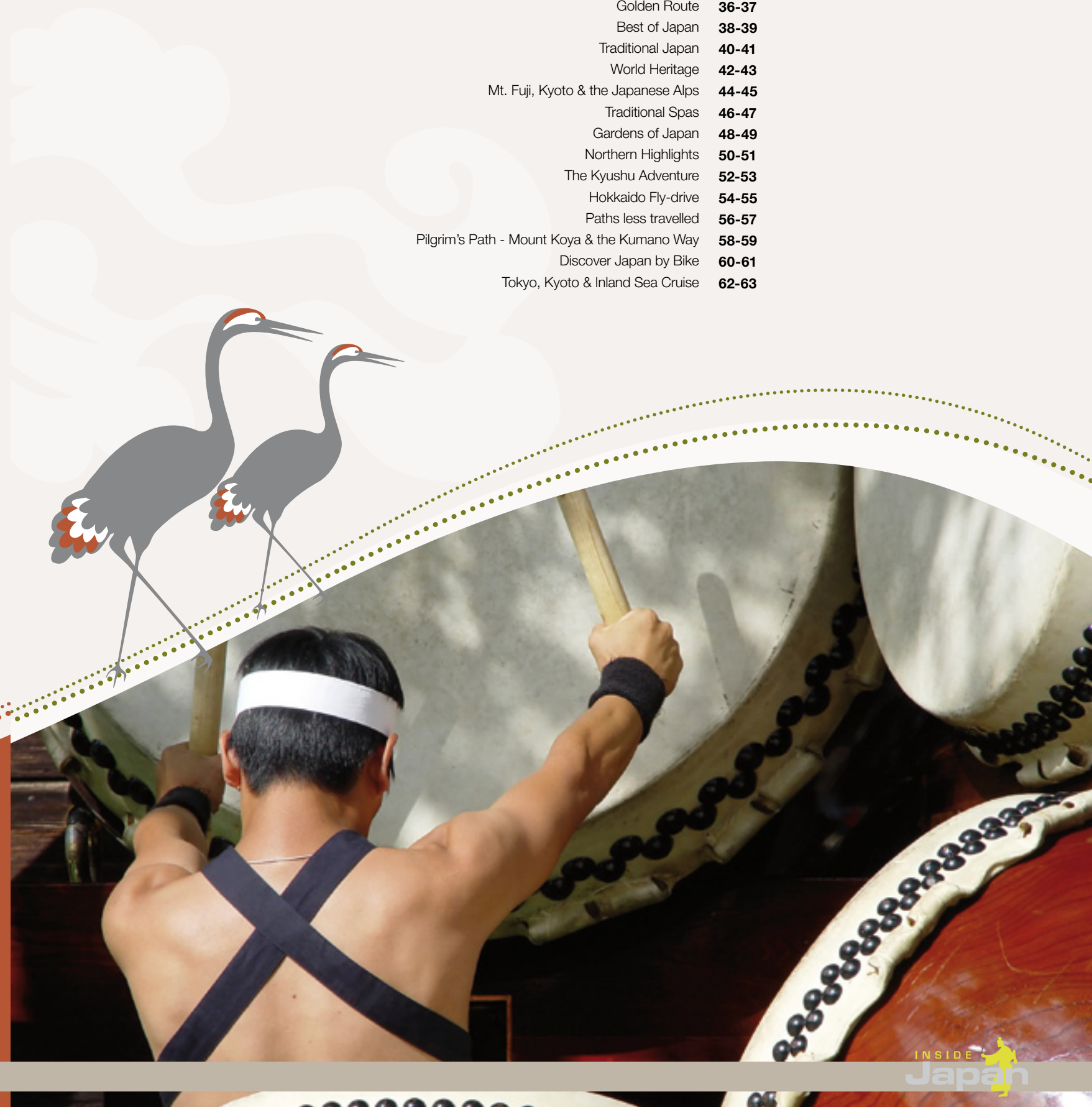
The smallest and least populated of the four major islands, Shikoku is a glimpse of Japan before the Meiji restoration ushered in the industrial age at the end of the nineteenth century. Much of the inland area is impenetrable; steep-sided, densely forested mountains soar skywards, their bases disappearing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



Self-Guided Adventures

Contents

Self-Guided Adventures in Japan	34-35
Golden Route	36-37
Best of Japan	38-39
Traditional Japan	40-41
World Heritage	42-43
Mt. Fuji, Kyoto & the Japanese Alps	44-45
Traditional Spas	46-47
Gardens of Japan	48-49
Northern Highlights	50-51
The Kyushu Adventure	52-53
Hokkaido Fly-drive	54-55
Paths less travelled	56-57
Pilgrim's Path - Mount Koya & the Kumano Way	58-59
Discover Japan by Bike	60-61
Tokyo, Kyoto & Inland Sea Cruise	62-63



Self-Guided Adventures in Japan

Our Self-Guided Adventures are for those who wish to travel independently 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 all include an airport meet and greet, the majority of transport between destinations, breakfast each morning and a number of evening meals. Although travel is by yourself, most itineraries feature one or two days with a local professional guide to help you get the most out of your holiday. All of this is supported by your detailed Info-Pack and the services of English speaking staff in our Nagoya office in central Japan.

Combining our favourite destinations and experiences we have created a range of itineraries showcasing the diversity of Japan.

Flexibility and independence are key and we can tailor arrangements to match your exact specifications. Feel free to request changes and additions to any of the itineraries; go budget or treat yourself to a luxury stay. Itineraries can be booked for single travellers, couples, families or groups and can be taken at any time of the year; catch the cherry blossom in spring, challenge Mount Fuji in summer, photograph the autumnal leaves or enjoy the crisp, clear days and quiet temples of winter.

Transport is mainly by train utilising Japan's outstanding rail network, including the famous *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train', with the use of car hire, public buses and ferries where suitable.

The itineraries presented here start and finish in Tokyo, for arrival and departure from Tokyo Narita Airport, with the exception of the 'Paths Less Travelled' itinerary, where Osaka Kansai Airport is the most convenient arrival and departure point.

“This was the best trip we have encountered. Your service was outstanding, not one detail was missed for our two week trip”

B. Estorga, 2009



Self-Guided Adventures

Flexible, independent travel

Expert advice, planning & on the ground support

Detailed, personalised travel instructions

Local professional guides in key destinations

With or without international flights

Options to suit all budgets and tastes

Prices & booking

Your holiday is one of the most important events of the year and we prefer to discuss your travel plans with you in depth. This way we can provide the most up-to-date information, the keenest prices and the very best expert advice. For this reason you won't find any prices printed in our brochure. Contact us or your local travel agent or check our website for the latest information on pricing, accommodation and options.

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

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, tastes and smells 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.

The Golden Route package includes breakfast each morning, two evening meals, transport between destinations and quality, tried and tested accommodation. Additionally, the service of a professional guide for a day in both Tokyo and Kyoto provides a deep insight into these cities and a greater understanding of the country.

Using the included Japan Rail pass you will have the chance 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.



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 way 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 whole *Shinkansen* network can be found on our Self-Guided Adventures and Small Group Tours.

“Everything about this trip was absolutely wonderful...from the country and the people to the accommodation.”

K. Morini, 2009

What's included

- 9 night's accommodation
- Breakfast every day
- 2 evening meals
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- 7 Day Japan Rail Pass
- Airport transfers
- Meet & greet upon arrival
- 8 hours private guide service in Tokyo & Kyoto
- Tokyo transport card with 2,500 yen of credit
- Hakone area transport pass
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

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 you will find traditional crafts, sake breweries and morning markets in picturesque Takayama. Here, the old streets have been carefully preserved to showcase the original architecture

and structures of this old artisan centre. The local speciality beef is fabulous as is the *miso* for which Takayama is renowned and the festivals held every spring and autumn, really are something to behold. 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, is not to be missed. 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.



“ Thank you so much for the booklets and guides which really made our holiday one of the best ever! ”

V. Gregory, 2010

What's included

- 14 night's accommodation
- Breakfast every day
- 5 evening meals
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- 14 Day Japan Rail Pass
- Airport transfers
- Meet & greet upon arrival
- 8 hours private guide service in Tokyo & Kyoto
- Tokyo transport card with 2,500 yen of credit
- Hakone area transport pass
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

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 remarkable 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 fantastic 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 in to valleys and wandering along misty pilgrim routes will reveal a side of Japan so often lost to the busyness of modern life.

Your journey through stunning countryside and regional towns 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.

Professional private guiding is included for a day in Tokyo and Kyoto allowing the chance to delve deeper into these historic cities. We will also book a visit to the Tondaya *machiya* in Kyoto, where 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 for no extra cost using the included Japan Rail Pass. Possible destinations include 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, the Traditional Japan Self-Guided Adventure will captivate you with the hidden secrets of this ancient land.



“The Traditional Japan itinerary provided just the right balance of destinations to make this a wonderful journey.”

K. Sternstein, 2007



What's included

- 14 night's accommodation
- Breakfast every day
- 4 evening meals
- Most transport between destinations in Japan
- 14 Day Japan Rail Pass
- Airport transfers
- Meet & greet upon arrival
- 8 hours private guide service in Tokyo & Kyoto
- Tondaya *machiya* visit with tea ceremony, *kimono* dress-up & lunch
- Tokyo transport card with 2,500 yen of credit
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

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

17 nights

TOKYO (3) – NIKKO (2) – KYOTO (3) – MOUNT KOYA (2) – NARA (1) – MIYAJIMA & HIROSHIMA (2) – KANAZAWA (2) – SHIRAKAWAGO (1) – TOKYO (1)

Japan is a country blessed with 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 World Heritage sites at ancient villages and shrines, beautiful gardens and islands, mountain-top temple settlements and the history of Tokyo, Kyoto and Hiroshima, to create a unique and comprehensive experience.

You will begin in Tokyo, the neon-lit beating heart of Japan, home of the 200 miles-per-hour *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train'; a city racing headlong into the future. The contrast with your later visit to the ancient capital of Kyoto is dramatic; 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. The included Japan Rail Pass also gives the possibility of day trips from Kyoto to Osaka, Kobe or Himeji.

In the mountains of Tochigi you will find the town of Nikko, home to the World Heritage complex of Tocho-gu. Set amidst towering cedar trees, the lavish temples and ornate shrines built to honour and enshrine the spirit of the first Tokugawa *Shogun*, are a world apart from the modern nation. Further along your journey, the retreat of Mount Koya in the Kii Mountains of Wakayama Prefecture, gives a chance to stay in atmospheric Buddhist temple lodgings and participate in a timeless, religious way of life that has spanned the centuries.

Your odyssey also takes in Nara, capital of Japan some 1,300 years ago and famed for the giant Todai-ji Temple and statue of Buddha as well as its deer park. You will then speed through the centuries with a visit to Hiroshima, a city which has blossomed in the sixty years since the devastation caused by the A-bomb. The skeleton of the A-bomb dome, located on the

edge of the Peace Park, stands as a poignant reminder of the horrors of war. Just off the coast from Hiroshima you will stay in traditional Japanese-style *ryokan* accommodation on Miyajima Island where the tranquil 'floating' *torii* gate of Itsukushima Shrine is a place of quiet reflection and timeless beauty.

The garden of Kenrokuen, samurai houses, a 'Ninja Temple' and a charming geisha quarter are all to be explored in Kanazawa, while the World Heritage village of Shirakawago, in the heart of the spectacular Hakusan National Park, provides a breathtaking vision of old Japan and a chance to stay in a unique *gassho-zukuri* thatched farmhouse.

Private guiding is included for a day in Tokyo, Nikko and Kyoto allowing the chance to make some Japanese friends as well as gain expert insights into each of these destinations.

The World Heritage itinerary will enable you to experience the places that have shaped the Japanese nation, exploring the history and culture of this ancient land.



“For me self-guided travel was wonderful with just the right blend of independence and hassle-free travel and accommodation arrangements”

E. Coonan, 2008

What's included

- 17 night's accommodation
- Breakfast every day
- 7 evening meals
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- 14 Day Japan Rail Pass
- Airport transfers
- Meet & greet upon arrival
- 8 hours private guide service in Tokyo & Kyoto
- 1/2 day private tour in Nikko
- Tokyo transport card with 2,500 yen of credit
- Hakone area transport pass
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Mount Koya and 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

Mount Fuji, Kyoto & The Japanese Alps

14 nights

TOKYO (3) – KAWAGUCHIKO & MOUNT FUJI (2) – MATSUMOTO (1) – KAMIKOCHI OR YUDANAKA (2) - TAKAYAMA (2) – KYOTO (3) – TOKYO (1)

Take a leap off the tourist track and discover the crisp mountain air and clear blue skies of Japan's little known Alpine region, an area of outstanding natural beauty with walks and hikes for all abilities. Set this natural history in the context of the castles, shrines, temples and gardens of Tokyo, Kyoto and Matsumoto and you have a wonderfully varied journey to savour.

This 14 night trip begins in the buzzing neon of Tokyo, the modern capital of Japan and a treasure trove of sights and experiences. From here travel to Kawaguchi-ko, one of the five lakes set in the shadow of Japan's most evocative image, Mount Fuji. In summertime this famous landmark opens to climbers - only the truly determined need apply!

For spring, autumn and summer departures you can stroll alongside the crystal blue waters of the Azusa River in Kamikochi National Park, a stunning plateau some 2,000 metres above sea level, keeping an eye out for the native monkey population. There is also more serious hiking here if you wish, along with ample opportunities for hot spring relaxation or perhaps afternoon tea in the luxurious Kamikochi Imperial Hotel.

During the winter months heavy snow fall closes Kamikochi National Park. Therefore, your adventure will instead take you straight from Matsumoto to Takayama, with an additional two nights in Yudanaka Onsen added after your stay in Kyoto. Here you can see the famous hot spring waters enjoyed by the local Japanese macaque monkeys. These photogenic monkeys, relaxing in the steaming pools with snow steeped all around, have become an iconic image of Japan. Nearby, the traditional village of Obuse was the home of Hokusai, the famous wood block print artist, and a visit to his museum is highly recommended.

Whether to fuel gentle strolls or strenuous hikes, you will want to try as much Japanese food as possible. To this end we have made sure that this itinerary is a gourmand's treat; not only a feast for the taste buds but also the eyes, numerous evening meals are included, often served in your *ryokan* room as is traditional.

In Matsumoto, you will step back in time while climbing the well worn wooden stairs of the imposing 'Black Crow' castle, whereas Takayama's charming old-world streets, sake breweries and thatched roof farmhouses give a glimpse of rural life past and present.

Kyoto, famed for its World Heritage temples, gardens and shrines is also surrounded by mountains. A walk through the majestic temples of Mount Hiei or the hundreds of vermilion *torii* gates climbing the hills of Fushimi Inari Shrine, are a wonderful addition to the classic sights of the glorious Golden Pavilion and the Zen gardens of Ryoan-ji Temple.

This Self-Guided Adventure brings you to the heart of Japan; a delicate balance between natural beauty and ancient culture and traditions.



“I am so glad I choose you to sort our holiday. I don't think anybody could have done it better.”

G. Essam, 2008



What's included

- 14 night's accommodation
- Breakfast every day
- 5 evening meals
- Most transport between destinations in Japan
- 7 Day Japan Rail Pass
- Airport transfers
- Meet & greet upon arrival
- 8 hours private guide service in Tokyo & Kyoto
- Tokyo transport card with 2,500 yen of credit
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

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!

Legend has it that Kamikochi's mountains were first climbed by a Buddhist priest called Banryu as a way of worshipping nature's deities, but it wasn't until the late nineteenth century that the sport of mountaineering really took off, ignited by the arrival of Westerners to this region. An English goldsmith named William Gowland, hired by the Meiji Government, first coined the term 'Japanese Alps' and the Reverend Walter Weston showcased Kamikochi in his book 'Mountaineering and Exploration in the Japanese Alps'. The Reverend is actually honoured in Kamikochi with his own festival, taking place in June each year.

Kamikochi's popularity grew, with high profile visitors such as novelists and members of the Imperial Family scaling the spectacular peaks, inspiring the public to do the same. As numbers increased the Japanese authorities recognised the need for protection and in 1934 created the Chubu Sangaku National Park, into which Kamikochi is incorporated.

Today, 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 tranquility. Our **Mount Fuji, Kyoto and the Japanese Alps** itinerary includes two nights here, giving you the perfect opportunity to discover for yourself what makes it so special.



Traditional Spas

15 nights

TOKYO (3) – KUSATSU ONSEN (2) – SHIBU ONSEN (1) – KYOTO (3) – MATSUE (2) – KINOSAKI ONSEN (1) – HAKONE (2) – TOKYO (1)

To the Japanese, *onsen* hot springs are a quintessential part of any holiday experience and we're sure you will love them as well. Part of a culture stretching back more than a thousand years, *onsen* spas dot the volcanic islands of Japan. For this special itinerary we have selected the very best hot springs combined with stays in Japan's must-see cities, Tokyo and Kyoto.

From Tokyo's most traditional district, Asakusa, the train will ease you deep into the mountains of rural Japan. First stop, the thermal town of Kusatsu Onsen. Consistently voted Japan's favourite hot spring spa, Kusatsu is a fantastic place to relax in therapeutic waters and explore the trails of Mount Shirane. Steam from the volcanic water fills the air of the town centre creating a magical atmosphere and visitors flock here for rejuvenation in the healing waters.

Heading over the top of Mount Shirane, via the smoking Asama volcano, you will travel to Shibu Onsen deep in a Japanese Alps' valley. Dressed in *yukata* cotton *kimono*, bathers wander the old-Edo style streets lined with wooden bath houses. In the cooler months, the nearby forested 'Hell Valley' plays host to the famous snow monkeys who like nothing better than a soak in the natural hot spring baths to keep warm.

A ride on the *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train' will take you to a treasure trove of World Heritage temples, shrines and gardens in Kyoto. Arguably the cultural capital of Japan, Kyoto is also a great base for day trips to Nara and rural Kurama Onsen up in the mountains surrounding the city.

Next stop is the Japan Sea coast and the water city of Matsue. Here an impressive samurai castle takes centre stage, its surrounding moat lined with old tea shops and traditional houses.

On the banks of Lake Shinji, Shinjiko Onsen provides hot spring bathing adding to Matsue's laid back feel.

Continuing along the coast past sleepy fishing villages and stunning seascapes, Kinohaki Onsen features old wooden buildings along a willow tree lined river. This is the perfect place to hop from bath house to bath house clip-clopping in *geta* wooden shoes borrowed from your traditional *ryokan*; a truly Japanese experience.

Before returning to the capital, you will hop off the *Shinkansen* line into Hakone National Park in the foothills of Mount Fuji. This region is rich in *onsen* and, in fine weather, enjoys panoramic views of Japan's iconic mountain.

By the time the express train sweeps you back towards the capital, your Japan will be one of mountains and valleys, hidden temples, castles and gardens and of course, the silky, therapeutic waters of Japan's *onsen* spas. All in all, a thoroughly relaxing foray into Japanese culture.



“I just wanted to thank you for helping us organise a truly wonderful honeymoon. I have fallen completely in love with Japan.”

M. Hutson, 2010



Matsue

Without doubt one of the highlights of the **Traditional Spas** itinerary is Matsue. Situated on the coast and sandwiched between two lakes, Matsue is known as 'The City of Water' and provides an interesting look into Japan's feudal past.

Next to the modern city hall stands the thoroughly impressive Matsue Castle. The castle is an original, undamaged by wartime bombing, and is the second largest in Japan after Himeji. The reflection of its ramparts mirrored in the moat makes for fantastic photographs. The castle interior is splendid and contains three floors filled with artefacts, including samurai weapons and armour as well artwork and intricate models depicting Matsue in days gone by.

A stone's throw from the castle gardens sit the Lafcadio Hearn Museum and Residence, the Tanabe Art Museum and the Meimei-An Tea House, all well worth a look. But the essential sight is the Adachi Museum which features the very best of Japanese modern art set against the backdrop of a stunning Japanese garden.

Of course, in keeping with the rest of this unique itinerary, Matsue offers splendid hot spring bathing. Be sure to visit Shinjiko Onsen but a lesser known treat located just a short scenic train ride away is Tamatsukuri, an *onsen* with a 1,300 year history and the pride of the San'in region.

With its many charms and enviable location it is not surprising that the citizens of Matsue are known for their chirpy, easy-going demeanour. It is impossible not to feel relaxed and rested here.

What's included

- 15 night's accommodation
- Breakfast every day
- 5 evening meals
- Most transport between destinations in Japan
- 14 Day Japan Rail Pass
- Airport transfers
- Meet & greet upon arrival
- 8 hours private guide service in Tokyo & Kyoto
- Tokyo transport card with 2,500 yen of credit
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack



Gardens of Japan

14 nights

TOKYO (3) – OMIYA (1) – KANAZAWA (2) – KYOTO (3) –
TAKAMATSU (1) – MATSUE (2) – OKAYAMA (1) – TOKYO (1)

A single rock afloat a sea of meticulously raked gravel; koi carp gliding serenely beneath the surface of a lotus pond; the gentle curves of teahouse set against a crimson flash of autumnal maple. Such images of the gardens of Japan have found deserved fame in the West. While this adventure seeks out some of the classic examples of this art form, you will also delve beyond these scenes into the hidden delights and detail of the Japanese garden.

In Japan, religion, art and nature are never far apart, and horticulture is no exception combining the Shinto love of natural environment with Buddhist ideals of paradise. In fact the Japanese word for garden, *niva*, once referred to an area that had been purified in preparation for Shinto deities or *kami* which are believed to be present in the elements of rock, water and wood: Essential constituent parts in any Japanese garden.

Given this link, it is little surprise that Kyoto, the epicentre of Japanese culture and history, boasts some of the country's best gardens, from simple Zen gardens to lovingly kept stroll gardens and borrowed scenery gardens where the mountains surrounding Kyoto form a dramatic backdrop. The perfectly manicured and precise gardens of the Imperial Villas and temples within Kyoto provide an insight into the Japanese appreciation of the aesthetic, as well as beautiful vistas and rich landscapes in the blossom of spring or turning leaves in autumn.

This itinerary also includes stays in some of Japan's most famous garden cities: Kanazawa for Kenrokuen, Okayama for Korakuen and Takamatsu on Shikoku Island, home of Ritsurin Koen. The latter is a stunning landscape garden cultivated for centuries since its creation by local feudal lords in the early Edo Period.

North of Kyoto near Matsue on the Japan Sea Coast, the Adachi Museum's gardens have won accolades from around the world and are a real must-see. The art museum is also top-class, while Matsue itself is an attractive castle town.

Even the non-stop metropolis of Tokyo where you will start and finish your trip has pockets of calm; the beautiful Hamarikyu Gardens on the banks of the Sumida River nestle peacefully among the gleaming skyscrapers of Ginza and Meiji Park provides a lungful of fresh air with the amazingly serene Shrine at the centre.

Omiya, just outside the capital, is home to gardens in miniature; famous for its *bonsai* villages which boast Japan's largest collection of these intricate living sculptures. In Omiya and Matsue you will stay in traditional Japanese inns with sumptuous evening meals included.

Gardens of Japan takes you beneath the surface of this beautiful, sacred art in both famous and wonderful lesser-known locations.



“I would highly recommend your company to anyone. From our first initial enquiries you answered every big and little question quickly and reassuringly.”

M. Butler, 2007

What's included

- 14 night's accommodation
- Breakfast every day
- 2 evening meals
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- 14 Day Japan Rail Pass
- Airport transfers
- Meet & greet upon arrival
- 8 hours private guide service in Tokyo & Kyoto
- Entrance to Saiho-ji temple in Kyoto
- Tokyo transport card with 2,500 yen of credit
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Saiho-ji Moss Temple

In the beauty and order of Japanese gardens is to be found an inner peace and tranquillity and perhaps nowhere captures this for the visitor more than the moss gardens of Saiho-ji Temple. 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.

Today, however, visitors are drawn to Saiho-ji by the velvety green carpet of moss, covering the ground under the trees and creating a sublime atmosphere of still calm. The moss grew naturally after completion of the garden, perhaps representing the Japanese ideal of a life lived in harmony with nature.

Since 1977 the temple has been closed to the general public and is viewable by appointment only – a service we include on the Gardens of Japan itinerary. Before entering, all visitors are asked to join in a 30-minute session involving the chanting and copying of Buddhist scriptures, called *sutra*; a ceremony designed to enable a true appreciation of the gardens, free from worldly cares and distractions.

With your calligraphy brush as a souvenir, your visit to Saiho-ji is an experience that will live long in the memory.



Northern Highlights

14 nights

TOKYO (3) – NIKKO (2) – SENDAI (2) – NYUTO ONSEN (1) – AKITA (1) – MOUNT HAGURO (1) – NIIGATA (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. A myriad of sights and experiences await you, from the ornate temples and shrines of Nikko National Park, to the rugged seascapes and unique culture of remote Sado Island. You will experience an atmospheric overnight stay at the mountain temple complex on Haguro-san, and travel back in time to the wonderfully rustic Nyuto Onsen, one of Japan's hidden hot spring spas, a collection of half a dozen tiny *onsen* villages in the mountains with ramshackle buildings; a world away from the sleek modernity of the cities.

The past is very much present in Tohoku and Japanese history comes alive as you learn about the Fujisawa clan in Hiraizumi and tour Kakuodate's beautifully preserved samurai district. Though mainly rural, this trip also includes short city stays in Sendai and Niigata, 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. Your adventure features a day with your own private expert guide in both Tokyo and Nikko. Accommodation includes 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



What's included

- 14 night's accommodation
- Breakfast every day
- 6 evening meals
- Most transport between destinations in Japan
- 4 Day Flexi JR East Rail Pass
- Airport transfers
- Meet & greet upon arrival
- 8 hours private guide service in Tokyo
- Car hire on Sado Island
- 1/2 day private tour in Nikko
- Tokyo transport card with 2,500 yen of credit
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Nyuto Onsen

A relaxing soak in natural *onsen* hot spring waters is one of 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.



The 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 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 bellowing 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... Kyushu is definitely off the beaten track for Westerners and we enjoyed that fact. And the volcanoes, mountains, trees and wildlife did not disappoint.”

A. Williams, 2010



What's included

- 16 night's accommodation
- Breakfast every day
- 7 evening meals
- Most transport between destinations in Japan
- Airport transfers
- Meet & greet upon arrival
- 8 hours private guide service in Tokyo
- Tokyo transport card with 2,500 yen of credit
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

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

16 nights

TOKYO (3) – HAKODATE (1) – TOYA ONSEN (2) – SAPPORO (2) – BIEI (3) – KAWAYU ONSEN (2) – RAUSU OR TSURUI (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.

For centuries, this northern island remained separate from mainland Japan, providing a home to the Ainu people – a distinct rugged landscape far from the crowds and influences of the mainland population. The Japanese only arrived on the island within the last 100 years, with the resultant mix creating a unique standalone culture very different to the rest of the country. Hokkaido offers a range of adventures you simply won't find elsewhere in Japan, from viewing amazing wildlife on land and by sea, to exploring steaming lava pools and bubbling volcanic 'hells'.

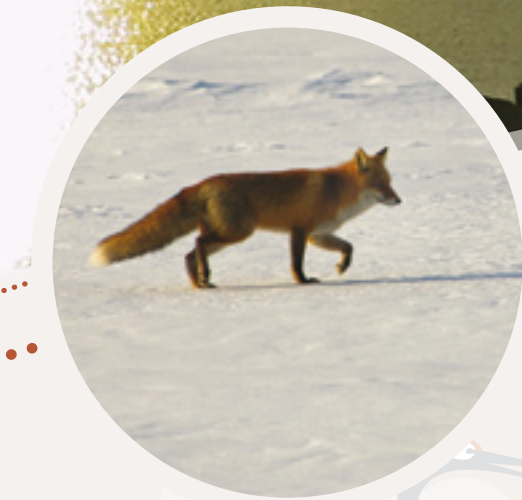
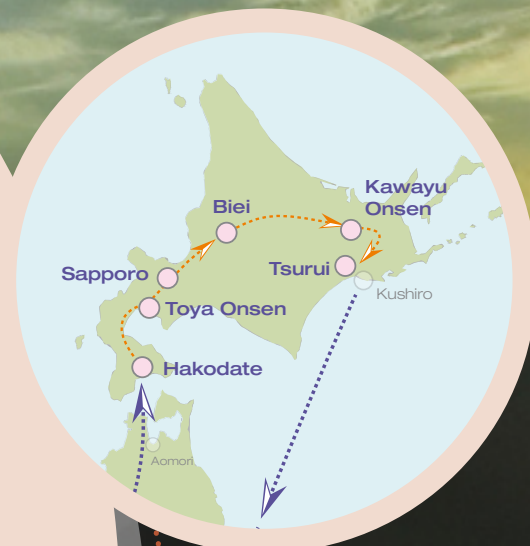
Your first foray into Hokkaido is Hakodate, where you will pick up your hire car. One of the first ports to open up to foreign visitors, Hakodate enjoys a lasting legacy of churches and European buildings. At night, the views from the top of Mount Hakodate are spectacular. Take a cable car to the top 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 snow festivals, beer festivals and plenty of *sake* breweries, the island's capital is a great destination at any time of year.

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 through, with stunning views of Mount Asahidake with the flora of summer, the brightly coloured leaves of autumn and the snow-capped peaks of winter. Conquer the 16 volcanic peaks, 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, cranes, whales, seals, deer, eagles and owls to name but a few species.

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

Shiretoko Peninsula

With its name deriving from an Ainu word meaning “end of the earth”, the weathered basalt cliffs, hot spring waterfalls and sheer mountainous inclines of the Shiretoko Peninsula give you a taste of a remote and spectacularly rugged Japan. Formally recognised in 2005 as a World Heritage site, a stay in this far-flung territory instils a sense of Japanese small-town life with warm, friendly accommodation and seafood to die for.

The star attraction is the 300 or so brown bears, viewable at close quarters during much of the year, but best in autumn when they demonstrate their salmon-catching skills. Exotic wildlife does not stop here; passing sperm whales, red-crowned cranes and the magnificent, endangered Blackiston's fish owl are also highlights of this remote region.

The area also offers political intrigue. Clearly visible just a short distance off the eastern coast of the peninsula is Kunashiri Island, the southernmost of the Kuril Islands, which were annexed by Russia during the final days of World War Two and remain the subject of a territorial dispute with Japan.

The Shiretoko Peninsula is even wilder in winter. Large floes of drift ice from Siberia bring spotted seals pursued by enormous sea eagles. For the adventurous, we recommend a hike around frozen waterfalls, a trek out on the sea ice or even a scuba dive beneath! If that's too much action for you, then simply sit out under the stars in a hot spring bath, enjoy a cold beer and listen to the owls.

What's included

- 16 night's accommodation
- Breakfast every day
- 9 evening meals
- All transport between destinations in Japan including 12 day's car hire
- Airport transfers
- Meet & greet upon arrival
- 8 hours private guide service in Tokyo
- Car hire in Hokkaido
- Tokyo transport card with 2,500 yen of credit
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Paths Less Travelled

15 nights

KYOTO (3) – TOKUSHIMA (1) – IYA VALLEY (1) – KOCHI (2) – UWAJIMA (1) – MATSUYAMA (2) – KOTOHIRA (1) – TAKAMATSU (1) – NAOSHIMA ISLAND (2) – OSAKA (1)

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 will experience a side of Japan those who focus on the classic sites will never see. In Kotohira you will follow the pilgrims skywards as you climb the steep steps of *Kompira-san*, Shikoku's most famous shrine, while in Matsuyama you can soak in the hot spring waters of historic Dogo Onsen.

There's the chance to see wildlife too; from May to October whale watching boats run regularly from the laid-back city of Kochi – an eco-friendly alternative to Japan's usual whale related headlines.

In remote Iya Valley, you will stay in a beautiful thatched-roof farmhouse and take part in volunteer work as part of the Chiiori project. Here you can get a sense of helping the local community and contributing to the preservation of Japan's cultural heritage. The garden city of Takamatsu, home to Ritsurin Park, is our boarding point for the ferry across the Inland Sea to unique Naoshima Island. This 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 we have included a stay in lodgings at an atmospheric Buddhist temple, number 19 on the famous 88 temple circuit, with dinners of traditional vegetarian cuisine.

Numerous other evening meals are included, making this trip a culinary treat and the chance to experience the breadth of cuisine Japan has to offer, from locally made *soba* noodles to *sashimi* cut from the freshest fish and traditional *tempura*.

With stays at small family-run inns you will have fantastic opportunities to meet the Japanese people, whilst making sure your trip benefits the local community. Getting there is all part of the fun on this adventure into rural Japan and you will be combining local train and bus rides through the mountains, with ferries on the inland sea – a great way to see this sleepy pastoral isle.

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

Paths Less Travelled is a fascinating voyage of discovery that will reward you for journeying into the rural heart of "lost 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



Chiiori farmhouse

Deep in the staggering ravines of the Iya Valley, the Paths Less Travelled itinerary includes a one night stay at Chiiori, a lovingly preserved, 300-year-old thatched farmhouse.

Literally meaning 'house of the flute', Chiiori is the heart of the Chiiori Trust, a non-profit organisation dedicated to the revitalisation of Japan's rural regions through sustainable tourism and agriculture. The mission is threefold: to restore the natural beauty of Chiiori and other old houses in the area; to revitalise Iya village through the establishment of an eco-friendly community deeply rooted in Japanese tradition; and to spread Chiiori's ideals throughout Japan.

The house itself was rescued in 1973 by Alex Kerr, an American author and long-term Japan resident. The house is typical of old Iya construction with wooden floors and massive beams and rafters, all smoked black from centuries of fires in the *irori*, a hearth set down into the floors.

Life at Chiiori is communal and guests are expected to pitch in with chores such as cooking and cleaning. Afterwards visitors and staff can enjoy dinner together around the *irori*, sleep under the rafters and watch the morning mists over a cup of home-grown tea.

Beyond the usual chores, work at Chiiori is entirely optional. We realise that you are staying here for a short time and will want to get out and explore Iya Valley. That said, once the magic of Chiiori has swept over you, you may decide to give up an afternoon of sightseeing for time in the tomato patch!

What's included

- 15 night's accommodation
- Breakfast every day
- 6 evening meals
- Most transport between destinations in Japan
- Airport transfers
- Meet & greet upon arrival
- 8 hours private guide service in Kyoto
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Pilgrim's Path – Mount Koya and the Kumano Way

14 nights

TOKYO (3) – ISE (2) – YUNOMINE (2) – TOTSUKAWA ONSEN (1) –
MOUNT KOYA (2) – KYOTO (3) – TOKYO (1)

Japan has a long tradition of pilgrimage. Beginning in the Nara period (710 to 794) and increasing in popularity through the centuries, today over six million people a year head to Ise Shrine in search of a spiritual lift, a connection with their ancestors and more practical benefits such as a promotion or good health!

On our Pilgrim's Path itinerary you will join the ranks of the *junreisha*, as pilgrims are known in Japanese, for your own pilgrimage through Japan, exploring modern cities, old towns, remote villages and visiting some of the country's most sacred sites.

Tokyo, Japan's remarkable capital city, provides a dramatic introduction to your stay. Here a visit to bustling Senso-ji Temple, where the smell of incense fills the air and young and old alike queue to purchase their fortunes, gives a glimpse of a Tokyo seemingly lost amongst the skyscrapers and office buildings; contrast this with Shinjuku, where dazzling neon lights illuminate the way to a high-tech, digital future.

A ride on Japan's *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train' followed by a scenic local train ride hugging the coastline brings you to the pilgrimage town of Ise where you will find Naiku, the inner shrine of Ise Jingu, dedicated to Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess. Stroll through the extensive grounds before a traditional lunch in the restored old quarters.

Kyoto, your other city stay, requires no introduction. As the cultural and historical heart of Japan, the city offers the very best in arts and crafts, gardens and cuisine as well as a remarkable 17 World Heritage sites. An expert private guide is included for one day, providing detailed background and the local low-down.

Following in the footsteps of Emperors, you will continue along the ancient *Kumano Kodo*, a designated World Heritage route leading to Kumano Sanzen – the three grand shrines of Kumano. You will stay in the hot spring villages of Yunomine and Totsukawa, cherished by generations of travellers for their fantastic spa waters and beautiful scenery. For one day, your expert guide will lead you on a choice of hiking trails across the region, from easy to more challenging routes.

You will complete your pilgrimage with a temple lodging stay at the mountain-top sacred site of Koya-san. We recommend a twilight walk through the incredible Okuno-in cemetery before sitting down to a dinner of *shoujin ryori*, traditional vegetarian Buddhist cuisine, served at your lodgings. Join the early morning meditation ceremony for full emersion into a timeless way of life that has endured since the monk Kukai first set foot on Mount Koya some 1,200 years ago.

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.



“The travel tips and guides in the Info-Pack made travelling around Japan a breeze. All in all it was the trip of a lifetime.”

C. Robinson, 2010



What's included

- 14 night's accommodation
- Breakfast every day
- 7 evening meals
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- 14 Day Japan Rail Pass
- Airport transfers
- Meet & greet upon arrival
- 8 hours private guide service in Tokyo & Kyoto
- Private guide for the Kumano Kodo (1 day)
- Tokyo transport card with 2,500 yen of credit
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

The Kumano Kodo

The World Heritage Kumano Kodo is a collection of ancient pilgrim trails linking the former capitals of Nara and Kyoto to the sacred Sanzen 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. Roads and rest stops were first maintained in the Heian Period (794 to 1192) to provide for Emperors and former Emperors making the journey. But Kumano Sanzen was not just for the nobility; the Gods of Kumano becoming renowned for their generosity and accepting all pilgrims "without regards to status or gender".

The route reached its zenith of popularity in the twelfth 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 easy 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.



Discover Japan by Bike

13 nights

TOKYO (2) KYOTO (3) TOKUSHIMA (1) RURAL SHIKOKU AND THE IYA VALLEY (4) MATSUYAMA (1) HIROSHIMA (1) TOKYO (1)

Historic cities, lush tea fields, virgin forest, farming villages and *onsen* hot spring baths all await the intrepid cyclist. With some fantastic scenery and unforgettable cultural experiences, this trip proves that the best way to experience Japan is by bike.

Discover rural Japan and enjoy the sights and sounds of Tokyo, Kyoto and Nara as you revel in the country's grand history. Travelling by bicycle gives you unrivalled access to remote parts of the countryside, allows you to meet with local people, visit some stunning hidden areas and sample some great regional cuisine. It is also a whole lot of fun!

For a full day in Tokyo and for the Kyoto to Nara cycle, you will have a guide to show you the best sights, restaurants and routes, whilst for the self-guided cycling on Shikoku Island you will be provided with our extensive trip notes. Bike hire is of course, included and your hybrid bike comes complete with lock and helmet as well as an emergency repair kit in case you pick up an inconvenient puncture along the way.

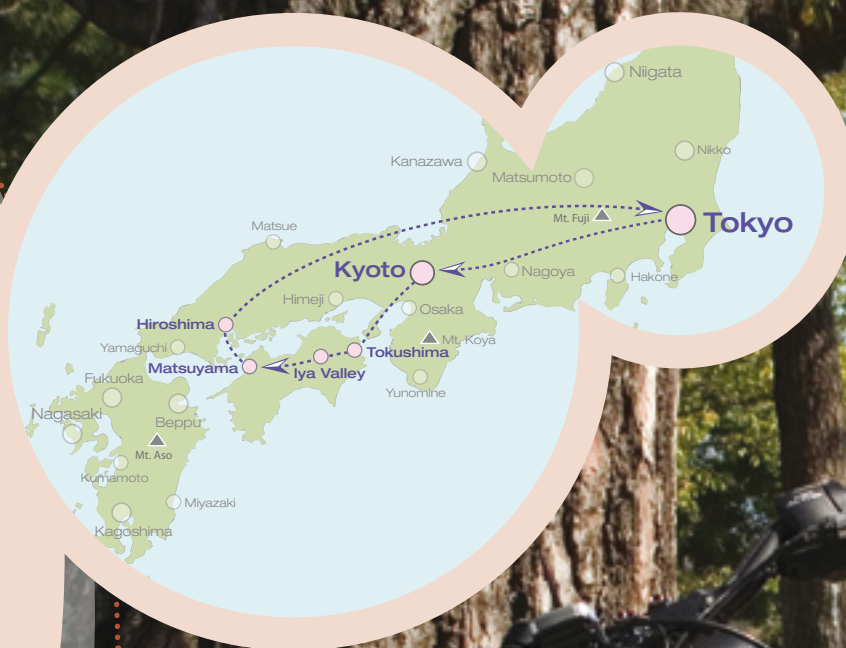
As you head out of Tokushima City, early on Day 7, the urban landscape gradually begins to change and within 25 minutes you are cycling through lush countryside. The mountains loom large in front of you, a vision of what is to come as over the next four days you will make multiple climbs and descents, before finally returning to the north coast of the island. En route you will pass through the central mountains of the Iya Valley, famous for its clear running rivers, gorges and ancient vine bridges, before spending a night in the castle port city of Matsuyama, famous for its historic *onsen* hot spring baths.

Each day of your ride will bring with it lasting memories; the sweeping descent into the Iya Valley; the triumphant feeling as you conquer the 1,000 metre ascent of the Minokoshi Pass; an ancient temple set back from the road, welcoming you just as pilgrims have been welcomed for a thousand years.

The cycling on this trip (around 70 kilometres per day for 6 days) is easy in the cities but tough in the countryside, with some challenging climbs. You will need to a reasonably strong and determined cyclist - but the effort pays fantastic dividends.

On the final day's riding, you will board a ferry through the islands of the Inland Sea, leaving the quiet, slow-paced world of Shikoku behind; ahead of you the lively city of Hiroshima and a return to twenty-first century Japan.

With local inns, secluded countryside *onsen* hot springs and traditional local culinary treats, this is an experience of Japan that is up close and personal. You will leave Japan with life long memories, an incredible sense of achievement and a wealth of stories about the time you cycled the soaring mountains of Shikoku.



What's included

- 13 night's accommodation
- Breakfast every day
- 4 evening meals
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- Airport transfers
- Meet & greet upon arrival
- Guided cycle in Tokyo
- Guided cycle from Kyoto to Nara
- Bike hire in Tokyo & Kyoto (1 day each) & for Shikoku (7 days)
- Helmet, lock & route maps
- Tokyo transport card with 2,500 yen of credit
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Other cycling Options

Japan has something to offer cyclists of all abilities and we can arrange cycle hire and trip notes for a number of destinations around the country.

In Tokyo and Kyoto single day bike hire is a great way of exploring the relatively flat streets and local countryside. Take the cycle path from Kyoto station alongside the **Kamogawa River** to the Path of Philosophy – a lovely mainly traffic free route. For a day in Tokyo take a 45 kilometre circle around the Imperial Palace alongside the moats, passing a *sake* tasting shop, over sea bridges, next to Shogunate gardens and right through the centre of the city.

Many of Japan's great lakes make for further one day cycle options – **Tazawa-ko** in the north, **Toya-ko** on Hokkaido Island and **Kawaguchi-ko** in the Fuji Five Lakes area near Tokyo are all worth exploring by bike.

For an easy 4 day cycle visit the **Izu Peninsula**, a rural area south of Tokyo and rich in history, hot springs and beaches. Discover **Shimoda**, the port where Commodore Perry's Black Ships landed and forced Japan to open her borders, and take scenic coastal roads to small seaside villages looking out for views of Mt. Fuji on the way.

A little further a-field, the **Shimanami-kaido** is a unique 70 kilometres route linking Shikoku Island with Japan's main island of Honshu via a series of huge bridges which were built with cyclists in mind. The views are stunning, a well rehearsed system is in place for bike hire and there are plenty of nice stops along the way such as the Hirayama Museum on **Kuchijima**, dedicated to one of Japan's most famous painters.

Tokyo, Kyoto and Inland Sea Cruise

18 nights

TOKYO (3) – AOMORI (1) – ORION II CRUISE (10) – KYOTO (3) – TOKYO (1)

With a coastline of 18,486 miles and in a country where nowhere is more than 100 miles from the sea, a cruise is the perfect way to explore Japan. On this Self-Guided Adventure you will combine stays in modern Tokyo and historic Kyoto with 10 nights aboard the luxurious Orion II boutique cruise ship, exploring the Inland Sea national park and beyond.

Reach Orion II by taking the brand new 200 miles per hour *Shinkansen* 'Bullet Train' from Tokyo to Aomori for a night's stay in one of northern Japan's most important cities. The previous three nights will have been spent in Tokyo, where you will have been able to soak up the atmosphere of the capital with the help of a guide for a full day.

From Aomori port the 10 night cruise takes you first around the Japan Sea coast for the gardens of Kanazawa and the wild rugged vistas of Sado Island, once a harsh place of exile, now a cultural treasure trove. You will spend a full day in both, allowing time to visit samurai houses and castle remains in Kanazawa and experience *taiko* drums, traditional *tarai-bune* boats and ancient *bunraku* puppet theatre on Sado. These and all other shore excursions, are accompanied by expert Expedition Leaders who will be able to explain the cultural and historical background to the sights you are visiting.

Make a brief foray into South Korea for a full day excursion to the bustling city of Busan, before continuing around the Japanese main island until reaching land at Nagasaki. Famous of course for the events of 9th August 1945, Nagasaki is now a lively international city with a beautiful harbour and fascinating history. The Dutch trading post of Dejima in Nagasaki harbour was one of only two ports to remain open during Japan's Shogun period and during the Napoleonic wars was the only place in the World able to freely fly the Dutch flag.

Stops at the World Heritage 'floating' *torii* gate of Miyajima Island, home to monkeys as well as monks, and Hiroshima's Peace Park and A-Bomb Museum, mark your return to the coast of Honshu, Japan's main island. Here, if you wish, you will be able to indulge in some *okonimiyaki*, a local speciality savoury pancake.

Before saying "sayonara" to Orion II at Kobe port, you will also visit Uwajima on rural Shikoku island. Home to a castle built in 1585 by Toyotomi Hidenaga as well as a rather unusual fertility shrine and some lovely stroll gardens.

Further gardens as well as the best of Japan's temples and shrines await you in Kyoto, where we have included a full day with a local guide during your three night stay. Capital of Japan for over a thousand years, Kyoto fascinates with every step you take; Geisha stroll down the streets of Gion; a pilgrim prays at Yasaka shrine; and a thousand multi-limbed bronze statues of Buddha await the visitors to Sanjusangendo hall.

The *Shinkansen* ride back to Tokyo for a final night's stay will allow you both a glimpse of Mount Fuji as well as time to relax and reflect on a fantastic adventure around the coast of Japan.



Orion II

Orion II is a private, yacht-like expedition cruise ship built by Cantieri Navale Ferrari of Italy and offers the finest standards in small-ship cruise travel. This boutique ship is equipped with speedy Zodiacs for shore expeditions and small-boat sightseeing and has a staff of 68 officers and crew to look after the 100 guests on board.

Every room offers ocean views and is appointed with a sitting area or separate living room, twin or queen-size beds and marble bathrooms. All rooms offer conveniences such as ample storage space, complementary 24-hour room service, a flat screen TV, DVD/CD player, internet connectivity, air conditioning, a personal safe, hairdryer and a mini-refrigerator continuously stocked with complimentary bottled water.

Facilities on-board include cafes and a bar, gymnasium, sun deck, Jacuzzi and a bright and welcoming lounge, the social centre of the boat and also the venue for tour briefings and expert talks. Dining is at a choice of two restaurants, one of which is open-air and both of which offer wide ranging high quality menus.

The well thought-out excursions are led by Expedition Leaders who are all experts in their field including botany, biology, anthropology and history. On board lectures are also available and these are led by Guest Speakers or Expedition Leaders.



What's included

- 10 night's onboard Orion II
- 8 night's hotel accommodation
- Lunch, dinner & selected drinks for 11 days on-board Orion II
- Breakfast every day
- All transport between destinations in Japan
- Airport transfers
- Meet & greet upon arrival
- 8 hours private guide service in Tokyo & Kyoto
- Selected excursions & guiding during cruise
- Tokyo transport card with 2,500 yen of credit
- InsideJapan Tours' complimentary Info-Pack

Nagoya - Our Home in Japan

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

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

Toyota factory visit

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

Nagoya Castle

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

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

Tokugawa Art Museum

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

JR Towers, Nagoya Station



Meiji Mura



Kuragari Gorge



Nagashima Spa Land



Toyota Factory Visit



Tokugawa Art Museum



Nagoya Castle

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.

Holiday descriptions & inclusions

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

Our packages include:

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

Our packages generally do NOT include:

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

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

International flights

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

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

Meals

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

Prices

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

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

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

How to book, payment & travel documents

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

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

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

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

Late bookings

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

Passports & visas, health advice

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

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

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

Children

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

Rooms & check-in

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

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

Car hire

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

Luggage

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

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

W: www.insidejapantours.com

E: info@insidejapantours.com

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

For your local AiTO Specialist Travel Agent see: www.aitoagents.com

Image credits

Please see www.insidejapantours.com/brochure-images for full details of all the images used in our brochure.

Average weather conditions

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

Average start of cherry blossom

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

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

Average start of autumn leaves

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

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

Rainy season

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

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

Source: Japan Meteorological Agency

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

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





INSIDE
Japan
get beneath the surface

InsideJapan Tours Ltd

☎ UK 0117 314 4620

☎ US 1 303 952 0184

@ info@insidejapantours.com

www.insidejapantours.com



The mark of responsible forestry

