

INSIDE  
Japan 



Small group tours  
Tailormade travel  
Experiences & inspiration

# Welcome to InsideJapan Tours®

It's great that you are here, reading the intro to the latest iteration of our Japan Inspirations brochure. Thank you. During the pandemic we sorely missed working with people like you to plan inspiring cultural adventures which visit the places we love across the length and breadth of Japan; you could say that it's our team's *ikigai*, our company's 'reason for being', and what has sustained us for over 20 years. Japan means the world to us, and we can't wait to share that with you.



## CONTENTS

About InsideJapan Tours	2 - 3
Our Covid Booking Guarantee	4 - 5
Traveling responsibly	6 - 7
Introducing Japan	8 - 9
When to travel	10 - 11

### Small Group Tours 12 - 37

<b>Tailormade travel</b>	<b>38 - 83</b>
Self-Guided Adventures	38 - 73
Exclusive Private Journeys	72 - 79

### Experiences & inspiration 80 - 115

<b>Accommodation</b>	<b>116 - 121</b>
Asia stopovers	122 - 127
Weather & climate	128
Glossary	129
FAQs & important information	130 - 131



### Get beneath the surface

InsideJapan Tours - award-winning, innovative and fun group tours, tailormade trips and cultural experiences throughout Japan.

# About InsideJapan Tours

## From the founders, Alastair and Simon

2020-21 were the years that travel stopped. And how we've missed it; the feeling of possibility as you touch down and begin a new adventure. The joy of discovering your new favorite food (and the sadness that you'll never find it back home!); or finding yourself inserted for real into that view from the brochure.

Travel matters. It helps us to recharge our batteries and to find new perspectives on life. It increases understanding across cultures, brings the world closer together. Our vacations give us good times to reminisce about and future adventures to look forward to. And done the right way, as we have strived to do since founding the business in 2000, travel benefits the destinations we visit and helps protect them for future generations.

**Inside this brochure you'll discover why Japan matters to us and why we've dedicated over twenty years to sharing what we love about it with as many people as possible.**

Japan gets under your skin. It is undeniably addictive. Every minute is a learning experience, a deep-dive cultural adventure. Whether you are being instructed in Zazen meditation by a Buddhist monk in Kyoto, shopping for snacks in a convenience store (dried shredded squid, anyone?), meeting a sacred deer in Nara or belting out your favorite karaoke classics – Japan surprises, excites, amuses, confuses and intrigues in equal measure. And it never, ever disappoints.

Of course, the last two years have seen Japan close its borders in defense against Covid-19 – and the Japan you'll find post-pandemic will be subtly different. The country's famed cleanliness is more in evidence than ever. Expect more contact-free check-in and check-out, ubiquitous use of face masks on public transport and in shops, and hand sanitizer available everywhere. But one thing that remains unchanged is Japan's dedication to service: something that at InsideJapan, we pride ourselves on emulating – from your first call to the day you return.

Enjoy exploring Japan through our brochure, then get in touch and we'll be here to help turn your ideas and dreams into a trip you will never forget.

**Alastair Donnelly & Simon King**  
Founders

### Our Japan specialists

Bringing your dreams and ideas to life is our team's passion. Our travel consultants aren't salespeople, they're genuine enthusiasts and cultural experts who've spent years living in Japan, and every one of them came back determined to make Japan part of their future.

From your first enquiry to your return home, our personalized, collaborative process means your travel consultant will get to know you well (so well, in fact, that some of our team members have compared that final phone call to a break-up). In 2019, 99% of customers rated us 'good' or 'excellent', so we know this commitment makes a difference.

### Award-winning

We are honored to have our services recognized by several prestigious travel industry associations and publications



### Book with confidence

We've completely redesigned our [booking policy](#) to give you maximum flexibility and security, no matter what's thrown at us. It's short, simple, and written in plain English – and if you're not sure about something, we're happy to chat to you about it. We've all had to get used to living with uncertainty, but that shouldn't mean you can't have something to look forward to!

All trips booked with us are fully financially protected by either ABTOT or ATOL.

## Our vacations

### Small Group Tours

p. 10-37

Sociable travel under the expert guidance of a tour leader

Travel with one of our experienced Insiders who will show you their favorite places and hidden haunts, while efficiently handling all of the logistics. Our groups have a maximum 14 guests (16 on All-in Japan and HyperJapan's J-Pop & Go, and 12 on Walking the Nakasendo & Beyond) and the tours have fixed itineraries and set departure dates throughout the year.

Just sit back and enjoy the ride.

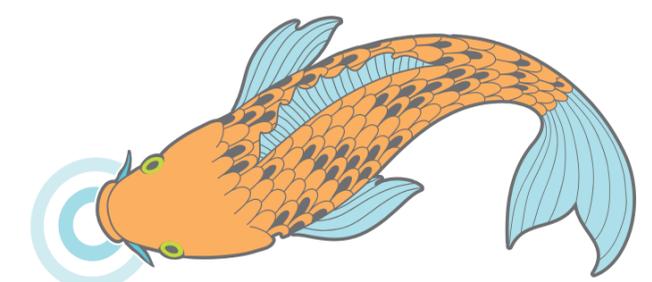
### Tailormade travel

p. 38-79

Private trips designed especially for you

On a **Self-Guided Adventure** you'll make your own discoveries at your own pace, traveling independently around Japan without a group or a tour leader. We can include as much or as little private guiding as you like, as itineraries are fully flexible and can start on any day of the year.

If you're searching for the very best Japan has to offer, look no further than our **Exclusive Private Journeys**. This is an elite level service with professional guides and drivers in each destination. We'll tailor your itinerary to include Japan's very best hotels, advance restaurant reservations and exclusive experiences with artisans and experts.



# Our Covid Booking Guarantee

1

## We look after your money

Committing your money to a vacation that Covid might prevent you taking is a scary prospect. We understand that. That's why we've completely redesigned our [booking policy](#) to give you maximum flexibility and security, no matter what Covid decides to throw at us. It's short, simple, and written in plain English — and if you're not sure about something, we're happy to chat to you about it.

If you are unable to travel due to Covid, you can rebook or receive a full refund up to three weeks before departure.

All trips booked with us are fully financially protected by either ABTOT or ATOL.



2

## We look after you

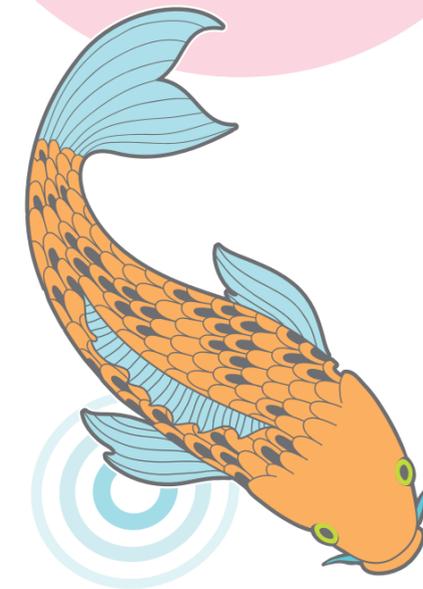
When you hand over the reins to us, you can stop worrying. We take care of everything, from booking your accommodation and transport to arranging cultural experiences, explaining the etiquette, and pretty much anything else you'd like us to do. **If you get lost, fall ill with Covid or have any concerns, all you need to do is pick up the phone and our support team will be there to help, any hour of the day.** Our service doesn't stop until you're home safe and sound — and that's why 99% of our customers give us positive feedback with 86% of our customers rating our service as excellent.

All the accommodation providers and suppliers we work with have undergone thorough health, safety and hygiene checks to ensure your trip is as safe and stress-free as a possible, and our guides and Insider team members have all received comprehensive health and safety training and are well versed in Covid safety.

3

## We do the hard work, so you don't have to

We are in regular contact with our suppliers and teams on the ground and are tuned in to the very latest border openings and travel restrictions. Our regular [travel updates](#) on our website provide a clear and comprehensive picture of the latest travel and vaccination status in Japan. Once you book a trip with us, you can rest assured that **we will look out for any significant updates on your behalf and be in touch personally about the status of your trip.**



New Covid restrictions? Changes in entry requirements? New forms required? Don't worry. We monitor the situation on your behalf and will be in touch personally about the status of your trip.

If you are unable to travel due to Covid, you can rebook or receive a full refund up to three weeks before departure.

If you get lost, fall ill with Covid or have any concerns, all you need to do is pick up the phone and our support team will be there to help, any hour of the day.

Still unsure? Call us!

Consultations are absolutely free, so why not call us on 303 952 0379 and put us to the test? We can't wait to hear from you.



# Traveling responsibly

We believe travel brings huge benefits; vacations make us happy, improve our well-being, create life-long memories, and strengthen the relationships that matter most to us. Tourism creates jobs – and done right, it protects and benefits the destinations visited.

At InsideJapan we feel a deep sense of responsibility to the places and people we work with, and to the wider planet. That's why we're working to maximize the good that travel does. But, there is an elephant in the room. Tourism accounts for 8% of global carbon emissions, and we are under no illusions that there is any such thing as guilt-free travel.

## You and your trip

One of the most rewarding things about traveling responsibly is that it's synonymous with authenticity. We work directly with hundreds of small, Japanese-run accommodations and knowledgeable local people, so you can experience everything from traditional Japanese inns to family-run restaurants serving locally grown, seasonal produce (not to mention the little old lady who'll teach you to fold an origami crane).

We know you want to see well-protected animals in their natural environment, so we only work with those who put animal conservation front and center. Like Dr Sumio Okada's giant salamander conservation project. And the Picchio Research Center for flying squirrels and bear protection in Karuizawa.

But what about our impact on local communities? Well. Across Japan, rural regions are suffering from depopulation as young people relocate to the big cities. We endeavor to redress the balance, ease the burden of overcrowding on tourist hotspots, put money back into fragile communities and offer you an unforgettable travel experience to boot. Take Joge, for example: a small town we visit on Hidden Japan (pp.30-31) between Hiroshima and Kyoto. It's not on the tourist map, it won't ever come up in bucket-list recommendations – but if you ask our customers once the tour is complete, visiting Joge is one of their standout experiences.

## Giving back

Our Giving Back Policy states that we will give back 5% of operating profit to organizations who provide a break for families who cannot normally afford time away and who need it the most.

Not only that, but we also support charities within our destinations, like Second Harvest Japan – an organization that's been pioneering food banking in Japan since the year 2000 – and our company volunteering program sees InsideJapan staff volunteer for causes as diverse as supporting the homeless in Bristol and building koala habitats in Brisbane.

**We measure and offset our carbon emissions, plus set ourselves ambitious reduction targets**

**All our customers' trips are carbon neutral through an award-winning carbon offset program that brings direct benefits to local communities in our destination countries**

*InsideJapan's off-the-beaten-track mindset is the reason we decided to travel with you.*

Helen & Dean, Plymouth, UK

Interested to find out more?

If you'd like to learn more about our sustainability practices, the charities we support, and the experiences mentioned on this page, please give us a call today. Alternatively, you can visit our website: [www.insidejapantours.com/responsible-travel-sustainability](http://www.insidejapantours.com/responsible-travel-sustainability)

**We're committed to becoming a fully carbon neutral business by 2025**

# Introducing Japan

Just what is it about Japan? Equal parts beguiling and bewildering, Japan's ancient traditions meet the rush of globalization head-on to create a country like nowhere else on earth.

Spend a little time in Japan and you'll soon start thinking: "Why don't we do things this way at home?" The trains run on time to the second, there isn't a scrap of litter to be seen, and simple activities such as bathing and drinking tea have been elevated to high culture. Tradition is always revered, from the spiritual and meditative beauty of Japanese gardens to the countless festivals that continue to play out just as they have for centuries. And the people are unfailingly polite – even in Tokyo's rush hour.

Then there's the food! Who could fail to be impressed by the huge range of dishes on offer? Slices of *sashimi* served fresh from the sea, steaming winter stews, *bento* box picnics beneath the cherry blossom and exquisite *kaiseki* banquets – to name but a few of the culinary highlights.

The range of geography to be found here is staggering. Comprising some 6,800 islands, Japan stretches over over 1,900 mi (3,000 km) from the quasi-Siberian snowscapes of Hokkaido to the subtropical beaches and mangrove forests of Okinawa. Of this, over 70% of the terrain is mountainous and contains one tenth of the world's active volcanoes.

In a land of such diversity and volatility, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Japanese have an extraordinary sense of the power of nature and the fleeting impermanence of things. Consequently, even the tiniest details are cherished – from the exposed skin at the nape of a geisha's neck to the composition of an *ikebana* flower arrangement; from the rhythmic beat of a *taiko* drum to the beautiful irregularities found in handcrafted pottery.

What's more, the Japanese themselves are some of the most charming, gracious, hospitable hosts you'll ever meet, and we can't wait to introduce you to them. So go on, take a trip to Japan. The only danger is that it's sure to draw you back time and time again.



Kanto

Home to the Tokyo-Yokohama megalopolis and some 35 million people who live amid towering skyscrapers, zebra crossings and neon lights



Kansai

A tale of two cities: earthy Osaka, Japan's economic powerhouse, and Kyoto, the epicenter of tradition, known for its arts, temples, gardens and geisha



Chugoku

Where modern art meets seaside towns and the fishing islands of the Inland Sea. Home to infamous Hiroshima and the "floating" red gate of Miyajima Island



Tohoku

Bruised but undefeated by the 2011 tsunami. Samurai legends live on in rural mountain communities and hidden temples



Central Japan

Traversing the Japanese Alps, and dozens of fascinating towns and villages with historic castles, gardens, craft shops, morning markets and sake breweries



Hokkaido

A rugged, untamed wilderness with a mere scattering of people and an abundance of wildlife. Also famous for Japan's best powder skiing



Kyushu

A land of bubbling lava, steaming fumaroles and active volcanoes – plus the fascinating cities of Nagasaki, Fukuoka and Kagoshima



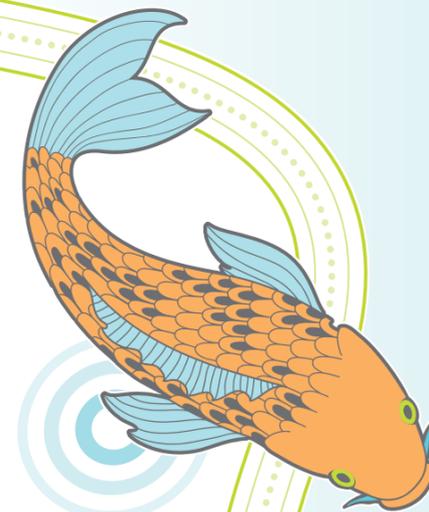
Okinawa

An archipelago of subtropical islands boasting great beaches, fantastic scuba diving and a distinctive culture



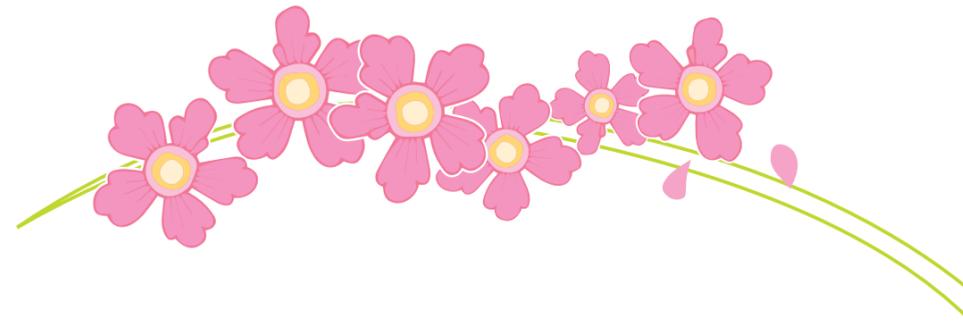
Shikoku

White-water rivers twist through the dense forest and secluded valleys that characterize this island's interior, dotted with tiny hamlets and shrines



# When to travel

Japan is a fantastic vacation destination all year round, with each season offering its own particular appeal. So take your pick!



冬

## Winter (December to February)

Visit Japan in winter and you'll be rewarded with crisp, clear skies and fantastic views of Mount Fuji, which tends to hide behind the clouds for much of the rest of the year.

For winter sports enthusiasts, Siberian winds dump mountains of snow across Hokkaido, northern Tohoku and the Japan Sea Coast, providing Japan with some of the world's best (and most reliable) powder conditions.

### More winter highlights

- Visit the snow monkeys of Yudanaka Onsen
- See the January sumo tournament in Tokyo
- Watch red-crowned cranes in their spectacular mating dance



春

## Spring (March to May)

Take advantage of the spring to do as the Japanese do – admire the transient beauty of the beloved cherry blossom, and make new friends at a sake-fuelled picnic party beneath canopies of pink.

The cherry blossom opens as a wave, blooming as early as February in Okinawa then slowly climbing north, usually peaking in Tokyo and Kyoto in early April and reaching Hokkaido by late May. April is the busiest time of year to visit Japan, but everything quiets down after the first week of May, a warm, sunny month of lush greens and iris flowers. At this time, rice paddies are filled with water so you can catch the reflections of mist-covered mountains.

### Top spring experiences

- Head to Kyoto for the spring geisha dance shows
- Visit Inuyama Castle, a prime cherry blossom picnic spot
- Enjoy a farm stay and try your hand at rice planting



夏

## Summer (June to September)

Do you like your vacations hot? Head to the subtropical islands of Okinawa to sun yourself on the beach in the 95°F (35°C) heat – or cool off by scuba diving with the manta rays.

June and July see more rainfall than at any other time of year, but their packed program of parties and festivals more than make up for it. Party at Fuji Rock, see the elegant parade at Kyoto's Gion festival or enjoy fireworks over Tokyo's Sumida River.

And if you're looking for a challenge, summer is your chance to climb Mount Fuji, Japan's tallest mountain at 12,388 ft (3,776 m), only open to hikers in July and August. The saying goes that only a fool climbs Fuji twice – don't ask how many times our team have climbed it!

### Our favorite summer suggestions

- Watch one of Japan's magnificent fireworks displays
- Escape the heat and head up to the Japanese Alps
- Enjoy doing absolutely nothing on the beaches of Ishigaki Island



秋

## Autumn (October & November)

In autumn, as the temperature drops, indigenous maple trees flame magnificently in vibrant reds; a picturesque backdrop to city temples and country hikes.

Imagine the photos you can take at this time of year; an ordinary shrine looks spectacular against a backdrop of vermillion maple leaves while Tokyo streets are transformed by rows of yellow ginkgo trees. We recommend staying in a *ryokan* inn with a private outdoor hot-spring bath overlooking multi-colored *nanakamado* shrubbery.

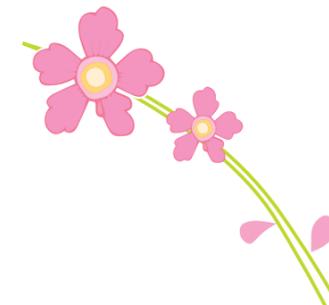
### Further autumn recommendations

- See spectacular autumn colors in Kamikochi National Park
- Eat warming *nabe* stew with crab, mushrooms, tofu and cabbage
- Go maple leaf peeping at Kanazawa's Kenrokuen Garden



## Still unsure when to visit?

Please give us a call and our travel consultants will be happy to advise you. Alternatively check out our online When To Travel guide: [www.insideasiatours.com/when-to-travel](http://www.insideasiatours.com/when-to-travel)





# Small Group Tours



**Robert Kodama**  
Insider Team Leader



Welcome to our **Small Group Tours**.

As an Insider tour leader, I've had the privilege of sharing what makes Japan a brilliant destination through our **Small Group Tours** for the last five years. No two days (or even tours!) are the same, making for a fantastic and exciting experience – not just for me, but also for everyone else on the tour.

Our **Small Group Tours** are ideal for anyone seeking to discover what Japan is really like whilst sharing that experience with other travelers. Along the way, through the expertise of our Insider tour leaders, you'll uncover Japan's history, its culture - both traditional and modern – and experience what makes Japan such a fascinating (and addictive) country to visit.

Join us on an adventure through Japan and immerse yourself in the culture, history, and divine cuisine the country has to offer. Trust me – the experience will be unforgettable!



## CONTENTS

Small Group Tour concept	14 - 15	
Our Insiders	16 - 17	
Choose your Small Group Tour style	18 - 19	
Japan Enchantment	20 - 21	<b>SUPERIOR</b>
All-In Japan	22 - 23	<b>ALL-INCLUSIVE</b>
Spring Elegance	24 - 25	<b>CLASSIC</b>
Classic Japan	26 - 27	<b>CLASSIC</b>
Winter Highlights	28 - 29	<b>CLASSIC</b>
Hidden Japan	30 - 31	<b>CLASSIC</b>
Japan Unmasked	32 - 33	<b>ESSENTIAL</b>
Tokaido Trail	34 - 35	<b>ESSENTIAL</b>
Special departures	36 - 37	



# Our Small Group Tour concept

Travel with us on a Small Group Tour. Fun, sociable travel guided by an expert Insider tour leader.

## The InsideJapan group tours' difference

-  Our expert Insiders are there for you all day, every day
-  When we say "small" we mean it! Maximum 14 travelers (16 on All-in Japan and HyperJapan's J-Pop & Go, and 12 on Walking the Nakasendo & Beyond)
-  More than just a place to sleep – stay in carefully selected hotels and traditional inns
-  From bullet trains to cable cars, your journeys are part of the adventure
-  Feeling adventurous? You're free to explore independently if you wish
-  Want a break? Take downtime when you need it
-  Don't worry about the nuts and bolts. Transport, accommodation, Insider tour leader, breakfast and some dinners are all included

### Your group

The maximum group size is 14 people (16 on All-in Japan and HyperJapan's J-Pop & Go, and 12 on Walking the Nakasendo & Beyond) plus your full-time Insider tour leader, which means you'll eat at local restaurants, stay at small hotels and *ryokan* inns with personal service, travel on Japan's fantastic public transport system and have the opportunity to interact with local people along the way.

You'll meet a wide range of people on our group tours: solo travelers, couples and families, ages ranging from six to 80 and nationalities from all over the world.

### Families and children

Families with children aged six years or older are welcome on most of our tours. Children under 12 years old can be booked on a tour at a reduced price. Please ask us for details.

### Accommodation

Variety is key to our **Small Group Tours** which is why we always stay in a mixture of en-suite Western-style hotels and traditional Japanese inns. For details of the accommodation used on each tour, please speak to one of our travel consultants or your local travel advisor, or check out the **Small Group Tour** pages on our website.

### Meals

Are you looking forward to Japanese food? You should be! Your Insider tour leader will introduce you to fantastic local restaurants – many of which would be difficult to find by yourself or intimidating to enter alone. The Insider tour leader will be on hand to translate the menu, order the food, make recommendations and handle any dietary requirements you may have.

### Flexible sightseeing

On an InsideJapan **Small Group Tour** you can spend as much or as little time with the group as you wish. Want to try Kobe beef? Let your Insider tour leader know and he or she will make a dinner reservation just for you. Interested in Zen gardens? Your Insider tour leader will explain which Kyoto bus you'll need to hop on to reach Ryoan-ji Temple.

### Solo travelers

Traveling solo? You'll be in good company on all of our Small Group Tours. We have a fair and transparent pricing policy for solos. Please see our website or speak to one of our travel consultants for details.

### Fitness

You will need to be of moderate fitness to join any of our **Small Group Tours**. City sightseeing often involves walking between sights and climbing up steps in temples and shrines. As most of our tours use public transport, you will also need to walk between hotels and stations.

### International flights

International flights are not included in our tour prices, giving you the freedom to source your own flights. With airlines offering the best fares to clients who book direct, this helps you to get the very best deal. If you need any advice, please ask us. Do also turn to p.122-127 for information on stopovers.

### Extra nights and extensions

We believe that an extra night (or even two) at the beginning of your trip is a good idea to help you settle in and get over any jet lag before the tour gets underway.

On all **Superior, All-Inclusive** and **Classic** tours, your Insider tour leader will arrive at the hotel two nights before the tour departs so he or she will be on hand to offer you sightseeing information and advice before the tour begins.

We can also book extra nights after the tour, or even put together a fully tailored tour extension if you would like to explore Japan further once the tour is over. A selection of exciting extension ideas can be found on our website.

## Prices & booking

For prices, departure dates and availability, please contact us directly or speak to your local travel advisor.

You can find all the information on our website:

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





# Our Insiders

What really sets our Small Group Tours apart, is the excellence of our Insider tour leaders. We have 7 full-time Insiders hailing from across the globe. We also work with several hand-picked freelance Insiders who've been trained how to lead our Small Group Tours the 'InsideJapan' way. They are first-class Japanese speakers who have made their homes in Japan, but crucially, they can still remember what it was like to step foot in Japan for the very first time. Who better to guide you through Japan's fascinating, labyrinthine culture?

Your Insider will accompany you on every step of the vacation, staying in the same hotels throughout. As well as introducing you to Japan's classic sights, they all have their favorite lesser-known spots, secret bars and tucked-away restaurants to show you.

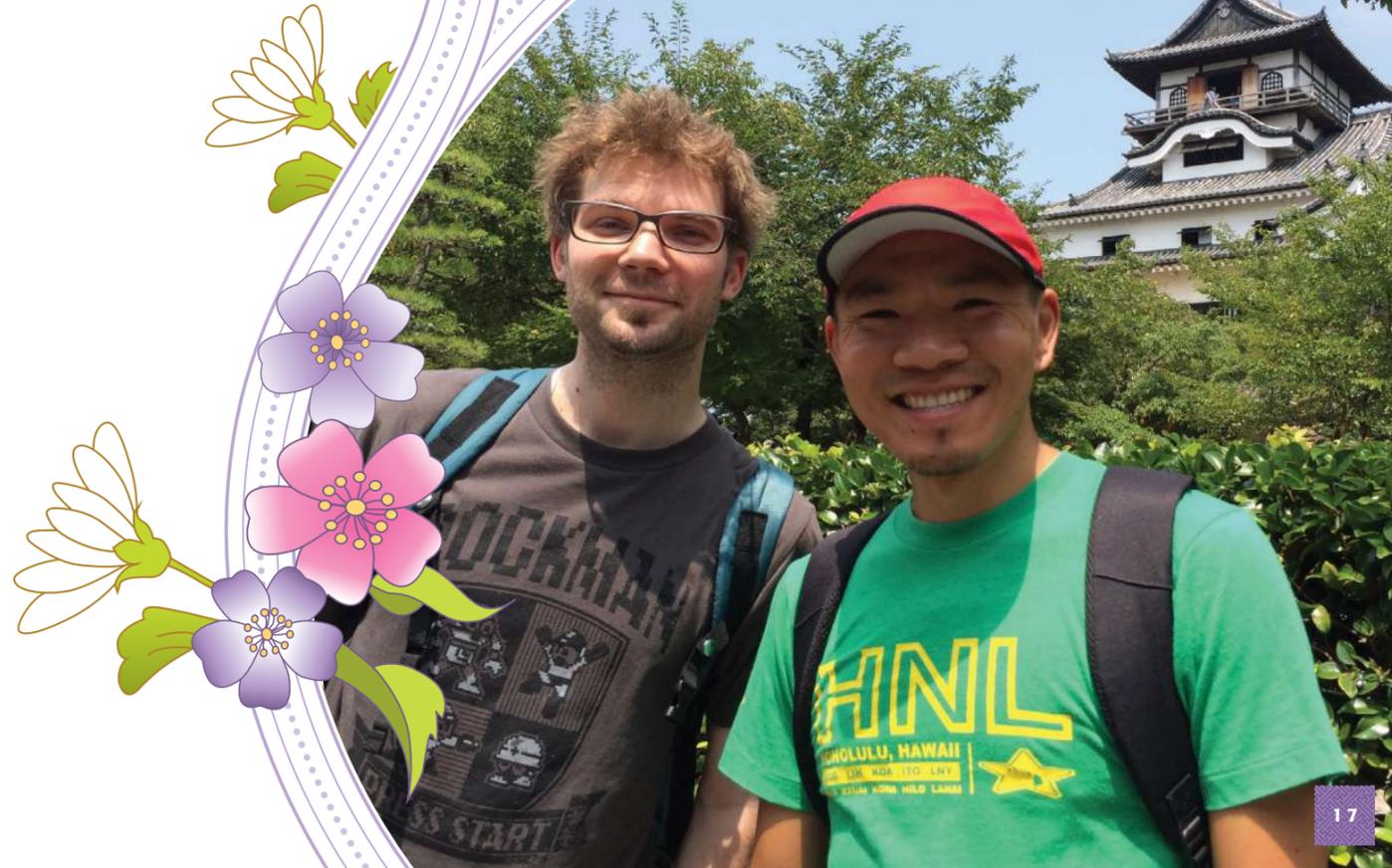
Got a special wish for your trip? A passion for origami, a specific garden you want to see or a certain dish you've always dreamed of trying in Tokyo? Just ask your Insider. As well as making sure the tour runs as planned, they'll help you make the most of every moment of your trip.

## Insider profiles



## Our Covid promise

- + Our Insider team members have all received comprehensive health and safety training, are all qualified first-aiders and are well versed in Covid safety.



**Mark Rawlins**  
Insider Tour Leader

Mark was born and raised in our home city of Bristol. He's been a key part of the InsideJapan tour leading team since 2013.

Mark first came to Japan as a law and politics student at university in Fukuoka. Fascinated by Japanese politics, Mark likens Japan to a "flock of sandpipers": each individual chases their own instinct on the ground, but when they take to the air the whole group flies together without need of a leader. Now living just north of Tokyo, Mark puts his deep understanding of Japanese society to good use, helping our tour groups unlock Japan's mysteries. When he's not further studying Japanese culture, he can be found playing soccer or reading European history and Russian literature.

*My top tip for traveling in Japan is to get acquainted with convenience stores. They are open 24/7, sell hot food, alcohol, coffee, underwear and shirts, and everything else. They also have trash bins, which are in short supply in Japan. But most important, they have clean bathrooms!*



**Brett Plotz**  
Insider Tour Leader

Proud video game geek and Japanophile, Brett joined InsideJapan Tours in 2015.

A former journalist, English teacher, television extra and children's party superhero, Brett had quite the eclectic professional history before joining InsideJapan. Originally from very rural Iowa, Brett now lives in Yokohama. When he's not leading tours he loves frequenting game bars and arcades, exploring new restaurants, going to festivals, eating *tonkotsu* ramen and simply waiting to see what interesting things each day will bring. He's also a dab hand at *kyudo* (Japanese archery) - so don't get on his wrong side!

*If you're visiting Japan for the first time, you have to try everything once. You'll never know if you actually like raw horse meat unless you try it. Another piece of advice: don't be afraid to get lost. It's how we discover things. Let's just start walking and see what happens.*



# Choose your Small Group Tour style

We have divided our Small Group tours into four categories, so there's bound to be a tour to suit your travel style and budget.

## SUPERIOR

*If you're hankering for an in-depth cultural experience coupled with high-quality accommodation, look no further than our Superior tours*

- Local professional guides in key destinations (in addition to your tour leader)
- Four to five-star accommodation
- En-suite rooms in all locations
- Private airport transfers
- All transport between destinations
- Some private minibus transfers where beneficial
- Breakfast every day plus several lunches & dinners
- Most entrance fees included
- Selected luggage forwarding included
- Guaranteed maximum of 14 travelers
- Solo travelers: a single room is available throughout on payment of a mandatory supplement

## CLASSIC

*If you like mid-range hotels, try our Classic tours which cover Japan's best sights or specific themes (e.g. activity tours, regional & seasonal highlights)*

- Three-star accommodation
- En-suite rooms in almost all locations
- Airport meet-and-greet and transfers
- All transport between destinations
- Breakfast every day plus some lunches & dinners
- Selected entrance fees included
- Selected luggage forwarding included
- Guaranteed maximum of 14 travelers except on HyperJapan's J-Pop & Go which is maximum 16 travelers
- Solo travelers: a single room is available at all accommodations on payment of a mandatory supplement

## ALL-INCLUSIVE

*If you want classic sights as well as lesser-known spots, you can take comfort in everything being included up front (from lunch to luggage-handling) on our All-Inclusive tours*

- Local professional guides & experts in key destinations (in addition to your tour leader)
- Four-star accommodation
- En-suite rooms in all locations
- Airport meet-and-greet and transfers
- All transport between destinations (mainly by private coach but with at least one bullet train journey)
- All meals and some drinks included
- A mix of sightseeing and hands-on activities
- Evening entertainment at several destinations
- All entrance fees included
- Luggage handling between all destinations
- Guaranteed maximum of 16 travelers
- Solo travelers: a single room is available throughout on payment of a mandatory supplement

## ESSENTIAL

*If you like fast-paced travel with just the basics included, so you can spend as much or as little as you like, our Essential tours are just the ticket*

- Two-star to three-star accommodation
- En-suite rooms in Western-style hotels, shared bathroom facilities in Japanese-style inns
- No airport transfers (but a city transport pass and detailed airport transfer instructions are provided)
- All transport between destinations
- Breakfast every day plus one or two evening meals
- Entrance fees not included
- Carry your own luggage
- Guaranteed maximum of 14 travelers except on Walking the Nakasendo & Beyond which is maximum 12 travelers
- Solo travelers: single clients of the same sex will share rooms on tour, or they can choose to pay a single supplement and have a single room throughout





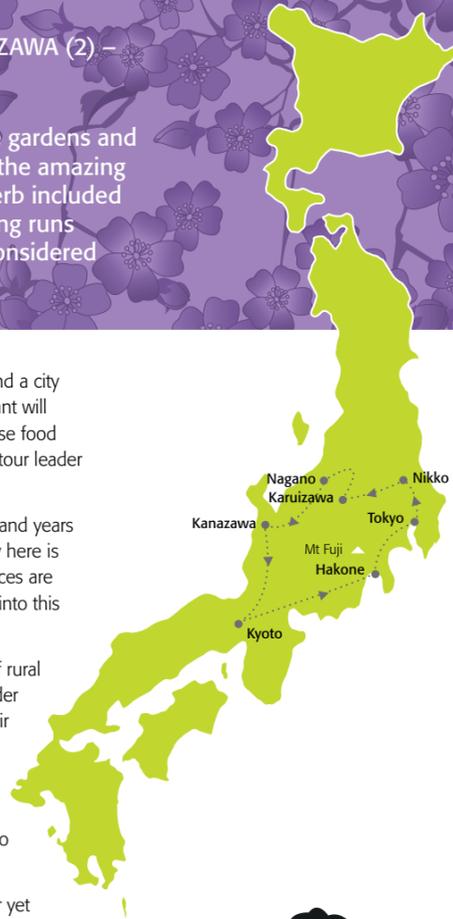
# Japan Enchantment

14 nights, Small Group Tour

SUPERIOR

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

Encompassing high-tech wonders and ancient temples, landscape gardens and alpine resorts, urban giants and national parks; this tour captures the amazing diversity of Japan. With a range of high-end accommodation, superb included meals and your Insider tour leader on hand to make sure everything runs like clockwork, this is the perfect introduction to a culture often considered impenetrable by the outside world.



## Tour highlights

- Enjoy a private audience with an apprentice geisha
- Explore an open-air sculpture park in Hakone
- Spot nocturnal flying squirrels in Karuizawa
- See the *onsen*-bathing "snow monkeys" of Yudanaka
- Learn from local guides in Tokyo, Nikko Karuizawa & Kanazawa

We'll begin and end the tour in Tokyo, icon of high modernity and a city of bewildering size and scope. Our first dinner at a local restaurant will provide you with a relaxed yet invaluable introduction to Japanese food and etiquette, and is the perfect way to get to know the Insider tour leader and group.

Kyoto is Japan's other great city: imperial capital for over a thousand years and packed with architectural treasures. The highlight of our stay here is a private audience with a *maiko* (trainee geisha). Such experiences are rarely available to non-Japanese, giving us an exclusive window into this mysterious and captivating profession.

Complementing the city stays, we'll also get a tantalizing taste of rural Japan. In Hakone National Park we'll cruise across Lake Ashi under the watchful gaze of Mount Fuji, explore the outstanding open-air sculpture park and rest our legs in volcanic hot-spring baths.

In thickly forested Nikko we'll be privy to the most lavish religious architecture in all of Japan, while in Karuizawa, one of the country's favorite mountain escapes, we'll have the chance to spot the local nocturnal inhabitants on a flying squirrel tour.

The cities of Kanazawa and Nagano, contrasting as they are, offer yet more remarkable variety. High in the Japanese Alps, Nagano is our gateway to the famous *onsen*-bathing snow monkeys of Yudanaka. Kanazawa, meanwhile, offers beautifully preserved samurai districts, one of the very best Japanese gardens and a plethora of traditional craft workshops.



## Kanazawa



Tim Grisbrooke - Campbell Senior Travel Consultant

A Japanese language graduate, Tim's passion for Japan was first ignited watching *The Last Samurai*. Tim recently visited Kanazawa on one of our Small Group Tours.

"As soon as we stepped off the train in Kanazawa, we knew we were arriving in a cultured city. We walked through the beautiful Tsuzumi Gate, inspired by traditional Japanese hand drums, and headed southeast through the city center – passing art galleries, craft shops, and gold leaf workshops to reach Kenrokuen Garden.

"*Kenrokuen is lauded as one of Japan's 'top three' gardens, and quite rightly so – it was the highlight of my visit to Kanazawa. I stayed for two or three hours at least, just wandering around taking pictures of the teahouses, waterfalls, lakes and samurai villas – not to mention wonderful views of the city below.*

"*With its beautiful temples and gardens, Kanazawa is often sold as 'Kyoto Lite' – but it's got plenty of charms of its own. Don't miss the wonderfully fresh seafood, the ninja temple and the beautiful winding streets of the samurai quarter.*"



Nikko



Hakone



Karuizawa



Nikko



Kanazawa



Nikko

I cannot praise Richard the tour leader more. His knowledge of Japan and his enthusiastic approach was contagious throughout the group.

Nicola, West Sussex, UK

BEST SELLER

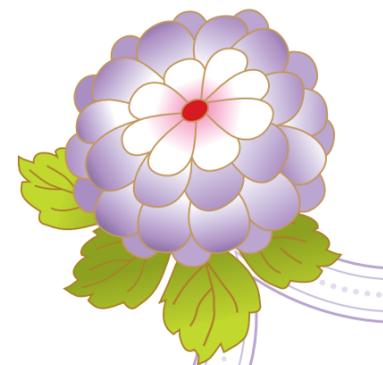


## Is Japan Enchantment calling you?

This is an ever-popular **Small Group Tour** so let's confirm your place as soon as possible. Speak to our expert travel consultants, talk to your local travel advisor or visit our website for online booking, pricing, departure dates and availability.

## Our Covid promise

✚ If you are unable to travel due to Covid, you can rebook or receive a full refund up to three weeks before departure. See our flexible [booking policy](#) for more details.





# All-In Japan

12 nights, Small Group Tour

ALL INCLUSIVE

TOKYO (2) – HIROSHIMA (2) – KYOTO (3) – AWARA ONSEN (1) – KANAZAWA (2) – TOKYO (2)

With all meals, transport, and entrance fees included – there's nothing for you to do on All-In Japan but sit back, relax, and enjoy the ride. Covering Japan's classic destinations with a few unusual twists, this trip is full to bursting with cultural experiences designed to give you a comprehensive, sophisticated and stress-free journey through Japan.



## Tour highlights

- Enjoy a private audience with an apprentice geisha
- Visit Kenrokuen, one of Japan's three great gardens
- Explore Daianzen-ji Temple in rural Fukui
- Stay in a gorgeous traditional inn in Awara Onsen
- Visit a World Heritage shrine on Miyajima Island

Sometimes, a vacation should just be a vacation: a chance to relinquish all responsibilities, make no decisions, and worry about absolutely nothing. On All-In Japan, you'll do just this. Leaving every aspect of your trip to us, from your lunch to your luggage handling, you'll be free to concentrate on immersing yourself in Japanese culture – safe in the knowledge that you don't have a yen to pay on the ground.

This tour is an exhilarating journey through Japan's history and traditions, from Kanazawa's historic samurai district to an exuberant taiko drumming workshop in Tokyo. Tour the ancient temples of Kyoto, visit Japan's biggest original castle at Himeji, and experience zazen meditation at a beautiful temple deep in the forests of Fukui Prefecture.

Try your hand at *washi* papermaking in Kanazawa, visit the fascinating Peace Memorial Park and Museum at Hiroshima, and ride the cable car to the top of Mount Misen on Miyajima Island for spectacular views over the Seto Inland Sea. Forget the tour bus bubble – we'll take you to meet the artisans, restaurateurs and small business owners who make all this possible.

It's not all temples and tradition, however, and we'll make sure you're well-acquainted with modern Japan – from Tokyo's architecture to Kanazawa's outstanding 21st Century Art Museum.

One of the great features of this tour is the wide range of cuisine and evening entertainment in all sorts of settings – including a samurai sword show, a contemporary theater performance in Kyoto and a private audience with an apprentice geisha.

All-In Japan is about comfort and peace of mind, but don't let that fool you – this is all-inclusive as you've never seen it before: culturally immersive and packed full of action.

## Maiko dance performance



Samantha Ng  
Travel Consultant

*Samantha moved to Kobe, Japan, in 2011 and stayed for a total of 6 years as an English teacher. During her time there she had the special opportunity to see a maiko (trainee geisha) in Kyoto.*

*"A petite girl dressed in a beautiful light green kimono suddenly appeared on the stage. The term maiko literally translates to 'dancing girl,' and she did the title justice as she moved beautifully*

*in time with the traditional music, even incorporating a lovely red-tipped fan into her performance.*

*"Given the expertise with which she danced, it was easy to forget that she may have been as young as 15 years old – and at the time, there were only 85 maiko in Kyoto. We felt privileged to have met one in the flesh, and to have seen her perform a dance she had potentially spent years perfecting."*



Tokyo



Tokyo



Kyoto



Kaga Onsen



Miyajima



© Inside Travel Group

EVERYTHING INCLUDED



## Looking for an All-Inclusive adventure?

If this **Small Group Tour** sounds like your cup of green tea, please speak to your local travel advisor or call us today and we'll provide details of departure dates and pricing. Alternatively please visit our website which has all the details of this tour.

## Our sustainability promise

We're committed to be carbon neutral by 2025. Find out more about our [climate commitment](#).





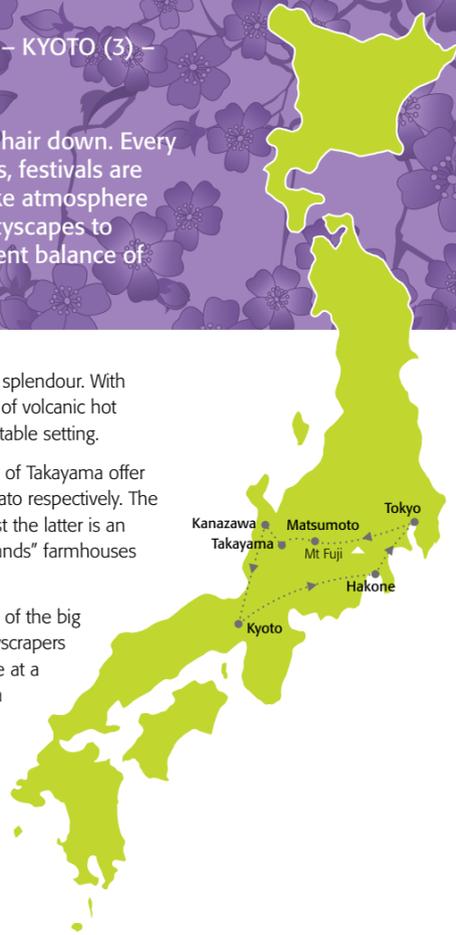
# Spring Elegance

13 nights, Small Group Tour

CLASSIC

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

Spring is when Japan casts off its winter blanket and really lets its hair down. Every park is packed with revellers gathered to view the cherry blossoms, festivals are underway across the country and everyone embraces the party-like atmosphere – this really is a wonderful time to travel. Taking you from neon cityscapes to towering mountains and back, Spring Elegance provides an excellent balance of superb experiences and value for money.



## Tour highlights

-  Drink green tea in Tokyo's beautiful Hamarikyu Garden
-  Explore traditional thatched farmhouses in the Japanese Alps
-  Admire world-famous Kenrokuen Garden in Kanazawa
-  Wander among the sculptures of Hakone's open-air art museum
-  Attend a performance of the spring geisha dances in Kyoto

Not far from Tokyo, Hakone National Park is a haven of natural splendour. With stunning views of Mount Fuji across Lake Ashi and a profusion of volcanic hot springs, we'll also visit a world-class sculpture park in an unbeatable setting.

In the Japanese Alps, the city of Matsumoto and the craft town of Takayama offer a trip to the iconic "Black Crow" and an excursion to Hida no Sato respectively. The former is one of Japan's most impressive samurai castles, whilst the latter is an open-air museum showcasing the steeply thatched "praying hands" farmhouses typical of the region.

No trip to Japan would be complete without seeing something of the big city, and your tour will be bookended by stays amongst the skyscrapers of Tokyo. Here we'll receive an introduction to Japanese cuisine at a local restaurant and see the city from the waters of the Sumida River.

Three days in Kyoto, meanwhile, will induct you into Japan's other great city. The highlights here are meeting a *maiko* (apprentice geisha) and tickets to the annual geisha dances given to celebrate the spring. Kanazawa, meanwhile, offers a glimpse of life in a small city with a historic heart.

This is an active tour packed with opportunities for exploration, good-value mid-range accommodation and a variety of meals included. With your tour leader to steer you through the highlights of these superb destinations, this tour offers a classic sightseeing experience at a fantastic time of year.

## Hanami



Ayako Koide  
Nagoya Branch  
Manager

Ayako has been friends with the company directors, Alastair and Simon, since their English teaching days in the late 90s. She is a founding member of InsideJapan Tours and a native of Nagoya.

"Hanami means 'flower viewing', and is a seasonal event held throughout March and April which signals the beginning of spring.

"When the sakura, or cherry blossom, appears, people are happier, the sakura forecast is all over the news, and the shops are filled with sakura-flavored food

and drink. You can even buy a cherry blossom flavored latte at Starbucks. If you're in Japan at this time I recommend trying some of these seasonal treats, but to be honest I'm not a huge fan of the taste!

"My favorite hanami spot is at my parents' house just outside Nagoya. Our family, friends and neighbors all gather by the river to eat and relax under the cherry trees. The blossoms look especially beautiful in the evening, illuminated by paper lanterns and reflected in the water."



Kanazawa



Kyoto

*Spring Elegance was excellent in its choice of activities and sites, as well as its organization. Our tour leader was terrific.*

Norman, Brisbane, Australia



Matsumoto



Kanazawa



Hakone

## SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS

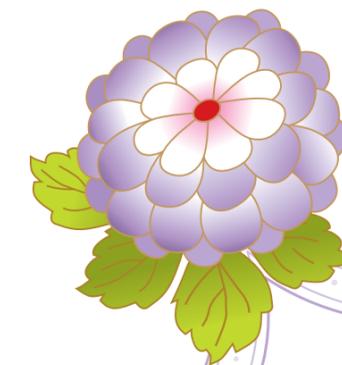


## Inspired by the cherry blossoms?

We run just a handful of Spring Elegance **Small Group Tours** in late March and April, so make sure you book early to avoid disappointment. Call us directly, speak to your local travel advisor or go to our website for dates, pricing and availability.

## Our Covid promise

**+** Uncomfortable about traveling due to Covid? Speak to us and we can rebook your trip for a later date without charge up to three weeks before departure. See our flexible [booking policy](#) for more details.





# Classic Japan

13 nights, Small Group Tour

TOKYO (2) – HAKONE (2) – OSAKA (2) – KYOTO (2) – TAKAYAMA (2) – KAMIKOCHI (2) – TOKYO (1)

Imagine basking in a hot-spring bath at the foot of Mount Fuji, meeting an apprentice geisha in Kyoto or seeing Tokyo from the water as we cruise down the Sumida River. This tour collects the best of Japan's classic cultural and natural locations at a relaxed pace, from the *tatami* mats and paper screens of countless woodblock prints to the exquisite gardens and temples you've always dreamt of visiting.



## Tour highlights

-  Cruise through Tokyo on the Sumida River
-  Get an introduction to feudal history at Osaka Castle
-  Visit Kiyomizu-dera Temple for spectacular views across Kyoto
-  Meet a trainee geisha in Kyoto's Gion district
-  Experience a traditional *ryokan* stay in Takayama

Discover some of the locations that have given Japan its reputation as a land of mysterious spirituality and exquisite aesthetics, as we ride cross-country on the world-famous bullet train and stay in some lovely traditional accommodations. Our journey will be gastronomic too – we'll sample local specialities from melt-in-the-mouth Hida beef in the alpine regions, to quick bites from street vendors in Osaka and multi-course *kaiseki* feasts in Kyoto.

In each destination we'll take in a range of experiences, from learning about the history of magnificent Osaka Castle to wandering among the thatched farmhouses of Takayama's Hida no Sato Folk Village. We'll enjoy an exclusive audience with a trainee geisha, and drink tea at the beautiful Hamarikyū Garden, hidden in the heart of Tokyo's skyscraper district.

Along the way we'll visit two stunning national parks: Kamikochi and Hakone. The former is home to some of Japan's most magnificent mountain scenery and a thriving population of Japanese macaque monkeys, while the latter offers a pirate ship ride across Lake Ashi and the chance to boil eggs in volcanic hot springs.

Accompanying you throughout will be your Insider tour leader, who will introduce you to Japanese history and culture, guide you on excursions, demystify the local etiquette and generally make sure you get the best from our Classic Japan tour.

## Kamikochi



Richard Farmer  
Insider Team  
Leader

Zen expert Richard currently lives in Kyoto, but counts Kamikochi as one of his favorite places in Japan.

*"Kamikochi is easily my favorite destination on Classic Japan, and even if I were choosing between my favorite destinations on any Small Group Tour, it's likely that it would still emerge victorious."*

*"A mountain resort in Nagano Prefecture, Kamikochi is an area of outstanding natural beauty. In order to preserve the region, access by private cars is not permitted, and access by train is impossible due to the remote location. The best way to get into the*

*national park is on a chartered bus – it is possible to hike in, but that's certainly not for the faint of heart! The area is only open from April to November and closed during the rest of the year due to heavy snow during the winter – hence you'll find that Classic Japan only runs during these months.*

*"The area we refer to as Kamikochi is a 9 mi (15 km) valley with a number of mountain lodges dotted through the woodland. There are plenty of great hiking opportunities for all levels of experience and fitness – I love leading my groups on a couple of gentle walks through the valley."*



*Classic Japan was the perfect vacation! I'll be using InsideJapan Tours again.*

Andrea, Richmond Hill, NY



**BEST SELLER**

SMALL GROUP TOURS

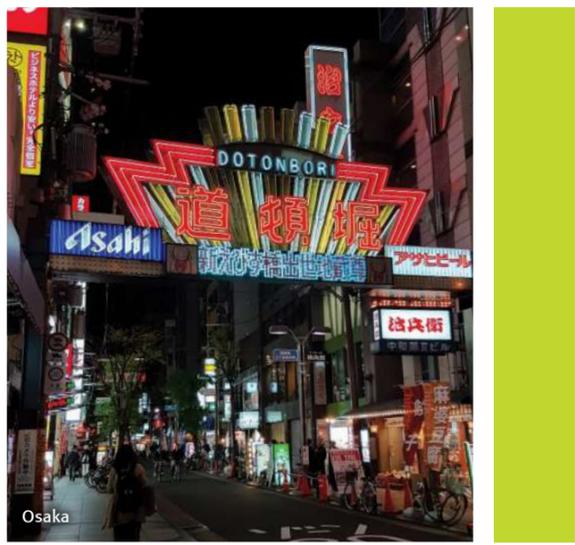


Already picturing yourself on this Small Group Tour?

To book or simply find out more, speak to one of our travel consultants, talk to your local travel advisor or visit our website for dates, pricing and availability.

**Our sustainability promise**

 We reduce our emissions where we can, and offset where we can't. Read more about [our commitment](#) to making travel more sustainable.



© Louise Marston, Inside Travel Group



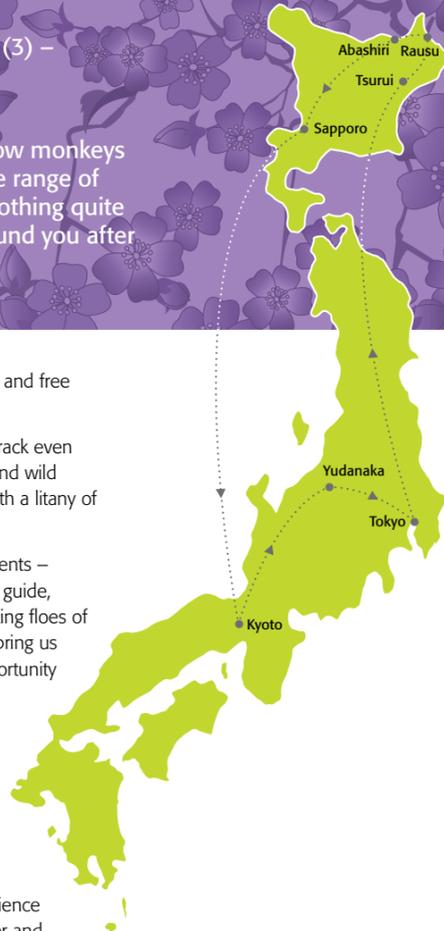
# Winter Highlights

14 nights, Small Group Tour

CLASSIC

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

From incredible snow sculptures and rare birds in Hokkaido to snow monkeys and cultural treasures on Honshu, this tour demonstrates the huge range of winter season attractions on Japan's two largest islands. There's nothing quite like sinking into a natural hot-spring bath with snow falling all around you after a long day of sightseeing.



## Tour highlights

-  Take an icebreaker cruise on the Okhotsk Sea
-  See giant snow sculptures at the Sapporo snow festival
-  Visit the famous onsen-bathing monkeys of Yudanaka
-  Spot dancing cranes and Steller's sea eagles
-  Meet an apprentice geisha in Kyoto



Japan in the winter is a magical destination, blanketed in snow and free from the crowds that throng the cultural hotspots in summer.

Hokkaido, Japan's remote, northern outpost, is off the beaten track even for most Japanese. Here we'll wander vast, windswept plains and wild peninsulas where smoking volcanoes provide the backdrop, with a litany of rare birds to be spotted.

In Tsurui we'll receive an introduction to Hokkaido's avian residents – including dancing red-crowned cranes – with an expert birding guide, while in Rausu we'll take an icebreaker cruise among the creaking floes of the Okhotsk Sea. With a bit of luck on our side, the cruise will bring us within range of magnificent Steller's sea eagles, a fantastic opportunity for keen wildlife photographers.

Before returning to the mainland we'll spend three nights in Sapporo, Hokkaido's capital, to catch the famous snow festival, during which 400 giant snow sculptures occupy the city's spaces. Sapporo is famous for beer as well as snow, so in addition to enjoying the festival we'll take a tour of one of the local breweries.

Honshu is Japan's main island and offers a very different experience from Hokkaido. In Tokyo we'll take a cruise on the Sumida River and warm our hands around bowls of green tea at Hamarikyū Garden, while in Kyoto we might be lucky enough to enjoy the enchanting sight of the Golden Pavilion wreathed in snow. We'll also have a private audience with a *maiko* (trainee geisha), which is sure to be a memorable experience.

Finally, one of the highlights of our tour comes in Yudanaka – where we'll witness the Japanese macaques as they stave off the cold in mountain hot springs.

## Sapporo Snow Festival



Aaron Boothe  
Senior Travel  
Consultant

Originally from London, UK, Aaron lived in Sendai for two years after university, where he taught English in a junior high school. During his time in Japan, he traveled the length and breadth of the country from the beautiful beaches in Okinawa to the snowy mountains of Hokkaido.

"Winter Highlights is a tour like no other, covering some of Japan's most diverse landscapes. Traveling from Tokyo to Hokkaido almost feels like you are visiting a new country."

"I'm fascinated by Japan's wildlife but for me the highlight was the Sapporo Snow Festival. The whole of the city is taken over by grand snow structures, slides made of ice and fabulous light shows in the evenings. Even when the weather dropped to -11 degrees, I was able to warm myself up with a delicious bowl of Sapporo Ramen".



Yudanaka



Tsurui

*Winter Highlights was my third trip with InsideJapan, and as usual everything went without a hitch. I had a fantastic time.*

Michael, Isle of Man, UK



Sapporo



Kyoto



Sapporo



Abashiri

SEASONAL HIGHLIGHTS

SMALL GROUP TOURS

## Can you feel the call of Hokkaido?

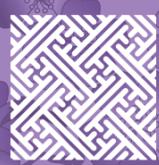
We run just a handful of Winter Highlights **Small Group Tours** each February to catch the Sapporo snow festival, so make haste and confirm your place as soon as possible. Call us directly, visit your local travel advisor or check our website for departure dates, pricing and availability.

## Our Covid promise

+ One thing Covid has taught us is the importance of flexibility. We have completely redesigned our [booking policy](#) to give you extra security and peace of mind.



© Chris Stanley, Tim Hutchin, Inside Travel Group



# Hidden Japan

12 nights, Small Group Tour

CLASSIC

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

Are you looking for depth of cultural insight, with experiences that take you away from the usual tourist trail? This tour gives you both, liberating you from the pressure of checking off destinations or visiting “must-see” locations and steering you instead towards the road less traveled.



## Tour highlights

-  Spend the night in Buddhist temple lodgings
-  Glide to the top of Mount Bizan by cable car
-  Watch a traditional bunraku puppet show
-  Visit Risturin, one of Japan's most famous gardens
-  Explore Naoshima “Art Island” with an expert local guide

Eschewing Tokyo allows us more time to discover Japan's intriguing south-central regions, which is why this tour begins and ends in Kyoto. Here you'll get to know your group and meet a trainee geisha before we explore the temples and gardens that lurk behind every sliding screen and around every corner in this incredible city.

Mount Koya offers an overnight stay in a temple lodging, with exquisite vegetarian Buddhist cuisine and the chance to join the monks at their morning prayers. In Tokushima, meanwhile, we'll ride the ropeway to the top of Mount Bizan and see a traditional *bunraku* puppet show.

Venturing across the Inland Sea to Shikoku, we'll visit the island's most famous shrine, Konpira-san, and stay in a wonderful *ryokan* inn in Kotohira.

We'll also explore Naoshima Island's Art House Projects with an expert local guide; visit Matsuyama, home to a magnificent original samurai castle; walk across breath-taking vine bridges in the fertile Iya Valley; and take a ferry to Hiroshima for a visit to the Peace Memorial Park and idyllic Miyajima Island.

Finally, before returning to Kyoto, we'll visit Joge – a little town known for its traditional white-plaster buildings and beautiful wood-built kabuki theater. Here we'll be welcomed by a local community center for a day of cultural interaction including the chance to try the martial art of *kendo* stick-fighting.

On Hidden Japan your full-time tour leader will be worth their weight in gold, making sure the journey runs like clockwork and explaining the finer points of local custom in these fascinating destinations.

## Naoshima



Naomi Norton  
Senior Travel  
Consultant

Originally from Bristol, UK, Naomi lived in Tokyo for three years teaching English and hiking the length and breadth of the county.

*“Hidden Japan is easily one of my favorite tours to chat about, and a fantastic introduction to all that Japan has to offer, away from the usual tourist loop. It isn't just temples and beautiful gardens, but stunning onsens, unique sleeping options and world-class art museums.*

*“Naoshima is one such place that houses some of the world's best art museums and art experiences. There is a reason why it is on the must-see list for so many people, and why Yayoi Kusama's pumpkin fiasco in 2021*

*made global news.*

*“I visited Naoshima as a weekend break from Tokyo in 2017 and found it to be a healthy mix of modern art and beautiful landscapes. For me, it was a fun introduction to Tado Ando's concrete architecture, which, as a Brit, took a bit of getting used to – but I can now say that I too am into ‘concrete’!*

*“For those less interested in the art and more the island itself, the setting is stunning – and with the local guide on this tour, you'll have a greater insight into the history of the island and how it changed from a forgotten fishing town to one of the best art locations in the world.”*



Kyoto



Dogo Onsen



Tokushima



Takamatsu



Takamatsu

*We have taken many tours, but our tour leader Steve is the best. There were thirteen people on our tour from three continents and we all gave him two thumbs up!*

Susan & Richard, Portland, OR

© Peter Jackson, Inside Travel Group

## OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

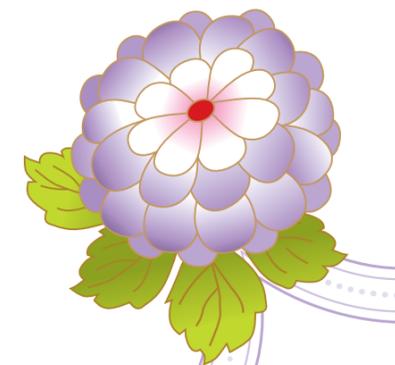


## Intrigued by the secrets of Hidden Japan?

Fantastic, let's confirm your place on this **Small Group Tour**. Book via our website booking system, visit your local travel advisor or simply call us for full details including pricing, availability and departure dates

## Our sustainability promise

 Our trips visit Japan's rural heartlands, working through community-based tourism to support local people across the country.





# Japan Unmasked

13 nights, Small Group Tour

ESSENTIAL

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

Are you looking for a tour with maximum flexibility? Japan Unmasked packs in a huge variety of destinations across Japan, with simple accommodation and fewer inclusions giving you the freedom to choose where you spend your time and money. Whether you see yourself slurping on a quick bowl of noodles or splurging on sushi, with your tour leader's suggestions you'll certainly make the most of your vacation.



## Tour highlights

-  Explore the old canal district of lovely Kurashiki
-  Stay in a Buddhist lodging at Nagano's Zenko-ji Temple
-  Ride the famous *shinkansen* bullet train
-  Explore the traditional market town of Takayama
-  Visit Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Museum

Japan Unmasked begins in Tokyo: the beating, neon heart of Japan. The first of many rides on the bullet train then whisks us into the Japanese Alps, where we'll spend the night in temple lodgings, try vegetarian Buddhist cuisine and search for the key to paradise in the pitch-dark tunnels underneath Zenko-ji – one of Japan's most important temples.

A chance for us to see mischievous monkeys soaking in the natural hot-spring pools of Yudanaka will be followed by a visit to the "Black Crow", Matsumoto's magnificent original samurai castle.

Delving deeper in the mountains we'll experience warm Japanese hospitality at a traditional *ryokan* inn in Takayama, where the old-town streets hide sake breweries, craft shops and morning markets loaded with fresh produce.

Kyoto and Kanazawa offer a glimpse of traditional Japan – one a magnificent former capital with an astounding 17 World Heritage Sites, the other a small but beautifully preserved city with lamp-lit streets and one of the best gardens in Japan. Walking around the Gion district in Kyoto, we might be lucky enough to spot a geisha in full regalia.

Further west we'll visit Hiroshima, where the Peace Memorial Park offers a sobering reminder of Japan's darkest hour. Though haunted by its past, Hiroshima today is a city teeming with life and optimism. We'll make sure to try the region's favorite savory pancake: *okonomiyaki*.

Finally we'll visit Kurashiki – a real gem of a town that often goes unseen by foreign visitors but whose beautiful merchant canal district, wealth of excellent museums and architecture from the Meiji Period (1868-1912) make it well worth the trip.

## Nagano



Lachlan Woodland  
Senior Travel Consultant

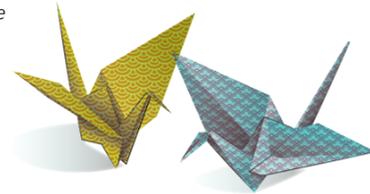
Originally from Brisbane, Australia, Lachlan studied Japanese in University and spent time living in both Osaka and Fukuoka.

*"Of the stops on Japan Unmasked, Nagano is one of the most memorable. For the spiritually inclined, a visit to Zenko-ji, a 7th-century Buddhist temple that overlooks the city, is an absolute must. It's at its most beautiful in the evening when lit up and the crowds have disappeared."*

*"While evenings are my favorite time to see the temple, it truly comes alive if you invest in an early start. Though a 6am start might not sound*

*like the most tempting prospect when you're on vacation, trust me when I say, there is nothing quite like getting blessed by the head priest before breakfast.*

*"No visit to Nagano would be complete without a stop in Jigokudani Monkey Park, just outside of the city. Locals named this area Jigokudani, "hell valley", due to the pungent sulphur steam bellowing out from the hot springs. Despite this foreboding name, it's actually heaven on earth for the monkeys who have taken to warming themselves in the hot spring waters."*



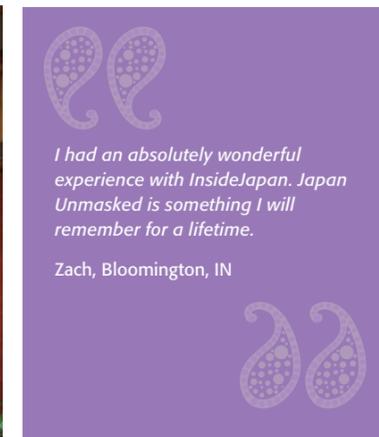
Matsumoto



Yudanaka

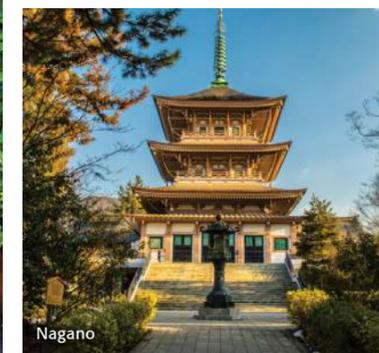


Kyoto



*I had an absolutely wonderful experience with InsideJapan. Japan Unmasked is something I will remember for a lifetime.*

Zach, Bloomington, IN



Nagano

BEST SELLER



## Dreaming of Japan Unmasked?

We can make your dream a reality! To book this **Small Group Tour**, please call us directly or talk to your local travel advisor. We'll answer any questions and provide details of pricing, departure dates and availability which you can also find on our website

## Our Covid promise

**+** We are in regular contact with our suppliers and teams on the ground and are tuned in to the very latest border openings and travel restrictions. Our regular [travel updates](#) provide a clear and comprehensive picture of the latest travel status in Japan.





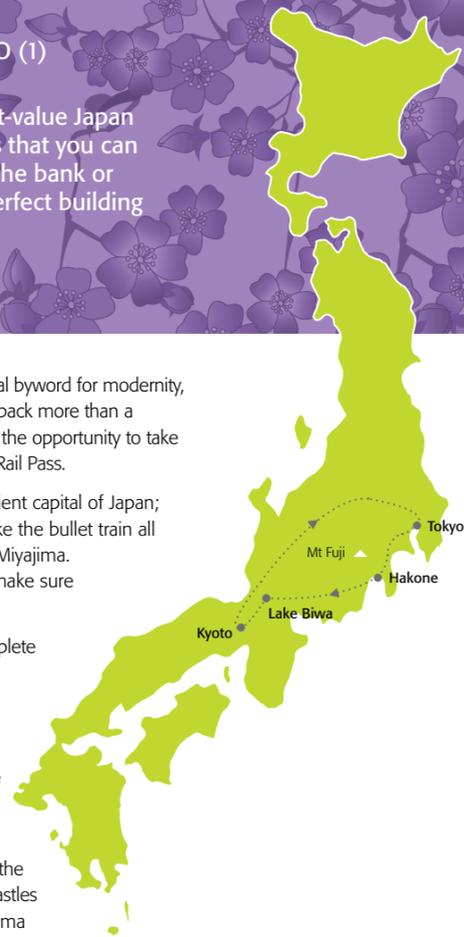
# Tokaido Trail

9 nights, Small Group Tour

ESSENTIAL

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

Traveling with a modest budget and time constraints? For the best-value Japan experience look no further than the Tokaido Trail. This tour proves that you can cover the classic “golden route” sights of Japan without breaking the bank or missing out on unforgettable cultural experiences. It is also the perfect building block with which to plan a longer trip.



## Tour highlights

-  Stay in a traditional *ryokan* inn with hot spring baths
-  Take a walking tour of Kyoto’s traditional geisha district
-  Explore hyper-modern Tokyo and historical Kyoto
-  Ride the famous *shinkansen* bullet train
-  Cruise across Lake Biwa to the island shrine of Chikubushima

Tokyo and Kyoto are Japan’s two great cities: one an international byword for modernity, the other Japan’s ancient cultural heartland whose history goes back more than a millennium. This tour gives us ample time to explore both, with the opportunity to take a day trip from Kyoto at no extra cost using the included Japan Rail Pass.

With this flexibility you might choose to visit Nara, another ancient capital of Japan; sample the irresistible street food in nearby Osaka; or even take the bullet train all the way to Hiroshima and its neighbor, the stunning island of Miyajima. Whichever experience you choose, your tour leader will help make sure your trip runs like clockwork.

In Hakone we’ll spend the night in a traditional *ryokan* inn, complete with tatami rush mats and sliding paper screens. Japanese-style accommodation is an experience in itself, and this is sure to be a highlight of our tour. Don’t miss the natural onsen hot-spring baths, an integral part of Japanese culture and the perfect end to a day of sightseeing. Two nights in this beautiful area will give us plenty of time to explore, and if the weather is favorable we may be honored with spectacular views of Mount Fuji.

Between Hakone and Kyoto, we’ll visit Lake Biwa, the largest in the country. After exploring Hikone Castle, one of only 12 original castles left, on the shores of the lake we’ll hop on a boat to Chikubushima island, home to a beautiful Shinto shrine and a Buddhist temple that dates back to the 8th century.

## Kamakura & Enoshima Island



Michael Trombold  
Senior Travel Consultant

Spending part of his childhood growing up near Los Angeles, Michael found himself surrounded by Japanese culture. It was no surprise that his first international vacation was to Japan, exploring Tokyo as a high schooler. After college, he took that love to the next level and moved to Hyogo prefecture to teach English at a local high school.

“Hakone is the perfect rural getaway from Tokyo that I wish I had known about sooner! Being less than an hour away from Tokyo, it seems like a great fit for a day trip – but having ‘been there and done that’, I now actively encourage an overnight stay here. There is just too much to see and experience that a day trip can’t capture.

“When arriving in Hakone for the first time, no longer was I surrounded by tall buildings and bright lights, but instead lush green mountains, volcanic valleys, and the occasional glimpse of Japan’s iconic Mount Fuji. The sightseeing loop is the best way to get around this expansive area, giving easy access to all of the must-see spots. My favorite? The Hakone Open-Air Museum, with sculptures and collections by a variety of artists, including Taro Okamoto and Pablo Picasso. After a day of being in nature, ending the night at a *ryokan* is an absolute must. I can’t think of a better way to enjoy the serenity of the Japanese landscape than by relaxing in a traditional hot spring.”



Hakone



Kamakura

FIRST TIME FAVORITE



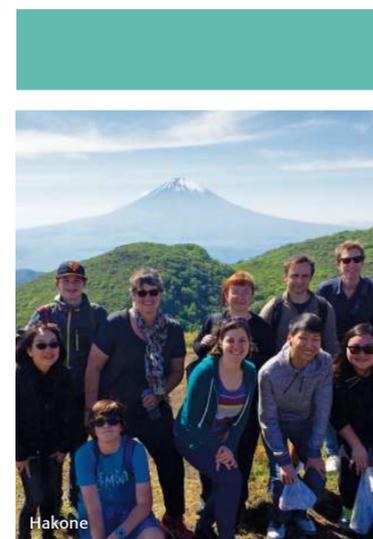
Kyoto

## Fancy becoming a Tokaido Trailer?

Let us book you on this **Small Group Tour**. Please call us directly, inquire at your local travel advisor or book via our website. You can also find the latest availability, pricing and departure dates on our website.

## Our sustainability promise

 The carbon emissions from every InsideJapan trip from are offset via gold-standard projects. Find out more about our [climate commitment](#).



Hakone

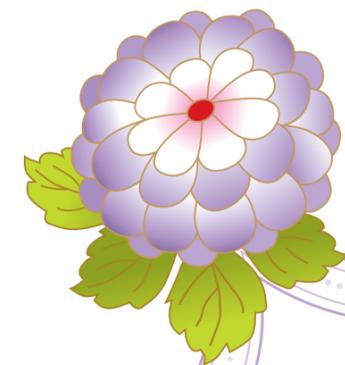


*InsideJapan’s accommodation network is outstanding; we loved the hotel and ryokan selections. Just the right variety of longer and one-night stays with time to catch our breath in Kyoto.*

Ruby & Michael, Scottsdale, AZ



© Sara Pretelli, David Lowrey, Inside Travel Group





# Special departures

And that's not all! We have several more Small Group Tours, including tours that focus on special interests, and regional itineraries that offer an in-depth exploration of an off-the-beaten-track area. For more details, please visit [www.insidejapantours.com/japan-small-group-tours/](http://www.insidejapantours.com/japan-small-group-tours/)

## Walking the Nakasendo and Beyond

CLASSIC

Venture off the beaten track into rural Japan, where the scenery is unspoiled, signposts are only in Japanese, and the welcome is exceptionally warm.



© SarahStagg, Blancscape\_Pixta

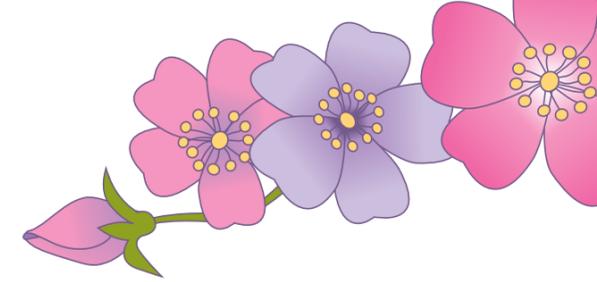
## Spirit of Honshu

CLASSIC

In between stays in Japan's two greatest cities you'll relax in hot springs, explore the beautiful Izu Peninsula, and make day trips to the fascinating historical sites of Nikko and Nara.



© Dreamstime



## Our Covid promise

+ If you fall ill or test positive for Covid while on your trip, our customer support team is available 24/7 to assist with any problems you may have and make the necessary arrangements to ensure your comfort and safety.

## A Northern Soul

CLASSIC

Travel north from Tokyo to see a side of Japan suffused with legend and mystery. Visit Sado Island, gorges and geysers in the secret north.

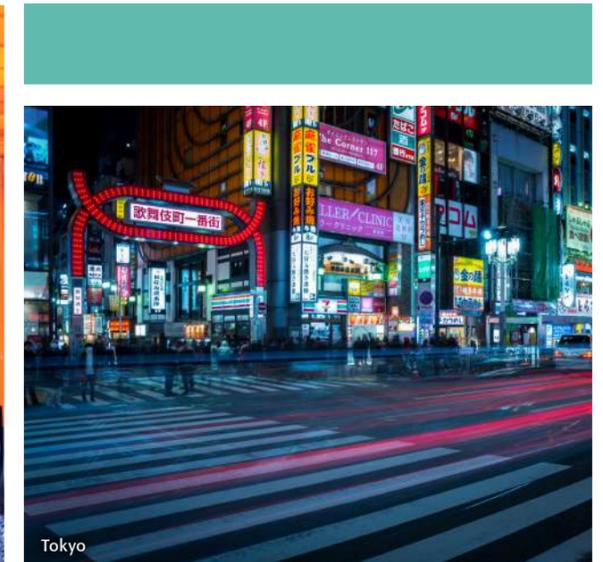


© Peter Jackson Inside Travel Group

## HYPERJAPAN'S J-Pop & Go!

ESSENTIAL

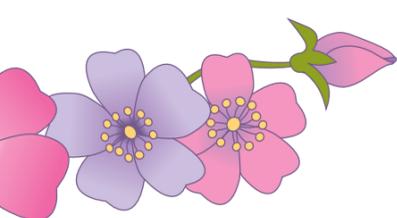
From day-glo cafés and *kawaii* street fashions to ancient temples and spectacular natural scenery, J-Pop & Go! is the perfect mixture of kitschy pop culture and traditional Japan.



© David Lovejoy, Mike Readdy

## Want to find out more?

Visit our website for full details of these tours and all our vacation packages. Alternatively speak to one of our travel consultants or your local travel advisor for pricing, departure dates and more.





# Self-Guided Adventures



**Louise Pigot**  
Global Head of Product & Commercial



*I like freedom and flexibility when I travel. Work and home life can feel so hectic – and when you go away on a trip, I don't think that it should feel the same. There should be time for relaxing, for soaking up new atmospheres, and even taking those moments to sit and watch people go about their business, no matter whereabouts in that country you are.*

*I am a planner, but I also plan for downtime. I want to do all my research beforehand, decide what I want to see, what experiences I am looking for, where I am going to stay, and in which location. This helps me to feel relaxed, reassured, and safe, but also ticks that 'sense of freedom' box!*

*If you are even a little bit like me, then I think that our **Self-Guided Adventures** are well suited to you. You will be supported the whole trip, safe in the knowledge that everything has been thought of, planned and you are free to just get on and enjoy your adventure. If you need us at any point, then we are here.*

*You'll be working with our expert, knowledgeable Japan travel consultants. They'll ensure that you'll work in partnership together, designing the perfect itinerary for you. It's a given that they will offer you the very best advice on the hotels we use, the location, the experiences, the transport, plus navigating the Japan rail system, which truly is a marvel. They'll also give you that extra dose of inspiration too; they've all lived and worked in Japan, and can tell you about those hidden gems that you can't find anywhere else.*

*If you like freedom, independence, excitement and inspiration, **Self-Guided Adventures** are the way to go!*



## CONTENTS

Our Self-Guided Adventure concept	40 - 41
Your Info-Pack	42 - 43
Private guiding	44 - 45
Golden Route	46 - 47
Best of Japan	48 - 49
Traditional Japan	50 - 51
World Heritage	52 - 53
Honshu Hiking	54 - 55
Secrets of Shikoku	56 - 57
Northern Highlights	58 - 59
Kyushu Adventure	60 - 61
Wild Hokkaido	62 - 63
Japan Arts Trail	64 - 65
Gastronomic Adventure	66 - 67
Manga & Anime	68 - 69
Okinawa Island Hopping	70 - 71



# Self-Guided Adventure concept

A Self-Guided Adventure is a fully tailored vacation experience. Your trip can start on any day of the year, giving you complete flexibility over itinerary, duration and budget. We'll use our years of Japan travel experience to put together a customized Self-Guided Adventure exactly to suit your interests and wishes. No two people are the same, which is why every trip is different.

## The InsideJapan tailormade experience

-  Take a private trip designed just the way you like it
-  Make the most of every moment with expert advice from your travel consultant
-  Any month, any day – travel where and when works best for you
-  From cooking to cycling, choose from a huge range of experiences
-  Take day tours with knowledgeable local guides, or be guided throughout
-  Get directions, recommendations and cultural tips from our tailormade Info-Pack

### Using this brochure

In the next section of this brochure we highlight a selection of example Self-Guided Adventures to showcase the variety of trips we can offer. Some take in Japan's classic sights, others focus on more remote islands and a handful of itineraries are based on themes – such as Japanese cuisine or pop culture.

You may like to choose an itinerary and book it exactly as described in this brochure, but we expect that you'll want to add experiences and make alterations to suit your personal preferences. Please speak to one of our travel consultants who'll be happy to discuss your travel plans and start customizing an itinerary for you.

### Unforgettable experiences

We base our itineraries around experiences rather than sights, as we believe this is the best way to really get beneath the surface of Japan. Each of our trips can be tailored to include any number of activities, whether you want to watch a sumo tournament, go white water rafting or have afternoon tea with a maiko. Please turn to p. 80-115 for more ideas and inspiration.

### Accommodation

Japan boasts a tremendous diversity of accommodation, from skyscraper hotels to traditional Japanese inns; Buddhist temple lodgings to glorious beach resorts. You can find a selection of our favorites on p. 116-121 as well as on our website. We have an ever-evolving list of hotels which we have personally tried and tested, meaning we'll be sure to suggest the right accommodation for you.

### Transport

With your Info-Pack in hand, you won't have any problems getting around Japan by yourself. These days train stations and bus terminals are well labeled in English. Japan's public transport is also wonderfully efficient. If your Info-Pack says your bullet train will arrive at 10:15, you can be sure it'll be there on the dot.

### Japan office

At any point during your Japan trip, our bilingual Customer Support Team based in our Nagoya Office, is just a phone call away. You can call them for on-the-spot translations, sightseeing advice or to make restaurant recommendations. Should you need medical attention or if the weather disrupts your travel plans, use our 24-hour emergency hotline.

### Prices & booking

Our brochure trips are designed to be tailored, so you won't find prices here. However you can find guideline pricing for sample itineraries with recommended accommodation on our website: [www.insidejapantours.com](http://www.insidejapantours.com)

Please speak to one of our consultants or your local travel advisor, for a detailed, no-obligation proposal quote.





# Your Info-Pack

Worrying about getting lost in translation in Japan? You needn't be if you travel with InsideJapan Tours, as you will receive our detailed Info-Pack three weeks before departure. Written by our team of Japan experts, the Info-Pack is full of cultural tips, Japanese language hints, our restaurant recommendations and sightseeing guides to every place on your itinerary.

What's more, the Info-Pack will also contain personalized instructions for each journey you'll make, and detailed directions to every hotel or *ryokan* inn. All in all, the Info-Pack is your essential travel companion.

-  Follow our "Perfect Day" sightseeing ideas for the inside track on each city
-  Discover our top tips on everything from hot spring bathing to *kaiseki* dining
-  Get step-by-step instructions for each journey on your itinerary
-  Navigate to your hotels and *ryokan* inns with easy-to-follow directions
-  Keep on track with timings and details for each cultural activity or day with a guide
-  We are constantly monitoring the Covid situation and will contact you directly if there are any implications to your trip.

  
 The level of detail provided in the Info-Pack was amazing — it was like our Bible for the whole trip!  
 Rachael & Richard, Chichester, UK  






# Private guiding

Your guide will help you navigate to the best parts of the country's megacities, bringing Japanese culture and history bursting to life every step of the way. Although 'self-guided' means you'll be traveling by yourself for most of your trip, we highly recommend you spend at least a couple of days accompanied by a private guide in key destinations such as Tokyo and Kyoto. Professional guides have a wealth of knowledge to share from their unique perspective as a Japanese local – which in itself is something many visitors to the country may miss out on.



## Private guiding in Kyoto



Ayako Kiyono  
Professional guide

Ayako has worked with InsideJapan Tours as a full-time guide for over nine years. Born and raised in a Buddhist temple, she is the perfect person to introduce you to the historic religious sites of Kyoto, including her favorite spot, Fushimi Inari Shrine.

*"Fushimi Inari's 10,000 red gates are one of the most famous images of Japan. What the photographs don't show you is that you can follow these gates along trails that snake through the forest all over Mount Inari. To hike through all of them would take about two to three hours – but don't worry, I know some shortcuts! The views from the mountainside are lovely, and there are some great traditional restaurants where we can stop for a breather on the way."*

*"Please don't worry about the language barrier when you come to Japan. It isn't such an obstacle as you might think. Besides, I can teach you a few words of Japanese to help you enjoy your travels in Japan even more!"*



*Our private guides in Tokyo and Kyoto were very knowledgeable and really tailored the tour to the things we were interested in. They were great value for money and added so much to our trip.*

Rachel & family,  
Cheltenham, UK



## Osaka street food tour



Takeshi Suzuki  
Professional guide

Takeshi is another of our trusted professional freelance guides. Hailing from Osaka, Takeshi honed his English skills during seven years living in the US.

*"If you're interested in Japanese cuisine, let me take you on an evening tour of Osaka to try the city's best street food. We can start by sampling takoyaki – dumplings filled with octopus – in the Amerikamura fashion district, before moving on to Dotonbori Street. Near the neon Glico running man advertisement we'll see all manner of billboards flickering in the night sky including a giant mechanical crab."*

*"Next up I'll take you to my favorite gyoza joint or if you're feeling brave we can try fugu – after the poisonous parts of the pufferfish have been removed! There's so much more we can taste in Osaka from ramen noodles, meat skewers and okonomiyaki savory pancakes to every flavor of ice cream. Along the way I'll explain the preparation, ingredients and etiquette for each dish. You won't go hungry on my tour, that's for sure."*



## Find out more

We work with hundreds of top-quality guides all across Japan. If you're interested in including private guiding in your **Self-Guided Adventure**, please speak to your local travel advisor or call us directly. Our travel consultants would be delighted to match you up with the best guides to suit your interests. It's your vacation, so we can include as little or as much private guiding as you'd like.

The guides that we work with have all received comprehensive health and safety training and are well versed in Covid safety.



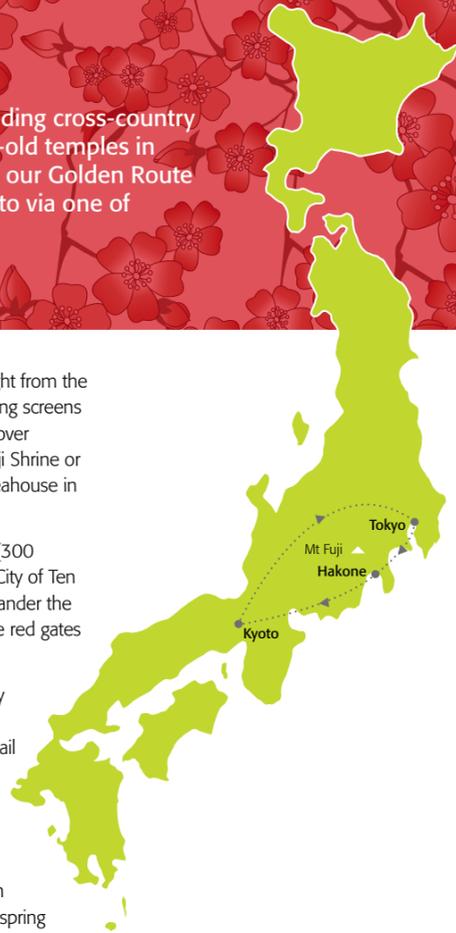


# Golden Route

9 nights, Self-Guided Adventure

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

Imagine basking in a hot spring in the shadow of Mount Fuji, speeding cross-country at breakneck speeds on the bullet train, or marvelling at centuries-old temples in Japan's former imperial capital. You'll experience this and more as our Golden Route transports you from futuristic Tokyo to the historical capital of Kyoto via one of Japan's most beautiful national parks.



## Trip highlights

-  Marvel at space-age skyscrapers in Tokyo
-  Ride the world-famous *shinkansen* bullet train
-  Bask in a hot spring in the foothills of Mount Fuji
-  Admire Kyoto's World Heritage temples and shrines
-  Experience Japanese hospitality at a traditional *ryokan* inn

Your trip begins and ends in Tokyo, a city seemingly drawn straight from the pages of a science fiction novel. In between gazing at the towering screens and space-age gadgetry of Akihabara's "electric town", you'll discover Tokyo's traditional heart as you glimpse a Shinto wedding at Meiji Shrine or perhaps take part in a traditional tea ceremony at the lakeside teahouse in Hamariky Garden.

Rocketing west on the bullet train at speeds of up to 186 mph (300 kmph) you'll arrive in Kyoto. Not for nothing is it known as the "City of Ten Thousand Temples", and while here you'll have the chance to wander the bamboo groves of Arashiyama and visit famous sites such as the red gates of Fushimi Inari and the Golden Pavilion of Kinkaku-ji.

Kyoto is a fantastic base from which to make a day trip to nearby Osaka, the great Buddha of Nara, or Hiroshima and its beautiful neighboring island of Miyajima. Thanks to your included Japan Rail Pass, you can make any of these day trips at no extra cost.

Connecting your city stays will be a visit to Hakone National Park, where you'll be greeted by spectacular views of the surrounding countryside. Here you'll experience true Japanese hospitality as you hunker down at a traditional *ryokan* inn, tuck in to an elaborate *kaiseki* dinner and soak in a natural volcanic hot spring – all beneath the shadow of Japan's most iconic landmark: Mount Fuji.

## Tokyo Skytree



Halley Trujillo  
Senior Sales  
Team Leader

Originally from Fort Collins, Colorado, Halley majored in Japanese language in college. She has lived in Osaka Prefecture for study abroad, Mie Prefecture for the JET program, and Nagoya City working at InsideJapan's Japan office.

*"The Tokyo Skytree is my favorite place to get a new perspective on the capital. As the second-tallest structure in the world at 2,080 feet (634 meters), it towers above you as you get closer – and soon, you'll be towering over Tokyo as you reach the top! The elevator*

*ride up feels like a spaceship with how fast it zooms. When you reach the observation deck, there are not only stunning views awaiting you, but a café and restaurant if you'd like to relax for a while high up in the sky.*

*"Apart from the beautiful views, the Skytree has an expansive mall called Solamachi at its base. Here, high-end fashion sits side-by-side with quirky anime-themed stores and a wide variety of restaurants (I recommend the conveyor belt sushi)."*



Tokyo

FIRST  
TIME  
FAVORITE

SELF-GUIDED ADVENTURES



## Has the Golden Route caught your eye?

This is a **Self-Guided Adventure** that can start whenever suits you. For details and guideline pricing please visit our website, talk to your local travel advisor or speak to one of our fantastic travel consultants. We can tailor the itinerary in any way you like to match your Japan wish list.

## Our sustainability promise

 We believe travel makes a difference, which is why we give back 5% of our profits to charities that provide breaks for people who are struggling.

*"Our travel consultant was outstanding! From his suggestion to forward our luggage, to his recommendation for the perfect tempura restaurant in Hakone, no detail was left undone."*

Marcia & Crispin, Newburyport, MA



Kyoto



Tokyo

© Tom Bullock, Norman Blake, Sara Preteff, Inside Travel Group





# Best of Japan

14 nights, Self-Guided Adventure

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

Are you a first-time visitor to Japan and don't know where to start? This could be the perfect itinerary for you, combining a broad sweep of some of the country's most exciting and diverse destinations, from the glittering tumult of the cities to mountain towns, stunning national parks, ancient temples and a beautiful island on the Seto Inland Sea.



## Trip highlights

-  Sample Osaka's mouth-watering street food
-  Explore the spectacular scenery of Hakone National Park
-  Admire one of Japan's most iconic views from Miyajima Island
-  Explore sake breweries and morning markets in the Japanese Alps
-  Visit the haunting Peace Park Memorial in Hiroshima

Your trip begins in Tokyo: world-famous for its eclectic fashions, multitudinous karaoke booths and futuristic architecture. From here you'll be swept westwards on the bullet train to Kyoto, ancient capital of Japan; indulge in Osakan street food in Dotonbori – known as "Japan's kitchen"; and visit Hiroshima, a vibrant city with a haunting past.

Japan is not all glaring neon and skyscrapers, and between your city stays you'll experience a more relaxed pace of life in Hakone National Park, the alpine town of Takayama and on the island of Miyajima. In these stunning locations you'll sleep on *tatami*-mat flooring at traditional *ryokan* inns, sample the local cuisine, soak in natural *onsen* hot-spring baths and enjoy plenty of old-fashioned Japanese hospitality.

The best way to experience Japanese culture is to jump right in, and this itinerary is packed with exciting activities to help you get the most out of your trip.

Admire Mount Fuji from the deck of a pirate ship as you cruise across Lake Ashi and explore Hakone's outdoor sculpture park. Visit Miyajima Island's Itsukushima Shrine, whose "floating" red shrine gate provides one of the most iconic views in all Japan. Tour sake breweries and shop for traditional crafts at Takayama's morning markets, surrounded by the vertiginous peaks of the Japanese Alps.

With expert private guides in selected locations, included travel passes and plenty more optional activities on offer – this will be a trip you'll never forget!

## Cycling in the Hida countryside



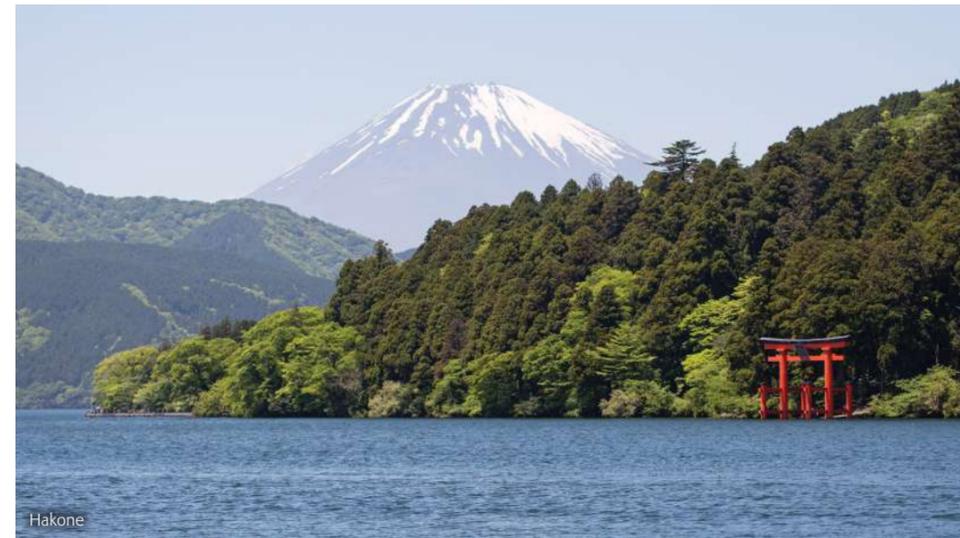
Ben Guest  
Senior Travel  
Consultant

Ben's love of classic samurai films led him to Tokyo where he lived for six years. A few years ago he visited Takayama in the Japanese Alps.

"On a day trip from Takayama, our guide, Hiro, led us on a ride through the countryside, weaving through countless rice paddies and vegetable farms. Most of the farmers we met seemed to know Hiro and were more than pleased to answer our questions. Many of them were also eager for us to try their produce. One lady, who had been farming

strawberries, invited us to help ourselves to her leftover crop.

"At the end of the tour, Hiro suggested that we all go to an *okazuya* – a kind of Japanese deli – for lunch. We were each given a box and told to fill it with as much food as we liked, as they were sold by weight. My box cost me no more than 400 yen (about \$3.50). I would never have found this place without Hiro's guidance, and it just reminded me how much more you can get from travel by interacting with people who live and work in the places we visit."



Hakone



Takayama



Kyoto



Miyajima



Takayama

**BEST  
SELLER**

SELF-GUIDED ADVENTURES



## Already dreaming of the Best of Japan?

You can book this **Self-Guided Adventure** exactly as described to start on any day of the year, or let our expert travel consultants tailor it to suit your travel style. Please check our website for guideline pricing and read on for hotel ideas and cultural experiences coming up later in this brochure.

## Our Covid promise

-  Due to the uncertainties around Covid, we only ask you to pay your final balance six weeks before departure. See our flexible [booking policy](#) for more details.



Phenomenal suggestions and very detailed guidance. Everything went according to plan and exceeded expectations!

Stephen, New York, NY



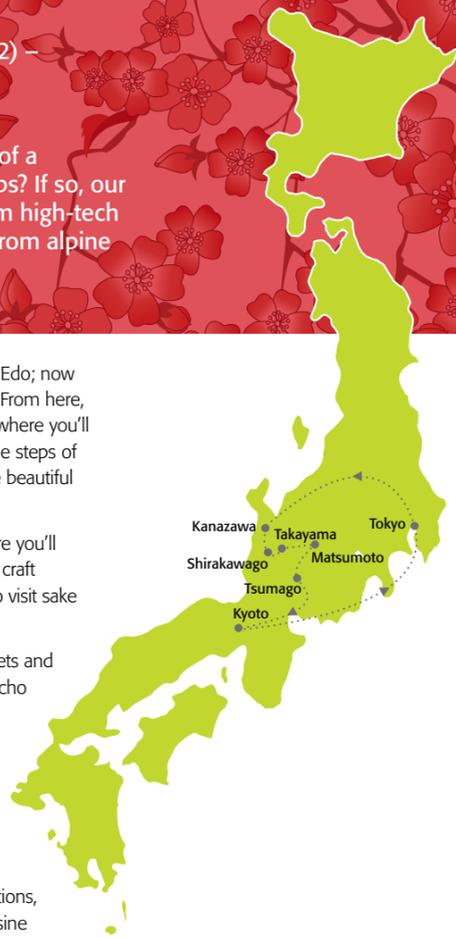


# Traditional Japan

14 nights, Self-Guided Adventure

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

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to climb the steps of a samurai castle, or live in a thatched farmhouse in the Japanese Alps? If so, our Traditional Japan itinerary could be for you. Steering you away from high-tech cities, this journey introduces a side of Japan suspended in time, from alpine villages to traditional *ryokan* inns.



## Trip highlights

-  Retrace the steps of samurai on the Nakasendo Way
-  Spend the night in a traditional alpine farmhouse
-  Discover Kyoto: Japan's ancient imperial capital
-  Explore Matsumoto's magnificent "Black Crow" castle
-  Visit one of Japan's top three landscape gardens in Kanazawa

Your journey begins in Tokyo: once a small fishing village called Edo; now a glittering metropolis and one of the largest cities in the world. From here, watch the skyscrapers melt away as you travel into rural Japan, where you'll visit Matsumoto's magnificent "Black Crow" castle and retrace the steps of the samurai as you walk the Nakasendo Way to Tsumago in the beautiful Kiso Valley.

In Shirakawago, you'll journey high into the Japanese Alps, where you'll stay in a steeply thatched "praying hands" farmhouse. Next, the craft town of Takayama, set amid alpine scenery, offers the chance to visit sake breweries before indulging in a dinner of succulent Hida beef.

In Kanazawa, you'll wander beautifully preserved, lantern-lit streets and visit the elegant gardens of Kenrokuen. Don't forget to visit Omicho Market to try some of Japan's freshest sushi.

Finally your journey brings you to Kyoto: the undisputed cultural center of the country. There's no better place to discover Japan's traditional heart – and if you're lucky you may even spot one of the city's elusive geisha scurrying through the streets of the old Gion district.

Included in your journey will be a mixture of rustic accommodations, each boasting *onsen* hot-spring baths and outstanding local cuisine – the best way to experience traditional Japan.

## Walking the Nakasendo Highway



Kester Wright  
Senior Travel  
Consultant

Kester has done all manner of jobs in Japan, from lifeguarding in Okinawa to working on a search-and-rescue team in Nozawa Onsen ski resort. A few years ago, he had the opportunity to walk a section of the Nakasendo Way.

"It is just just 5 mi (8 km) from Magome to Tsumago, beginning with a steady climb to the mountain pass. Past the summit, the long downhill to Tsumago village begins. In this area is a teahouse run by a lovely old man providing walkers with tea and snacks after the climb. This building used to be an inspection post belonging to the Shogun government, checking the identities of travelers and making sure traders were not transporting prohibited goods. A reminder that this lovely mountain path used to be a major thoroughfare!"

"From here the path continues to descend into deeper, darker and more ancient woodland. The trail hugs the side of steep gullies with crystal-clear streams, becoming a series of wooden walkways over sections of deeper river. Down here the moss grows thick and you can feel the age of the forest – it's easy to imagine yourself back in the Edo Period, making the long trek between the old and new capitals (Kyoto and Tokyo).

"Finally, the path emerges from the forest as you make the approach to Tsumago village, where the trees turn to rice paddies once again and houses reappear in the landscape. It's like wandering into a fairy tale."



*Inside Japan's accommodation network is outstanding; we loved the hotel and ryokan selections. Just the right variety of longer and one-night stays with time to catch our breath in Kyoto.*

Ruby & Michael, Scottsdale, AZ



**BEST SELLER**



## Longing to explore Traditional Japan?

This is a **Self-Guided Adventure**, which means you'll travel independently wherever you want, whenever you want. Visit our website for guideline pricing and call our expert travel consultants who'd love to tailor a detailed itinerary proposal for you.

## Our sustainability promise

 Our trips visit Japan's rural heartlands, working through community-based tourism to support local people across the country.





# World Heritage

17 nights, Self-Guided Adventure

TOKYO (3) – NIKKO (2) – KYOTO (3) – MOUNT KOYA (2) – HIMEJI (1) – HIROSHIMA (2) – KANAZAWA (2) – SHIRAKAWAGO (1) – TOKYO (1)

Discover Japan's most important cultural and historical monuments as you visit the elaborate temples of Nikko, the haunting Peace Memorial Park at Hiroshima, and incredible Himeji Castle – all UNESCO World Heritage Sites. During your adventure you'll stay in some excellent traditional accommodation, including a thatched-roofed farmhouse in alpine Shirakawago and a temple lodging on atmospheric Mount Koya.



## Trip highlights

- Visit Himeji, Japan's finest original samurai castle
- Explore the elaborate temples and shrines of Nikko
- Admire Kinkaku-ji, Kyoto's golden temple
- Take time to reflect at Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park
- Spend the night in a traditional alpine farmhouse

Your adventure begins and ends in Tokyo, a beacon of modernity whose radical architecture and irrepressible pop culture provide a fascinating counterpoint to the rich historical monuments that are the inspiration for this itinerary.

A two-hour train journey north from Tokyo lies Nikko, home to the mind-bogglingly intricate temple complex that serves as the final resting place of the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu: one of the most important figures in Japanese history.

Mount Koya provides a link to another celebrated personage, the monk Kobo Daishi, who introduced Shingon Buddhism to Japan. You'll stay in a temple lodging, eat strictly vegetarian Buddhist cuisine, and watch as monks perform their solemn morning rites.

The cities of Kyoto and Hiroshima, meanwhile, harbor a diverse array of remarkable historical gems. In Hiroshima you'll visit the atmospheric Peace Memorial Park, where the tragic events of 1945 come alive. Kyoto is home to no fewer than 17 World Heritage locations, from much-loved Kiyomizu-dera Temple to the "nightingale floor" of Nijo Castle, and offers the chance for a day trip to another World Heritage hotspot: the ancient capital of Nara.

Shirakawago, a peaceful village amid the bucolic scenery of the Japanese Alps, offers a very different experience: a stay in a traditional thatched-roofed farmhouse with dinner included. A chance to sample yams, assorted mountain vegetables and ayu river fish, all sourced locally. Finally, crowning your World Heritage trip is a visit to Himeji Castle, by far the largest and most spectacular of all Japan's castles – there really is nothing else like it!

## Himeji



Sian Halsey  
Travel Consultant

A lover of Japanese trains and stationery shops, Sian spent four years living in Fukushima. During her time in Japan, she traveled up and down the country – including to Himeji, home of the 'White Heron Castle'.

"I think it's fair to say that the majority of people visiting the city of Himeji are there to see the famed castle – and rightly so. Not only is it one of the few remaining 'original' castles in Japan, it is also a stunning sight to behold. Its imposing structure and striking white walls rise dramatically above the city, creating a

postcard perfect image of Japan.

"And I'm not the only one who thinks so. The UNESCO World Heritage site even appears as one of the iconic Japanese settings in the James Bond film You Only Live Twice!

"But there is more to Himeji than just the castle. The city is rich in samurai history and home to a series of beautiful gardens, all styled to reflect the Edo era. Let your imagination free and immerse yourself in the atmosphere of feudal Japan."



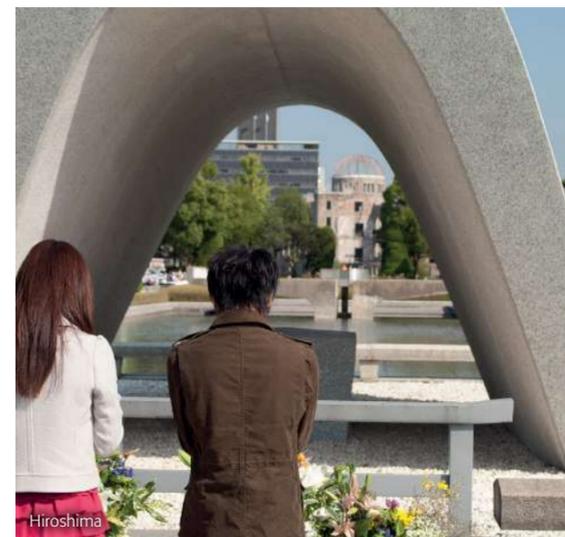
Nikko



Mount Koya



Shirakawago



Hiroshima

BEST SELLER



Already imagining yourself among Japan's World Heritage sites?

Let our travel consultants plan this **Self-Guided Adventure** for you by speaking to us today. We can arrange the itinerary exactly as described or weave in extra nights, different destinations or more cultural experiences – whatever you'd like to create the dream vacation.

## Our Covid promise

- Uncomfortable about traveling due to Covid? Speak to us and we can rebook your trip for a later date without charge up to three weeks before departure. See our flexible [booking policy](#) for more details.



The World Heritage trip was perfectly designed to offer us exposure to many different aspects of Japan. I could never have planned such a well thought out trip on my own.

Brooke, Long Beach, CA





# Honshu Hiking

UPDATED FOR 2022

14 nights, Self-Guided Adventure

TOKYO (3) – MATSUMOTO (1) – TSUMAGO (1) – NARAI (1) – KYOTO (3) – KUMANO KODO (3) – OSAKA (1)

If your idea of an adventure is discovering new places on foot, this is the trip for you. With multi-day walks along the Nakasendo Way and the sacred pilgrimage trails of the Kumano Kodo, you'll discover ancient forests, mountain shrines and family-run inns that the bullet train simply can't reach. Slow down, admire the view and discover Japan under your own steam.



## Trip highlights

-  Hike the ancient pilgrimage routes of the Kumano Kodo
-  Enjoy seven days' walking between family-run inns
-  Walk the prettiest sections of the Nakasendo Way
-  Make optional hiking day trips from Tokyo & Kyoto
-  Rest your feet in Osaka, Japan's food capital

This trip will see you follow in the footsteps of samurai as you tread the Nakasendo Way, once an important trade route between Kyoto and the new capital of Edo, now Tokyo. Warm up your legs on the walk from Magome and Tsumago, then hike the mountain pass to Narai; all three are well-preserved villages, once important posts on the samurai trail.

Later you'll traverse the Kumano Kodo; ancient pathways that have been trodden by pilgrims from diverse religious and social backgrounds for over a millennium, linking the three great shrines of Hongu, Nachi and Hayatama.

You'll visit all three shrines as well as walking misty mountain passes, admiring the tallest waterfall in Japan, sleeping in traditional accommodation, soaking in mineral-rich hot springs and hiking through ancient forests on a section of the Daimonzaka cobblestone stairway.

What's more, you'll stay on a tiny island in Katsuura Bay, visit the "Black Crow" castle of Matsumoto and explore the temples, shrines and gardens of Kyoto.

Finally bookending the walking sections, stays in the great cities of Tokyo and Osaka provide an arresting contrast to your rural exploration, with towering skyscrapers, glittering neon and clamorous crowds whisking you far away from the seclusion of mountain trails.

## Ancient pilgrimage routes



Ali Muskett  
Senior Travel  
Consultant

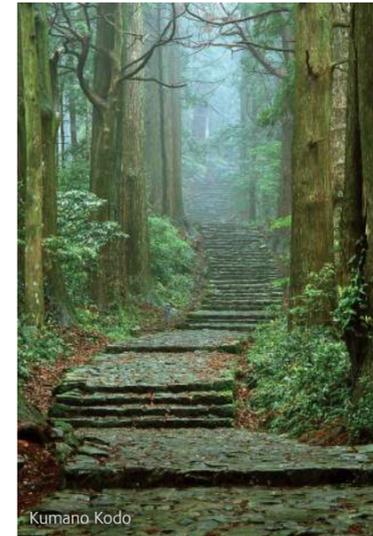
Ali first visited Japan for a two-week vacation in 2006 and has never looked back. She has lived in Nagoya and Shizuoka, and traveled all over Japan, including a solo expedition into the Kumano Kodo.

"The Kumano Kodo is a series of pilgrimage trails that criss-cross the Kii Peninsula, trodden by all sorts of people – from samurai warriors and aristocrats, to priests and commoners – for over 1,000 years. On my most recent trip to Japan, it was my turn to follow in their footsteps.

"Tall, skinny trees towered above me, and a rough stone path stretched out before me on my 5 mi (8 km) hike. With blue-green mountains visible in

the distance, I peered into the valley below. Much to my delight, a little way down the trail, I came across a small rest house where I could sit for a while and contemplate the scenery over a steaming coffee made with hot-spring water.

"Refreshed and ready for more, I continued on to Kumano Hongu Taisha: the Grand Shrine and central point of the Kumano Kodo. There was something about arriving at such an important and grand shrine on foot that made me feel like a true pilgrim. Although I was walking on ground so many had trodden before me, I felt like I had discovered somewhere special that very few people know exists."



Kumano Kodo



Kumano Kodo

## WALKING VACATION



## Keen to follow in the footsteps of pilgrims?

We can make this Self-Guided Adventure a reality for you. Guideline pricing for these travel arrangements can be found on our website, but better still talk to your local travel advisor or call our travel consultants. We'll create a custom itinerary with as much or as little hiking as you like.

## Become a Dual Pilgrim

If you've already completed the Way of St James (*Camino de Santiago*) in northern Spain, you must try the Kumano Kodo in Japan. These are the only two pilgrimage routes in the world with UNESCO World Heritage status. What's more, if you finish both of them you'll qualify for Dual Pilgrim status, making you part of a very select group!

## Our sustainability promise

 We believe travel makes a difference, which is why we give back 5% of our profits to charities that provide breaks for people who are struggling.

*We loved the section of the Kumano Kodo we walked; swimming in the river, hiking in the sun through beautiful countryside, eating enormous, beautifully presented dinners at the inns, and relaxing in the hot-spring baths.*

Alison & Maya, Worcestershire, UK



Kumano Kodo



Kumano Kodo

© Kumano Travel, Sara Pretelli





# Secrets of Shikoku

UPDATED FOR 2022

13 nights, Self-Guided Adventure

KYOTO (3) – MIYAJIMA (2) – MATSUYAMA (2) – KOTOHIRA (1) – IYA VALLEY (2) – TAKAMATSU (2) – OSAKA (1)

If you're drawn to the mysteries of rural Japan, seek out the secrets of Shikoku: the smallest of Japan's four main islands. A world apart from the crowded sidewalks and neon-spangled skyscrapers of the big cities; this itinerary promises stunning natural beauty, from hidden valleys and meandering rivers to mountains and jagged coastlines.



## Trip highlights

-  Visit Shikoku's most celebrated historical garden
-  Stay in a traditional farmhouse in the secluded Iya Valley
-  Make a day trip to Naoshima 'Art Island'
-  Climb the steps to atmospheric Konpira-san Shrine
-  Try your hand at udon noodle making

Starting in traditional Kyoto and ending in vibrant Osaka, this journey will take you from Japan's former imperial capital of over a thousand years to its work-hard, play-hard neighbor. With a visit to Hiroshima's moving Peace Memorial Park included, these cities really showcase the variety that can be found in Japan's metropolitan centers.

Leaving Japan's main island, your adventure begins in earnest as you step off the well-worn tourist trail and onto Shikoku Island. Follow the steep pilgrimage route up 1,368 stone steps to Kotohira's famous shrine, Konpira-san, cross swinging vine bridges in the verdant Iya Valley and explore an original samurai castle in Matsuyama. Visit a hidden mountainside village and stay in a traditional farmhouse – this is a region overflowing with natural beauty and remarkable cultural experiences.

A visit to Ritsurin Garden, one of the most famous historical gardens in Japan, will be a highlight of your visit to Takamatsu – and on a day trip to Naoshima Island, where art spills out of museums and into abandoned shrines, disused workshops, hilltops and beaches, you'll get a taste of Japan's world-class art scene. On Miyajima, island of the gods, you can take the cable car to the top of Mount Misen for magical views across Seto Inland Sea.

You'll also visit the 'Black Crow' castle of Matsumoto and explore the temples, shrines, and gardens of Kyoto. We always include a range of evening meals to make your trip a culinary treat, and along the way this itinerary introduces you to regional specialties such as bonito tuna and red snapper. You'll even have the opportunity to take a lesson in udon noodle-making at a family-run cooking school.



## The vine bridges of Iya Valley



Amy Tadehara  
Senior Travel Consultant

Amy's Shikoku roots run deep: her great-grandparents were born in Kochi, just an hour or so from the Iya Valley. She spent four years in Japan, and visited the vine bridges with her parents.

*"We had only planned to pause at the vine bridges on the way from Takamatsu to Kochi, 15-20 minutes maybe, but we ended up staying much longer. There's just something really neat about standing on a bridge made of vines, peering down at the river*

*between the slats beneath your feet, and yet knowing you're not going to fall through to your death!*

*"There are steel safety cables running through the bridge now, but it still felt as though we were traveling the old way, like people did for hundreds of years. This really is rural Japan – it was an incredible contrast even to the small cities of Shikoku, let alone Kyoto and Osaka, and we felt as though we'd really got away from it all."*

*Best service we've ever had from a travel company. We were particularly impressed with the wealth of recommendations provided in your Info-Pack, far more useful than the run-of-the-mill guidebooks. Our itinerary was easy to follow and extremely helpful.*

Thomas & Roberta, Woodland Park, CA



Iya Valley

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

SELF-GUIDED ADVENTURES



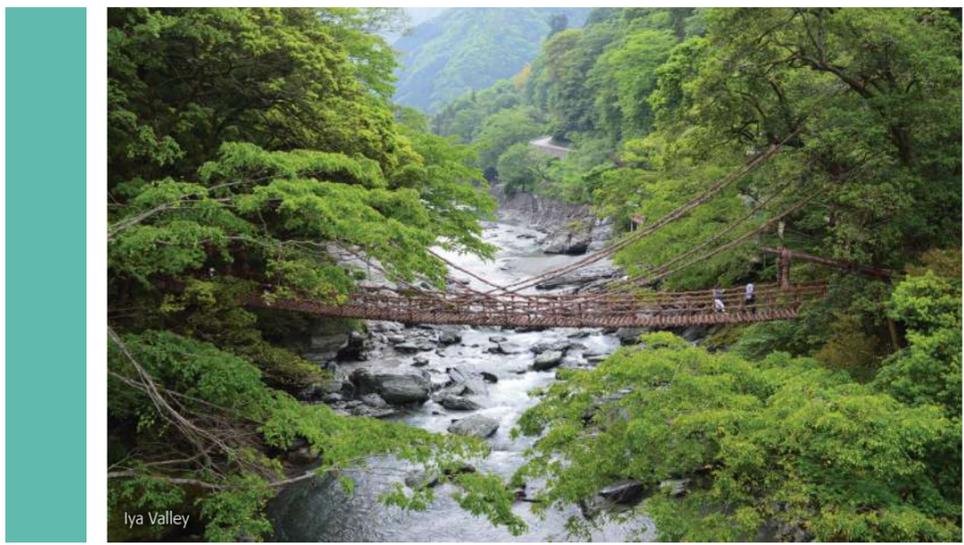
Kotohira

## Has rural Shikoku Island captured your heart?

The journey described is a **Self-Guided Adventure** which means you'll travel independently around Japan. It also means our team can tailor the arrangements exactly to suit you. Visit our website for guideline pricing and more ideas, or speak to our Shikoku experts today.

## Our sustainability promise

 Our trips visit Japan's rural heartlands, working through community-based tourism to support local people across the country.



Iya Valley

© Louise Marston, Doug McKinley, Inside Travel Group





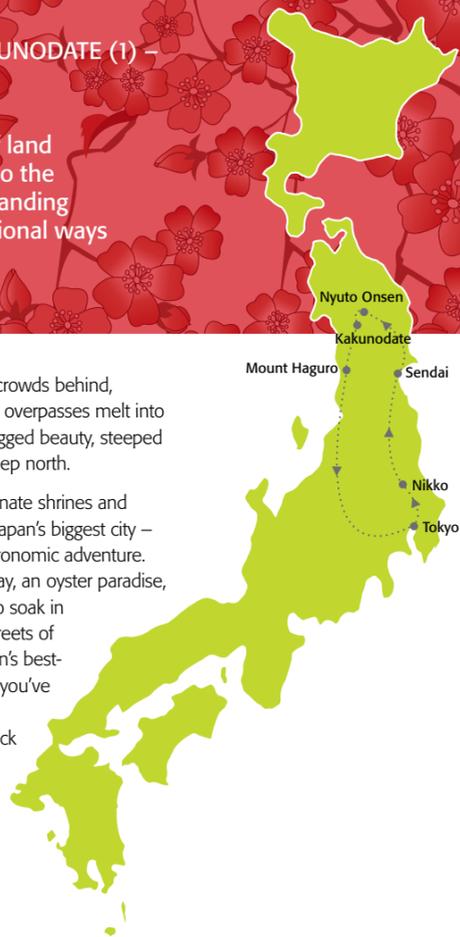
# Northern Highlights

UPDATED FOR 2022

13 nights, Self-Guided Adventure

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

Venture north and discover the Tohoku region: a vast, wild tract of land stretching 500 mi (800 km) north of the capital. In stark contrast to the burnished skyscrapers of Tokyo, this untamed region boasts outstanding natural beauty and well-preserved history – a reminder that traditional ways are still alive and well in Japan.



## Trip highlights

-  Wander the preserved samurai district of Kakunodate
-  Soak in hot spring baths in Nyuto Onsen
-  Sample Buddhist cuisine at a temple lodging
-  Take a boat ride through island-studded Matsushima Bay
-  Admire Japan's most elaborate religious architecture in Nikko

No sooner does your train pull out of Tokyo than you leave the crowds behind, watching concrete tower blocks give way to forests while roaring overpasses melt into fields and lakes. This is northern Honshu: a region of remote, rugged beauty, steeped in the stories of the pilgrims and poets who first explored the deep north.

Your first stop is Nikko, where cedar forests conceal dazzlingly ornate shrines and thundering waterfalls. From here, stop off in Sendai – northern Japan's biggest city – and indulge in the local food culture with a guided evening gastronomic adventure. Take day trips out of the city: hop across to idyllic Matsushima Bay, an oyster paradise, and the mountainside Yamadera Temple complex. Journey on to soak in the milky blue waters of Nyuto Onsen, then tread the ancient streets of Kakunodate, where weeping cherry trees lean over rows of Japan's best-preserved samurai houses – which you can stay in and feel like you've stepped back in time. On Mount Haguro, one of three sacred mountains, well-worn pilgrimage routes will lead you through thick cedar forests to a sacred mountaintop community.

Japan's rural north may have been devastated by the 2011 tsunami, but Northern Highlights reveals a region that refused to give up – with a long history, rich culture, and fighting spirit.

## Hiking Mount Haguro



Brett Plotz  
Insider Tour Leader

A former journalist, women's hockey goalie, terrible barista, television extra and children's party superhero, Brett had quite an eclectic professional history before joining InsideJapan! Originally from very rural Iowa in the American Midwest, Brett first became interested in Japan as a child, when his uncle used to send him souvenirs and crazy sweets from his business trips.

*"The journey up Haguro-san is one of the most magical hikes I've ever done. Though 2,250 stone steps run up the backbone of this walk in the woods, you'll never notice the heaviness in your legs as you take in the misty surroundings of this mystical place."*

*"Picture this: ancient, dense forest surrounds as you make your way up the mountain, past raging waterfalls and extant shrines. You reach a clearing and there stands before you the magnificent Goju-to, the region's oldest five-story wooden pagoda, dating back to the year 937. This is just one of the amazing sights waiting for you at Haguro-san, the most accessible of the Three Sacred Peaks."*

*"The ascetic monks and pilgrims use their hike up Haguro-san as a way to experience rebirth; you'll understand why once you've reached the top."*



Nyuto Onsen



Mount Haguro



Mount Haguro

*The accommodation selected was excellent, especially the Japanese-style places. Sleeping 'on the floor' and eating Japanese food gave us a much better feel for Japan than if we'd only stayed in Western-style hotels.*

Eric & Donna, Ontario, Canada



Nikko



Tokyo

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

SELF-GUIDED ADVENTURES



## Excited to venture to Japan's Tohoku region?

Drop into your local travel advisor or call us today and we'll create a detailed itinerary proposal for this **Self-Guided Adventure** starting whenever you like. Book Northern Highlights exactly as described or discuss your Japan travel wish list with us so we can tailor the plans just for you.

## Our Covid promise

**+** One thing Covid has taught us is the importance of flexibility. We have completely redesigned our [booking policy](#) to give you extra security and peace of mind.





# Kyushu Adventure

UPDATED FOR 2022

13 nights, Self-Guided Adventure

NAGASAKI (2) – KAGOSHIMA (2) – YAKUSHIMA (3) – KIRISHIMA NATIONAL PARK (2) – KUMAMOTO (2) – KUROKAWA ONSEN (1) – FUKUOKA (1)

Stand in the shade of a thousand-year-old Japanese cedar, visit the former residence of the most powerful samurai clan in Kagoshima, and explore the rugged volcanic landscape of Kirishima National Park on this spectacular adventure around Japan's rural southwestern region. If you're an adventurous traveler who wants to discover a rarely seen side of Japan, this itinerary is the one for you.

## Trip highlights

- Explore the wild beauty of Kirishima National Park
- Trek to Jomon Sugi, the oldest tree on Yakushima
- Learn about Kagoshima's powerful samurai past
- Visit Suizen-ji, a classic landscape garden in Kumamoto
- Boat down steep-sided Takachiho Gorge

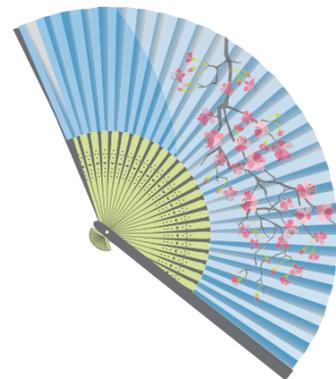
Kyushu is the third-biggest of Japan's four main islands, lying to the southwest of the country. Kyushu's cities are excellent proof that there is plenty of outstanding scenery, history and local cuisine to be found outside their famous cousins on Japan's main island. This is why your adventure will begin in the cosmopolitan city of Nagasaki, not Tokyo, allowing you time to see more of this little-visited region.

Nagasaki is infamous as the second location to be hit by an atomic bomb during World War Two, yet it is now a vibrant and cosmopolitan city. During Japan's long period of isolation (1633–1853) it was the only port open to foreign trade, a fact that is still evident in the distinctly European atmosphere and style of architecture at Glover Gardens and Dejima "Exit Island".

In the shadow of the rumbling, smoking Sakurajima volcano, Kagoshima boasts a long samurai history including a key role in the overthrow of the Tokugawa shogun in the Meiji Restoration of 1868.

Woven between these city stays is the wild volcanic landscape of Kirishima National Park, where hiking trails wind past clear lakes, and the bubbling hot spring town of Kurokawa Onsen. Finally, there's subtropical Yakushima Island, the inspiration for Hayao Miyazaki's seminal animated film *Princess Mononoke*. Hike through thousand-year-old cedar forests up vertiginous peaks or bask in seaside hot spring baths.

*Shinkansen* bullet trains connect the main cities, but a rental car is the best way to explore the natural wonders of Kyushu. We've included a rental car on Yakushima, and between Kirishima National Park and Fukuoka, to allow you to fully discover the region.



## Mount Aso caldera



Holly Brown  
Senior Travel  
Consultant

Holly spent two years teaching English in a tiny rural town in northern Kyushu, before joining our Bristol team.

"Mount Aso is the most active volcano in Japan and one of the largest calderas in the world, measuring 15.5 mi (25 km) in diameter. It was once one huge mountain until a series of eruptions 300,000 years ago caused the volcanic chamber to collapse. This created the doughnut-shaped depression you see today with a central crater that still bubbles away."

"The caldera is part of the Aso-Kuju National Park, my favorite area of Japan for hiking. When I lived in Kyushu, I had many a hiking trip - getting up early, walking all day, then celebrating with an ice cream followed by a hot spring bath."

"It's actually quite difficult to see the Mount Aso crater though - it's often hidden in a field of clouds or billowing sulphurous gas. But you go to Aso for the scenery as much as the volcano; the wide rolling farmlands of the caldera are beautiful."



Yakushima



Yakushima



*Kyushu Adventure was my fifth trip with InsideJapan and I think it was the best one yet.*

Lewis, Edinburgh, UK



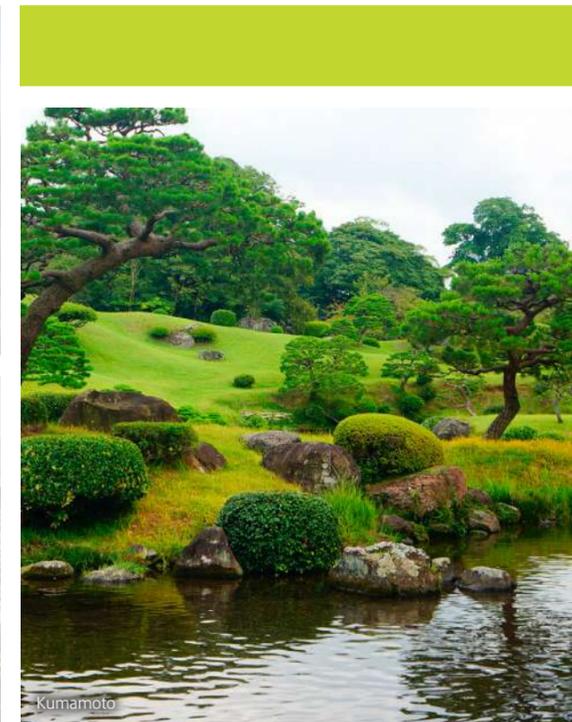
Kagoshima



Mount Aso



Nagasaki



Kumamoto



## Ready for a Kyushu Adventure?

This **Self-Guided Adventure** can start on any day of the year. As you'll be traveling independently our travel consultants can tailor this itinerary to suit you. Why not explore Tokyo first, then fly down to Kyushu? Upgrade the *ryokan* stays or spend longer on Yakushima? The choice is yours.

## Our sustainability promise

The carbon emissions from every InsideJapan trip from are offset via gold-standard projects. Find out more about our [climate commitment](#).





# Wild Hokkaido

UPDATED FOR 2022

14 nights, Self-Guided Adventure

TOKYO (2) - SHIRETOKO PENINSULA (2) - LAKE KUSSHARO (2) - MOUNT ASAHI (1) - BIEI (1) - SAPPORO (3) - HAKODATE (1) - TOKYO (1)

Imagine driving for miles through a patchwork of lavender fields and hiking along majestic mountain trails. Or marvelling at the wildlife as you take a boat cruise along one of Japan's most spectacular peninsulas. If you have a thirst for adventure and love the freedom of the open road, our Wild Hokkaido itinerary is the ultimate trip for you.



## DRIVING VACATION



### Trip highlights

- Cruise along the Shiretoko Peninsula to spot the wildlife
- Drive across the patchwork meadows of Biei
- Gaze at the night-time panorama from atop Mount Hakodate
- Enjoy Japanese beer and buttery ramen in Sapporo
- Hike in Daisetsuzan National Park with a mountain guide

Hokkaido is frontier country. The second-largest of Japan's four main islands, for centuries Hokkaido was cut off from the mainland, home only to the indigenous Ainu people, until its annexation in 1869.

Flying north from Tokyo, your journey begins in the Natural World Heritage Site of Shiretoko Peninsula, in the town of Utoro on the western side. The peninsula is home to all sorts of wildlife, from brown bears to rare birds. Take a cruise on the wild Sea of Okhotsk for a chance to spot killer whales, dolphins, and seals, and join a guide for a trekking tour through the Shiretoko Five Lakes, ringed by snow-capped mountains.

After a relaxing stay on the shores of Lake Kussharo, drive west past volcanoes and mist-blanketed lakes until you reach Daisetsuzan National Park. Here, you'll summit Mount Asahi, the tallest peak in Hokkaido, with an expert guide. From here, the landscape softens into rolling meadows and the patchwork flower fields of Biei, before you finally hit Sapporo – Hokkaido's cosmopolitan capital. Fuel up on Japan's best beer and barbecue lamb, and take a day trip out to pretty Otaru, where shops and cafés now reside in the traditional warehouses lining the canal. Then, turn south and gaze at the twinkling nighttime lights of Hakodate's anvil-shaped harbor.

With a rental car at your disposal and vast, sweeping scenery from coast to coast, this itinerary promises to introduce you to a remote yet captivating area of Japan quite unlike any other region.



### Dreaming of Hokkaido's open roads?

This **Self-Guided Adventure** works best if you travel in July, August or September when the high roads are open and the scenery's at its best. For guideline pricing please visit our website, or better yet, talk to our Hokkaido experts who can tailor a driving itinerary to suit you.

### Our Covid promise

- We are in regular contact with our suppliers and teams on the ground and are tuned in to the very latest border openings and travel restrictions. Our regular [travel updates](#) provide a clear and comprehensive picture of the latest travel status in each of our destination countries.

### Hiking in Hokkaido



Lachlan Woodland  
Senior Travel Consultant

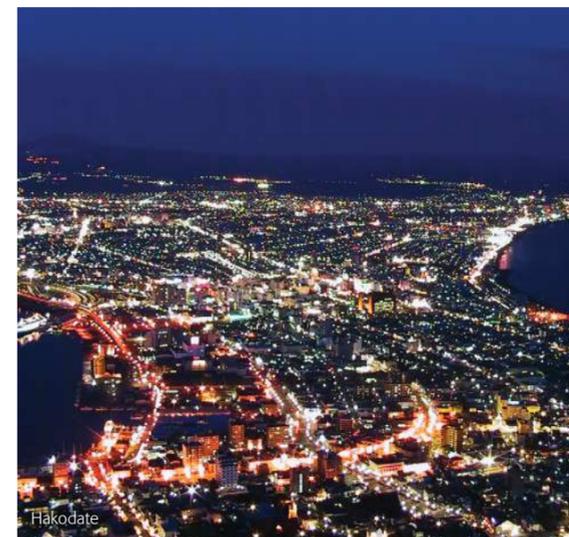
Originally from Brisbane, Australia, Lachlan studied Japanese in University and spent time living in both Osaka and Fukuoka.

"To most who visit, Hokkaido is a whole world unto itself; a place like no other in Japan."

"Spending my high school days in the warmer Kansai region, I constantly longed for the day I would see my first snow in Japan. That's why when my first family took me for a trip up to Hokkaido one winter, I was completely blown away by its magical winter landscapes, its indescribably moreish cuisine, and its completely unique history when compared to the rest of Japan."

"Splitting the island from north to south, the Daisetsuzan National Park is known lovingly as 'the backbone of Hokkaido'. This region of rugged peaks, pristine ski fields and otherworldly onsen is one of the few places in Japan you can look into the horizon and not see civilization for miles. I've done my fair share of backcountry snow-shoeing and other winter sports around this region and it's a place I can't stop coming back to."

"One absolute must while driving along Hokkaido's wide plains is a pitstop in Kuriyama, between Biei and Sapporo – for a tour and tasting at Kobayashi Sake Factory."



On every night of our trip we got into bed thinking, "What an amazing day!" This was hands down the best, most impressive trip we've ever taken.

Hannah & Lawrence, Louisville, CO



© Dreamsime, Reggie Thomson, Inside Travel Group





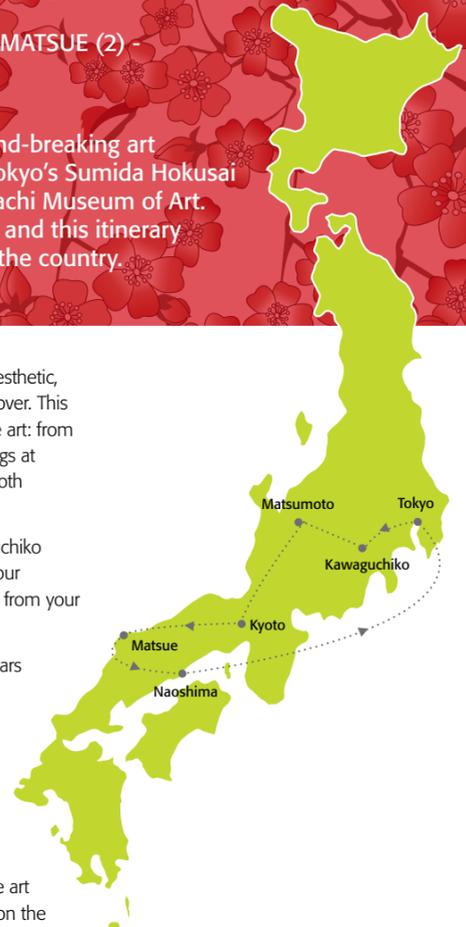
# Japan Arts Trail

UPDATED FOR 2022

14 nights, Self-Guided Adventure

TOKYO (3) - KAWAGUCHIKO (2) - MATSUMOTO (1) - KYOTO (3) - MATSUE (2) - NAOSHIMA (2) - TOKYO (1)

Admire kimono art in the foothills of Mount Fuji, explore the ground-breaking art projects on Naoshima Island, study *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints in Tokyo's Sumida Hokusai Museum, and wander the award-winning gardens of Matsue's Adachi Museum of Art. Japan boasts a huge selection of international and indigenous art, and this itinerary shows the incredible range of museums and galleries throughout the country.



## Trip highlights

- Trace the history of Japanese art in Tokyo
- Visit small galleries and artisan workshops in Kyoto
- See Zen-inspired gardens at the Adachi Museum
- Stay on Naoshima "Art Island" on the Seto Inland Sea
- Explore the exquisite kimono art of Itchiku Kubota

For centuries Japan has placed the utmost value on the visual aesthetic, leaving it with a rich artistic heritage that is renowned the world over. This itinerary will take you on a journey through the ages of Japanese art: from Asuka Period (538–710) pottery and traditional *nihonga* paintings at Tokyo's National Museum to the towering contemporary behemoth that is the Mori Art Gallery.

The Itchiku Kubota museum at the foot of Mount Fuji in Kawaguchiko showcases the intricate kimono art of the famous textile artist. Your accommodation here comes complete with views of Mount Fuji from your own hot-spring bath.

Kyoto was the seat of the imperial court for more than 1,000 years and its members were influential patrons of the arts. Today the city is the epicenter of Japanese crafts, and you can visit kimono ateliers, woodblock print galleries, pottery studios, lacquerware workshops and *washi* paper specialists. In Matsue the Zen-inspired gardens at the venerable Adachi Museum are an artwork in themselves.

Each of the destinations on this itinerary offers a superb introduction to aspects of traditional and contemporary Japanese art – but the highlight of this trip has to be Naoshima, a tiny island on the Seto Inland Sea that has garnered a worldwide reputation for its innovative approach to art.

## Naoshima "Art Island"



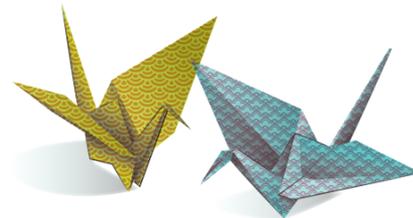
Claire Brothers  
Senior Sales Team  
Leader

Claire spent five years teaching English in Kyoto, where she used her time to enjoy Japan's delicious street food and peruse the city's flea markets for vintage kimono.

"In crowded Japan, where people live packed into high-rise cities and go everywhere by train, it's something of a novelty to have space to roam around freely, entirely at your leisure. Naoshima, a tiny island in the Seto Inland Sea, offers the chance to do just this – and that's what I really loved about it. I rented a bike and headed out without a plan, cycling through gloriously quiet streets and beautiful countryside, stopping to walk on the beaches and admire the amazing art installations that lie dotted around the place.

"One of my favorites was Sou Fujimoto's Naoshima Pavilion, a huge latticework structure looking out to sea.

"In addition to all the artwork outside, there are tiny, hidden 'art houses' that conceal exhibitions in abandoned shrines and workshops – not to mention the heavyweight Chichu and Benesse House museums, famous for their cutting-edge architecture and world-class collections. For art lovers visiting Japan, Naoshima is a guaranteed highlight."



Tokyo



Naoshima



Matsumoto



Naoshima

Niki de Saint Phalle Le Banc  
Photo: Osamu Watanabe



Naoshima

We utterly loved the hotels, ryokan and the self-catering machiya townhouse chosen by Toby our travel consultant.  
Rowan & family, Nyon, Switzerland



Tokyo

SELF-GUIDED ADVENTURES

**SPECIAL INTEREST**

## Inspired by Japan's world-class art scene?

You can book this Self-Guided Adventure exactly as described on these pages, or ask our travel consultants to tailor it to match your Japan dreams. Guideline pricing can be found on our website but do read on for more inspiration on arts and crafts experiences in Japan on p. 102 - 103.

## Our sustainability promise

We believe travel makes a difference, which is why we give back 5% of our profits to charities that provide breaks for people who are struggling.





# Gastronomic Adventure

14 nights, Self-Guided Adventure

TOKYO (3) - MATSUMOTO (1) - HIDA FURUKAWA (2) - KANAZAWA (2) - KYOTO (3) - MOUNT KOYA (1) - OSAKA (2)

If you've ever wanted tempura in Tokyo, yearned for *okonomiyaki* in Osaka, fancied miso in Matsumoto, or craved *kushikatsu* in Kyoto – it's time to indulge in the ultimate cultural and culinary journey. From vegetarian Buddhist cuisine on Mount Koya to *izakaya* pubs and an exquisite dinner cooked by a private chef, our Gastronomic Adventure will tickle your taste buds and leave you hungry for more!



## Trip highlights

- Make your own *soba* noodles in Matsumoto
- Indulge in succulent Hida Beef at a private dinner in the Alps
- Sample Buddhist cuisine at a temple lodging on Mount Koya
- Take a street food tour of Osaka, famous as "Japan's Kitchen"
- Enjoy Kyoto's finest tempura

With three times as many Michelin star restaurants as Paris, where better to begin your culinary exploration than Tokyo? We'll arrange for you to spend the evening with one of our Tokyo-based Insiders at our favorite local *izakaya* – Japan's much-loved tapas-style gastropub.

In the mountain towns of Matsumoto and Hida Furukawa, we'll set up a lesson in *soba*-making at a 130-year-old noodle shop and treat you to a private dinner of melt-in-the-mouth Hida beef, served in your own *machiya* townhouse accommodation. Next up, in Kanazawa you'll take a crash-course in hearty home-cooking with two of our favorite local residents, before enjoying a dinner of the finest tempura in an atmospheric restaurant in Kyoto, with sliding paper screens and a Japanese garden.

In the temple community of Mount Koya you'll discover *shojin ryori* – vegetarian Buddhist cuisine that prizes simplicity and seasonality, and whose preparation is treated as a meditative activity by the monks who make it. A guided street-food tour of Osaka will then introduce you to a very different culinary philosophy – with its battered octopus, savory pancakes, meat-and-veg skewers and ramen shops brimming over with fun-loving crowds.

Throughout your foodie adventure, we'll be there to assist with reservations at the best restaurants in town, as well as all manner of experiences – whether you want to visit Matsumoto's wasabi farms, sample sake in Takayama, or tuck into fresh seafood bowls at Kanazawa's Omicho Market. This is *your* gastronomic adventure, and we can't wait to make it happen. Not a fan of seafood, love your vegetables, or can't eat nuts? Don't worry, we know all about it. Let us know your dietary restrictions and likes and dislikes, and we can tailor everything to suit your needs.

## Izakaya



Grant Ekelund  
Senior Travel  
Consultant

Grant split his six years in Japan between Kanazawa, Nagoya, and rural Gunma Prefecture. A home brewer and beer enthusiast, he has plenty to say about Japanese *izakaya*!

"The Japanese answer to the pub, the *izakaya* is my favorite place to grab an easy and delicious dinner anywhere in Japan. With their extensive menus of small, shareable plates – encompassing everything from sashimi and gyoza dumplings to pizza and bacon-wrapped asparagus – they are the perfect place to try new things and discover innovative spins on old favorites.

"One of my favorite *izakaya* snacks is *renkon* (lotus root) and *gobo* (burdock root) chips, served with sweet chilli sauce and mayonnaise for dipping. They go perfectly with a frosted beer after a long day of sightseeing. And while the beer is always refreshing, you'll also find a wide variety of cocktails, sake and shochu – an East Asian spirit made from sweet potatoes or brown sugar.

"Wherever you are in Japan, there's bound to be an *izakaya* or two, and almost all of the major chains have picture menus, so you don't have to worry about reading or speaking Japanese. *Kanpai* (cheers)!"



Matsumoto



Kyoto



Tokyo



Takayama



Matsumoto



Osaka

## FOODIE TRAVEL



## Hungry for more Japanese cuisine?

This is a **Self-Guided Adventure** and we can arrange it for you exactly as described in this brochure. Visit our website for guideline pricing, speak to your local travel advisor or call us today. Alternatively we can create a custom foodie itinerary to suit you – or weave culinary experiences into any Japan vacation.

## Our Covid promise

✦ If you are unable to travel due to Covid, you can rebook or receive a full refund up to three weeks before departure. See our flexible [booking policy](#) for more details.



The service and *kaiseki* dinner at the ryokan blew me away. I couldn't get enough of the food in Japan!

Brian, Louisville, CO



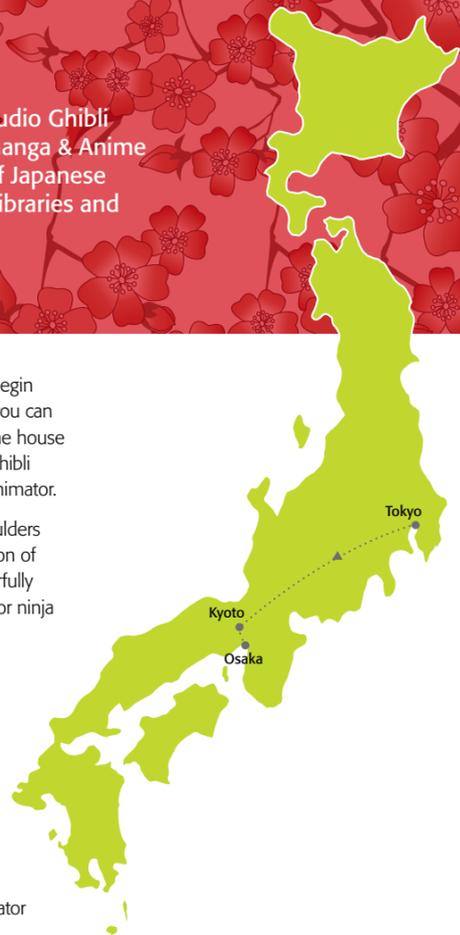


# Manga & Anime

UPDATED FOR 2022

10 nights, Self-Guided Adventure  
TOKYO (4) – KYOTO (3) – OSAKA (3)

When you think of Japan today, the chances are that Pikachu and Studio Ghibli are just as likely to spring to mind as Zen gardens and geisha. Our Manga & Anime itinerary provides you with an insight into the kaleidoscopic world of Japanese pop culture – from Akihabara’s retro game shops to Kyoto’s manga libraries and everything in between.



## Trip highlights

- Pay homage to anime legends at the Ghibli Museum
- Visit samurai movie sets in Kyoto
- See the giant Gundam Wing state at Odaiba
- Wander among Ferris wheels and animatronic crabs in Osaka
- Explore the comic shops of Tokyo’s manga districts

Tokyo is the pop culture hub of Japan, so it’s only fitting that you begin and end your trip here in the capital. With our Info-Pack to hand, you can mingle with gaming geeks in multi-story arcades, play master of the house at a maid café in Akihabara “electric town”, and visit the magical Ghibli Museum to wander through the imagination of Japan’s greatest animator.

In Kyoto you’ll find the International Manga Museum rubbing shoulders with ancient temples and age-old shrines – the perfect juxtaposition of distinguished tradition and popular culture. Don’t miss the wonderfully kitsch Toei Movie Park, where you can dress as a geisha, samurai or ninja and explore authentic Japanese film sets.

Moving on to Osaka, you’ll be catapulted into the tumult of one of Japan’s most exciting cities as you wander beneath the giant animatronic crabs, Ferris wheels and the looming neon “running man” of the Dotonbori district. Visit the fashion arcades, explore the vintage shops in America Mura, or perhaps even spend a day in The Wizarding World of Harry Potter™ at Universal Studios Japan. While in Osaka, manga aficionados should also make a half-day trip to Takarazuka, home of the all-singing, all-dancing, manga-adapting cabaret the Takarazuka Revue – and the Osamu Tezuka Manga Museum, commemorating the revered creator of Astro Boy.

## Nakano Broadway



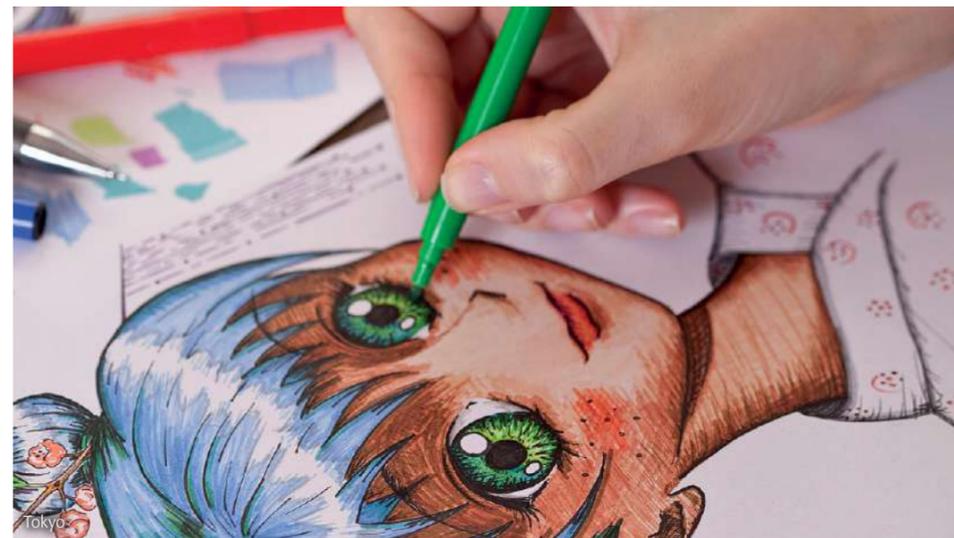
Tim Supplitt  
Senior Travel Consultant

As the former president of the Tucson Anime Screening Society/University of Arizona Anime Club, Tim is our go-to guy for all things otaku (geek).

“All anime fans dream of going to Akihabara, the hub of otaku culture, but have you heard of Tokyo’s Nakano Broadway? Nakano Broadway is a key destination if you are on the hunt for that one hidden treasure for your collection. With a complex of no fewer than 25 different Mandarake speciality shops, each focusing on a microcosm of pop culture like figures, cosplay, manga,

and dojinshi (fan art) this is less a shopping mall and more like the nerdiest garage sale in the world.

“As an anime figure collector and a collector of physical media, Nakano Broadway is an essential shopping destination every time I go to Japan. The shops are generally second-hand, which can mean great bargains and a great place to find out-of-print items. But watch out: you might just find that incredibly rare item you’ve been hunting for, causing your wallet to instantly go up in flames.”



SPECIAL INTEREST



## Obsessed with Japanese manga?

So are we! Speak to one of our in-house manga and anime geeks who’d love to arrange this **Self-Guided Adventure** to start whenever suits you. For guideline pricing please visit our website, but we can tailor the travel arrangements to meet (almost) any budget. For more inspiration please also see the Pop Culture section (p.108-109) later in this brochure.

*This trip was my first time traveling alone, but the support from InsideJapan made it a very comfortable and satisfying experience.*

Ryan, Minneapolis, MN

## Our sustainability promise

The carbon emissions from every InsideJapan trip from are offset via gold-standard projects. Find out more about our [climate commitment](#).



© Inside Travel Group



# Okinawa Island Hopping

**NEW FOR 2022**

10 nights, Self-Guided Adventure

TOKYO (2) - ISHIGAKI (3) - TAKETOMI (2) - IRIOMOTE (2) - TOKYO (1)

Few people realize that Japan has subtropical islands – let alone hundreds of them. Allow us to introduce the Okinawa Archipelago: a string of islands that until 150 years ago were a thriving independent kingdom. With white sandy beaches, iridescent seas and dense jungles of mangroves filled with rare wildlife – this is a true island paradise.

## Tour highlights

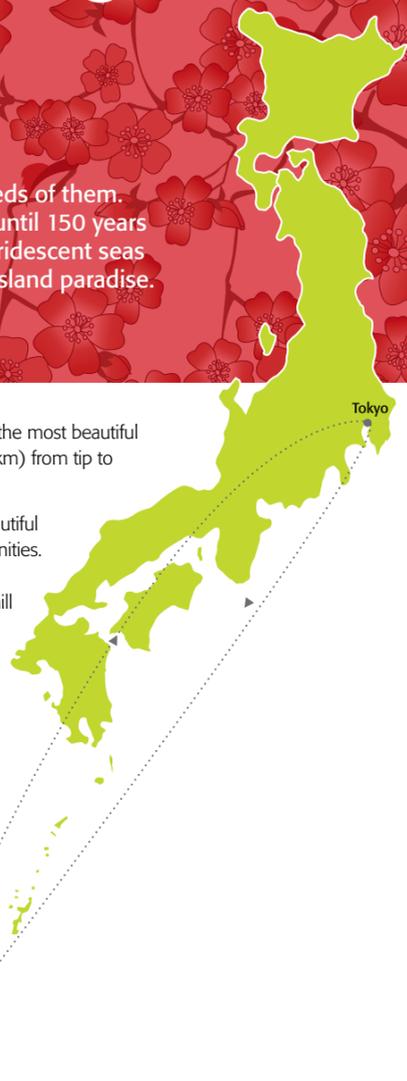
-  Relax and unwind on tropical beaches
-  Road trip or hike through Ishigaki's hilly interior
-  Island hop to explore the jungles of Iriomote
-  Snorkel or scuba dive over the coral reefs
-  Get to grips with Okinawan culture

After a couple of days in the capital, you'll jet south and land on one of the most beautiful islands in Okinawa: Ishigaki. This white-beached gem is just 25 mi (40 km) from tip to toe, yet it's packed with potential for adventure and relaxation.

Kabira Bay, in the north of the island, is considered one of the most beautiful spots in Japan, while the forested interior holds plenty of hiking opportunities. You can dive amid the coral reefs, go underground at impressive limestone caves, or while away the hours with a drink in hand as you chill out on the beach. Public transport is fairly limited on Ishigaki, which is why we've included a rental car so you can really explore the island.

You'd be quite justified in spending your entire time on Ishigaki, but don't miss out on the equally beguiling charms of neighboring islands Iriomote and Taketomi – both just a short ferry ride from the local port. Mountainous and almost entirely clad in jungle, circumnavigated by a single road, Iriomote is famous for its beautiful waterfalls, outstanding hiking, and the rare Iriomote wildcat, endemic to the island. Taketomi, meanwhile, is even smaller – just 1.9 mi (3 km) across – with water buffalo ambling past low-slung red-roofed houses and tranquil beaches with star-shaped sand.

What many people find surprising about these little islands is the strong and distinctive culture they all share. Reflecting a motley assortment of influences from Taiwan, China and America, everything about Okinawan culture is entirely distinct from that of mainland Japan – from its eclectic cuisine and indigenous languages to its traditional *sanshin* music and *eisa* dance. This cultural richness, coupled with glorious weather, warm seas and stunning beaches, make the Okinawa Islands one of Asia's best-kept secrets.



Ishigaki



Taketomi



Iriomote



Taketomi



Ishigaki

*I am very happy that I traveled to the island of Ishigaki. I saw five or six manta rays on my second day of diving which was truly incredible.*

Bruce, Houston, TX

## Looking for a Japanese beach break?

If you fancy adding a relaxing beach stay in Okinawa to the beginning, middle, or end of your Japan exploration, please speak to your local travel advisor or get in touch with our excellent travel consultants. We can arrange this Okinawa Island Hopping exactly as described, or tailor the itinerary's length and contents to suit you.

## Our Covid promise

**+** Due to the uncertainties around Covid, we only ask you to pay your final balance six weeks before departure. See our flexible [booking policy](#) for more details.

## Island hopping to Iriomote



Rachel Rykala  
Senior Travel Consultant

Before joining InsideJapan, Rachel worked as a travel rep in the Canary Islands, Cyprus and the Maldives – so she knows a thing or two about tropical paradise! A few years ago she made her first trip to Japan's southernmost islands.

*"For me, Japan me has always been about the mix of rural and urban; how in just a few short hours you can go from the bright lights and hyperactivity of Tokyo to wild mountains or windswept plains. On my most recent trip I wanted to see another side of Japan: tropical Japan. Well, subtropical anyway."*

*"Iriomote Island, just a short ferry ride from Ishigaki in the Okinawa Archipelago, is well-known for its thick jungles and beautiful scenery. A trek through the lush green paths to Pinaisara Falls is*

*easily combined with a few hours of kayaking among mangroves, or snorkelling in the warm sea. All around the island are little coves and inlets with great beaches – and they're often completely deserted! One of the highlights of my trip to Iriomote was taking a ride on the beach in a cart drawn by a water buffalo, while the driver sang and played traditional music.*

*"The tiny Island of Taketomi, meanwhile, is just half an hour's ferry ride from Ishigaki. While Iriomote is jungle-like with its mangroves, waterfalls and rugged coves – Taketomi is more tranquil, with long white sandy beaches and buildings mainly built of coral. Some of the beaches even have grains of sand shaped like stars. As a former resident of the Maldives, I felt quite at home!"*



Ishigaki





# Exclusive Private Journeys



**Alastair Donnelly**  
Co-founder and Visionary



*What makes the perfect vacation? Since our first tailored journey landed in Japan in 2001, I have been pondering this constantly.*

*I have come to realize that it is the simple things that form the basis of your experience with us. This is why we are always friendly, polite, thoughtful and considerate. We listen to you; we want to know who you are and what your ideal trip looks like. After all, it is your vacation, not ours, and we want you to return saying that it was the best trip you've ever taken. These things may seem basic but in my experience, they're hard to find.*

*Our **Exclusive Private Journeys** concept is the culmination of everything we have learnt since founding the company. Since then the range of services and experiences we can arrange for you has grown dramatically. No longer are you restricted to the tourist tea ceremony experience – instead you can take tea with the head monk of a private temple.*

*We have extended our network of contacts far and wide so you can assist a master sword-maker in forging a blade, get your hands dirty with a fourth-generation master potter, take a tour with a leading photographer, visit galleries with an academic, discover a local market with a renowned food writer and enjoy a cookery class with a Michelin-starred chef.*

*We open closed doors for you. We allow you to really get beneath Japan's surface, giving you an insight into this fascinating country through interactions with its most interesting residents.*

*Allowing complete flexibility and with every trip intelligently designed just for you, our **Exclusive Private Journeys** provide you with the finest experience of Japan available anywhere.*



## CONTENTS

Our Exclusive Private Journey concept	74 - 75
Guides, experts & artisans	76 - 77
Innovative cultural experiences	78 - 79





# Our Exclusive Private Journey concept

**Our Exclusive Private Journeys are elite-level itineraries including only the very best hotels, restaurants and experiences, created to suit you – down to the very last detail.**

Escorted from start to finish by top-quality professional guides, you'll have access to Japan's most exclusive experiences, made possible by our excellent network of experts and artisans. What's more, from the moment your driver greets you at the airport to the day you return home, your trip will run like clockwork. Our team is working constantly behind the scenes to ensure that everything goes according to plan – whether you want to eat at Tokyo's best sushi restaurant, meet one of Japan's last living swordsmiths, or make that last-minute trip into the Japanese Alps. This is your ultimate trip to Japan, and we will make it happen.



Hoshinoya Resort, Karuizawa



Lamp no Yado, Noto Peninsula

## Exclusive service

-  Innovative, custom itineraries created just for you
-  Top-level guides in every destination
-  The finest hotels, restaurants and exclusive experiences
-  Private cars & drivers for all transfers and sightseeing
-  Elite-level service and concierge support

### Sumptuous hotels and traditional inns

On an InsideJapan **Exclusive Private Journey**, Japan's finest hotels and traditional inns are available to you. Tokyo, of course, offers top-end international chains including the exceptional Park Hyatt, and the Peninsula is also a firm favorite. What's more, we can introduce you to remarkable Japanese-owned and managed properties – the wonderful Palace Hotel with balconies overlooking the grounds of the Imperial Palace, and the Hoshinoya Tokyo, a Japanese oasis in the heart of the Otemachi skyscraper district.

Step out of the capital and the options diversify even further. We'll have you taking tea served by impossibly graceful, kimono-wearing attendants; soaking in hot springs overlooking mountain forests; and waking in the morning to the sight of a perfectly manicured Japanese garden as you relax in an elegant *ryokan* inn. This is the Japan of romantic imagination; it is the total immersion and dream-like escape that will have you asking yourself "did that really happen?"

### Fine dining

Then there is the cuisine. Japan is a gourmand's dream and we guarantee that you'll go home with tales of some of the best dining experiences you have ever had. We will make sure you have a table at a sprinkling of the most famous places in town. That's not to say we're solely interested in Michelin stars; only a local knows where the best, most authentic eateries are hidden. So allow our guides to take you off-piste to tiny ramen stalls beloved of salarymen, seek out the freshest sushi at a fish market or venture into hidden bars on a sake-soaked safari through the city nightlife.



*Flawlessly organized, everything went exactly to plan and the level of detail provided in the documentation was excellent.*

Jill & Bernd  
London, UK



Murata Ryokan, Yufuin



Asaba Ryokan, Izu Peninsula



# Guides, experts & artisans

You will be accompanied by knowledgeable, English-speaking guides at every step of your trip. Hand-picked professionals, our guides provide a deep insight into the history and culture of every destination on your itinerary.

Our guides are also experienced travel facilitators, able to accommodate last-minute requests. They'll coordinate with drivers, call ahead to inform hotel staff of your imminent arrival, and make advance reservations for garden visits and temple appointments. That's in addition to coordinating out-of-the-ordinary experiences to heighten your vacation enjoyment.

On an **Exclusive Private Journey** you really won't have to worry about anything as we ensure you have a seamless adventure.



**Masa Hattori**  
Professional guide

Masa is one of InsideJapan's trusted freelance guides who looks after guests during their Exclusive Private Journey.

*"I'm originally from Iga Ueno, a small rural town famous for its ninja training schools. In fact I have a renowned ancestor: the samurai Hanzo Hattori. I now live in Tokyo with my wife and daughters. Before I became a professional guide, I spent 43 years working in sales and management for Kintetsu, a Japanese logistics firm. 21 of those years were stationed in North*

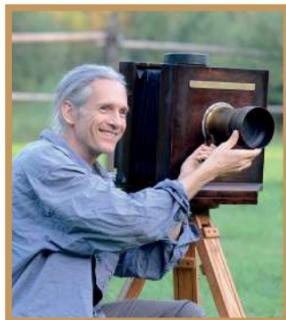
*America – I have lived in Toronto, Houston, Boston, LA and New York.*

*"As a guide I most enjoy enabling guests to uncover the mysteries of Japanese culture. Japan has achieved economic success in a relatively short time while keeping our unique traditions – something that I hope will fascinate you as much as it does me."*

## Experts & artisans

At InsideJapan Tours we believe in experts. We have a far-reaching network of artisans and specialists with a wealth of knowledge to share from head priests in Kyoto and Mount Koya, through to an eighth-generation ceramicist, sake sommeliers, geisha, and even one of Japan's few remaining falconers.

Thanks to these connections we can create innovative custom itineraries connecting you with just the right expert to match your specific interests.



**Everett Kennedy Brown**  
Photographer

InsideJapan has been working with Everett for many years. If you are a keen photographer, you'll have an inspirational trip under Everett's expert tutelage.

*"A photographer working in Japan for the past 25 years, my work has appeared in most major global media, including National Geographic, Geo, Time, Newsweek, Le Monde, Der Spiegel, The Times, and the New York Times. I've been fortunate to travel extensively throughout the Japanese archipelago and have many opportunities to meet remarkable people and hear their stories. Amazing doors have opened allowing me to view things rarely accessible to the public eye. In my photography and teaching I wish to share these experiences with you as much as I can.*

*"For me, life in Japan is a long and ever-deepening love affair with place and culture. Through my imagery, honoring the use of classical Japanese techniques and traditional materials, I hope to share my vision of the deep currents of Japanese culture that I encounter in my journeys."*



**Peter Macintosh**  
Geisha culture expert & multimedia artist

A former professional soccer player from Canada, Peter has called Kyoto his home since 1993. He is widely known as the leading expert on geisha culture.

*"Kyoto is a magical city. You just have to know the right people to show you where to look. Allow me to give you an exclusive glimpse behind closed doors at the mysterious world of geisha culture.*

*"Since arriving in Kyoto almost 30 years ago, I began a deep study of Japan's traditional arts including calligraphy, sumie ink painting, song and dance. Through the connections I made with local artists, I was introduced to the 'floating world' of the geisha. I have since appeared in numerous TV shows and print articles worldwide shedding light on the history and traditions of geisha, as well as being a location scout for the Hollywood movie Memoirs of a Geisha. I also created a course in geisha studies for Kansai University in 2009 – the first of its kind. I am currently working on my second documentary film about the 'Geisha Renaissance!'"*



Excellent guides are a key feature of our **Exclusive Private Journeys**. It has not been easy to bring together the talented team we now have in place, but it is enormously satisfying when clients tell me that their guide was the best they've ever had.

Our guides are experienced, charismatic and thoroughly knowledgeable, and their efforts will bring alive each place you visit. After all, it is the people you meet, not just the things you see, that help make a great trip so memorable and special.



**Alastair Donnelly**  
Co-founder and Visionary

## Our Covid promise

✚ The guides that we work with have all received comprehensive health and safety training and are well versed in Covid safety.





# Innovative cultural experiences

There is no limit to the carefully curated experiences we can arrange on an **Exclusive Private Journey** in Japan. We can reveal secretive worlds that are often not accessible to the general public or available elsewhere.

For our team, Japan is an endless discovery, and we are passionate about research to create highly sought-after cultural encounters. Simply let us know what aspects of Japanese culture appeal and we will craft a custom itinerary just for you.

## Hunt for rare vinyl Tokyo

Passionate about vinyl? We'll connect you with a Tokyo resident who is himself an avid vinyl music collector. Whether you're into jazz, The Beatles, Japanese folk or looking for bootlegs, we'll help you find it among Tokyo's fantastic record shops, jam-packed with rare vinyl.

## Take a night-time drive in a supercar Tokyo

Nothing beats the feeling you get behind the wheel of a luxury supercar. And what better place to experience this than Tokyo at night? Choose from an Aston Martin, McLaren, Porsche, Ferrari or Lamborghini and hit the city streets. Drive the Rainbow Bridge to Odaiba Island in Tokyo Bay, then circle back to Ginza along one of Tokyo's most beautifully lit streets for what is sure to be an unforgettable evening.



## Meditate under the guidance of a head priest Mount Koya

Stay in gorgeous private quarters at Sanbo-in, one of the oldest temples on Mount Koya. Here you'll meet the chief abbot who will explain the temple's history and the founding of Shingon Esoteric Buddhism. In the early morning the abbot will guide you through a meditation practice after a special purification ritual.

## Photograph geisha on location Kyoto

Searching for an exceptional photo opportunity? Thanks to our strong connections in the geisha world, let us arrange for you to photograph geisha on location around Kyoto. You'll be accompanied by an esteemed photographer who can provide guidance to help you take the most enviable pictures – a truly rare window into a world few foreigners ever see.

## Unravel the mysteries of Bizen pottery Okayama

Meet a fourth-generation ceramist at his workshop in the Bizen pottery district near Okayama. With the help of your guide, the ceramist will show you how reddish-brown Bizenware is fired in a wood-burning kiln to create the pottery's distinctive markings.

Get the inside track on the artistic debate going on in Bizen, as some potters promote individual self-expression while others fight for the preservation of tradition.



## Create *kaiseki* cuisine with a Michelin-starred chef Tokyo

To learn from a Michelin-starred chef is an extraordinary privilege. Accompanied by your guide to translate, you'll begin with a trip to a local market to buy ingredients before returning to a professional training kitchen. Here the chef will teach you how to prepare a selection of *kaiseki* dishes of your choice in a private, hands-on lesson.

## Make *wagashi* confectionery with a renowned pâtissier Tokyo

Let us take you to one of Tokyo's most prestigious *wagashi* shops to meet a master pâtissier. Born into a *wagashi*-making family, the chef creates the Japanese sweets by hand, paying close attention to flavor and aesthetics to express the season. He is a true master of his art, and his expertise has been sought by famous confectionery makers around the world, including eminent French chocolatier Jean-Charles Rochoux.

## Taste Japanese wines with an expert sommelier Tokyo

Japan is not the first place that springs to mind when you consider the world of wine, but let us introduce you to a Japanese sommelier who'll show you just how far Japan's wine has come. Your guide for this wine-tasting evening is also a prolific food writer and photographer – the perfect person to demonstrate how Japanese wine can be paired with *kaiseki* cuisine and other dishes only to be had in Japan.





# Experiences & inspiration

We don't just want you to see Japan, but to experience it yourself, hands-on. What better way to get to grips with the country's fascinating culture, landscape and history?

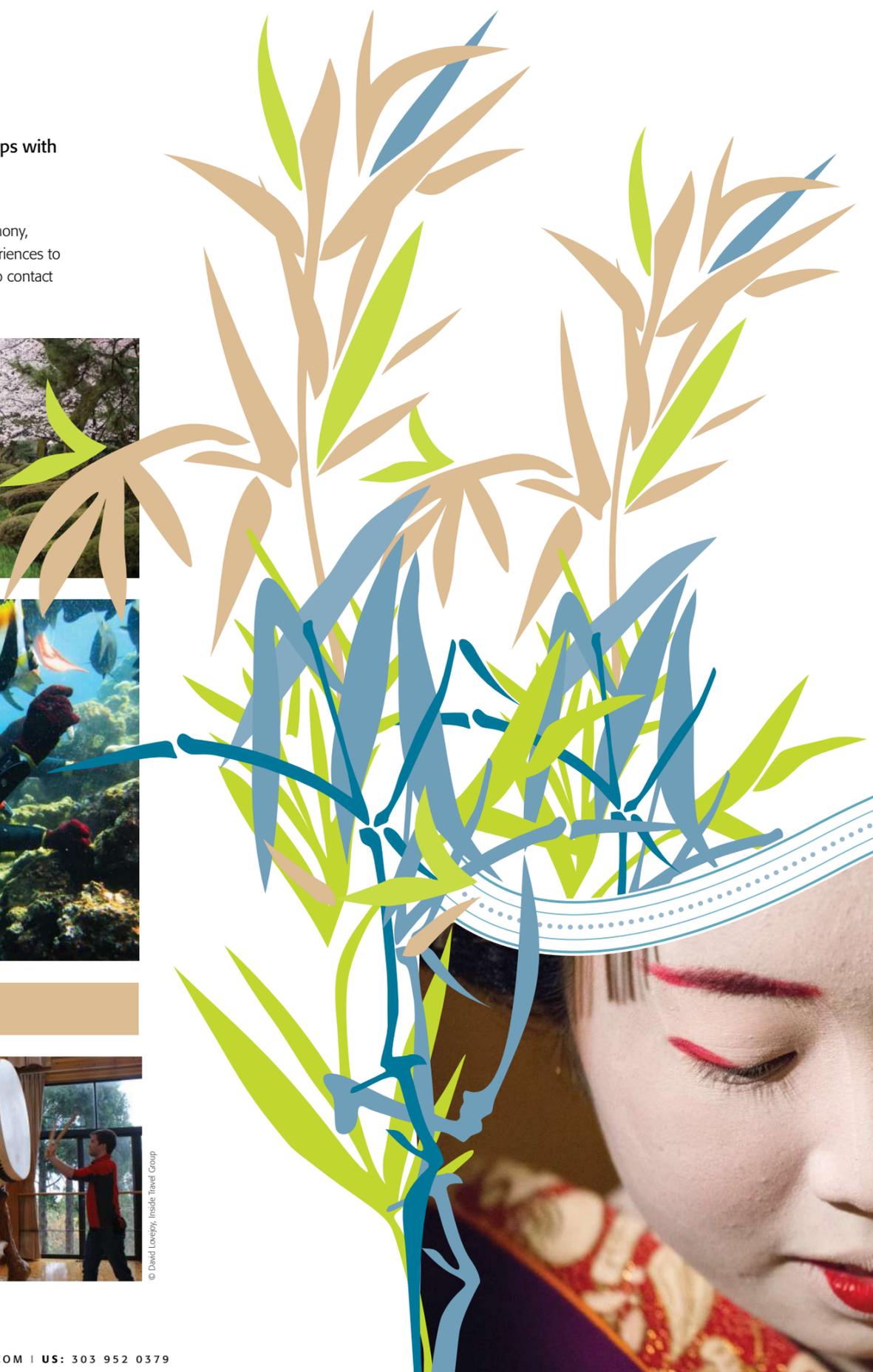
Are you planning the perfect honeymoon or looking for the ultimate family vacation? Perhaps you love being outdoors: hiking the mountains, exploring by bike or kayaking the rivers. Or are you more of an arts-and-crafter; in which case taking part in a tea ceremony, *ikebana* flower-arranging lesson or a pottery class might be for you. There are endless ways we can create memorable Japan experiences to suit you. Whatever your interests, abilities and budget, we hope the ideas outlined in this section of the brochure will inspire you to contact us and find out more.



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## CONTENTS

Insider experiences	82 - 83
Honeymoons	84 - 85
Families	86 - 87
Food & drink	88 - 89
Winter sports	90 - 91
Walking & hiking	92 - 93
Active	94 - 95
Sumo	96 - 97
Buddhism & Shintoism	98 - 99
Geisha	100 - 101
Traditional arts & crafts	102 - 103
Japanese history	104 - 105
Samurai	106 - 107
Pop culture	108 - 109
Hot-spring bathing	110 - 111
Gardens	112 - 113
Festivals	114 - 115



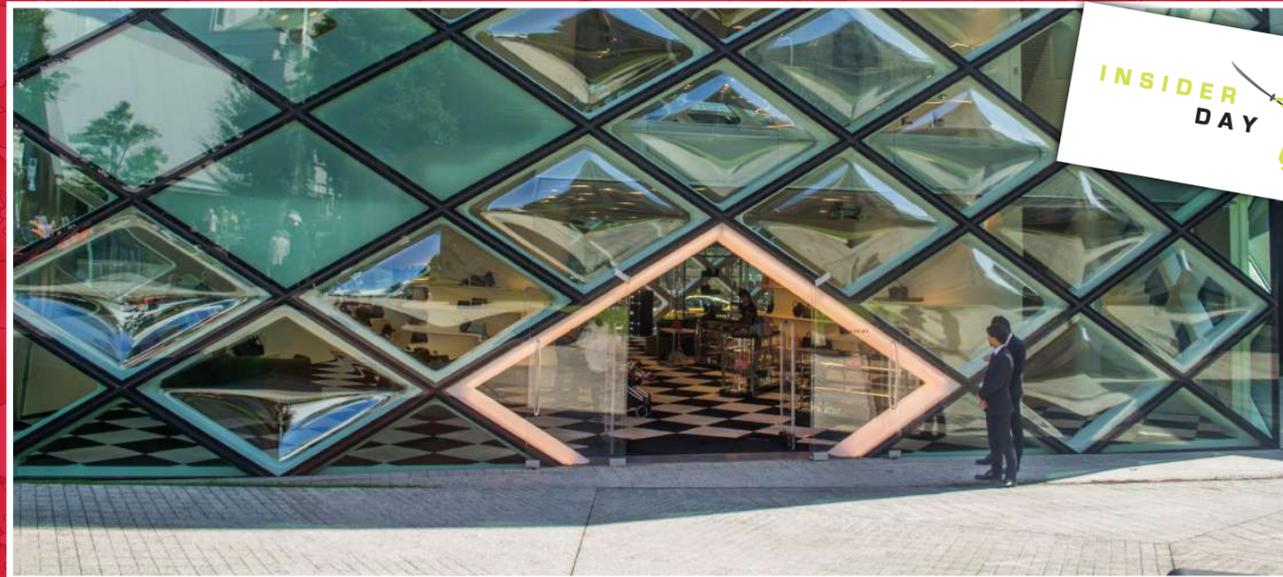


# Insider experiences

Welcome to the *crème de la crème* of the exciting cultural activities we can arrange for you. Created exclusively for InsideJapan Tours, you won't find these experiences anywhere else.

Each experience has been created by our Insider staff based on their personal passions and interests. And who are our Insiders? From professional Japanese guides to experts from across the world who have made Japan their home, our Insiders are united in their desire to peel back the layers of Japanese society and give you a unique glimpse into this fascinating culture.

You could visit Tokyo's video arcades and themed cafes with our resident gaming geek, or get the inside track on Kyoto's Zen heritage with an expert in Japanese religion. Step inside the secret world of sumo with an exclusive look behind the scenes at a morning sumo training session or meet one of the few remaining swordsmiths in Japan.



Mark Rawlins

## Tokyo architecture tour

Tokyo is simply vast. With many architectural gems sprinkled through the urban sprawl, you could easily spend a week in the capital barely scratching the surface. Instead, allow us to give you the Insider view, as you discover the most remarkable buildings in the city with a long-term Tokyo resident and culture aficionado.

Guided by one of our expert Insiders, the day can be tailored to suit your tastes and interests. Start perhaps with the eye-catching facades of Ginza's luxury brands,

then dabble in Metabolism — the Japanese fusion of architectural science with organic growth — epitomised by the Nakagin Capsule Tower made up of individual cubes.

Heading west, Mark can introduce you to the Pritzker Prize winners: first Kenzo Tange's 1964 Olympic Stadium, then self-taught architect Tadao Ando. Whichever buildings you visit, your Insider tour is sure to expose the philosophies that underpin Japanese architecture and design, and their influence across the capital.



Brett Plotz

## Izakaya night

For want of a better word, *izakaya* are often described as "Japanese gastropubs" — but that barely covers it. The name is in fact a compound word; "i" means "to stay" while "zakaya" is a "sake shop", so yes, expect to do your fair share of drinking. As for the food, "pub grub" here is far more ambitious than a steak pie and chips: *izakaya* have an extensive menu of bar snacks, served *tapas*-style and encompassing everything from edamame beans and deep-fried tofu to chicken skewers and pizza.

Visiting an *izakaya* is an absolute must if you're in Japan — but plucking up the courage to slide back the door to a

dimly-lit restaurant, go inside and decipher the menu can be daunting. So enlist our very own Brett Plotz for the evening and you'll get a fantastic, fuss-free introduction to Japanese food and culture. A long-term Japan resident, Brett will translate the menu, do the ordering, help you identify what's on your plate, and (if you're willing) coax you into eating some more adventurous dishes.

Available as a private experience, you're sure to have a fun evening out with Brett that will set you up for your own gastronomic adventures throughout your time in Japan.



Robert Moran

## Tokyo Art Scene

Accompanied by Insider Robert Moran, you'll visit renowned art galleries, famous for launching the careers of Takashi Murakami, Yoshitomo Nara, and many of Japan's foremost artists. In addition to the exhibitions of established artists, you'll be shown the diverse and less refined work of the avant-garde in architecturally unique spaces. Most places on the day tour are hidden down backstreets in unmarked buildings, making them difficult to find without a local guide.

Your tour will start off with a bite at an atmospheric café, followed by a stroll through a nice cross section of photogenic neighborhoods, ranging from the charming and nostalgic in Yanaka, to the modern and affluent of Ginza and its environs. You will have opportunities to purchase artwork, if you are so inclined, and possibly meet the artists.





# Honeymoons

Japan is a dream honeymoon destination. Where else could you experience ancient traditions, impeccable hospitality, world-class cuisine and fantastic accommodation – ranging from exquisite *ryokan* with private hot-spring baths to super-deluxe hotels at the top of towering city skyscrapers? And that's not to mention the romantic scenery, from quaint rural villages to impeccable gardens filled with cherry blossom.

Whether your ideal honeymoon includes visiting a Zen-inspired spa at an exclusive mountain retreat, taking a Yakatabune sunset cruise, or relaxing with a cocktail on a subtropical island – our expertly planned packages and on-the-ground support ensure that no hiccup can get in the way of your experience. Some of our staff have even honeymooned in Japan themselves, so you can rest assured that we know how to make your trip extra-special.



*Not only did we have an amazing honeymoon, but it was the best trip we have ever had. The experience with InsideJapan was incredible. Extremely happy with our honeymoon!*

Salvador & Maria, Kensington, CA



## Ready to start planning your honeymoon?

Or looking for more information? Try our website. We have a comprehensive honeymoon section with example itineraries and prices, diverse accommodation ideas and many more experiences.

Better still, talk to one of our travel consultants who'd love to tailor a custom **Self-Guided Adventure** or **Exclusive Private Journey**. Fancy a **Small Group Tour** instead? No problem, honeymooners have joined our tours before and are always very welcome.



**Shinto wedding ceremony**  
Kyoto

For the ultimate Japan honeymoon, why not celebrate your marriage with a Shinto wedding ceremony at a Kyoto shrine? Kimono rental, professional hair styling and make-up for the bride are included, as is a wedding photographer and a *kaiseki* feast after the ceremony.



**Kimono photo shoot**  
Kyoto

Simpler than a full Shinto ceremony, we can arrange a photo shoot of you and your partner dressed in formal wedding kimono. The bride wears an elegant white *shiomuku* kimono made up of multiple layers, while in contrast the groom wears a formal black *montsuki* kimono.



© Inside Travel Group

**Champagne & flowers**  
Across Japan

Treating your partner? Or perhaps you're the best man or bridesmaid and you want to make sure your friends' honeymoon gets off to the very best start? We can arrange for surprise champagne or flowers to be delivered to any hotel across Japan.



**Yakatabune sunset cruise**  
Tokyo

Take a break from sightseeing on foot and enjoy the Tokyo views from a different perspective on a traditional evening *yakatabune* boat cruise. As you take in the sights of Skytree and Tokyo Tower and the bright lights of Rainbow Bridge and the Tokyo skyscrapers, you'll be served a sumptuous dinner of tempura and sashimi with plenty of drinks.



# Families

If adults come away from Japan enthralled – just imagine visiting Japan as a child. Utterly fascinating yet accessible, a trip to Japan is a mind-opening experience for the whole family.

Japan's cities are a flashing, whirring paradise for kids of all ages. In Tokyo alone, your family can enjoy the imaginative flights of anime masters at the Ghibli Museum, take a master class in manga drawing, meet Hello Kitty at the Sanrio Puroland theme park and get lost in the endless amusement arcades of Akihabara "electric town".

Out in the countryside, your family can cycle through rural villages, kayak from Hiroshima across to Miyajima Island or meet the friendly deer in Nara Park. There are also endless hands-on activities to try, from martial arts to origami or *taiko* drumming – inspiring, educational experiences for any age.

One of the safest and cleanest countries in the world, Japan boasts superb amenities and excellent family accommodation, making traveling with children wonderfully stress-free.

What's more, dining options encompass everything from all-you-can-eat ice cream parlors to mild Japanese-style curry that's always a favorite with Japanese school kids – so if your child doesn't take to sushi, you needn't worry.

Accommodation is an important part of any vacation, especially when traveling as a family. Whether you are looking for family rooms with three or four beds, connecting rooms, large Japanese-style rooms or a family-sized apartment, we have something to suit.



As we were traveling with our 13-year-old grandson, extra activities were planned for us. Taiko drumming was such fun. The indigo dyeing workshop was fabulous, and the baseball game was a terrific experience with fabulous seats!

Beverley & Leslie, Toronto, Canada

## Planning a family adventure?

We have a dedicated family section on our website with example itineraries and pricing, accommodation recommendations, destination suggestions and tons of family-friendly cultural experience ideas.

Alternatively, speak to one of our experienced travel consultants. Let them know which of the ideas on these pages has caught your eye, and they'd be delighted to start designing a **Self-Guided Adventure** or **Exclusive Private Journey** to suit your family. If you'd prefer a **Small Group Tour**, families with children aged six or older are welcome on the majority of our tours.



### Mystery Game Tokyo

The whole family will have to get their thinking caps on to solve the riddles and clues in our Tokyo Mystery Game. Tokyo is the world's largest city, so it should come as no surprise that even the locals haven't explored all of this megalopolis. If you can answer the questions in our quiz correctly, you'll progress on foot, train and bus to discover corners of Tokyo that visitors rarely get to see.



### Taiko drumming Kyoto

Got energy to burn? A *taiko* drumming class is sure to exhaust even the most energetic youngster. The instructor will soon have your family working as a team in a choreographed rhythmic performance banging massive wooden drums. We can arrange *taiko* drumming lessons in Tokyo and Kyoto, but to visit the spiritual home of *taiko* you must head for magnificent Sado Island.



### Beginner's Japanese lesson Tokyo

Learning a little bit of Japanese can go a long way toward winning over the locals. Knowing even just the basic greetings can get you admiration all round! That's why we highly recommend getting your family vacation off on the right foot with a short lesson in basic Japanese. Lessons are private so you can focus on the topics you want; suggested themes include introducing yourself, making friends, ordering in restaurants, asking directions and shopping.



### Roketsu indigo dyeing Kyoto

Create your own batik-style creations and get a little messy in the process. This fun activity is available at a studio in Kyoto overseen by craftspeople with 50 years of experience. *Roketsu* dyeing is unique to Kyoto: wax is used to block dyes in an area finely drawn by hand onto the cloth. You can choose to create a handkerchief, bandana, t-shirt or curtain. And of course the best bit is that the whole family gets to take their creations home with them.

© Adrian Furner, Inside Travel Group



# Food & drink

When it comes to food, Japan deserves every accolade it gets. Besides its best-known exports – sushi, tempura, *teriyaki*, Kobe beef, sake – the list of speciality and regional cuisines is truly staggering.

During any Japan vacation you can try hot and spicy ramen noodles, delicately battered tempura pumpkin, and melt-in-the-mouth morsels of *sashimi* – to name just a few examples.

What's more, each meal in Japan is a real experience – whether it's grilling your own beef on a tabletop hot-plate, having your sushi rolls delivered by a toy bullet train at a conveyor belt sushi bar, or indulging in a *kaiseki* banquet served by a kimono-wearing host in the privacy of your *ryokan* room. *Kaiseki* cuisine comprises a multitude of small dishes made from seasonal ingredients, each exquisitely presented on ceramics and lacquerware chosen to enhance the meal's aesthetics.

At the other end of the spectrum, the *izakaya*, after-work haunt of the suited salaryman, is a very different dining experience – but one that's certainly not to be missed. Here Japanese and Western food is served tapas-style, washed down in high spirits with plenty of beer.

Some of the best comfort food in Japan is not elaborate at all, but can be found at street stalls and tiny restaurants with room for only a couple of customers. Be sure to try *takoyaki* octopus dumplings in Osaka and discover the delights of *okonomiyaki* savory pancakes in Hiroshima. Food is a highlight of all our trips to Japan, and we'll make sure that you leave with an appetite for more.

## Feeling hungry?

Many of our **Small Group Tours** include cooking lessons and wonderful meals; give us a call and we can talk you through what you'll eat and where. Alternatively let us know which of the experiences on this page tickle your taste buds and we'll add it to any **Self-Guided Adventure** or **Exclusive Private Journey**.

Got dietary requirements? Just let us know your needs, and we'll communicate this to your hotels and guides. Lots of our staff are vegetarian and vegan, so we can also give you tailored restaurant recommendations.



### Soba noodle making Matsumoto

Just as the Inuit people have 50 different words for snow, it is impossible to translate the word "noodle" into Japanese, as there are just so many varieties: ramen, udon, sobo, to name a few. One of the most popular kinds, especially in Tokyo and the Japanese Alps, is soba: thin noodles made from buckwheat and wheat flour. In the mountain town of Matsumoto, you can have a go at making your own soba in a hands-on lesson. Learn how to create a dough of the correct consistency, roll it out and slice it into thin noodle strips using a special soba knife – not quite as easy as it sounds!



### Sake tasting Tokyo

Do you have a taste for Japanese sake? Or curious to try it for the first time? Thanks to continuous technical improvements over the centuries and relentless efforts over the last 20 years by brewery owners and their skilful master brewers, Japanese sake is undergoing a remarkable renaissance. On an evening with a sake expert you'll be introduced to the history, traditions and production processes of sake, learning how to distinguish the best from the not-so-good varieties – essential training for the remainder of your Japan culinary adventure.



### Japanese cooking class Kanazawa

Learn the secrets of healthy Japanese cuisine at a charming cooking school in a traditional *machiya* townhouse in Kanazawa. The tutors speak excellent English and will guide you through the creation of seven dishes including sushi, Japanese-style omelette, grilled fish and a simmered local speciality called *jibunji*, which is often served in *kaiseki* course meals. Once your creations are complete, you can tuck in while seated in the townhouse's dining room.

Vegetarian or vegan? Fear not, the class can be tailored to suit your dietary requirements and has rave reviews from travel travelers.



### Ramen safari Tokyo

Steaming bowls of noodles drenched in a thick rich broth, laden with pork, spring onions and soft-boiled eggs; ramen is Japanese soul food. A world apart from finicky *kaiseki* fine dining, ramen has universal appeal. We'll pair you with a self-confessed ramen geek for a lunchtime safari to Tokyo's most down-to-earth ramen joints.



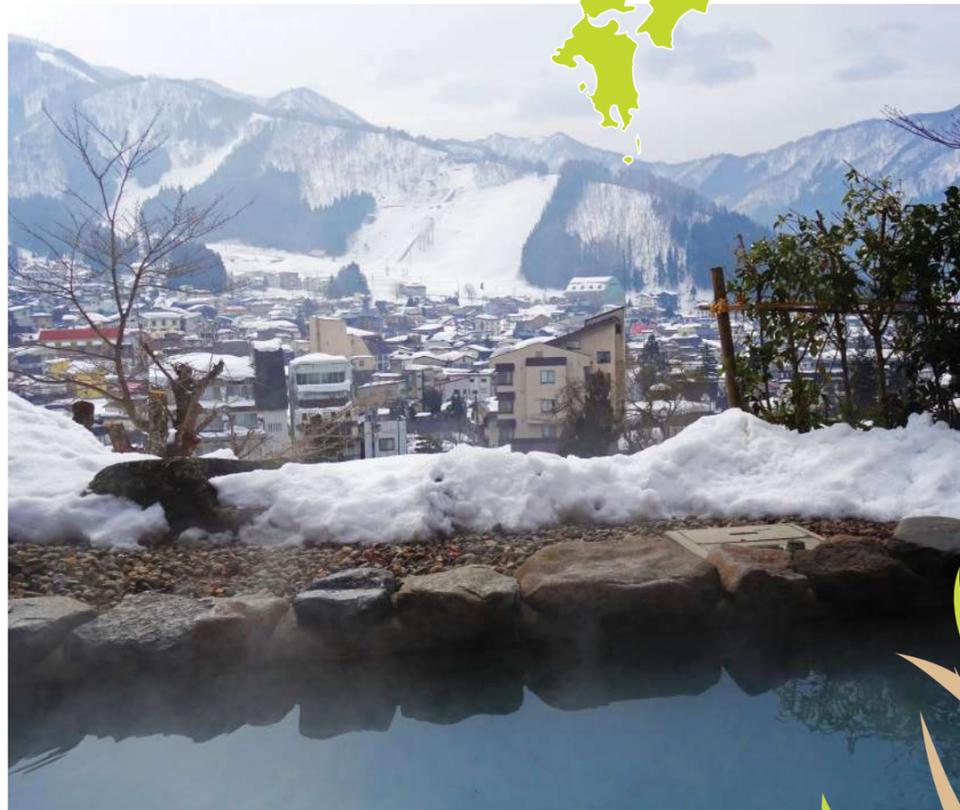
# Winter sports

With freezing temperatures and a surfeit of mountainous terrain, Japan provides an exhilarating platform for winter sports. From the vast, windswept island of Hokkaido to the Japanese Alps, superb powder conditions and a staggering 600 ski resorts mean that there's no better place to hit the slopes.

Thanks to the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano and several occasions of the Winter Asian Games, Japan's top mountain resorts boast excellent infrastructure, buzzing nightlife and comprehensive tourist facilities. Not only this, but its snowfall is among the most reliable in the world, so you won't be left fretting over that all-important weather forecast before your vacation.

## Nozawa Onsen

Our top tip for skiing in Japan? Nozawa Onsen. While Hakuba and Niseko are Japan's most famous resorts, attracting millions of overseas tourists every winter, you can be forgiven for forgetting you're even in Japan. But the quaint village of Nozawa Onsen offers excellent pistes for all abilities and a beguiling dose of Japanese culture. After a day on the slopes you can relax in a rustic Japanese inn, tuck into a feast of *kaiseki* haute cuisine, then sit back in an outdoor hot-spring bath surrounded by snow, with a cup of sake to ease away any aches and pains.



## Inspired by all this talk of fresh powder snow?

Do check out our website. We have a special section dedicated to winter sports vacations in Japan, including example itineraries and pricing, and information on lesser-known ski destinations across the country.

Alternatively, talk to one of the winter sports enthusiasts on our team who can work time on the slopes into any tailor-made wintertime **Self-Guided Adventure** or **Exclusive Private Journey**. The best time to visit Japan for winter sports is January to early March.

*The powder in Niseko was incredible!  
I can't wait to go back.*

James, West Sussex, UK



## Skiing & snowboarding Nozawa Onsen, Niseko and Hakuba

Whether you're a skier or a snowboarder, we can arrange for you to rent equipment on arrival or bring your own with you. Nozawa Onsen, Niseko and Hakuba all have a wide range of slopes for skiers and boarders of all abilities, with tons of fresh powder snow. Are you a complete beginner? Let us organize ski school lessons for you.



## Backcountry guides Niseko

Do you love the thrill of off-piste skiing? We'll book a backcountry guide to take you to the best spots in the safest, most enjoyable way to suit your ability as well as the weather conditions. Tackle the back bowls of Niseko, or try the gladed slopes of Rusutsu and Kokusai – also on Hokkaido Island.



## Snowshoeing Niseko

Strap on some snowshoes and explore winter scenery at a tranquil pace. Instead of hurtling through busy ski resorts at speed, a guided snowshoe tour around the foot of Mount Yotei near Niseko will have you admiring frozen lakes and Hokkaido's snowy wilderness.



## Snow monkeys Yudanaka Onsen

Japan's most famous primates are the "snow monkeys" of the Jigokudani hot springs in Yudanaka Onsen, close to Hakuba and Nozawa Onsen. To escape the chill of winter, the monkeys love to play in the natural hot-spring baths. You'll see whole families of monkeys eating, washing, splashing around – and even having snowball fights!



© William Allum, Inside Travel Group



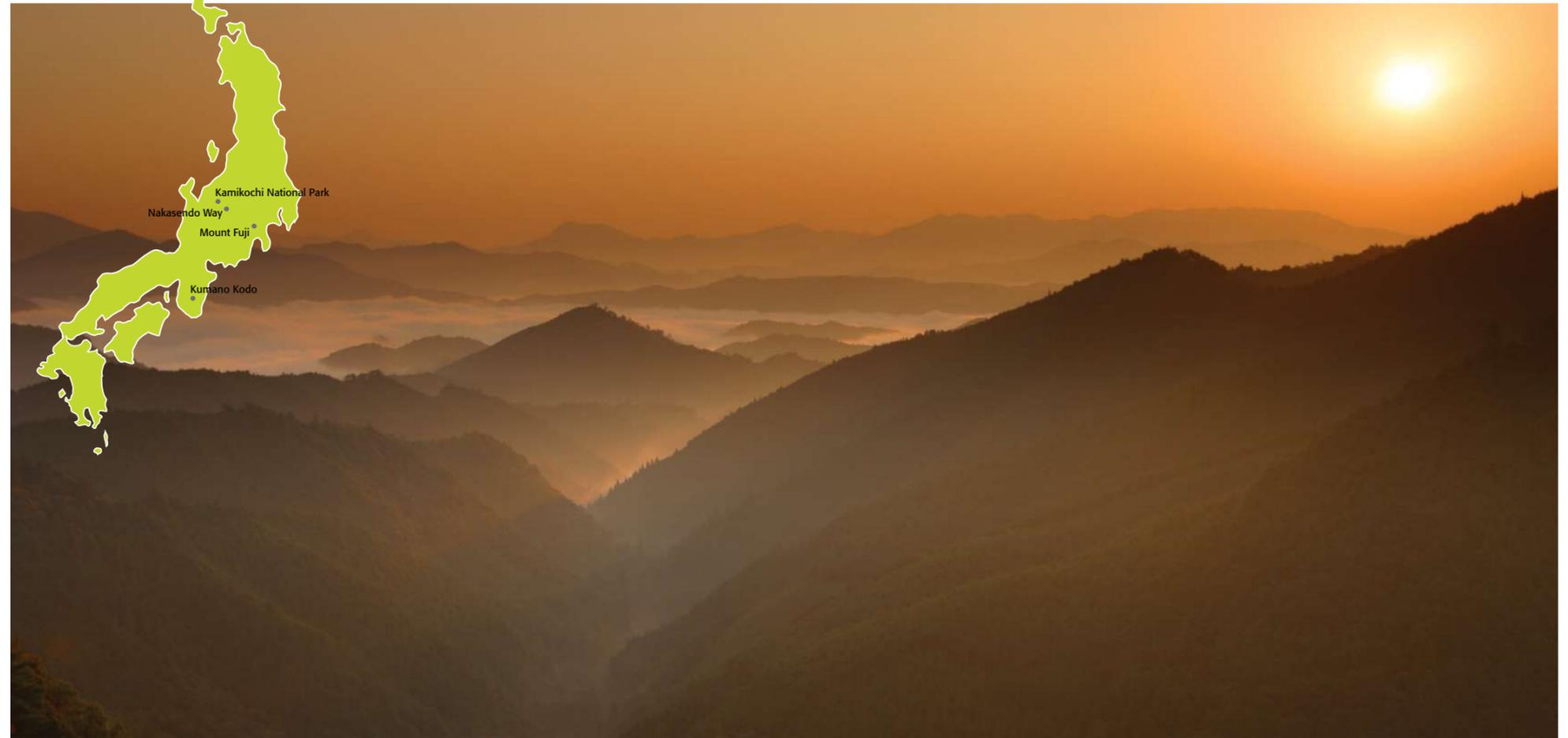
# Walking & hiking

Often the most memorable travel experiences are when you slow down to walking pace, giving you time to absorb the finer details of the scenery around you. From the untamed wilds of Hokkaido to the subtropical jungles of Okinawa, Japan is a walker's dream.

The vast majority of Japan's population is squeezed into towns and cities that occupy less than 30% of the country's total area, leaving huge swathes of mountainous and undeveloped terrain ripe for exploration. With vast forests and abundant nature occupying the length and breadth of the country, it couldn't be easier to incorporate a bit of hiking into your itinerary.

Wander the ancient pilgrimage routes of the Kumano Kodo, scramble up the rocky scree to the top of Mount Fuji, walk in the footsteps of samurai as you trace your way along the Nakasendo Way or trek through ancient cedar forests on jungle-clad Yakushima Island – we can arrange short day walks or multi-day hiking itineraries of all lengths and difficulties.

The Japanese engage in walking with enthusiasm, and even on the most challenging routes you'll find yourself sharing the trail with plenty of friendly pilgrims – and every so often being overtaken by elderly Japanese hikers! Mingling with fellow rambles is one of the joys of walking in Japan, and we would be delighted to help you get out into the countryside as part of your trip.



## Ready to pull on your hiking boots?

If you're looking for multi-day trekking, why not try our Honshu Hiking Self-Guided Adventure (pp.54-55), or our Walking the Nakasendo and Beyond Small Group Tour (p.36)?

Let us know if any of the walking options on these pages appeal to you and one of our travel consultants will be happy to weave it into your trip. For more ideas, visit our website: [www.insidejapantours.com/walking-and-hiking-in-japan/](http://www.insidejapantours.com/walking-and-hiking-in-japan/)



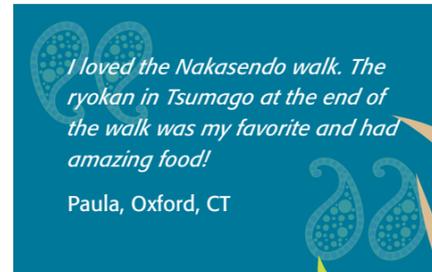
### Mount Fuji

They say only a fool climbs Fuji twice – but most of our staff have done it multiple times! Fools or not, we know the best routes to the top of Japan's tallest and most iconic mountain, 12,388 ft (3,776 m) above sea level. July and August are the months to tackle Fuji, and even then it can be freezing at the peak so do pack accordingly. It's a long, hard slog to the top over dusty volcanic rock but worth it when you arrive in time for sunrise over the Kanto plains.



### Kumano Kodo pilgrimage trails

Tackle the spiritual paths of the Kumano Kodo region, a great place for several days' walking from rustic inn to inn. For more than a thousand years, pilgrims have trodden these trails en route to pray at the sacred Shinto shrines in the heart of the Kii Mountains. The pathways are a UNESCO World Heritage Site twinned with the Way of St James (*Camino de Santiago*) in northern Spain.



### Nakasendo Way

Follow in the footsteps of samurai on the Nakasendo Way, which once linked Kyoto with Edo (Tokyo). The section through the Kiso Valley is the prettiest, particularly between the preserved villages of Magome and Tsumago where you'll pass through tea fields, farmlands and cypress forests.



### Kamikochi National Park

Explore alpine Kamikochi, a 9 mi (15 km) river plateau some 5,000 ft (1,500 m) above sea level. It's a fantastic area for walking with easy, flat trails along the bottom of the valley from Taisho Pond to Myojin Bridge, or adventurous hiking up the mountain peaks in summer. October brings spectacular autumn colors, but whatever the season you're sure to see families of macaques monkeying around.



### Mount Asahi

In the middle of Japan's largest national park, Daisetsuzan, is Hokkaido's tallest peak: Mount Asahi. At 7,500 ft (2,290 m) the summit is well above the treeline, with volcanic pools and sulphurous vents part of the exhilarating climb. We can arrange an experienced mountain guide to lead you on this exciting hike to the roof of Hokkaido.



Buttoned-up Japan isn't known for its thrill-seeking mentality, but it's a reputation that's thoroughly undeserved. Japan's dramatic landscapes are an untapped paradise for would-be adventurers.

With deep, snowy wastes in the north, thick subtropical jungles in the south, and no end of craggy mountain ranges and cedar forests in between, rural Japan covers a staggering range of topographies and climates. Spanning all of these are the rumbling volcanoes, belching geysers and steaming hot springs that attest to Japan's position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", imbuing Japanese culture with a sense of awe for the monumental power of the earth. What a setting for adventure!

Take a leisurely kayak through Miyajima's great gate or a heart-pounding white-water raft down the Yoshino River. Or set off on two wheels as you cycle across suspension bridges and tiny islands on the Seto Inland Sea. These are just a few of the adventure activities Japan has in store.



### Cycling the Shimanami Kaido Seto Inland Sea

The king of Japan's cycling routes, the 43 mi (70 km) Shimanami Kaido connects Japan's kidney bean-shaped main island of Honshu with rural Shikoku Island. Along the way, this feat of engineering spans multiple bridges across six stepping-stone islands on the Seto Inland Sea. The cycling is fairly gentle, and you could opt to do the ride in one go, or stay overnight in a traditional inn on one of the islands; the choice is yours.



### Sea kayaking Miyajima

Fancy splashing about in the water? We love the three-hour sea kayaking experience from mainland Hiroshima across the bay to Miyajima Island. Suitable even for novice paddlers, at high tide you'll be able to kayak through Itsukushima Shrine's famous "floating" red gate.



### River rafting Iya Valley

Some of the most beautiful parts of Japan can only be seen from the water; a great excuse for a day of rafting. Paddling downstream in a big inflatable raft, you can tackle the mighty rapids of Shikoku's Yoshino River, which races through the scenic Iya Valley. Drift through pools, jump in, swim and generally get wet!



*We had a fantastic experience. Kayaking and canyoning on Iriomote Island, the tea ceremony and the cycling tour were all highlights.*

Sarah & Geoff, London, UK

## Looking for an adventure?

Speak to one of our travel consultants or visit your local travel advisor to find out more about the exciting adventure opportunities Japan has to offer. Alternatively visit our website, where we have a dedicated area for active vacation ideas.



### Diving Ishigaki

Boasting thousands of islands with a combined coastline of 21,000 mi (34,000 km), Japan just might be the diving world's best-kept secret. The island of Ishigaki is our top recommendation, especially from June to November when you can see huge Pacific manta rays swirl above the coral reef in a magnificent water ballet. We can arrange dives to suit all experience levels.



© iStock

### Canoeing and snorkelling Iriomote

The dense forests of Iriomote island in Okinawa are like nowhere else in Japan. One of our favorite ways to experience them is by canoeing through the mangrove swamps armed with a picnic lunch to enjoy when you've reached Sangara Waterfall. Then, trade your canoe for snorkelling gear as you explore the coral reefs of the nearby tiny, unpopulated Barasu Island.



© node\_pina



### Canyoning Minakami

There are plenty of ways to enjoy Minakami, Japan's outdoor adventure mecca, and canyoning is one of the best. Complete beginners are as welcome as experienced thrill-seekers; all you need to bring is a sense of adventure! Canyoning season is from late spring until early autumn, and you can combine it with a riverside barbecue to round off the day.



# Sumo

What could be more Japanese than the ancient sport of sumo? If you're lucky enough to make it to a tournament, you'll be in for an exciting day. Watch gargantuan wrestlers engage in a ritual face-off before each bout begins. Then, in just a few dramatic seconds, it's all over as one wrestler hauls his opponent over the straw bales and out of the ring, or thrusts him to the ground.

In the West, sumo wrestlers are often depicted as comical figures – famous for their portly size and skimpy loincloths – but in the sumo world, nothing could be more serious. Sumo originated as a religious ritual over 1,500 years ago, and is still closely associated with its Shinto origins. Sumo wrestlers live an incredibly regimented lifestyle, renouncing the trappings of the modern world to live in their *sumobeya* – or “stable” – where they don't just train hard but cook, clean, serve food and wait on their higher-ranked colleagues.

Wrestlers begin training in the early hours each day, must wear traditional *yukata* robes in public, and are even banned from driving cars. What's more, their public behavior is closely scrutinized: all wrestlers are expected to maintain a self-effacing demeanour, and refrain from showing joy or disappointment in the ring.

Sumo is a fascinating sport involving a level of discipline most of us can't begin to imagine – so get your ticket, grab a *bento* box and few beers, and enjoy the show!

## Sumo tournament

There are six annual sumo tournaments in Japan, each lasting for fifteen days. Each wrestler performs in just one match per day in an attempt to rise up the ranking hierarchy. Bouts begin first thing in the morning, with the top division competing from 4 to 6pm. We'll make sure you get the best seats in the house to catch all the action.

The sumo tournaments always take place in the following months, in these locations.

## 2022 - 2023

Tokyo	January
Osaka	March
Tokyo	May
Nagoya	July
Tokyo	September
Fukuoka	November



### Morning sumo stable training Tokyo

If you can't get to one of the sumo tournaments, get up early instead to see the wrestlers in training in Tokyo. InsideJapan Tours are an official sponsor of one *sumobeya* where wrestlers eat, sleep and practice. Thanks to our special access, we can arrange an English-speaking guide to accompany you to the training session and explain the strict etiquette for spectators, so you'll avoid making a cultural faux pas!



### Lunch with the sumo wrestlers Tokyo

For an exclusive, behind-the-scenes glimpse into the world of sumo, we can take you behind closed doors to meet the wrestlers in person. After watching a morning training session, sit down with them for a meal of *chanko nabe* – a thick hearty stew prepared by the wrestlers themselves. These men are responsible for keeping Japan's national sport alive and this is a fascinating window into their lives..

## Captivated by sumo?

Speak to one of our travel consultants, who can advise on dates and pricing, then arrange for you to watch a sumo tournament or see a morning training session during your **Self-Guided Adventure**, **Exclusive Private Journey** or even as part of a **Small Group Tour**.



*The trip was excellent and everything worked perfectly. Sumo was quite an experience!*

Janet, Phoenix, AZ



# Buddhism & Shintoism

The saying goes that in Japan people are born Shinto and die Buddhist. This is Japan's syncretic belief system in a nutshell: two different religions practiced side-by-side as a single system.

Until Buddhism arrived in Japan in the sixth century by way of China, Shintoism didn't have a specific name. It was simply Japan's indigenous spirituality in which every living thing – trees, flowers, animals, rocks, even sounds – contains a *kami* god. This belief in nature runs throughout Japanese culture; it's in the cherishing of the changing seasons, and in arts such as ikebana flower arranging and garden design.

Today Shinto ceremonies at birth are balanced by Buddhist rituals at death. This entwining of religions runs so deep that establishing a firm boundary between the two is all but impossible. In fact, so close are the two faiths that red Shinto gates and Buddhist prayer halls can often be found on the same site.

Japan's rich and fascinating religious history has bestowed a legacy of superb art and architecture, from the thousands of red gates at Kyoto's Fushimi Inari Shrine to the giant Buddha of Kamakura and the treasures of ancient Nara. We hope that a knowledge of Japan's spirituality will enrich your travel experience.



## Temple lodgings stay Mount Koya

Experience Buddhism up close with a stay in a temple lodging on Mount Koya. Originally set up for pilgrims visiting the sacred mountaintop, accommodation is fairly simple with futon mattresses to sleep on and shared bathing facilities. In keeping with Buddhist tradition, meals are strictly vegetarian, and in the early morning guests are invited to join the temple priests for a meditation service before the temple altar.



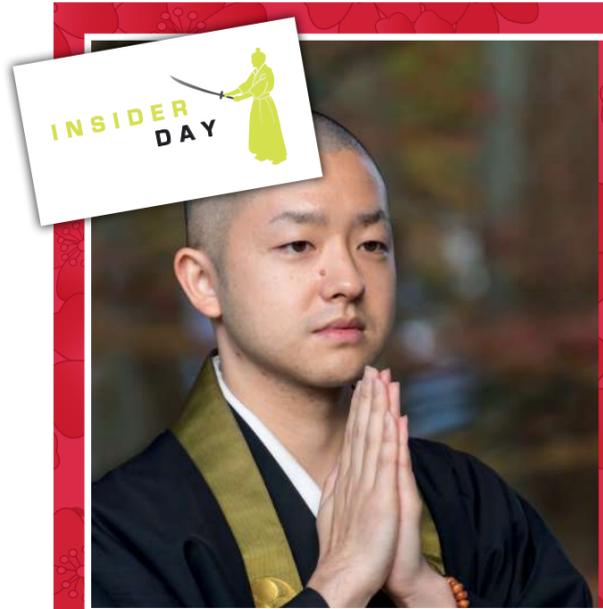
## Zazen meditation Kyoto

Chances are you'll only be in Japan for a short while, so taking time out to clear your mind and appreciate the moment is a great opportunity to make the most of your trip. Seated meditation is one of the most important aspects of Zen Buddhism, and we can arrange an inspiring introduction to this practice with the head priest of one of Kyoto's most beautiful temples.



## Shinto grand shrines Ise

The grand shrines of Ise are Shintoism's most sacred sites. In accordance with tradition, the outer and inner shrines are rebuilt every 20 years – most recently in October 2013. Unlike most religious sites in Japan, this is Shintoism in its purest form. The simple, minimalist architecture is classically Japanese, with minimal influence from the Asian mainland.



© Inside Travel Group

## Kyoto's Zen heritage



Richard Farmer

Zen: rarely has a word been more frequently or widely misappropriated. Temple gardens are commonly described as inducing "Zen-like calm", and in books using the title "Zen and the Art of..." one will find advice relating to myriad pursuits, from golf to motorcycle maintenance. But what really is Zen?

Join Richard Farmer, our Kyoto Insider, on a Zen heritage day tour and you'll gain a deep and fascinating insight into one of the world's great religious philosophies – as you test your mettle on some

enigmatic *koan* riddles; master the art of "just sitting", and uncover Kyoto's hidden temples and gardens.

Richard studied Asian religion at university, has trained at monasteries in the UK, Taiwan and Japan, and is currently a permanent resident of Kyoto. Even those without a pre-existing interest in Buddhism can't fail to be swept along with his enthusiasm, as Zen is a fascinating prism through which to explore Japan.

## Intrigued by Japan's spiritual side?

Visit our website to view our Pilgrim's Paths **Self-Guided Adventure**, which includes a Mount Koya temple lodging stay, and visits to Ise and the sacred Kumano Kodo shrines.

Alternatively speak to one of our travel consultants and let them know what appeals to you. We can weave a spiritual element into any tailor-made **Self-Guided Adventure** or **Exclusive Private Journey**.

*We loved the temple lodging on Mount Koya and the vegetarian cuisine there was the best culinary experience of all.*

John & James, London, UK



# Geisha

The image of a geisha – bedecked in an exquisite kimono and teetering on wooden sandals, with an elaborate black hairstyle, ivory make-up and scarlet lips – is one of the most iconic and easily recognisable images of Japan. Yet this is a profession that remains mysterious and little understood by outsiders.

Geisha are performing artists who entertain their patrons in teahouses with dance, music and conversation. Although the first geisha emerged from the pleasure quarters of the Imperial court around the turn of the 18th century, geisha are not courtesans – instead carving out a separate niche as artists and highly skilled entertainers.

Geisha training is a lifelong commitment to the arts, keeping alive the traditions of fan dancing, flute and *shamisen* music, tea ceremony, calligraphy and poetry. Even geisha who have been performing for decades are expected to practice their skills every day.

The lives of geisha are so secretive that they are said to inhabit a separate reality, known as “the flower and willow world”. Not just anyone can enter a teahouse; in traditional Japanese society, hierarchy and social connections are everything and most Japanese will never have the honor of an official invitation.

Fortunately, thanks to our connections in the geisha world, we are delighted to offer a brief window into their realm through a number of exclusive experiences in Kyoto.



*My daughter's makeover in which she was made up head-to-toe as a geisha was amazing.*

Thomas, Elkridge, MD



## Enchanted by Kyoto's geisha?

Almost all of our **Small Group Tours** feature a geisha experience, while our travel consultants can tailor a **Self-Guided Adventure** or **Exclusive Private Journey** to include any of the experiences on this page. Please pick up the phone and let us know what appeals to you.



### Private audience with a geisha

We can arrange an exclusive evening hosted by a geisha or *maiko* (apprentice geisha). Over dinner and drinks, you'll be entertained with dances, a *shamisen* performance and no doubt a few drinking games. With a translator on hand to help, this experience grants you a unique opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the geisha world.



### Geisha dance performances

Take a trip to the theatre to see a geisha dance show. Kyoto's four geisha districts stage beautifully choreographed performances every April, May and November. The dances tell stories of love and loss, life and death, accompanied by *shamisen* music and a backdrop reflecting the changing of the seasons.



© David Lovejoy, Norman Blake, Inside Travel Group

### Gion evening walking tour

Don't miss a guided tour of Gion for a glimpse into the history and traditions of Kyoto's most famous geisha district. With a bit of luck you'll spot a geisha hurrying between teahouse appointments, so be sure to take your camera.



### Maiko makeover

Do you fancy getting the geisha look, like our travel consultant Ali pictured above? We can arrange a full *maiko* makeover, dressing you in an ornate kimono with full make-up and hair ornaments. Afterwards you'll have a studio photo-shoot in all the geisha regalia or head out on location to have your photo taken amid Kyoto's temples and gardens.



# Traditional arts & crafts

Despite its dramatic modernization, Japan defends its culture and traditions fiercely. Whether it's donning a traditional kimono, attending a kabuki performance or finding time to practise the art of *ikebana* flower arranging – the Japanese take the responsibility of preserving their cultural heritage very seriously.

There are plenty of opportunities for you to participate in, and learn about, the traditional arts. Create your own woodblock print, indigo-dye *noren* curtains using time-honored techniques or throw a clay pot with an expert.

What's more, you can also try your hand at the art of calligraphy, take part in a tea ceremony, learn a kimono fan dance, or catch a *bunraku* puppet show.

Cultural experiences are easily worked into any trip to Japan and will enhance your experience and understanding of this fascinating culture. Most importantly, your participation helps keep these ancient customs alive, so do let us know which traditional arts and crafts interest you.



## Ikebana flower arranging

Study the 600-year-old art of Japanese flower arranging, which evolved from the Buddhist tradition of offering flowers to the spirits of the ancestors. Following strict rules governing shape, color and form, let an *ikebana* expert guide you through a hands-on flower-arranging experience that we hope you can recreate at home.



## Pottery

Have you got what it takes to throw a ceramic pot? Learn from the masters in Japanese ceramics and porcelain at a well-known Kyoto pottery studio, where you'll learn the basic techniques in a half-day lesson. Finished items can be glazed and shipped home if you wish.



## Origami

Learn how to fold an origami paper crane – it's a great party trick! According to Japanese folklore, cranes symbolize longevity and peace, which is why you'll see strings of thousands of cranes at the Hiroshima Peace Park. While an hour's origami lesson won't give you time to make a thousand, you will perfect one little paper bird to take home with you.



## Kintsugi

Literally "golden joinery", *kintsugi* is the art of using lacquer dust mixed with powdered gold to repair broken pottery or ceramics. Learn about its history and techniques in a hands-on lesson – where the aim is not to hide the breakages, but to display the chips and cracks in a way that's even more beautiful! You'll be able to take your keepsake home with you as a reminder of the Japanese concept of *wabi sabi*: the acceptance of transience and imperfection.



## Calligraphy

*Shodo* or "the way of writing" is the art of Japanese calligraphy. Just as good handwriting is prized in the West, being skilful with a calligraphy brush to produce beautiful *kanji* characters is an important attribute that Japanese children begin learning in primary school. Grind your own ink in a *shodo* lesson and learn to paint *kanji* characters in the correct order of strokes.



## Kabuki

Dating back to the Edo Period (1603–1867), kabuki is one of Japan's classical theatrical arts – a great spectacle involving elaborate costumes and outlandish make-up, live music and creative sets with trapdoors and revolving platforms. Performances use old forms of Japanese, so kabuki actors make stylized, exaggerated movements to convey meaning. English audio guides are also available to help you understand the story.



## Tea ceremony

Could there be anything more Japanese than sliding back a paper door, kneeling on a *tatami* mat floor and learning the revered art of the tea ceremony? The ancient rituals surrounding the presentation of green tea date back to 12th-century Buddhist ceremonies, and are an integral part of traditional Japanese culture. You can take part in your own meditative tea ceremony in a gorgeous Kyoto teahouse.

## Interested in Japanese traditional arts?

If you'd like to try your hand at one of these traditional arts, or have further craft ideas of your own, please let us know. We can mesh arts and crafts activities into any custom **Self-Guided Adventure** or **Exclusive Private Journey**.

*The tea ceremony and ikebana lesson were outstanding.*

Frederick, Farmingdale, NY





# Japanese history

The history of Japan is simply fascinating. Long periods of isolation, and the fact that Japan has never been successfully invaded or colonized, have created one of the world's richest and most intriguing cultures.

In its early history, Japan received a great deal of influence from China, adopting Chinese culture, religion and governing policies. The Nara and Heian Periods (710–1185) saw the establishment of the nation's first permanent capitals at Nara and Kyoto, heralding a long period of cultural flowering often looked to as a golden age of Japanese history.

The feudal period that followed (1185–c1600) was the age of shogun warlords. This was a time characterized by powerful clans jostling for power, during which Japan also survived two near-catastrophic invasions by Mongol forces.

The Edo Period (1603–1868) saw power rest in the hands of the Tokugawa family, Japan's last and most celebrated shogunate, which brought peace to the

country and established Japan's period of isolation, or *sakoku*. Instituted out of fear of invasion, *sakoku* lasted until 1853, when American Commodore Matthew Perry forced Japan to reopen trade. Shortly after this, the Meiji Restoration restored the Japanese Imperial Family to power, ending the rule of the shogun.

The twentieth century saw disaster and destruction on an unprecedented level during World War Two, before a rapid and remarkable recovery – fuelled by astonishing economic growth – propelled modern Japan forward to become the incredibly advanced and complex society it is today.

If you are as captivated by history as we are, Japan has a wealth of wonderful historical sites that we'd be delighted to incorporate into any itinerary.



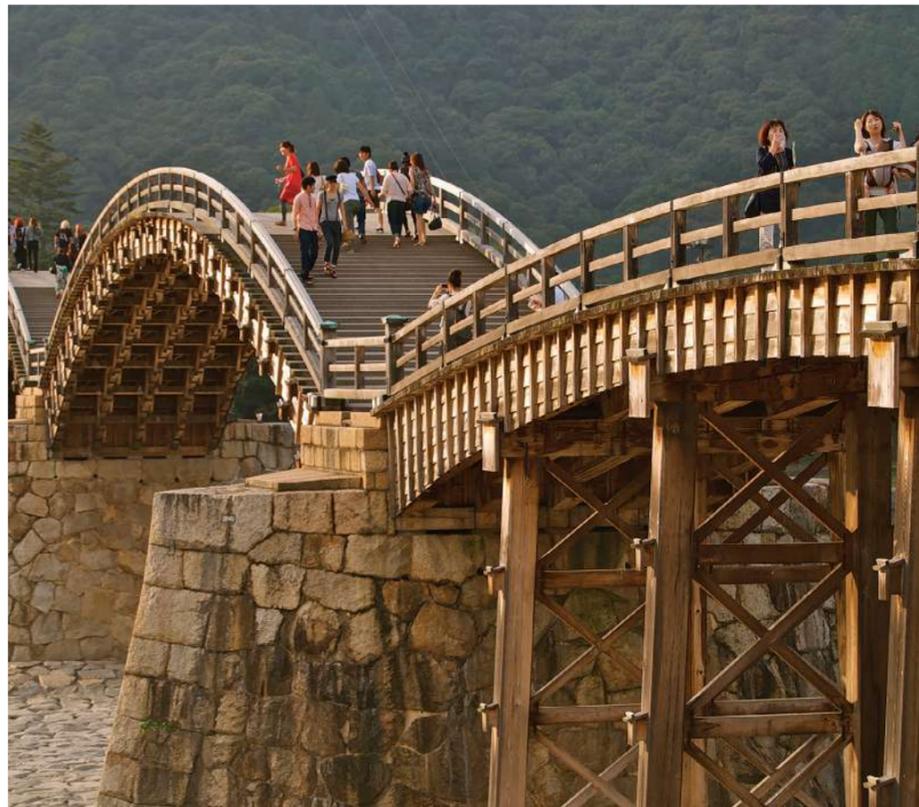
## Want to delve deeper?

Whether you're a bona fide history buff or just feel inspired by something you've seen here, our Traditional Japan (p. 50-51) and World Heritage (p. 52-53) **Self-Guided Adventures** are a great place to start.

If a **Small Group Tour** is more up your alley, Hidden Japan (p. 30-31) stops by Hiroshima's Peace Park.

*Both of the private guides I had were well versed in Japanese history. Highly recommended!*

Blaine, Dallas, TX



## Sannai Maruyama Archaeological Site, Aomori

Jomon Period (13,000–300 BC)

Venture to Aomori on the northern tip of Honshu to uncover the secrets of a Jomon-Period village. This is Japan's best-preserved archaeological site, where excavations of the village – thought to have contained over 700 buildings including longhouses, roads, burial pits and storage huts – is still ongoing. The neighboring museum explains more about life in this early period of Japan's history.



## Ancient burial tombs, Nara

Asuka Period (538–710 AD)

The small district of Asuka in Nara Prefecture was once the site of Japan's first capital city in a time when Buddhism was beginning to take root and change the cultural and religious landscape. Only a few ruins remain from that time, but the huge stone tombs of the ruling Soga clan have survived intact. Nearby Asuka-dera is thought to be the oldest Buddhist temple in Japan.



## Dejima "Exit Island", Nagasaki

Edo Period (1603–1867)

Dejima is an artificial island built in the bay of Nagasaki in 1634. Measuring just 390 by 250 ft (120 by 75 m), for two centuries it was home to Dutch traders, who were forbidden from operating on the mainland due to Japan's self-imposed isolationist policy during the Edo era. While Dejima is no longer an island – the surrounding area has been reclaimed for development – some historical structures remain, including Dutch residences, warehouses, walls and gates, offering a fascinating insight into the period.



## Meiji Mura, Nagoya

Meiji Period (1868–1912)

The opening of Japan's borders during the Meiji Period 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 60 historical buildings have been moved and reconstructed in the 247 acre park, the most significant of which is the main entrance and lobby of Frank Lloyd Wright's landmark Imperial Hotel.



## Peace Memorial Park, Hiroshima

World War Two (1945)

To understand the modern Japanese psyche, you must visit Hiroshima. The Peace Memorial Park commemorates the atomic bombing of August 6th, 1945 and is the city's biggest draw for visitors. Comprising a peace museum recounting the build-up to and fallout from the bombing, several memorials and the shell of the Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall (now known as the A-Bomb Dome), the Peace Memorial Park presents an even-handed and thoroughly moving look at Japan's darkest hour.

© Inside Travel Group





# Samurai



Who could fail to be impressed by the mighty samurai and their long-standing philosophies? Rectitude, courage, benevolence, respect, honesty, honor and loyalty are the seven virtues of the samurai *bushido* code – traits that many Japanese strive to live by even today.

Samurai were the military nobility of Japan, first emerging in the mid-Heian Period (794–1185). Their skills as warriors were most in demand during the 15th and 16th centuries – a time of landowning clans and feudal wars, when Japan splintered into dozens of independent states.

As soldiers, the samurai were fierce fighters who followed strict codes of honor and combat. They employed bows and arrows, spears and guns, but their main weapon and symbol was the sword.

During the long peace of the Edo Period (1603–1868), samurai gradually lost their military function and expanded their roles as courtiers, bureaucrats and administrators. The samurai class was eventually abolished in the Meiji Reforms of the 19th century, after hundreds of years of power and influence.



## Kenbu martial dance Kyoto

Find out if you have what it takes to be a samurai under the tutelage of a *kenbu* master in Kyoto. Though sword dancing as an art has existed in Japan since the seventh century, *kenbu* as we know it today – an elegant dance performed to drumming or traditional music – was a product of the Meiji Restoration in 1868. As Japan transitioned from a shogunate to imperial rule and the former samurai class lost their martial function, *kenbu* was a way to preserve their traditional skills as an art form.



## Iaido Tokyo

*Iaido* is a modern martial art that draws on traditional Japanese swordsmanship techniques. Unlike *kendo*, in which participants hone their skills in combat with each other, *iaido* is performed solo, its movements smooth and controlled – almost meditative – with a focus on mental preparedness. We can arrange for you to take a class at an operating *iaido* dojo. Watch a choreographed demonstration using real *katana* swords, and then it's your turn to copy the graceful movements.



## Meet one of Japan's few remaining swordsmiths Tokyo

*Katana* samurai swords have been made by hand in Japan since the 10th century using techniques that can never be replicated by machine. Sadly there are only a handful of craftsmen keeping the art alive, but we can arrange an exclusive meeting with a master swordsmith in his workshop. Ask any question you have about samurai culture and watch the swordsmith in action as he welds layers of steel in a hot furnace before hammering the metal into a curved blade.



## Himeji Castle Himeji

Follow in the footsteps of samurai at Himeji's "White Heron" castle, one of only 12 surviving castles from the feudal era. Himeji-jo is certainly the most impressive of the castles with extensive ramparts and dramatic keep rising up above the city. A half-hour bus ride away is the temple complex of Engyo-ji atop Mount Shosha. Untouched for hundreds of years, this atmospheric site was the setting for many scenes from the Tom Cruise movie *The Last Samurai*.

*As I am an avid martial artist, my travel consultant Halley organized an iaido class in Tokyo and a samurai kenbu class in Kyoto. I loved both experiences!*

Jeannette, Melbourne, Australia

## Intrigued by samurai culture?

Keen to delve into Japan's feudal past? Any of our **Self-Guided Adventures** can be tailored to include an element of samurai history – just let us know what interests you.

If you're planning to join a **Small Group Tour**, why not consider Spring Elegance (p. 24-25), which takes you to Matsumoto's "Black Crow" castle and the preserved samurai district of Kanazawa?

© Okayama Tourism, Inside Travel Group



# Pop culture



Think of Japan today and you're as likely to think of robots and Pokémon Go™ as you are geisha and samurai. Ever since the boom years of the 1980s, Japanese pop culture has been an unstoppable powerhouse, and its ever-growing popularity abroad shows no sign of abating.

Manga (Japanese comics) and anime (Japanese animation) are Japan's biggest pop culture export. In Japan it is perfectly normal to see grown adults poring over their favorite comic books in the subway on their way to work, and finding anyone in the world who hasn't heard of Pikachu or Studio Ghibli is increasingly rare.

Meanwhile, kooky street fashion has become as common on travelers' checklists as the Imperial Palace, and barely a visitor to Tokyo leaves without a stop in Akihabara's gaming arcades. Japanese pop music, or J-Pop, is busy exporting its own brand of sparkling, upbeat tunes to the world – while *kawaii* (cute) culture continues to spawn legions of cuddly characters, from Hello Kitty to Japan's ubiquitous promotional mascots.

Whatever your perspective on Japanese pop culture, it's impossible to avoid – and without it, Japan wouldn't be the exciting and vibrant place it is today.



© Roman Barua

## Supercar Experience Tokyo

What better place to get behind the wheel of a supercar than night-time Tokyo? Choose your two favorites from a selection of incredible Aston Martin, McLaren, Porsche, Ferrari and Lamborghini vehicles and drive out into the neon-lit night. You'll take in the likes of Odaiba Island, Ginza and the glittering Keyakizaka Street in the Roppongi Hills – with plenty of scenic pit stops along the way (and of course, the chance to swap one luxury car for another).



© Ninja Tokyo

## Ninja Restaurant Tokyo

As befitting the most mysterious of ninjas, this restaurant is so secret it doesn't even have a sign! On arrival you'll be led through a secret maze and trapdoor to the restaurant where you'll be served by your personal ninja throughout dinner. Expect cleverly designed dishes which are not quite what they seem... Ninja magicians are also on hand for some tableside entertainment before dessert!

### Video game tour

Tokyo can make you feel like you're in a video game, but our latest Insider night tour powers this up to the next level. Our resident game enthusiast, Brett Plotz, has designed this new geek-tastic route, celebrating Japan's contribution to the industry and delving into all things *otaku* or 'nerd'.

On an evening with Brett, you'll be led through the capital's maze of towering arcade palaces, bewildering *pachinko* parlors and hidden retro game stores. The night can be tailored to

match your gaming tastes and interests, so if you want to find that elusive Famicom cartridge, or finally sit down in front of that arcade machine you saw online years ago, just ask Brett!

Brett Plotz

## Gripped by Japanese pop culture?

Turn to p. 68-69 for our Manga & Anime **Self-Guided Adventure**, which might be just what you're looking for. Otherwise give us a call today and we can start tailoring a quirky pop culture **Self-Guided Adventure** or **Exclusive Private Journey** for you. Please also keep an eye on our website as we often run pop culture-themed **Small Group Tours**.



© Inside Travel Group

## Manga-drawing class Tokyo

Head to Tokyo's Nakano district for a private two-hour manga drawing class from a published manga artist who speaks excellent English – a must for any wannabe comic artist. Learn the manga basics including dip-pen, screen-tone and color drawing techniques, or if you're more experienced, bring your own project along and get some expert direction.





# Hot-spring bathing

If stripping down to your birthday suit for a bath with a group of complete strangers doesn't sound like your cup of tea, prepare to change your mind.

*Onsen*, or geothermal hot-spring baths, are an integral part of Japanese life and something that we believe every visitor to Japan should try. *Hadaka no tsukiai*, or "naked companionship", refers to the deep friendships formed in an *onsen*. It's a great leveller, as social barriers fall away into the hot steamy water.

Thanks to all that volcanic activity, there is a profusion of wonderful baths in enchanting locations across Japan – from steaming pools surrounded by thick snow in Hokkaido, to cypress-scented hot tubs at ryokan inns. There are even

gigantic *onsen* theme parks where you can while away a whole day in endless saunas, steam rooms, Jacuzzis and baths of salts and minerals – or even ones filled with green tea and red wine (we kid you not – it's in Hakone).

The best baths are out in the open air. Nothing could be more relaxing than feeling the breeze on your face and the mineral water on your skin while you soak up views of open skies, rivers and mountains. For many, *onsen* are the first thing you'll miss when you return home from Japan.



## Hakone

Hakone is the ultimate Japanese spa town – historically frequented by samurai and just a short hop from Tokyo, with great views of Mount Fuji to boot. There are more than a dozen naturally occurring hot springs here, which supply the indoor and outdoor *onsen* at numerous bathhouses and *ryokan* around the national park.



## Kinosaki Onsen

This is *onsen*-bathing at its most traditional. Kinosaki is a pretty little town of canals lined with willow trees and time-worn wooden buildings. If you stay overnight at a Kinosaki *ryokan*, you can do as the locals do and take a bathtime stroll dressed in light cotton kimono and *geta* sandals as you wander between seven public bathhouses.



## Nyuto Onsen

Nyuto Onsen literally means "nipple hot springs": a name inspired by the shape of nearby Mount Nyuto apparently – not for any other reason! This is a rustic collection of outdoor hot-spring baths in glorious isolation deep in the Tohoku countryside.



## Sand baths

While there are fantastic volcanic hot springs across Kyushu Island, **Beppu** and **Ibusuki** are known for a different experience: sand baths. On a beach or in a bathhouse, you'll put on a cotton robe and lie down in the sand while assistants pour on more warm sand, burying you up to your neck. Have a nice nap for 15 minutes or so and enjoy the benefits to your complexion and circulation!

## Curious about hot-spring bathing?

Already imagining soaking in a beautiful hot-spring bath after a long day of sightseeing? All of the **Small Group Tours** and **Self-Guided Adventures** included in this brochure include a *ryokan* stay where *onsen*-bathing is part of the experience.

If any of the traditional spas described on these pages capture your imagination, let us know and we'll weave them into a custom **Self-Guided Adventure** or **Exclusive Private Journey**.

The best single experience was sitting in our private hot-spring bath overlooking a fast-running mountain river at our ryokan.

Brian & Margaret, Somerset, UK



© Kumano Travel, Inside Travel Group



# Gardens

A red bridge across a lily pond; weeping willow trees, autumn leaves and tunnels of cherry blossom; meticulously raked gravel and glistening moss in a hundred varieties of green. What could be more peaceful than spending an afternoon exploring one of Japan's beautiful gardens?

Visit a strolling garden, and you'll be led on a journey through a series of carefully thought-out landscapes; "borrowed scenery" gardens use components such as a mountain or a nearby castle to enhance the view. Zen gardens, meanwhile, are calculated to inspire contemplation with their white, raked sand and judiciously placed rocks.

Regardless of the particular style, no aspect of the garden is ever left to chance, and each choice represents principles that have been developed over centuries. When selecting rocks, great attention is paid to the color, positioning, size, and even the direction of the veins. Plants are chosen according to their season of flowering, color and religious symbolism, and their growth is controlled to create carefully planned effects – such as intricate shadows on the surface of a pond.

From the famous rock garden of Ryoan-ji in Kyoto to the spectacular Kenrokuen in Kanazawa, there is sure to be a horticultural wonder hidden just around the corner no matter what your itinerary.



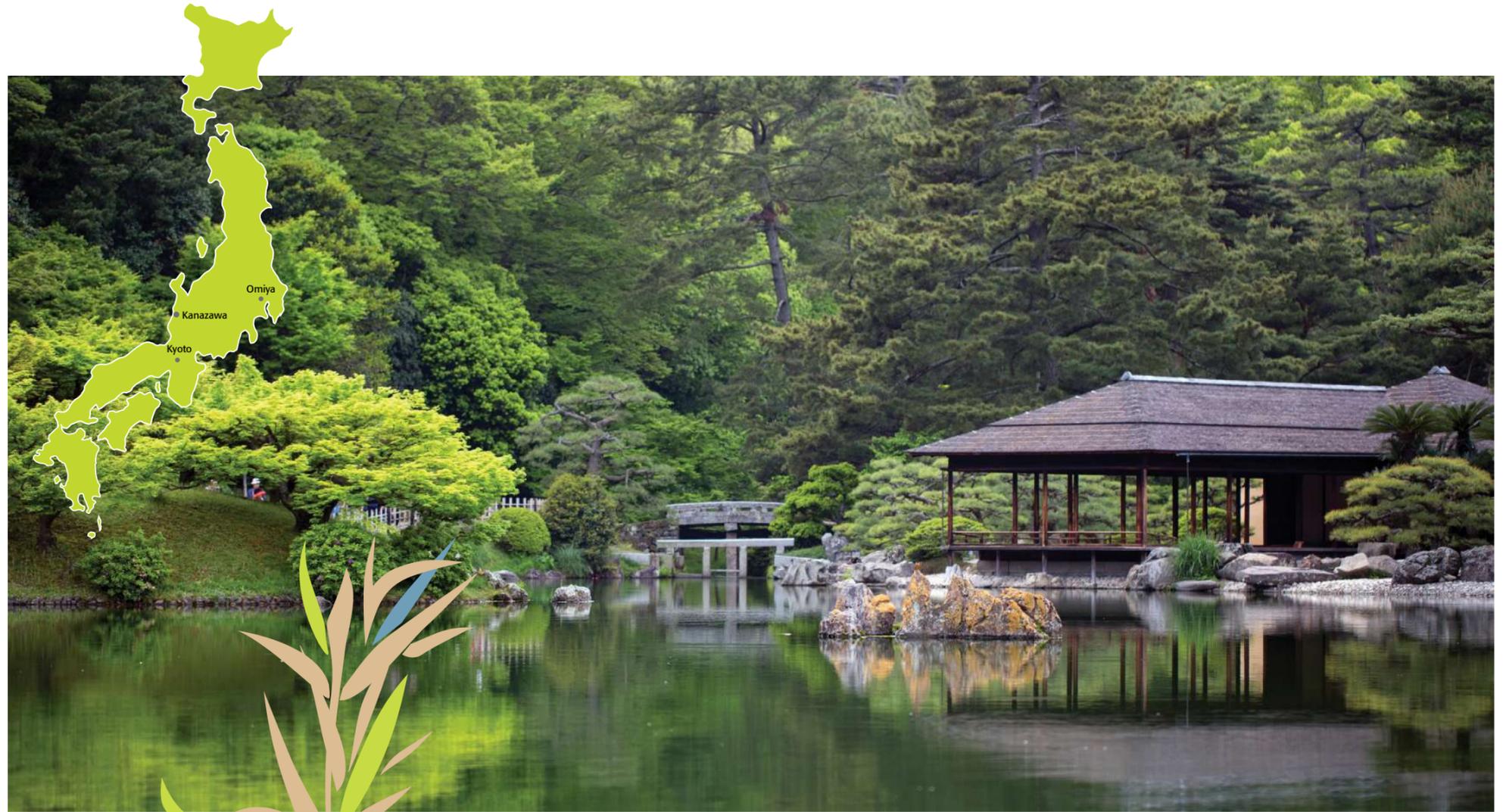
*The guide, temples and gardens in Kyoto were outstanding.*

George, Cave Creek, AZ



## Enchanted by Japanese gardens?

Beautiful gardens can be found in and around every major city in Japan, so can easily be incorporated on any **Small Group Tour** or **Self-Guided Adventure**. If a particular garden inspires you, let us know and our travel consultants can make sure to include it on a tailored **Self-Guided Adventure** or **Exclusive Private Journey**. We can even make Japanese gardens the main theme of your trip; the choice is yours.



**Bonsai Village**  
**Omiya**

Time to put your green fingers to the test in a hands-on lesson at the Omiya Bonsai Village. An expert instructor will introduce you to classic bonsai care techniques that you can try for yourself on a few practice trees. Afterwards you'll have the chance to appreciate the many fine bonsai exhibits in the renowned bonsai museum and garden.



**Kokedera moss garden**  
**Kyoto**

Particularly exquisite in rainy June, the garden surrounding Saiho-ji Temple is home to 120 varieties of moss – a velvety carpet in every shade of green. Entrance is by appointment only, which we can arrange for you in advance of your trip. As part of the visit, you'll be invited to participate in Buddhist chanting and the copying of sutra scriptures; a meditative experience designed to enhance your appreciation of the garden.



**Ryoan-ji rock garden**  
**Kyoto**

Ready to contemplate the true essence of nature? Visit Japan's finest dry landscape garden at Ryoan-ji Temple to see 15 rock islands cast adrift in a sea of fastidiously raked gravel. Rock gardens of this kind date back to the Muromachi Period (1336-1573) as an aid to meditation at Zen temples – so it's left to the visitor to ponder the meaning of it all.



**Kenrokuen strolling garden**  
**Kanazawa**

Once part of the outer grounds of Kanazawa Castle, Kenrokuen is the quintessential Japanese garden. Think lily ponds and stone pagodas, wooden bridges and teahouses, streams with *koi* carp, waterfalls, flowers, Japanese pine trees and delicately placed stones.



© Inside Travel Group



# Festivals

The Japanese absolutely love their festivals, whether they're entering the Guinness World Record book with the biggest tug-of-war in the world in Okinawa, or setting an entire mountain on fire for the Wakakusayama festival in Nara. From tiny local celebrations to huge, nationwide vacations – some estimates place the number of festivals in Japan as high as a staggering 200,000 per year.

With this many events on the calendar, the chances are your trip will coincide with a Japanese festival – and we'll be sure to let you know if there is anything exciting going on that fits in with your travel plans.

Whether you'd like to admire Sapporo's enormous snow sculptures, marvel at a traditional archery contest, see spectacular summer fireworks displays, or even run

semi-naked through the streets at Okayama's Naked Man festival – we can help you get involved.

All Japanese festivals boast a cornucopia of food stalls selling all kinds of delicious snacks and are plenty of fun for all ages. This is a fantastic opportunity to mingle with the locals who will be more than happy to welcome you into the celebrations.



Aomori Nebuta Festival



Snow festival (February)  
Sapporo

Visiting Japan in winter? Then you must catch the Sapporo snow festival, the highlight of the season. Teams from across Japan spend weeks carving sculptures from snow, carefully rendering sparkling white prehistoric animals, Disney characters and famous sights such as the Egyptian pyramids, Angkor temples and Matsumoto Castle. There's tons to do here no matter how old you are: explore a snow maze, take a toboggan ride, build a snowman, join an organized snowball fight or carve a sake cup from a block of ice. And after all that excitement? Don't miss Sapporo's seafood specialty: crab hotpot.



Takayama spring festival (April)  
Takayama

Head up to Takayama in the Japanese Alps on April 14th and 15th to catch the annual spring festival. The highlight is a huge procession of festival floats accompanied by hundreds of locals in colorful traditional dress, dancing, singing and playing traditional instruments. The floats are ornately decorated, and many feature intricate mechanical dolls perched on top, which move and dance under the control of skilled puppeteers hidden within.



Awa Odori festival (August)  
Tokushima

In early August, Shikoku Island comes alive with dance festivals, the most famous of which takes place in Tokushima. Catch the evening parade where thousands of dancers move through the city streets, divided into groups in matching *yukata* robes, and performing choreographed routines in perfect unison.



Horseback archery contest (September)  
Kamakura

Don't miss this spectacle: galloping archers controlling horses with their knees while firing a bow and arrow at targets along a 837 ft (255 m) track. Dating back to the 12th century, this contest developed as a way to entertain the Shinto gods, and thus secure their blessings and prosperity – as well as fulfilling a dual function as a military training exercise.

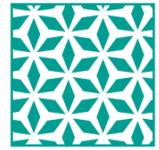
*Our tour group was lucky enough to witness the spring festival in Takayama which was an amazing spectacle.*  
Chelsea, Winnipeg, Canada

## Fancy a festival?

If you'd like to time your trip to coincide with one of Japan's major festivals, speak to one of our expert travel consultants who can advise you. Some **Small Group Tours** such as Winter Highlights (p. 28-29) are deliberately timed to catch a certain festival, while a **Self-Guided Adventure** or **Exclusive Private Journey** can start on any day of the year so it's easy to work a festival into your itinerary.



© Inside Travel Group



# Accommodation

Often, the quality of your accommodation can make or break your vacation. That's why at InsideJapan Tours we have an ever-evolving list of hundreds of Western-style hotels and traditional Japanese inns across the country. Each of these has been tried and tested by our team, who have slept in the beds, eaten the breakfasts and quizzed the hotel staff to ensure we only recommend the best.

The next few pages showcase a handful of our favorite properties. Some are exciting brand-new hotels; others we have maintained close ties with for years. Rest assured with our expert knowledge and years of experience, we can suggest the perfect accommodation for you.

## Our Covid promise

+ All the accommodation providers and suppliers we work with have undergone thorough health, safety and hygiene checks to ensure your trip is as safe as possible.



© Jamie Ford, Matt Lodge, Inside Travel Group



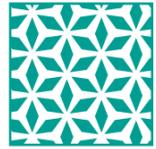
© Filiz Elaerts, Unsplash

## CONTENTS

- Western-style hotels 118 - 119
- Traditional Japanese inns 120- 121



The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto



# Western-style hotels

From budget accommodation for business travelers to family-run B&Bs and phenomenal five-star properties, Japan has a huge range of Western-style hotels.

When we talk about “Western-style hotels” in Japan, we mean your room will be carpeted, have Western beds (a mattress on a bed frame) and feature an en-suite bathroom. No matter your price range, all the hotels we choose are in good locations – either handy for sightseeing, close to train stations, or both. Budget hotels, usually designed for businessmen, are clean, comfortable and reliable. Rooms may be on the small side, but will be well equipped with air conditioning, TVs and hairdryers, with vending machines in the corridors and coin-operated washing machines available to use.

At the opposite end of the scale, Japan has world-class five-star properties that ooze luxury. As a rule of thumb: the more you pay, the larger the guest room, the more

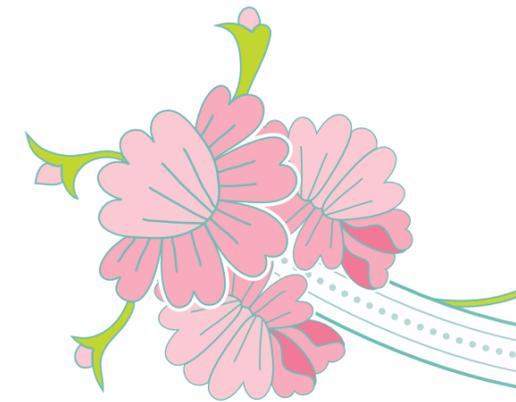
facilities (restaurants, bar, pool, gym, spa etc) and the better the English level and service.

Although known as “Western-style”, many hotels do feel very Japanese – making use of traditional textiles, paper screens, fans, scrolls and flowers in their interior design. Breakfast buffets can be a bit of a hybrid of cuisines and may include sausage, egg and toast, but also salad, miso soup and pickles – take your pick. The Japanese love their tea, so green tea and kettles are usually provided in hotel rooms with many hotels also offering complimentary coffee.



For sanctuary seekers  
**The Peninsula Tokyo**  
**Deluxe**

You'll have heard of The Peninsula's global reputation – timeless glamour and impeccable service – and The Peninsula Tokyo is no exception. With commanding views of the Imperial Palace, the 314 guest rooms are some of the largest in town (the dressing rooms alone are big enough to sleep in); and the Peninsula Spa is award-winning. The location in Yurakucho offers glitzy Ginza shopping and lively taverns.



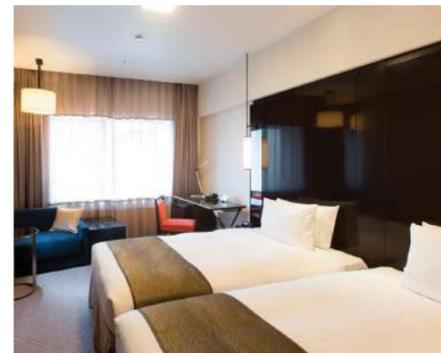
For art lovers  
**Park Hotel Tokyo**  
**Superior**

Fancy sleeping in an art exhibition? Try the Park Hotel in Tokyo, which occupies the ten uppermost floors of the sleek Shiodome Media Tower. 32 of the guest rooms have been individually designed by Japanese artists, so your sleep could be guarded by sumo wrestlers, overseen by Japanese *koi* goldfish or lulled into tranquillity in a bamboo forest.



For keen sightseers  
**Kyoto Hotel Okura**  
**Superior**

If you like the convenience of the city, but you're also seeking tranquillity, try the high-rise Kyoto Hotel Okura. Central to Kyoto's temples, gardens and restaurants, the hotel commands gorgeous views of the Higashiyama mountains – a relaxing retreat after all that sightseeing. Service here is a fine example of Japan's famed hospitality.



For bar hoppers  
**The Royal Park Hotel Kyoto Sanjo**  
**Moderate**

If your idea of a vacation means going out on the town, this hotel is in the spot for you. It's slap-bang in Kyoto's downtown, just a few steps from gorgeous Pontocho – a narrow lantern-lit alley lined with restaurants and teahouses. Neighboring Kiyamachi Street is rowdier but more accessible: a half-mile strip of *izakaya* pubs, ramen joints and clubs. The hotel itself is a quiet retreat from the hubbub.



For movie buffs  
**Park Hyatt Tokyo**  
**Deluxe**

Have your very own *Lost in Translation* experience at the Tokyo Park Hyatt, immortalized on the silver screen by Sofia Coppola. Fall in love with Tokyo as Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson did: drink Suntory whiskey at the New York Bar, take a swim in the pool on the 47th floor or simply enjoy gazing down on the streets of Shinjuku.



For luxury devotees  
**Palace Hotel Tokyo**  
**Deluxe**

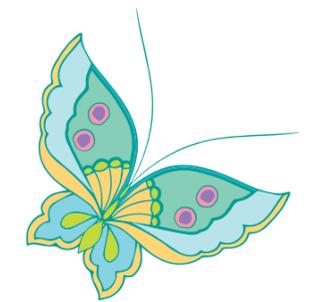
In a city as vertical as Tokyo, the view is everything. So picture yourself at Tokyo's most prestigious hotel, standing on your private balcony gazing across the moats of the Imperial Palace grounds. The natural greens outside are reflected in the interior design palette: mossy tones and pistachio carpets. The service is impeccable, as are the hotel restaurants.



**Feeling inspired?**

Let us know which hotels sound like your cup of tea and we can weave them into any **Self-Guided Adventure** or **Exclusive Private Journey**.

Traveling on a **Small Group Tour**? You can find out which accommodation each tour uses on our website, or call us for details.





# Traditional Japanese inns

In our opinion every Japan vacation should include at least one stay in a traditional Japanese inn, known as a *ryokan*. But what can you expect from a stay of this kind?

Slide back the wooden door to any *ryokan* and swap your shoes for the slippers provided in the entrance way. Here you'll be greeted by your host, who'll lead the way to your guest room for a welcoming cup of green tea.

*Ryokan* rooms look pretty minimalist at first glance. *Tatami* reed-mat flooring, paper screens, a low table, possibly a scroll or *ikebana* flower arrangement... and little else. But the beauty's in the simplicity. Floor-to-ceiling cupboards offer a space to put your luggage and contain the futon mattresses, duvets and blankets that your maid will lay on the floor for you after dinner. In your room you'll also find *yukata* robes which you can wear like dressing gowns around the inn.

In Japan the best chefs work in *ryokan* and therefore the evening meal is the highlight of the day. Expect dozens of tiny dishes, exquisitely presented, featuring a set menu of regional specialities made from seasonal ingredients. With slivers of raw fish, steaming hotpots, tempura vegetables, soups, pickles, grilled fish, rice and more, you certainly won't go hungry.

Like Western-style hotels, *ryokan* range from budget to deluxe. In a budget inn, bathing facilities will be communal (men and women separate) while en-suite bathrooms or even private outdoor hot-springs are only available at higher grade properties. The Japanese love their communal bathing and the nicest *ryokan* have a huge range of shared hot-spring baths or *onsen*. Trust us; soaking in a hot tub under the stars is the perfect way to rest after a long day of sightseeing.

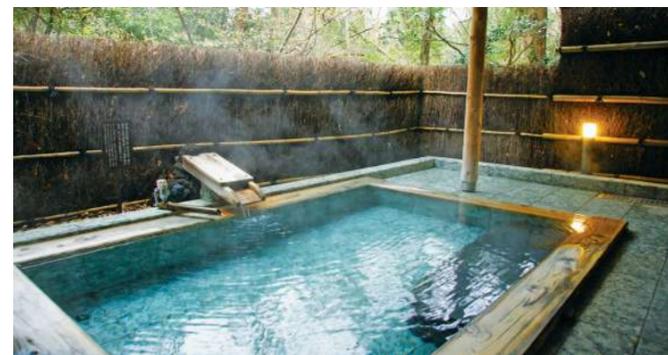


For independent types

## Machiya Residence Inn

Kyoto, Kanazawa and Takayama, moderate

Don't you just love pretending that you're not on vacation, but actually living like a local? A stay in a self-catering *machiya* townhouse in Kyoto grants you this illusion. Shop in local stores, potter down residential streets, chat to the neighbors, then climb the stairs to the tatami mat bedroom in your own Kyoto house.



For *onsen* aficionados

## Hanafubuki

Izu Peninsula, superior

At the Hanafubuki you can soak in hot-spring baths to your heart's content. All seven baths are open 24 hours a day and are for private use only – so you needn't feel shy about getting naked. We recommend taking an afternoon to try each outdoor bath at least once; in some you can inhale the scent of cypress or *kuromoji* spice bush, while others are beautifully decorated with Japanese ceramics.



For first-timers

## Tanabe Ryokan

Takayama, superior

This traditional *ryokan* inn in the mountain town of Takayama is one of our favorite places to stay in Japan – and its old-town location is perfect for visiting the morning markets. The wonderful owners, Mr and Mrs Tanabe, are gracious hosts, and will provide warm hospitality that will make even a first timer feel right at home; you won't have to worry about etiquette such as where to take your shoes off, and how to tie your *yukata* robe. We highly recommend upgrading to a room with its own private hot-spring bath for ultimate relaxation.



For gourmands

## Beniya Mukayu

Yamashiro Onsen, deluxe

For world-class cuisine, take dinner at the Beniya Mukayu – a gorgeous 17-room *ryokan* where the staff take time to talk you through the food. Each exquisite *kaiseki* dish reveals seasonal specialities: sea bream in spring, oysters and river fish in bamboo leaves in the summer, mushrooms in autumn and steaming crabs in winter. Knowledgeable waiters can recommend wines and sake to pair with each course.



For fans of homespun hospitality

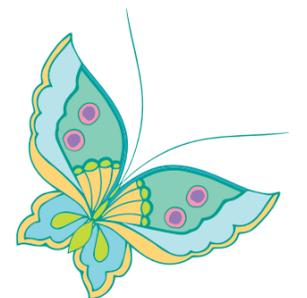
## Daikichi

Tsumago, moderate

In the picturesque hamlet of Tsumago, allow yourself to be mothered by the always-charming Mrs Daikichi, who runs a five-room inn with her family in a little wooden house overlooking the tea fields. Dinners are homemade by the host herself – just look out for the fried grasshoppers!

## Looking for more ideas?

Our website is full of information about fantastic hotels and *ryokan* to suit all budgets and tastes. Or ask our expert travel consultants for their recommendations. We've all got our favorites which we'd be more than happy to share with you.





# Stopovers

Stopovers are a great way to break up your journey to the Far East and see more of Asia. Our travel consultants can arrange accommodation, airport transfers, guided tours and excursions in many major Asian cities.

See majestic colonial buildings and state-of-the-art skyscrapers in Kuala Lumpur, seek out sizzling street food and the finest restaurants in Hong Kong, or sip cocktails in swanky hotels and cold beer on the beach in Singapore. The list is endless!

## Our Covid promise

- + Confused by Covid paperwork? Our expert team will provide you with all the information you need and check everything has been completed correctly prior to your departure. It's all part of the service.



*We really enjoyed our stopover in Singapore. Going to the Gardens by the Bay at sunset was a fantastic end to our vacation.*

**Paul & Julie, Plymouth, UK**



## CONTENTS

Hong Kong	124
Bangkok	125
Singapore	126
Kuala Lumpur	127



# Hong Kong

Compare Tokyo with Hong Kong: a similarly vertical city surrounded by mountains, with a spectacular waterfront from which high-tech skyscrapers rise like a glittering bar chart. Start your day early with a hike in the surrounding mountains or tai chi at dawn, and work up an appetite for the city's food scene. Downtown, you can tuck in at a *dai pai dong* street stall or take afternoon tea in a five-star hotel, before picking up a souvenir at one of the markets. For something more sedate, sail the harbor in a traditional junk boat and take the tram to the top of Victoria Peak for the finest views over the city. To see Hong Kong Island's towers light up at night, order a drink and take a pew at one of the sky bars in Kowloon.



## East meets west on Hong Kong Island

Strolling around Hong Kong Island, you'll see a tale of two cities. The Western District with its seafood vendors, Chinese herb shops and antique dealers, and the Central District, all glass buildings and financial conglomerates. After exploring on the ground, take a tram journey to Victoria Peak for views over the island and ride on the iconic Star Ferry to see the city from the water.



## Star Ferry & harbor cruises

Having shuttled passengers across the harbor since 1888, a trip on the Star Ferry is an authentic way to see Hong Kong's breath-taking skyline from the water. After something a little more glamorous? A cruise in a traditional junk boat, with dragon-like sails and teak hulls, is a swish way to spend an evening.



## Kowloon

Gritty, hectic and mischievous, the neon lights, busy streets and popular night markets of Kowloon showcase a very different side of Hong Kong. Bursting with life, there are superb eateries, great museums, intimate neighborhoods, quiet parks, and bars with views of Hong Kong Island's skyscrapers over the bay. Strap yourself in and let Kowloon take you on a big city adventure.



## Lantau Island

With mountainous terrain, long sandy beaches, quaint fishing villages, national parks and secluded waterfalls, Lantau has more in common with an island idyll than a sprawling city. Spend a night here to visit old monasteries, see the enormous bronze Tian Tan Buddha and ride on the cable car.

# Bangkok

Turn a blind eye to the slapdash city planning, poor infrastructure and chaotic congestion – Japan this is not. Instead, Thailand's capital is all about the allure of the haphazard. Imagine taking a boat trip along the city's canals for a seafood lunch at Taling Chan floating market. Explore a different branch of Buddhism

at Wat Arun and Wat Pho temples, visit the grand Palace's sacred Emerald Buddha, or relive your youth in the madness of Khaosan Road. And don't forget the food! You've got mouth-watering pad thai, hot green curries, spicy papaya salad and much more to look forward to.



## Hidden Khlongs

Bangkok is often referred to as 'Venice of the East' for its network of canals. Zip past waterside communities on a longtail boat to uncover a charming, tranquil side of the capital. Stop off and wander through hidden temples, fruit orchards, and small neighborhoods, and stand back to see glimmering modern skyscrapers alongside traditional wooden houses and fading colonial buildings.



## Food Tour

From Michelin-starred crab omelettes to fishball soup, and from drunken noodles to chive dumplings, Bangkok cuisine is much, much more than just pad thai (though there's that, too). Zip through the streets in the back of a tuk-tuk on a Bangkok food tour. Your guide will take you beyond the usual tourist hotspots and deep into the after-hours food culture of the city, stopping in for cold drinks at hidden bars and street-food treats at thronging night markets.



## Grand Palace, Wat Arun & Wat Pho

For first-time visitors, Bangkok can seem overwhelming, so take a step back to embrace this melting pot of spirituality, history and modernity. Wat Pho is the city's most enchanting temple; rise early to see resident monks chanting and take time to admire the famous reclining Buddha image. Then head to Wat Arun, a 17th-century riverside pagoda, before strolling around the Grand Palace: the seat of Thailand's revered Royal family for more than two centuries.



## River Kwai & the 'Death Railway'

Learn about Thailand's involvement in World War II, one of the country's darkest eras, with a visit to the River Kwai bridge (built by Allied Prisoners of War), and the Railway Museum. The museum's displays tell the tragic tale of the construction of the infamous bridge and 'Death Railway'. Read first-hand accounts of prisoners forced to work under harsh conditions and continue to the war cemetery to pay your respects to those who died.

# Singapore

Welcome to Singers, as it's affectionately known by the expat community. Another former British colony, the city state of Singapore is now a global financial center and one of the wealthiest places in the world. With a tropical climate and a multicultural population, Singapore makes a great first-time stop in Asia – it's sparkling clean, English is widely spoken and everything is just so perfectly efficient.



## Raffles & the Singapore Sling

Since opening its doors in 1887, Raffles remains one of Singapore's most iconic landmarks; no trip to the city is complete without a visit to this historic hotel. Its world-famous Long Bar is packed every night with people enjoying Singapore Slings, a famous cocktail first mixed here in 1913. Although it will set you back nearly \$23 a pop, it's money well spent! An evening here is like stepping back in time; sit back with your cocktail and a handful of monkey nuts for a nostalgic look at days gone by.



## China Town, Little India & Arab Street

Modern Singapore has more to offer than impressive skyscrapers and shiny shopping malls; the cultural quarters of Little India, Chinatown and Arab Street have close communities, a huge variety of food and religious centers sitting harmoniously side by side. Wander around to see the diversity of this historic trading port and get lost in the maze of streets.

Compact and easy to navigate, there's plenty to keep you occupied. Shop for designer goods on Orchard Road, explore the restaurant scene at Dempsey Hill and stroll around the National Botanical Gardens. Take your camera for views over the rainforest canopy at MacRitchie Park's treetop walkway and spend a day at Universal Studios Singapore on Sentosa Island. After all of that, you'll be ready to sip a Singapore Sling at the Long Bar in Raffles Hotel.



## Sentosa Island

Sentosa Island is a serene place to escape the city streets. Originally a Japanese prisoner of war camp for British and Australian servicemen during WWII, it's now a resort island with sandy beaches and world-class hotels. There are plenty of things to do besides dipping in the pool and sprawling out on the beach though; Universal Studios Singapore, the S.E.A aquarium and the Tiger Sky Tower (Singapore's tallest stand-alone observatory tower) are nearby.



## Night Safari & Gardens by the Bay

Wildlife enthusiasts will love Night Safari, the world's first safari park for nocturnal animals. It has 85 acres of rainforest with over 2,500 residents from over 130 species – including the endangered Asian elephant, Malayan tapir and Malayan tiger.

There's also the award-winning Gardens by the Bay, spanning 250 acres of reclaimed land with massive Supertrees, verticle gardens, a mist-veiled mountainous cloud forest and the world's largest indoor waterfall.

# Kuala Lumpur

The capital of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur (or "KL") has had a colorful history, making the journey from small tin-mining town to capital of British Malaysia, and finally becoming the cosmopolitan powerhouse it is today. Chinese, British, Indian and Japanese all claim heritage to the city with traditional temples and hawker stalls alongside futuristic architecture and shopping malls. The skyline is punctuated by dazzling skyscrapers towering above colonial buildings and charming mosques. Spend a few days here to try the best fusion cuisine in Chinatown; see the stunning Moorish architecture of the Sultan Abdul Samad Building, where Malaysian Independence was declared in 1957; and head up the iconic Petronas Towers for a birds-eye view of the city below.



## Central Market

Built in 1929, Kuala Lumpur's Central Market is the perfect place to piece together the city's past. With origins as a humble wet market, over the years it has evolved into a warren of handcraft boutiques and souvenir stalls. Local traders sell goods reflecting Malaysia's various cultures: Straits Chinese, the Lorong Melayu and Lorong India. Don't miss the Annexe – an arts space hidden on the top of the market's small auxiliary building – while you're here.



## Walking the contrasts of Kuala Lumpur

Take a walking tour with a local guide to see how Kuala Lumpur's various communities have shaped the city and influenced its eclectic blend of architectural styles. Visit important Indian mosques to find out more about the Indian-Malay community; walk around the iconic colonial architecture of old KL; then cross into Chinatown to try street food stalls at the market, pay respects at ancestral shrines and pick up souvenirs in the hidden shophouses of Kuala Lumpur's Chinese-Malay residents.



## Petronas Towers

The Petronas Towers, also known as the "Twin Towers", are a world-renowned landmark and an iconic symbol of Malaysia's journey into the 21st century. The towers were designed in a distinctive postmodern style by Argentine architect Cesar Pelli, and were the tallest buildings in the world from their construction in 1998 until 2004. Seeing the towers up close is awe-inspiring – but 170 m above ground in the Skybridge and Observation Deck, you get a sense of the scale of the city, with views for miles.



## Batu Caves

The Batu Caves can be found in a limestone outcrop 7.4 mi (12 km) north of Kuala Lumpur. Guarded by a towering 138-foot statue of Lord Murugan, and home to the country's holiest Hindu temple and shrine, thousands of worshippers make the trip here each year. Climb 272 stairs to the main cave to see depictions of the Ramayana legend, then reach the main temple for impressive views of the city.

# Weather & climate

## When to go

Japan is a fantastic vacation destination all year round, regardless of which season you choose.

**Spring (March to May):** Warm weather, not too humid. Very popular during cherry blossom season

**Summer (June to September):** Hot and humid in the cities, but great for exploring mountains and beaches

**Autumn (October & November):** Mild to warm weather and autumn leaves visible throughout this period depending on the altitude

**Winter (December to February):** Cool, crisp, clear days with heavy snowfall in the mountains. Excellent powder snow for skiing

## Cherry blossom

Spring is a wonderful time to be in Japan to catch the transient beauty of the beloved cherry blossom season. Japan really lets its hair down at this time of year, as the whole population enjoys sake-fuelled picnics beneath canopies of pink.

Be warned, though, that this is a very busy time of year to visit Japan; trains, temples, restaurants and hotels will be full to capacity. Our advice is to book early and be flexible about budget and accommodation as hotels and guides get booked up a long time in advance.

The cherry blossom usually lasts around two weeks, with the average full bloom dates shown right. However, please note that the cherry blossom is as unpredictable as the weather, and timings can vary widely from year to year.

City	Average full bloom
Sapporo	May 7 <sup>th</sup>
Sendai	April 16 <sup>th</sup>
Tokyo	April 3 <sup>rd</sup>
Kanazawa	April 10 <sup>th</sup>
Kyoto	April 5 <sup>th</sup>
Hiroshima	April 4 <sup>th</sup>
Matsuyama	April 4 <sup>th</sup>
Fukuoka	April 1 <sup>st</sup>
Kagoshima	April 4 <sup>th</sup>
Ishigaki	January 30 <sup>th</sup>

## Autumn leaves

Lasting longer than the cherry blossom, the leaf-viewing season is arguably more spectacular. On average you can see the autumn colors at their best as shown in the table on the right.

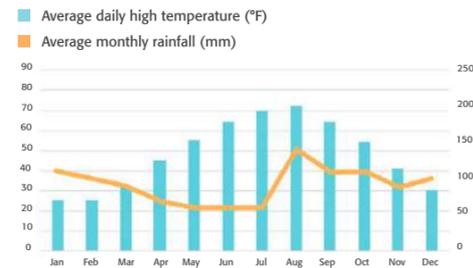
Be warned: in Tokyo and Kyoto the leaves turn much later in the year than you might expect!

Region	Autumn leaves
Hokkaido	Mid-September to mid-October
Tohoku	Mid-October to early November
Japanese Alps	Early October to mid-November
Tokyo	Late November to early December
Kyoto	Mid- to late November
Shikoku	Mid- to late November
Kyushu	Late October to mid-November

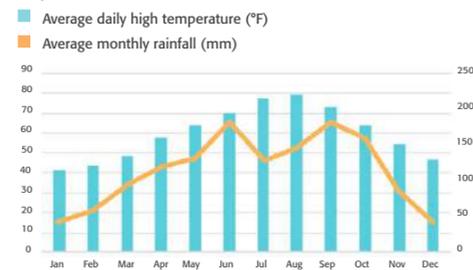
## Rainy season

While it can rain in Japan at any time all year round, the rain is at its heaviest from June to mid-July. However even during this rainy season, it won't rain every day and it's not always torrential. When it does pour, it tends to be in quick, tropical bursts before blue skies are revealed again. Traveling in Japan is still possible at this time of year; you'll just need to carry an umbrella and invest in sensible footwear. Okinawa experiences a rainy season one month earlier from May to mid-June, as well as occasional typhoons later in the summer and autumn. Hokkaido does not have a rainy season at all.

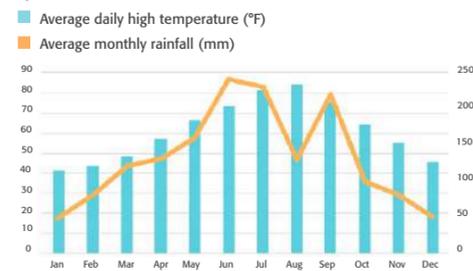
Sapporo (Hokkaido)



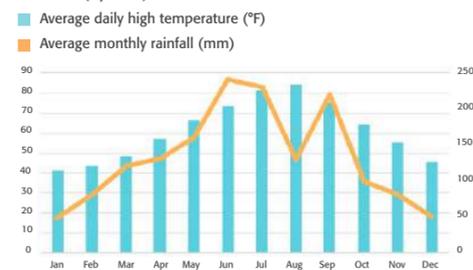
Tokyo



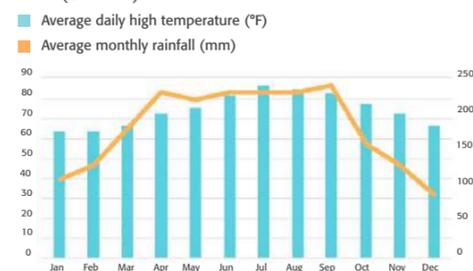
Kyoto



Fukuoka (Kyushu)



Naha (Okinawa)



# Glossary

Throughout the InsideJapan Tours offices, we're guilty of speaking "Japanglish" – our own blend of Japanese and English. That's because Japanese has words that can't be neatly translated into English, or we need to describe things that just don't exist in the English-speaking world.

Here's a handy glossary to define the Japanese words used in this brochure. If you encounter any more, our bilingual travel consultants would be happy to explain.

- anime:** Japanese film and television animation. Aimed as much at adults as children
- basashi:** a dish of sliced raw horse meat. A speciality in Matsumoto
- bunraku:** puppet theatre. A high-art form dating back to the 18th century
- dojo:** a school or practise hall where karate, judo or other martial arts are practiced
- eisa:** a folk dance originating in Okinawa accompanied by singing, drums and the *sanshin*
- fugu:** a dish of pufferfish, eaten as a delicacy once the highly poisonous parts of the fish have been expertly removed
- futon:** a thick, quilted mattress for sleeping on. Much more comfortable than Western-style futons – no wooden slats underneath
- gassho zukuri:** a traditional farmhouse with a steep thatched roof built to withstand heavy snowfall in the Japanese Alps
- geta:** traditional wooden clogs worn outdoors, with a thong that passes between the first two toes
- gyoza:** a dish of wonton wrappers stuffed with pork and cabbage
- hanami:** a cherry blossom viewing party. Usually a picnic with food and sake
- iaido:** a martial art using traditional Japanese swordsmanship techniques. Lit. "the way of the encounter"
- ikebana:** the art of Japanese flower arranging
- izakaya:** a gastro-pub. Serves alcohol and food which comes in small sharing dishes, akin to Spanish tapas
- kaiseki:** Japanese haute cuisine. A set-menu meal of many small meat, fish and vegetable dishes made with different cooking techniques to create contrasting textures. Often served at traditional Japanese inns, using seasonal produce and regional specialities
- kanji:** a system of Japanese writing using Chinese-derived characters
- katana:** a long, curved, single-edged sword traditionally used by samurai
- koi:** a large ornamental variety of carp
- kushikatsu:** a dish of deep-fried skewered meat or vegetables
- kyudo:** the martial art of longbow archery which incorporates choreographed movements practiced in a meditative state
- machiya:** a historic, wooden townhouse. Typified in Kyoto, they formerly housed merchants and craftsmen
- maiko:** an apprentice geisha. Entertainers who perform dances and play traditional Japanese instruments
- manga:** Japanese comic books and graphic novels. Aimed as much at adults as children
- miso:** a thick substance made from soy beans and salt used in Japanese cooking
- nabe:** a hotpot dish of meat or seafood and vegetables. Usually enjoyed in winter
- ninja:** from the feudal area. A person highly trained in martial arts and stealth, hired for covert espionage including sabotage and assassinations
- noren:** traditional fabric dividers or curtains with vertical slits that hang in doorways or windows
- okonomiyaki:** a savory pancake dish containing cabbage and various fillings including meat, seafood or vegetables, topped with barbecue sauce
- onsen:** a hot-spring bath. Can be indoors or outdoors, but always with natural spa water – a testament to Japan's volcanic landscape
- otaku:** a person who is a huge fan of a particular aspect of popular culture
- ramen:** a meat or fish soup containing noodles and vegetables
- ryokan:** a traditional Japanese inn. Guest rooms have reed mats on the floor, and you'll sleep on thick mattresses rolled out on the mats. For a more detailed description please turn to pp. 124-125.
- sake:** a drink made by fermenting rice; the national beverage of Japan
- sakura:** cherry blossom. The flowers of several trees of the genus *Prunus*
- sanshin:** a three-stringed musical instrument from Okinawa
- sashimi:** a dish consisting of slivers of raw fish eaten with soy sauce
- shabu shabu:** a dish of thinly sliced beef or pork cooked quickly with vegetables in boiling water and then dipped in sauce
- shamisen:** a traditional three-stringed lute with a square body, played with a large plectrum
- shinkansen:** the bullet train. Lit. "new trunk line"
- shodo:** Japanese calligraphy. Lit. "the way of writing"
- shojin ryori:** a type of vegetarian cooking introduced to Japan alongside Buddhism in the 6th century. *Shojin* is a Buddhist term that refers to asceticism in pursuit of enlightenment, and *ryori* means "cooking"
- soba:** noodles made from buckwheat. Can be served hot or cold
- somen:** thin, white noodles made of wheat flour and salt
- sumobeya:** Living quarters where sumo wrestlers train and live, known as a "stable" in English. All professional sumo wrestlers must belong to one
- taiko:** a Japanese drum. They come in various shapes and sizes
- takoyaki:** a dish of grilled dumplings filled with diced octopus
- tatami:** flooring made from reed mats. Shoes off and socks only on the *tatami!*
- tempura:** a dish of fish, shellfish or vegetables fried in a light batter
- teriyaki:** a dish consisting of fish or meat marinated in soy sauce and grilled
- torii:** a red gate found at the entrance to a Shinto shrine
- udon:** thick noodles made of wheat pasta
- wagashi:** Japanese confectionery typically made with plant ingredients and served with green tea
- wagyu:** tender beef from a specific breed of Japanese cattle
- washi:** traditional Japanese paper
- yakatabune:** a low barge-style boat lined with red lanterns



# FAQs

## What are the prices?

You won't find prices in this brochure, simply because exchange rates fluctuate and we are constantly making improvements to our itineraries to make each trip better and better. Instead, please visit our website for fixed prices for **Small Group Tours** and guideline pricing for our **Self-Guided Adventures** and **Exclusive Private Journeys**. Alternatively, our travel consultants would be happy to provide prices over the phone.

Please note that we do not surcharge. You can rest assured that our prices are guaranteed once you have paid your deposit.

## Is traveling around Japan difficult for non-Japanese speakers?

Traveling in Japan is a joy. Public transport is fast, efficient, clean and punctual. All trains and most buses have sufficient English-language signs and announcements, and with your InsideJapan Tours Info-Pack to guide you on your Self-Guided Adventures, or your Insider Tour Leader on call should you decide on a Small Group Tour, your adventures through Japan will be remarkably smooth and worry-free! We also have our own English-speaking customer experience team in Japan who are available 24/7 to help you with anything you may need, from restaurant recommendations to an emergency dentist appointment.

Even though English is not as widely spoken in Japan as in many other Asian countries, in the major cities such as Tokyo and Kyoto there are more English speakers and in most situations you will usually find someone around who speaks English. The Japanese are almost universally polite and helpful. Even in a situation where someone does not speak English they will almost certainly be willing to try to help, and people often go out of their way to assist foreign travelers. This is out of genuine care and concern and is not done expecting anything in return!

However, the further away from large urban areas you get, the less English you will find spoken – and in rural areas you may struggle to find anyone who understands you! There are often staff who speak some English at tourist sights and attractions. English (to differing degrees) is spoken at most of the accommodation options we work with. Signs in English follow a similar pattern – plenty in the big cities, not so many in smaller towns and rural areas. All but the tiniest train stations are signposted in English, including the whole rail and subway network in Tokyo. English explanations at sights and attractions vary; some have plenty of information in English, some have less.

Most visitors who had concerns about finding their way around Japan later comment about how simple it was in the end. Many also come home with the odd miracle story about the kind, helpful person on the bus/train, or at the shop/restaurant, who came to their rescue in their moment of need!

## I have dietary restrictions or allergies. What can I eat in Japan?

Japan has a multitude of dining options and is able to accommodate many different preferences and requirements. To help you on your way, we can provide written dietary restriction and allergy information in both English and Japanese so that you can inform restaurant staff of any considerations that need to be taken. Menus in English can be found at some restaurants, mainly those in the big cities with more regular non-Japanese trade. However, many restaurants that do not have English menus will have picture menus which take a lot of the stress and worry out of ordering. There are some circumstances in which it becomes more challenging to accommodate certain dietary requirements, for example set meals included at traditional Japanese inns (ryokan), but whether you're vegan or have a gluten allergy, as long as we know what you need in advance, we can make arrangements. Please let us know about any restrictions you may have as soon as possible, so that we can plan accordingly and make your vacation as worry-free (and delicious!) as possible.

## Is Japan welcoming for LGBTQ travelers?

In a word, yes. While Japan still lags behind the UK, US and Australia in gay and transgender issues, there are no legal restraints to sexual activities based on gender.

We're proud to have arranged many trips for gay couples and have had no problem booking double bedrooms regardless of the travelers' gender. Public displays of affection are rare between same-sex couples in Japan, but the same can be said for heterosexual couples. You may raise a few eyebrows if you hold hands in the countryside, but that's probably about all.

## Can you plan accessible travel in Japan?

Yes, we would be delighted to. We have arranged many Self-Guided Adventures for wheelchair users and others who require consideration for accessibility in the past.

In the major cities many Japanese hotels have accessible rooms, trains and stations can accommodate wheelchairs and we can let you know exactly which temples, shrines and gardens have suitable access. Do let us know your needs and we'll tailor the trip to suit you.

## Is Japan safe? Who can we contact if something goes wrong?

Japan is generally regarded as one of the safest countries in the world, and has some of the lowest crime rates among developed countries. Tokyo has almost one police box (called *koban*) per square mile, and 83% of lost mobile phones and 65% of lost wallets in the city are returned to the owner – often same day!

When traveling to any country, you should maintain the same vigilance that you would do at home and take sensible precautions. Some areas are known to have rare instances of muggings, such as Roppongi and Kabuki-cho in Tokyo, and America Mura in Osaka. Extra care should be taken in these locations.

There are occasionally extreme weather events or natural disasters, such as typhoons and earthquakes, but Japan's advanced infrastructure means that localities are able to respond quickly in these situations. Changing conditions or events beyond our control are extremely rare, and we have sent customers on trouble-free trips for many years.

That said, throughout your trip you will have the support of English-speaking staff at our Japan office in Nagoya should anything unexpected happen. Our Japan office will have full details of your trip itinerary, and is only a phone call or email away in the unlikely event that you should have any problems while you are in Japan. Our experienced support team has years of experience assisting our travelers when they've needed directions, run into rough weather, or become sick. Whether it's a lost item, or you've got lost yourself, we're available 24/7 to support you on the ground. If you need any further advice, our experienced travel consultants are on hand and happy to help. With teams in the UK, US, Australia and Japan, there's always someone there to take your call.

## What will happen if I can't travel?

We've completely restructured our booking policy to provide you with maximum flexibility and reassurance, so you know you can book with confidence.

You can find our complete flexible booking policy [here](#) and our general terms and conditions [here](#).



# Important information

## Financial protection

InsideJapan Tours is a trading name of Inside Travel Group Limited. We offer financial protection through membership of the following internationally recognized travel trade organizations:



The Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT) provides financial protection under The Package Travel and Linked Travel Arrangements Regulations 2018 for Inside Travel Group Limited (5233) and in the event of their insolvency, protection is provided for:

- Non-flight package bookings sold by Inside Travel Group Limited (Company No. 04094031) as Principal in the contract with the customer / consumer.
- Flight inclusive package bookings commencing outside of the United Kingdom and sold to customers / consumers outside of the United Kingdom by Inside Travel Group Limited (Company No. 04094031) as Principal in the contract with the customer / consumer.

ABTOT cover provides for a refund in the event you have not yet traveled or repatriation if transportation was included in your package. Please note that bookings made outside the UK are only protected by ABTOT when purchased directly with Inside Travel Group Limited.

In the unlikely event that you require assistance while abroad due to our financial failure, please call our 24/7 helpline on 01702 811397 and advise you are a customer of an ABTOT protected travel company.

You can access The Package Travel and Linked Travel Arrangements Regulations 2018 here: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uk/si/2018/634/contents/made>



Book with confidence. Inside Travel Group Ltd is a fully bonded Member of ABTA which means you have the benefit of ABTA's assistance and Code of Conduct and your money is protected.

Visit [ABTA.com](http://ABTA.com) for more information.



Inside Travel Group Ltd is a member of the Association of Independent Tour Operators. The Association represents Britain's leading independent tour operators and encourages high standards of quality and service. Inside Travel Group Ltd abides by the Association's Code of Business Practice and adheres to the AITO Quality Charter which can be viewed on [AITO.com](http://AITO.com).

Visit the website to find out more about the Association or call +44 20 8744 9280.

## Travel advice

In advising our clients on safety issues, we follow the recommendations set by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office. For the latest information, please visit:

[www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice](http://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice)

You may also find information at:

US: [www.travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/alertswarnings.html)

Canada: [www.travel.gc.ca/traveling/advisories](http://www.travel.gc.ca/traveling/advisories)

## Trip descriptions & inclusions

Full details of the inclusions, accommodation and day-by-day itineraries for the trips described in this brochure can be found on the InsideJapan Tours' website or by contacting your booking agent. Every effort will be made to deliver your trip exactly as described. Occasionally however, changes have to be made, in which case we will notify you as soon as possible.

## Pricing

For the latest prices, please contact your booking agent or check our website. Please bear in mind that during certain Japanese vacation periods, prices can be a lot higher than usual. The main peak travel times are:

- New Year: December 29<sup>th</sup> to January 4<sup>th</sup>
- Cherry blossom season: late March to mid-April
- Golden Week: April 29<sup>th</sup> to May 5<sup>th</sup>
- Obon Festival: August 9<sup>th</sup> to August 17<sup>th</sup>
- Autumn season: October & November

## Booking, payment & travel documents

You can book through your local travel advisor or by contacting InsideJapan Tours directly. If you are booking through a travel advisor, all subsequent correspondence should be made through that agency. For all bookings you will be required to accept our terms and conditions on behalf of all those in your party.

InsideJapan Tours asks for a non-refundable deposit upon booking and then full payment 42 days prior to your package start date.

Bookings made fewer than four weeks before your planned departure date will be accepted on a case-by-case basis.

After we have processed your booking, we will issue you or your travel advisor with a confirmation document, which will show exactly what is included in your vacation. Your Info-Pack and final travel documents will be sent to you approximately three weeks before departure. Some tickets may be sent to your first hotel in Japan for collection on arrival. Full details of which tickets and documents will be sent when and where will be in your final travel documents.

## Passports & visas

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 printing, citizens of the US and Canada do not need a visa to visit Japan. If you are unsure, please contact the Japanese Embassy in your home country. You can find a full list of embassies at [www.mofa.go.jp](http://www.mofa.go.jp)

## Health advice

Vaccinations are generally not needed for visiting Japan, but if you suffer from any health problems, please consult your doctor before booking. Healthcare in Japan is usually very good, but can be expensive. Please note that some medications are not permitted in Japan. Please contact the Japanese Embassy in your home country for the latest advice.

## Medical conditions & dietary requirements

If you have a medical condition, reduced mobility or a disability which may affect your vacation, please let your booking agent know so we can make appropriate recommendations. You must also let us know if there is any change in your medical condition after your booking has been confirmed.

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.

## Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with InsideJapan Tours that you and all members of your party have adequate travel insurance to cover medical costs and repatriation. Although not compulsory, we also recommend you take out cancellation and baggage insurance.

## Money, debit & credit cards

Japan is still a cash society, and smaller shops and restaurants do not accept debit or credit cards, so you will need to carry Japanese yen in cash. You can exchange US or Canadian cash on arrival at any airport, or at some banks and post offices during your trip. Please note that Japanese banks and post offices have shorter opening hours than in the US or Canada and are usually closed on Saturday afternoons, Sundays and national vacations.

You can also use Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus or Maestro branded credit and debit cards to withdraw Japanese yen in cash from ATMs at post offices and Seven Eleven convenience stores. 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.

## 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; please ask your booking agent for details. Any children aged 17 years old or younger at the time of travel must be accompanied by a parent, guardian or another adult who will assume legal responsibility for them for the duration of the trip. We are happy for children aged six years or older at the time of travel to join most of our Small Group Tours.

## Rooming & check-in

In Japan check-in times are strictly adhered to and early check-in requests may be refused. You can, however, always leave your suitcase with the front desk before check-in time. Adjoining, triple or quad-share rooms may be available on request; please ask your booking agent for further details.

## Car rental

If your package includes a rental car, the named driver must be in possession of a full and valid driving licence from their home country as well as an International Driving Permit (issued in accordance with the Geneva Convention 1949). Swiss and German driving licence holders need to obtain a Japanese translation of their home country driving licence before departure. Cars drive on the left and most roads signs are in English.

## Luggage

Luggage handling is not included as standard in our packages, although the top hotels in Japan will provide porterage between the front desk and your guest room at their discretion. On most trips you are responsible for carrying your own luggage from place to place. We recommend traveling light with a suitcase on wheels, and making sure you can handle your luggage comfortably.

Japan does have an excellent overnight luggage forwarding system which is available at the front desk of most hotels. This service is included at pertinent times on our Small Group Tours. For our Self-Guided Adventures, you can pay for this service on the day and full instructions will be in your Info-Pack. If you plan to use this service, it is useful to carry an overnight bag as well as your main suitcase.

## Further questions

If you have any questions, please contact your booking agent. Our full terms and conditions can be found on our website here: [www.insidejapantours.com/terms-and-conditions/](http://www.insidejapantours.com/terms-and-conditions/)

*"Booking agent" refers to your InsideJapan Tours travel consultant or your local travel advisor*

# Did you know...

## We also have a sister brand?

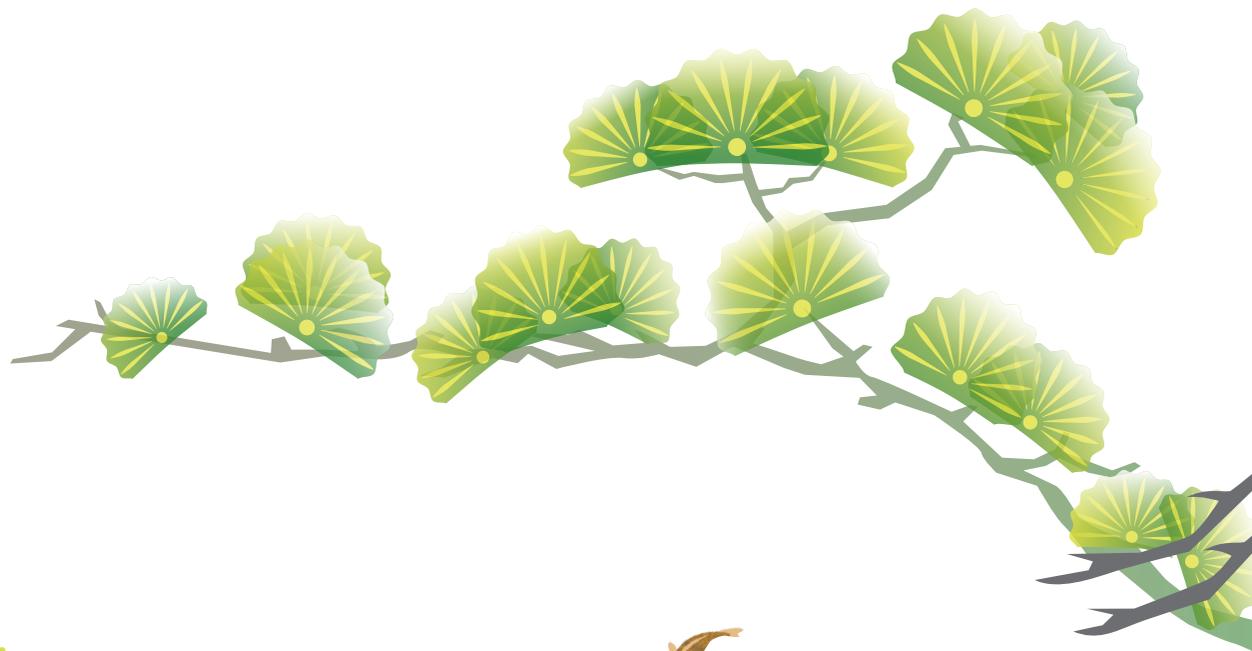
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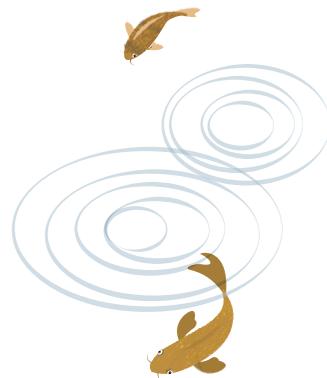


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**US Edition**



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