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16 Day Inspiring Japan

- ✓ Return international airfares with a full-service airline
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You will be visiting

Osaka - Takamatsu - Beppu - Nagasaki - Hiroshima - Himeji - Kanazawa -

Matsumoto - Kawaguchiko - Tokyo - Kyoto - Matsuyama - Shirakawago - Takayama - Mt Fuji.

Day to Day Itinerary

Day 1

Destination: Home ✈ Osaka

Hotel: Stargate Hotel Kansai, or Similar

Welcome to Japan! You'll take a shared shuttle bus to your hotel.

Your journey through this magical land of contrasts begins in Osaka, a vibrant city renowned for its food culture. Known as *tenka no daidokoro* (the nation's kitchen), it's a dream for foodies. Try some of its famed street food like *takoyaki* (octopus and pickled ginger in batter), *kushikatsu* (deep-fried meat and vegetable skewers) or Osaka-style *okonomiyaki* (a delicious savoury pancake).

With friendly locals, it's the perfect welcome to this lovely country.

Please note: Some flights may depart the day before.

Check-in: Passengers will be arriving at various times throughout the day from as early as 6am through to late evening. If arriving prior to standard check-in time, which is generally 3pm local time, you are welcome to leave your luggage with hotel reception and explore your surroundings until check-in becomes available, as there are generally no scheduled activities on Day 1 of the itinerary.

Day 2

Destination: Osaka 🚆 Kyoto

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Hotel Wing International Kyoto, or Similar

There will be a welcome meeting at the hotel this morning to discuss some tour logistics and to give you a chance to meet your fellow travellers.

We'll tour central Osaka today, starting with a tour of the extensive grounds of Osaka Castle, an important historic monument of feudal Japan. It was built in the 16th century by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, one of Japan's most famous warlords. At the time of completion it was the largest castle in the country.

We'll go to the Namba area and see Shinsaibashi, a shopping district with everything from fast fashion to luxury brands. The flashy district of Dōtonbori is a hive of activity; a shopping, food and entertainment hotspot. You'll find a host of gastronomic delights here, from Michelin-starred establishments to exciting street food – no surprise given the city's strong food heritage. With its colourful neon lights and signs, it's home to one of Osaka's most photographed icons, the neon Glico running man sign. Dōtonbori Street runs parallel to the eponymous canal and is a great place to pick up souvenirs.

We'll head for magical Kyoto and visit Fushimi Inari Shrine on arrival. This important Shinto shrine in southern Kyoto was dedicated to Inari, the god of rice and sake, by the Hata clan in the eighth century. A magical path of over 5000 vibrant orange *torii* gates winds its way through the hills behind the shrine.

A contrast to bustling Osaka, Kyoto showcases the essence of traditional Japanese culture and rich history with its timeless charm. Kyoto is considered by many to be the jewel in Japan's crown and one of the only cities in Japan to escape destruction during World War II, leaving its countless relics intact.

Perhaps stroll the streets of Gion, Kyoto's most famous geisha district. With any luck you might spot a geisha, otherwise known as a geiko or maiko.

OPTIONAL TOUR - KYOTO BY NIGHT

Enjoy an evening walking tour of downtown Kyoto – from the heart of the city's geisha culture in Gion to the tiny backstreets and bars of Ponto-chō. Experience Gion's atmospheric streetscape at night and catch glimpses of geisha on their way to work. Visit neighborhood shrines illuminated at night and stop at a bar and sample some local sake and food.

Day 3

Destination: Kyoto

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Hotel Wing International Kyoto, or Similar

We'll see the sights of ancient Kyoto this morning, starting with Tofukuji Temple, one of Japan's oldest and most famous temples. Its grand *sanmon* entrance gate, the oldest in Japan, is a National Treasure. This vast complex includes 24 sub-temples and four distinctly different

gardens, each facing in a different direction. Many of these buildings date back to the Muromachi period (1338-1573) and are shining examples of Zen architecture of the time.

Nearby Heian Jingu Shrine is a relatively young sacred location – built in 1895 – but this Shinto shrine is very impressive, with its enormous *torii* (sacred gate) standing almost 25 metres high.

We'll continue onto some of Kyoto's most iconic sites, like Kinkakuji (Golden Pavilion). This is a Zen temple and UNESCO World Heritage Site, with two floors covered entirely in thin layers of pure gold, set within a beautiful classical Zen garden.

We'll stop for lunch at Arashiyama before a mesmerising experience – standing amongst the soaring stalks of bamboo at Arashiyama Bamboo Grove. It's green, peaceful and the seemingly endless boughs make for a serene experience, even with the tourist crowds. Take in the sound of rustling bamboo as you stroll these paths – if there's a bit of wind, the groves will gently sway back and forth which only adds to the magic.

OPTIONAL TOUR - GEISHA DINNER EXPERIENCE

A very special once-in-a-lifetime Japan experience – meet a maiko from Kyoto's exclusive geisha community. Enjoy a dance and music performance and learn about the life of a modern-day geisha in a private session in a traditional Kyoto townhouse, and enjoy a traditional Kyoto-style *kaiseki* meal.

OPTIONAL TOUR - TRADITIONAL SHOPS AND MARKETS OF KYOTO

Start with a walk through Nishiki Market where everything from fresh produce to Japanese green teas and pickles are sold. On the way, explore traditional fan shops, chopstick shops and one of the best knife shops in Kyoto. Wander through the famous shopping arcade of Teramachi, discovering incense shops, Japanese woodblock print shops, ceramics and traditional tea shops, as well as the best of Japan's contemporary fashion – both mainstream and quirky!

Day 4

Destination: Kyoto 🚗 Naruto Strait 🚗 Takamatsu

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Dormy Inn Takamatsu, or Similar

We'll travel to Naruto Strait, and tour the Naruto whirlpools off the Shikoku coast, the smallest of Japan's four main islands. These tidal whirlpools, created by the fast tidal current, are a captivating sight on the surface of this narrow strait. In ideal conditions they can measure up to about 20 metres in diameter. The tidal current is fastest during a full moon and the roar is a spectacular sound.

We'll then head for Takamatsu, on the north coast of Shikoku island. This scenic port city is known for its udon noodles, a Japanese favourite.

Touring the open-air museum of Shikoku Mura is the perfect chance to explore Japan's history and heritage, with a glimpse of old village life. Over 20 restored traditional buildings and structures, built in the Shikoku style and mainly from the Edo and Meiji periods, were relocated here from all over the island.

This hillside village includes farmhouses, storehouses, production workshops for soy sauce and sugar, a thatched kabuki theatre and a vine suspension bridge made of vine and wood. There is also a small, modern art gallery.

Day 5

Destination: Takamatsu 🚗 Matsuyama 🏯 Beppu

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Beppu Kamenoi Hotel, or Similar

We'll start the day with Ritsurin Garden, an exquisite traditional garden. Built during the Edo period – when the city was a castle town controlled by the Matsudaira clan – it's a National Treasure and arguably one of the most beautiful gardens in the country.

There are six ponds and 13 buildings in this tranquil oasis, including a lush lotus pond and the Okedoi-no-Taki waterfall. Pine-covered Mount Shiun at the garden's western border provides a gorgeous backdrop. There is also a tea house and various folk art and craft exhibits.

On the way to the picturesque castle town of Matsuyama, we'll stop at Matsuyama Castle for a photo opportunity and then onto the historic Dogo Onsen area for another photo stop and lunch.

At Misaki, we'll board a ferry to the *onsen* town of Beppu, known for its spectacular hot springs. It's on the island of Kyushu, Japan's third-largest island.

Day 6

Destination: Beppu 🚢 Nagasaki

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Dormy Inn Nagasaki, or Similar

Kyushu Island is onsen country, with hot springs dotted all over this island. The city of Beppu is home to over 2,000 hot springs but this morning we'll visit the most bizarre. The Hells of Beppu are a spooky sight – each hot spring bubbles and steams somewhat violently. These *jigoku* (hells) can reach temperatures of about 98 degrees. They are for viewing, not bathing!

Each 'hell' is distinctly different. The largest of the seven pools, Umi (Sea) Jigoku, earned its name for its vivid turquoise colour. The oldest hell, Chinoike (Blood Lake) Jigoku is – you guessed it – blood red, a magnificent sight with steam rising from it. Undoubtedly the most scary pool is Oniyama Jigoku, with crocodiles bred and kept here.

We'll travel south to Nagasaki, one of two cities in Japan destroyed by an atomic bomb during World War II.

On arrival we'll tour the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum and Peace Park. The museum is a difficult but important visit, with photos and other relics from the period that were found after the bomb. The harrowing gallery displays stories compiled from survivors. 75,000 people lost their lives in the attack and its aftermath.

Nagasaki Peace Park is next to the museum, located near the hypocentre of the atomic bomb blast. In the Zone of Hopes, the towering Peace Statue at the back of the park points up to the sky with its right hand and its left arm is horizontal to represent the wish for peace. On either side of the statue are two small shrines draped with origami crane garlands, in memory of *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes*. There are five zones in this grand park, a serene place for reflection.

OPTIONAL TOUR - RAMEN DINNER AND NAGASAKI NIGHT VIEWS
Stroll through central Nagasaki in the evening, stopping for a bowl of *champon* ramen noodles, Nagasaki-style. Champon is a classic Nagasaki dish and reflects the city's cosmopolitan past and history with early Chinese and Western traders. Afterwards, head up Mount Inasa for stunning panoramic views of this attractive port city at night.

Day 7

Destination: Nagasaki

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Dormy Inn Nagasaki, or Similar

Today's sightseeing starts with Glover Garden, for an insight into Nagasaki's cosmopolitan past. This open air museum has six Western-style buildings from all over the city that were relocated here – grand mansions that were once home to Nagasaki's foreign residents, such as European diplomats and foreign traders. Take in the lovely views over the harbour.

We'll visit the Twenty-Six Martyrs Monument, dedicated to 26 missionaries and Christians executed here in the 16th century, when missionary activities were prohibited. They became saints in the 20th century.

Next stop is the city's major Shinto shrine, Suwa Shrine, that sits atop a hill overlooking Nagasaki. There are 277 stone steps leading up the mountain to the shrine complex. Built in 1614, it features ornate animal sculptures, including the *komainu* (guard dogs).

We'll drive past Dejima, the old Dutch trading post, and stop for a photo at Oura Church, said to be the oldest church in Japan.

Day 8

Destination: Nagasaki 🚗 Hiroshima

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Washington Hotel Hiroshima, or Similar

We'll travel from Nagasaki to Hiroshima today, with a lunch stop on the way.

On arrival, we'll visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, home to the ruins of the Genbaku Dome, one of the few buildings that were left standing near ground zero. In Hiroshima today, locals have mixed feelings

about the UNESCO World Heritage Site structure: some see it as a reminder of war, while others consider it a tribute to the lost that ensures we'll never forget the tragic events that took place here.

The flame in the cenotaph is intended to burn until the last nuclear weapon has been destroyed. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, located in the Peace Memorial Park, is a sobering experience for those who wish to explore further.

OPTIONAL TOUR - OKONOMIYAKI DINNER

Tonight, you will be able to enjoy an *okonomiyaki* dinner. Okonomiyaki is a savoury Japanese pancake, famed in Hiroshima for its layering of ingredients including batter, cabbage and pork to which you can add optional items such as squid, octopus or more vegetables.

Day 9

Destination: Hiroshima 🚢 Miyajima Island 🚢 Hiroshima 🚌 Himeji 🚗
Osaka

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Hotel MYSTAYS Shin Osaka, or Similar

We'll take the ferry to Miyajima Island this morning. Known for its lush forests, ancient shrines and temples, and freely roaming sika deer, this island is just as popular with Japanese tourists as it is with international visitors.

Just offshore we'll spy a 'floating' vermilion torii, which becomes partially submerged at high tide. It marks the entrance to Itsukushima Shrine, which was first built in the 12th century. We'll tour the shrine, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

We'll travel to Kurashiki for lunch, then continue onto Himeji for a tour of magnificent Himeji Castle, the largest surviving example of a traditional Japanese castle.

Comprising 83 buildings, the white roof of this UNESCO-listed complex is said to evoke the wings of a heron taking flight, hence the popular name 'Shirasagi-jō', meaning White Heron Castle. Himeji Castle is said to be the most visited in Japan, and the site offers some wonderful views of surrounding Himeji city.

Japan's world-famous bullet train, a shining example of this country's technology and engineering prowess, is an absolute must-do. We'll take the *shinkansen* to Osaka.

OPTIONAL TOUR - SUKIYAKI DINNER EXPERIENCE

Experience one of Japan's most classic meals – *sukiyaki* – in one of Osaka's traditional restaurants in the heart of the city. Enjoy fine slices of wagyu beef, silken tofu and fresh vegetables lightly cooked in a hot pot and dipped in sauce before eating.

Day 10

Destination: Osaka 🚆 Kanazawa

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Agora Kanazawa, or Similar

Today we'll travel to the city of Kanazawa, on the northwestern shore of Honshu, once the base for the powerful Maeda clan. During World War II, Kanazawa was Japan's second largest city (after Kyoto) to escape destruction by air raids. This means that parts of the old castle town, such as the Nagamachi samurai district and *chaya* entertainment districts, have survived.

On arrival, we'll tour Kenrokuen Garden, heralded as one of the three most beautiful gardens in Japan. Developed over the course of more than 200 years, starting in 1620, the garden contains almost 9000 trees and 200 plant species.

We'll enjoy a walking tour of Nagamachi samurai district and the Higashi Chaya District, famous for its well-preserved wooden teahouses where geisha perform.

OPTIONAL TOUR - GOLD LEAF CRAFT EXPERIENCE

Learn about the history of gold leaf in Japan and how it's used to embellish fine lacquerware, ceramics, chopsticks and modern-day items. Create your own design and apply gold leaf to your choice of material – whether chopsticks, lacquerware, glassware or even washi stationery and postcards.

OPTIONAL TOUR - IZAKAYA PUB EXPERIENCE

Enjoy the relaxed atmosphere of an *izakaya* pub – Japan’s traditional drinking place where friends and colleagues get together to catch up and socialise over traditional Japanese food and drinks. Kanazawa’s proximity to the Sea of Japan means that fresh seafood (particularly crab) is a key feature of izakaya in this city.

Day 11

Destination: Kanazawa 🚗 Matsumoto

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Matsumoto Hotel Kagetsu , or Similar

Step back in time to see the small, historical village of Shirakawa-go, a UNESCO World Heritage Site located in the Japanese Alps. Enjoy a walk through this village to see the traditional thatched houses (*gassho-zukuri*) and beautiful mountain scenery.

Then we’ll head to the city of Takayama, nestled in the Hida mountains.

This city still retains a traditional feel, especially in its beautifully preserved old merchant district. Here you’ll find quaint, old latticed wooden buildings and Sannomachi Street, with pretty homes, restaurants and sake breweries. Enjoy a walking tour of the old town before travelling to Matsumoto.

OPTIONAL TOUR - BENTO LUNCH EXPERIENCE

Experience a classic Japanese bento, served lunch-box style in a traditional building near the town’s old centre. The ingredients used are sourced from Takayama’s farms and served in lacquered boxes.

OPTIONAL TOUR - SAKE TASTING EXPERIENCE

Sample some fine sake produced from Takayama’s clear alpine waters in an old sake brewery located in the heart of Takayama’s old town area. Experience different sake styles from aged forms to newly released varieties made from the latest rice harvest. Enjoy the traditional rustic ambience of a merchant’s house from Japan’s feudal era.

Day 12

Destination: Matsumoto 🚗 Mt Fuji 🚗 Lake Kawaguchiko

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Hotel: Motosu View Hotel , or Similar

This morning, we'll take a tour of historic Matsumoto Castle and the charming old town area surrounding the castle. Nakamachi Street is a quaint, charming street with well-preserved old buildings, like restored Edo-period storehouses. Here you'll find craft shops, a sake brewery, restored Japanese *ryokan* (inns) and restaurants. This used to be the main street when Matsumoto was a castle town. Across the river, pedestrian-friendly Nawate Street is a great place to pick up quirky souvenirs and snacks.

Matsumoto Castle, with its wide moat, is also known as 'Crow Castle' due to its dramatic black exterior. The *donjon* (keep) – Japan's oldest remaining wooden keep, completed around 1593 – is listed as a National Treasure of Japan. On a clear day, the backdrop of the Japanese Alps is the perfect touch on this majestic setting.

It's then about a three-hour journey to the revered peak, Mount Fuji, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This enduring cultural symbol has been considered sacred since ancient times. It's an imposing sight, standing 3,776 metres high.

We'll travel to Mount Fuji 5th Station, about halfway up the mountain, at an elevation of 2,300 metres. You'll savour spectacular views over the Fuji Five Lakes and Hakone National Park.

You'll be staying in the Lake Kawaguchiko area. This is the most accessible of the Fuji Five Lakes; popular sightseeing spots for admiring the dramatic peak. Iconic Mount Fuji is notoriously shy, but in clear conditions the views from these spots are stunning. This lake is also home to a cherry blossom festival held during the season, one of the most popular in the country.

Day 13

Destination: Lake Kawaguchiko 🚗 Tokyo

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Agora Place Asakusa, or Similar

We'll tour the Lake Kawaguchiko area for more stunning views of this revered mountain. Depending on weather conditions, we'll visit Fuji-san World Heritage Visitor Centre or Oishi Park on the north side of the lake.

Enjoy a visit to Itchiku Kubota Art Museum to learn about the revival of the lost art of Tsujigahana silk dyeing for kimonos, thanks to celebrated 20th-

century textile artist Kubota Itchiku. This serene complex in the wooded hills, ensconced in nature with extensive gardens and a traditional tea room, is home to a vast collection of the artist's works.

Then it's onto Tokyo, famed metropolis, arguably one of the most extraordinary capital cities on the planet. Japan's eclectic capital is a city of wonder. The Tokyo metropolitan area spreads over three prefectures with 38 million residents.

On the way to our hotel, if conditions are clear, we'll stop at Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building for late afternoon panoramic city views over this energetic city.

OPTIONAL TOUR - ASAKUSA WITH KARAOKE EXPERIENCE

Celebrate the end of your Japan adventure with a casual meal in one Asakusa's backstreet eateries, followed by a visit to a karaoke bar for that quintessential Japan experience!

Day 14

Destination: Tokyo

Meals: Breakfast

Hotel: Hotel MyStays Premier Narita, or Similar

In a city of such frenetic pace, a stop at the charming Asakusa neighbourhood is a refreshing taste of older Tokyo. It's home to the ancient seventh-century Sensō-ji Temple. Built in the Asuka era, it's the oldest and most important Buddhist temple in Tokyo – be prepared for crowds! It's known for its imposing entrance gate, Kaminarimon (also known as 'Thunder Gate'), with its magnificent red lantern.

We'll walk along Nakamise, the shopping street connecting the front gate and main hall of the temple. It's a wonderful atmosphere, with food stalls and souvenir shops, selling authentic Japanese items like traditional crafts. You'll find great souvenirs here.

Then, foodies will be in heaven at Tsukiji Outer Market, a shopping district adjacent to the enormous former wholesale fish market. This lively area is home to everything food-related – fresh ingredients, street food vendors, kitchen utensils. There's great sushi and other restaurants around here, too.

We'll explore the outer grounds of the Imperial Palace, the primary

residence of the Emperor of Japan. Previously home to samurai warriors, it's a sprawling complex with beautiful 17th-century parks in the heart of the city. Built on the site of the old Edo castle, it is surrounded by a large park, moats and massive stone walls. Come cherry blossom season, it is blanketed in a sea of pink blooms.

Our day's touring will finish in Ginza, an upmarket area with high-end shopping, galleries and restaurants. This is a superb spot for people watching, given the sophisticated crowd that frequent this elegant neighbourhood. It was the first Western-style shopping district in the city and you can still find some of Tokyo's original department stores here.

We'll travel to our hotel at Narita International Airport.

Day 15

Destination: Tokyo ✈ Home

Meals: Breakfast

Enjoy one last delicious breakfast this morning, before your Japanese adventure comes to an end. You'll take a shared shuttle bus from your hotel for Narita International Airport.

We hope you've enjoyed this extraordinary journey.

Check-out: Passengers will be departing at various times throughout the day. Standard hotel check-out times will apply no matter what time your flight is scheduled to depart. Check-out time is generally anywhere from 10am-12pm. You are welcome to leave your luggage at hotel reception and spend your final moments of free time exploring the area or, alternatively, please speak with hotel staff if you would like to extend your check-out time. Please note this service is subject to availability and will likely come at an additional cost. Your tour guide (or hotel staff) will confirm the time of your airport transfer with you directly.

Day 16

Destination: Home

Arrive home today. We hope you've been *inspired*.

What's Included

- Return international airfares with a full-service airline
- Return airport shuttle transfers
- 14 nights in quality 3-4 star hotels throughout Japan
- All Transportation - coach, rail and boat
- Bullet train from Himeji to Osaka
- Activities indicated in the itinerary including entry fees
- Meals: Breakfast daily, 1 dinner, as per itinerary
- 1 English speaking tour leader – Will accompany the group throughout
- All accommodation as listed
- All entrance fees to the sites listed (except optionals)
- All activities listed in the itinerary unless a paid optional
- Comfortable, dedicated private transportation throughout
- 24/7 customer service and your own Dedicated Support Agent

Sightseeing Highlights

- Osaka – Visit the expansive grounds of Osaka Castle, a grand monument of feudal Japan
- Osaka – Stroll through lively, colourful Dōtonbori and Shinsaibashi
- Kyoto – See this ancient capital's most famous temples and shrines – Kinkakuji, Heian Jingu and Fushimi Inari
- Kyoto – Revel in the lush, peaceful green splendour of Arashiyama Bamboo Grove
- Naruto – See some of the greatest whirlpools in the world in the Naruto Strait
- Takamatsu – Explore exquisite Ritsurin Garden, a National Treasure
- Matsuyama – View beautiful Matsuyama Castle, one of Japan's few original surviving castles
- Matsuyama - See the history of the oldest hot springs in Japan - Dogo Onsen
- Beppu – Tour the Hells of Beppu, a bizarre series of hot springs
- Nagasaki – Discover the devastating effects of the atomic bomb at the Atomic Bomb Museum
- Nagasaki – See the grand European mansions of Nagasaki's past at Glover Garden
- Hiroshima – Visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Genbaku Dome to understand the tragedies of Japan's past
- Miyajima – Tour the 12th-century Itsukushima Shrine and see the famous floating torii gate
- Himeji – Explore the enormous, UNESCO-listed 'White Heron' Himeji

Castle

- Himeji – Ride the iconic Japanese bullet train between Himeji and Osaka
- Kanazawa – Visit celebrated Kenrokuen Garden, ranked as one of Japan's top three gardens
- Kanazawa – Step back in time in the Higashi Chaya district, where geisha still live and perform today
- Shirakawa-go – Admire more than 100 traditional thatched houses in this historical alpine village
- Takayama – Experience the rustic charm of this quaint city with a walk through its beautifully-preserved old town
- Matsumoto – Tour the dramatic black castle and see Japan's oldest remaining wooden keep
- Mount Fuji – Savour the views from halfway up this iconic mountain at the 5th Station
- Kawaguchiko Lake – Admire the dramatic, imposing beauty of Mount Fuji
- Tokyo - Enjoy the buzz and energy of one of the world's great cities
- Tokyo – Get a bird's eye view from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building observation deck, 202 metres high
- Tokyo – Enjoy a walking tour of Asakusa, Japan's oldest temple Sensō-ji Temple, and atmospheric Nakamise
- Tokyo – Visit the outer grounds of the Imperial Palace, the primary residence of the Emperor of Japan
- Tokyo – Enjoy people watching in upmarket Ginza, an elegant area with high-end shopping and restaurants
- Tokyo – Visit Tsukiji Outer Market, a haven for foodies