



Luxury Japan, Spring 2019

Saturday March 23rd to Saturday April 6th 2019



Luxury Japan Spring Tour 2019

March 23rd – April 6th 2019



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This 15 day tour includes the best of everything Japan has to offer. It is designed for newcomers to Japan who want first class hotels and follows a leisurely pace without one night stays. We keep the groups small (up to 16) which allows you to have some very personal experiences and see life in Japan first hand. You will have your own tour escort throughout as well as the very best local guides each day. The tour is timed to include the stunning cherry blossoms as well as the Spring Geisha Dances. The tour route and highlights are shown below.



Private dinner with performing Geisha



Iconic views of Mount Fuji from lakeside hotel



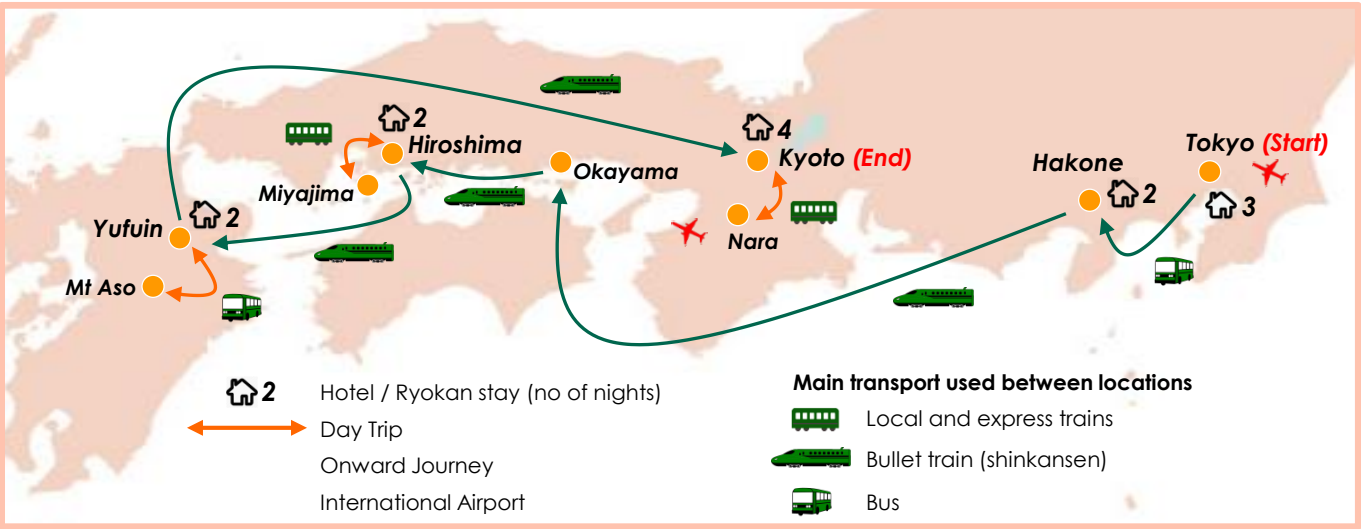
Magnificent views over the Imperial Palace Gardens from your Tokyo hotel balcony



Ryokan experience with outdoor hot springs



Beauty of the cherry blossoms



Exquisite Japanese walking gardens



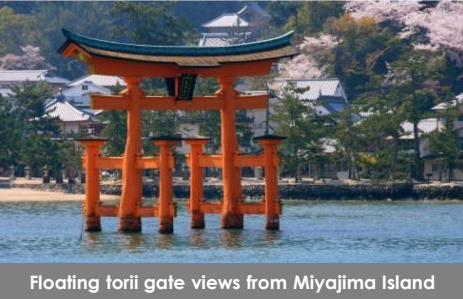
Exhilarating speed of the Bullet Train in first class



Sushi making lesson with a top chef



Meet the deer in Nara Park



Floating torii gate views from Miyajima Island



Spectacular views of Mt Aso caldera

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The tour is designed to be comfortable but also include a variety of experiences for those who like a bit of adventure. We make use of the various forms of Japan's superb public transport, but use coaches or taxis when it is the best option to save time or for convenience. Your luggage is sent by courier between each location so you can travel light. About two months before departure we will advise you of the confirmed tour details, including accommodation. You will also be offered the chance to see traditional entertainment such as kabuki based on their performance schedules.

Schedule Summary

Day	Schedule Summary	Transport	Hotel / Ryokan	Meals
Mar 23 rd	Flight to Tokyo		Overnight flight	
Mar 24 th	You are met on arrival in Japan and assisted with your transfer to the hotel in Tokyo. The group will get together in the early evening and you are invited to join us for dinner.	Airport bus or train	Tokyo Hotel	
Mar 25 th	<p>Our first day in Japan begins with a sushi making lesson with a top chef. You'll learn how to prepare the rice – the most important part of sushi – as well as cutting the fish correctly and how to shape the various styles of sushi. After the lesson, you'll be able to lunch on your own creations!</p> <p>The afternoon begins with a stroll through Hamarikyu gardens, an oasis of traditional Japan amongst the skyscrapers. We continue by boat on the Sumida River to Tokyo's oldest temple, Asakusa Kannon. Today ends with a walking tour of the Imperial Palace Gardens in the home of the Japanese royal family.</p>	Taxi Boat Local Train Walking	Tokyo Hotel	B, L
Mar 26 th	<p>We begin the day at the Tokyo National Museum, home to a vast collection of Japanese art and antiquities. We continue on to Akihabara, Tokyo's famous high-tech shopping district and recently the home to a number of maid cafés.</p> <p>The rest of the day is at your leisure - we would be happy to assist you with visiting Meiji Shrine, the trendy Omotesando shopping area or anywhere else in the capital that may be of personal interest.</p>	Walking Taxi Local train	Tokyo Hotel	B
Mar 27 th	<p>We depart the capital and make our first stop at the Taya Caves. The modest entrance belies an astonishing maze of tunnels and carved Buddhist images, all created by hand over a 500 year period. It's a short trip to Kamakura where we visit the Great Buddha and Tsuruoka Hachiman Shrine whilst enjoying views out to the Pacific Ocean. Today's destination is Hakone and our lakeside hotel with fabulous views across Lake Ashi to Mount Fuji.</p> <p>Due to our rural location, we offer dinner at the hotel as our guests.</p>	Coach	Hakone Hotel	B, D
Mar 28 th	<p>We have a day to enjoy the views of Mount Fuji as we explore the local area on the cable car, steam boat ride or our private coach when convenient. We go to Mt Komagatake and, weather permitting, see Mt Fuji as a majestic background.</p> <p>The day continues with a visit to the Hakone Open-Air Museum, featuring about 120 exhibits from well known sculptors in a park setting and an extensive collection of Picasso works in the Pavilion. On our way back to the hotel we will visit the Yosegi parquetry studio where we have special access to their workshop to see this very traditional form of inlaid woodcraft. You can enjoy a stroll by the lake or to the nearby Hakone Shrine before dinner.</p>	Steamer Cable Car Train Coach	Hakone Hotel	B, D
Mar 29 th	We leave Hakone and experience our first bullet train speeding west. The smooth ride in these spotless carriages makes it a very relaxing way to get from A to B. We stop in Okayama to see Korakuen, one of Japan's three famous "walking" gardens. From here we take a short bullet train journey to Hiroshima where we stay for two nights.	Bullet Train Taxi (luggage sent by courier)	Hiroshima Hotel	B
Mar 30 th	A local train takes us to the ferry across to Miyajima for a leisurely day on the island. We visit Itsukushima shrine in its serene setting over the tidal waters opposite the iconic torii gate. There is time to explore the island, visiting the island peak on foot or by cable car, and to browse through the village and shops. It is common to see Japanese style weddings taking place on this sacred island.	Local Train Ferry Cable car	Hiroshima Hotel	B

Luxury Japan	Day	Schedule Summary	Transport	Hotel / Ryokan	Meals
	Mar 31 st	We start the day with a short tram ride to visit the Atomic Dome and Peace Park. It is a moving experience to see the museum exhibition and the thousands of "peace" origami cranes sent daily to the park. We leave Hiroshima on the bullet train and connect to an express train following the coast down to Beppu. We see the devil's (thermal) pools and try a sand bath in Japan's most famous hot spring town. We then take a coach up into the mountain town of Yufuin where we have two nights to experience the hospitality, hot spring baths and fantastic traditional food in our Japanese Inn.	Tram Bullet Train Express Train Coach	Yufuin Japanese Inn	B, D
	Apr 1 st	We travel by coach towards the vast caldera that encircles Mount Aso, stopping first to see the superb panoramic views from the northern edge. The road steeply descends to the base of the caldera before continuing to the foot of Mount Aso and then we enjoy a nature trekking tour with the curator of Aso volcano museum at Kusasenri. On our return we visit the remarkable pottery village of Onta. We can see how a group of families continue to produce pottery with traditional methods dating back centuries.	Coach	Yufuin Japanese Inn	B, D
	Apr 2 nd	You have another opportunity to enjoy a traditional breakfast before the train journey back east towards Kyoto. We follow the inland route through the green landscapes of northern Kyushu before rejoining the bullet train one final time. We will reach Kyoto in the early afternoon. You can relax in your hotel or explore the adjoining modern station complex with its myriad of shops and stunning architecture. We would also be happy to assist those who would like to visit the nearby Sanjusangendo, which dates back to the 13th Century and houses 1001 statues of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy.	Express Train Bullet Train (luggage sent by courier)	Kyoto Hotel	B
	Apr 3 rd	We travel to the ancient capital of Nara to see the picturesque park, home to a number of temples and deer in beautiful landscaped gardens. From the huge sitting Buddha in Todaiji Temple we gently walk up to Nigatsu-do Temple. We have sweeping views across the park and the town beyond. We'll stroll through Nara-kōen Park, which is home to very friendly local deer who will follow you hoping for tasty treats! Moving on, we'll also visit the lovely Isui-en Strolling Gardens, where you can watch the carp and wander amongst the plum, cherry, and maple trees.	Local trains	Kyoto Hotel	B
	Apr 4 th	This morning starts at the Golden Pavilion, so called because the glittering temple is overlaid with glittering gold leaf. Nearby is the stone garden in Ryoan-ji Temple, a representation of Zen philosophy, consisting of fifteen stones placed in white sand representing islands in an expanding sea. We return to the hotel with a couple of hours free time to relax or visit Nijo Castle if you wish. Towards the end of the afternoon we visit Gion with its traditional wooden buildings, cobbled streets and renowned Geisha. This evening you are treated to a special private dinner with dancing and music performed by two Geisha. You will hear about this mysterious world and ask your own questions with the help of an interpreter. Keen photographers can also snap some truly memorable shots. After dinner we take a late evening stroll around the lit-up Kodaiji temple and gardens which is particularly atmospheric after dark.	Coach / Taxi Walking	Kyoto Hotel	B, D
	Apr 5 th	This morning starts in the foothills on the east side of Kyoto as we head up to Kiyomizu Temple. From here, there are fantastic views over the whole city. We return to central Kyoto and visit the bustling Nishiki market, a great place to find some unusual presents. In the afternoon we have tickets to watch the Miyako Odori, the annual Geisha Spring dances at the Gion Theatre. You are free for the rest of the day, and we would be delighted to guide you around the shops or help you visit somewhere of personal interest.	Coach / Taxi Walking	Kyoto Hotel	B
	Apr 6 th	After breakfast at the hotel, transfer to the airport for your flight home or follow your onward arrangements.	Airport Train		B

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Saturday 23 rd March	Flight to Tokyo	     
Sunday 24 th March Arrival in Japan Tokyo Conrad Hotel or Prince Gallery	You are met on arrival in Japan and assisted with your transfer to the hotel in Tokyo. The group will get together in the early evening and you are invited to join us for dinner.	
TOKYO	<p>Tokyo offers possibilities that no other city rivals: Karaoke in glass-walled rooms, more Michelin stars than Paris, and the world's busiest fish market and train station. Japan's capital is a truly mesmerizing place, and giant TV screens, flashing neon, and cutting edge technology make Tokyo one of the most futuristic and thrilling places on earth.</p> <p>The old downtown (shitamachi) still exists alongside the modern city. Tiny station eateries, ancient temples, geisha districts and traditional shopping streets – seemingly unchanged in the last century – rub shoulders with super-luxury hotels, sleek skyscrapers and high-tech shops.</p> <p>Tucked in amongst the concrete and the tangled though massively efficient train and metro lines, there are also pockets of tranquillity to be found in Tokyo's abundant parks and gardens, which provide a welcome respite from the fast pace of the metropolis.</p>	
Monday 25 th March Tokyo: Sushi lesson Asakusa Imperial Palace Gardens Conrad Hotel or Prince Gallery	<p>Our first day in Japan begins with a sushi making lesson with a top chef. You'll learn how to prepare the rice – the most important part of sushi – as well as cutting the fish correctly and how to shape the various styles of sushi. After the lesson, you'll be able to lunch on your own creations!</p> <p>The afternoon begins with a stroll through Hamarikyu gardens, an oasis of traditional Japan amongst the skyscrapers. We continue by boat on the Sumida River to Tokyo's oldest temple, Asakusa Kannon. Today ends with a walking tour of the Imperial Palace Gardens in the home of the Japanese royal family.</p>	
Sushi & Sashimi	Most famous of all the increasingly popular and amazingly varied Japanese cuisine, sushi actually refers to the sweet vinegar rice rather than the raw fish most usually eaten with it. More correctly, raw fish and other meat, including chicken and horse (served so fresh and prepared so carefully as to be safe to eat), is described as sashimi, meaning uncooked. In Japan, sushi and sashimi must be fresh and many Japanese people will tell you that some things are most delicious when eaten as fresh as possible - alive!	
Hamarikyu Gardens	Backed by skyscrapers and cloaked in green, Hama Rikyū Teien Garden is a peaceful oasis within Tokyo's metropolis. Once a Shogun's villa, where feudal lords hunted ducks in the tidal waterways, the garden was opened to the public in 1948 and features tidal ponds, plum groves, and a peony garden. We highly recommend stopping for a reviving cup of bitter, whipped green matcha tea at the garden's traditional Nakajima teahouse.	

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Asakusa	<p>Asakusa is as close to the old shitamachi downtown atmosphere as it's possible to get in modern day Tokyo. Centring on Sensō-ji Temple, Asakusa is vibrant, festive, and somewhat nostalgic – very little has changed from the 1950s when the area was re-constructed.</p> <p>Sensō-ji Temple, red, and pleasantly crowded with pigeons and sight-seers, is the oldest and most important Buddhist site in Tokyo, home to a small golden statue of the goddess Kannon which is so sacred that it cannot be viewed. The main entrance is marked by an impressively large lantern that hangs suspended below the kaminari-mon gate. The temple also boasts a lovely five storied pagoda, and is a popular spot for Tokyoites and visitors alike.</p> <p>Asakusa's streets are busy and festive, lined with stalls selling freshly grilled rice crackers, Buddhist charms, and paper fans. The buildings in the area mainly date back to the years immediately post-war, though some are older, and the local cinemas play old films, catering to nostalgic elderly Japanese tourists and pilgrims who remember when much of Tokyo looked very similar.</p> <p>Behind the temple lies Tokyo's most famous geisha quarter, where you can see the outsides of famous tea houses and occasionally catch a glimpse of the geisha on their way to work in the evenings.</p>	        
Imperial Palace Gardens	<p>Immaculately manicured, the Imperial Palace (Kōkyō) Gardens house Edo castle's impressive ruined keep, and are a wonderfully calm place within the hustle and bustle of the capital.</p> <p>The East Gardens – the only part of the palace generally open to the public – is both large and varied, and, being famous for cherry blossoms, azalea, irises and pine, is lovely at any season. Leave yourself enough time to explore both the castle ruins and the Japanese style garden.</p>	
Tuesday 26 th March Tokyo: National Museum Akihabara Meiji Shrine Conrad Hotel or Prince Gallery	<p>We begin the day at the Tokyo National Museum, home to a vast collection of Japanese art and antiquities. We continue on to Akihabara, Tokyo's famous high-tech shopping district and recently the home to a number of maid cafés.</p> <p>The rest of the day is at your leisure - we would be happy to assist you with visiting Meiji Shrine, the trendy Omotesando shopping area or anywhere else in the capital that may be of personal interest.</p>	
Tokyo National Museum	<p>The Tokyo National Museum was established in 1872, and is the oldest Japanese national museum and the largest art museum in Japan. The museum collects, houses, and preserves a comprehensive collection of art works and archaeological objects of Asia, focusing on Japan. The museum holds over 110,000 objects, which includes 87 Japanese National Treasures and 610 Important Cultural Properties.</p> <p>Located inside Ueno Park, the facilities consist of the Honkan (Japanese Gallery), Tōyōkan (Asian Gallery), Hyōkeikan, Heiseikan, Hōryū-ji Hōmotsukan (Gallery of Hōryū-ji Treasures), as well as Shiryōkan (the Research and Information Center), and other facilities. There are restaurants and shops within the museum's premises, as well as outdoor exhibitions and a garden where visitors can enjoy seasonal views.</p>	
Akihabara	<p>Akihabara – known colloquially as Akiba – is the heart of Tokyo's electronic district, and is something of a Mecca for otaku of all stripes.</p> <p>Which shops to visit depend very much on what you're looking for, as some specialize in one thing only, while others have nearly every electronic device imaginable.</p> <p>Some of the best bargains are to be had off the main Chūō-dōri street – though be aware that some of the smaller shops are less prepared to deal with non-Japanese speakers. Also, if you are purchasing electronics, keep in mind such issues such as voltage differences and the possible lack of international warranties.</p> <p>If you're shopping seriously, we highly recommend comparing prices before you purchase. There are also second hand electronics stores for the more budget-conscious. Yodobashi Camera has a good range of electronics, and we also recommend stopping by Radio Kaikan and Robot Tsukumu.</p> <p>The arcades have some of the best variety in Tokyo as well, with good selections of both modern and classic games. Akihabara is also famous for maid cafes, and we recommend @home café, on Kanda-myōjin Street, where you can take refreshment in a unique environment.</p>	

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Meiji Jingu	<p>Tokyo's largest shrine, Meiji-jingū, covers 175 acres and houses over 100,000 trees – making it a lush escape from the hard angles of the city. The shrine itself is austere and built using cypress and copper in the nagare-zukuri style, and though often busy with tourists and pilgrims is still extremely popular for weddings, which are a treat to see.</p> <p>We particularly recommend the inner garden, which pre-dates the shrine itself and is said to have been designed by the Meiji Emperor for his wife. Particularly beautiful when the masses of irises – much loved by the Meiji Empress – are in bloom, it is a tranquil spot during the remainder of the year and boasts a pond with large colourful koi and an interesting well.</p>	
Omotesando	<p>A broad, straight street lined with an avenue of zelkova trees, Omotesando Dōri is where sub culture meets high fashion, and should you need to pick up any high-end brand goods, this is the place to do it.</p> <p>Omotesando also offers wonderful people-watching, any number of excellent cafes and restaurants, and there are a few architectural gems in the area too – in particular Dior's glass tower, or Tod's Omotesando building, which echoes the shape of the local zelkova trees in its structure.</p>	
Wednesday 27th March <i>Tokyo – Hakone: Taya Caves Kamakura</i> <i>Yamano Hotel</i>	<p>We depart the capital and make our first stop at the Taya Caves. The modest entrance hides an astonishing maze of tunnels and carved Buddhist images, all created by hand over a 500 year period. It's a short trip to Kamakura where we visit the Great Buddha and Tsuruoka Hachiman Shrine whilst enjoying views out to the Pacific Ocean. Today's destination is Hakone and our lakeside hotel with fabulous views across Lake Ashi to Mount Fuji.</p> <p>Due to our rural location, we offer dinner at the hotel as our guests.</p>	
Taya Caves	<p>From roughly between the years 1200 to 1700, Shingon Buddhist monks excavated an underground maze of tunnels near Kamakura as a site for spiritual training. Damp, silent corridors lead to small, domed meditation chambers with walls and ceilings carved with fantastic creatures and Buddhist images, and on down to the spring room with a great turtle and birds carved on the walls. Taking a small flashlight will be helpful to see those carvings that the light from the candle you are provided with does not reach.</p>	
Kamakura	<p>About 50km south west of Tokyo, the lovely seaside town of Kamakura is known for its large variety of shrines and temples, as well as a giant bronze Buddha.</p> <p>The Buddha, the second largest in Japan, was once housed in a grand temple, but a tsunami tore down the building in the 15th century, and the statue has since weathered the elements from a quiet clearing in the trees. The peaceful holiday feel of the town belies the power once wielded here: from 1192 to 1333 Kamakura was the seat of the shogun's government. Many of the area's great temples date from the Kamakura Shogunate, or bakufu, and there is no shortage of interesting historic sights.</p>	
The Great Buddha	<p>Kamakura's great Buddha, or Daibutsu, is undoubtedly the town's most famous sight. The 13th Century statue dominates the grounds of Kōtoku-in temple. The temple is most easily reached from Hase Station on the Enoden line or from the Daibutsu-mae bus stop from stops 1 through 6 at Kamakura Station. We however recommend the Daibutsu Hiking Course , which leads from here past shrines and gardens for a peaceful 3 kilometres.</p>	
Hachimangu Shrine	<p>Properly known as Tsurugaoka Hachiman-gū, this imposing shrine is Kamakura's most important Shinto shrine, and on holidays and festivals this is made apparent by the happy crowds of visitors. The shrine grounds are particularly lovely, including as they do a pond (the lotus blossom in mid-summer) and Japanese-style bridges, and the wide steps leading up to the main building give the shrine a stately air. The shrine is open from 7a.m. to 9p.m. and entrance is free. The shrine can be reached on foot from Kamakura Station's east entrance in about ten minutes and from the Enoden Station in about the same amount of time.</p>	

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HAKONE	<p>The most famous of the fifty-three stations on the old Tōkaidō Road from Kyoto to Edo (Tokyo's ancient name), Hakone is most famous for its peaceful lake, steaming hot springs, and above all, for its views of Mount Fuji. A popular holiday spot, Hakone has a number of museums and sights are linked by ropeways, cable-cars and funicular or cliff railways.</p> <p>Lake Ashi (Ashinoko) marks the centre of a large national park, and the mountains around, as well as old sections of the cobbled Tōkaidō Road provide excellent walking trails, with Mount Fuji making a memorable backdrop. The area is still volcanically active, and the Great Boiling Valley is full of strange sulphurous springs.</p>	  
<p>Thursday 28th March</p> <p>Hakone: Lake Ashi Boiling Valley Open Air Museum Woodwork Studio</p> <p>Yamano Hotel</p>	<p>We have a day to enjoy the views of Mount Fuji as we explore the local area on the cable car, steam boat ride or our private coach when convenient. We go to Mt Komagatake and, weather permitting, see Mt Fuji as a majestic background.</p> <p>The day continues with a visit to the Hakone Open-Air Museum, featuring about 120 exhibits from well known sculptors in a park setting and an extensive collection of Picasso works in the Pavilion. On our way back to the hotel we will visit the Yosegi parquetry studio where we have special access to their workshop to see this very traditional form of inlaid woodcraft. You can enjoy a stroll by the lake or to the nearby Hakone Shrine before dinner.</p>	  
Mt Fuji	<p>Reaching its conical summit 3776 meters above the Pacific, Mount Fuji is Japan's tallest mountain, and one of the country's most impressive symbols. The dormant volcano last erupted three centuries ago, but still demands respect in a country where Shinto gods, or kami, are believed to inhabit the natural features of the landscape. Legend relates that Fuji-san, as the mountain is called in Japanese, is home to the goddess Konohana Sakuya Hime, and there are shrines in her honour at both the base and the peak. Rendered most famously in Hokusai's wood-block prints, Mount Fuji tends to be coy, and unless the sky is very clear you'll need to be up early or lucky with the weather in order to see the mountain in all its splendour. Although you can catch glimpses of Mount Fuji from parts of Gōra, the best views are to be had from the Great Boiling Valley and from Lake Ashi.</p>	
Open Air Museum	<p>Chōkoku-no-mori, ("the sculpture forest"), an intriguingly-named station on the Hakone Tozan railway line, is home to the Hakone Open Air Museum. The museum houses over 300 works by Picasso alone, as well as sculptures by many other famous artists, including Henry Moore, Rodin, and Miro.</p> <p>We highly recommend taking advantage of the hot spring foot bath to rejuvenate your tired feet (you'll want to take a handkerchief or a small towel to dry off with). Simply shed your shoes and socks, roll up your trousers, and lower your feet in to soak. Keep in mind that every foot bath has a hot end, closer to where the water flows in, and that further towards the other end the water will be somewhat cooler.</p>	
<p>Friday 29th March</p> <p>Hakone – Hiroshima: Korakuen Gardens</p> <p>Sheraton Hotel</p>	<p>We leave Hakone and experience our first bullet train speeding west. The smooth ride in these spotless carriages make it is a very relaxing way to get from A to B. We stop in Okayama to see Korakuen, one of Japan's three famous "walking" gardens. From here we take a short bullet train journey to Hiroshima where we stay for two nights.</p>	

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Shinkansen	<p>The Shinkansen, or Bullet train, is an amazing experience in itself – travelling so smoothly at such a speed. Watching the landscape whizz by, you realise how mountainous Japan is, and how this inaccessibility has protected the vegetation and wildlife from human impact – nearly two thirds of the land is still forested. Surprisingly, the extreme landscape did not deter construction of the Shinkansen line for the 1964 Olympics. It was carefully engineered to use the most direct routes, tunnelled through mountains and on tracks over suburban areas, and, can be faster than flying between major cities.</p>	
Korakuen	<p>One of the three most famous gardens in Japan (the others being Kairaku-en in Mito and Kenroku-en in Kanazawa), Kōraku-en looks very much now as it did on its completion in 1700. Open to the public since 1884, Kōraku-en is full of gorgeous views, green lawns (a surprising and unusual feature in traditional Japanese gardens), and architectural treasures, including the unusual Ryuten Pavilion which houses a running stream.</p> <p>We recommend a visit to the Nishiki-ga-oka Hill, where many wild birds visit the lush cypress woods. There is an excellent view of the Kaya-no-ike pond from the Renchi-ken Teahouse, and the tea fields (which are a more bitter variety of tea than that commonly drunk today) are well worth visiting.</p>	 
HIROSHIMA	<p>Rebuilt after the Second World War, Hiroshima is a modern city. Nevertheless, the Atomic Bomb Dome and Peace Park are poignant reminders of the city's tragic past, as are the swarms of origami cranes made by school children as symbols of peace.</p> <p>The Peace Memorial Museum documents the bomb and its aftermath, with exhibits demonstrating the destruction of the city, its people and the events leading up to it.</p>	 
Saturday 30 th March Hiroshima: Miyajima Island Sheraton Hotel	<p>A local train takes us to the ferry across to Miyajima for a leisurely day on the island. We visit Itsukushima shrine in its serene setting over the tidal waters opposite the iconic torii gate. There is time to explore the island, visiting the island peak on foot or by cable car, and to browse through the village and shops. It is common to see weddings taking place on this sacred island.</p>	
MIYAJIMA	<p>Across the a narrow stretch of the Seto Inland Sea from Hiroshima is the small island shrine of Ikutsushima. Commonly known as Miyajima (lit. 'shrine island') for its principal Ikutsushima Shrine, the whole island has long been considered sacred by association.</p> <p>Miyajima is best recognised for its iconic red torii gate – an element of what is said to be one of the three best views in Japan. The spectacular torii, built on tidal sands, faces the majestic Itsukushima shrine at the foot of Mount Misen. As the tide comes, sweeping under and around the ancient shrine, the torii appears to float on the sea. The shrine itself extends on stilts over the water, and at high tide the whole shrine appears to be floating on the waves.</p> <p>Historically, to avoid spiritual 'contamination', stepping foot on the island itself was allowed for devout men only, with women banned completely. Common men could approach the shrine (built specially out over the water rather than on the land), but only by passing through the large torii gate in the sea by boat first. Nowadays customs are more relaxed, but births and deaths are kept on the mainland as much as possible, and burial on the island is still legally forbidden.</p> <p>The local deer are not subject to any such restrictions, or indeed any interference at all – according to the Shinto religion they are the messengers of the gods. They wander the island freely, and they will happily approach anybody they think might have food for them.</p>	

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Itsukushima Shrine	<p>Ikutsushima Shrine (Ikutsushima-jinja) is built out over the water, as a spiritual threshold that separates the sacred island from the profane outer world. With its large torii gate standing nearby, it forms the iconic image of Miyajima.</p> <p>The shrine itself was first built in the 6th Century, and took its present form in the 12th Century, though typhoons have caused periodic reconstruction over the years – most recently in 2004. The shrine's buildings are best visited at high tide, when the water sweeps in below and the whole complex appears to float on the waves. At low tide you can explore the structures from below.</p>	
Mt Misen	<p>The forested peak which rises up behind Miyajima's striking torii gate, Mount Misen is 535 metres high, which makes for a short if strenuous climb, though there's also a cable car to near the top if you're not feeling energetic.</p> <p>In addition to the striking views of the island-dotted Seto Inland Sea that can be had from its peak, Mount Misen is home to the not-so-timid sacred deer, who may well follow you a little way along the hiking trails hoping for food. If you are lucky you might also spot the local troupe of Japanese macaques.</p>	 
Miyajima Tides	<p>At high tide, the Itsukushima torii appears to float above the waves, and the ocean sweeps in under the shrine. If you have time, boat trips out to the gate can be arranged when the water is in, or when the tide is out you can walk out and explore the shrine gate or the buildings from below – though be sure to wear shoes you don't mind getting muddy!</p> <p>On March 30th 2019, low tide should be at 11:30am and high tide at 16:40.</p>	 
<p>Sunday March 31st</p> <p>Hiroshima – Yufuin; Peace Park Beppu</p> <p>Saigakukan Ryokan</p>	<p>We start the day with a short tram ride to visit the Atomic Dome and Peace Park. It is a moving experience to see the museum exhibition and the thousands of "peace" origami cranes sent daily to the park.</p> <p>We leave Hiroshima on the bullet train and connect to an express train following the coast down to Beppu. We see the devil's (thermal) pools and try a sand bath in Japan's most famous hot spring town. We then take a coach up into the mountain town of Yufuin where we have two nights to experience the hospitality, hot spring baths and fantastic traditional food in our Japanese Inn.</p>	 
Peace Park	<p>Visiting Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park and Museum is likely to be most moving part of your holiday to Japan. The spacious park is full of memorials dedicated to those who lost their lives on August the 6th 1945, as well as those who later succumbed to diseases, and is also home to the famous Atomic Bomb Dome.</p> <p>The paper cranes found everywhere represent solidarity with these victims and an on-going prayer for world peace. The Peace Memorial Museum is in two buildings within the park, and while visiting it can be an upsetting and unsettling experience for many, it should not be missed.</p>	
BEPPU	<p>Beppu is Japan's onsen (hot spring) capital, containing nine major pools sometimes referred to as the 'Nine Hells of Beppu'. It is a beautiful setting – the sea to one side and mountains on the other with onsen always evident by their columns of rising steam. Most people walking around Beppu wear traditional yukata (kimono style cotton robes) provided by their Ryokan. For the really ambitious there is usually time to try hot sand baths at Takegawara Spa.</p>	
YUFUIN	<p>Yufuin is a delightful hot springs town, where you can enjoy the relaxation of a ryokan stay. In this little onsen town you can admire the picturesque views of Mount Yufudake, and rivers flow down and across the valley. In your luxurious ryokan, you can experience the high standard of Japanese hospitality. After taking a bath in your ryokan's hot spring, or onsen, enjoy a traditional Japanese kaiseki meal.</p>	

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Day	Suggested Schedule	
Ryokan	<p>Staying at a ryokan allows you to enjoy the very best of Japanese hospitality in surroundings little changed in the past century. As you enter your room, the distinctive rice-straw scent of tatami floors and paper and wood doors set the scene. Leaving your slippers at the door, the yukata (casual cotton kimono) are neatly folded, ready for you to change and head to the onsen baths. Wandering the hot spring town in your yukata before dinner is the traditional way to explore the area and work up an appetite. In the evening, enjoy a sumptuous kaiseki meal, with dozens of tiny dishes brought to you in stages by your hostess. Most meals will include sushi or sashimi, a grilled dish, a fried dish, and a simmered dish, among others, and your waitress will help you navigate any self-cooking dishes and sauces. You may not recognise some of them, but you should certainly try them all. With meticulous attention to aesthetics and detail, this is as much a feast for the eyes as the stomach.</p>	 
Onsen	<p>A volcanic archipelago with a high rainfall, Japan is a land of abundant natural hot water, and onsen are popular throughout the country. Nothing is as intensely soothing as a soak in geothermic onsen pools, and many of the minerals in the water are thought to have healing properties .</p> <p>Onsen bathing has its own etiquette, which is easy enough to follow: men and women enter separate pools, leaving their clothes in wicker baskets in separate changing areas (often marked by a red curtain with the character 女 for women and a blue curtain with the character 男for men). The bathing experience is almost a ritual: bathers scrub themselves from head to toe and rinse thoroughly before stepping gently into the piping hot pool.</p> <p>Bathing naked with strangers with only a small towel for cover can be a daunting experience, but once in the steaming water, concerns about modesty melt away. Calming, cleansing, relaxing and nearly meditative, it's a liberating experience that's well worth the initial trepidation.</p>	
Monday 1 st April Yufuin; Mt Aso Onta Pottery Saigakukan Ryokan	<p>We travel by coach towards the vast caldera that encircles Mount Aso, stopping first to see the superb panoramic views from the northern edge. The road steeply descends to the base of the caldera before continuing to the foot of Mount Aso and then we enjoy a nature trekking tour with the curator of Aso volcano museum at Kusasenri. On our return we visit the remarkable pottery village of Onta. We can see how a group of families continue to produce pottery with traditional methods dating back centuries.</p>	  
Mt Aso	<p>Peaking at some 1500m above sea level, Mount Aso is one of the largest active volcanoes in the world. The present caldera was formed as a result of eruptions occurring over 90,000–300,000 years ago, and is now home to city Aso as well as other towns and villages. Its rising fumes remind visitors of the awesome natural forces at work below ground, while its green-blue bubbling waters are a sight to see. The views are incredible and have a host of myths legends attached.</p> <p>Mount Aso's main attraction is the impressively active Nakadake, up which you can drive, walk, or take a cable car. The crater contains a steaming lake of bubbling sulphuric acid, which, if the winds are right, you can peer into. The poisonous gasses are closely monitored and the viewing areas are sometimes closed to visitors – and should not be visited at all by those with asthma or any respiratory problems.</p>	 
Onta Pottery Village	<p>Since the opening of the original kiln over 300 years ago, Onta-yaki pottery has established its simple yet tasteful style. In the villages hidden in the mountains surrounding Hita City, ten kilns still operate using the same traditional techniques and produce pottery pieces which are mostly used in casual, everyday settings.</p> <p>The ten families that live today in Onta can trace their lineage to the three original founders of the Onta kiln in 1705. Each family passed their pottery knowledge and skills from fathers to sons and this patrilineal practice has helped to preserve Onta's original pottery-making techniques in its purest form despite three centuries of generational succession.</p> <p>The traditional way of making Onta-yaki, and the skills passed on to the younger generation all helped it to become listed in Japan's Important Intangible Cultural Assets in 1993.</p>	 

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Day	Suggested Schedule	
Tuesday 2 nd April Yufuin – Kyoto: Sanjusangendo Granvia Hotel	<p>You have another opportunity to enjoy a traditional breakfast before the train journey back east towards Kyoto. We follow the inland route through the green landscapes of northern Kyushu before rejoining the bullet train one final time. We will reach Kyoto in the early afternoon. You can relax in your hotel or explore the adjoining modern station complex with its myriad of shops and stunning architecture. We would also be happy to assist those who would like to visit the nearby Sanjusangendo, which. dates back to the 13th Century and houses 1001 statues of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy.</p>	
KYOTO	<p>Kyoto, the most traditional of all Japan's major cities, has a phenomenal collection of temples and shrines, dating back to its days as the capital city and before. There are about 2000 temples in total, many having national significance, which give the city a relaxed and traditional atmosphere.</p> <p>Kyoto is where Japanese people go to see Japan, and overseas it is well known for its lovely Zen gardens, the most famous of which is the raked gravel and fifteen stones at Ryōan-ji, as well as its iconic Geisha, best glimpsed in the early evenings in the Gion district.</p> <p>Kyoto is also renowned for its elegant kaiseki cuisine, and is the original home of the tea ceremony. Like nearly all of Japan's cities, modernisation has left its share of concrete in Kyoto, and often the most beautiful of the traditional buildings rub shoulders with less elegant post-war constructions or modern skyscrapers.</p>	
Temples & Shrines	<p>Still central to the rituals and ceremonies of Japanese life, Buddhist Temples and Shinto Shrines remain some of Japan's most intriguing and popular sights. Shrines and Temples serve as a cultural focus, and New Year celebrations, elaborate wedding ceremonies, dignified funerals, and riotous festivals keep people in touch with their past as well as establishing a sense of place and community.</p> <p>Shrines and temples peacefully coexist and even sometimes overlap in Japan, where the native Shinto kami and Buddhist saints are equally revered. Shinto Shrines can be distinguished by their distinctive torii gates which mark the entrance to holy ground, as well as their architecture which tends to consist of traditional Japanese styles. Buddhist Temples, on the other hand, often reflect Chinese architectural styles, and, though famed for their Zen-style gardens, are most easily distinguished by their peaceful graveyards.</p>	
Sanjusangendo	<p>Sanjūsangen-dō is officially known as Rengeō-in. A Tendai Buddhist temple, it was built in 1164 to house 1001 statues of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy. A fire in 1249 destroyed the hall and most of the statues, and reconstruction was completed in 1266.</p> <p>Though the golden statues are said to have one thousand arms apiece, most visitors notice fairly quickly that they have only forty. The Buddhist formula is that each arm can save an impressive 25 worlds.</p>	
Wednesday 3 rd April Kyoto: Nara Todaiji Isuien Kasuga Taisha Granvia Hotel	<p>We travel to the ancient capital of Nara to see the picturesque park, home to a number of temples and deer in beautiful landscaped gardens. From the huge sitting Buddha in Todaiji Temple we gently walk up to Nigatsu-do Temple. We have sweeping views across the park and the town beyond. We'll stroll through Nara-kōen Park, which is home to very friendly local deer who will follow you hoping for tasty treats! Moving on, we'll also visit the lovely Isui-en Strolling Gardens, where you can watch the carp and wander amongst the plum, cherry, and maple trees.</p>	
NARA	<p>Nara is another ex-capital of Japan – the Imperial family ruled the country from here between 710 and 794 – and its legacy is a varied collection of ancient temples spread throughout a vast park.</p> <p>The most famous of these is Tōdai-ji, evidence to the strong Chinese influence during the Nara Period, home to a giant bronze statue of the Buddha, and thought to be the largest free-standing wooden structure in the world.</p> <p>From here you can take the meandering paths through park dotted with temples and longer rambles up into the foothills of the neighbouring mountains.</p>	



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Nara Park	Nara's main sights are arranged in the grassy Nara-kōen, through which friendly deer freely wander (you can buy special deer-food sembei crackers which will make you popular). We suggest starting at Tōdai-ji, Nara's most important and impressive, and home to a Japan's largest Buddha statue. Though the current temple structure is only two thirds the size of the original, Tōdai-ji remains the largest free-standing wooden structure in the world.	
Todaiji Temple	Todaiji ("Great Eastern Temple") is one of Japan's most famous and historically significant temples and a landmark of Nara. The temple was constructed in 752 as the head temple of all provincial Buddhist temples of Japan and grew so powerful that the capital was moved from Nara to Nagaoka in 784 in order to lower the temple's influence on government affairs. Todaiji's main hall, the Daibutsuden (Big Buddha Hall) is the world's largest wooden building; despite the fact that the present reconstruction of 1692 is only two thirds of the original temple hall's size. The massive building houses Japan's largest and most famous bronze statue of Buddha (Daibutsu). At 15 meters tall, the seated Buddha is an impressive sight and his open hand alone is as big as a human. Several smaller Buddhist statues and models of the former and current buildings are also on display in the Daibutsuden Hall. Another popular attraction is a pillar with a hole in its base that is the same size as the Daibutsu's nostril. It is said that those who can squeeze through this opening will be granted enlightenment in their next life.	
Isuien	Isuien is a very pretty Japanese garden close to Todaiji Temple. The garden is divided into two parts; Front & Rear, with several tea houses found in both parts. The front garden is older and dates back to the mid 17th century. The rear garden, which is larger, is more modern, having been built in 1899 by a wealthy local merchant.	
Thursday 4 th April	This morning starts at the Golden Pavilion, so called because the glittering temple is overlaid with glittering gold leaf. Nearby is the stone garden in Ryōan-ji Temple, a representation of Zen philosophy, consisting of fifteen stones placed in white sand representing islands in an expanding sea. We return to the hotel with a couple of hours free time to relax or visit Nijo Castle if you wish. Towards the end of the afternoon we visit Gion with its traditional wooden buildings, cobbled streets and renowned Geisha.	
Kyoto: Golden Pavilion Ryoanji Nijo Castle Gion	This evening you are treated to a special private dinner with dancing and music performed by two Geisha. You will have a chance to hear about this mysterious world and ask your own questions with the help of an interpreter. Keen photographers can also snap some truly memorable shots. After dinner we take a late evening stroll around the lit-up Kodaiji temple and gardens which is particularly atmospheric after dark.	
Granvia Hotel		
Kinkakuji	Generally known as the Golden Pavilion, Kinkaku-ji was built in 1398 by Shogun Ashikaga, and served as a flourishing centre of the arts before becoming a Rinzai Zen temple in 1419. Though the gardens are superb, featuring a large pond with islands representing the landscape of the Buddhist creation myth, it is the Golden Pavilion itself that people come to see: Gold plated and startling against the backdrop of trees. The pavilion, reflecting in the mirror lake, is justifiably one of the best known images of Japan, although the building itself is a recent but faithful reproduction of the 15th century original.	
Ryoanji	Nestled at the base of Kyoto's Mount Kinugasa, Ryōan-ji Temple dates back to 983, though the temple was officially founded in 1467, and a number of the present buildings are reconstructions dating to 1800. More importantly, Ryōan-ji is home to Japan's first, and arguably best, kare-sansui (dry landscape) garden. The garden is a masterpiece of Zen art, consisting of white raked gravel and fifteen stones, of which only fourteen can be seen at any one time. Although it can often be busy and crowded, the stone garden is not to be missed. We also recommend visiting the temple buildings, and strolling through the lush gardens that surround the large pond.	

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Nijo Castle	<p>Completed in 1603 by Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate, Nijō Castle is listed as a UNESCO world heritage site. The architecture was ostentatious for its day – designed to illuminate the Shogun's growing strength in contrast to the emperor's dwindling power. Don't miss the 'nightingale floors', made to creak on purpose to give away any intruding assassins. The castle's famous garden, adjoining the Ninomaru Palace, is attributed to the renowned landscape architect Kōbori Enshū. The garden features islands in a pond, and is said to be typical of the excessive designs of the Edo period.</p>
Gion	<p>Called geiko in the Kyoto dialect, geisha are disciplined artists under an elaborately-coiffed exterior, and Kyoto geisha's famously rigorous apprenticeship as maiko ensures that the women who choose the lifestyle are talented and dedicated musicians and dancers. Geisha have, for many years, entertained at the most exclusive and important gatherings in Japan, and are proud of their status both as artists and national symbols. Gion, the most famous and largest of the Kyoto geisha districts, is best visited between 10:00 and 10:30 in the morning, when the geisha can often be seen on their way to classes. You can also usually catch glimpses of geisha on their way to work in the early evening.</p>
Friday 5 th April Kyoto: Kiyomizu Temple Nishiki market Miyako Odori Granvia Hotel	<p>This morning starts in the foothills on the east side of Kyoto as we head up to Kiyomizu Temple. From here, there are fantastic views over the whole city. We return to central Kyoto and visit the bustling Nishiki market, a great place to find some unusual presents.</p> <p>In the afternoon we have tickets to watch the Miyako Odori, the annual Geisha Spring dances at the Gion Theatre. You are free for the rest of the day, and we would be delighted to guide you around the shops or help you visit somewhere of personal interest.</p>
Kiyomizu Temple	<p>Overlooking Kyoto from the base of the eastern mountains, Kiyomizu Temple takes its name from the pure water of the cascade which runs down the hill behind the complex. Founded in 780, this temple of the Buddhist Hossō sect is older than Kyoto itself, though Kiyomizu-dera has been rebuilt many times over the years – most recently in 1633. The temple is renowned for its construction, which uses no nails to support the elaborate wooden structure of the main hall. In addition to the three streams of clear water, believed to promote health, longevity, and scholastic success, the temple precincts house Shinto shrines dedicated to love, and many hopefuls come to try to walk, eyes closed, between the "love stones".</p>
Nishiki Market	<p>Nishiki Market – a long, narrow covered street packed with shops selling local specialties – is sometimes called Kyoto's kitchen, and it's easy to see why. Barrels of fresh and pickled vegetables spill out into the street, and the air is fragrant with the savoury smell of grilling sembei crackers and steaming fish dumplings. Many of the shops offer free samples, and the Nishiki Market is a wonderful way to stock up on very Japanese picnic supplies for lunch, although there are plenty of restaurants as well if your appetite has been whet by the tastings.</p> <p>For more lasting souvenirs, we highly recommend the Aritsugi Knife Shop, which dates back to 1560 and stocks all kind of beautifully handmade kitchen equipment, from knives through strainers to the special cutters for making vegetables into flower shapes. Dintora sells Japanese spices, and is a wonderful place to pick up flavourings for your favourite foodie or to recreate Kyoto dishes at home. Fu, or wheat gluten, which is a staple of Buddhist vegetarian cooking, can be purchased at Fuka and also travels well.</p>
Miyako Odori	<p>The geisha of Gion are perhaps the most famous, having appeared countless times in literature, and most recently in Arthur Golden's fictional <i>Memoirs of a Geisha</i> and the subsequent film. The Miyako Odori (Dance of the Capital) has been held every April in Kyoto since 1872, and the Geiko (Geisha) and Maiko (apprentice Geisha) still carry out their traditional annual dances during the height of the cherry blossom season throughout the month of April. The most popular of these dances are the Miyako Odori "Cherry Blossom Dances" and "Dances of the Old Capital." Spectators flock from all across Japan and the world to attend the event.</p>
Saturday 6 th April	<p>After breakfast at the hotel, transfer to the airport for your flight home or follow your onward arrangements.</p>



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Accommodation

Tokyo – The Conrad Hotel

5 Star, Deluxe Class Modern Hotel

- Tokyo's Conrad Hotel is one of Japan's best, with impeccable service, incredible views, and irresistibly luxurious rooms.
- The Shiodome location is ideal for sight-seeing - just minutes on foot from the Tokyo Wholesale Fish Markets at Tsukiji, and even closer to the Hamarikyu Gardens that are overlooked by the Conrad's garden rooms.
- The Conrad offers unparalleled dining options, with Cerise serving French Cuisine, and China Blue, arguably Japan's best Chinese restaurant, which offers Michelin-starred modern Chinese dishes. Breakfasts are served at Cerise.

• <http://conradhotels1.hilton.com/en/ch/hotel>



Or Tokyo – The Prince Gallery Kioicho

5 Star, Deluxe Class Modern Hotel

The hotel, which opened in 2016, is situated atop 15 floors of offices so it won't come as much of a surprise that the rooms at the Prince Hotel all have splendid, unobstructed views. With 250 rooms and 11 suites, it is a large-scale, distinctly modern hotel, with much of the electronic and creative prowess commonly associated with Japan. One of the hotel's unique selling points is that it is not surrounded by any other tall buildings, meaning that the view from the hotel rooms is really quite spectacular, and like a tour of Tokyo in itself. Rooms have one, entirely glass wall, with a long "day bed" in front of it, meaning you can sit and look out across the city for miles, right the way from Tokyo station to Shinjuku station, from the comfort of your own room. Even from the bathroom, as you soak in the bath after a long day of sightseeing, you can look out over the beautiful Tokyo skyline. Then, at the touch of a button, you can obscure the bathrooms glass and get changed in privacy. It's little touches like these which make the hotel feel so luxurious.

• <http://www.princehotels.com/wp-content/princehotels-static/en/kioicho/>



Hakone – Yamano Odakyu Hotel or similar

4 Star, Superior First Class Modern Hotel

Odakyu Hotel de Yama is nestled on the shores of Lake Ashi with superb views of Mt Fuji from the extensive gardens. Mt Fuji is one of those iconic images but regular visitors to Japan will tell you that it often becomes shrouded in cloud. The clearest views are usually had in the early morning hence we have chosen this hotel to make sure you will have the best chance to see this majestic sight during your stay in Hakone. It is very quiet here and a stroll by the lake or to the nearby shrine is highly recommended. You are away from the touristy areas but it is just a pleasant 15 minute walk to the small town of Moto Hakone. For your comfort we offer dinner at the hotel in one of their excellent restaurants. This is also a good chance to try some natural hot spring baths.

www.odakyu-hotel.co.jp/yama-hotel/english/

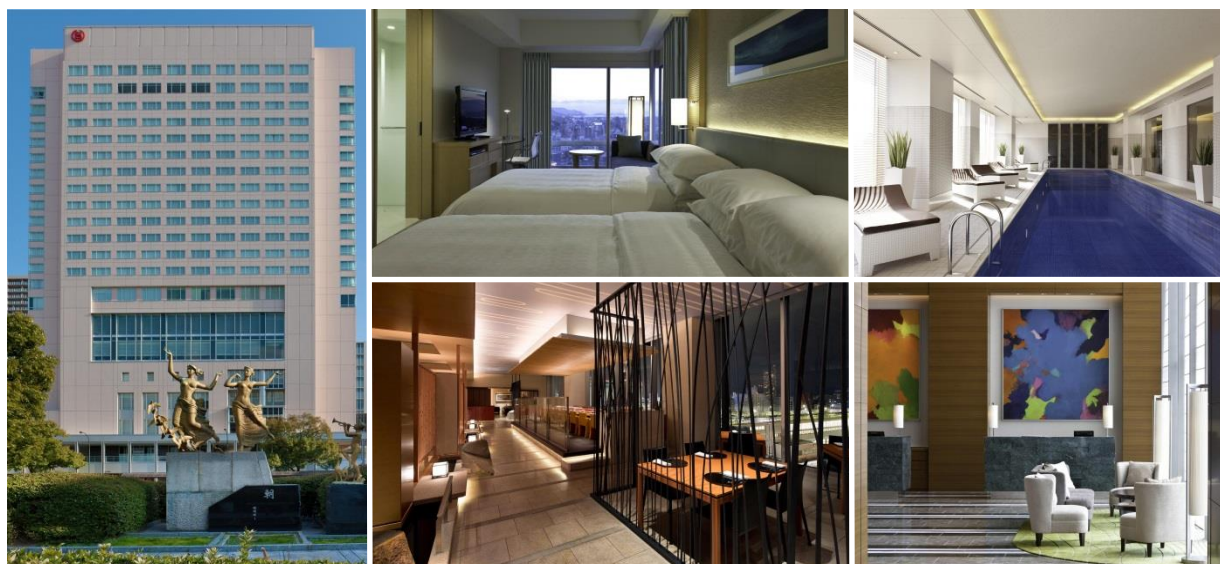


Hiroshima – Sheraton Hotel

5 Star, Superior Class Modern Hotel

The Sheraton Hiroshima opened its doors during the Spring 2011 and quickly became established as the best place to stay in Hiroshima. This very modern hotel offers comfortable rooms and excellent facilities with a swimming pool, spa and fitness centre. It is conveniently located next to Hiroshima Station which makes for a smooth tour. From here it is a 15 minute tram ride to the Peace Park and a 25 minute train ride to the ferry across to Miyajima Island.

www.starwoodhotels.com/sheraton/property/overview/index.html?propertyID=3595



Beppu – Saigakukan or similar

Ryokan, Traditional Japanese Inn

Saigakukan is a traditional Ryokan nestling on the hillside on one side of Yufuin village, with superb views across the plateau to Mt Yukudake. With only 24 rooms, there is an intimate feel enhanced by the authentic architecture and rural setting. Your room has tatami mats and sliding doors and also beds for maximum comfort. If you prefer futons we are very happy to prepare those for you. The panoramic vista truly enhances the bathing experience from the outdoor hot spring baths, and if you are looking for something more intimate then the private wooden private wooden or stone bath will not disappoint. You are provided with "yukata" robes to change into after the hot spring baths and it is traditional to wear these for the rest of the evening.

Your kaiseki dinner is served with many small dishes including seasonal vegetables, and all carefully prepared with exquisite presentation. Ingredients are locally sourced and mainly organic. After dinner you can relax in the "bar" area and relax with your view onto the subtly lit Japanese garden. We have planned an easy schedule here so you can make the most of the facilities.

<http://www.saigakukan.co.jp/en/>



Kyoto – Granvia Hotel or similar

5 Star, Superior Class Modern Hotel

Located in the upper levels of Kyoto's recently rebuilt railway station, the Granvia Hotel Kyoto is the most convenient as well as one of the most luxurious of Kyoto's hotels. The Granvia offers excellent service, impeccably comfortable rooms, and a desirable selection of restaurants and bars from which to enjoy the city lights at the thoroughly modern heart of the old capital. Despite the location, the Granvia Kyoto's cosy rooms are perfectly quiet, and seem a world away from the fascinating, busy station building. Within the hotel, the chic décor blends traditional and contemporary styles and there is a wide variety of restaurants, cafés, bars and lounges to choose from, in addition to an indoor swimming pool.

On your doorstep you also have hundreds of themed restaurants, boutique shops, cafés and a department store all set within the same station building. It is worth exploring to get the views over Kyoto and look down over the station from the suspended walkway. Staying here also makes it convenient and simple for those who enjoy venturing out independently.

www.granviakyoto.com/



Luxury Japan Spring Tour 2019

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Tour Price and Booking Details

Price per person : £6,195 (without flights)

**Single supplement : £1,995*

**A single supplement is necessary for all single bookings*

Prices are valid for exchange rate exceeding £1=125yen
Flight prices start from around £600 in economy, £1000 in premium economy, £2000 in business depending on airline and departure airport. Flight classes can often be mixed and then the airfare is approximately the average of the two fares.

Minimum number of people: 10

Maximum number of people: 16

The tour is guaranteed as soon as we receive 10 guaranteed bookings. In the unlikely event there are less than 10 confirmed bookings 60 days before departure the tour may be cancelled or offered to you with modified conditions.

Please note that there is a small chance that the price will change due to taxes or the pound - yen exchange rate (see above & booking conditions). However all prices are guaranteed from 60 days before departure.

Included in Tour Package Price

- Airport meeting and assistance on arrival
- Hotel transfer to and from arrival and departure airports
- Escorted service from first evening in Tokyo throughout tour available 24hrs/day up to and including final hotel departure
- Emergency assistance from our Japan Office throughout tour
- Local Japanese guides in addition to group escort above
- All accommodation
(total 13 nights in Japan and 1 night on overnight flight)
- All meals as shown on itinerary (total excl. meals on flights; 13 breakfast, 1 lunch, 5 dinner)
- All train travel in first class including the bullet train (where available)
- All other transport as shown on itinerary, except during free time
- All entry fees and any other necessary fees and tips except during free time
- Luggage courier service whenever changing tour location (same day or overnight)

Not included in the Tour Package Price

- International flights
- Travel Insurance
- Meals not listed on brief itinerary
- Incidental costs such as personal laundry, drinks, snacks
- Passport and other visa document fees
(UK / US citizens do not need a visa for stays up to 90 days in Japan)

Full tour details including confirmed hotels will be sent to you by 23rd January 2019.

Optional extras

We will be happy to make a personal quote for any of the following:

- Requests for additional services during the tour including theatre tickets
- Additional accommodation or personal tours before or after the scheduled tour

Bookings

Bookings are confirmed by sending a signed and completed booking form which includes all participants and making the deposit payment of £1000 per person by card, cheque or bank transfer.

Once we have received the booking form and the deposit payment has been cleared we will send you booking confirmation with tour details within 2 working days.

We can accept a provisional booking which holds a place on the tour. To keep a provisional booking we must receive a completed booking form within 7 days. This will be held until you confirm or cancel. If we contact you before that, you will be given at least 7 days to decide. If you wish to confirm we must receive your deposit as cleared funds within 14 days.

Your Financial Protection:

All monies paid by you for an air holiday package as shown are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is 6977.

If you purchase a tour without flights then you are protected by our ABTOT insurance. For more information see our booking terms and conditions.



General tour information

Tour extensions

Your tour can be extended at the start or finish if you wish to have more free time or to visit somewhere of particular interest. We can arrange escorted extensions or make some suggestions for more independent visits to suit your interests. The tour does not include flights but we are happy to arrange your flights or modify the tour to fit with your travel arrangements. Please contact us to discuss your plans and provide a personalised quote. Almost anything is possible so please feel free to ask!

Visas

British nationals do not require a visa and will normally receive a 90 day permit on entry. For other nationalities, please check with the Japanese embassy at www.seejapan.co.uk/fvisitor.html.

Meals

There is a huge variety of food available in Japan including European and other world cuisines. Most visitors enjoy traditional Japanese food but strict vegetarian dishes are not always easily available. Breakfast is included at all accommodation during the tour with hotels usually offering a breakfast buffet including English, continental and Japanese dishes. Ryokan accommodation offers a traditional Japanese breakfast and dinner comprising lots of small, immaculately presented dishes. For other meals during the tour, we can offer guidance on the best local restaurants and delicacies if you would like to explore on your own. Alternatively, we can usually join you for dinner if you are unsure and need help deciphering the menu! We can also recommend local European, American or Asian restaurants if you prefer something more familiar! Food is very good value in Japan, despite what you may have heard! You can easily find good quality lunches for £5 and dinner for just £10. Dining in hotels or more exclusive restaurants can be much more expensive but in general you will get much better quality for your money than in the UK.

We have included a brief guide to the most popular Japanese dishes. If you have a particular dietary concern, please contact us.

Single Supplements

We understand that single supplements are a considerable extra cost. Most of the hotels we use do not have smaller 'single' rooms due to their high standards so the accommodation costs are almost double but you can expect the same high standards as those sharing rooms. We can provide a quote for the tour using different hotels in Tokyo and Kyoto to reduce the supplement.

Group Leaders

In most cases, you are joined by a member of our Japan staff on arrival who is your tour leader throughout your stay. We also use the services of excellent local guides so there are generally two members of staff with you at each location.



Popular Japanese dishes

Sukiyaki is prepared at your table in a bubbling pot by cooking thinly sliced beef with vegetables, tofu and noodles



Tempura is fish, seafood & vegetables coated in a very light and crisp batter, deep fried in vegetable oil.



Sushi is exquisitely prepared fish or seafood placed on a ball of specially seasoned, sticky rice. A few non-seafood options are usually available



Sashimi is super fresh, delicately sliced fish eaten raw with soy sauce and fiery wasabi.



Kaiseki Ryori is regarded as the most exquisite culinary refinement in Japan. The dishes are mainly composed of vegetables, fish, seaweed and mushroom flavours and the presentation is truly a work of art.



Yakitori is small pieces of seasoned chicken or other meat and vegetables, cooked on skewers over a charcoal grill.



Tonkatsu is a crispy crumbed pork cutlet, fried and usually served with a distinctive, fragrant sauce and salad.



Shabu-shabu is a communal dining experience – using your chopsticks, fine slices of beef and vegetables are swirled in a pot of bubbling water, then dipped in a special sauce.



Soba and Udon are two kinds of Japanese noodle. Soba is made from buckwheat flour and Udon from wheat flour. They are served either in a soup or a sauce and are available in hundreds of delicious variations.



Luggage

Your luggage is couriered between hotels usually as a same day service, so you need only carry a small bag during your trip. When moving on to the next location, you usually prepare your suitcase in the morning before breakfast and leave it in your room. It will be sent to the next hotel and will be available for you after dinner. There may be one or two overnight luggage courier services during the tours, when a small overnight case is suitable. Carrying luggage on trains can be difficult in Japan where storage space and lift access is limited. Surprisingly, luggage forwarding services are not included on many tours but we view this as a basic requirement for a relaxing tour!

Laundry

Most hotels offer a laundry service which is very straightforward to use as we stay at least two nights in each location. The cost for laundry services is similar to hotels in the west and can be quite expensive.

Health Advice

There are no particular health or immunisation requirements for travel to Japan. However, it is worth noting that the flight is quite long usually about 11-12 hours. Our scheduled tours are intended to be relaxing and enjoyable with a couple of hours of free time each day before dinner. We stay for at least two nights in each location so you have time to adjust and recover from jet lag. For those who wish to have a free day or two at the start we are very happy to book your hotel for extra nights accordingly.

Our tours are specifically designed for people who enjoy a relaxed holiday avoiding anything too physically demanding!

Climate and clothing

All scheduled tours are in the spring and autumn when the climate is very pleasant. The latitude is further south than the UK so the sun is quite warm (similar to Spain) and afternoons are generally sunny. You do not necessarily need formal clothes and it is perfectly acceptable to bring comfortable, casual clothes for your entire stay as there are no religious or cultural taboos regarding dress. Mornings and evenings can be colder especially in March and November and we would recommend bringing some warmer clothes. Rain is not common in spring or autumn but a light raincoat or fold-up umbrella is a sensible addition to your day-bag. All such clothing and equipment can be bought easily and cheaply in Japan, although the sizes are small, have a slightly different cut and large sizes are quite rare.

Ryokan

Our scheduled tours include a two-night stay at a Ryokan and this is one of the special Japanese experiences that most people will treasure. However, sleeping on a futon on the floor may be a concern to some people but we would like to reassure you that the rooms arranged do have western beds. Meals are taken sat at low tables on the floor but back supports can usually be supplied to make it easier. We may be able to arrange alternatives if this is going to be particularly difficult for you and if you have any other concerns regarding the stay in a Ryokan, please feel free to discuss it with us.

Bathing and Bathrooms

Japanese hi-tech bathrooms are slightly different to British versions and often include digital temperature control pads and heated toilet seats! In general, bathing is very thorough, typically including a vigorous shower before stepping into a hot bath. Your ryokan bathrooms are small and functional as the facilities also include private outdoor hot spring baths and communal (single sex) ones too. This style of bathing is not to be missed as part of the ryokan experience.

UK connections and flight upgrades

We will advise you about flights, depending on your preferred class of travel, departure airport and airline. British Airways, All Nippon Airways, Japan Airlines and Virgin Atlantic fly direct from Heathrow to Tokyo with connections from Osaka. If you wish to depart from Edinburgh or Manchester then Air France, Lufthansa and other European airlines can be good options. We will happily arrange a separate airport meeting and escort for you if required. You are not restricted by group flights in any way.



Why choose Into Japan Specialist Tours?

Our company was founded by David Lee 20 years ago and during that time we have built up a team with unparalleled knowledge about Japan. Our staff have lived in Japan for an average of ten years, we speak the language and are fascinated by the culture. Japan is an enthralling country with a long history, and we pride ourselves on continuous learning. Whether it is a new hotel, a hot restaurant, or extension of the bullet train line, Japan changes every year and we all make regular inspection visits from our UK and Japan offices, to keep on top of the very latest information. We believe that our expertise, experience, and enthusiasm make us the leading choice amongst Japan tour operators.

It is normal for travel companies to work with ground agents based in the country and it may not surprise you that many of the very best tour operators ask us to organise their clients' travel to Japan. In coming directly to Into Japan your tour will be handled exclusively by us, from your first enquiry through the duration of your tour. Being accompanied by tour leaders who are our own experienced specialists means personal and professional service throughout your tour.

No other company can provide this level of quality personal service, and with only one company involved, your holiday will be both smooth and efficient, giving you value for money and an enhanced experience in Japan.



What our clients say

"The Luxury Japan Tour was just wonderful. Warren and I are so glad we booked this holiday, and we had a brilliant time. I have been looking forward to going to Japan for a long time now. And I must say that this holiday has been one of the highlights of my life. What could have been a daunting and highly stressful experience on our own, was turned into a highly relaxing and enjoyable one thanks to Into Japan. Warren and I have now gained knowledge and confidence to look forward to our next trip to Japan on our own. Many thanks to all of you for your help throughout".

"Amazing - everything went so smoothly – not one hitch. Japan is a fantastically interesting country and we learned a lot.. Into Japan has made travelling so easy and everything was efficient and delightful... It was not an inexpensive trip but I would recommend Into Japan Specialist Tours to anyone wishing to go to Japan. We felt part of life in Japan, from tradition to contemporary".

"Megumi's sunny disposition and spontaneity make her the perfect "minder"! She was always happy to explain, helpful and resourceful, acting instantly to solve individual problems or meet someone's needs. Delightful. Into Japan has a pearl!"

"The trip exceeded our expectations, the best holiday we have ever had. Especially as we have been to Japan before. We would go again tomorrow, we didn't want to go home!"



"The tour was excellent. I really enjoyed myself and I had many experiences to bring home. The hotels were excellent, I could get used to this sort of luxury. The tour lived up to its "luxurious" description. I thought all the guides were top rate - knowledgeable without being dull, and happy to adjust to the vagaries of the weather. Some of the best bits came from informal parts of the programme."

"Excellent, very informative tour. The hotels were all excellent, and the ryokan in Yufuin was a good experience. The guides were all very helpful, and they were eager to share their love of Japan. Naomi was exceptional in her organisation, even when the weather was against her. She was also flexible with the itinerary when asked or was necessary. A truly memorable holiday."

"A most enjoyable tour. The accommodation was very good, especially the very nice onsen facilities in the Hakone hotel. The guides were very good, especially Nobu, who spoke of wartime Hiroshima most movingly."

Please read the following conditions carefully. All holidays are sold subject to these conditions and the information in our brochure and quotation.

Into Japan Specialist Tours is a trading name of Oxford International Exchange Ltd, whose administrative offices are at Wesley House, 7 High St, Kidlington OX5 2DH, UK.

In these conditions Into Japan Specialist Tours is referred to as 'we', 'us' and 'our'. The person or persons named on the booking form are referred to as 'you' and 'your'. This contract and all matters arising out of it are governed by the laws of England and Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland.

1. Holiday Payment

(i) The deposit for all scheduled tours is £1000 / US\$1,000 or 15% of the total price per person for all other holidays. Once we have received your deposit we will send you your confirmation which will confirm all details of the holiday and what is included in the price. Once this confirmation has been sent to you a contract will exist between you and us. You must check all details on the confirmation and contact us immediately if there is anything you believe to be incorrect.

(ii) The confirmation details will also state what balance is due on the holiday and when payment is to be made. The balance will be due 60 days before the departure date and if this is not received we reserve the right to cancel your booking and charge cancellation fees as detailed below. It is our company policy to send a reminder at this time but it is still your responsibility to pay the balance even if you do not receive the reminder. If for any reason you have informed us of an exceptional reason for delay in payment and we choose to retain your booking, you will be liable for the higher cancellation fees if you do not pay the balance as stated or cancel at a later date.

(iii) If a holiday is booked within 60 days of departure, full payment is required to confirm the booking.

2. Insurance

It is required that every person named on the booking form is fully covered by travel insurance for the purposes of this holiday. We must receive a copy of your policy cover note at least 60 days before departure. We highly recommend that you take out travel insurance that will cover cancellation costs of your holiday due to unforeseen circumstances.

3. If you change your holiday

If you request any changes to your booking after we have issued confirmation you may be liable for any costs including administration and/or cancellation fees that arise from the changes. We will do our best to accommodate your changes and we will do our best to avoid any additional costs. Please note that misspelled names can require flights to be rebooked and up to 100% cancellation fees applied to the original booking.

4. If you cancel your holiday before departure

If any person named on the booking form cancels their holiday the cancellation fees below will apply. Cancellation can only be accepted when confirmed in writing. The date this confirmation is received will be taken to be the cancellation date. We can accept signed faxes provided the original is posted to us immediately. The cancellation costs can be covered in many cases by appropriate travel insurance. Cancellation charge per person based on number of days before departure when written confirmation of cancellation is received at our office.

More than 60 days: Deposit only

59-43 days: 30%

42-29 days: 60%

28-8 days: 80%

Within 7 days: 100%

5. Alterations or cancellations by you after departure

In general we are unable to make any refunds for unused portions of the holiday. We strongly recommend that adequate travel insurance is taken out that will cover all possible unforeseeable situations. If changes requested by you result in additional charges then these charges will be passed on to you. In particular, if special assistance is needed from our Japan office due to an emergency situation then you will be liable for additional costs (although these may be covered by your travel insurance).

6. If we change your holiday

All aspects of your holiday are normally arranged several months in advance but occasionally changes are unavoidable as we rely on our suppliers in Japan. We reserve the right to make minor changes as defined below. We will only cancel your holiday less than 60 days before departure if you have not complied with the booking conditions as described or if we have no choice as a result of 'force-majeure' as described below.

Minor changes include change in order of schedule (without changing the contents), change to named hotel (without decreasing the standard or changing the type of accommodation), changing mode of transport (without changing the main schedule).

Major changes include change to contents of schedule (such as location change), change to flight departure or arrival date, decrease in standard or change of type of accommodation.

If a major change is made to the holiday we will inform you as soon as possible and you will have the choice to accept the change, cancel the holiday booked and book an alternative holiday (a balance may be due but we will not charge you for an increase in price on the same holiday schedule), or cancel the holiday booked and receive a full refund. You will have 10 days from the date we inform you to confirm your decision. If a major change results in reduced costs (for example a lower standard of hotel) and you do not cancel the holiday then we will make a corresponding refund to you. In addition we will make a further £50 / US\$100 compensation payment to you.

Most holidays will give a minimum number and a maximum number of persons on the tour. If the minimum number of persons for a tour is not reached 60 days before departure we reserve the right to cancel the holiday. We may offer you alternative arrangements (such as the same schedule with a group escort in Japan but no escort from the UK) and you may choose to accept these arrangements if you wish.

If a major change is made to the holiday after departure we will do our best to compensate you during the tour, either financially or through additional services. If a major change is as a result of 'force-majeure' then we do our best to carry out the schedule as planned but we reserve the right to terminate a schedule early and return you to the point of departure. In both of these cases all refunds that we can obtain from suppliers will be passed on to you.

'Force majeure' means any event (man-made or natural) which is out of the control of us and our suppliers can could not be avoided during normal planning and preparation. This would include earthquakes, extreme weather, fire, technical problems with transport, operational decisions of air carriers, actual or threatened terrorist activity, industrial action and any similar events.

7. Surcharges

If there are any surcharges to be made you will be notified at least 60 days before departure. We will not make any additional charges whatsoever after that. The only possible reasons for a price surcharge are as follows:

(i) A change in the yen - pound exchange rate. You will only be asked to pay a surcharge in exceptional circumstances. There will only be a surcharge if the actual rate changes by more than 10% after the tour price is published/quoted. Should the exchange rate surcharge represent more than 10% of the original tour cost you will have the right to cancel and receive a full refund with 14 days of receiving notification.

(ii) A new tax or duty is imposed by the airline or government. This would normally be due to fluctuations in oil prices.

8. Our responsibilities

We will carry out the holiday as advertised and described to the best of our ability. We will accept responsibility for all the actions of our staff and suppliers when carrying out their work during the tour. We will not accept responsibility if injury, death, illness, damage or loss is the result of

(i) your actions

(ii) the actions of a third party not related to part of the described schedule of the tour

(iii) an event which we and our suppliers could not foresee

(iv) the actions of any other member of the tour group

(v) any health or condition which was not informed to us at the time of booking

(vi) additional services (for example, those that may be supplied by hotels) which are not included as part of the tour price

(vii) excursions not detailed in the tour schedule (although these may be introduced to you by our staff). These are taken at your own risk and your contract is directly with the operator of these excursions.

If you are not happy with any aspect of the tour it is your responsibility to make it known to the group escort or our Japan or UK office as soon as is reasonably possible and during the tour whenever possible. We will discuss the situation with you, and then endeavour to deal with the complaint at the time and request feedback from you. If you do not report a problem, which can be dealt with at the time, we cannot accept any associated liability at a later date. Tour escorts and our offices will keep logs of such reports during tours and these will be referred to when dealing with claims. If you are still not happy after the end of the tour and wish to make a claim you must write to us within 30 days of your return with full details of your complaint. If your claim is our responsibility and your travel insurance processes the claim but there is an excess, we will pay the excess due.

Claims related to transport or accommodation will be limited to the maximum amount of compensation for which we are liable under the international convention or regulation which would normally apply. We are entitled to deduct from this amount and compensation given by the supplier in question. There may also be claims for which we have no liability according to the international convention or regulation.

You must assist us in dealing with any claims, transfer any rights against suppliers to us if requested and cooperate with us or our insurers in enforcing these rights. For further details please refer to the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992.

9. Your responsibilities

The flight details shown on original booking confirmation are subject to change. Final details will be confirmed on your travel documentation, sent approximately 14 days prior to departure. Any such change will not entitle you to cancel or change other arrangements without paying our normal charges unless the departure or arrival time has changed by more than 12 hours, or a non-stop flight has changed to a flight that is not non-stop.

The company can accept no responsibility for clients who arrive later than 2 hours prior to check in and miss their flight as a result nor can we accept responsibility for any loss by you of your holiday/flight travel tickets, vouchers or coupons. We cannot accept liability for any delay related to air travel unless it has a material effect on your holiday arrangements.

During the tour you will follow the directions and instructions of the group leader without reserve or hesitation at all times. You will also behave in an appropriate fashion which does not lead to possible damage, danger or annoyance to property or people. If, in our view, this is not the case we will have the right to terminate your contract with immediate effect without any further obligations to you in respect of covering any expenses, compensation, refunds, or arranging for your return home.

You accept responsibility for any damage or loss caused by you or any member of your party. Full payment for any damage or loss must be paid directly at the time to the accommodation owner or manager or other supplier. Otherwise you will be liable for any later claims against us (including any legal costs) which are due to your actions. You must prepare all the necessary valid travel documents including full passports, visas, vaccination certificates, currency and traveller's cheques

You must check the name on your airline tickets is exactly the same as the name that appears on your full passport. We cannot be liable for your entry refusal into Japan and if this is due to invalid documents you will be liable for any financial penalty to us.

10. The brochure details and quotations

We reserve the right to change the prices, services or other particulars contained in this brochure or any quotation at any time before we enter into a contract with you. We will notify you of any change before entering a contract. Additional tour information, hotel information and schedules can be taken to be part of the contract. Note that hotel classifications are subjective as there is no international standard. You must check all details of your chosen holiday (including the price) with us at the time of booking and on your booking confirmation.

11. Dealing with special requests

If you have any special request, you must advise us in writing at the time of booking. We cannot guarantee any request will be met unless we have specifically confirmed this in writing. Note we may also confirm a special request has been received without confirming that it is possible.

If you or any member of your party has any medical problem or disability which may affect your holiday or any other members in the group, you must tell us at the time a booking request is made. Otherwise we reserve the right to cancel your booking or curtail your holiday as described under your responsibility above.

12. Your holiday protection

For our flight inclusive packages departing from the UK we are licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority, ATOL number 6977 and you will be fully covered under the terms of the license for our holidays as follows:

Your Financial Protection

When you buy an ATOL protected flight or flight inclusive holiday from us you will receive an ATOL Certificate. This lists what is financially protected, where you can get information on what this means for you and who to contact if things go wrong.

We, or the suppliers identified on your ATOL Certificate, will provide you with the services listed on the ATOL Certificate (or a suitable alternative). In some cases, where neither we nor the supplier are able to do so for reasons of insolvency, an alternative ATOL holder may provide you with the services you have bought or a suitable alternative (at no extra cost to you). You agree to accept that in those circumstances the alternative ATOL holder will perform those obligations and you agree to pay any money outstanding to be paid by you under your contract to that alternative ATOL holder. However, you also agree that in some cases it will not be possible to appoint an alternative ATOL holder, in which case you will be entitled to make a claim under the ATOL scheme (or your credit card issuer where applicable).

If we, or the suppliers identified on your ATOL certificate, are unable to provide the services listed (or a suitable alternative, through an alternative ATOL holder or otherwise) for reasons of insolvency, the Trustees of the Air Travel Trust may make a payment to (or confer a benefit on) you under the ATOL scheme. You agree that in return for such a payment or benefit you assign absolutely to those Trustees any claims which you have or may have arising out of or relating to the non-provision of the services, including any claim against us, the travel agent (or your credit card issuer where applicable). You also agree that any such claims may be re-assigned to another body, if that other body has paid sums you have claimed under the ATOL scheme.

For non-flight inclusive packages you are protected by our ABTOT protection.

The Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT) protection:

The Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT) provides financial protection under the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992 for Oxford International Exchange Ltd. (OIE), and in the event of their insolvency, protection is provided for the following:

1. non-flight packages commencing in and returning to the UK;
2. non-flight packages commencing and returning to a country other than the UK; and
3. flight inclusive packages that commence outside of the UK, which are sold to customers outside of the UK.

1, 2 and 3 provides for a refund in the event you have not yet travelled. 1 and 3 provides for repatriation. Please note that bookings made outside the UK are only protected by ABTOT when purchased directly with OIE.

13. Personal information and images

We will pass your personal information to suppliers as necessary for the planning and the operation of the tour. Your personal information will not be passed on to a third party for any other purpose. Any photographs or video taken during the tour may be used for our own promotional materials both in print and on our website. They will not be used for any other purpose.

14. Dealing with complaints

If, despite our best efforts and having followed the above procedure for reporting and resolving your complaint, you feel that it has not been satisfactorily settled, we recommend that it is referred for arbitration under the ABTOT Travel Industry Arbitration Service. An Independent Arbitrator will review the documents relating to any complaint and deliver a binding decision to bring the matter to a close.

Details of this scheme are available from The Travel Industry Arbitration Service, administered by Dispute Settlement Services Ltd
9 Savill Road, Lindfield, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 2NY
or from ABTOT
117 Houndsditch, London EC3A 7BT.

This scheme cannot however decide in cases where the sums claimed exceed £1,500 per person or £7,500 per booking form, or for claims which are solely or mainly in respect of physical injury or illness or the consequence thereof.

These booking conditions were revised in October 2014 and are valid until replaced by a later revision.



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