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Japan Tours

Group and Tailor Made



Into Japan Specialist Tours

I first travelled to Japan 1992 and I remember wandering the streets of Tokyo for three days feeling that I was on another planet. Since then I have lived in Kyoto for extended periods, married a Japanese lady, and done my best to learn the language. However on every trip I am still bemused by something I experience or astonished by a new discovery and I don't think that will ever change.

Japan remains so utterly different from the rest of the world that it is easy to understand the fascination with its culture and history. Globalisation has had remarkably little impact and while cities have the occasional familiar sight, almost everything here is unique and new for travellers. Venture slightly off the main tourist routes and you can suddenly feel transported back to past centuries on your own personal adventure.

All our staff members have been fortunate enough to have lived and travelled in Japan, and having experienced the adventure are eager to share their enthusiasm for Japan with our clients. We aim to offer you a depth and breadth of experiences that you cannot find anywhere else. The support provided by our UK and Tokyo offices make unexpected pleasures possible in a way organised travel so rarely achieves, balancing adventure with security.

Japan is also dealing with environmental issues, and we do our best to minimise impact on our tailor made and scheduled tours. Rural communities are constantly looking to offer new possibilities for visitors, and Into Japan is often involved in directly developing these special opportunities which not only broaden the range of options for our clients, but also contribute to sustainable tourism for the future.

I know that for many clients a tour of Japan is a dream holiday, and we are privileged to help make that dream come true. I also understand that this opportunity for our customers is an important responsibility for our company, and we strive to go above and beyond expectations. I am confident that Into Japan offers the best experience possible.



David Lee,
Managing Director
Into Japan Specialist Tours



*Into Japan Specialist Tours is a trading name of Oxford International Exchange Ltd.

Why book with a specialist?

To us a specialist means much more than selling tours to one country. It means our staff have lived extensively in Japan, speak Japanese and have studied Japanese culture. More importantly it means we all love Japan and can't wait to introduce it to others.

To you it means you will get

- *Good value for money* – all our arrangements are made directly so you are not paying extra because other companies are involved.
- *Good first-hand knowledge* – we recommend hotels or experiences because we have stayed there or done them ourselves.
- *Good communication* – nothing is passed on so there is no confusion or misunderstanding in the information we provide.
- *Direct support* – our staff make all the arrangements and the same staff give you support in Japan which makes for a seamless tour, avoiding problems than can arise when relying on another company.
- *The best guides* – this is a vital part of your tour and we make sure you have the very best available.
- *Special extras* – we have contacts on the ground so you get those unexpected extras which only a specialist can arrange.

Our Eco-Tourism Commitment

We believe that businesses like ours need to take responsibility and lead the way in protecting our environment for the future. As a result we are adopting policies of recycling our office waste, minimizing energy consumption and using recycled materials whenever possible. Tours are designed to use public transport wherever possible, which is excellent in Japan. We are also working with local organisations to develop sustainable tourism programmes that benefit rural parts of Japan. This will help preserve the local culture, support dying traditions and arts and provide local employment.

Supporting Japan

After the tsunami in 2011 we set up a charity to work with local volunteer organisations in northern Japan and we are continuing this work. As well as making financial contributions, our staff regularly visit the affected areas to assist with the on-going support programmes. For anyone who has an interest in doing volunteer work in Japan please visit the Helping Hands for Japan website; www.helpinghandsforjapan.org.uk

Your Financial Protection

The air holiday packages in this brochure are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority. Our ATOL number is ATOL 6977. Please see our booking conditions for more information. ATOL Protection does not apply to all holiday and travel services in this brochure. In the case of packages sold without flights our ABTOT policy would apply (see details below). Please ask us to confirm what protection may apply to your booking.



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1. non-flight packages commencing in and returning to the UK;

ABTOT cover provides for a refund in the event you have not yet travelled or repatriation if you are abroad. Please note that bookings made outside the UK are only protected by ABTOT when purchased directly with OIE.

In the unlikely event that you require assistance whilst abroad due to our financial failure, please call our 24/7 helpline on 01702 811397 and advise you are a customer of an ABTOT protected travel company.

You can access The Package Travel and Linked Travel Arrangements Regulations 2018 here: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/634/contents/made>

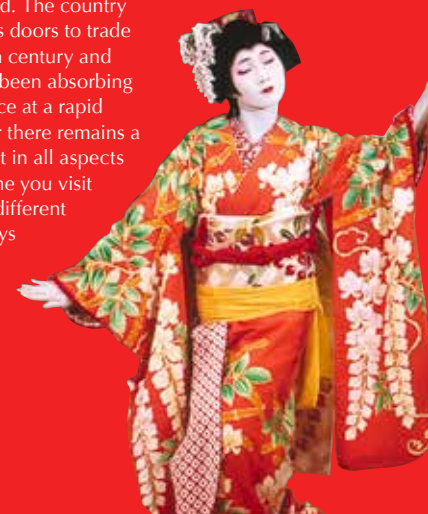


Introduction to Japan

Japan is a country of contrasts. When standing in neon-filled commercial hubs of Shinjuku or Shibuya it's hard to imagine the lush scenery, verdant landscapes and Zen-like retreats that make up most of the country.

Modern Japan looks ahead for its place in the world, always building, renewing and innovating, but order, ritual and ceremony are still at Japan's heart. Traditional Japanese martial arts, tea ceremony, flower arranging, calligraphy, culinary arts and even social interaction have grown from this sense of order and method. Look for shop assistants elaborately counting your notes or rail staff solemnly checking the platform before departure to see that ceremony is second nature and influences almost every aspect of the culture.

The nation maintains its connection to nature and ceremony through its temples, art, traditions, seasonal festivals and a great enthusiasm for its fresh, local food. The country only opened its doors to trade in the mid-19th century and since then has been absorbing foreign influence at a rapid pace. However there remains a traditional spirit in all aspects of life; each time you visit will be a little different but it will always be uniquely Japanese.





Temples

Temples and shrines are still central to the rituals of Japanese life, helping to maintain a Japanese identity throughout a century of immense change. New Year celebrations, riotous festivals, elaborate wedding ceremonies, and dignified funerals keep people in touch with their past and establish their sense of place.

For the visitor, temples and shrines give a sense of the ceremony and an introduction to traditional Japanese architecture.

Traditional Costume

Even in the heart of the city, tucked somewhere amongst the fashion-conscious youth, elegant women and grey suited 'salarymen', you can still see the traditional kimono. Elegant layers and folds of coloured silks seem incongruous against a sterile train interior or the grey of a modern pavement but this image captures Japan's past and present. The kimono is commonplace at temples and other traditional locations on our itinerary such as Gion, the historic 'geisha' quarter of Kyoto. Elsewhere you might see a Sumo wrestler on his way to the training stables wearing a traditional blue and white *yukata* (cotton kimono) and *geta* (wooden shoes), with hair swept perfectly into the traditional *mage* style.

Shinkansen

The Shinkansen (bullet train) is more than just a mode of transport – it's a truly Japanese experience. Immaculately clean, comfortable and fast, it's the epitome of efficiency. Originally built to connect Japan's urban areas for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, it was a tremendous feat given that most of the track had

to be raised above existing developments or tunnelled through mountains. Incredibly, in a land of typhoons, earthquakes and heavy snowfall, the trains always keep to schedule, sometimes running just three minutes apart at 300kph. There will be ample opportunity during tours to experience speeding through the countryside with tea plantations, orange groves, rice paddies and Mount Fuji providing the perfect backdrop.

Hot Springs

Japan's natural hot springs, or *onsen*, are an experience not to be missed. Nothing is as intensely soothing as a soak in these volcanic pools. But here again there are a multitude of rules for bathers to follow. Men and women usually enter separate pools, leaving their clothes in wicker baskets in the changing area. Bathers must scrub themselves from head to toe before stepping gently into the piping hot pool. Bathing naked with strangers can be a daunting experience, but once in the steaming water, concerns about modesty melt away. It's a liberating experience that's well worth the initial trepidation but for those who remain unpersuaded, some hotels offer smaller, private pools.

Festivals and Seasonal Celebrations

Japan is rich with festivals and seasonal traditions. New Year is a family time with traditional food, decorations and visits to the shrine to pray for good fortune in the coming year.

In spring, the cherry blossom fills parks with soft pink petals and people celebrate with food and drink under the picturesque trees. Visitors in May can enjoy the famous 'Aoi' festival when a long procession of traditionally dressed revellers makes its way from Shimogamo to Kamigamo shrine in Kyoto.

Summer evenings bring *Bon odori*, as neighbourhoods are bejewelled with paper lanterns and traditional melodies fill the air.

The highlight of autumn is the celebration of the Japanese maple colours, with leaves turning from delicate yellow to vibrant red. Equally spectacular are the fire festivals in which mountainsides are set alight and huge bundles of fire are carried around temples. October brings Kyoto's Jidai festival and November, the Shichi-go-san festival in which children aged three, five and seven dress in bright kimono and visit local temples - a great opportunity for some photos.

Food

Japan is one of the great food nations, where eating and drinking are integral to the culture. Tokyo alone boasts over 300,000 eateries, ranging from tiny street stands to wallet-crunching restaurants. Japanese fare emphasises light, fresh, seasonal produce and delicate preparation. There are also now many imported culinary traditions, from celebrity British chefs to cheap American chains, but the traditional recipes remain a staple of the daily diet.

For quick, casual Japanese dining *udon*, *soba* or *ramen* noodles are a treat. The hustle and bustle of the busy shop, the welcoming call of "Irasshai!", the billowing steam, the blend of wonderful aromas and the percussion of slurping salarymen all create a unique atmosphere. At the other end of the spectrum, *ryokan* (Japanese guest houses) serve up sophisticated menus comprising a procession of small dishes of meat, fish, vegetables, pickles, rice, soup and perhaps a portion or two of something unusual!

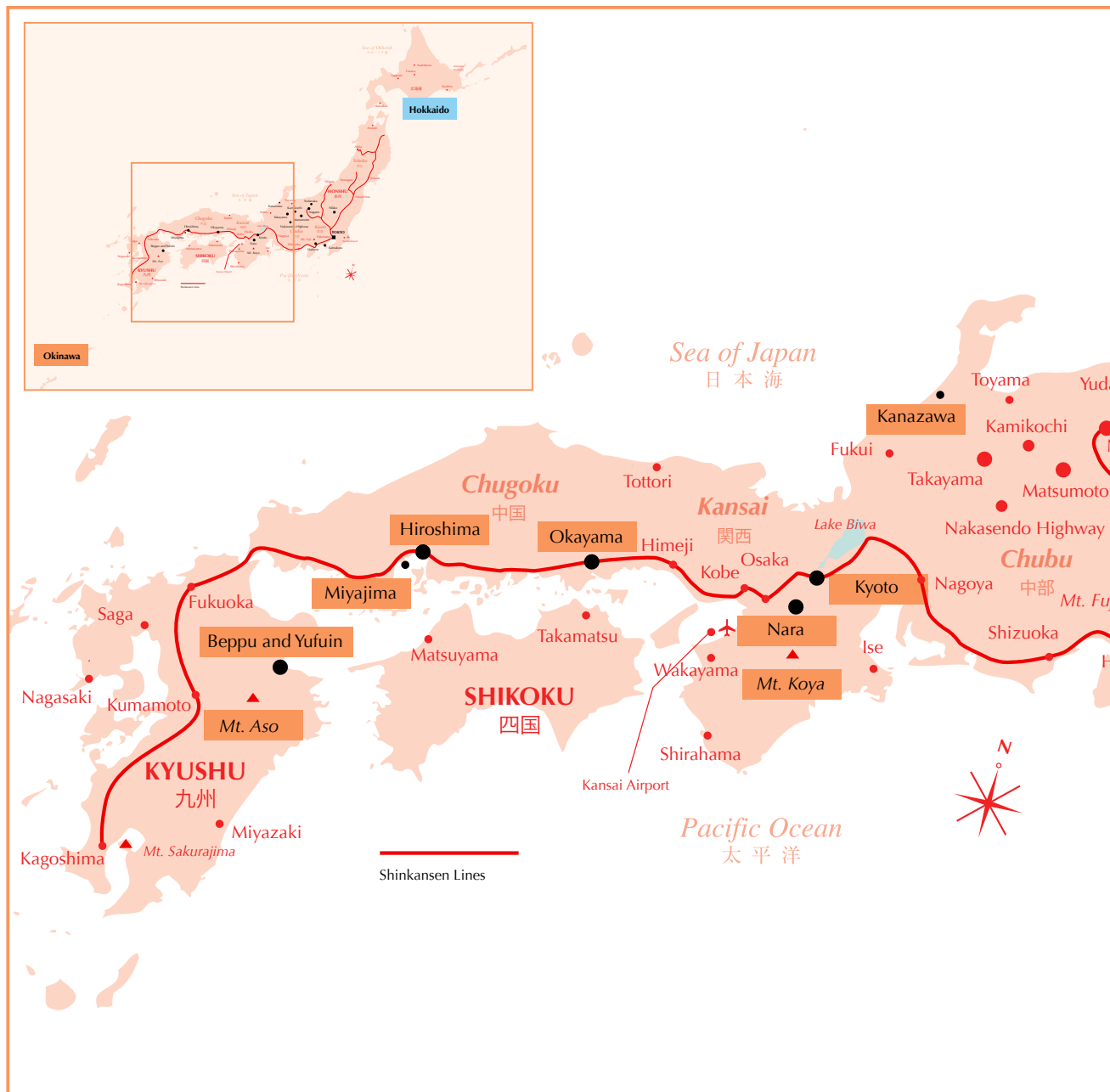
Volcanoes

Japan's most famous volcanic formation is the iconic Mount Fuji - truly a natural wonder. It is hard to believe that something so perfectly symmetrical was created through explosive destruction and chaos. Fuji towers about 3.7km above the surrounding plain with a 500m crater at its summit, snow-capped for much of the year. The volcano is visible on many tours from various vantage points. While Mount Fuji has been dormant since the early 18th century, it is possible to witness the active Mount Aso in southern Japan with spluttering sulphurous gases and the world's largest caldera, a breathtaking twenty miles wide, encircling it.



Western Japan Highlights

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Kyoto

Kyoto is where Japanese people go to see Japan. The capital for a thousand years, Kyoto is home to Japan's best known Buddhist temples as well as many famous Shinto shrines, and streets corners are dotted with Jizo statues and paper garlands decorating sacred trees and stones, and is in many ways the heart of the country.

Kyoto is quite simply a must-see destination. Known for its Zen gardens, geisha, tea houses, and palaces, Kyoto is very much a vibrant modern city proud of both its past and present, where rowdy karaoke coexists with the subtlety of *kaiseki* cuisine.

Many of the stock images of Japan are shot in Kyoto – striking and familiar photographs of ornate temples, dramatic pagodas or geisha strolling down old cobbled streets. Kyoto was founded in 794 when the capital was moved from neighbouring Nara, and many of Japan's most famous temples and shrines were built in the following centuries, and still stand as reminders of Kyoto's ever-present history. Best known of these are Kinkakuji, the golden pavilion nestled in lush gardens in Kyoto's western hills, and Kiyomizu Temple, which overlooks the cobbled streets of Gion, the most famous geisha quarter of the old capital. Sometimes you will see well organised uniformed school groups or fanatical photographers – aspects of the culture which can be as entertaining as the sights themselves.



Nara

Nara is another ex-capital of Japan and its legacy is a varied collection of temples spread throughout a vast park. The most famous is Todaiji, home to a giant statue of Buddha. Despite being rebuilt two thirds the original size, it remains the largest free-standing wooden structure in the world. From here you can take the meandering paths through the park and up the foothills of the neighbouring mountains. There are temples all around and this area hosts two famous fire festivals in the autumn and winter.





Miyajima

Miyajima is a short ride from Hiroshima across the inland sea. A torii gate built in the tidal sands faces the majestic temple at the foot of the island's peak. As the tide comes in it sweeps under and around the temple, with the torii appearing to float on the sea. The local deer will be grateful for some food while you look around the tourist shops and local village.



Hiroshima

Rebuilt post-war, Hiroshima is a thoroughly modern city with glass buildings and wide boulevards. The Atomic Dome and Peace Park are poignant reminders of the city's tragic history, as are the swarm of origami cranes left by school children as symbols of peace.



Okayama

Okayama's main attraction is Korakuen Garden, one of Japan's most famous traditional gardens. Wandering through these gardens is always an adventure, with many places to discover and views to ponder from the red wooden bridges.



Kanazawa

Kanazawa, best known for the stunning Kenroku-en Gardens, is one of Japan's best kept secrets. Ruled first by Buddhist monks and then by the powerful and wealthy Maeda clan, Kanazawa was once one of Japan's richest cities. It was also one of only a handful of cities to escape damage during the Second World War, and Kanazawa's older districts are consequently remarkably well preserved. Kanazawa's treasures reflect its rich and varied history, with geisha districts rubbing shoulders with temples and the newly reconstructed castle. The Kenroku-en Gardens are considered to be the most impressive of Japan's three most beautiful gardens, and features ponds, hills, and a number of buildings and tea houses. Kenroku-en famously combines all six principles traditionally desirable in a Japanese strolling garden, with spaciousness and seclusion, artifice and antiquity, and water courses and panoramas.



Okinawa

Strung out to the south of Japan, the island chain of Okinawa reaches nearly as far as the Tropic of Cancer: pristinely white-sanded in the blue waters of the East China Sea.

Originally an autonomous kingdom, the islands were once known as the Ryukyu Islands, and have a culture, climate and cuisine that are simultaneously Japanese and non-Japanese. Okinawan architecture, arts, and cuisine are all unique to the islands. To the mainlanders, Okinawa is exotic; almost foreign.

People come here for the scuba diving and the superb beaches, and a number of world class resorts dot the coastlines. Away from the coral reefs and untouched wilderness of the more remote islands, the prefectural capital of Naha is famous for pottery and markets.

A visit to Okinawa offers an experience worlds away from the traditional temple tours of the mainland, and is a wonderful destination in its own right.



Beppu and Yufuin

Beppu is a coastal town with a picturesque mountainous backdrop. Columns of steam rise up throughout the area - one of the world's most active geothermic regions.

The area's jigoku or 'hells', are a collection of hot, multi-coloured lakes, geysers and bubbling mud pools surrounded by beautiful botanical gardens. A visit here is well complemented by staying up in the valley at Yufuin where the ryokan offer superb views from their outdoor hot-spring baths.



Mount Aso

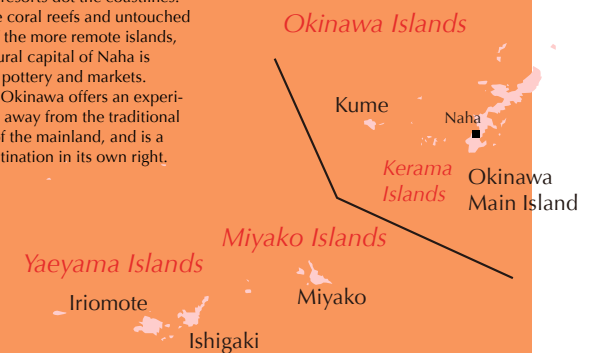
Mount Aso, towering above the surrounding villages and paddy fields, is an active volcano and the rising fumes remind visitors of the awesome natural forces at work below ground.

The views are incredible and have a host of myths and legends attached. And with so much geothermal activity, there are many great, traditional onsen resorts in the area.



Mt. Koya

Not far from Japan's third largest city, the holy mountain known as Koya-san is one of the most peaceful spiritual centres in the country. Mount Koya is the heart of Shingon Buddhism, and the resting place of the sect's founder. A number of the many temples provide temple-stays, or shukubo, for travellers. Staying on Mount Koya is one of the best ways to experience Buddhist life in Japan: bathing before a dinner of traditional shojinryori, and rising at dawn for morning prayers with the monks.



Eastern Japan Highlights

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Tokyo

Japan's capital city is a truly mesmerising place. A myriad of stimuli competing for your attention and a constant buzz of jingles, neon, giant TV screens, and pop music help to make Tokyo one of the most thrilling and futuristic places on earth.

A vast and complicated sprawl when you look at the rail map, Tokyo is actually several distinct cities, each with its own character, atmosphere and function – the broad leafy avenues of fashionable **Omotesando**, the hi-tech stores of **Akihabara**, the skyscrapers of **Shinjuku**, the bright lights of **Shibuya** and the narrow market alleys and parks of Ueno.

The old downtown, or *shita-machi*, still exists alongside the modern city, and tiny station eateries, ancient temples and old shopping districts – seemingly unchanged in the last century – rub shoulders with super-luxury hotels, sleek skyscrapers and high-tech shops.

Tokyo is Japan's city of lights: at dusk the neon flickers on and the

daytime rules dissolve over glasses of sake and beer. The city has no single entertainment hub, and each district has its own atmosphere and draws its own crowd. Few cities can rival the possibilities of Tokyo after dark, and there really is something for everyone, from **Roppongi** for the club crowd to **Odaiba** for the modern-day romantic.

Though much of the city is hectic, exciting and crowded, it's easy to find respite in tranquil parks, palace gardens and historic temples not far from each busy hub.



Sado Island

Popular for its stunning natural scenery, green hills and cliffs dotted with strange shaped rocks and small islands, Sado Island also has an interesting, though dark history. Because of its relatively secluded location, the island was used as a place of political exile for elements showing a tendency to oppose the system in power. In the early Edo period, however, gold and silver were discovered on the island, and its significance changed dramatically. The world famous Kodo Taiko group, has its roots on here and you can visit their purpose built heritage centre. Shukunegi Port



is one of the island's greatest charms where a handful of traditional houses are clustered around an inlet of Sado's rugged coast. At the museum, a replica of one of the largest vessels once built in local shipyards is on display and can be fully explored by visitors.





Hakone

Hakone is a leading area for hot springs, with many baths offering superlative views of the surrounding mountains, including the grand Mount Fuji. The region is criss-crossed by ropeways, cable-cars and funicular railways which link a variety of museums. There is also the volcanic Great Boiling Valley, and sulphuric ponds cooking the local speciality - "onsen eggs".



Takayama

A quiet, mountain town most of the year, Takayama descends into raucous revelry twice a year when tens of thousands of visitors flock from all over Japan for its legendary festivals. Large, elaborate yatai (floats) are paraded through the streets by locals in traditional dress each spring and autumn. The rest of the year, visitors can enjoy one of Japan's most traditional towns - famous for its timber and carpentry.



Yudanaka

In another of Japan's famed hot spring areas, Yudanaka and Shibu Onsen are the two most prominent springs. Yudanaka offers modern spas, while Shibu is more traditional, with wooden bathing houses. The area also offers the unique sight of the wild "snow monkeys" who appreciate the warm waters as much as the visitors, and can often be seen taking a soak in the colder months.



Nagano

The host of the 1998 Winter Olympics developed around the 1400-year-old Zenkoji temple. The ancient holy place holds a statue of Buddha - said to be the first such effigy brought to Japan. Every seven years a replica of the statue is put on public display - the next viewing scheduled for 2010. The temple also offers "the key to paradise" attached to a wall in an underground tunnel. Any visitor able to locate and touch the key in the pitch black tunnel is reputedly granted enlightenment.



Nakasendo Highway

The Nakasendo Road runs through the very centre of Japan, brushing the shoulders of the Japan Alps and winding along river valleys and over forested passes. The best preserved of the five Edo Period highways, the Nakasendo Road connected Kyoto and Tokyo. Long stretches, particularly in the more mountainous regions, remain very much as they did in the 17th century, and it is still possible to walk the route of the highway between the old and new capitals.



Kamakura

Known for its large variety of shrines and temples, as well as a giant bronze Buddha who sits serenely beside the town, about 50km south west of Tokyo. The Buddha was once housed in a grand temple, but since a tsunami tore down the building in the 15th century, the statue has weathered the elements from a quiet clearing in the trees.



Matsumoto

This small town's key attraction is the great 16th century castle. Visitors are welcome to wander the ancient building and see the elaborate architecture designed to protect the occupants from attack. Until the last century sub-zero temperatures and heavy snowfall made the region largely inaccessible. Fortunately modern travellers will have no trouble reaching this charming town.



Kamikochi

This national park is a plateau more than 2,000 metres above sea level in the centre of the Japan Alps. It is an area of truly outstanding natural beauty, home to wild bears and monkeys and many other animals and birds. A popular tourist destination, Kamikochi provides both a base for climbing some of Japan's highest peaks, as well as peaceful, well tended trails along the Azusa River.



Nikko

Set amidst sumptuous mountains, the home of the first Tokugawa shogun offers spectacular beauty all year round. In winter a thick blanket of snow tops the dramatic Toshogu shrine. In springtime the blossom-covered trees fill the valleys. Come summer and the area is a lush green, while autumn offers colourful foliage of red and gold. Nikko is also considered a heartland of spirituality.

Hokkaido

The northernmost of Japan's main islands, Hokkaido is still thought of as frontier country. Much like the Wild West, Hokkaido conjures up images of cowboys, wilderness, and far horizons, but bills itself as the Far North, with deep winter snows and arctic references in Sapporo's shopping districts. This unique culture is also defined by the indigenous Ainu, who, though small in number, add a distinct element to Hokkaido.

Hokkaido skilfully balances its main industries of tourism and agriculture, and some of the same areas that are world-renowned for skiing in the winter are popular for picturesque summer lavender fields. Though best known for its winter snow sports, which have been favourably compared to Canadian conditions, Hokkaido is also a nature lover's paradise, and some of Japan's best and wildest national parks make for stunning hiking amidst crater lakes, caldera, and steaming waterfalls.



Luxury Japan Tour

Tour planning and special features

We believe a good tour should offer time to relax, to see things in detail and to meet local people. We don't believe in itineraries that cram in as many locations as possible, ignoring many of the real treats on offer and not allowing time to relax after each part of the journey.

Your itinerary starts with a four night stay in Kyoto as we feel this allows just enough time to take in the best of the city. You can take as much time as you need at the hotel to recover from the flight. For the rest of the tour, you stay for at least two nights at each location allowing you just enough time to settle in so you are ready for the excitement ahead. You do not need to handle your main luggage during the tour as it is forwarded to each hotel by courier.

Most activities and excursions are planned to finish between 4pm and 5pm giving you time to yourself in the evening. You are welcome to join us for dinner but we will happily advise you if you prefer to be more independent.

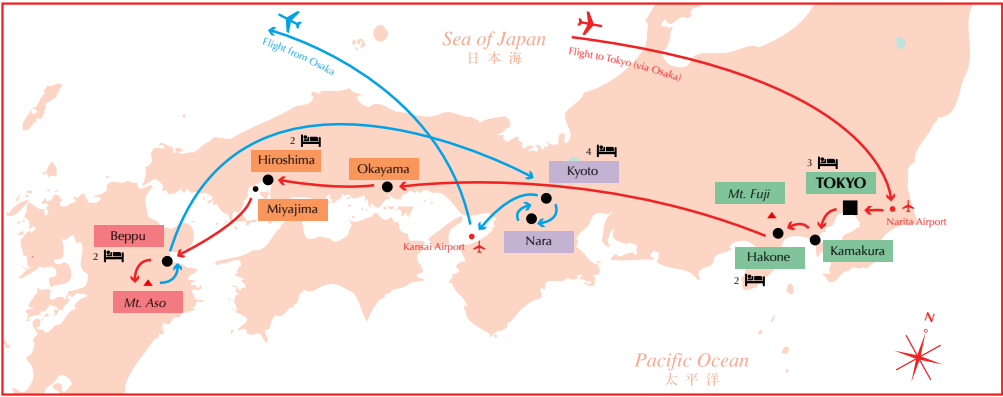
Our hotels are the best possible at each location and will usually be 5 star. You will also have the chance to experience two nights in a luxurious Japanese inn, or ryokan, with exquisite traditional Japanese cuisine and natural hot spring baths.

Each tour is timed to include at least one local festival (see the **Luxury Tour Seasons** for details).

Groups are limited to 16 travellers and your tour leader is joined by local guides at each location.

The tour price includes everything except some of the meals. In our experience this allows our guests to choose the style of food they wish and also offers the opportunity for more independence if desired.

In addition, we can arrange tailor made extensions to our luxury tours and our UK and Tokyo offices can make special arrangements such as flight upgrades or kabuki theatre or other performance tickets.



Day	Schedule	Main Transport	Accommodation
1	Flight to Tokyo		Flight
2	You are met on arrival and assisted to your hotel in Tokyo.	Airport Train	Tokyo Hotel
3	Our first day in Japan begins with a visit to Tsukiji and the world's largest fish market. Enjoy a stroll in Hamarikyu gardens and continue by boat to Asakusa Kannon. Today ends with a walking tour of the Imperial Palace Gardens.	Taxi / Boat / Walking	Tokyo Hotel
4	We begin the day at the Tokyo National Museum, and continue on to the high-tech shopping district of Akihabara. The rest of the day is at your leisure - we would be happy to assist you with visiting Meiji Shrine, or the trendy Omotesando shopping area.	Walking / Taxi / Local train	Tokyo Hotel
5	We visit Taya Caves with carved Buddhist images, all created by hand over a 500 year period. Continuing to Kamakura we visit the Great Buddha and Tsuruoka Hachiman Shrine. We arrive at our lakeside hotel in Hakone with fabulous views across Lake Ashi to Mount Fuji.	Coach	Hakone Hotel
6	We enjoy views of Mount Fuji as we explore the local area by cable car, mountain train, and pleasure boat. We see the Great Boiling Valley, the Hakone Open-Air Museum, and the Yosegi parquetry studio's workshop.	Steamer / Cable Car / Coach	Hakone Hotel
7	We take the bullet train to Hiroshima with a stop in Okayama to see Korakuen, one of Japan's three famous "walking" gardens.	Bullet Train / Coach	Hiroshima Hotel
8	We visit Miyajima island for a leisurely day including Itsukushima shrine, the iconic torii gate in the sea and the island summit.	Local Train / Ferry / Cable car	Hiroshima Hotel
9	We take a tram to the Atomic Dome and Peace Park. We head west along the coastline to Beppu where we see the devil's pools and try a sand bath. Our destination is the mountain town of Yufuin and our Japanese Inn.	Bullet Train / Express Train / Coach	Yufuin Japanese Inn
10	We travel by coach to Mount Aso, enjoying the spectacular views around the volcano. On our return we visit the remarkable pottery village of Onta.	Coach	Yufuin Japanese Inn
11	We enjoy the green landscapes of northern Kyushu to Kyoto. You have time to visit the 13th Century Sanjusangendo which houses 1001 statues of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy.	Express Train / Bullet Train	Kyoto Hotel
12	We visit Nara Park, home to Todaiji Temple, Nigatsu-do Temple and many deer in beautiful landscaped gardens. We head to a local Japanese tea farm for a special lunch and to pick the tea leaves, to process and take home.	Coach	Kyoto Hotel
13	A morning visit to Golden Pavilion, is followed by Ryoan-ji Temple. We visit Nijo Castle and Gion with its renowned Geisha. Enjoy a special private dinner with two performing Geisha. After dinner we take a late evening stroll around the lit-up temples nearby.	Coach / Taxi / Walking	Kyoto Hotel
14	This morning we head up to Kiyomizu Temple and on to the bustling Nishiki market. In the afternoon we may be watching a traditional festival or tea ceremony with Maiko dance depending on the season.	Coach	Kyoto Hotel
15	Transfer to the airport for your flight home.	Airport Train	



Luxury Japan

The best of everything Japan has to offer. This tour is designed for newcomers who seek first class hotels and a comprehensive introduction to Japan. The tour follows a leisurely pace, commencing with three full days in Kyoto and Nara, indulging your senses with all the delights of the region.

This tour is always timed to coincide with a major festival. Detailed brochures are available on request or see our website for full tour information including dates and prices.

15 day tour to experience Japan's most spectacular locations



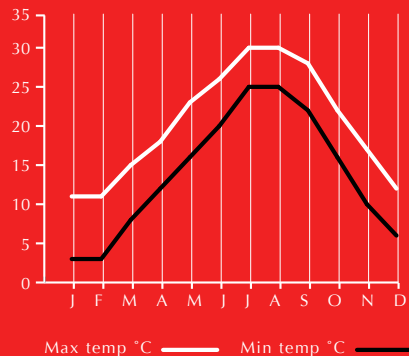
Climate

The Japanese archipelago covers a huge latitude with tropical islands in the south and harsh winters in the north. Most tours take place in areas on the main islands which have a similar climate to Tokyo.

Winters are cold but sunny with occasional snow. Spring (March to May) brings warm sunny days that are ideal for sightseeing with many seasonal attractions. Summer starts with the rainy season which is followed by hot and humid weather with temperatures often over 30°C. The autumn is another pleasant time with many days of unbroken sunshine and comfortable daytime temperatures for seeing the sights.

Most of our scheduled tours are planned in the spring and autumn. At other times we will advise on climate conditions and design tours accordingly.

Avg. monthly temperatures in Tokyo



Luxury Tour seasons

Our luxury tour runs in the spring from late March into April and in late October. They are timed when the climate is most pleasant and for the best seasonal highlights.

Springtime **cherry blossom** is an enduring image of Japan and our spring tour is very popular for that reason. The delicate pink clouds of cherry blossom transform temple gardens and parks throughout the country. The whole country is swept up in its ephemeral beauty as it blooms from the south to the north with weather reports showing local blossom counts. We hope to see the blossom at its best in Kyoto but you will almost certainly catch it at some point in the tour as the season lasts a month and varies with latitude and altitude. To celebrate the blossom season, Maiko Geisha perform the Cherry Dance, or **Miyako Odori**, in Gion and you will have a special chance to enjoy a performance.



October and November bring pleasant, sunny weather comparable to that of southern Italy, a welcome return after the heat and humidity of summer.

Our October Tour starts with a special treat, when we witness two of Japan's most famous festivals. Firstly, the Festival of the Ages, or **Jidai Matsuri**, is a costume procession from the Imperial Palace to Heian Shrine, celebrating Kyoto's history as the ancient capital.

The second, **Kurama Fire Festival**, is celebrated in a mountain village 30 minutes north of Kyoto. Long rows of fire torches are lit on both sides of the street leading to Yuki Shrine and the local boys run to and fro brandishing torches and yelling, "Sairei Sairyo!" meaning, "Merry festival!"



Comments from previous tours

"Nigel asked me for a highlight of the Tour. I immediately said 'Geisha' because Geisha and kimono were the reasons for going. However, seconds later I thought about kabuki, ryokan, exquisite food presentation, hot spring bath, temple gardens... The aim of my trip melded into a series of amazing sights and experiences. I really can't list them all. Many thanks to all those responsible, particularly Megumi."

— Pat, Bristol

"Naomi, I want to tell you (once again) and will likely want to repeat this many times again, that we feel VERY fortunate to have met you and look forward to the time our paths cross once again. We can't thank you enough for how you made everyone's voyage into Japan a lifetime highlight. Your tender compassion and attentive unrelenting efforts with every detail were acknowledged by everyone. How you arranged to share so many weddings with us is truly amazing!"

— Louis and Anna, Canada

Tailor Made Itineraries

A Japan Tour made for you

In addition to our scheduled tours, we also offer tailor made itineraries according to your requirements. We can design your trip to suit your budget, the time of year you prefer to travel, your chosen hotel type or your particular interests, for example. Whether you have a limited budget, prefer more independent travel, would like to visit a particular area of Japan or are interested in something specific like Japanese gardens, animation or sumo, we can arrange a tour just for you. We would be happy to discuss your requirements and make a detailed printed quote.

Our tailor made itineraries can be designed to include as much or as little support as you need. You may be interested in our services if you haven't travelled in Asia before, are travelling with young children, or just prefer to be looked after!

We are currently the only company to use of our own staff to look after you during your tailor made tour. This ensures that all the information we have gathered during the process of planning your tour will be well understood by the staff looking after you once you arrive. After your initial personal contact with the Japan office staff you can feel comfortable contacting us at any time through the telephone support.

Prices

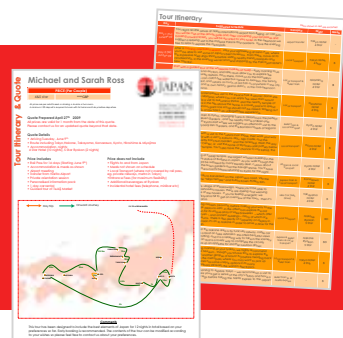
The cost of tailor made itineraries varies according to your choice of airline, season, hotel or ryokan grade. We can design a tour according to your budget or give you an immediate indication of approximate costs. Please contact us for further information.

Quote and Personalised Tour Information

As part of your tailor made tour service we prepare detailed information about your tour. This is a personal guide that includes a detailed suggested itinerary, your hotel guides, relevant train schedules, location guides and general advice. It is normally about 20 pages and we are happy to provide this as a pdf file and / or a bound booklet according to your wishes. When you meet our staff in Japan they will provide more local information such as maps and further sightseeing information and go through your whole schedule to make sure you understand all your arrangements fully.

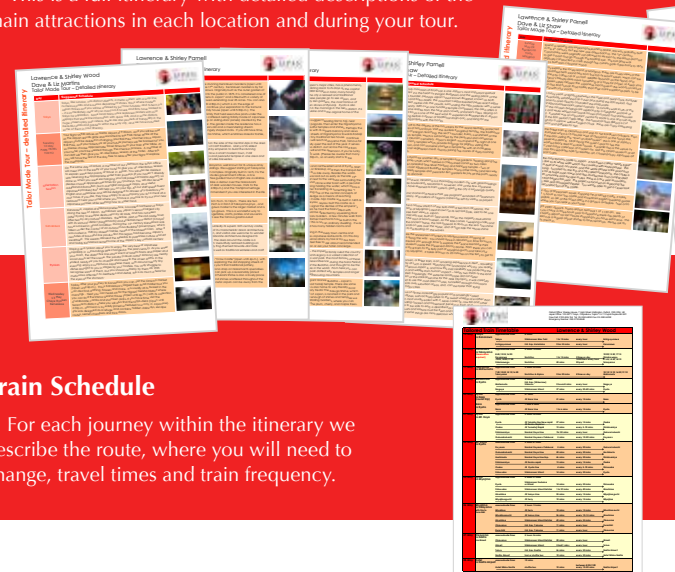
Quote

This is normally presented as a suggested itinerary with a map and different price levels according to the standard of accommodation.



Detailed Itinerary

This is a full itinerary with detailed descriptions of the main attractions in each location and during your tour.



Hotel Guides

Each hotel or ryokan in your itinerary will be presented with several images, location map and general information.



General advice

We also include several pages of useful general information about visiting Japan.



“ We loved Japan: the politeness and helpfulness of the people, the high standards of cleanliness everywhere... the beauty of the temples and their gardens... the efficiency of the public transport system, the good and respectful service given to us in shops, the range of delicious foods in all kinds of restaurants... and the calm and tranquil atmosphere wherever we went. We will recommend you highly to all our friends. ”

— Barbara and Margaret, Shrewsbury





and Jane Warren

into JAPAN
SPECIALIST TOURS

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September 28th
Tokyo, Hakone, Sado Island, Matsumoto,
Nagasaki, Takayama, Kanazawa, Kyoto, Miyajima
Osaka, Ryokan (11 nights)

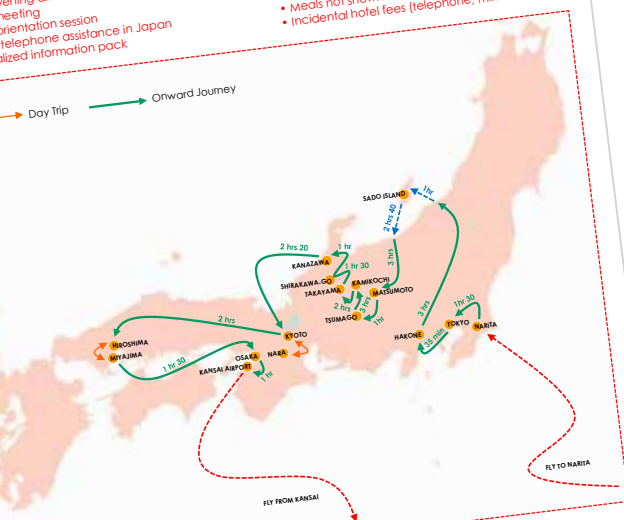
22 nights
(11 nights)

Flights to and from Japan
Transfers (1 case/person)
and 3 half-day privately guided tours
Entrance fees on guided days
Lunch for the fish market in Tokyo (incl. lunch)
Many in Kyoto
Evening and kaiseki dinner in Kyoto
Meeting
Orientation session
Telephone assistance in Japan
Detailed information pack

Not Included:

- Flights to and from Japan
- Meals not shown on schedule
- Incidental hotel fees (telephone, minibar etc)

Day Trip Onward Journey



Comments from previous tours

"We just wanted to let you know that we loved Japan and had a fantastic holiday! Thank you once again for organising things on our behalf, and also for the extra information/advice you gave us once we arrived, and for showing us around some of Tokyo. We've got loads of great memories and hope to go back some time in the future."

— Sarah and Mike, Spain

"Just a brief note to say how much we enjoyed our stay in Japan. It is a most fascinating and enjoyable country and the itinerary worked extremely well — a lovely mix of the cities, country and traditional communities. The arrangements worked really well. All the hotels were good (and Takayama quite out of the ordinary). The choice of Asakusa in Tokyo was excellent - it is such an interesting neighbourhood full of life..."

— Neil and Gwendoline, Essex

"Thank you so much for planning such a brilliant Japan trip for our family. We had a great time and saw so much — Kyoto, Nara and Himeji Castle being our favourites, although Tokyo was so vibrant and fun and the Conrad was excellent. We can't wait to go back and see more of the country. Please send our regards

to Megumi who was just delightful. This was one of our best family holidays ever. Thank you so much for your superb planning and service."

— Monique, Sekhar, Nina and Jennifer, London

"Thank you so much for all the help you gave to Margaret and me in arranging our holiday in Japan and for the continuing support we felt we had whilst at the airports and throughout our trip. We would not have enjoyed ourselves as we did if we had not had the help of your English-speaking guides: all of whom were charming young people, full of fun! The ryokan experience was really special and our path amongst the etiquette of it all was smoothed and eased by having Megumi with us. She also gave us clear and informed instructions for the days when we went off on our own."

— Barbara and Margaret, Shrewsbury



Tailor Made Itineraries

Support Services

Airport Meeting

We will meet you from your flight and give you assistance at the airport before escorting you to your hotel. You can relax as we take you through the necessary arrangements to a perfect start to your tour.

Orientation

Your orientation would normally take place at your hotel on your arrival day or the following day depending on your schedule. We ease you into Japanese life, providing the following services during the orientation or airport meeting as appropriate:

- *Going through all your arrangements with you to make sure you understand fully and are well prepared.*
- *Providing local maps and sightseeing information to supplement your personalised information pack.*
- *Converting your rail pass and booking train tickets for your journey which can only be done once you arrive in Japan*
- *Visiting a restaurant and understanding the menu. We will also advise on Japanese cuisine and basic dining etiquette.*
- *Changing money or travellers cheques*
- *Arranging mobile phone*
- *Making national and international phone calls*
- *Advising on any special requirements such as travelling with small children*
- *Learning basic phrases - good morning, thank you, excuse me, etc*

Guides

We work closely with Japan's best guides including many specialists allowing us to offer a number of unique opportunities. Beyond private tours of the key attractions we also arrange a variety of experiences such as sumo wrestler stable visits, architecture tours, backstreet fashion tours and many others.

24 Hour Assistance

Whatever your needs - from general advice on sightseeing to assistance in an emergency - you can use our Japan office contact numbers or support email for 24 hour help and advice.



"When ever anyone asks how our holiday was I find I am saying that it was just perfect - nothing was wrong at all. In fact just the opposite, everything was well organised, we were taken care of all the way through by all the guides and especially, of course, by Megumi. She had a delightful balance of professionalism and personal attention. Nothing was too much trouble - indeed any mention of anything we wanted was immediately researched and made to happen."

— Barbara and Jack, Leamington Spa

"Many, many thanks for organising a superb tour for us. It was THE holiday of a lifetime and we came back with very happy memories and over 1000 pictures of a beautiful country and such lovely people. Nothing was too much to ask and every request was met speedily and with great courtesy. The place is so clean, trains etc run on time and the heated toilet seats were a boon, especially at Mt Koyasan! They are clever the Japanese. Thanks again from us all - we are totally satisfied customers of Into Japan Specialist Tours."

— Norman, Elise and John, Newcastle

"What a star! Nothing was too much trouble for Naomi... She was exceptionally professional and a credit to your company.. great fun too... knowledgeable about everything and everywhere we visited, but also open and honest ...We would like to think we have found a new friend."

— Rosemary and Dan, Cheshire





Accommodation

Hotels in Japan range from simple and efficient business hotels to the luxurious accommodation found only in Tokyo. Ryokan still fill the luxury niche in many locations.

Hotels

Japanese accommodation is known for service at any level and even in smaller establishments in the 3 star category, staff will be polite, knowledgeable and friendly, while at the higher end the service often exceeds the highest expectations. Rooms at all levels are generally spotlessly clean and breakfasts are very good quality - though a Japanese "Western" breakfast will vary from the traditional, with salads being a very common addition, along with eggs, meats, toasts, rolls, yoghurt and fruit. Japanese breakfasts are also often available.

Traditionally, Japanese couples sleep next to each other on futons and though hotels provide beds, the prevalence of twin rooms, often with two single sized beds, still reflects this. Wherever possible, we will accommodate requests for double beds, though outside the larger cities twin rooms remain standard up to the 4 Star level.

Top end hotels are somewhat limited outside major cities, with 5 Star + really only available in Tokyo - though luxury ryokan are available throughout the country



Ryokan in Japan

Ryokan, traditional Japanese inns, range from simple, modest lodgings, through rambling wooden inns reminiscent of times past, to sleek modern resorts designed by top firms and providing every indulgence.

At any level, ryokan offer an exceptional dining experience, with kaiseki dinners and traditional Japanese breakfasts served at a low table in your room. Rooms are in the traditional Japanese style, emphasising clean lines and a sense of space. There tend to be few furnishings and soft Japanese futon mattresses are spread out on the tatami floor in place of beds. All ryokan offer communal onsen baths, often in stunning outdoor settings and all rooms booked in the star categories below will include en suite facilities.

In terms of facilities and services, ryokan offer something quite different from hotels in the same level. Where hotels will offer twenty-four hour room service, mini bars, swimming pools and concierge service, ryokan offer traditional Japanese service that will not generally include the above. Instead, the focus is on the food, the rooms, the baths and the atmosphere. As ryokan tend to cater to Japanese guests, English is not always spoken, even in the higher star ratings, though staff will always do their utmost to communicate with you.

A Guide to Ryokan facilities based on equivalent hotel star ratings

Rating	Example	General	Rooms	Cuisine
3 Star ☆☆☆	<i>Shirayu no Yado, Yamadaya</i>	These ryokan may not be much to look at from the outside, but the clean, simple interiors are comfortable and well-maintained. Indoor and outdoor communal public baths are provided.	Simple, clean tatami rooms with touches of refinement, such as fresh flowers and tea-making facilities. Futon mattresses are laid out by staff before or after dinner. As in all our ryokan categories, yukata (kimono-style robes) are provided, as are towels and hair dryers and other toilet amenities. These rooms will have a private toilet and sink area ensuite to the room.	High quality, multi-course kaiseki dinners, often incorporating local specialties and seasonal ingredients.
4 Star ☆☆☆☆	<i>Yoshiike Ryokan, Hakone</i>	Generally larger ryokan, with more impressive lobbies and occasionally separate dining areas. In addition to ensuite rooms, private baths are generally available for those seeking some privacy from the communal onsen.	Larger, increasingly ornate tatami rooms often with flat-screen televisions and tea-making facilities. Ryokan in this category may offer rooms with Western-style twin beds. In general, however, futon mattresses are laid out on the tatami after dinner and folded up again by staff before breakfast.	As above with an increased emphasis on quality and presentation.
5 Star ☆☆☆☆☆	<i>Senkei Annex, Yamagaso</i>	The exteriors of these lovely ryokan vary greatly, ranging from traditional wood to ultra-modern. Interiors are beautifully decorated, with great attention to detail and the communal onsen are luxurious and peaceful.	Comfortable and spacious, these rooms unite the traditional with modern touches. Some ryokan may offer Western-style beds in fusion rooms. Large windows open onto garden views or distant mountains. Ensuite baths are luxurious, with marble, stone, or fragrant cypress tubs.	Excellent kaiseki cuisine, focusing on high-quality and often local seasonal ingredients, served in elegant handmade dishes.
5 Star Plus ☆☆☆☆☆☆	<i>Ginyu, Hakone</i>	Often newly renovated, these designer ryokan have been run by the same family for generations, and excel at service. Spa treatments are available and the communal onsen are large, beautifully designed havens with garden or mountain views.	The epitome of indulgence, these large rooms have outdoor onsen in the room's private balcony or garden. Fusion-style rooms with double beds are often available. Suite-type rooms, with separate dining areas are standard. Rooms will often contain beautiful examples of traditional scrolls and flower arrangements.	Elaborate, innovative kaiseki that occasionally leans towards fusion and rival those in top restaurants, served in ceramic dishes made by renowned artists.

Special experiences and themes



Winter Sports

Winter in Japan shows another unmissable side of this very diverse country. Northern Japan is blessed with metres of snow and although ski resorts are more compact, skiing and snow boarding can be enjoyed on some of the very finest powder snow in the world. Once you have experienced a day on the slopes followed by a soothing hot spring bath and splendid Japanese cuisine, you won't want to ski anywhere else!

Okinawa - Tropical Japan

Okinawa is little known outside Japan yet this semi-tropical paradise could be an ideal part of a relaxing holiday. Venturing south of Okinawa itself, you find tranquil islands with white sandy beaches and stunning coral bays. Snorkelling and scuba diving locations are some of the best in Asia. Day-trips inland to the untouched tropical forests are also a treat.



There is a variety of accommodation including some fantastic small resort hotels - some with resident turtles swimming in the shallows.

Sumo

Sumo wrestling is at the heart of Japanese culture. The emotional control exhibited before and after the bouts typifies Japanese society. The techniques can be unfathomable and newcomers may find it hard to work out who has actually won. The sumo wrestlers' size is overwhelming but in spite of appearances, they are very agile athletes who follow strict training regimes. We can arrange tickets to one of the main tournaments or a very special visit to a sumo wrestling stable with an international sumo journalist.

Tea ceremony

Most famous of the Zen arts, drinking the stimulating matcha began in the monasteries as an aid to meditation. It was formalised in the fifteenth century by the tea master Sen-no-Rikyū, who laid down rules linking tea ceremony to the arts of calligraphy, flower arranging, and ceramics.

A traditional tea ceremony is performed in a specially designed tea house within a formal garden. The guests enter the tea house through a door so low that everyone must stoop to enter, signifying equality within the tea house. Traditionally samurai weapons were left outside: people entered unarmed and thus equal. Tea ceremonies vary in length depending on the food and tea served, though the most common and easy to appreciate features a simple bowl of whipped tea complemented by a Japanese confection.

Geisha Dinner

Geisha (gei meaning 'art' sha meaning 'person of') are female entertainers and arts specialists. The closest approximation to their skills is perhaps the idea of traditional English ladies' accomplishments and manners. Geisha live a disciplined life learning traditional dance, music, deportment and costume to entertain their patrons and are highly respected and honoured in Japanese society. They perform in Kyoto's exclusive tea houses and entry into their world is by invitation only. We are proud to be able to invite into Japan guests (men and women) to enjoy an evening with a Geisha including dance, music, conversation and delicious food and drink.

Family attractions

Manga — Hiroyo Miyazaki is perhaps the most internationally famous Japanese animator. His more recent films shown in the UK include Princess Mononoke, academy award winner Spirited Away and Howl's Moving Castle. His style is very different from Disney and his Studio Ghibli near Tokyo is certainly worth a visit. Another animation great is Osamu Tezuka who brought us Astroboy, a real Japanese icon. There is a museum dedicated to his animation in Kyoto and like Studio Ghibli, it has a permanent exhibition, exclusive anime screenings, guest exhibitions and of course some great 'character goods' shopping.

Eigamura — Toei Movieland, or Eigamura, is great for families or adults with an interest in the more bizarre side of Japan. It is a working movie set where Japanese samurai dramas are filmed. If lucky, you can watch the actors being filmed in live action sword fights. The sets look authentic and some of the buildings are open for people to explore inside.

There is an old-style theatre, a school room with demonstrations, a haunted house and a fun opportunity to be dressed as a samurai or a geisha for photos.

Disney — Tokyo Disneyland is familiar, easily accessible and fun for families. It was the first Disney theme park to be opened outside the USA and has expanded to include Tokyo DisneySea, with attractions, parades and live performance based on the myths and legends of the sea. There are hotels, restaurants and lots of shopping too.

Couples and Honeymooners

From the quiet, secluded countryside to the bustle of the big city, there is always plenty of room for romance in Japan. A candlelit meal in the sky overlooking the sparkling lights of the Tokyo nightscape, walking hand in hand along blossom canopied lanes or relaxing on a tropical coral beach are some of the romantic moments Japan has to offer. A stay at a Japanese inn, or ryokan, with a natural hot spring bath of scented cedar wood or stone and views out over countryside is a wonderful memory only to be made in Japan.

Tea Farm

Tea is the most commonly drunk beverage in Japan and plays an important part in Japanese food culture. Although various types of tea are widely available, green tea is the most common and is also the central element of the tea ceremony. A tour of a tea farm includes a visit through the beautiful tea fields in the surrounding mountains and offers an authentic tea picking and making experience. You can also enjoy a tea tasting of traditional locally made teas which will give you a unique insight into the world of tea in Japan. They also offer a special lunch box with many of the delicacies using tea as an ingredient.



Do you think...

Japanese people are reserved?

Most people are surprised how friendly Japanese are to overseas visitors. They are positively thrilled that you have come to Japan and you will get vast encouragement if you try a few Japanese words. You will see highly ordered behaviour on public transport and in work environments but in the evenings, restaurants and bars are as lively as anywhere else. It can get even more extreme at some of the festivals!

Japanese food is all raw fish?

Traditional Japanese food is extremely varied and raw fish is a tiny part of that. Most dishes consist of cooked meat, chicken or fish and it is not hard to find delicious, high quality food, whatever your preferences. Many restaurants have English menus and models or pictures of the dishes, making it easy to find what you fancy. While strictly vegetarian food can be harder to find, we will provide you with the means to enjoy the culinary side of Japan, no matter what your dietary restrictions.

Japan is crowded?

Tokyo and Osaka are big cities and like other cities of the world, they get busy during rush hour but at other times things are calmer. Experiencing a day of hectic city life is a fascinating experience and if you need a break, there are always pockets of peace and quiet wherever you are. Once you leave the city, most of Japan is mountain, farmland and tranquil countryside.

It will be difficult to get around Japan?

Many signs, especially in Tokyo and other cities, have English alongside the Japanese and there was a big push to make city transport easier to understand for the 2002 World Cup. Most hotels have English-speaking staff so you can check any plans before leaving for the day. Transport is fast, efficient and punctual. For English speakers, Japan is no more of a challenge than any other overseas country and if you look lost, don't be surprised if a complete stranger asks if they can help.

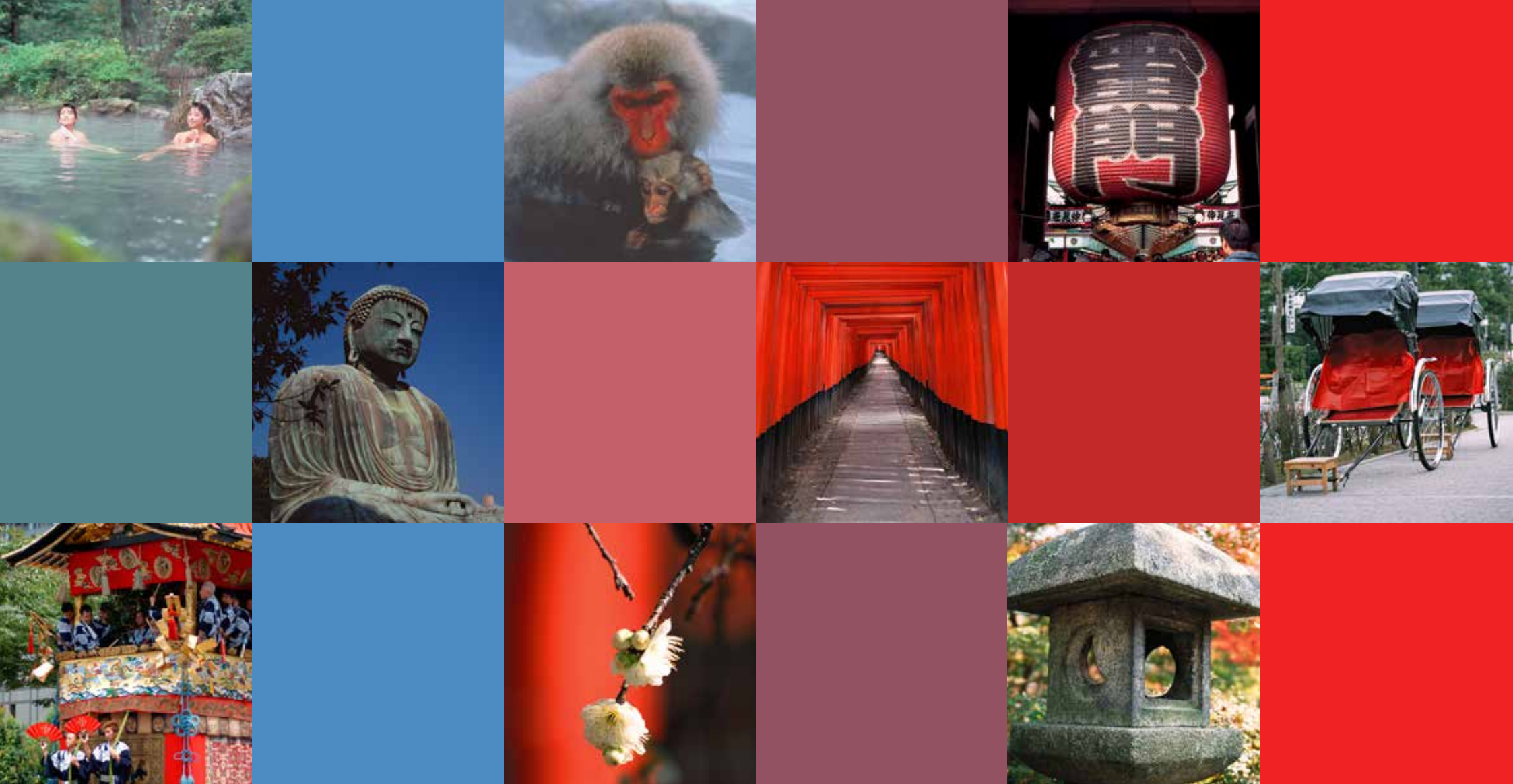
Japanese will be offended by my behaviour?

It will be obvious to Japanese people that you are a tourist and while their society has many layers of etiquette, you will not be expected to follow it. Visitors are welcomed and people are happy to show you how to do things and teach you a few words. You will be surprised to see how thrilled people are by a few words of Japanese or good use of chopsticks!



“ We thoroughly enjoyed the trip - it all worked perfectly. I would also like to say how wonderful our guide, Megumi, was - in fact Megumi really made the trip as we learnt and saw so much more than we could possibly have done on our own and she made it all really good fun. ”

— Sir Digby and Lady Jones



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