SAMURAI TOURS

Adventures in Discovering Traditional Japan

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Best of Shikoku and Kyushu

15 Days / 14 Nights

Best of Shikoku and Kyushu

Tour Overview

The Best of Shikoku and Kyushu tour focuses on the two main islands in southern Japan. With its mild climate, tranquil gardens, famous hot springs, active volcanoes, historic castles, beautiful countryside, and warm-hearted people, this part of Japan offers a dramatic experience that will create travel memories for a lifetime.

Destinations

Osaka, Takamatsu, Kotohira, Iya Valley, Oboke, Kochi, Matsuyama, Dogo Onsen, Beppu Onsen, Usuki, Takachiho, Miyazaki, Sakurajima, Kagoshima, Nagasaki

Tour Factors

Cultural Immersion
★★★★☆

Pace
★★★☆☆

Physical Activity
★★★★☆

Tour Details

The rural mountainous island of Shikoku will charm you with its natural beauty, mild climate, laid-back atmosphere and friendly people. It is the smallest of the four major islands of Japan, and is also the one least visited by foreigners, although this tranquil island offers elements of traditional Japan that are hard to find elsewhere. For more than 1,000 years, Shikoku has been the focus of “henro” (pilgrims) following in the footsteps of Kobo Daishi (the 9th century Buddhist monk who helped to change Japanese religion forever) in their ever-elusive search for enlightenment.

Kyushu, the third largest and southern-most island of Japan, was at one time the most important gateway into Japan for foreigners. But at the same time, according to Japanese legend, it was from Kyushu that the first Japanese emperor, Kimmu, began his campaign to unify Japan. Kyushu is therefore considered to be the cradle of the Japanese civilization. With its grumbling volcanoes, steaming hot springs and rugged mountains along with its relaxed and uncomplicated atmosphere, Kyushu is not to be missed.

Follow in the footsteps of Kobo Daishi, the 9th century Buddhist monk, and visit numerous important religious centers in Japan including Kotohira Shrine, a favorite destination of pilgrims for hundreds of years and Takachiho, steeped in Japanese mythology. Visit Udo Shrine, said to be the birthplace of Emperor Jimmu, the first emperor of Japan born more than 2,000 yeas ago. Bathe in some of Japan’s oldest, most famous and largest onsen and climb to the top of Japan’s largest original Samurai castles. Discover Sakurajima, one of Japan’s most active volcanoes. You will visit some of Japan’s best gardens, and tour Nagasaki, once the only gateway to Japan for foreigners, and much, much more.

Tour Highlights

- ✔ Walk along the Shikoku 88 Temple Pilgrimage while visiting 5 temples
- ✔ Yashima
- ✔ Ritsurin Garden
- ✔ Iya Valley and Kazurabashi Vine Bridge
- ✔ Matsuyama Castle
- ✔ Usuki's Stone Buddhas
- ✔ Takachiho Gorge and Amano Iwato Shrine
- ✔ Takachiho Yokagura Dance Performance
- ✔ Udo Shrine
- ✔ Sakurajima
- ✔ Senganen Garden
- ✔ Dejima

Tour Inclusions

- ✔ Travel Guard Gold Policy (for American tour members only)
- ✔ Reserved Seat Train Tickets on all Inter-City Travel or Travel by Private Vehicle
- ✔ One ride on a Shinkansen (bullet train)
- ✔ Meeting service at the arrival airport
- ✔ Sending service to the appropriate train station
- ✔ Baggage transfer from city to city
- ✔ Electronic version of Tour Handbook and Japanese History

Tour Exclusions

- ✖ International airfare is NOT included.
- ✖ A printed itinerary is not included
- ✖ Alcoholic beverages, soft drinks and desserts are NOT included

Map

Tour Destinations

- Osaka
- Takamatsu
- Oboke and Iya Valley
- Kochi
- Matsuyama
- Beppu Onsen
- Usuki
- Takachiho
- Miyazaki
- Kagoshima
- Nagasaki

🚌Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive in Osaka

After clearing Customs and Immigration (which can take up to three hours due to increased tourism to Japan) you will be met at Tokyo’s Osaka Kansai Airport by a private taxi service. The meeting service will help with your transfer to Osaka. No meals included.

Travel: 1 Hour; Walking: Light

Day 2 Travel to Takamatsu; Tour Yashima

After breakfast, we will travel to Takamatsu. Takamatsu, on the coast of the Seto Inland Sea, is the capital of Kagawa, Japan’s smallest prefecture. The city’s port used to be the main entry point to Shikoku Island until the opening of the Seto Ohashi Bridge in 1988.. After dropping off our luggage at coin lockers at the train station, we will travel to Yashima, a plateau just outside of Takamatsu. Yashima was the site of a famous 12th century battle between the Taira and Minamito clans, the origins of the Samurai. Here the Taira were defeated in what was to be the last battle before their final destruction. Around the flat summit are some attractions related to the former battleground, including a monument to the Battle of Yashima and Chinoike (“blood pond”), a pond which is said to have turned red with blood after the victorious Minamoto washed their swords in it.In addition, you will get an excellent view of Takamatsu and the Seto Inland Sea. We will start our tour of Yashima by visiting the Shikoku Mura. Shikoku Mura is an open air museum situated at the base of Yashima. This pleasant hillside park preserves and exhibits traditional buildings and structures that have been relocated here from all over Shikoku Island. Among the exhibited buildings, which mainly date from the Edo and Meiji periods, are a number of farmhouses and storehouses, as well as various traditional workshops that produced goods such as sugar and soya sauce. Next wee will stop for a lunch of the famous Sanuki Udon at a local restaurant. After continuing on to the top of Yashima, we will visit the battlefield sites and Yashima Temp. This temple is number 84 of the 88 temples on the Shikoku Pilgrimage. And we will enjoy the view of Takamatsu and the Seto Inland Sea. Breakfast at the hotel and lunch and dinner at a local restaurant is included.

Travel: 2 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 3 Takamatsu - Ritsurin Garden; Kotohira - Konpira Shrine, Kanamaruza Theater

We will begin today by touring Ritsurin Koen. This is considered to be one of the most beautiful gardens in Japan, taking more than one hundred years to create. Here we can also take a short break to enjoy green tea and sweets in a peaceful teahouse overlooking a koi-filled pond. In the afternoon, we will visit the Konpira Shrine in the city of Kotohira. Located on the wooded slope of Mount Zozu, and dedicated to sailors and seafaring, the approach to Kompirasan is 788 stone steps. Despite being among the more challenging shrine approaches in Japan, Konpirasan is a highly popular site visited by pilgrims from across the country. After visiting the shrine, we will visit the nearby Kanamaruza Theater. Built in Kotohira in 1835, it is Japan’s oldest surviving, complete kabuki playhouse. From time to time, it still stages kabuki performances, featuring some of the country’s most popular kabuki stars.Breakfast at the hotel and lunch at a local restaurant are included.

Travel: 3 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 4 Travel to Oboke Gorge - Oboke Sightseeing Boat Cruise; Iya Valley -

Kazurabashi Vine Bridget; Travel to Kochi

After breakfast, we will travel to Oboke Gorge. Cut by the swirling rapids of the Yoshino River, the name means “big dangerous steps” as the jagged, rocky walls can be perilous to navigate. We will take a gentle 30 minute boat ride down the Yoshino River, where guides point out interesting rocks, many of which resemble different animals, along the way. After a short stop for lunch, we will drive to the Kazurabashi vine bridge, located in the remote Iya Valley. Suspension bridges made of mountain vines (kazurabashi) were the main means for people to cross the river of the Iya Valley in the past. History is unclear about their origins, but legends say that they were either first raised by Kobo Daishi, founder of the Shingon Sect of Japanese Buddhism, or created by Heike refugees hiding in the area after their defeat in the Gempei War (1180-1185) as a means of quickly cutting off access to the valley. After returning to Oboke station, we will continue on to the city of Kochi. Located on the southern coast of Shikoku, the city is small and friendly, with a casual atmosphere and a dose of southern flair. The city is also the proud home of Sakamoto Ryoma, who played a role in realizing the Meiji Restoration. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at a local restaurant is included.

Travel: 3 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 5 Kochi - Kochi Castle, Katsurahama Beach

We will begin today by touring Kochi Castle. This castle is one of the 12 remaining original castles in Japan. A unique feature of Kochi castle is that its main tower (donjon) was not only used for military purposes, but also as a residence. In most other castles, the lords usually resided in separate palace buildings rather than in the castle keep. The castle’s wooden interior maintains the appearance of it Edo Period origins, and the lookout point from the castle tower’s top floor offers nice view of downtown. We will continue on to Katsurahama beach. Katsurahama is a scenic beach, 30 minutes south of central Koch. Because of strong currents, swimming is prohibited at Katsurahama. In place of swimming, visitors see the many other attractions located around the area. A famous statue of Kochi’s favorite son, Sakamoto Ryoma stands near the beach. Sakamoto was one of the architects of modern Japan. He was instrumental in negotiating an alliance between the Choshu and Satsuma clans that helped to bring an end to Japan’s feudal age in 1868. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 6 Travel to Matsuyama, Matsuyama - Ishiteji Temple; Overnight Dogo onsen

We will start the day traveling to the city of Matsuyama. After dropping off our luggage we will visit Ishiteji Temple, It is number 51 of the 88 temples on the Shikoku Pilgrimage. Pilgrims dressed in white are a frequent sight at this large temple. Ishiteji’s name literally means “stone hand temple”, referring to a local legend in which an aristocrat had held a stone tightly in his hand at his death bed after seeking the priest Kobo Daishi to no avail, and was later reborn with the stone still held in the baby’s hand.Before leaving the hotel in the morning, we will transfesr your main luggage forward to Matsuyama. You will be traveling to Iya Valley and Matsuyama with an overnight bag only. You will need enough items for 2 days and 1 night. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at a local restaurant or the hotel are included.

Travel: 3 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 7 Free Day in Dogo Onsen and Matsuyama

Today is a free day to tour Dogo Onsen and Matsuyama. We suggest visiting Matsuyama Castle. It is one of Japan’s twelve “original castles”, i.e. castles which have survived the post-feudal era

since 1868 intact. It is also one of the most complex and interesting castles in the country. It is located on Mount Katsuyama, a steep hill in the city center that provides visitors with a bird's eye view of Matsuyama and the Seto Inland Sea. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: N/A; Walking: TBDF

Day 8 Travel to Beppu; Tour Beppu Onsen, Overnight Beppu Onsen

After breakfast we will take a ferry to the city of Beppu Onsen. Beppu is one of Japan's most famous hot spring resorts, producing more hot spring water than any other resort in the country. Beppu offers an unmatched range of baths to be enjoyed, including ordinary hot water baths, mud baths, sand baths and steam baths. In addition, the Hells of Beppu are several spectacular hot springs for viewing rather than bathing. After dropping off our luggage at the hotel, we will visit some of the Beppu "Hells". Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 6 Hours; Walking: Light

Day 9 Travel to Usuki; Usuki Samurai District, Usuki Stone Buddhas, Travel to Takachiho; Yokugura Dance Performance

After breakfast, we will travel to Usuki. We will begin our visit to Usuki at the Samurai District. Usuki's samurai district retains the flavor of an old castle town with their stone paved alleys lined by traditional houses. Next, we will visit the Usuki stone buddhas. These are statues of Buddha, carved into the rock cliffs. It is unknown who and why they were created, as well as when they were created. Later in the day, we will travel to Takachiho. After dinner, we will enjoy a demonstration of the local Yokugura dance. These dances are reenactments of the local mythology in which the Sun Goddess hides herself and brings darkness to the world. The other gods create a way to coax her out of the cave, bringing light back to the world. Breakfast and dinner at the hotel and lunch at a local restaurant are included.

Travel: 4 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 10 Takachiho - Takachiho Gorge, Amano Iwate Shrine; Miyazaki - Aoshima

In the morning, we will visit the Takachiho Gorge and Amano Iwato Shrine. The Takachiho Gorge is a narrow chasm cut through the rock by the Gokase River. The sheer cliffs lining the gorge are made of volcanic basalt columns. Halfway along the gorge is the 55-foot high Minainotaki waterfall cascading down to the river below. There are two ways to enjoy the gorge and the waterfall. The first perspective is from a paved path that follows the edge of the gorge. The cave where Amaterasu hid herself is on the grounds of the Amano Iwato Shrine. However, it is too sacred to be seen. We can, instead, visit the cave where the other gods met to plan how to coax her out of her hiding place. After lunch, we will travel to the city of Miyazaki. With one of the warmest climates on the main islands of Japan, resorts, beaches and sports facilities, Miyazaki used to be the top honeymoon spot and a popular destination with domestic travelers until the 1980s. Here, we will visit the island of Aoshima. Aoshima Island is a small, beautiful island just off of the coast of the resort beaches south of Miyazaki City. Aoshima is connected to the mainland by a bridge and is ringed by white beaches surrounding a subtropical jungle at the island's center. It is a 1.5 kilometer walk around Aoshima's beaches with a number of canvas stands selling souvenirs along the way. At the center of the island is Aoshima Jinja, a colorful shrine set back in the jungle that is said to bring luck to married couples. We will overnight in Miyazaki. Breakfast and dinner at the hotel are included.

Travel: 2 1/2 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 11 Miyazaki - Udo Shrine; Sakurajima; Travel to Kagoshima

After breakfast, we will visit Udo Shrine, located on the Nichinan Coast south of Miyazaki City. The shrine is dedicated to Yamasachihiko, the father of Emperor Jimmu, the mythical first emperor of Japan. This brightly painted shrine is set in a cave on the side of a cliff overlooking the ocean. Next, we will travel to Sakurajima. Sakurajima is one of Japan's most active volcanoes and the symbol of Kagoshima. The volcano smokes constantly, and minor eruptions often take place multiple times per day. Located in the middle of Kagoshima Bay, Sakurajima is the area's most prominent geographic feature. While on the island, we will visit a couple of observation spots where you will get up-close view of the volcano. We will take the ferry to Kagoshima where we will be staying overnight. Breakfast at the hotel included.

Travel: 4 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 12 Kagoshima - Senganen Garden, Iso Residence, Shoko Shuseikan Museum; Travel to Nagasaki

We will start our tour of Kagoshima by visiting the Senganengarden. Senganen Garden is a Japanese style stroll garden located along the coast of Kagoshima Bay. The most striking feature of the garden is its use of Sakurajima and Kagoshima Bay as borrowed scenery. The garden also includes small ponds, streams and shrines. The garden was constructed in 1658 by the Shimazu clan, one of Japan's wealthiest and most powerful feudal clans during the Edo Period. The Shimazu clan ruled the Satsuma domain (present day Kagoshima) for almost 700 years. After the Edo Period, they continued to be influential as some of the earliest adopters of western science and technology. At the center of the garden stands the Iso Residence. After the end of the Edo Period, the Iso Residence became the main residence of the Shimazu family. Next we will visit the small Shoko Shuseikan Museum located next to the garden which originally served as one of the earliest western style machinery factories inJapan. Today it contains exhibits about the culture and maritime activities of the Shimizu clan and the early factory and machines which contributed to Japan's modernization in the 1800s. In the afternoon we will travel by train to Nagasaki. Before leaving the hotel in the morning, we will transfer your main luggage forward to Nagasaki. You will be traveling to Nagasaki with an overnight bag only. Breakfast at the hotel and lunch at a local restaurant are included.

Travel: 4 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 13 Nagasaki - Dejima, Glover Garden

The day starts by visiting Dejima. Dejima was a man-made island in the port of Nagasaki constructed in 1636. A few years later, the Dutch trading factory was moved to Dejima. The Dutch workers, the only remaining Westerners allowed in the country, were restricted to Dejima during Japan's two centuries of isolation. Today, Dejima is no longer an island, as the surrounding area has been reclaimed during the 20th century. However, a number of Dejima's historical structures have been reconstructed, including various residences, warehouses, walls and gates. There are many displays in these buildings documenting the daily life of the Dutch residents. Next, we will tour Glover Gardens. Glover Garden is an open-air museum, exhibiting mansions of former Western residents of Nagasaki. It is located on the hill where Western merchants settled down after the end of Japan's era of seclusion in the second half of the 19th century. You can also enjoy a panoramic view of the city from the garden. Next, we will visit Chinatown for a lunch of Champon, a Chinese version of the Japanese favorite of ramen. The rest of the day if free to explore on your own. Breakfast at the hotel, lunch at a local restaurant and dinner at the hotel or at a local restaurant are included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 14 Travel to Osaka; Sayonara Dinner

Today we will return to Osaka by express train and Shinkansen (bullet train). After arriving in Osaka, we will check into the hotel. In the evening, we will enjoy our “Sayonara” Dinner. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at a local restaurant are included.

Travel: 5 1/2 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 15 Return Home

It’s time to say goodbye. You will be transferred to either Osaka’s Kansai or Osaka’s Itami airport (depending on your departure) by private, pre-arranged taxi service. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 1 Hour; Walking: Light

Walking level descriptions:
Light – 0 to 2 miles on level ground
Medium – 2 to 4 miles on level ground or 0 to 2 miles on hilly ground
Heavy – 4 to 6 miles on level ground or 2 to 4 miles on hilly ground

Dates & Pricing

Dates	Price (land only) / Single Supplement (All prices are per Person)	Status
Oct 19, 2025 - Nov 2, 2025	¥938,862/ ¥106,836	**Full**
May 3, 2026 - May 17, 2026	¥980,949/ ¥121,405	Available
Oct 18, 2026 - Nov 1, 2026	¥980,949/ ¥121,405	Available

Add-On Tours

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Inclusions

- **Travel insurance from Travel Guard**, one of the world's largest travel insurance providers, will be provided to everyone from the United States. All others will receive a $100 per person credit and will be responsible for obtaining their own travel insurance in their own home country. (The insurance provided by Samurai Tours will cover the land portion only. Insurance to cover airfare and other additional expenses is the tour member's responsibility.)
  - Exact coverage dependent on state
    - For residents of the following states please click here for your available plan. FL, KS, MN, MO, MT, NY, and WA
    - For all other states and the District of Columbia click here
  - **Travel Insurance Surcharge:** Depending on your age at the time the travel insurance is purchased, you may be subject to the following surcharge for your travel insurance. Travel insurance surcharges will be due at the same time as your tour deposits. (the surcharge itself is not insured)
    - Up to 69 – $0
    - 70-74 – $104
    - 75-79 – $180
    - 80-84 – $356
    - 85+ – $545
  - **Travel Insurance Opt-Out:** If you would prefer to opt out of the travel insurance, please note this at the time of registration. You will receive a $100 credit per person, which will be reflected on your invoice. In the event that you would need to cancel your tour, cancellation penalties may apply. See the Terms and Conditions page for the Cancellation Fees Schedule.

- Local, licensed, English-speaking, Japanese guides
- Electronic version of itinerary
- Meeting service at Osaka's Kansai Airport (KIX) or Osaka's Itami Airport (ITM) by a private taxi meeting service and transfer to Osaka hotel
- Optional meeting service at either Tokyo's Narita or Haneda Airport will be an extra $100 fee per group. If you are arriving or departing at Tokyo's Narita or Haneda Airports, there will be an extra $150 fee per person for the train tickets to/from Osaka for either of these airports (the meeting service is required if you want us to purchase the train tickets to Osaka for arrival, if you are arriving at one of the Tokyo Airports, the meeting staff will help you board the train. You will travel on your own to the Shin Osaka station, and will be met there and escorted to the hotel.)
- Sending service to Osaka's Kansai Airport (KIX) or Osaka's Itami Airport (ITM)
  - If you will be leaving from Tokyo's Narita Airport or Haneda Airport, there will be an extra $150 fee per person for the train tickets from Osaka to one of these airports.
- For those requiring meeting or sending services on dates other than the scheduled arrival/departure dates, there will be a $100 fee for the meeting service from the airport into Osaka or the sending service to Kansai Airport.

- Lodging for 14 nights in Japanese-style ryokans and western style hotels

- Meals
  - Japanese-style or Western-style breakfast every morning (Please Note: Some ryokans offer Japanese breakfasts only.)
  - Five Japanese-style lunches
  - Eight Japanese-style dinners
- The appropriate amount of free time to allow you to explore and discover your own personal Japan.

- All transportation costs when traveling with the group. (Transportation costs during scheduled free times are the tour member's responsibility.)

- Admission fees to the destinations and activities listed in the Tour Highlights column on the right. (Itinerary specifics subject to change)

- Sayonara dinner at the end of the tour
- Baggage transfer from Osaka to Takamatsu (one bag only).
- Baggage transfer from Takamatsu to Matsuyama (one bag only).
- Baggage transfer from Matsuyama to Takachiho (one bag only).
- Baggage transfer from Takachiho to Kagoshima (one bag only).
- Baggage transfer from Kagoshima to Osaka (one bag only).

Each tour member receives an electronic copy of our tour handbook. This handbook is full of tips and suggestions taken from our Japan travel experiences that allow you to better plan and prepare for your trip, and therefore enjoy your trip even more. The tips and suggestions included cover everything from how to save while exchanging money, what to pack, some basic Japanese-language tips, general etiquette do’s-and-don’ts, ryokan customs, etc.

Exclusions

- Airfare is NOT included.
- Alcoholic beverages, soft drinks and desserts are NOT included
- A printed itinerary is not included

Thank you for downloading this PDF version of our tour. Please visit our website at www.samuraitours.com/tours for the most current dates, prices and information.

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