SAMURAI TOURS

Adventures in Discovering Traditional Japan

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Best of Japan Adventure Self Guided



17 Days/16 Nights

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Tour Overview

Enjoy the Best of Japan in the Best of Japan Adventure Self Guided tour. This fast-paced, well-rounded tour is for those who crave adventure and want to make the most of their time in Japan. If you are looking for a hike or two, different modes of transportation, and a highly active adventure, this is the tour for you! Discovering the new and exploring the old is what makes this tour the trip of a lifetime.

📍 Destinations

Tokyo, Nikko, Magome, Tsumago, Jigoku-dani Snow Monkey Park, Takayama, Shirakawa-go, Kanazawa, Koya-san, Osaka, Himeji, Miyajima Island, Hiroshima, Kyoto

Tour Details

Get ready for an exciting adventure as you explore 14 destinations in 17 days. You'll enjoy the dramatic contrast of large cities, lively alleyways, quaint mountain towns, historic hikes, and everything in between.

Hiking the Nakasendo Trail from Magome to Tsumago, and discovering where the wild snow

monkeys bathe in Nagano will offer a sense of wonderment and awe as they display the beauty of Japan. The ancient shrines and temples of Kyoto, the religious center of Koya-san, and the traditional charm of Takayama will leave you craving more. You will experience the energy and spirit that drive the large cities like Tokyo and Osaka. Best of all, you will take your tastebuds on a whirlwind adventure as you discover the taste and zest of local cuisine on Miyajima Island, the street food in Osaka, and local specialties in traditional ryokans.

This tour is fast-paced and made for those who seek adventure and excitement. Japan has much to offer, so come experience a little bit of everything!

Tour Highlights

- ✔ Overnight at a Buddhist temple and attend morning prayer service
- ✔ Seven separate rides on a Shinkansen (bullet train)

Tour Inclusions

- ✔ 14 Day JR Rail Pass
- ✔ Meeting service at the arrival airport
- ✔ Baggage transfer from city to city
- ✔ Electronic version of Tour Handbook and Japanese History
- ✔ Detailed, easy-to-follow directions on how to travel between cities
- ✔ Bi-lingual maps, addresses and phone numbers for all your lodging
- ✔ English-speaking emergency contact number in Japan
- ✔ SUICA card pre-loaded with 2,500 Yen to be used on the subways in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka and the streetcars in Hiroshima
- ✔ Nankai Koya-san World Heritage Tickets (includes round-trip reserved seats on the express trains to and from Koya-san, round trip cable car tickets and bus passes on Koya-san
- ✔ Hakone Free Passes for travel in and around Hakone Yumoto Onsen

Tour Exclusions

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

Map



Tour Destinations

Tokyo

Nikko

Magome

Tsumago

Jigokudani Snow Monkey Park

Takayama

Shirakawago

Kanazawa

Koyasan

Osaka

Himeji

Miyajima Island

Hiroshima

Kyoto

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive in Tokyo

You will be welcomed at Tokyo's Narita Airport by a Samurai Tours representative who will help you with your rail pass exchange, obtain your limousine bus ticket into Tokyo, and assist with boarding the bus to your hotel in Tokyo.

Travel: 1-1/2 Hours

Day 2 Tokyo – Tokyo Tower, Ginza, Asakusa

After breakfast, the licensed, English-speaking guide will meet you in the lobby of your accommodations. The guided tour will start with traveling to Tokyo Tower. The Tokyo Tower is a communications and observation tower in the center of Tokyo. At 332.9 metres (1,092 ft), it is the second-tallest structure in Japan. The structure is an Eiffel Tower-inspired lattice tower with a main observatory at 150 meters that is reached via elevator or a 600-step staircase. Thanks to the tower's central location, the observatory offers an interesting view of the city despite being only at a relatively moderate height. Afterwards we will travel to the famous Ginza district, the most expensive real estate in the world. Ginza is recognized by many as one of the most luxurious shopping districts in the world, attracting visitors and regulars alike from across the globe. Before continuing we will first stop for a lunch of Kushiage (fried meat and vegetables on bamboo skewers). Next we will travel to the nearby Asakusa area. Here we will tour the Nakamise-dori, Senso-ji Buddhist Temple and the Asakusa Shrine where you will learn about Buddhist and Shinto Japanese religious practices. We will return to the hotel where we will go through the train tickets for the rest of the tour. Breakfast at the hotel and lunch at a local restaurant included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 3 Tokyo, Nikko

You have the option to continue touring Tokyo, or travel to the mountain town of Nikko on your own using your JR Rail Pass. You will travel to Nikko by Shinkansen (bullet train) and express train where the Tosho-gu Shrine is located. This shrine – built by Tokugawa Iemitsu – is a dedication to his grandfather, Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (James Clavell's fictional Shogun in his novel Shogun was based on this person). It is one of the most elaborate monuments in Japan, as no expense was spared in this shrine's construction. You can also visit Rinnoji, Toshogu and Taiyuin before returning to Tokyo for the night.

Travel: TBD

Day 4 Travel to Magome; Tour Magome

Today you will be traveling by Shinkansen (bullet train), express train, and bus to the city of Magome. Magome and Tsumago were once major stops on the Nakasendo, a major highway through the Japan Alps built in the late 16th century. After the Tokkaido Highway was built in the early 17th century near the coast, Magome, Tsumago and the other towns along this highway became ghost towns. Tremendous efforts have been made recently to rebuild the memory and feel of these old settlements. After arriving in Magome, you will be free to explore. We would suggest touring the Toson Memorial Musuem which documents the life of the writer Shimazaki Toson who became well-known in Japan writing about the city of Magome.

Travel: 3 1/2 Hours

Day 5 Walk to Tsumago; Tour Tsumago

After breakfast at the ryokan, you can have your overnight bags delivered from Magome to Tsumago (you will walk with day bags only), and then walk the 5 miles from Magome to Tsumago along the route of the old Nakasendo Highway. The old highway winds through quaint neighborhoods, old forests, and along mountain streams and waterfalls as it makes its way to the historic city of Tsumago. There are even sections of the original highway still remaining. (For those who are unable to walk this far, you can take the bus either from Magome to Tsumago, or there is a bus available from the half-way point of the walk to Tsumago). All of the electrical and utility lines have been removed and placed underground in Tsumago causing you to feel like you truly stepped into 17th- century Japan. Tsumago is also often used for filming period movies and television shows, revealing the unique beauty that it portrays. We suggest touring the Wakihonjin Okuya where the retainers of the feudal lord's party would stay, and the Honjin, where the feudal lords would stay..

Travel: N/A

Day 6 Jigokudani Snow Monkey Park; Travel to Takayama

Today you will travel by express train and bus to Jigokudani Monkey Park where you will delight in the famous "snow monkeys" of Japan. These monkeys are world-famous for using the hot springs baths located in and around Yukanaka Onsen. The Red-Faced "snow monkeys" are only found in Japan, and during the winter the monkeys enjoy using the baths to stay warm, just like people. In the afternoon you will travel by bus, Shinkansen, and express train to Takayama.

Travel: 6 1/2 Hours

Day 7 Tour Takayama

We recommend starting the morning at the farmers market strolling past the vegetable stands and stalls selling herbs, pickles, and souvenirs, sampling the numerous options as you go. In the afternoon, the choices for what to do are abundant. You can explore the Takayama Jinya, visit the many temples, see numerous shrines and museums, rummage through antique shops, or relax at one of sake breweries. You may also take the bus to the Hida-no-Sato Open Air Museum with its traditional, thatched-roof homes from the surrounding area, or visit the Yatai Kaikan, a museum chronicling the famous festival held every April and October in Takayama. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: N/A

Day 8 Travel to Shirakawago; Tour Shirakawago; Travel to Kanazawa

Today you will travel by bus to Shirakawa-go, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A number of "gassho-zukuri" style homes have been relocated to Shirakawa-go from surrounding locations. "Gassho-zukuri" literally translates to "praying hands home", and is a fitting description of these thatched-roof A-frame style homes which are well-suited for the large amounts of snow this area of Japan receives. We suggest visiting the Shirakawa-go Open Air Museum where you can get a glimpse into the hard lives of 18th century Japanese farmers. You may also want to visit the observation area where you will have a chance to view Shirakawa-go from above. Later in the afternoon you will travel by bus to the city of Kanazawa.

Travel: 2 1/2 Hours

Day 9 Tour Kanazawa

We suggest beginning the day touring the Kenrokuen Garden. This garden is considered to be one of the three best gardens in Japan and was initially constructed in the 17th century. After enjoying the garden, you can tour the Kanazawa Handicrafts Museum to learn how the local Kanazawa handicrafts are made, and then explore the Nagamachi District. This is where the Samurai who worked at the nearby Kanazawa lived. At the Nagamachi District, you can tour the Nomura House. The Nomura Family was a high-ranking retainer for the Maeda Family, the feudal lord family who ruled Kanazawa and the surrounding area during the Edo Period.

Travel: N/A

Day 10 Travel to Koyasan

You will board an express train and Shinkansen bound for Osaka, and continue on to Koya-san by train and funicular. Koya-san is the world headquarters of the Shingon school of Esoteric Buddhism. Kobo Daishi, considered by many to be the most influential religious person in Japanese history, established a religious community here in the year 816. After checking into your shukubo (Buddhist temple lodging), you are free to roam and visit one of the 110 temples in the area, wander through the nearby ghostly cemetery at the famous Okuno-in temple, or just rest in the garden at the shukubo. Your dinner of shojin-ryori (traditional Buddhist vegetarian cuisine – no meat, fish, onions or garlic) will be served.

Travel: 7 Hours

Day 11 Tour Koyasan; Travel to Osaka

Very early in the morning, you can attend o-inori (Buddhist prayer services). After the prayer service, a shojin-ryori breakfast is served. Following breakfast you can tour the Garan and Kongobu-ji Temples, or wander through the huge cemetery leading up to the Okuno-in temple where Kobo Daishi is buried. Many Japanese still believe that Kobo Daishi is not dead, but merely in a very advanced state of meditation, waiting to awaken at the appropriate time. In the afternoon, you will travel by funicular and train back to the city of Osaka. In the evening, you can enjoy the famous South Osaka entertainment districts of Dotombori, Shin-Sekai and Namba.

Travel: 2 Hours

Day 12 Travel to Himeji; Tour Himeji; Travel to Miyajima Island

On your way from Osaka to Miyajima, you will tour the Himeji Castle, a significant piece of architecture from the Feudal Period, built in 1333. In the afternoon, you will travel by Shinkansen to Hiroshima, then by local train and ferry to Miyajima Island.

Travel: 3 Hours

Day 13 Tour Miyajima Island

Miyajima Island is considered by the Japanese to be one of the three most beautiful spots in Japan. You can ride the cable car to the top of the mountain, visit the Itsukushima-jinja shrine which was built in its present form in 1168, or just take in the beauty and ambiance of Miyajima Island while enjoying grilled oysters, the island’s specialty.

Travel: N/A

Day 14 Travel to Hiroshima; Tour Hiroshima; Travel to Kyoto

In the morning you will take the ferry back to the mainland, then a local train to Hiroshima. There you can tour the Peace Memorial Museum and the Peace Memorial Park, both sobering testaments to the dropping of the A-bomb on August 6, 1945. In the afternoon, you will travel by Shinkansen (bullet train) to the city of Kyoto. For many, just the name of Kyoto conjures up the classic images of Japan: streets of traditional wooden houses, the click-clack of geta (wooden sandals) on the paving stones, geisha in a flourish of brightly colored silks, and a tea master deliberately warming water and making tea.

Travel: 3 Hours

Day 15 Tour Kyoto

Free day to explore Kyoto on your own.

Travel: N/A

Day 16 Tour Kyoto

Tour Kyoto on your own.

Travel: N/A

Day 17 Return Home

It’s time to say “sayonara” (goodbye) to Japan. You will take the express train to the Kansai International Airport just outside Osaka for your flight back home (if you are flying out of Narita Airport, be sure to schedule a flight after 15:00).

Travel: 1 1/2 to 4 Hours

Dates & Pricing

Low Season-
¥633,818 (per person, based on double occupancy)
January 6 – February 28
June 16 – August 10
August 19 – August 31
November 16 – December 24

Regular Season-
¥686,623 (per person, based on double occupancy)
March 1 – March 16
May 7 – June 15
September 1 – October 14

Peak Season-
¥738,485 (per person, based on double occupancy)
March 17 – May 6 (Cherry Blossom & Golden Week)
August 11 – August 18 (Obon Holiday)
October 15 – November 15 (Fall Foliage)
December 25 – January 5 (New Years)

Inclusions

- Accommodations in 3 Star hotels including all taxes, fees and breakfast every morning (contact us about accommodation upgrades)
  - Tokyo: Western-style hotel such as Shinagawa Prince Hotel
  - Magome: Japanese-style ryokan such as Iroribata
  - Tsumago: Japanese-style ryokan such as Matsushiroya
  - Takayama: Western-style hotel such as Takayama Ouan
  - Kanazawa: Western-style hotel such as Dormy Inn Kanazawa
  - Koya-san: Japanese-style Buddhist Temple such as Shojoshinin Temple
  - Osaka: Western-style hotel such as Cross Hotel Osaka
  - Miyajima Island: Japanese-style ryokan such as Kawaguchi
  - Kyoto: Western-style hotel such as Kyoto Hatoya Hotel

- Detailed, easy-to-follow directions on how to travel between cities
- Bi-lingual maps, addresses and phone numbers for all your lodging
- 14 Day Ordinary Car JR Rail Pass
- English-speaking emergency contact number in Japan
- Meeting service at the airport (Narita Airport only)
- Airport transfers
- 8 Hours of guiding service from a licensed, English-speaking guide
- Suggested train schedules including train schedules for 2 hours prior and 2 hours after the suggested time to allow you to choose your own times
- SUCIA card pre-charged with 2,500 Yen to be used on the subways in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka and the streetcars in Hiroshima (2,500 Yen will allow as many as 7 or 8 trips depending on the length of the trips)
- Nankai Koya-san World Heritage Tickets (includes round-trip reserved seats on the express trains to and from Koya-san, round trip cable car tickets and bus passes on Koya-san
- Nohi Bus Tickets to cover transportation to Shirakawa-go and Kanazawa
- Reserved seat train ticket to cover the express train from Kyoto to Kansai Airport
- Breakfast every day
- Electronic version of itinerary
- A copy of our “Gaijin on Getas” tour handbook (this is the same popular handbook our escorted tour members receive) which contains 180 pages of Japan travel tips, Japanese language tips, Japanese customs and etiquette and Japanese history to prepare you properly for your trip and allow you to enjoy Japan even more after you arrive.
- Baggage transfer forms (We will provide the necessary forms in Japanese to transfer your main baggage ahead, allowing you the freedom of traveling light. The service provided will only work overnight, so you will need to travel with an overnight bag. The actual transfer fees are not included and will be paid by you at the time of transfer. These fees normally run between 1,250 Yen and 1,750 Yen.)

What’s Not Included

- Airfare is not included
- Local transportation (subways, buses, taxis, etc.)
- All admission fees
- Lunches and dinners (except where noted)
- Desserts at any included meals (except where noted)
- Drinks other than water and tea at any included meals (except where noted)
- A printed itinerary is not included

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