

Ancient Capitals of Japan

Delve into Japan's rich and engaging history on this 9-day traversal of the country's ancient and modern capitals.



Day 1 – Arrival in Tokyo

Our airport representative will be waiting to greet you on arrival in Tokyo. They'll escort you to the train/shuttle bus that will take you to your hotel in the city centre.

The rest of the day is at leisure. If arriving into Tokyo in the morning, we can arrange for a guided afternoon tour of the city. Alternatively, you may prefer to explore at your own pace or simply relax at your hotel.

Day 2 – Tokyo (B)

Your guide will meet you at your hotel after breakfast to begin your guided tour of Tokyo. Start the tour with a stroll through Hama-Rikyu Teien. Once the private hunting ground of the Shogun, this immaculately-maintained public garden is situated near the mouth of the Sumida River, and features as its centrepiece a beautiful tidal pond complete with moon-viewing pavilions and traditional tea villa, where you can stop to enjoy a taste of Japanese matcha (green tea).

Following the tea ceremony, continue along the promenade to the pier where you'll board the Tokyo water bus for a cruise on the Sumida River. During the half hour cruise you'll enjoy wonderful views of Tokyo's skyline, including famous landmarks such as the Tokyo Skytree and the iconic Sumida Bridges, before disembarking at Asakusa.

Tokyo's traditional old quarter, Asakusa offers a glimpse of classical Japan. Here you'll discover Tokyo's oldest Buddhist temple, Senso-ji, which dates back as far as the early 7th-century. Take the time to explore Asakusa's ancient temples and lantern-lit lanes, with their wooden shopfronts and century-old ateliers, before continuing to Ginza on the Tokyo metro.

Tokyo's most polished neighbourhood, Ginza (literally, "Seat of Silver") was established in 1612 as the city's first silver mint district. In later years, Ginza would become the first part of Tokyo to adopt a European layout, incorporating a French promenade and Georgian brick houses. The area remains famous to this day as an upmarket shopping and dining district, where Tokyo's most expensive real estate is found.

A short distance from Ginza is the Imperial Palace, the permanent residence of Japan's Emperor. The Palace is closed to the public, but you can enjoy a walk in the surrounding grounds and Palace East Gardens.



End the day with a visit to Tokyo's most famous monument, the Meiji Shrine. Hidden away in the Meiji Jingu Forest, a natural woodland in the heart of the city, the shrine is perhaps most famous for its two dramatic shrine gates (*torii*), which are among the largest of their kind in Japan. Take the time to explore the shrine and its adjoining Iris garden (best in May/June when the flowers are in bloom), before returning to your hotel.

NB: We may change the order of this itinerary depending on the location of your hotel. If there are any areas of Tokyo you particularly want to cover, just let your guide know and he/she will try to adjust the tour to suit.



Day 3 – Day trip to Kamakura (B)

Embark on a day trip to Kamakura. Former political capital of Japan under the Kamakura Shogunate (1185-1333) – now a practical suburb of Tokyo owing to urban sprawl – the coastal enclave of Kamakura is rich in history and medieval Japanese culture, housing a staggering number of temples and shrines, both Shinto and Zen Buddhist.

Your local guide will be waiting to greet you on arrival at Kamakura Station (one hour by train from central Tokyo). During the course of the morning they'll introduce you to some of Kamakura's most prominent temples, including the famous 'Bamboo Temple' (Hokokuji), set within a grove of 2,000 bamboo trees; Jomyoji, one of the Five Great Zen Temples of Kamakura, notable for its dry landscape gardens in the Zen-style; and Tsurugaoka Hachimangu, Kamakura's most prominent Shinto shrine, dedicated to the Samurai deity, Hachiman.

After lunch, take the Enoden (electric tram) to Hase, from where you can visit what many consider to be Kamakura's two most spectacular sights: Hasedera, a complex of ceremonial halls and cave shrines notable for its towering carved wooden statue of Kannon, the Goddess of Mercy; and Kotokuin, whose focal point is a 13.5m tall bronze Buddha.

End the day with a stroll along the Kamakura coast before catching the train back to your hotel in central Tokyo.



Day 4 – Tokyo to Kyoto (B, D)

Depart Tokyo this morning on the world-famous bullet train (Shinkansen) to Japan's traditional capital, Kyoto. The Shinkansen is able to complete the 500km journey in just over two and a half hours! On arrival into Kyoto, check into a centrally-located hotel.

Famous for its ancient Buddhist shrines, tranquil gardens and sublime palaces, Kyoto is classical Japan writ large. The city, which served as the capital of Japan for over 1,000 years between the 8th and 19th centuries, can be overwhelming for first-time visitors, with over 2,000 temples and shrines (of which no fewer than 17 are UNESCO World Heritage Sites!) But take your time to explore Kyoto slowly over the course of several days and you'll discover a city of rich historical and cultural interest.

Your tour this afternoon will focus, not on Kyoto's temples, but on its equally rich food culture. You'll be

collected from your hotel by a culinary guide, who will lead you on a tour of Kyoto's mile-long Nishiki covered food market, to be followed by a Japanese cooking class! Please note that the cooking class is a shared activity and there may be other participants.



The Nishiki market tour is a chance for you to learn more about Japanese cuisine, while at the same time shopping for the ingredients you'll need to prepare traditional favourites such as rolled sushi and miso soup in your cooking class. During the market tour you'll also have the opportunity to visit a sake brewery for a guided tour (with tasting).

After the cooking class and dinner, the rest of the evening is free for you to explore central Kyoto. Let your guide know if you'd like to return directly to your hotel.

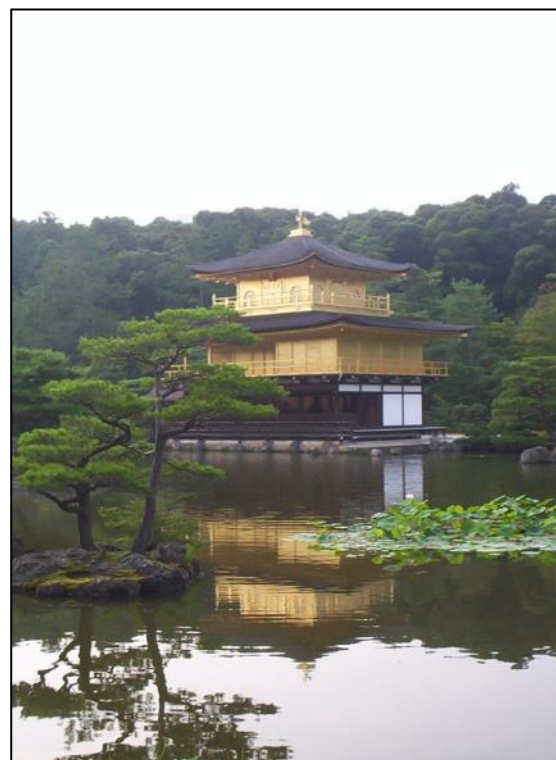
Day 5 – Arashiyama, Kyoto (B)

Explore Japan's former imperial capital with a knowledgeable local guide, taking advantage of Kyoto's first-class bus and subway system to visit several of the city's most famous World Heritage Sites.

Your sightseeing today will focus on Arashiyama district, in the far west of Kyoto. One of two major sightseeing districts, Arashiyama is home to Kyoto's most iconic monument, the Golden Pavilion, as well as the famous Sagano Bamboo Grove.

Your guide will meet you at your hotel in central Kyoto, from where it's a half hour train/bus ride to Arashiyama. Start your tour with a visit to the 14th-century Zen temple, Tenryuji, to explore its famous shakkei gardens and pond, before continuing to the Bamboo Grove.

Photos struggle to capture the strange beauty of the Sagano Bamboo Grove, the play of light and shadow that make this unique forest such a marvel to behold.





Leaving Tenryuji, follow the trail through the bamboo thicket to Okochi-Sanso Villa, the former estate of the early 20th-century Japanese silent film actor, Denjirō Ōkōchi. Okochi-Sanso's unique "spiral" gardens are sublime, rivalling many of Kyoto's ancient temple gardens for sheer beauty. Take your time to explore them before stopping to rest and enjoy a bowl of traditional whipped green tea in the villa's teahouse.

After lunch in Arashiyama, continue to Kinkakuji, otherwise known as the Golden Pavilion. Built in the late 14th-century as a retirement home for the then-Shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, Kinkakuji was later converted into a Buddhist temple, and now stands as one of Kyoto's most spectacular sights. Covered in a thick layer of gold-leaf, Kinkakuji gleams like a beacon in the sunlight, its golden reflection captured by the shimmering waters.

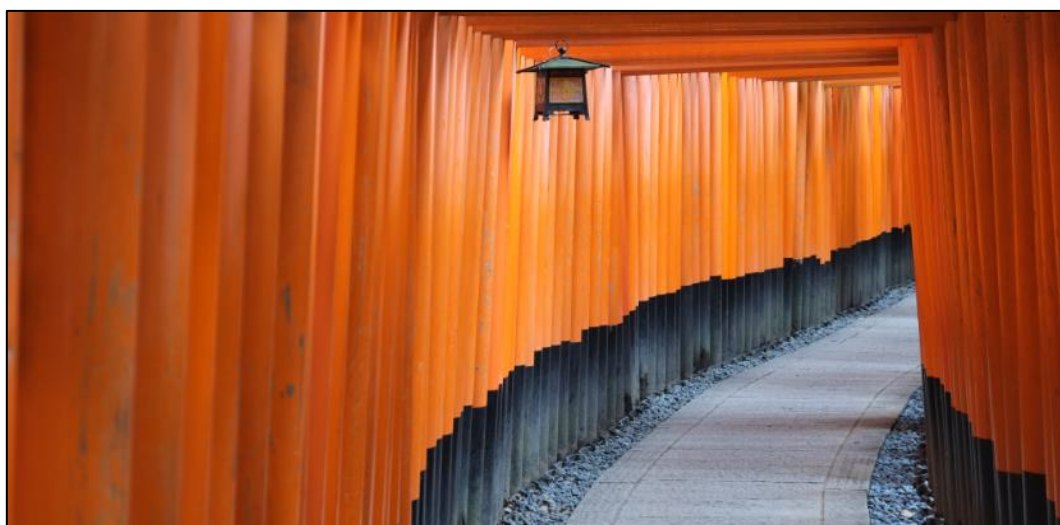
End the tour with a visit to Ryoanji, a 15th-century Zen temple and one of Japan's most famous rock gardens. Stunningly simple, the garden is an austere rock scape intended to reflect the principles of Zen meditation.

Your guide will help you return to your hotel in central Kyoto. The evening is at leisure.

Day 6 – Higashiyama, Kyoto (B)

Your guide will meet you at the hotel after breakfast for your second day of sightseeing. Today's tour will focus on Higashiyama district, in the east of Kyoto.

Before travelling to Higashiyama, however, pay a visit to Nijo Castle, situated close to the heart of the city. Built in 1603 by the first Tokugawa shogun, Ieyasu, Nijo Castle is considered by many to be the definitive piece of Momoyama (1573-1615) architecture. Unlike most of Japan's surviving medieval castles, Nijo resembles a palace more than it does a fortress. Intricate woodcarvings and Kano-style sliding doors give the interiors an understated elegance, and suggest that this palace was intended to be a demonstration of the Tokugawa clan's cultural credentials as much as their military prowess.



Leaving Nijo Castle, take the train to Fushimi-Inari, a large shrine complex situated at the base of the Inari Mountain in the far south-east of Kyoto. Famed for its seemingly endless procession of vibrant vermilion torii, Fushimi-Inari is perhaps Kyoto's most immediately spectacular sight. It's a huge complex, with numerous miniature shrines and offering halls to get lost among. Allow two hours to explore in full, before breaking for lunch.

From Fushimi-Inari, take the train north to Higashiyama Station. Close to the station is Shorein, an intimate 12th-century temple with beautiful landscaped gardens set against a backdrop of the Higashiyama Mountains. This is a pleasant spot to enjoy a moment's rest and a cup of green tea, before continuing to Kiyomizu (the "pure water" Temple), your last stop for the day.

Set on the slopes of Mount Otowa, Kiyomizu enjoys stunning views of the city from its main hall, which hangs dramatically over the edge of a cliff, its 13-metre high verandah supported by 139 wooden pillars arranged in an intricate lattice-like pattern. Allow an hour to explore the temple and its numerous halls and pagodas, before walking down Chawan-zaka (Teapot Lane), with its quaint shops selling souvenirs, sweets and Kiyomizu-yaki pottery, to Kyoto's central Gion district.

The tour ends in Gion. Your guide can help you return to your hotel, or you may prefer to stay in Gion for dinner and an evening walk along the Kamo River.



Day 7 – Day trip to Nara (B)

Leave Kyoto early this morning on the train to Nara (45 mins).

Nara served as Japan's first permanent capital for 84 years between 710 and 794. Though a much shorter period than Kyoto's 1,000 years as capital, Nara's pre-eminence marked a period in which Japanese culture (as represented in its architecture, literature and handcrafts) flowered into something unique, increasingly distinct from the Chinese influences that had dominated Japan's art and culture in prior centuries. The legacy of this era is visible in Nara's numerous shrines, temples and palaces, of which eight are UNESCO World Heritage Sites (only Kyoto has more).

Perhaps more than any other city, Nara offers an insight into Japan's early medieval era. Many of Nara's 8th-century monuments survive in something close to their original state—unlike the temples and shrines of Kyoto, which are for the most part a product of the Edo era, having evolved with the city and undergone numerous revisions. For

Japanese pilgrims, Nara gives them the sense that they're communing with their ancestors. For overseas visitors, it offers a glimpse of an earlier Japan.



Nara is small and relatively compact, with most of the major attractions concentrated around the Nara Deer Park, making it easy to explore independently and on foot. We recommend starting with Kasuga Taisha, Nara's most celebrated Shinto shrine, which is situated in the verdant Kasugayama Primeval Forest in the west of the city.

Kasuga Taisha is notable for its beautiful botanical gardens and elaborately decorated offering hall. Perhaps more impressive than the shrine itself, however, is the approach. A towering shrine gate at the foot of Kasuga Hill marks the entrance to the shrine, from where a winding path, flanked by two thousand stone lanterns, guides pilgrims up through the woods to the main shrine hall.

From Kasuga Taisha, it's possible to walk down through Nara Deer Park to the city's star attraction, Todaiji Temple. The world's largest wooden building, containing Japan's largest Buddha (Daibutsu), Todaiji is a spectacular sight.

For further sightseeing in Nara, we recommend Isuien, a sublime Meiji-era garden, and Kofukuji Temple, notable for its five-storey pagoda (the second highest in Japan). When ready, return to Kyoto by train.

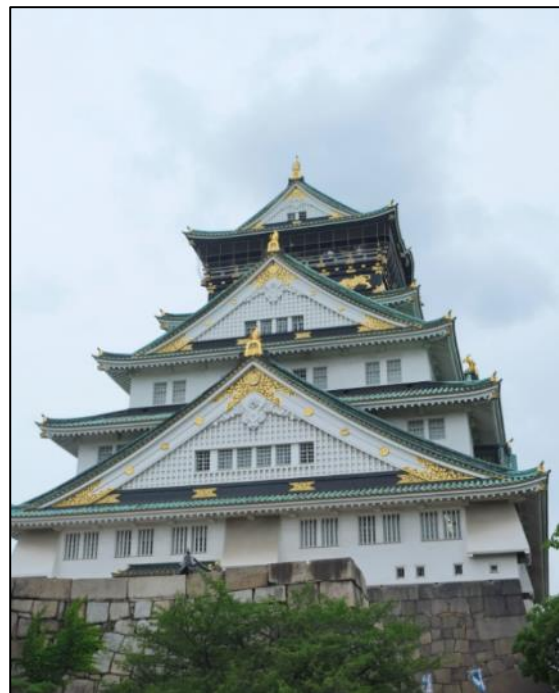
Day 8 - Osaka (B)

Check-out of your Kyoto hotel this morning and catch the train to Osaka (30 mins).

Japan's third biggest city, Osaka is a brash, boisterous city that poses a stark contrast to the prim propriety of neighbouring Kyoto. In place of Kyoto's innumerable gardens and temples, Osaka offers neon lights, high-end shopping, and amazing food!

That being said, Osaka is not without history. As one of Japan's first (albeit short-lived) political capitals, it houses a number of fascinating monuments, including Japan's oldest state temple, the 6th-century Shitennoji, and a stunning castle.

After leaving your luggage at your centrally-located hotel, start your explorations with a visit to Osaka's standout historical attraction, Osaka Castle. Originally constructed in the 16th-century (before



being burnt down and later rebuilt), Osaka Castle impresses with its towering stone ramparts, black and gold-leaf trim, and beautifully-maintained grounds (at their best during the cherry blossoming season). The castle-turned-museum occupies a high vantage point on a hill close to the centre of Osaka, from where it offers marvellous views of the city skyline.

Allow one to two hours to tour Osaka Castle and its grounds; don't forget to travel up to the 8th floor observatory for a great view of the city! Afterwards, take the metro to Shitennoji, Osaka's oldest Buddhist temple. Originally built in 589, Shitennoji has been reconstructed numerous times but still retains many traces of its original design, including an ancient stone torii (the oldest in Japan) at its entrance. Allow an hour to explore the temple grounds and the adjoining Japanese landscape gardens, before stopping for lunch.

There are a number of possibilities for this afternoon. You can continue your tour of Osaka's historical monuments with a visit to the 3rd-century shrine complex of Sumiyoshi Taisha, headquarters of the Sumiyoshi Shinto sect. Osaka also boasts some wonderful museums, foremost among them the subterranean National Museum of Modern Art, which are well worth visiting.

Alternatively, if you've had your fill of history and culture, you might like to spend the afternoon exploring the lively Kuromon Ichiba food market, or perhaps doing some last-minute shopping in the arcades around Namba, downtown Osaka.



In the evening, a visit to the restaurant mecca of Dotonbori, where you can sample local dishes such as takoyaki, is a must. We can also arrange theatre tickets for you (at additional cost). Osaka is famous

for both its Noh (traditional Japanese musical drama) and Bunraku (elaborate puppet shows with a long association with the city) theatre.

Day 9 – Departure from Osaka (B)

Today is at leisure until your shuttle bus transfer to Kansai Airport. Time-allowing, you might like to take a trip to the “Floating Garden Observatory” at top of the Umeda Sky Building for a wonderful view of the city—the perfect way to say goodbye to Osaka, and Japan.



Price Guide:

*The cost of this itinerary is from **£2,670 per person**, based on twin/double accommodation in mid-range hotels (superior hotels available from **£3,045pp**; deluxe from **£3,885pp**). Travel in peak season (i.e. Sakura or koyo seasons) will require a higher budget.*

For more information, or if you would like to enquire about a tailor-made holiday combining part or all of the above itinerary, please [contact us](#).

Includes:

- Twin accommodation with breakfast
- Meals as outlined in itinerary
- Meet and greet at the airport and return transfers to the airport
- Train fares (Tokyo-Kyoto, Kyoto-Nara, Kyoto-Osaka)
- PASMO Transport Pass (Tokyo) and 2-day Kyoto Subway Pass)
- English-speaking guide for tours in Tokyo (day 2), Kamakura (day 3), and Kyoto (days 5 and 6)
- All entrance fees and public transportation fees for days 2, 3, 5, and 6
- Market tour and cooking class in Kyoto on day 4

Excludes:

- International flights – please ask us for a quote
- Visas
- Personal travel insurance
- Personal expenses and tips
- Travel expenses and entrance fees during self-guided days
- Lunch and dinner to own account unless stated otherwise in itinerary

Accommodation Categories

Mid-range (3 or 4-star equivalent)			
Location	Hotel	Category	Room
Tokyo	Villa Fontaine Shiodome	Mid-range	Standard Room
Kyoto	Hotel Vista Premio	Mid-range	Superior Room
Osaka	Cross Hotel	Superior	Standard Room

Superior (4-star equivalent)			
Location	Hotel	Category	Room
Tokyo	Park Hotel	Superior	City Room
Kyoto	Hotel Granvia	Superior	Standard Room
Osaka	Cross Hotel	Superior	Standard Room

Deluxe (5-star equivalent)			
Location	Hotel	Category	Room
Tokyo	Conrad	Deluxe	City View Room
Kyoto	Hyatt Regency	Deluxe	Deluxe Room
Osaka	St. Regis	Deluxe	Deluxe Room

Accommodation Notes:

- The above hotels are given as examples and are subject to availability. If unavailable, we will arrange a hotel of a similar category.