

Classic Japan

Explore highland villages, ancient walking trails and spectacular Shinto shrines on this comprehensive two-week overview of Honshu and Shikoku Islands.



Day 1 - Arrival in Tokyo

You will be met by our airport representative on arrival in Tokyo. They will 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 in the morning, we can arrange for a guided afternoon tour taking in some of Tokyo's highlights (at additional cost), though you may prefer to explore the city at leisure or relax in your hotel.

Day 2 - Tokyo (B)

Today is a chance for you to get a real feel for Tokyo, Japan's sprawling capital. Accompanied by a local guide, you'll explore the city's central highlights, from the classical architecture of Asakusa, Tokyo's traditional "low" town, to the futuristic high rises of Omotesando.

Your first stop is Meiji Jingu, Tokyo's most famous Shinto shrine. Set within a huge 200-acre park in the heart of the city, and surrounded by beautiful gardens, Meiji is wonderfully serene.

From Meiji, take a stroll down Takeshita Street (Harajuku), a popular teen hangout, to Omotesando. This lengthy promenade is famous the world over and houses Tokyo's most fashionable stores and

boutiques, as well as many of its most striking buildings, such as the iconic shopping complex, Omotesando Hills.

A short subway ride will take you from the modernist sheen of Omotesando, with its imposing tower blocks and stylized glass-and-metal facades, to the narrow alleyways and wooden shopfronts of Asakusa.

The heart of Tokyo's *shitamachi*, or old town, Asakusa was once the city's traditional entertainment district, as well as the original home of Kabuki theatre. Though badly damaged during the bombing raids of the 1940s, it houses some fascinating historical monuments, foremost among them Sensoji, Tokyo's oldest and largest Buddhist temple. Take the time to wander through Asakusa's lantern-lit lanes and tour its ancient temples.

End the day with a boat cruise on the Sumida River, taking you from Asakusa to Hamarikyu Garden. Surrounded by a sea of skyscrapers in the heart of the city, this formerly private garden is a quiet refuge from the crowds. Enjoy a stroll through the garden, stopping for a taste of green macha tea at a local teahouse, before returning to your hotel.



NB. The order of your Tokyo tour may change depending on the location of your hotel. There's a huge amount to see in Tokyo and you can't possibly hope to cover everything in a day – let your guide know if you have any particular interests and they'll adapt your itinerary to suit.



Day 3 – Day trip to Nikko (B)

A 2 hour train journey north of Tokyo takes you deep into the Nikko Mountains, Tochigi Prefecture. Your main destination today is the Toshogu Shrine complex, a UNESCO World Heritage site and one of Japan's most spectacular monuments. A local guide will be waiting for you on arrival at Nikko JR station. They'll accompany you this morning as you tour some of the many shrines and temples that make up the Nikko World Heritage site (of which the famous Toshogu Shrine complex is just one).

Located in a dense cryptomeria forest to the north of the small city of Nikko, the Toshogu Shrine was built in the early 17th century as a tribute to Tokugawa Ieyasu, founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate and one of Japan's great unifiers. Initially a modest mausoleum, Toshogu developed in the 200 years following Tokugawa's death into a spectacular complex of lavishly decorated shrines, which stands as much a tribute to the glories of Japan's Edo period (1600-1868) as to the Tokugawa public good.

Against popular perceptions of traditional Japanese taste, Toshogu is decidedly grandiose, its numerous halls and pagodas overloaded with sculpted detail, in a style not dissimilar to China's most lavish imperial temples.



Surrounding Toshogu, but forming part of the same overall complex, are the temples of Rinnoji and Taiyu-in, as well as several smaller sites. You can explore the whole area on foot, but you'll need a full day to cover everything. With your guide you should be able to cover the major sights this morning. Then, after lunch in town, continue exploring the shrine complex, or, if you want a change of pace, pay a visit to the Nikko Botanical Garden. End the day with a stroll along the Kanmangafuchi Abyss, a scenic walking trail that follows the course of the Daiya River through a deep gorge lined with traditional *jizo* statues.

Your guide will return you to the JR station late this afternoon for the return ride to Tokyo.

Day 4 – Kiso Valley (B, D)

It's time to say goodbye to the city as you depart Tokyo early this morning and travel into the Central Japanese Alps. Much of the 4-5 hour journey is on high speed train, but as you approach the mountains you'll change to a local train which follows a winding course through the hills to Nagiso, with beautiful views all the way.



You stay tonight in a traditional *minshuku* – a small family-run guesthouse – in Tsumago.



One of 69 'shukuba', or post stations, that served the 500km Nakasendo highway between Tokyo and Kyoto during the 17th and 18th centuries, Tsumago is a beautifully-preserved town which still retains much of its Edo-era charm and character, as well as many of its original buildings. It's a living community, but much of Tsumago feels like an open-air museum. As you explore the old town centre on foot, stopping to enter its feudal-era inns, warehouses and labourers' cottages, you'll feel like you've stepped back 300 years in time.

Tsumago is a short bus journey from Nagiso station, where your JR train arrives. On arrival, check into a traditional family-run guesthouse with tatami mat flooring, futon beds, and onsen baths. For dinner, you'll be served a tasty kaiseki (multi-course) meal fit for a samurai!



NB. Before leaving Tokyo for Kiso, we recommend having your luggage couriered to your next destination, Takayama, and carrying only your essentials with you in a day pack. Just ask the desk staff at your hotel in Tokyo to arrange this for you. If you do prefer to bring your luggage with you, you can arrange for it to be couriered from Magome to Tsumago at the Magome tourist office (at additional cost).

Day 5 – Kiso Valley – Takayama (B, D)

Depart Tsumago after a fulsome Japanese breakfast and follow the old Nakasendo trunk road to Magome, Tsumago's neighbouring post town. The 3-4 hour (8km) journey is made on foot, following one of Japan's most scenic walking routes, and will see you trek through pine forests and quiet mountain villages, past stepped rice paddies and fields of green tea, before arriving in Magome. It's a popular route that's clearly sign-posted, so there's little risk of getting lost! (There is also a regular bus between Tsumago and Magome, and then on to the JR station in Nakatsugawa, if you're not keen on walking.) On arrival in Magome, stop for lunch and a rest.

Kiso's southernmost post town, Magome is a pretty settlement set on a steep mountain slope, from where it enjoys commanding views of Mt Ena. Developed around a cobbled section of the Nakasendo highway, Magome captures the spirit and ambience of the Edo era wonderfully in its creaky old water mill and traditional wooden inns.



Spend a pleasant hour exploring Magome before moving on to Nakatsugawa by bus. Notable sights in Magome include the old flour mill, with its creaking wooden water wheel; and the home of the early 20th-century novelist Shimazaki Tōson, now a museum displaying fragments of the writer's life.

From Nakatsugawa, take the JR train to Takayama, a wonderfully atmospheric Jomon-era town that is most famous for its biannual festival. You stay tonight in a traditional ryokan in the heart of Takayama's old town. End the day with a kaiseki dinner at your traditional ryokan and a soak in Takayama's famous hot springs to recover from the morning's long walk.



Day 6 – Takayama (B, D)

Today is free for you to explore Takayama independently.

Due to its remote location in the mountainous Hida region, Takayama was for many years cut off from the rest of Japan, allowing it to develop a highly unique culture in almost total isolation. This culture is placed on full display during Takayama's biannual (Spring and Autumn) festivals, when the otherwise sleepy town comes alive in celebration, as crowds flock to Takayama's old town to watch an elaborate procession of yatai (festival floats) and karakuri (mechanical dolls).



Even outside of the festive periods, however, Takayama has much to offer visitors interested in learning more about Japan's rural folk traditions. Here's our suggested programme:

After breakfast at your ryokan, start your tour of Takayama with a visit to the Miyagawa Morning Market, where you can browse stores selling local sweets such as *mochi* and *genkotsu ame*, or "fist candy", alongside traditional crafts. Miyagawa isn't just a tourist market, however. Many locals come here to do their morning shop, so alongside the usual trinkets and gifts you'll find lots of fresh local produce, like tsekemono (Japanese pickles), for which the Hida region is famous!

Late this morning, pay a visit to the Takayama Festival Floats Museum, where Takayama's famous processional floats are displayed when not in use. Time allowing, you might also like to visit some of Takayama's smaller, mostly private museums. Among our favourites is *Showa Kan*, which is chock-a-block with 20th-century Japanese memorabilia!

For lunch, sample some of Takayama's local specialities, such as Hida beef steamed buns and Hoba miso. For vegetarians, the popular Bandai Kadomise in Takayama old town does a lovely all-vegetable lunch set comprised of the best Hida produce. Afterwards, wash it all down with a sake tasting at one of Takayama's many open breweries!





There's much to see in the region surrounding Takayama. A short bus ride will get you to Hida No Sato Folk Village, a simulacrum of a traditional Hida mountain village complete with traditional farmhouses and cottages (allow two hours), while further afield the historic villages of Shirakawago and Gokayama regions, notably Ogimachi, Ainokura and Suganuma, are famous for their thatched gasshō-zukuri style farmhouses, and can be easily visited on a day trip (please note that bus tickets must be booked in advance).

In the evening, return to your ryokan for dinner.

Day 7 – Kanazawa (B)

After breakfast at your ryokan, say goodbye to your hosts and take the train from Takayama Station to Kanazawa, the capital of Ishikawa Prefecture. It's another scenic rail journey, taking you out of the hills and along a beautiful stretch of coastline overlooking the Sea of Japan.

On arrival in Kanazawa, check into your hotel within easy reach of the JR station. The rest of the day is free for you to explore Kanazawa at your own pace.

Sometimes referred to as “little Kyoto”, Kanazawa is one of Japan's great cultural capitals. Indeed, in its 17th century heyday, this beautifully-preserved castle town was the country's wealthiest city, with a thriving port facilitating a lively trade in everything from traditional crafts (white porcelain, lacquerware) to gold bullion and exotic foodstuffs. Present-day Kanazawa, by contrast, is a decidedly low-key place, especially compared to the mega-metropolises of Tokyo and Osaka, which still retains much of its Edo-era heritage in its old Samurai and Geisha districts.



Kanazawa's traditional sights are many and varied. The highlight for most visitors to the city, and a good place to start your tour, is Kenroku-en Garden. One of the top three Great Gardens of Japan, Kenroku-en's beauty shines through in all seasons. A visit to the imposing Kanazawa Castle, directly

next door the gardens, is also a must. Though very little of the original fortification survives, the castle impresses with its scale and beautifully-maintained grounds.



In the afternoon, explore Kanazawa's original Geisha district, Nishi Chaya, with its traditional tea houses and wooden shopfronts. Within walking distance of Nishi Chaya is the temple district, which contains innumerable shrines and small family temples. On the way back to your hotel, make a stop at Nagamachi, Kanazawa's Samurai district, where you can tour carefully-preserved Samurai homes and wander narrow lanes skirted by high earthen walls.

Kanazawa is one of Japan's great culinary capitals, meaning you're spoilt for choice when it comes to dining out. Seafood is the local specialty, with the city home to several top sushi restaurants. Ask your hotel staff if you need help to arrange a dinner reservation.

Day 8 - Hiroshima (B)

Your journey through central Honshu continues as you travel by train to Hiroshima (5-6 hours, with a change of line in Kyoto.)

Perhaps more than any other city in the world, Hiroshima is synonymous with a single moment in history, the dropping of the first atomic bomb in August 1945. The association is such that, for many of the hundreds of thousands of visitors who travel to the city every year to pay their respects at the Peace Memorial Park and Museum, it might come as a surprise to find that, outside of these monuments to the past, Hiroshima is a vibrant, modern city, with a warm coastal climate and an equally sunny disposition.

After checking into your hotel, we recommend a visit to the Peace Memorial Park. Situated close to the heart of the city, the memorial marks the exact location where the atomic bomb was dropped on August 6th, 1945. Its centrepiece, the Genbaku Dome, is a husk of a building, a skeleton structure preserved as a monument to the



destruction caused by the bomb. It was, in fact, the only building to (barely) survive the explosion within a 2km radius, its position at the epicentre of the blast shielding it from the worst of the destruction.

Take your time to explore the Memorial Park and its adjoining museum, before returning to your hotel. (NB. The Memorial Museum is currently undergoing renovation and some of the displays may be closed.)

In the evening, we recommend taking the streetcar into central Hiroshima to visit the Okonomimura food park, where you can sample Hiroshima's most popular dish, Okonomiyaki, delicious grilled pancakes!



Day 9 - Day trip to Miyajima (B)

Take a day trip to Miyajima Island, a short tram and ferry ride from Hiroshima.

A small forested island situated in the Seto Inland Sea, Miyajima is home to one of Japan's most iconic sights, the Floating Torii Gate. Part of the 6th-century Itsukushima Shrine, the Torii Gate is located some 200 metres offshore so that, when the tide comes in, it appears to float above the water. The view of the gate at sunset or sunrise against the backdrop of the island is truly spectacular.

The tram and ferry ride to Miyajima takes about an hour. Try to set off early so as to give yourself ample time to explore the island. Besides Itsukushima, you'll want to allow time to visit Miyajima's smaller temples, such as the beautiful Daisho-in, a Buddhist temple situated at the foot of the thickly-forested Mount Misen. Time-allowing, you might also like to take the cable car to the top of Misen for stunning views of the island, and, on a clear day, Hiroshima port.



Finally, don't leave Miyajima without sampling the local dish, barbecued oysters, at one of the island's many oyster restaurants!



Return to Hiroshima on the late afternoon ferry.

Day 10 – Kotohira (B, D)

Today you'll be leaving Japan's main island of Honshu for the first time during your tour and travelling to Shikoku. The smallest of Japan's four main islands, Shikoku attracts relatively few visitors, yet it boasts stunning scenery and a wealth of historic treasures.

Depart Hiroshima this morning on the train bound for Kotohira, in the north-east of Shikoku Island. Kotohira is a small town that houses Shikoku's most impressive shrine complex, Kōpira-san, a major pilgrimage site situated on the forested slopes of Mount Zozu. The Kōpira complex is a fascinating blend of Shinto and Buddhist tradition, thought to have been constructed in the 10th century AD, perhaps earlier, in honour of the Shinto guardian of mariners, Ō-mono-nushi-no-mikoto.

Most visitors to Kōpira-san will climb only as far as the main hall. A further climb of several hundred steps along a quiet forest trail will take you to the inner shrine (Okusha), for which you're rewarded with a marvellous view of Kotohira and the Sanuki Plain.

Tonight you'll be staying in a local ryokan in Kotohira, with outdoor hot spring baths overlooking Kōpira-san. For dinner, delicious kaiseki-ryori!



Day 11 – Kyoto (B, D)

Leave Kotohira this morning and travel 4 hours by train to Japan’s former imperial capital, Kyoto. On arrival into Kyoto Station, check into a centrally-located hotel.

Kyoto is classical Japan writ large, a city of ancient Buddhist shrines, tranquil gardens and sublime palaces. It is the home of Japanese court culture and traditional artisanry, and the setting and focal point of over 1,000 years of Japanese Imperial history. For first-time visitors, Kyoto can be overwhelming. The city houses no fewer than 2,000 temples and shrines, of which 17 are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Certainly, no other city in Japan can rival Kyoto for historical and cultural interest.

It’s Kyoto’s equally rich cuisine and food culture, and not its temples, which will be the focus of your tour this afternoon. You’ll be collected from your hotel by a culinary guide, who will lead you on a guided tour of Kyoto’s mile-long Nishiki covered food markets, to be followed by a traditional cooking class! 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 dishes such as rolled sushi and miso soup in your cookery class. In the course of the market tour, which will take you through Kyoto’s old back lanes and side streets, you’ll also have the opportunity to visit a former sake brewery for a guided tour with sake 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 12 – Kyoto (B)

Explore the 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 World Heritage Sites.

Start the day with a tour of Nijo Castle. Built in 1603 by the first Tokugawa shogun, Ieyasu—whose mausoleum you’ll remember from your visit to Nikko—Nijo Castle is considered by many to be the definitive piece of Momoyama architecture. Unlike most of Japan’s surviving castles, which were constructed as defensive structures, Nijo was built with a clear aesthetic purpose. Its intricate woodcarvings and Kano-style sliding doors give the palace an understated elegance, intended as a demonstration of the shogun’s cultural credentials as much as his military prowess.



From Nijo, take the train/bus to Kyoto's western Arashiyama district to visit Ryoan-ji. This 15th-century Zen Buddhist temple contains one of Japan's most famous rock gardens. Stunningly simple, the garden is an austere collection of rocks carefully positioned on a flat bed of sand, intended to reflect the principles of Zen meditation.

After lunch in Arashiyama, continue to Kinkakuji, the famous "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.

Your last stop for the day is Kiyomizu, the "pure water" Temple. Set on the high slopes of Mount Otowa, on the outskirts of Kyoto, Kiyomizu enjoys stunning views of the city from its main hall, which features a 13-metre high verandah supported by 139 wooden pillars. Allow an hour to explore the temple and its numerous halls and pagodas, before walking down through the atmospheric Higashiyama district, with its busy lanes filled with quaint shops selling souvenirs, sweets and Kiyomizu-yaki pottery, to Kyoto's central Gion district.



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

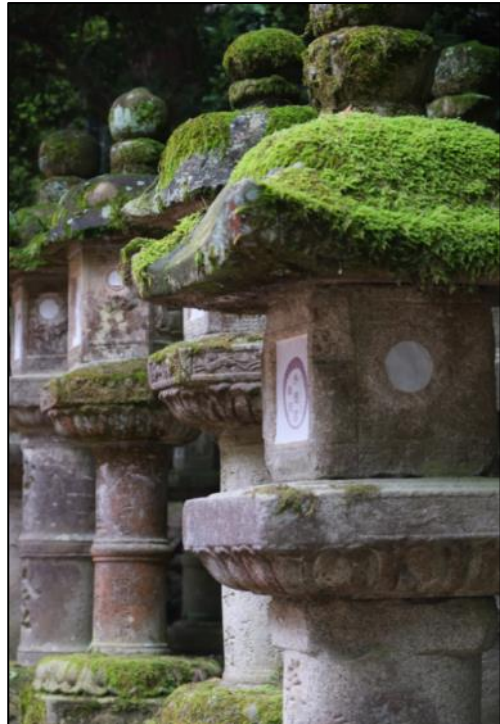
Day 13 – Day trip to Nara (B)

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, particularly 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 visitors, Nara gives them the sense that they're communing with their ancestors. For travellers from overseas, 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 far 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 Mt. Kasuga marks the entrance to the shrine, from where a winding path, flanked by two thousand stone lanterns, extends through the woods to the main shrine hall.

From Kasuga Taisha, it's possible to walk down through Nara Deer Park to Nara'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 14 – Departure from Kyoto (B)

At leisure in Kyoto until your scheduled departure by shuttle bus to Kansai International Airport.



Price Guide:

*The cost of this itinerary is from **£3,345 per person**, based on twin/double accommodation in mid-range hotels (superior hotels available from **£3,985pp**; deluxe from **£4,970pp**). 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 (for *ryokan*, *minshuku*, and other traditional accommodation, rooms are Japanese-style with *futon* and meals are half board)
- Meals as outlined in itinerary
- Meet and greet at the airport and return transfers to the airport
- 14-day Japan Rail Pass
- PASMO Transport Pass (Tokyo), 1-Day Hiroden Tram and Ferry Pass and 1-day Kyoto Subway Pass)
- English-speaking guide for tours in Tokyo (day 2), Nikko (day 3), and Kyoto (day 12)
- All entrance fees and public transportation fees for days 2, 3 and 12
- Market tour and cooking class in Kyoto on day 11

Excludes:

- International flights – please ask us for a quote
- Visas
- Personal travel insurance
- Personal expenses and tips
- Supplementary 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	Hotel Category	Room
Tokyo	Villa Fontaine Shiodome	Mid-range	Standard Room
Tsumago	Onyado Daikichi	Mid-range	Japanese-Style Room (shared bath & toilet)
Takayama	Minshuku Sosuke	Mid-range	Japanese-Style Room (shared bath & toilet)
Kanazawa	Daiwa Roynet	Mid-range	Standard Room
Hiroshima	Hotel New Hiroden	Mid-range	Standard Room
Kotohira	Sakura no Sho	Mid-range	Japanese-Style Room (private toilet, shared bath)
Kyoto	Hotel Vista Premio	Mid-range	Superior Room

Superior (4-star equivalent)			
Location	Hotel	Hotel Category	Room
Tokyo	Park Hotel	Superior	City Room
Tsumago	Onyado Daikichi	Mid-range	Japanese-Style Room (shared bath & toilet)
Takayama	Honjin Hiranoya Bekkan	Superior	River-View Japanese-Style Room (with <i>ensuite</i> bath)
Kanazawa	Tokyu Hotel	Superior	Standard Room
Hiroshima	Sheraton Hotel	Superior	Deluxe Room
Kotohira	Sakura no Sho	Mid-range	Japanese-Style Room (private toilet, shared bath)
Kyoto	Hotel Granvia	Superior	Standard Room

Deluxe (5-star equivalent)			
Location	Hotel	Hotel Category	Room
Tokyo	Conrad	Deluxe	City View
Tsumago	Onyado Daikichi	Mid-range	Japanese-Style Room (shared bath & toilet)
Takayama	Honjin Hiranoya Kachoan	Deluxe	Japanese-Style Room (with <i>ensuite</i> bath)
Kanazawa	Hotel Nikko	Superior	Comfort Room
Hiroshima	Sheraton Hotel	Superior	Deluxe Room
Kotohira	Sakura no Sho	Mid-range	Japanese-Style Room (private toilet & <i>onsen</i> bath)
Kyoto	Hyatt Regency	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.