

## Honshu Highlights

*Discover Japan's cultural heartland on this 8-day overview of central Honshu. Your tour starts amid the neon cityscapes of Tokyo, where you'll spend three days exploring the city and its surrounds, before being whisked away by bullet train to Kyoto, Japan's old Imperial capital, for four days of cultural exploration.*



### Day 1 – Arrive in Tokyo

You will be met by our airport representative on arrival in Tokyo, who will guide you to the correct train or bus 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, 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 towering high rises of Omotesando.

Your first stop is Meiji Jinja, Tokyo's most famous shrine. Set within a huge 200-acre park in the heart of the city, and surrounded by beautiful gardens, Meiji is in many ways Tokyo's defining landmark.



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 department store, 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, before continuing to Ueno.



Your final stop for the day is Ameyokocho, a bustling market set beneath the railway lines in Ueno district. The site of Tokyo's largest black market in the years following WWII, this lively market street is filled with stalls and stands selling exotic foods, antiques and eccentric gifts. It's also a great place to sample traditional Japanese snacks! The market tends to wind down in the late afternoon, making it a good time to visit.



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 – Nikko/Kamakura (B)

Today is a self-guided day. We recommend making an excursion outside of Tokyo to one of the following destinations:

**Kamakura**, a delightful seaside town and former political capital of Japan. Kamakura is notable for its innumerable temples and shrines (both Shinto and Zen Buddhist), and provides a fascinating insight into the era of Japan's first shogunate.

**Nikko**, a small city located in the mountains two hours north of Tokyo, most famous for its spectacular shrine complex, Toshogu, a UNESCO world heritage site which houses some of Japan's most extravagant displays of religious architecture.

Alternatively, if you prefer to stay in Tokyo, today can be spent taking in some of the sights and sounds missed during yesterday's tour. Districts you might like to visit include Akihabara, the city's electronics mecca; Shibuya, famous for its scramble crossing and Tokyu food show; and Shinjuku, a large entertainment and shopping area that centres on the busiest railway station in the world (while here, don't miss the stunningly beautiful Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden!) Or, if you're wanting to escape the crowds, Yanaka carries the rustic charm and ambience of Asakusa but not the traffic, while Roppongi, as Tokyo's largest art district, offers world-class galleries and museums where you can happily while away a few hours.



#### Day 4 – Kyoto (B)

Depart Tokyo this morning on the bullet train to Japan's traditional capital, Kyoto. You will be taking the world-famous Shinkansen, which is able to complete the 500km journey in little over two and a half hours! On arrival in Kyoto, check into your 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.

This afternoon, we've arranged for you to visit a private Kyoto home to learn more about Japanese tea ceremony, or *cha-no-yu*. Japanese tea ceremony is an incredibly intricate and involved procedure, rich in symbolism and elaborate ritual. The tea master will explain the origins of the ritual, its long history and association with Zen Buddhism, and the meaning behind each gesture and movement. Afterwards, you can try your own hand at making and serving tea in the Japanese style.



After the ceremony, the rest of the evening is free for you to explore central Kyoto at your own pace. Let your host know if you'd like a taxi to return directly to your hotel.



#### Day 5 – 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, 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. Its intricate woodcarvings and Kano-style sliding doors give the castle an understated elegance, intended as a demonstration of the Tokugawa clan's cultural credentials as much as their military prowess.

After exploring the castle, visit Ryoan-ji in Kyoto's western Arashiyama district. This 15<sup>th</sup>-century Zen Buddhist temple contains one of Japan's most famous gardens. Stunningly simple, the garden is an austere rockscape intended to reflect the principles of Zen meditation.





After lunch, continue to Kinkakuji, the “Golden Pavilion”, a fabulous Imperial villa constructed in the late 14<sup>th</sup>-century as a retirement home for the then Shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. Following his death, the villa was converted into a Buddhist temple, and now stands as one of Kyoto’s most famous 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 perches on the edge of a cliff, supported by an intricate lattice of timber frames. Allow an hour to explore the temple and its numerous halls and pagodas, before walking down through the atmospheric Higashiyama district—where you can explore 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 perhaps a walk along the Kamo River.

### **Day 6 – 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).

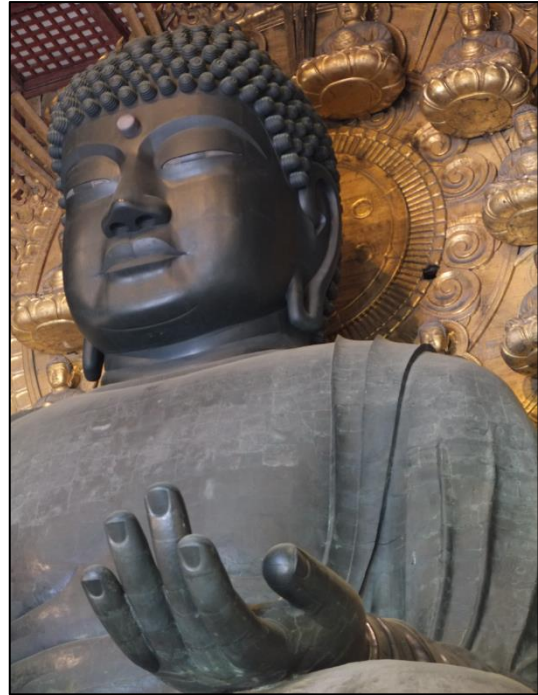
Perhaps more than any other city, Nara offers an insight into Japan’s early medieval era. Many of Nara’s 8<sup>th</sup>-century monuments survive in something close to their original state, unlike the temples and shrines of Kyoto, which are for the most part a product of the Edo era, having evolved with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



visitors, Nara gives them the sense that they're communing with their ancestors. For overseas tourists, 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 Kasuga Hill marks the entrance to the shrine, from where a winding path flanked by two thousand stone lanterns climbs through the woods to the main offering 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 tallest 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). Return to Kyoto on the late afternoon train.



### Day 7 – Osaka/Himeji (B)

Today is a self-guided day. Explore Kyoto at your own pace, or take an excursion beyond Kyoto to one of the following interesting destinations:

**Osaka**, Japan's third largest city, is a vibrant, bustling entrepôt famous for its good food, warm-hearted people, and lively entertainment district. If you're wanting a break from temple tours and sightseeing,



Osaka offers fantastic shopping and restaurants, as well as several of Japan's best museums, including the subterranean Museum of Art.

**Himeji**, 130km to the east of Kyoto (one and a half hours by Shinkansen), offers an escape from the crowds.

The standout attraction of this quiet medieval city is its 400 year-old castle, a huge complex centred around a towering five-storey keep. Known as the "White Heron Castle" (the counterpart to Matsumoto's austere "Black Crow Castle"), on account of its gleaming white walls and curved structure, Himeji is considered by many to be the most magnificent castle in all of Japan. Miraculously, it survived the WWII bombings, which destroyed much of the rest of the city, almost entirely unscathed, making it one of the few medieval-era castles in Japan to survive in something close to its original state.



Allow 4-5 hours to explore the castle and the nearby Koko-en gardens.

Evening in Kyoto.

**Day 8 – Departure (B)**

At leisure until your included transfer to Kansai Airport.

**Price Guide:**

*The cost of this itinerary is from **£1,890 per person**, based on twin/double accommodation in mid-range hotels (superior hotels available from **£2,275pp**; deluxe from **£3,050pp**). 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)
- PASMO Transport Pass (Tokyo) and 1-day Kyoto Subway Pass)
- English-speaking guide for tours in Tokyo (day 2) and Kyoto (day 5)
- All entrance fees and public transportation fees during guided days
- Tea ceremony 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**

<b>Mid-range (3 or 4-star equivalent)</b>			
<b>Location</b>	<b>Hotel</b>	<b>Hotel Category</b>	<b>Room</b>
<b>Tokyo</b>	Villa Fontaine Shiodome	Mid-range	Standard Room
<b>Kyoto</b>	Hotel Vista Premio	Mid-range	Superior Room

<b>Superior (4-star equivalent)</b>			
<b>Location</b>	<b>Hotel</b>	<b>Hotel Category</b>	<b>Room</b>
<b>Tokyo</b>	Park Hotel	Superior	City Room
<b>Kyoto</b>	Hotel Granvia	Superior	Standard Room

<b>Deluxe (5-star equivalent)</b>			
<b>Location</b>	<b>Hotel</b>	<b>Hotel Category</b>	<b>Room</b>
<b>Tokyo</b>	Conrad	Deluxe	City-View Room
<b>Kyoto</b>	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.