

Japan Vacation Specialists

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All Japan Tours

Grand Tour of Japan (Reverse) - Takayama Spring Festival & Cherry Blossom Special Tour -

21 days 20 nights

US\$7498.00

Tour Start Dates: 2017 - 4/5



TOUR COST INCLUDES:

14 nights Western style and 6 nights Japanese style accommodation
Meet and greet upon arrival at Fukuoka Airport
Airport transfers on arrival and departure
Private luxury coach transfers between destinations in Japan
Comprehensive escorted with AJT professional English speaking tour guide
Gratuities

Meals

Breakfast everyday
14 lunches and 11 dinners

Admission fees and activities

Entry fees to sites, gardens, and museums listed in the itinerary
Ferry from Shimabara to Kumamoto
Takachiho Yokagura Performance
Shinkansen Bullet Train Rides
Kobe Wagyu Beef Dinner
Green Tea Ceremony
Nishijin Kimono Show
Miyako Odori Cherry Blossom Dancing Performance Show
Takayama Sanno Spring Festival
Hakone Ropeway
Matsushima Cruise
Seikan Undersea Train Ride
Mt Hakodate Ropeway
Usuzan Ropeway

All prices are per person, based on double or triple occupancy. International flights are not included on our tours -this allows you the flexibility to choose your own departure and get the best value for your money!
We can arrange international flights for US customers if needed, please ask for details.

All Japan Tours

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ITINERARY

Day 01: Fukuoka Airport

Welcome to Fukuoka! Our tour guide will greet and direct you to transfer to the hotel.

Overnight: Hotel Nikko Fukuoka or similar class

NOTE 1: The meet and greet is ONLY available for flights arriving after 11:00 AM

NOTE 2: If you wish to stay extra nights before the tour starts, please contact us to book hotel accommodations.

Day 02: Saga (Mifuneyama Rakuen), Nagasaki (Glover Garden / Gunkanjima Island)

The day begins with a visit to Saga, where we will visit the Mifuneyama Rakuen. In spring, the park is reminiscent of a Shan shui painting that portrays 5000 cherry blossom trees and 50,000 azaleas all blooming against a backdrop of the rugged cliff of Mt. Mifune. From there, we proceed to Nagasaki to visit to the Glover Gardens, an open air museum, also a place where we can see a fine collection of historic mansions of former Western residents of Nagasaki. Then, visit the Gunkanjima Island, a small island located about 20 kilometers from Nagasaki Port. Until 1974, the island served as a coal mine, and a resident to more than 5000 people who called the 480 meter long, 150 meter wide island home, resulting in the highest population density in history recorded worldwide. To accommodate so many people in such a small area, every piece of land was built up so that the island came to resemble a massive battleship. In fact, "Gunkanjima" means "battleship island" in Japanese. The island was formally approved as UNESCO World Heritage site in July 2015.

Overnight: ANA Crowne Plaza Hotel Nagasaki Gloverhill or similar class

Meals: Breakfast & Lunch

Day 03: Ferry from Shimabara to Kumamoto, Takachiho (Takachiho Gorge / Amano Iwato Shrine & Amano Yasukawara / Yokagura Performance)

Today we will take a 30 minute ferry from Shimabara and cross the Ariake Sea to Kumamoto. From Kumamoto, we drive east to Takachiho, a town in northern Miyazaki Prefecture that is steeped in Japanese mythology. It is the supposed site of legend where Amaterasu, the Shinto Sun Goddess, disturbed by her brother's cruel pranks, hid herself in a cave, prompting the other gods and goddesses to try and lure her out. Another legend suggests that this is where Amaterasu's grandson Ninigi-no- Mikoto descended to earth to establish Japan's imperial family. Takachiho is also known as a "power spot", a place of profound religious importance and natural beauty, which radiates spiritual energy. We will visit Takachiho Gorge, a narrow chasm cut through the rock by the Gokase River. The nearly sheer cliffs lining the gorge are made of slow forming volcanic basalt columns, which resemble the scales of a dragon where the stone twisted and flowed as it was formed. Partway along the gorge is the 17 meter high Minainotaki waterfall cascading down to the river below, and it is truly impressive to see the waterfall against a backdrop of dense green foliage and the surrounding grey cliffs. Then visit Amano Iwato Shrine and Amano Yasukawara. Amano Iwato Shrine was built near the cave where Amaterasu is said to have hid herself. A short walk down the road from Amano Iwato Shrine is a path that leads down to the river below. Eventually the path leads to a simple shrine inside a cave known as Amano Yasukawara. This is said to be the cave where the gods and goddesses met to discuss their strategy of luring Amaterasu out of hiding. The natural beauty of the cave and river lined by countless stacks of stones make Amano Yasukawara a place not to miss. After dinner, we have a special treat-a Yokagura Dance Performance. An outrageously ribald dance that supposedly caused Amaterasu to leave the cave to see what all the fun was about, and in doing so she returned her light to the world.

Overnight: Hotel Takachiho or similar class

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

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Day 04: Beppu (Beppu Hells / Mt. Takasaki Monkey Park), Kitsuki (Kitsuki Samurai Districts - Ohara Residence), From Kitsuki, take the "Sonic" express train to Kokura, then board the Shinkansen bullet train to Hiroshima

After your Japanese breakfast at the hotel, we proceed to a bather's paradise - the celebrated hot spring resort of Beppu. Marvel at one of Beppu's most celebrated attractions, the Jigoku Meguri, or "Boiling Hells" hot springs. View two of the nine hot springs or "hells" of Beppu. These hot springs are ideal for viewing rather than bathing. The springs earned their name because it was said that these mysterious, steamy attractions resembled a scene from hell ("jigoku" means "hell"). Then we will enjoy a scenic drive to Mt. Takasaki Monkey Park where we will take a monorail up to the observation area. Mt. Takasaki is a forested mountain just outside of Beppu and home to over 1,500 wild Japanese monkeys. Within this natural habitat, the monkeys have been fed regularly in order to keep them living on the mountain and prevent conflicts with local fruit farmers. The monkeys are quite accustomed to human visitors, and it is possible to get very close in order to take their pictures! From here, visit the Kitsuki Samurai Districts en route to Kokura before taking a ride on the top speed Shinkansen bullet train to Hiroshima.

Overnight: Sheraton Hiroshima Hotel or similar class

Meals: Breakfast & Lunch

Day 05: Hiroshima (Peace Memorial Park - A-Bomb Museum / Miyajima - Itsukushima Shrine), Shimanami Kaido (Scenic Driving / Kirozan Observatory)

Today we will visit the Peace Memorial Park and Atomic Bomb Museum. After lunch, we will take a short ferry ride to the island of Miyajima; the cherry blossoms on the island are spectacular to behold. At high tide, the famed vermilion torii gate of the Itsukushima Shrine looks like it's floating in the middle of the sea. The shrine complex is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Miyajima has been selected as one of Japan's three most scenic places (nihon sankei). In the afternoon, we will drive through the Shimanami Kaido to Shikoku Island. The Shimanami Kaido is a 60 kilometer long toll road that connects Japan's main island of Honshu to the island of Shikoku, passing over six small islands in the Seto Inland Sea. It is also known as the Nishiseto Expressway. We will stop by Kirozan Observatory where you can take in views of the Kurushima Kaikyo Bridges standing among hundreds of islands beautifully scattered over the Seto Inland Sea. The modern observation deck was cleverly designed and built halfway into the ground of the hillside so as not to spoil the natural surroundings.

Overnight: Imabari Kokusai Hotel or similar class

Meals: Breakfast & Dinner

Day 06: Takamatsu (Shikoku Mura Village / Ritsurin Park), Seto Ohashi Bridge

This morning we will proceed to Takamatsu with a visit to the Shikoku Mura Village. Shikoku Mura (Shikoku Village) 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. Then visit Ritsurin Park, a masterpiece of Japanese landscape 100 years in the making. This sprawling park features beautiful ponds and pavilions, with Mt. Shiun as the perfect backdrop. In the evening, we will drive through the Seto-ohashi Bridge back to Honshu Island. Seto-ohashi Bridge is a collective term for the six bridges that connects Japan's main island of Shikoku to the island of Honshu, passing over five small islands in the Seto Inland Sea. These beautiful bridges took 40 years and a tremendous amount of money to build. They are the essence of all available bridge-building technologies. Tonight, we will stay in a spa hotel in Kurashiki Yuga Onsen, where you can soak in the therapeutic waters of a spa bath and feast on a traditional Japanese Kaiseki banquet dinner.

Overnight: Kurashiki Yuga Onsen Hotel Santoka or similar class

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

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Day 07: Kurashiki (Canal Area / Ohara Museum of Art), Himeji (Himeji Castle), Kobe (Wagyu beef)

Today we will visit Kurashiki. In merchant days, this scenic town thrived as a port for rice shipments. Several old rice granaries and examples of historic architecture still remain, in addition to the stone lined canal. We will also visit the Ohara Museum of Art, which is considered the first museum of Western art in Japan. It is a private museum consisting of three adjacent buildings next to the canal. Then we will proceed to Himeji to visit Himeji Castle. It is known as "White Egret Castle" and "White Heron Castle" because of its brilliant white exterior, resembling a bird taking flight. Himeji Castle is the largest and most visited castle in Japan, and is one of the few remaining original castles in Japan. This splendid example of traditional architecture was declared one of the first UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Japan. There are about 1,000 cherry trees spread out across the castle grounds. Enjoy the combination of the castle's stone walls and imposing buildings with the blooming flowers. In the evening we continue to Kobe, where we will savor the world famous Wagyu beef.

Overnight: Hotel Elseraine Osaka or similar class

Meals: Breakfast & Dinner

Day 08: Osaka (Osaka Castle), Nara (Todaiji Temple / Deer Park), Uji (Green Tea Ceremony), Kyoto (Kiyomizu Temple)

In the morning we will travel to Osaka Castle by private coach. The construction of the castle began in 1583 on the ruins of the Ishiyama Honganji Temple, and it was the largest of its time. From Osaka, our coach departs to Nara, the oldest capital city of Japan. We will visit Todaiji Temple, the largest wooden building in Japan. This temple also houses the largest bronze statue of Buddha at 16.3 meters high, and the surrounding park is filled with over 1,000 Sika deer. Then, we proceed to Uji where we will experience a traditional Japanese tea. From Uji, our coach departs to Kyoto, a historical city that was spared from air raids and the atomic bomb for its cultural and historical value during World War II. We will visit the famous Kiyomizu Temple, best known for its wooden stage that juts out from its main hall, 13 meters above the hillside below. The stage affords visitors a nice view of the numerous cherry and maple trees below that erupt in a sea of color in the spring and fall, as well as of the city of Kyoto in the distance. We will stay two nights in Kyoto.

Overnight: Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class

Meals: Breakfast & Lunch

Day 9: Kyoto (Heian Shrine / Heian Shrine Garden / Nishijin Kimono Show / Golden Pavilion / Miyako Odori - Cherry Blossom Dancing Performance Show / Gion)

Today we will continue our tour of Kyoto, once the capital of Japan and still considered its cultural center. First is a visit to the spectacular Heian Shrine, where we see an extensive stroll garden of the Meiji period with a grove of weeping cherry trees. Of special note are the stepping stones in the pond, which were actually the pillars of a 16th century stone bridge that once spanned the Kamo River. Here you also find the largest Torii Gate in Japan spanning the road leading to the shrine. Then proceed to the Nishijin Textile Center where you can view displays of kimonos and even watch a kimono fashion show. Next, visit the Kinkakuji Temple (Golden Pavilion) covered with 18 carat gold leaf. This three story structure was originally built by the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu in 1397 and was rebuilt and restored over the years. Its history inspired the fictional book The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, by Yukio Mishima. We have a special treat this afternoon - Miyako Odori (Cherry Blossom Dancing Performance Show). This dance is performed by the geiko (geisha) and maiko (apprentice geisha). The first performance in 1872 was promoted as part of the Exhibition for the Promotion of Domestic Industry, as a measure to promote prosperity in Kyoto after the city's decline as a result of the capital having been moved to Tokyo in 1869. Infusion of new ideas into this annual event has made it very popular. It is now one of the main events in

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Kyoto. Lastly, we will tour Gion, the old Geisha Quarter, and Pontocho, whose cobblestone alleys vibrate with night life.

Overnight: Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class

Meals: Breakfast & Dinner

Day 10: Shinkansen Bullet Train Ride, Kanazawa (Kenrokuen Garden), Shirakawa-go, Takayama (Takayama Night Festival)

After breakfast, experience a Shinkansen bullet train ride, which can reach speeds of up to 300 km/hr. Then transfer to Kanazawa to visit Kenrokuen Garden, one of the three most beautiful strolling gardens of Japan. The name Kenrokuen literally means a garden combining the 6 attributes of a perfect landscape: spaciousness, seclusion, artifice, antiquity, water features, and panoramas. Here, you'll find the oldest fountain in Japan and Kotoji-toro, the two-legged stone lantern that is the icon of Kenrokuen and Kanazawa. From Kanazawa we cross the mountains by coach to the World Heritage listed rural area of Shirakawa-go. In this very photogenic village, we will walk past thatched roof farm houses and cultivated fields and see unspoiled Edo period wooden buildings. Then, we will continue on to Takayama where a festival, which dates back to the 15th century, will be heating up. This city is located amongst the Japanese Alps and is known as "Little Kyoto" for its preserved historical structures and environment. Due to its remote position in the mountains, it was cut off from the rest of Japan for most of its history and thus has maintained a very unique and traditional atmosphere. This festival is also known as the Sanno Festival because it is centered on Sanno Shrine. It is held on the 14th and 15th of April to pray for a good harvest. The highlight of the festival is in the evening when colorful dashi (floats) are led through the streets amid cheers and drums. These ornate floats are decorated with intricate wood carvings and beautiful metal works.

Overnight: Okada Ryokan or similar class

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Day 11: Takayama (Morning Market / Takayama Jinya / Old Town / Takayama Festival)

After breakfast we will continue sightseeing in Takayama, including the Morning Market, Takayama Jinya and Old Town. You can browse the market stalls for local crafts and fresh farm products. Takayama's Old Town has been beautifully preserved, with many buildings and whole streets of houses dating from the Edo Period (1600-1868). On some streets, like Sannomachi Street, you can find many old homes, shops, coffee houses and sake breweries, some of which have been in business for centuries. In the afternoon, we will continue to enjoy the festive atmosphere of the Takayama Spring Festival, watching floats as they parade through Old Town. Tonight, we will stay at the Yatsugatake Onsen Ryokan, where you can soak in the therapeutic waters of a spa bath and feast on a traditional Japanese Kaiseki banquet dinner.

Overnight: Yatsugatake Royal Hotel or similar class

Meals: Breakfast & Dinner

Day 12: Mt Fuji, Gotemba Peace Park, Hakone (Hakone Ropeway / Owakudani)

After enjoying a Japanese breakfast at the ryokan, we will travel to Mt. Fuji on our private luxury coach. Along the way, enjoy the changing scenery, from thick vegetation to lowlands to rolling clouds. We will stop at Mt. Fuji 5th station (depending on weather) to admire the world famous peak. Next, we head to Gotemba Peace Park, take in the scenic view of Mt. Fuji and thousands of cherry blossoms. From Gotemba we will proceed to Hakone and take a 20 minute ropeway from Togendai to Owakudani. Much of the area here is considered an active volcanic zone since its creation from the eruption of Mount Hakone some 3,000 years ago. There, you can view hot springs and hot rivers, where sulfurous fumes still linger. Owakudani also has splendid views of Mount Fuji in good weather. Then, proceed to Tokyo.

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Overnight: Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class

Meals: Breakfast & Lunch

Day 13: Tokyo (Asakusa Sensoji Temple / Tokyo Edo Museum / Imperial Palace / Tokyo Tower / Odaiba)

In the morning you will be taken to Asakusa Kannon Temple, an active place of worship where you can see the largest paper lantern in Japan. Here, discover the difference between a Shinto Shrine and a Buddhist Temple, then explore Nakamise Market, which resembles a traditional style shopping street of a bygone era. Next is a visit to Edo Tokyo Museum, where you can learn the history of Tokyo from the time when it was a small village called Edo. The museum also offers many good picture taking opportunities, for example with vehicles and items which were used in the past. Then we will proceed to the Imperial Palace, the former site of Edo Castle. You can explore the park, surrounded by moats and stone fortifications, in the heart of the city. In the afternoon, we will visit the world's tallest self supporting steel tower. At 333 meters high, Tokyo Tower is 13 meters taller than its model, the Eiffel Tower. We will go up 150 meters to the main observatory deck and get a bird's eye view of Tokyo. From there we will cross the Rainbow Bridge, and be treated to stunning views of Tokyo Bay. We will travel to the man made islands of Odaiba and see cutting edge architecture, as well as the night view of Tokyo Tower and Rainbow Bridge.

Overnight: Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class

Meals: Breakfast & Lunch

Day 14: Omiya (The Omiya Bonsai Art Museum), Nikko (Lake Chuzenji / Kegon Waterfall / Toshogu Shrine)

Today we will first visit Omiya Bonsai Art Museum where you will learn about bonsai. There over 100 bonsai masterpieces at the museum. Afterwards, we travel overland to Nikko National Park in the mountains north of Tokyo and discover this lovely region. The Japanese have a saying: "Don't say kekko (wonderful) without seeing Nikko." The shrines and temples of Nikko, together with their natural surroundings, have for centuries been closely associated with the history of the Tokugawa Shoguns. Visit Lake Chuzenji and Kegon Waterfall. The almost 100 meter tall Kegon Waterfall is the most famous of Nikko's many beautiful waterfalls. In fact, it is even ranked as one of Japan's three most beautiful falls, along with Nachi Waterfall in Wakayama Prefecture and Fukuroda Waterfall in Ibaraki Prefecture. Next is a visit to the lavishly decorated Toshogu Shrine set in a grove of magnificent ancient Japanese cedars. Tonight, we will stay in the Onsen Ryokan at Kinugawa Onsen, where you can soak in the therapeutic waters of a spa bath and feast on a traditional Japanese Kaiseki banquet dinner.

Overnight: Kinugawa Onsen Hotel or similar class

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Day 15: Matsushima (Matsushima Cruise / Godaido / Zuiganji Temple)

After a Japanese breakfast at the ryokan, you will be visiting Matsushima, a picturesque bay full of pine tree covered small islands, where we explore ancient caves once frequented by meditating monks. Matsushima is famous for being one of Japan's three most scenic views alongside Miyajima and Amanohashidate. The bay is dotted by over 200 small islands covered by pine trees. We will take the best way to view the islands by boarding one of the sightseeing boat. We will then visit Godaido and Zuiganji Temple, the most famous in the Tohoku region, was built by Date Masamune and is designated as a national treasure.

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Overnight: Hotel Matsushima Taikanso or similar class

Meals: Breakfast & Dinner

Day 16: Hiraizumi (Chusonji Temple), Morioka (Morioka Castle Ruins)

This morning, we will head to Hiraizumi for a cultural interlude and to stroll around the magnificent Japanese Cedar Trees and photogenic buildings at Chusonji Temple. Hiraizumi is now listed as a World Heritage site and is home to Konjiki-do (Golden Hall) within Chusonji Temple, which attempts to recreate an ideal Buddhism world. As such, it is host to an ensemble of exquisite "culture of gold" remnants from the brand of Buddhism that developed independently in the Tohoku region far away from the cultural center of Kyoto in the late Heian era of the 11th century. UNESCO has recognized this area as being a globally rare example of local culture to manifest on such a high level in the transitional period from the ancient era to the medieval period. Then, we proceed to Morioka for a visit to the Morioka Castle Ruins, considered one of the most popular hanami spots in Tohoku area.

Overnight: Towadako Lake View Hotel or similar class

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

Day 17: Towada (Lake Towada / Oirase Gorge), Aomori (Nebuta Warasse), Undersea Train from Aomori to Hakodate (Mt Hakodate Ropeway)

Today, we will visit Japan's third deepest lake - Lake Towada, a volcanic crater lake 44 km in circumference. We will have a nature walk along the creek through Oirase Gorge. Over a dozen waterfalls cascade down into the stream all along its length from the walls of the gorge. The stream flows along the floor of the Oirase Gorge, winding among trees which a lush green in spring and summer and turn brilliant shades of red, yellow and orange from late October through early November. Then visit the Nebuta Warasse, a well done museum about the Nebuta Matsuri in Aomori. In the afternoon, we will travel across the Tsugaru Channel between the islands of Hokkaido and Honshu by train via the undersea train tunnel, before arriving to Hakodate. It is a small city that has some of the most authentic and best preserved historic buildings in Japan. Upon arrival in Hakodate, we will take a tram and ropeway ride up to Mt Hakodate from where we can look down upon the twinkling lights that surround Hakodate Bay. The views from the mountain are spectacular and included among Japan's three best night views alongside the views from Nagasaki's Mount Inasa and Kobe's Mount Rokko.

Overnight: Loisir Hotel Hakodate or similar class

Meals: Breakfast & Lunch

Day 18: Hakodate (Hakodate Morning Market / Fort Goryokaku), Onuma Park, Lake Toya (Usuzan Ropeway)

Today we will continue our tour in Hakodate. Hakodate was one of the first Treaty Ports in Japan which opened up to world trade in 1854, so there are many preserved buildings around the area from that time. First is a visit to the famous morning market, where you will see a variety of fresh seafoods, local fruits and vegetables. Then visit the Goryokaku Pentagonal Fort, built in 1868 and the only structure of its kind in Japan. The surrounding moat and defensive grounds are now a city park and gardens. From Hakodate, we head to Lake Toya, along the way we stop at the Lake Onuma. In Lake Toya, we will take the Usuzan Ropeway to the observation deck and have a panoramic views of Lake Toya and neighboring Showa Shinzan. Tonight we will stay in Noboribetsu where we will have dinner in the hotel.

Overnight: Noboribetsu Manseikaku or similar class

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

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Day 19: Noboribetsu (Jigokudani), Shiraoi (Ainu Village), Sapporo (Clock Tower / Odori Park / Susukino)

In the morning, we will visit the Jigokudani. The valley generates 10,000 tons of bubbling water everyday, and visitors can walk to the nearby Oyunuma Lake and watch the plumes of steam rise. Today we will have the opportunity to learn about the Ainu, the indigenous people of northern Japan. At the Shiraoi Ainu Village, you will experience an authentic Ainu performance with music, dancing, and singing. In the afternoon, we proceed to Sapporo city. The tour includes a visit to the Sapporo Clock Tower and Odori Park, where you can stroll along the promenade. The next stop is Susukino, Hokkaido's largest entertainment district. In the evening is for you to enjoy your free time.

Overnight: ANA Hotel Sapporo or similar class

Meals: Breakfast & Lunch

Day 20: Sapporo (Historic Village / Sapporo Beer Museum), Otaru (Otaru Canal / Sakaimachi Street - Kitaichi Garasukan - Otaru Music Box Museum)

In the morning our tour of Sapporo continues with a visit to the Historic Village, you can view architecture from the Meiji and Taisho periods when Japan experienced rapid expansion. From there we will visit the Sapporo Beer Museum, dedicated to all things beer. Sapporo is Japan's oldest brewery and exports its beer throughout the world. Then, we will travel to Otaru, renowned for its canals and glassblowing. During the first half of the 20th century, the Otaru Canal was a vital part of the city's busy harbor. The canal allowed large vessels to be unloaded onto smaller ones, then transported to local warehouses. Although the canal became obsolete when modern dock facilities allowed for the direct unloading of large vessels, the canal remains an integral part of the city's history and culture. As part of a citizen's movement in the 1980s, the canal was beautifully restored and former warehouses have been transformed into cafes, restaurants, museums, and shops. Next, we will visit glass workshops and Music Box Museum in Sakaimachi Street.

Overnight: ANA Crowne Plaza Hotel Chitose or similar class

Meals: Breakfast & Lunch

Day 21: Tour End

After breakfast, our tour officially ends. Checkout time is 11 am and Chitose Airport can be reached by hotel shuttle bus.

Meals: Breakfast

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