

Japan Vacation Specialists

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All Japan Tours

# Grand Tour of Japan Kyoto Aoi Festival & Cherry Blossom Special Tour

21 days 20 nights

**US\$7398.00**

**Tour Start Dates: 2017 – 5/4**



**TOUR COST INCLUDES:**

15 nights Western style and 5 nights Japanese style accommodation  
Meet and greet upon arrival at Chitose 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 10 dinners

***Admission fees and activities***

Entry fees to sites, gardens, and museums listed in the itinerary

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: Chitose Airport**

Welcome to Sapporo! An AJT representative will meet you at the arrival gate and direct you to the hotel.

***Overnight: ANA Crowne Plaza Hotel Chitose or similar class***

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

## **Day 02: Otaru (Otaru Canal / Sakaimachi Street - Kitaichi Garasukan - Otaru Music Box Museum), Sapporo (Clock Tower / Odori Park / Susukino)**

In the morning we will travel to Otaru, renowned for its canals and glassblowing in Kitaichi Garasukan. 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. In the afternoon, we will visit 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 03: Sapporo (Nijo Market / Historic Village), Shiraoi (Ainu Village), Noboribetsu (Jigokudani)**

In the morning our tour of Sapporo continues with a visit to the Nijo Market, where you will see a variety of fresh, local fruits and vegetables. Next is a visit to the Historic Village, you can view architecture from the Meiji and Taisho periods when Japan experienced rapid expansion. Today we get 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 will stop at Hokkaido's most famous hot spring resort, Noboribetsu Onsen. 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. Tonight we will stay in a traditional Japanese style hotel in Noboribetsu offering hot spring baths.

***Overnight: Noboribetsu Manseikaku or similar class***

***Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner***

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#### **Day 04: Lake Toya (Usuzan Ropeway), Onuma Park, Hakodate (Fort Goryokaku / Mt Hakodate Ropeway)**

After breakfast, we will head to Lake Toya and take the Usuzan Ropeway to the observation deck and have a panoramic view of Lake Toya and neighboring Showa Shinzan. Along the way we stop at the Lake Onuma before arrive 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. We will continue our tour to visit 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. In the evening, we will take a ropeway ride up to Mt Hakodate from where we can look down upon the twinkling lights that surround Hakodate Bay. The view from the mountain are spectacular and it's listed as Japan's three best night view alongside with the view from Nagasaki's Mount Inasa and Kobe's Mount Rokko.

***Overnight: Loisir Hotel Hakodate or similar class***

***Meals: Breakfast & Lunch***

#### **Day 05: Undersea Train from Hakodate to Aomori (Nebuta Warasse), Towada (Lake Towada / Oirase Gorge)**

Today we will travel across the Tsugaru Channel between the islands of Hokkaido and Honshu by train via the undersea train tunnel, before arriving to Aomori. We will visit the Nebuta Warasse, a well done museum about the Nebuta Matsuri in Aomori. Then we will visit Japan's third deepest lake - Lake Towada, a volcanic crater lake 44 km in circumference. We will go for 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.

***Overnight: Towadako Lake View Hotel or similar class***

***Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner***

#### **Day 06: Morioka (Morioka Handi-Works Square), Hiraizumi (Chusonji Temple)**

In the morning we head to Morioka for a visit to the Morioka Handi-Works Square, a facility where you can "see, touch, and create" various traditional craftworks and foods of Morioka. Then, visit 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 re-create 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. Tonight we will stay in Matsushima where we will have dinner in the hotel.

***Overnight: Matsushima Taikanso or similar class***

***Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner***

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## **Day 07: Matsushima (Matsushima Cruise / Godaido / Zuiganji Temple)**

Today 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, that was built by Date Masamune and is designated as a national treasure. Tonight, we will stay in the Onsen Ryokan at Kinugawa Onsen, where you can soak in the therapeutic water of a spa bath and feast on a traditional Japanese Kaiseki banquet dinner.

***Overnight: Kinugawa Onsen Hotel or similar class***

***Meals: Breakfast & Dinner***

## **Day 08: Nikko (Toshogu Shrine / Futarasan-Shrine / Rinnoji Temple / Kegon Waterfall / Lake Chuzenji)**

After a Japanese breakfast at the ryokan, we will start a tour of 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. We will visit the lavishly decorated Toshogu Shrine set in a grove of magnificent ancient Japanese cedars. Then, visit Futarasan-Shrine and the Rinnoji complex of Buddhist temples founded in 766 BC by the Buddhist hermit Shoto. Next is a visit to the 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. In the evening, we will proceed to Tokyo for a night stay before your return flight on the next day.

***Overnight: Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class***

***Meals: Breakfast & Lunch***

## **Day 09: 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, the 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, vehicles and items which were used in the past are placed on display for museum goers. 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 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 the Rainbow Bridge.

***Overnight: Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class***

***Meals: Breakfast & Lunch***

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## **Day 10: Mt Fuji, Hakone (Hakone Ropeway / Owakudani)**

We will depart from Tokyo to Mt. Fuji on our private coach. Along the way, enjoy the changing scenery, from thick vegetation to lowlands to rolling clouds. Stop at Mt. Fuji 5th station (depending on weather) to admire the world famous peak. Next, we will travel to Hakone, which is among Japan's most popular hot-spring resorts, and view the forested slopes of Hakone National Park. We will take a 20 minute ropeway ride from Togendai to Owakundani. Most of the area around Owakundani is considered an active volcanic zone since its creation from the eruption of Mount Hakone some 3,000 years ago. Now, you can experience hot springs and hot rivers there, where sulfurous fumes still linger. Owakundani also has splendid views of Mount Fuji in good weather. Tonight, we will stay at the Onsen hotel at Atami Onsen, where you can soak in the therapeutic waters of a spa bath and feast on a traditional Japanese Kaiseki banquet dinner.

***Overnight: Atami New Akao Hotel or similar class***

***Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner***

## **Day 11: Shinkansen Bullet Train Ride from Atami to Nagoya, Hikone (Hikone Castle), Koka (Miho Museum)**

After breakfast at the hotel, our group will experience a Shinkansen bullet train ride from Atami to Nagoya, which can reach speeds of up to 300 km/hr. Visit the Hikone Castle, an original castle, i.e. it survived the post feudal era without undergoing destruction and reconstruction, considered one of the four most beautiful castles in Japan with its three-layered chalk tower. Hikone Castle has a backdrop of Lake Biwa and Konki-zan Hill, and is regarded as one of four national heritage castles, along with Inuyama Castle in Aichi, Himeji Castle in Hyogo, and Matsumoto Castle in Nagano. Then visit Miho Museum, a stunning architecture that accentuates the surrounding nature while exhibiting a variety of items from different ancient civilizations. It was designed by the renowned architect, I. M. Pei, and is named after Koyama Mihoko, one of the richest women in Japan and the founder of the museum. Moreover, the museum has been listed as one of the "1000 Places To See Before You Die". Afterwards, we will proceed to Kyoto for three nights

***Overnight: Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class***

***Meals: Breakfast & Lunch***

## **Day 12: Kyoto (Aoi Festival)**

This morning, we visit the Aoi Festival by train. Aoi Festival is the festival of Kamigamo Shrine, held on May 15. This festival is one of the most solemn and graceful festivals in the country, and it has been well preserved since the eighth century, when it first started. It's a very popular festival that includes a procession of about 500 people clad in the elegant and ornate dress of the ancient imperial court and gorgeous carriages pulled by oxen. The festival consists of a private imperial service, a Shinto ritual, and a parade from the Imperial Palace in Kyoto to Kamigamo Shrine. When people talk about the Aoi Festival, they usually mean the parade and the courtly music and dances that are performed along the way. The festival began with the court officials in the Heian period (794-1185) who made an outing to offer their prayers at the Kamigamo Shrine, as well as the Shimogamo Shrine just to the south. The parade attracted many onlookers a thousand years ago, just as it does today, and the event has been the subject of many literary and artistic works.

***Overnight: Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class***

***Meals: Breakfast***

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### **Day 13: Kyoto (Arashiyama - Tenryuji Temple - Sagano Bamboo Forest - Togetsukyo Bridge / Golden Pavilion / Nishijin Kimono Show / Kiyomizu Temple / Gion Geisha District)**

Today we will start our tour of Kyoto, once the capital of Japan and still considered its cultural center. First is a visit to Arashiyama to see Tenryuji Temple where you can have a glimpse of traditional Zen landscape garden design. Then proceed through a dense bamboo forest, past several small shrines, tea shops and private houses before arriving at the Togetsukyo Bridge over Hozu River. Continue on to the Kinkakuji Temple (Golden Pavilion) covered with 18 carat gold leaves. This three-story structure was originally built by the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu in 1397. At the Nishijin Textile Center, you can view displays of kimonos and even watch a kimono fashion show. Then, 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 spring and fall, as well as a beautiful scene of Kyoto City in the distance. Lastly, we will tour Gion, the old Geisha Quarters, and Pontocho, whose cobblestone alleys vibrate with night life.

***Overnight: Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class***

***Meals: Breakfast & Dinner***

### **Day 14: Kyoto (Fushimi Inari Shrine / Gekkeikan Okura Sake Museum), Uji (Green Tea Ceremony), Nara (Todaiji Temple / Deer Park), Osaka (Dotonbori - Shinsaibashi)**

The day begins with a visit in the scenic and historic Fushimi district, which is also one of the brewing capitals of Japan. First is a visit to the stunning vermilion colored Fushimi Inari Shrine, whose 4km long tunnel of scarlet torii gates was featured in the film *Memoirs of a Geisha*. This complex wraps around a bamboo wilderness that includes mountains, streams, and ponds, the perfect backdrop for a scenic hike. At the Gekkeikan Okura Sake Museum, you will learn the fascinating history of sake brewing with its nostalgic buildings, tasting experience, and valuable collection of traditional brewing tools. From there we continue to Nara, the oldest capital city of Japan. We will visit Todaiji Temple, the largest wooden building in Japan. The 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. In the afternoon we will travel to Osaka by private coach. Our last visit for the day is Dotonbori, which runs parallel to the Dotonbori canal. A popular shopping, entertainment, and food district, Dotonbori is known for the hundreds of neon and mechanized signs that line the street, including the famous Glico Running Man and Kani Doraku Crab signs.

***Overnight: Hotel Elserine Osaka or similar class***

***Meals: Breakfast & Lunch***

### **Day 15: Himeji (Himeji Castle), Kurashiki (Canal Area / Ohara Museum of Art)**

Today we take a 2 hour ride on a luxury coach 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. Next is a visit to 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. 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 & Dinner***

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## **Day 16: Seto Ohashi Bridge, Takamatsu (Shikoku Mura Village / Ritsurin Park)**

After your Japanese breakfast at the hotel, we will cross the inland sea through the Seto-ohashi Bridge to Shikoku Island. Seto-ohashi Bridge is a collective term for the six bridges that connects Japan's main island of Honshu to the island of Shikoku, 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. 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.

***Overnight: Imabari Kokusai Hotel or similar class***

***Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner***

## **Day 17: Shimanami Kaido (Scenic Driving / Kirozan Observatory), Hiroshima (Peace Memorial Park - A-Bomb Museum / Miyajima - Itsukushima Shrine)**

In the morning, we will drive through the Shimanami Kaido to Honshu Island. The Shimanami Kaido is a 60 kilometer long toll road that connects Japan's main island of Shikoku to the island of Honshu, 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. In Hiroshima, we will visit the Peace Memorial Park and Atomic Bomb Museum. Then take a short ferry ride to the island of Miyajima, considered sacred by many. 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).

***Overnight: Sheraton Hotel Hiroshima or similar class***

***Meals: Breakfast***

## **Day 18: Shinkansen to Kokura, then board the "Sonic" express train to Kitsuki, Kitsuki (Kitsuki Samurai Districts - Ohara Residence), Beppu (Beppu Hells / Mt. Takasaki Monkey Park), Takachiho (Takachiho Shrine - Yokagura Performance)**

This morning, we will take a ride on the top speed Shinkansen bullet train to Kokura, then board the "Sonic" express train to Kitsuki where we will visit the Kitsuki Samurai Districts. From Kitsuki, 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, we drive west 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

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beauty, which radiates spiritual energy. 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**

## **Day 19: Takachiho (Takachiho Gorge / Amano Iwato Shrine), Ferry from Kumamoto to Shimabara**

After breakfast, 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 lunch, proceed to Kumamoto and take a 30 minute ferry crossing the Ariake Sea to Shimabara. Tonight we stay in a western style hotel in Nagasaki.

**Overnight: ANA Crowne Plaza Hotel Nagasaki Gloverhill or similar class**

**Meals: Breakfast & Lunch**

## **Day 20: Nagasaki (Dejima / Glover Garden / Gunkanjima Island), Fukuoka (Wagyu Dinner)**

After breakfast, we will visit Dejima, an island with a 400-year history of Dutch trade. Next, visit to the Glover Gardens, an open air museum where we see a fine collection of historic mansions of former Western residents of Nagasaki. Then, head to Gunkanjima Island, a small island located about 20 kilometers from Nagasaki Port. Until 1974, the island served as a coal mine, and more than 5000 residents 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. In the afternoon, we depart Nagasaki to Fukuoka, where we will savor the world famous Wagyu beef.

**Overnight: Hotel Nikko Fukuoka or similar class**

**Meals: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner**

## **Day 21: Tour End**

After breakfast, our tour officially ends. Checkout time is 11 am, free for leisure until transfer Fukuoka Airport for departure.

NOTE 2: If you would like to stay longer in Japan, please contact us to book hotel accommodations.

**Meals: Breakfast**

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