

Japan Vacation Specialists

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Japan In Depth with Japanese Alps (Reverse) - Cherry Blossom Special Tour -

14 days 13 nights

US\$4998.00

Tour Start Dates: 2017 - 3/20, 3/24, 3/27, 4/10



TOUR COST INCLUDES:

10 nights Western style and 3 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
9 lunches and 7 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
Hakone 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.

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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: 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 Nishisetu 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 Elserine Osaka or similar class

Meals: Breakfast & Dinner

Day 08: Nara (Todaiji Temple / Deer Park), Uji (Green Tea Ceremony), Kyoto (Fushimi Inari Shrine / Kiyomizu Temple)

In the morning we will travel to Nara, the oldest capital city of Japan, by private coach. 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. We will continue our tour to Uji where you can experience a traditional Japanese tea ceremony. In the afternoon we will travel to Kyoto, a historical city that was spared from air raids and saved from the atomic bomb during World War II for its cultural and historical value. We will 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. 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 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 09: Kyoto (Arashiyama - Tenryuji Temple Zen Garden - Bamboo Grove - Togetsukyo Bridge / Golden Pavilion / Nishijin Kimono Show / 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 Arashiyama to see Tenryuji Temple where you can have a glimpse of traditional Zen landscape garden design. Then proceed through a dense bamboo grove, past several small shrines, tea shops and private houses before arriving at the Togetsukyo Bridge over Hozu River. 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. Then proceed to the Nishijin Textile Center where you can view displays of kimonos and even watch a kimono fashion show. We have a special treat this afternoon - Miyako Odori (Cherry Blossom Dancing Performance Show). This dance is performed by the

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

NOTE: For tour that starts on March 20th, 2017, we will visit the Gion Corner - maiko dances and traditional performing arts show instead of the Miyako Odori.

Overnight: *Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class*

Meals: *Breakfast & Dinner*

Day 10: Shinkansen Bullet Train Ride from Kyoto to Maibara, Kanazawa (Kenrokuen Garden), Shirakawa-go (Shiroyama Viewpoint - Gassho-zukuri Minkaen)

After breakfast, experience a Shinkansen bullet train ride from Kyoto to Maibara, which can reach speeds of up to 300 km/hr. Then transfer to Kanazawa to visit Kenrokuen Garden, one of 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 private coach to the World Heritage listed rural area of Shirakawa-go. Shirakawa-go is home of the UNESCO designated Gassho-styled ("praying hands") farmhouses. First is the Shiroyama Viewpoint, where great views of Ogimachi Village can be seen. Next is the Gassho-zukuri Minkaen open air museum where farmhouses and other structures were relocated to the area. Then, we will continue on to Takayama, a city 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. Tonight, we will stay at the Ryokan, where you can soak in the therapeutic waters of a spa bath and feast on a traditional Japanese Kaiseki banquet dinner.

Overnight: *Okada Ryokan or similar class*

Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner*

Day 11: Takayama (Morning Market / Takayama Jinya / Old Town), Matsumoto (Matsumoto Castle)

After enjoying a Japanese breakfast at the ryokan, 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 on to Matsumoto. Visit Matsumoto Castle, also known as "Crow Castle" because of its black exterior. Inside, we can see the best examples of wooden construction of a traditional Japanese style castle. This is a classical "flatland" castle surrounded by a still intact defense moat.

Overnight: *Yatsugatake Royal Hotel or similar class*

Meals: *Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner*

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

After breakfast, we will travel to Mt. Fuji on our private 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.

Overnight: Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class

Meals: Breakfast & Lunch

Day 13: Tokyo (Asakusa Sensoji Temple / Ueno Park / 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. Continue to Ueno Park, famous for its more than 1,000 cherry trees. 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 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: Narita Excel Hotel Tokyu or similar class

Overnight: Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class (NOTE 2)

NOTE 2: If you wish to stay in the center of Tokyo for the last night, we can arrange for you to stay at Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo instead of Narita Excel Hotel Tokyu. In this case, airport transfer is not included but your tour guide will help you with directions to the airport.

Meals: Breakfast & Lunch

Day 14: Tour End

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

NOTE 3: If you would like to stay longer in Japan, please contact us to book hotel accommodations.

Meals: Breakfast

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