

Charms of Southern Japan (Reverse): Cherry Blossom Tour 2018 - 3/26, 4/2, 4/5

Discover the culture, national parks, countrysides, gardens and "must see" sights of Southern Japan in cherry blossom season.

Tour Code: GTA1562050

Tour Information

Land cost: from USD \$2898

Single supplement: USD \$560

Tour duration: 8 days 7 nights

Destination:

Saga / Nagasaki / Takachiho / Beppu / Kitsuki / Hiroshima / Shimanami Kaido / Takamatsu / Kurashiki / Himeji / Kobe

Tour cost includes:

- 6 nights Western style and 1 night Japanese style accommodation
- Meet and greet upon arrival at Fukuoka Airport
- Airport transfers on arrival and departure
- Private coach transfers between destinations in Japan
- Comprehensive escorted with AJT professional English speaking tour guide
- Gratuities

Meals

- Breakfast everyday
- 4 lunches and 4 dinners

Admission fees and activities

- All entry fees to sites, activities listed in the itinerary

Dates & Price

2017

Start Date	End Date	Twin / Triple	Start City	End City	Style	Status
Wed. Apr 5, 2017	Wed. Apr 12, 2017	USD \$2898.00	Fukuoka	Osaka	Deluxe	View Tour
Sun. Apr 9, 2017	Sun. Apr 16, 2017	USD \$2898.00	Fukuoka	Osaka	Deluxe	View Tour

2018

Start Date	End Date	Twin / Triple	Start City	End City	Style	Status
Mon. Mar 26, 2018	Mon. Apr 2, 2018	USD \$2898.00	Fukuoka	Osaka	Deluxe	View Tour
Mon. Apr 2, 2018	Mon. Apr 9, 2018	USD \$2898.00	Fukuoka	Osaka	Deluxe	View Tour
Thu. Apr 5, 2018	Thu. Apr 12, 2018	USD \$2898.00	Fukuoka	Osaka	Deluxe	View Tour

Itinerary

Tour Code: GTA1562050

Day 1 Fukuoka Airport

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

Hotel:

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 2 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 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

ANA Crowne Plaza Hotel Nagasaki Gloverhill or similar class

Day 3 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Hotel Takachiho or similar class

Day 4 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Sheraton Hiroshima Hotel or similar class

Day 5 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Dinner

Hotel:

Imabari Kokusai Hotel or similar class

Day 6 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Kurashiki Yuga Onsen Hotel Santoka or similar class

Day 7 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Dinner

Hotel:

Hotel Nikko Kansai Airport or similar class

Hotel Elserine Osaka or similar class (NOTE 3 & 4)

NOTE 3: If you wish to stay in the center of Osaka for the last night instead of Hotel Nikko Kansai Airport, we can arrange for you to stay at Hotel Elserine Osaka (or similar class). In this case, airport transfer is not included, but we will provide full instructions for you to get to the airport in advance.

NOTE 4: If you will be flying out from Itami Airport (ITM) instead of Kansai International Airport (KIX), we can arrange for you to stay at Hotel Elserine Osaka (or similar class) instead of Hotel Nikko Kansai Airport. In this case, airport transfer is not included but we will provide full instructions for you to get to the airport in advance.

Itinerary

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Day 8 Tour Ends

After breakfast, our tour officially ends. Checkout time is 11 am and Osaka Kansai Airport can be reached in a three minute walk.

Meals:
Breakfast

NOTE 5: If you would like to stay longer in Japan, please contact us to book hotel accommodations.