

Spirit of Japan (Reverse): Cherry Blossom Tour 2018 - 4/7

Visit centuries old religious sites

Tour Code: GTC2187546

Tour Information

Land cost: from USD \$5598

Single supplement: USD \$1120

Tour duration: 15 days 14 nights

Destination:

Himeji / Kurashiki / Hiroshima / Shimanami Kaido / Takamatsu / Naruto / Koyasan / Kumano / Ise Shima / Nara / Uji / Kyoto / Kanazawa / Shirakawa-go / Takayama / Matsumoto / Mt Fuji / Hakone / Tokyo

Tour cost includes:

- 1 night temple lodging, 9 nights Western style and 4 nights Japanese style accommodation
- Meet and greet upon arrival at Osaka Kansai 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
- 11 lunches and 7 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
Sat. Apr 8, 2017	Sat. Apr 22, 2017	USD \$5598.00	Osaka	Tokyo	Deluxe	View Tour

2018

Start Date	End Date	Twin / Triple	Start City	End City	Style	Status
Sat. Apr 7, 2018	Sat. Apr 21, 2018	USD \$5598.00	Osaka	Tokyo	Deluxe	View Tour

Itinerary

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Day 1 Osaka Kansai Airport

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

Hotel:

Hotel Nikko Kansai Airport or similar class

Hotel Elserene Osaka or similar class (NOTE 1 & 2)

NOTE 1: If you wish to stay in the center of Osaka for the first night instead of Hotel Nikko Kansai Airport, we can arrange for you to stay at Hotel Elserene Osaka (or similar class). In this case, airport transfer is not included, but we will provide you directions to get to your hotel in advance.

NOTE 2: If you will be flying into Itami Airport (ITM) instead of Kansai International Airport (KIX), we can arrange for you to stay in the center of Osaka (Hotel Elserene Osaka or similar class) instead of Hotel Nikko Kansai Airport. In this case, airport transfer and meet-and-greet are not included, but we will provide with full instructions to get to the hotel in advance.

NOTE 3: The meet and greet is ONLY available for flights arriving in Terminal 1 after 11:00 AM. For guests arriving in Terminal 2, airport pickup is not included, but we will provide you with directions to get to your hotel in advance.

NOTE 4: If you wish to stay extra nights before the tour starts, please contact us to book hotel accommodations.

Day 2 Himeji (Himeji Castle), Kurashiki (Canal Area / Ohara Museum of Art)

Today we take a 2-hour ride on a private coach to Himeji to visit the Himeji Castle. It is known as "White Egret Castle" and "White Heron Castle" because of its brilliant white exterior, which resembles a bird taking flight. Himeji Castle is the largest, most visited castle in Japan, and is one of the few remaining original castles in the country. This splendid example of traditional architecture was declared one of the first UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Japan. Next is a visit to Kurashiki. Back in the day 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. In the afternoon, we will continue our journey to Hiroshima for two nights.

Meals:

Breakfast / Dinner

Hotel:

Grand Prince Hotel Hiroshima or similar class

Day 3 Hiroshima (Peace Memorial Park - A-Bomb Museum / Miyajima Island - Itsukushima Shrine)

Today our travels will continue with a visit to the Peace Memorial Park, the iconic landmark of Hiroshima's memorial for those who passed away in the infamous Hiroshima bombing on August 6th, 1945. There, we will also enter the A-Bomb Museum where documents, artifacts, and videos are displayed throughout the museum. After lunch, we will take a short ferry ride to the island of Miyajima; the cherry blossoms on the island are a spectacular sight. At high tide we can see 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, while Miyajima has been selected as one of Japan's three most scenic places (nihon sankei).

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Grand Prince Hotel Hiroshima or similar class

Day 4 Shimanami Kaido (Scenic Driving / Kiroosan Observatory), Takamatsu (Shikoku Mura Village / Ritsurin Park)

In the morning, 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 Kiroosan Observatory where you can take in views of the Kurushima Kaikyo Bridges standing among hundreds of islands that are beautifully scattered all 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. We then proceed to Takamatsu with a stop at 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

JR Hotel Clement Takamatsu or similar class

Day 5 Naruto (Whirlpool Viewing Boat Tour / Shikoku Pilgrimage Trail - Ryozenji to Gokurakuji / Ferry from Tokushima to Wakayama, Koyasan (Temple Lodging - Shukubo / After vegetarian dinner, visit Okunoin's graveyard at night)

We continue our journey today at Naruto. Naruto is known for its swirling whirlpools, we will take a small boat and get right up next to and among the whirlpools. Naruto is also the starting point of the Shikoku Pilgrimage, which leads around the island to visit 88 temples across Shikoku associated with the famous Buddhist monk, Kobo Daishi, the founder of Shingon Buddhism. Naruto's Ryozenji Temple is the first temple of the pilgrimage. We will be traveling by foot for approximately 1.2 km (0.75 miles) from Ryozenji Temple to Gokurakuji Temple. From Shikoku Island, we will board a ferry to Honshu Island where we will stay in a monastery in Koyasan complete with authentic Buddhist vegetarian meals. We will experience life very much as a monk would in Japan. Koyasan is the center of Shingon Buddhism, a Buddhist sect that was introduced to Japan in 805 by Kobo Daishi, one of the most significant personalities in Japan's religious history. The temple complex of over 100 temples is located on a mountain top, surrounded by cedar trees and mountain peaks. After a vegetarian dinner at the temple, you will have the option to follow your guide at night to Okunoin's gravesite. It is the largest cemetery in Japan where the founder of Shingon Buddhism is said to be in eternal meditation.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Koyasan Sekishoin or similar class

Day 6 Koyasan (Early Meditation with Monks / Okunoin Temple / Kongobuji Temple / Danjo Garan)

Today activities begin with reflection as we meditate with the monks of Koyasan. Then we will go to Okunoin Temple that is surrounded by many grave markings, the majority of which are old and worn out. The gravesite is also the resting place of the founder of Shingon Buddhism in Japan, Kobo Daishi. Next is Kongobuji Temple which was originally built by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, one of Nobunaga's generals during the warring era. The temple also has the Ohiroma room, a special room designated for ceremonies and rituals with tatami mat floors and elegantly designed sliding doors. The pilgrimage finishes at Danjo Garan, a temple complex also belonging to Kobo Daishi's original foundations. Painted in brilliant vermillion color, one of the pagoda structures called the Konpon Daito stands out amongst the others.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Katsuura Onsen Hotel Nakanoshima or similar class

Day 7 Kumano (Kumano Kodo Pilgrimage Trail - Daimonzaka to Nachi Fall , on the way visit Seigantoji Temple & Kumano Nachi Grand Shrine)

This morning we head out to the Kumano Kodo Pilgrimage Trail, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where pilgrims have walked the forest trails for over 1000 years. The Kumano region is the mountainous southern portion of the Kii Hanto, the largest Peninsula of Japan, where sacred trails are still used for the pilgrimage to the three grand shrines of Kumano. We will walk along a short section of Daimon-zaka Trail and visit the 133 metre high Nachi Waterfall, whose vertical torrent pouring over the cliff edge into the virgin forest, is said to be the highest in Japan. We slowly climb the pilgrim's steps to visit Seigantoji Temple, originally built in 1590, and a very picturesque 3 storied vermilion coloured pagoda that creates a perfect picture of Japanese tranquillity.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Toba Grand Hotel or similar class

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Day 8 Ise Shima (Ise Grand Shrine / Okage Yokocho District / Mikimoto Pearl Island)

The pilgrimage continues to Ise Shima where the Ise Grand Shrine is located. The Ise Grand Shrine has a two- thousand year history, is Japan's most important Shinto shrine, and serves as the centre of all Shinto shrines nationwide. Situated near the banks of the Isuzu River, the shrine is surrounded by Japanese cedar trees, some 800 years old. The inner shrine is considered to be the abode of Amaterasu, the sun goddess, the deity the emperor was considered to be descended from. At Okage Yokocho Street we can experience the townscape of a bygone era, where buildings leading to the inner shrine reproduce the architecture and atmosphere that surrounded Ise pilgrims during the Edo Period (1600-1868). Our next stop is at Mikimoto Pearl Island where in 1893, Kokichi Mikimoto first perfected the technique of producing cultured pearls and started a now world wide industry. Here we see 'Ama' , women pearl divers, demonstrate their skills, watch how cultured pearls are produced and see a truly amazing collection of million dollar treasures made with pearls.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Hotel Elserine Osaka or similar class

Day 9 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class

Day 10 Kyoto (Arashiyama - Tenryuji Temple Zen Garden - Sagano Bamboo Forest - 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 forest, 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 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Dinner

Hotel:

Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class

Day 11 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Okada Ryokan or similar class

Day 12 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Yatsugatake Royal Hotel or similar class

Day 13 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 Owakundani. 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. Owakundani also has splendid views of Mount Fuji in good weather. Then, proceed to Tokyo.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class

Day 14 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 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Narita Excel Hotel Tokyu or similar class

Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class (NOTE 5 & 6)

NOTE 5: If you wish to stay in the center of Tokyo for the last night instead of Narita Excel Hotel Tokyu, we can arrange for you to stay at Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo (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 6: If you will be flying out from Haneda Airport (HND) instead of Narita Airport (NRT), we can arrange for you to stay at Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo (or similar class) instead of Narita Excel Hotel Tokyu. 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 15 Tour End

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

Meals:
Breakfast

NOTE 7: If you would like to stay longer in Japan, please contact us to book hotel accommodations.