

Best of Hokkaido & Honshu Tour: Shibazakura Festivals 2017 - 5/22

Exploring Japan's two main islands: Hokkaido & Honshu

Tour Code: GTC2223336

Tour Information

Land cost: from USD \$5198

Single supplement: USD \$1120

Tour duration: 15 days 14 nights

Destination:

Hokkaido (Shiraoi / Noboribetsu / Lake Toya / Kutchan / Otaru / Sapporo / Furano / Biei / Sounkyo / Takinoue / Abashiri / Shiretoko / Lake Mashu / Kushiro), Honshu Island (Nara / Uji / Kyoto / Koka / Hikone / Hakone / Mt Fuji / Tokyo)

Tour cost includes:

- 11 nights Western style and 3 nights Japanese style accommodation
- Meet and greet upon arrival at Chitose Airport
- Domestic flight from Kushiro to Osaka
- 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
- 10 lunches and 6 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
Mon. May 22, 2017	Mon. Jun 5, 2017	USD \$5198.00	Sapporo	Tokyo	Deluxe	View Tour

2018

Start Date	End Date	Twin / Triple	Start City	End City	Style	Status
Mon. May 21, 2018	Mon. Jun 4, 2018	USD \$5198.00	Sapporo	Tokyo	Deluxe	View Tour

Itinerary

Tour Code: GTC2223336

Day 1 Chitose Airport

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

Hotel:

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 2 Shiraoi (Shiraoi Ainu Village), Noboribetsu (Jigokudani)

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 every day, and visitors can walk to the nearby Oyunuma Lake and watch the plumes of steam rise. Then, we will drive past fields and mountains to Lake Toya for dinner and overnight accommodations. Lake Toya is part of Shikotsu-Toya National park, known for its beauty of nature and good hot spring, and was chosen for 100 beautiful landscapes of Japan in 2008. This is the 3rd largest caldera lake in Japan; about 42 km around, with 4 pretty islands, and is the habitat of many kinds of birds and deer. Tonight we will stay in a traditional Japanese style hotel offering hot spring baths with beautiful views of the lake.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Toya Sun Palace or similar class

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Day 3 Lake Toya (Lake Toya Boat Ride / Usuzan Ropeway / Showa Shinzan), Kutchan (Shibazakura Garden of Kazuo Mishima)

After breakfast, we will take a 30 minute cruise to Nakanoshima Island, an island in the middle of the Lake Toya where you can stroll around the island and get acquainted to the local creatures. Then, head to Mt. Usu and take the Usuzan Ropeway to the observation deck and take in the panoramic views of Lake Toya and neighboring Showa Shinzan. Afterwards we will head to the Shibazakura (moss phlox) Garden of Kazuo Mishima in Kutchan. The field is 400 square meters big and has a mound made to look like Mount Yotei.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

ANA Hotel Sapporo or similar class

Day 4 Otaru (Otaru Cannal / Glass Workshops / Music Box Museum), Sapporo (Clock Tower / Odori Park / Susukino)

In the morning 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 the afternoon, we will visit Sapporo. The tour includes a visit to the Sapporo Clock Tower and Odori Park, where you can stroll along the promenade and sniff the spring blooms. The next stop is Susukino, Hokkaido's largest entertainment district. This evening is for you to enjoy your free time.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

ANA Hotel Sapporo or similar class

Day 5 Sapporo (Nijo Market / Okurayama Ski Jump / Sapporo Beer Museum / Historic Village / Shiroi Koibito Park)

This 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 Okurayama Ski Jump where the 90 meter ski jump portion of the 1972 Winter Olympics was held. 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. At the Historic Village, you can view architecture from the Meiji and Taisho periods when Japan experienced rapid expansion. Then visit Shiroi Koibito Park, a theme park founded by a local chocolate company. Its famous Shiroi Koibito cookies, buttery cookies with a white chocolate center, are a favorite with locals and tourists alike.

Meals:

Breakfast / Dinner

Hotel:

ANA Hotel Sapporo or similar class

Day 6 Furano (Cheese Factory / Furano Winery / Tomita Farm - Furano Flower Fields), Biei (Blue Pond), Sounkyo (Ginga & Ryusei Waterfalls)

On a private coach, we will travel to Furano. One of the best spots to see the beautiful flowers against the Tokachi Mountains is Farm Tomita. In addition to flowers, Furano is celebrated for its local wine. Located on a hill overlooking the city, the Furano Winery is open to the public and there are free wine tastings. You can see how local camembert cheese is made at the Furano Cheese Factory. Sample the black cheese, which gets its color from squid ink, and a number of other cheeses at the factory shop. Don't forget to visit the ice cream factory and pizzeria, or participate in one of the many hands-on workshops. In the afternoon, we will proceed to Biei, a small town surrounded by a picturesque landscape of gently rolling hills and vast fields. Visit Blue Pond, and then enjoy the beautiful landscapes of Panorama Road from the window. The Ginga and Ryusei Waterfalls are located in the Sounkyo Gorge about 3 kilometers away from the Obako valley. They are a pair of waterfalls that is divided by a huge rock formation protruding from the cliff.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Sounkyo Choyotei Hotel or similar class

Day 7 Takinoue (Takinoue Koen Park), Abashiri (Abashiri Prison Museum / Okhotsuku Ryu-hyo Museum)

Today we will be going to Takinoue Park, which is known for its shibazakura (pink moss phlox). The abundant pink moss phlox covers 100,000 square meters of a hillside. While there we will have the chance to enjoy the Shibazakura Festival happening around the blooming period. Next we will enjoy the beautiful scenery as we drive to Abashiri and visit Abashiri Prison Museum. Abashiri Prison was constructed in the 1890s to hold more than one thousand dangerous criminals. The prison gained national fame through a popular yakuza movie series by director Ishii Teruo in the 1960s. Following a major modernization of the Abashiri Prison in 1984, the prison's old buildings were moved into the Abashiri Prison Museum, which opened its doors to the public in 1985 as an open air museum. Next, visit Abashiri Drift Ice Museum, where we meet the curator and discover how the sea freezes here in winter. Stay at Shiretoko tonight and enjoy dinner at the hotel.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Shiretoko Grand Hotel

Day 8 Shiretoko (Shiretoko Nature Cruise), Lake Mashu, Kushiro (Akan International Crane Center / Kushiro Marshlands)

After breakfast discover nature treasures within Japan's newest World Heritage listed site, Shiretoko Peninsula, a mountainous wilderness protruding into the Sea of Okhotsk. We will take a small boat and cruise close to Shiretoko's sheer rocky cliffs and observe colonies of sea birds and brown bears. Then, we transfer to Lake Mashu where you can look down into the volcanic crater lake. Continue our journey to visit the Akan International Crane Center, a museum and breeding center and sanctuary for Tancho "Red-crowned" Cranes. Lastly, visit Kushiro Marshlands, the largest wetland in Japan, protected by the Ramsar Convention in 1980 and incorporated in the Kushiro Shitsugen National Park in 1987.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

ANA Crowne Plaza Hotel Kushiro or similar class

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Day 9 Kushiro Airport, Osaka Kansai Airport

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for your flight to Osaka. Upon arrival, an AJT representative will meet you at the arrival gate and direct you to the hotel. Free for leisure at the afternoon.

Meals:

Breakfast

Hotel:

Hotel Nikko Kansai Airport or similar class

Day 10 Nara (Todai-ji Temple / Nara Deer Park), Uji (Green Tea Ceremony), Kyoto (Gekkeikan Okura Sake Museum / Fushimi Inari Shrine)

In the morning you 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. Then, visit a sake museum in the scenic and historic Fushimi district, which is home to more than twenty breweries and is considered one of the brewing capitals in Japan. At the Gekkeikan Okura Sake Museum, you will be introduced to the fascinating history of sake brewing with its nostalgic buildings, tasting experience, and valuable collection of traditional brewing tools. Then 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. We will stay two nights in Kyoto.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class

Day 11 Kyoto (Arashiyama - Tenryu-ji Temple Zen Garden - 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Dinner

Hotel:

Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class

Day 12 Koka (Miho Museum / Koka Ninja Mansion), Hikone (Hikone Castle), Bullet Train Ride

This morning we will visit the famous Miho Museum. The Miho Museum has 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. This museum is also listed as one of the "1000 Places to See Before You Die". From there, visit Koka Ninja Mansion. This mansion used to be resided in by ninja, equipped with many ingenious traps and devices, designed to prevent intruders and to provide a means of escape in times of need. We will then continue to Hikone to visit Hikone Castle. Hikone Castle is 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. Next, our group will experience a Shinkansen bullet train ride, which can reach speeds of up to 300 km/hr. We will stay at the Onsen Hotel at Hamanako Kanzaiji 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:

Hamanako Royal Hotel or similar class

Day 13 Hakone (Hakone Ropeway / Owakudani), Mt Fuji, Tokyo (Shibuya - Shibuya Crossing - Hachiko Statue)

After enjoying Japanese breakfast at the hotel, we will travel 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 experience hot springs and hot rivers, where sulfurous fumes still linger. Owakundani also has splendid views of Mount Fuji in good weather. From Hakone we will proceed to Mt. Fuji on our private coach. Along the way, enjoy the changing scenery, from thick vegetation to lowlands and rolling clouds. We will stop at Mt. Fuji 5th station (depending on weather) to admire the world famous peak. In the afternoon we will travel to Tokyo. Our last visit for this day is Shibuya. We will be able to see the famed Shibuya Crossing in action and cross the street with the crowd. We will then take photos with the Hachiko Statue at the crossing, which is a monument dedicated to a loyal dog that waited even after his master passed away.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Tobu Hotel Levent Tokyo or similar class

Day 14 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 vehicles and items which were used in the past are placed on display for museum goers. 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 the Rainbow Bridge.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Narita Excel Hotel Tokyu or similar class

Tobu Hotel Levent Tokyo or similar class (NOTE 2 & 3)

NOTE 2: 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 3: 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.

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