

Hokkaido, Tohoku & Central Japan: Kyoto Aoi Festival & Cherry Blossoms 2017 - 5/4

Exploring Japan's two main islands: Hokkaido & Honshu, as well as the Kyoto Aoi Festival

Tour Code: GTG1065452

Tour Information

Land cost: from USD \$5198

Single supplement: USD \$1120

Tour duration: 15 days 14 nights

Destination:

Hokkaido (Sapporo / Otaru / Shiraoi / Noboribetsu / Lake Toya / Hakodate), Tohoku (Seikan Tunnel / Towada / Morioka / Hiraizumi / Matsushima), Central Japan (Nikko / Tokyo / Mt Fuji / Hakone / Hikone / Koka / Kyoto / Uji / Nara / Osaka)

Tour cost includes:

- 10 nights Western style and 4 nights Japanese style accommodation
- Meet and greet upon arrival at Chitose 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
- 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
Thu. May 4, 2017	Thu. May 18, 2017	USD \$5198.00	Sapporo	Osaka	Deluxe	View Tour

2018

Start Date	End Date	Twin / Triple	Start City	End City	Style	Status
Fri. May 4, 2018	Fri. May 18, 2018	USD \$5198.00	Sapporo	Osaka	Deluxe	View Tour

Itinerary

Tour Code: GTG1065452

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 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

ANA Hotel Sapporo or similar class

Day 3 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Noboribetsu Manseikaku or similar class

Day 4 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Loisir Hotel Hakodate or similar class

Day 5 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 are lush green in spring and summer and turn brilliant shades of red, yellow and orange from late October through early November.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Towadako Lake View Hotel or similar class

Day 6 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Matsushima Taikanso or similar class

Day 7 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Dinner

Hotel:

Kinugawa Onsen Hotel or similar class

Day 8 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class

Day 9 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class

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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Atami New Akao Hotel or similar class

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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class

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.

Meals:

Breakfast

Hotel:

Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class

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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Dinner

Hotel:

Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class

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. Afterwards, 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. We will continue our tour to Uji where you can experience a traditional Japanese tea ceremony. 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Hotel Nikko Kansai Airport or similar class

Hotel Elserine Osaka or similar class (NOTE 2 & 3)

NOTE 2: 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 3: 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.

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Day 15 Tour End

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