

Grand Tour of Japan (Reverse): Summer Flowers 2017

Exploring Japan's four main islands: Kyushu, Shikoku, Honshu, & Hokkaido.

Tour Code: GTI1789255

Tour Information

Land cost: from USD \$7298

Single supplement: USD \$1600

Tour duration: 21 days 20 nights

Destination:

Nagasaki / Takachiho / Beppu / Kitsuki / Hiroshima / Shimanami Kaido / Takamatsu / Kurashiki / Himeji / Kobe / Osaka / Nara / Kyoto / Koka / Toyota / Hakone / Mt Fuji / Tokyo / Chitose / Furano / Biei / Sounkyo / Abashiri / Shiretoko / Kushiro / Shiraoi / Noboribetsu / Lake Toya / Otaru / Sapporo

Tour cost includes:

- 16 nights Western style and 4 nights Japanese style accommodation
- Meet and greet upon arrival at Fukuoka Airport
- Domestic flight from Tokyo to Sapporo
- 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
- 15 lunches and 11 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. Jun 26, 2017	Sun. Jul 16, 2017	USD \$7298.00	Fukuoka	Sapporo	Deluxe	View Tour

Itinerary

Tour Code: GT11789255

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 Nagasaki (Dejima / Glover Garden / Gunkanjima Island)

The day begins with a visit to Nagasaki. Visit Dejima, an island with a 400-year history of Dutch trade. Next, 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.

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 / Kiroosan 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, considered sacred by many. 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 Kiroosan 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. In the evening we continue to Kobe, where we will savor the world famous Wagyu beef.

Meals:

Breakfast / Dinner

Hotel:

Hotel Elserine Osaka or similar class

Day 8 Osaka (Osaka Castle), Nara (Todai-ji Temple / Nara Deer Park), Kyoto (Fushimi Inari Shrine / Kiyomizu Temple)

In the morning we will travel to Osaka by private coach. We will visit Osaka Castle, whose construction began in 1583 on the ruins of the Ishiyama Honganji Temple. The castle was the largest of its time and played a major role in the unification of Japan during the sixteenth century. From Osaka, our coach departs 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 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 9 Kyoto (Arashiyama - Tenryuji Temple Zen Garden - Sagano Bamboo Forest - Togetsukyo Bridge / Golden Pavilion / Nishijin Kimono Show / Green Tea Ceremony / Gion Geisha District)

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. Continue on to 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. At the Nishijin Textile Center, you can view displays of kimonos and even watch a kimono fashion show. Next, we will experience a traditional Japanese tea ceremony. 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 10 Koka (Miho Museum / Koka Ninja Mansion), Toyota (Toyota Kaikan Museum), Shinkansen 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 Toyota Kaikan Museum, which has displays of Toyota's new car models and technologies. 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 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 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 Levant Tokyo or similar class

Day 12 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 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Narita Excel Hotel Tokyu or similar class

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Day 13 Narita Airport, Chitose Airport

After breakfast, transfer to the airport for your flight to Sapporo. 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:

ANA Crowne Plaza Hotel Chitose or similar class

Day 14 Furano (Cheese Factory / Furano Winery / Tomita Farm - Furano Flower Fields), Biei (Blue Pond / Panorama Road / Shikisai Hill / Takushinkan)

On a private coach, we will travel to Furano. The flower fields of Furano offer a wide variety of flowers from June to September. 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, then enjoy the beautiful landscapes of Panorama Road from the window. From the Larch tree grove running alongside the hills, to the overlapping layers of hills, the majesty of this landscape unfolds before your eyes. Among the area's highlights is Shikisai Hill, a spacious flower park with various flower fields. Stop by Takushinkan, an exhibition hall with beautiful landscape photography by renowned photographer Maeda Shinzo and his eldest son Akira. The exhibition displays landscape photographs from across Japan with an emphasis on photos from the local Biei region. Tonight, we will stay at the onsen ryokan at Sounkyo 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:

Sounkyo Choyotei Hotel or similar class

Day 15 Sounkyo (Ginga & Ryusei Waterfalls), Abashiri (Abashiri Prison Museum / Okhotsuku Ryu-hyo Museum)

After breakfast, we will explore the Sounkyo Gorge area including Ginga and Ryusei Waterfalls. Enjoy 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 16 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. We will spend a night at the Tokachikawa Onsen, renowned for its excellent spa waters where you can enjoy a relaxing soak.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Tokachikawa Daiichi Hotel or similar class

Day 17 Shiraoi (Porokokotan), 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 everyday, 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

Day 18 Lake Toya (Lake Toya Boat Ride / Usuzan Ropeway / Syowa Sinzan)

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 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.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Hilton Niseko Village or similar class

Day 19 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 and spend two nights there. The tour includes a visit to the Sapporo Clock Tower and Odori Park, where you can stroll along the promenade and sniff the summer 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 20 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 / Lunch

Hotel:

ANA Hotel Sapporo or similar class

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Day 21 Tour Ends

After breakfast, our tour officially ends. Checkout time is 11 am and Chitose Airport can be reached by Airport Limousine Bus.

Meals:
Breakfast

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