

## Japan Summer Highlights: Kyoto Gion Summer Festivals & Lavenders 2017 - 7/11

*This tour features Japan Summer Highlights including the summer flowers in Hokkaido, and Gion Summer Festival in Kyoto*

Tour Code: GTI2258212

### Tour Information

**Land cost: from USD \$6998**

**Single supplement: USD \$1600**

**Tour duration: 21 days 20 nights**

**Destination:**

*Himeji / Kurashiki / Hiroshima / Shimanami Kaido / Oobokeyo Gorge / Kotohira / Takamatsu / Kobe / Osaka / Nara / Kyoto / Koka / Toyota / Hakone / Mt Fuji / Tokyo / Furano / Biei / Sounkyo / Abashiri / Shiretoko / Kushiro / Shiraoi / Noboribetsu / Lake Toya / Otaru / Sapporo*

**Tour cost includes:**

- 17 nights Western style and 3 nights Japanese style accommodation
- Meet and greet upon arrival at Osaka Kansai 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
- 13 lunches and 9 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
Tue. Jul 11, 2017	Mon. Jul 31, 2017	USD \$6998.00	Osaka	Sapporo	Deluxe	<a href="#">View Tour</a>

# 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 Elseraine 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 Elseraine 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 Elseraine 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 / Morita Sake Brewery), Hiroshima**

Today we take a 2 hour ride on a private coach 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. Next is a visit to 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. Taste sake as you stroll along the streets of Kurashiki. In the afternoon, we will continue our journey to Hiroshima.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch

### **Hotel:**

Hiroshima Grand Prince Hotel or similar class

## **Day 3 Hiroshima (A-Bomb Museum / Peace Park / Okonomiyaki Making / Miyajima Island - Itsukushima Shrine), Shimanami Kaido (Scenic Driving)**

Today we will visit the Peace Memorial Park and Atomic Bomb Museum. Next, we will try making a popular Japanese dish called Okonomiyaki. This dish is a mixture of batter, cabbage, and any of your favorite ingredients. The mixture is then cooked on a hot plate and flipped using a metal spatula. The dish can be made easily at home, so you can show off your new skills to your family. 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.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Imabari Kokusai Hotel or similar class

## **Day 4 Oboke Gorge (Oboke Gorge Boat Ride), Kotohira (Kotohira-gu Shrine), Takamatsu (Ritsurin Park), Kobe (Wagyu Beef Dinner)**

After breakfast, we continue our journey to Oboke Gorge, one of three hidden mountain regions of Japan. Oboke is the valley located upstream of the Yoshino-gawa River. "Boke" means "dangerous to walk along," and Oboke (big boke) was named for its jagged V-shaped rocks and narrow path which, no matter how carefully or slowly you walk, makes walking dangerous. Enjoy a relaxing boat ride and take in the panoramic view of the valley. Then, climb the 1,368 stone steps to the Kotohira-gu Shrine, a Shinto shrine. In Takamatsu we will 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. From there, our private coach takes us across Awaji Island through a series of spectacular bridges. 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

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## Day 5 Osaka (Free day)

A free day to further explore this amazing city. Osaka is Japan's third largest and second most important city. It has been the economic powerhouse of the Kansai region for many centuries. Osaka Aquarium (also known as Kaiyukan), Shinsaibashi (the largest shopping area in Osaka), Umeda (A large, exciting and very crowded underground mall underneath Osaka) and Universal Studios Japan, are within easy reach. Since the old days, Osaka has been called "kuidaore," literally meaning "bringing ruin upon oneself by extravagance in food," and known for its food culture. Dinner is not included tonight so this is a good chance to head out for some culinary adventures.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast

### **Hotel:**

Hotel Elserine Osaka or similar class

## **Day 6 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 three nights in Kyoto.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch

### **Hotel:**

Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class

## Day 7 Kyoto (Gion Summer Festival)

This morning, we will visit the Gion Summer Festival by train. The Gion Summer Festival, familiarly known as "Gion-san," is a festival held at Yasaka-jinja Shrine, and the highlight is the splendid pageant of some 30 floats called yamaboko proceeding along the main streets of Kyoto on the 17th. Each float, two-storied and about 6 meters tall, is topped with a long pole shaped like a spear. Adorned with exquisite craftwork such as woven fabric, dyed textiles and sculptures, these floats are so gorgeous that they are sometimes even described as "mobile art museums." During the parade, children wearing make-up and musicians playing the flute, drums and bells are seated on the second level of the floats. Some floats have dolls propped up on the second level. This festival is believed to have started 1,100 years ago when floats were made and paraded in the town to appease the deity of plague and illnesses.

**Meals:**

Breakfast

**Hotel:**

Grand Prince Hotel Kyoto or similar class

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## **Day 8 Kyoto (Arashiyama - Tenryuji Temple Zen Garden - Sagano Bamboo Forest - Togetsukyo Bridge / Golden Pavilion / Nishijin Kimono Show / Green Tea Ceremony / 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. 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 9 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 10 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 11 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:**

Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class

## Day 12 Tokyo (Free day)

A free day to further explore this amazing city of Tokyo. Tokyo is the number one destination for tourist bound for Japan. It is the number one most populated, the biggest city, and is the capital of Japan. From shopping to sightseeing, this city offers everything that tourist want to see. There are a number of places to see the entire city, you can visit the Tokyo Skytree to get a breathtaking view of the city. For shopping, you can head to the most popular areas such as Ginza, Ikebukuro's Sunshine City, Harajuku, or Shinjuku. There are also many museums available such as the Nezu Museum, Mori Art Museum or the Tokyo National Museum.

**Meals:**

Breakfast

**Hotel:**

Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo 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 "Kita Kobushi" or similar class

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