

# Hokkaido, Tohoku & Central Japan (Reverse): Takayama Festival & Cherry Blossoms 2018 - 4/11

*Exploring Japan's two main islands: Honshu & Hokkaido, as well as the Takayama Sanno Spring Festival*

Tour Code: GTO1017569

## Tour Information

**Land cost: from USD \$5398**

**Single supplement: USD \$1120**

**Tour duration: 15 days 14 nights**

**Destination:**

*Central Japan (Osaka / Nara / Uji / Kyoto / Kanazawa / Shirakawa-go / Takayama / Mt Fuji / Hakone / Tokyo / Nikko), Tohoku (Matsushima / Hiraizumi / Morioka / Towada / Aomori / Seikan Tunnel), Hokkaido (Hakodate / Lake Toya / Noboribetsu / Shiraoi / Otaru / Sapporo)*

**Tour cost includes:**

- 9 nights Western style and 5 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
- 10 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
Tue. Apr 11, 2017	Tue. Apr 25, 2017	USD \$5398.00	Osaka	Sapporo	Deluxe	<a href="#">View Tour</a>

**2018**

Start Date	End Date	Twin / Triple	Start City	End City	Style	Status
Wed. Apr 11, 2018	Wed. Apr 25, 2018	USD \$5398.00	Osaka	Sapporo	Deluxe	<a href="#">View Tour</a>

# Itinerary

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Tour Code: GTO1017569

## 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 and 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 Osaka (Osaka Castle), Nara (Todaiji Temple / Deer Park), Uji (Green Tea Ceremony), Kyoto (Kiyomizu Temple)**

In the morning we will travel to Osaka Castle by private coach. The construction of the castle began in 1583 on the ruins of the Ishiyama Honganji Temple, and it was the largest of its time. From Osaka, our coach departs to Nara, the oldest capital city of Japan. We will visit Todaiji Temple, the largest wooden building in Japan. This 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. Then, we proceed to Uji where we will experience a traditional Japanese tea ceremony. From Uji, our coach departs to Kyoto, a historical city that was spared from air raids and the atomic bomb for its cultural and historical value during World War II. 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 the 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 3 Kyoto (Heian Shrine / Heian Shrine Garden / Nishijin Kimono Show / Golden Pavilion / 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 the spectacular Heian Shrine, where we see an extensive stroll garden of the Meiji period with a grove of weeping cherry trees. Of special note are the stepping stones in the pond, which were actually the pillars of a 16th century stone bridge that once spanned the Kamo River. Here you also find the largest Torii Gate in Japan spanning the road leading to the shrine. Then proceed to the Nishijin Textile Center where you can view displays of kimonos and even watch a kimono fashion show. 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. 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 4 Shinkansen Bullet Train Ride from Kyoto to Maibara, Kanazawa (Kenrokuen Garden), Shirakawa-go, Takayama (Takayama Night Festival)**

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 the 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 coach to the World Heritage listed rural area of Shirakawa-go. In this very photogenic village, we will walk past thatched roof farm houses and cultivated fields and see unspoiled Edo period wooden buildings. Then, we will continue on to Takayama where a festival, which dates back to the 15th century, will be heating up. This city is 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. This festival is also known as the Sanno Festival because it is centered on Sanno Shrine. It is held on the 14th and 15th of April to pray for a good harvest. The highlight of the festival is in the evening when colorful dashi (floats) are led through the streets amid cheers and drums. These ornate floats are decorated with intricate wood carvings and beautiful metal works.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Okada Ryokan or similar class

## **Day 5 Takayama (Morning Market / Takayama Jinya / Old Town / Takayama Festival)**

After breakfast 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 to enjoy the festive atmosphere of the Takayama Spring Festival, watching floats as they parade through Old Town. Tonight, we will stay at the Yatsugatake Onsen Ryokan, where you can soak in the therapeutic waters of a spa bath and feast on a traditional Japanese Kaiseki banquet dinner.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Yatsugatake Royal Hotel or similar class

## **Day 6 Mt Fuji, Gotemba Peace Park, Hakone (Hakone Ropeway / Owakudani)**

After enjoying a Japanese breakfast at the ryokan, we will travel to Mt. Fuji on our private luxury 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 7 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 8 Omiya (The Omiya Bonsai Art Museum), Nikko (Lake Chuzenji / Kegon Waterfall / Toshogu Shrine)**

Today we will first visit Omiya Bonsai Art Museum where you will learn about bonsai. There over 100 bonsai masterpieces at the museum. Afterwards, we travel overland to Nikko National Park in the mountains north of Tokyo and discover this lovely region. The Japanese have a saying: "Don't say kekko (wonderful) without seeing 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. Visit 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. Next is a visit to the lavishly decorated Toshogu Shrine set in a grove of magnificent ancient Japanese cedars. Tonight, we will stay in the Onsen Ryokan at Kinugawa 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:**

Kinugawa Onsen Hotel or similar class

## **Day 9 Matsushima (Matsushima Cruise / Godaido / Zuiganji Temple)**

After a Japanese breakfast at the ryokan, 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, was built by Date Masamune and is designated as a national treasure.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Hotel Matsushima Taikanso or similar class

## **Day 10 Hiraizumi (Chusonji Temple), Morioka (Morioka Castle Ruins)**

This morning, we will head 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 recreate 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. Then, we proceed to Morioka for a visit to the Morioka Castle Ruins, considered one of the most popular hanami spots in Tohoku area.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Towadako Lake View Hotel or similar class

## **Day 11 Towada (Lake Towada / Oirase Gorge), Aomori (Nebuta Warasse), Undersea Train from Aomori to Hakodate (Mt Hakodate Ropeway)**

Today, we will visit Japan's third deepest lake - Lake Towada, a volcanic crater lake 44 km in circumference. We will have 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. Then visit the Nebuta Warasse, a well done museum about the Nebuta Matsuri in Aomori. In the afternoon, we will travel across the Tsugaru Channel between the islands of Hokkaido and Honshu by train via the undersea train tunnel, before arriving to Hakodate. It is a small city that has some of the most authentic and best preserved historic buildings in Japan. Upon arrival in Hakodate, we will take a tram and ropeway ride up to Mt Hakodate from where we can look down upon the twinkling lights that surround Hakodate Bay. The views from the mountain are spectacular and included among Japan's three best night views alongside the views from Nagasaki's Mount Inasa and Kobe's Mount Rokko.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch

### **Hotel:**

Loisir Hotel Hakodate or similar class

## **Day 12 Hakodate (Hakodate Morning Market / Fort Goryokaku), Onuma Park, Lake Toya (Usuzan Ropeway)**

Today we will continue our tour 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. First is a visit to the famous morning market, where you will see a variety of fresh seafoods, local fruits and vegetables. Then visit the 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. From Hakodate, we head to Lake Toya, along the way we stop at the Lake Onuma. In Lake Toya, we will take the Usuzan Ropeway to the observation deck and have a panoramic views of Lake Toya and neighboring Showa Shinzan. Tonight we will stay in Noboribetsu where we will have dinner in the hotel.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Noboribetsu Manseikaku or similar class

## **Day 13 Noboribetsu (Jigokudani), Shiraoi (Ainu Village), Sapporo (Clock Tower / Odori Park / Susukino)**

In the morning, we will visit the Jigokudani. 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. Today we will have 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 proceed to 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 14 Sapporo (Historic Village / Sapporo Beer Museum), Otaru (Otaru Canal / Sakaimachi Street - Kitaichi Garasukan - Otaru Music Box Museum)**

In the morning our tour of Sapporo continues with a visit to the Historic Village, you can view architecture from the Meiji and Taisho periods when Japan experienced rapid expansion. 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. Then, 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 Sakaimachi Street.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch

### **Hotel:**

ANA Crowne Plaza Hotel Chitose or similar class

# Itinerary

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Tour Code: GTO1017569

## Day 15 Tour End

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

**Meals:**  
Breakfast