

## Spirit of Japan Tour Spring (Reverse): 2017 - 5/13

*Visit centuries old religious sites*

Tour Code: GTO2218957

### Tour Information

**Land cost: from USD \$5198**

**Single supplement: USD \$1040**

**Tour duration: 14 days 13 nights**

**Destination:**

*Himeji / Kurashiki / Hiroshima / Shimanami Kaido / Takamatsu / Naruto / Koyasan / Kumano / Ise Shima / Nara / Uji / Kyoto / Koka / Hikone / Hakone / Mt Fuji / Tokyo*

**Tour cost includes:**

- 1 night temple lodging, 9 nights Western style and 3 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 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
Sat. May 13, 2017	Fri. May 26, 2017	USD \$5198.00	Osaka	Tokyo	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 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 Himeji (Himeji Castle), Kurashiki (Canal Area / Ohara Museum of Art)**

Today we take a 2-hour ride on a private coach to Himeji to visit the Himeji Castle. It is known as "White Egret Castle" and "White Heron Castle" because of its brilliant white exterior, which resembles a bird taking flight. Himeji Castle is the largest, most visited castle in Japan, and is one of the few remaining original castles in the country. This splendid example of traditional architecture was declared one of the first UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Japan. Next is a visit to Kurashiki. Back in the day 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. In the afternoon, we will continue our journey to Hiroshima for two nights.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Grand Prince Hotel Hiroshima or similar class

## **Day 3 Hiroshima (Peace Memorial Park - A-Bomb Museum / Miyajima Island - Itsukushima Shrine)**

Today our travels will continue with a visit to the Peace Memorial Park, the iconic landmark of Hiroshima's memorial for those who passed away in the infamous Hiroshima bombing on August 6th, 1945. There, we will also enter the A-Bomb Museum where documents, artifacts, and videos are displayed throughout the museum. After lunch, we will take a short ferry ride to the island of Miyajima; the cherry blossoms on the island are a spectacular sight. At high tide we can see 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, while Miyajima has been selected as one of Japan's three most scenic places (nihon sankei).

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch

### **Hotel:**

Grand Prince Hotel Hiroshima or similar class

## **Day 4 Shimanami Kaido (Scenic Driving / Kiroosan Observatory), Takamatsu (Shikoku Mura Village / Ritsurin Park)**

In the morning, 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 that are beautifully scattered all 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. We then proceed to Takamatsu with a stop at 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.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch

### **Hotel:**

JR Hotel Clement Takamatsu or similar class

## **Day 5 Naruto (Whirlpool Viewing Boat Tour / Shikoku Pilgrimage Trail - Ryozenji to Gokurakuji / Ferry from Tokushima to Wakayama, Koyasan (Temple Lodging - Shukubo / After vegetarian dinner, visit Okunoin's graveyard at night)**

We continue our journey today at Naruto. Naruto is known for its swirling whirlpools, we will take a small boat and get right up next to and among the whirlpools. Naruto is also the starting point of the Shikoku Pilgrimage, which leads around the island to visit 88 temples across Shikoku associated with the famous Buddhist monk, Kobo Daishi, the founder of Shingon Buddhism. Naruto's Ryozenji Temple is the first temple of the pilgrimage. We will be traveling by foot for approximately 1.2 km (0.75 miles) from Ryozenji Temple to Gokurakuji Temple. From Shikoku Island, we will board a ferry to Honshu Island where we will stay in a monastery in Koyasan complete with authentic Buddhist vegetarian meals. We will experience life very much as a monk would in Japan. Koyasan is the center of Shingon Buddhism, a Buddhist sect that was introduced to Japan in 805 by Kobo Daishi, one of the most significant personalities in Japan's religious history. The temple complex of over 100 temples is located on a mountain top, surrounded by cedar trees and mountain peaks. After a vegetarian dinner at the temple, you will have the option to follow your guide at night to Okunoin's gravesite. It is the largest cemetery in Japan where the founder of Shingon Buddhism is said to be in eternal meditation.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Koyasan Sekishoin or similar class

## **Day 6 Koyasan (Early Meditation with Monks / Okunoin Temple / Kongobuji Temple / Danjo Garan)**

Today activities begin with reflection as we meditate with the monks of Koyasan. Then we will go to Okunoin Temple that is surrounded by many grave markings, the majority of which are old and worn out. The gravesite is also the resting place of the founder of Shingon Buddhism in Japan, Kobo Daishi. Next is Kongobuji Temple which was originally built by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, one of Nobunaga's generals during the warring era. The temple also has the Ohiroma room, a special room designated for ceremonies and rituals with tatami mat floors and elegantly designed sliding doors. The pilgrimage finishes at Danjo Garan, a temple complex also belonging to Kobo Daishi's original foundations. Painted in brilliant vermillion color, one of the pagoda structures called the Konpon Daito stands out amongst the others.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Katsuura Onsen Hotel Nakanoshima or similar class

## **Day 7 Kumano (Kumano Kodo Pilgrimage Trail - Daimonzaka to Nachi Fall , on the way visit Seigantoji Temple & Kumano Nachi Grand Shrine)**

This morning we head out to the Kumano Kodo Pilgrimage Trail, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where pilgrims have walked the forest trails for over 1000 years. The Kumano region is the mountainous southern portion of the Kii Hanto, the largest Peninsula of Japan, where sacred trails are still used for the pilgrimage to the three grand shrines of Kumano. We will walk along a short section of Daimon-zaka Trail and visit the 133 metre high Nachi Waterfall, whose vertical torrent pouring over the cliff edge into the virgin forest, is said to be the highest in Japan. We slowly climb the pilgrim's steps to visit Seigantoji Temple, originally built in 1590, and a very picturesque 3 storied vermilion coloured pagoda that creates a perfect picture of Japanese tranquillity.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Toba Grand Hotel or similar class



## **Day 8 Ise Shima (Ise Grand Shrine / Okage Yokocho District / Mikimoto Pearl Island)**

The pilgrimage continues to Ise Shima where the Ise Grand Shrine is located. The Ise Grand Shrine has a two-thousand year history, is Japan's most important Shinto shrine, and serves as the centre of all Shinto shrines nationwide. Situated near the banks of the Isuzu River, the shrine is surrounded by Japanese cedar trees, some 800 years old. The inner shrine is considered to be the abode of Amaterasu, the sun goddess, the deity the emperor was considered to be descended from. At Okage Yokocho Street we can experience the townscape of a bygone era, where buildings leading to the inner shrine reproduce the architecture and atmosphere that surrounded Ise pilgrims during the Edo Period (1600-1868). Our next stop is at Mikimoto Pearl Island where in 1893, Kokichi Mikimoto first perfected the technique of producing cultured pearls and started a now world wide industry. Here we see 'Ama', women pearl divers, demonstrate their skills, watch how cultured pearls are produced and see a truly amazing collection of million dollar treasures made with pearls.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch

### **Hotel:**

Hotel Elserine Osaka or similar class

## **Day 9 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 10 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 11 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 12 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 13 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 5 & 6)

NOTE 5: 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 6: 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.

# Itinerary

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## **Day 14    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 7: If you would like to stay longer in Japan, please contact us to book hotel accommodations.