

# Heart and Soul of Japan: Homestay and Takayama Spring Festival 2017 - 4/12

*Capture the essence of Japanese culture*

Tour Code: GTR2123289

## Tour Information

**Land cost: from USD \$3798**

**Single supplement: USD \$800**

**Tour duration: 11 days 10 nights**

**Destination:**

*Ina / Matsumoto / Okuhida / Takayama / Shirakawago / Kanazawa / Nara / Uji / Kyoto / Koka / Hikone / Hakone / Mt Fuji / Tokyo*

**Tour cost includes:**

- 1 night homestay, 7 nights Western style and 2 nights Japanese style accommodation
- Meet and greet upon arrival at Narita 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
- 8 lunches and 5 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
Wed. Apr 12, 2017	Sat. Apr 22, 2017	USD \$3798.00	Tokyo	Tokyo	Deluxe	<a href="#">View Tour</a>

# Itinerary

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## Day 1 Tokyo Narita Airport

Welcome to Tokyo! An AJT representative will meet you at the arrival gate and direct you to the hotel.

### **Hotel:**

Tobu Hotel Levant Tokyo or similar class

NOTE 1: The meet and greet is ONLY available for flights arriving in Terminal 1 & 2 after 11:00 AM. For guests arriving in Terminal 3, airport pickup is not included, but we will provide you with directions to get to your hotel in advance.

NOTE 2: If you wish to stay extra nights before the tour starts, please contact us to book hotel accommodations.

## **Day 2 Ina (Mushroom Picking / Takato Castle Ruins Park Cherry Blossom Viewing / Homestay)**

Our first destination will be Ina city in Nagano Prefecture, which is known for its mushroom production. Here we will have the chance to try out mushroom picking. The mushrooms picked will be used for your BBQ lunch. Afterwards we will head to the Takato Castle Ruins Park and attend the cherry blossom festival. Takato Castle Ruins Park is famous for their bridge that overlooks a cloud of cherry blossoms. There we will have a special traditional performance set up specifically for the group under cherry blossom trees. After the festivities at the Takato Castle Ruins Park, the group will be introduced to their host families where they will have dinner with them and sleep in their homes.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Homestay

## **Day 3 Matsumoto (Matsumoto Castle), Okuhida (Shin-Hotaka Ropeway), Takayama (Takayama Night Festival)**

Today we will head to Matsumoto where we'll visit the photogenic Matsumoto Castle, or Black Crow Castle, dating back over 400 years. Then we will head to Okuhida to ride the Shin-Hotaka Ropeway, which has the largest elevation gains in Japan. The double deck gondola cars are the first of their kind in Japan and offer fantastic views of the region. We will stop at the upper station of the ropeway where the observation deck is located. 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. The highlight of the festival is in the evening when colorful yatai (floats) are led through the streets amid cheers and drums. These ornate floats are decorated with intricate wood carvings and beautiful metal works. At night the lanterns covering the floats will be lit and accentuate the details of the craftsmanship put into designing these yatai.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Okada Ryokan or similar class

## **Day 4 Takayama (Morning Market / Takayama Jinya / Sanmachi Suji Old Town / Takayama Festival), Shirakawago**

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. There are also special times to watch the intricate karakuri (mechanical puppets) perform. Only several of the floats are equipped with the puppets. From Takayama we cross the mountains by coach to the World Heritage listed rural area of Shirakawago. In this very photogenic village, we will walk past thatched roof farm houses called Gassho Zukuri and cultivated fields with unspoiled Edo period wooden buildings. Gassho Zukuri refers to the shape of prayer hands as the style used to make the roofs.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Hotel Nikko Kanazawa or similar class

## **Day 5 Kanazawa (Nagamachi Samurai District - Nomura-ke / Kenrokuen Garden / 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art)**

We start the journey towards Kanazawa's Samurai District. It is an area where the former living quarters of samurai and their families in Kanazawa once resided. Most of the buildings have been well-preserved and are open to be visited by the public. Upon arrival, we will visit the residence of the Nomura samurai family, the Nomura-ke where a high ranking samurai family who thrived during the feudal age in Japan. Next we will head towards Kenrokuen Garden, which is east of the Nomura-ke residence and is considered one of the top three most gardens in Japan. Our next stop involves a step into art as we go through the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art where different mediums redefine what art is for the individual. This art museum was opened in 2004 and has been known for optical illusions created in "The Pool Room".

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch

### **Hotel:**

Hotel Elserine Osaka or similar class

## **Day 6 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 7 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 8 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 9 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 Owakudani. 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. Owakudani 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 10 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 Levant Tokyo or similar class (NOTE 3 & 4)

NOTE 3: 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 4: 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 11 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 5: If you would like to stay longer in Japan, please contact us to book hotel accommodations.