

Best Beyond Discoveries (Reverse): Cherry Blossom Tour 2018 - 3/31

Visit the "must see" and hidden gems of Japan

Tour Code: GTV2106207

Tour Information

Land cost: from USD \$5598

Single supplement: USD \$1120

Tour duration: 15 days 14 nights

Destination:

Awaji Island / Takamatsu / Naoshima / Kurashiki / Hiroshima / Iwakuni / Yamaguchi / Nagato / Hagi / Iwami Ginzan / Izumo / Matsue / Tottori / Kinosaki Onsen / Asago / Himeji / Kobe / Nara / Uji / Kyoto / Koka / Hikone / Hakone / Mt Fuji / Tokyo

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 8 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. Mar 25, 2017	Sat. Apr 8, 2017	USD \$5598.00	Osaka	Tokyo	Deluxe	View Tour

2018

Start Date	End Date	Twin / Triple	Start City	End City	Style	Status
Sat. Mar 31, 2018	Sat. Apr 14, 2018	USD \$5598.00	Osaka	Tokyo	Deluxe	View Tour

Itinerary

Tour Code: GTV2106207

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 Awaji Island (Kiseki- no-Hoshi Botanical Museum / Water Temple), Takamatsu (Ritsurin Garden)

Your travels will begin with a visit to Awaji Island where we will explore the Kiseki no Hoshi Botanical Museum. The museum has various exhibits that are meant to be experienced by your 5 senses and show a lifestyle of coexistence. There are 8 unique areas utilizing various plants. Afterwards we will head to the Water Temple, which was designed by the famed Tadao Ando. With pools of water secured by concrete, a set of stairs in the middle heads towards a sacred temple down below. Then, we will travel by coach to the Japanese-style garden, Ritsurin Koen in Takamatsu. The garden has both Western-style and Japanese style sections available. After taking in the beautiful hillside and garden scenery, we will spend one night in Takamatsu.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

JR Hotel Clement Takamatsu or similar class

Day 3 Naoshima (Benesse House / Chichu Art Museum / Lee Ufan Museum)

This morning, we will take a ferry to Naoshima, a small island with a lot of modern art. The Naoshima Benesse House is known for Japanese contemporary art and the environmental context in which the art is set. The famous giant pumpkin set on a pier is an iconic landmark for Naoshima. After visiting the Benesse House, we will visit Tadao Ando's art exhibitions in the Chichu Art Museum, which often features a room with a giant black sphere and a square roof opening that creates visual effects with shapes and shadows. Next is the Lee Ufan Museum, a contemporary and modern art museum based on a collaboration of Lee Ufan with Tadao Ando, the architect. Once we visit and explore the museum, we will leave Naoshima by ferry to arrive in Uno.

Meals:

Breakfast / Dinner

Hotel:

Hotel Granvia Okayama or similar class

Day 4 Kurashiki (Canal Area / Ohara Museum), Hiroshima (Miyajima - Itsukushima Shrine)

Today will begin with a visit to Kurashiki's Canal Area, a romantic view point where one of Edo's original canal's can be enjoyed by the public. This canal was once utilized by rice storehouse merchants for transporting their goods around Kurashiki. After enjoying the Edo-like atmosphere, we will move onto the Ohara Museum. The first Western museum to open in Japan has Japanese works of art as well, however you can find works by artists like Picasso and El Greco sharing the same museum. The museum has sections for Egyptian and Chinese art aside from pieces of art done by Japanese artists who painted in Western- styles. After viewing the multicultural works of art, we will visit Hiroshima's Miyajima Island where the elegant and noble Itsukushima Shrine is located. The famous torii gates are said to float above the water when high tides cover their base.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch

Hotel:

Grand Prince Hotel Hiroshima or similar class

Day 5 Hiroshima (Peace Memorial Park - A-Bomb Museum), Iwakuni (Kintaikyo Bridge), Yamaguchi (Akiyoshido Cave)

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 due to the infamous Hiroshima bomb that dropped in August 6th, 1945. There, we will also enter the A-Bomb Museum where documents, artifacts, and videos are displayed throughout the museum. From the museum, we will head out to Iwakuni's Kintaikyo Bridge. The bridge is comprised of 5 arches that have concrete bases, which allow the public to cross over the Nishiki River. The historical worth of the bridge can go back as far as 400 years, and is one of the most famous bridges in Japan. Afterwards, we will visit the eerie but enchanting limestone caves of Yamaguchi, the Akiyoshido Cave. Tonight, we will stay at the Onsen Hotel in Yumoto 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:

Yumoto Kanko Hotel Saikyo or similar class

Day 6 Nagato (Motonosumi-Inari Shrine), Hagi (Former Castle Town - Kikuya Residence / Hagi-yaki-Kaikan), Iwami Ginzan (Silver Mine)

Today we will be heading to Nagato and from there we will head to the Motonosumi Inari Shrine. It has been listed by CNN as one of the top 31 most beautiful places in Japan. There are 123 red torii gates going down a mountain side towards the Sea of Japan with beautiful greenery surrounding them. From there we will be towards to Hagi, a former castle town that prospered during the Edo Period (1603-1869). There we will be paying a visit to one of the old residences that was once owned by a samurai family turned merchants. The Kikuya Residence has over 350 years of history with an avant garde interior design. Then we will head to the Hagi-yaki Kaikan where we will learn and see the famed Hagi-yaki pottery. Our next destination will take us to the Iwami Ginzan (silver mine) in Oda City. It was used for almost 400 years and was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2007.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Matsue Shinjiko Onsen Hotel Ichibata or similar class

Day 7 Izumo (Izumo Grand Shrine), Matsue (Matsue Castle / Horikawa Boat Tour / Former Samurai District - Buke Yashiki)

Our first stop of the day will be in Izumo for the Grand Shrine. The Izumo Grand Shrine is one of the most important Shinto shrines in Japan. It is said that the main deity enshrined at the shrine is Okuninushi who, according to the creation myths, created the land of Japan and ruled ancient Izumo. He is also the deity that represents good relationships and marriage. Afterwards we will be heading to the nearby Matsue. There we will be going to Matsue Castle, which is one of the twelve original castles in Japan. Next we will be going on the Horikawa Boat Tour around the moat of Matsue Castle. On the cruise you will experience the scenic views of the area while traversing under various bridges. After the boat tour we will end the day with visiting the former Buke Yashiki (samurai district) where some samurai mansions have been preserved.

Meals:

Breakfast / Dinner

Hotel:

Matsue Shinjiko Onsen Hotel Ichibata or similar class

Day 8 Matsue (Adachi Museum of Art), Tottori (Tottori Sand Dunes), Kinosaki Onsen

Before leaving Matsue we will be first going to Adachi Museum of Art. The museum was founded by Adachi Zenko in 1990 in order to create a world that combined both artwork and gardens together. He hoped to expand people's perceptions and interests in Japanese Art. You can only view the gardens from the Adachi Museum of Art building as you enjoy paintings and artwork dating back to the twentieth century. Next we will be heading towards Tottori where the largest sand dunes in Japan are located. While there we will be going to The Sand Museum where large sand sculptures are displayed all year round with the theme changing on an annual basis. At the Tottori Sand Dunes there are various activities available for you to try out. After we will head to Kinosaki Onsen (hot spring) located on the coast of the Sea of Japan. It is one of the top hot spring locations in the Kansai Region. You will have the chance to enjoy the onsens and stroll around the old fashioned town.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Kawaguchiya Kinosaki Riverside Hotel or similar class

Day 9 Asago (Takeda Castle Ruin), Himeji (Himeji Castle / Kokoen Garden), Kobe (Wagyu Beef)

The tour begins with travelling to Asago where the Takeda Castle Ruins are located. Situated at 353 meters above sea level, the castle is listed as one of the top 10 castles in Japan. The Takeda Castle Ruins have been referred to as “Japan’s Machu Picchu.” Next we will head south towards Himeji where another one of the twelve original castles is located. Himeji Castle is one of the best preserved feudal castles in Japan. It is known as White Heron because of its majestic white appearance. To the west of Himeji Castle’s main entrance is the Kokoen Garden. There are a total of nine gardens that are separated by walls. They feature the various gardening styles of the Edo Period even though it was created in 1992. Then we will traverse to Kobe to experience the famous mouthwatering Wagyu Beef.

Meals:

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

Hotel:

Hotel Elserine Osaka or similar class

Day 10 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 11 Kyoto (Golden Pavilion / Ryoan-ji Rock Garden / Nishijin Kimono Show / Kiyomizu Temple / Maruyama Park / Gion Geisha District)

Today we will continue our tour of Kyoto, once the capital of Japan and still considered its cultural center. We will begin with the Kinkakuji Temple (Golden Pavilion), a temple covered with 18 carat gold leaves. This three-story structure was originally built by the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu in 1397. Next is the Ryoan-ji Rock Garden, famed for its exceptional rock and sand garden (seki-taki). At the Nishijin Textile Center, you can view displays of kimonos and even watch an 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 during the spring and the fall seasons, as well as a beautiful scene of Kyoto City in the distance. From Kiyomizu Temple we will head to Maruyama Park, which is one of the most popular places for cherry blossom viewing (hanami) 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 12 Koka (Miho Museum / Koka Ninja Mansion), Hikone (Hikone Castle), 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. There is a tunnel that leads from the museum to a road lined with hundreds of cherry blossom trees. 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. 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, an attractive hanami spot during the cherry blossom season. 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 13 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 14 Tokyo (Asakusa Sensoji Temple / Ueno Park / 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. Continue to Ueno Park, famous for its more than 1,000 cherry trees. 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 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 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 15 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.