

## Signature: Classic Japan - Takayama Spring Festival & Cherry Blossom Tour 2018 - 4/10

*The finest Japan group travel experience, with a maximum group size 24 guests*

Tour Code: GTY1821976

### Tour Information

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

**Single supplement: USD \$1560**

**Tour duration: 14 days 13 nights**

**Destination:**

*Nikko / Tokyo / Hakone / Mt Fuji / Matsumoto / Takayama / Shirakawa-go / Kanazawa / Kyoto / Nara / Osaka / Hiroshima / Miyajima Island / Kurashiki / Himeji / Kobe*

**Tour cost includes:**

- 11 nights Western style and 2 night Japanese style accommodation
- Meet and greet upon arrival at Tokyo Narita Airport or Haneda Airport
- Private 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 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                    |
|-------------------|-------------------|---------------|------------|----------|-----------|---------------------------|
| Mon. Apr 10, 2017 | Sun. Apr 23, 2017 | USD \$6998.00 | Tokyo      | Osaka    | Signature | <a href="#">View Tour</a> |

**2018**

| Start Date        | End Date          | Twin / Triple | Start City | End City | Style     | Status                    |
|-------------------|-------------------|---------------|------------|----------|-----------|---------------------------|
| Tue. Apr 10, 2018 | Mon. Apr 23, 2018 | USD \$6998.00 | Tokyo      | Osaka    | Signature | <a href="#">View Tour</a> |

# Itinerary

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Tour Code: GTY1821976

## **Day 1 Tokyo Narita Airport or Haneda Airport**

Welcome to Tokyo! You will be picked up from the Airport and taken to the hotel.

### **Hotel:**

Hotel New Otani Tokyo or similar class

NOTE 1: If you wish to stay extra nights before the tour starts, please contact us to book hotel accommodations.

## **Day 2 Nikko (Irohazaka / Kegon Waterfall / Toshogu Shrine - Shinto ceremony with a Shinto priest or miko - priestess)**

The Japanese have a saying: "Don't say kekko (wonderful) without seeing Nikko." Today, travel overland to Nikko National Park in the mountains north of Tokyo and discover this lovely region. To get to the Kegon Waterfall in Nikko is by going through Irohazaka. The name Irohazaka is based on the 48 hairpin turns on a pair of winding roads. The Kegon Waterfall is one of the three most beautiful waterfalls in Japan, which eventually becomes surrounded by spring foliage. The Toshogu Shrine is the final resting place of Tokugawa Iyasu, the first Tokugawa Shogun who ushered in over 250 years of stability in Japan. At the shrine there will be a Shinto ceremony held with a Priest or Miko (priestess). During the ceremony, they will pray for good luck and prosperity for the group.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Hotel New Otani Tokyo or similar class

## **Day 3 Tokyo (Imperial Palace / Tokyo Edo Museum / Ueno Park Cherry Blossom Viewing / Asakusa Sensoji Temple / Tokyo SkyTree)**

The Imperial Palace is located on the former grounds of the Edo Castle, and it is the current residence of the Imperial family. The Edo-Tokyo Museum provides an interactive exhibit to Tokyo's past. Next is Ueno Park, partly famous because of the 1000 Cherry Blossom trees that are lined up on the central pathway. Then, onwards to Asakusa Sensoji Temple, site of the oldest Buddhist temple in Tokyo and the Kaminarimon ("Thunder Gate") is symbolic of Asakusa and all of Tokyo. The newest addition to Tokyo is the Tokyo Skytree, which is the new television broadcasting tower. Now, the Tokyo Skytree is the tallest building in the city. You'll have a great view from the highest observation decks in Japan.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch

### **Hotel:**

Hotel New Otani Tokyo or similar class

## **Day 4 Hakone (Open Air Museum / Lake Ashi Cruise / Komagatake Ropeway)**

Travel to Hakone, which is among Japan's most popular hot-spring resorts, and view the forested slopes of Hakone National Park. We will first visit the Hakone Open Air Museum. Here, they have a Picasso exhibit inside, while the outside has sculptures that are meant to combine with nature in harmony. The cruise around Lake Ashi will be taken not on just any boat, but on a pirate ship. There are three different ships called Royal II, Victory and Vasa. Each ship has something unique as with each port. Lake Ashi is famous for having Mount Fuji in the background in combination with the lake, for example. Then, board a gondola on the Komagatake Ropeway for a spectacular view of Mount Fuji. Tonight, enjoy unparalleled service and kaiseki cuisine at a top-rated ryokan (traditional inn) in Lake Kawaguchi.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Kawaguchiko Onsen Kozantei Ubuya or similar class

## **Day 5 Mt Fuji, Matsumoto (Matsumoto Castle / Wasabi Farm), Takayama (Takayama Night Festival)**

We will stop at Mt. Fuji 5th station (depending on weather) to admire the world famous peak and enjoy spectacular views over the Fuji Five Lakes. From there, we drive across Honshu to the breathtaking Japanese Alps. Rice farms dominate the valleys, while lush forests blanket the mountains. We will visit Matsumoto Castle, also known as, Crow Castle for the black color adorning the exterior walls. Close to the Matsumoto area is Azumino City where one of the largest wasabi farms is located. The wasabi fields are maintained with networks of small streams utilizing the water from the Northern Alps. The shops and restaurants feature a wide variety of wasabi flavored products including wasabi ice cream. At night we will attend the Takayama Night Festival, which features 12 antique floats that are renowned for their craftsmanship and are illuminated by lanterns.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Assiopia Takayama Resort or similar class

## **Day 6 Takayama (Morning Market / Takayama Jinya / Old Town / Takayama Festival)**

Takayama is famous for the artisans and craftsmen with traditions continuing to this day from the 9th century. After breakfast we will continue sightseeing in Takayama, including the Morning Market, Takayama Jinya and Sanmachi Suji 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 lined with 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.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast

### **Hotel:**

Assiopia Takayama Resort or similar class

## **Day 7 Shirakawa-go (Shiroyama Viewpoint - Gassho-zukuri Minkaen - Mochi Making - Wada-ke House), Kanazawa (Kenrokuen Garden). Train to Kyoto**

Shirakawa-go is home of the UNESCO designated Gassho-styled ("praying hands") farmhouses. First is the Shiroyama Viewpoint, where great views of Ogimachi Village with cherry blossoms can be seen. Next is the Gassho-zukuri Minkaen open air museum where farmhouses and other structures were relocated to the area. Here you'll experience making mochi the traditional way, which means swinging a wooden mallet. The Wada-ke House was owned by the one of the wealthiest families in Ogimachi, and is now a public museum. The Kenrokuen in Kanazawa is classified as one of the three most beautiful landscape gardens in Japan. This afternoon we board the Thunderbird train for a rail journey to Kyoto for three nights.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch

### **Hotel:**

The Okura Kyoto or similar class

## **Day 8 Kyoto (Fushimi Inari Shrine / Nijo Castle / Golden Pavilion / Visit to a Traditional Wooden Townhouse to learn about Origami, Calligraphy and the art of Ikebana)**

The day begins with a visit in the scenic and historic Fushimi district. We will visit 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 or a nostalgic photograph. Then we travel to the Nijo Castle, a former residence of Tokugawa Iyeyasu, first Shogun of the Edo Period. Afterwards is the Golden Pavilion (Kinkakuji) known for the upper two stories that are covered in gold leaf designs, which creates a beautiful reflection on the water surrounding it. Continue on to a traditional wooden townhouse to learn about origami, calligraphy, and the art of Ikebana. Let your hands bend and fold traditional paper into an crane, rabbit, or a flower with a bright designs. Then, learn swift brush movements for Japanese characters and understand why calligraphy is considered one of the best arts of Asia with every stroke. Lastly, experience the art of flower arrangements and harmonize the delicate flowers with one another in this peaceful and traditional practice.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch

### **Hotel:**

The Okura Kyoto or similar class

## **Day 9 Kyoto (Kimono Experience / Sanjusangendo Hall / Kiyomizu Temple / Kodaiji Temple - Zen Meditation, Tea Ceremony / Gion - Kyoto Cuisine with Maiko Dinner)**

Finally, everyone will experience wearing kimonos (Japanese traditional garments), and wear it for the entire day. Start the tour with a visit to the Sanjusangendo Hall, where 1001 statues of Kannon, Buddha of compassion, are housed. Next is a visit to 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. A scene often photographed for its majestic features. Then at the Kodaiji Temple, belonging to the Rinzaï sect of Zen Buddhism, experience Zen meditation in a real temple. After practicing meditation, participate in a real tea ceremony. The ceremonial preparation and presentation of matcha, ground up green tea was influenced by Zen Buddhism. Lastly, we will tour Gion, the old Geisha Quarters, along with Pontocho, whose cobblestone alleys vibrate with night life. For dinner the finest Kyoto Cuisine made with ingredients representative of the season will be served, and a Maiko (apprentice Geisha) will provide entertainment for her guests. You will have the opportunity to ask questions about her profession and learn why they must train for years before finally becoming Geisha.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

The Okura Kyoto or similar class

## **Day 10 Nara (Todaiji Temple / Deer Park), Osaka (Japanese Cooking Class / Taiko Lesson), Bullet Train to Hiroshima**

We begin the day with Nara's Todaiji temple, which is over 1000 years old and home of the Daibutsu, world's largest bronze Buddha statue. Around the temple is the Nara Deer Park where visitors can feed the free-roaming deer with biscuits sold in the vicinity. The deers are considered to be sacred messengers of the gods in Shinto religion and thus have been designated natural treasures. Afterwards, we go onto Osaka where we will learn how to cook Japanese Food and play the traditional taiko (festival drums). Then, we ride one of Japan's fastest trains, the bullet train (shinkansen), all the way to Hiroshima, the place of the first atomic bombing.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Grand Prince Hotel Hiroshima or similar class

## **Day 11 Miyajima Island (Itsukushima Shrine / Senjokaku Hall / Daisho-in Temple / Mount Misen - Ropeway)**

From your hotel, a ferry will bring you to the famed Miyajima Island, holy site of Shinto, where the Itsukushima Shrine resides. The often photographed floating torii gate is iconic of the Itsukushima Shrine because during high tide the base is covered, giving the illusion of "floating." Nearby is the Senjokaku Hall, which is the size of 1000 tatami mats. The building was commissioned by Toyotomi Hideyoshi to chant Buddha sutras, but remains incomplete due to his passing. At the base of Mount Misen is the Daisho-in Temple, one of the significant places for Shingon Buddhism. Then using the Mount Misen Ropeway, we'll reach the highest peak of Miyajima Island where several more buildings of the Daisho-in Temple reside. From here you can see the amazing foliage around the island.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast

### **Hotel:**

Grand Prince Hotel Hiroshima or similar class

## **Day 12 Hiroshima (Peace Memorial Park / A-bomb Museum), Saijo (Kamotsuru Sake Brewery - Kura Study Tour, Sake Tasting)**

Today we will visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, also known as Genbaku Dome, where on August 6, 1945, the first atomic bomb was dropped, serves as a reminder of hope to one day live in a world without nuclear weapons. The A-bomb Museum goes through the history of Hiroshima and the aftermath of the destruction caused by the atomic bomb. Next is Saijo, an area known for their sake breweries. In the Kamotsuru Sake Brewery, you'll have the opportunity to learn about the process in making sake. The temperature of the kura (cellar) is maintained by the thick walls, which allows a natural balance without the need of air conditioners. After the tour you'll have the chance to try a variety of sake in their tasting room.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Washu Highland Hotel or similar class

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## **Day 13 Kurashiki (Canal Area), Himeji (Himeji Castle), Kobe (Kobe Beef Dinner)**

Kurashiki is a city in the Okayama Prefecture, where a canal is preserved dating back to the Edo Period. The area was mainly used as a rice distribution center with many storehouses. Many of those buildings have been converted to museums, shops, and cafes. The Himeji Castle, or White Heron Castle, in Hyogo Prefecture is one of the twelve castles still in its original state. This castle painted in white is well preserved and built like a maze. From Himeji Castle dinner will be enjoyed in Kobe. The city of Kobe is famous for their beef, which is a prized delicacy. The meal will be enjoyed teppanyaki style where the chef will cook the meal in front of you.

### **Meals:**

Breakfast / Lunch / Dinner

### **Hotel:**

Hotel Okura Kobe or similar class

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## Day 14 Tour End

After breakfast, our tour officially ends. Checkout time is 11 am, free for leisure until transfer to Osaka Kansai Airport or Itami Airport for departure.

**Meals:**  
Breakfast

NOTE 2: If you would like to stay longer in Japan, please contact us to book hotel accommodations.