



Discover Japan



ESSENTIAL

9 Nights

Tokyo > Hakone > Lake Biwa > Kyoto > Tokyo



Explore hyper-modern Tokyo and historical Kyoto



Visit Hikone's well preserved castle and take a stroll in the Genkyuen Gardens.



Stay in a traditional *ryokan* inn and enjoy hot spring baths in Hakone National Park



Ride the famous *shinkansen* bullet train



Enjoy a scenic cruise to sacred Chikubushima island



Take a walking tour of Gion, Kyoto's traditional geisha district



Admire outdoor sculptures in Hakone's Open Air Museum amongst stunning mountain scenery

IJT ESSENTIAL TOURS

Flexible, fast-paced tours. Just the basics included, keeping the cost down so you can choose how much you spend

Style Facts

- 3-star accommodation
- En suite rooms in Western-style hotels, shared bathroom facilities in Japanese-style inns
- Shared shuttle bus transfer from airport to hotel on arrival and airport limousine bus transfer on departure
- Breakfast every day plus one or two evening meals
- Entrance fees not included
- Carry your own luggage
- Solo travellers: a single room is available for no extra charge at Western-style hotels, but you will need to share with a member of the same sex in the Japanese-style inns

Tour Overview

Discover Japan proves that you can cover the classic "Golden Route" of Tokyo, Kyoto and Hakone without breaking the bank or missing out on unforgettable cultural experiences. It's the perfect introduction for those looking to explore Japan and the perfect building block with which to plan an extended trip.

Tokyo and Kyoto are two of Japan's great cities: one an international byword for modernity, the other an ancient cultural repository whose history dates back more than a millennium.

Tokyo is a fast-paced metropolis, yet surprisingly friendly and welcoming to the visitor. Here you will have time to explore lively markets, stroll through former samurai gardens, delve into anime and manga culture, catch your breath in a traditional teahouse, and of course enjoy the world-class cuisine.

Kyoto conjures up the classic imagery of ancient Japan: riverside temple complexes, the elegance of the geisha, spire-high pagodas, palaces and spiritual gardens.

With some free time on your second day in Kyoto, you might choose to visit Nara, another ancient capital of Japan; or sample the irresistible street food in nearby Osaka. For a more relaxed pace, you also have the option of staying closer to home and soaking up more of Kyoto's traditional atmosphere.

Whichever experience you choose, your Insider tour leader will help make sure your trip runs like clockwork, offering ideas, tips and travel advice to ease your way.

Between your stays in Tokyo and Kyoto, you'll stop off for two nights in the Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park and one night in the vicinity of Lake Biwa, both examples of some of the superb natural beauty to be found in Japan.

In Hakone you'll spend the night in a traditional ryokan inn, sleeping in the Japanese way on futon mattresses on a tatami-covered floor. Japanese-style accommodation is an experience in itself, and this is sure to be a highlight of your trip. Don't miss the natural onsen hot spring baths, an integral part of Japanese culture and the perfect soothing end to a day of sightseeing



Two nights in this beautiful area will give you plenty of time to explore all the attractions, and if the weather is favourable you may be blessed with spectacular views of Mount Fuji.

From mountainous scenery to Japan's largest freshwater lake, you'll continue to Lake Biwa for visits to the beautifully preserved Hikone Castle and a cruise to tiny Chikubushima Island to explore its combined shrine and temple complex.

Day by day

Many of our customers choose to arrive a day or two early to get over jet-lag and get the most out of the tour. Whatever the case, we will be happy to make arrangements to suit your needs

Day 1 Tokyo

Upon arrival at one of Tokyo's airports, you will be met by your driver and travel by shared shuttle bus to your hotel in the Asakusa district of Tokyo.

Asakusa is Tokyo's most traditional area, home to the city's oldest temple, the striking Senso-ji, and a lively market where you can sample delicious street food whilst browsing a huge range of souvenirs and traditional wares.

You'll have the day free to rest at your hotel or to explore the immediate locality, before meeting your tour leader and other group members at the trip briefing this evening.

Day 2 Tokyo (B)

After a good night's sleep, you'll have a full day to explore Tokyo and discover what makes Japan so unforgettable. Your tour leader will be there to fill you in on the information of Tokyo's famous landmarks, leading you to some of his or her favourite spots. Options include the chance to visit Meiji Shrine, Tokyo's most important Shinto site; look out for crazy fashions in trendy Harajuku; stroll through the tranquil setting of Hamarikyu Gardens; and marvel at the towering neon arcades of Akihabara's "electric town".

Whether joining your leader or heading out alone, Tokyo will not fail to leave its indelible mark on you!

Day 3 Hakone (B)

Today we continue to explore Japan as we leave Tokyo by bullet train. In less than an hour, you'll arrive in forest-covered Hakone National Park; home to the iconic Mount Fuji.

During your stay here you'll have the opportunity to cross Lake Ashi on a pirate ship, eat a black egg boiled in a steaming volcanic hot spring, wander the sculptures of the excellent Hakone Open-Air Museum and enjoy spectacular scenery.

Tonight you will be staying at traditional Japanese style ryokan inn, where you'll sleep on futon mattresses on tatami-mat floors – and will have the chance to soak in the restorative waters of the outdoor onsen hot spring bath.

Day 4 Hakone (B)

The verdant Hakone region has numerous activities to offer today: sail across Lake Ashi on a pirate ship observe the volcanic activity at Owakudani; follow the footsteps of samurai on the ancient Tokaido Trail, or enjoy the crafts shops and lakeside cafes of Hakone town. A cable car ride gives the best opportunity to view Mount Fuji in her full splendour. Today we will try and fit in as many of these activities as possible to ensure you get the most out of your second full day in Hakone.

Day 5 Lake Biwa (B, D)

Our journey continues by bullet train on to Hikone (not to be confused with Hakone!) where we'll visit the castle built in the early 1600s. Unlike many castles in Japan, Hikone-jo and its inner moats, walls and guard houses have survived intact, giving a fascinating glimpse into a time when samurai ruled the land.

We'll also visit Genkyuen Garden before taking the train around the shore of Lake Biwa to our lakeside accommodation. Dinner is included at our hotel tonight.

Day 6 Lake Biwa (B,D)

In the morning before travelling on to Kyoto, we'll take a boat across the lake to the sacred island of Chikubushima. This uninhabited island is home to both a Buddhist temple, Hogon-ji, and a Shinto shrine, Tsukubusuma.

Next stop is Kyoto, where you'll discover Japan's most illustrious former imperial capital. Having served as the political centre of government from 794 until 1868, Kyoto is renowned for its historical and cultural heritage, from the countless ancient temples and shrines to the traditional crafts that are still practised there today.

Tonight there is an included dinner, where you can eat together as a group and swap your favourite tales of the trip so far.

Day 7 Kyoto (B)

On your first full day in Kyoto you'll be taken around Kyoto by your tour leader who will put together a specific itinerary to show you some of the city's hidden gems based on the group's interest, the season and the weather.

Come early evening, we will benefit from the expertise of a local Kyoto guide as we navigate the narrow, wood-paneled streets of the city's best preserved traditional district, Gion. This quarter is famous as the home of Kyoto's geisha population, and as you follow our guide you may be lucky enough to spot one of these elusive artists in full regalia. Have your camera ready, as your encounter could be fleeting!

Day 8 Kyoto (B)

Many prefer to stay in Kyoto on their second full day to further discover Japan's cultural heritage, while others opt for nearby destinations

You might like to head to Nara to meet the friendly deer and admire the world's largest wooden building at Todai-ji Temple, with its enormous Buddha statue.

Day 9 Tokyo (B)

You'll board a morning bullet train for one final journey back to the glittering metropolis of Tokyo.

For the final night of your tour you'll be staying in the bustling, high-rise district of Shinjuku; known for its glaring neon, vibrant nightlife and literally thousands of excellent restaurants.

Close to your hotel, you can enjoy sky-high views of the city in the Tokyo Metropolitan Govt. Building's free observation deck, shop till you drop in the hundreds of shops and numerous

department stores, or find considerably more peace in Shinjuku Gyoen Park, arguably the finest in central Tokyo. As your adventure draws to a close, you'll return to Tokyo for a final evening in the capital – a chance to reflect on everything you've discovered along the way.

Day 10 Tokyo (B)

On your final morning, you will take the limousine bus to the airport for your flight home. Your tour leader will be able to help with your transfer arrangements. Have a safe trip home – we are sure you'll be tempted to come back soon!

Our tours aim to be as flexible as possible, so there is no set-in-stone itinerary for each day. You will be provided on the ground with Day-by-Day sheets and the tour leader will outline what they are going to do each day in detail. If you would like to break away from the group and do something different, they will be available to offer advice, and help you plan your day.

2026 departures will be finishing in the lively Ikebukuro district.

What's included

- ✔ Your comprehensive InsideJapan Info-Pack
- ✔ The full-time services of your IJT tour leader
- ✔ All transport between destinations in Japan
- ✔ IC transport card with 3,000 yen credit for city transport
- ✔ Arrival transfer by shared shuttle bus
- ✔ Nine nights' accommodation
- ✔ Breakfast every day and two evening meals
- ✔ Baggage forwarding from Tokyo to Kyoto
- ✔ Three-day Hakone Free Pass (for all transport modes in the area)
- ✔ Evening walking tour of Kyoto's Gion geisha district
- ✔ Entrance to Hikone Castle, Museum and Genkyuen Gardens.
- ✔ Lake Biwa Cruise & Chikubushima Island entrance fee
- ✔ Shared portable Wi-Fi access throughout trip

NOT Included

- ✘ International flights
- ✘ Entrance fees (including those for temples, shrines & museums) unless otherwise specified
- ✘ Baggage handling and luggage forwarding except between Tokyo and Kyoto. Unless otherwise specified - you will be expected to carry your own luggage.

Sample Accommodation

Please note that accommodation is subject to change. Final details of the accommodation will be included in your Info-Pack, which will be sent out approximately four weeks before departure. If you'd like to know more, please speak to your travel consultant.

Richmond Asakusa, Tokyo

This is the perfect base from which to explore Tokyo - located right within one of the city's most interesting districts. The famous Kaminarimon ("Thunder Gate") and Senso-ji Temple are just a short walk away, and there are numerous restaurants right at the doorstep. You are also ideally placed to visit the Tokyo Skytree (the city's newest and tallest tower) and there are many subway lines just a couple of minutes away on foot, providing easy access to the popular districts of Shibuya, Akihabara, Shinjuku, and Ginza.

Fuji Hakone Guesthouse, Hakone

The Fuji-Hakone Guest House is a simple Japanese-style, family-run accommodation with friendly, English-speaking staff. Free Wi-Fi is available.

Established in 1984, the guesthouse is an excellent budget accommodation located in Hakone - the perfect base for your exploration of the beautiful national park area surrounding Mount Fuji. Rooms are simple but comfortable, and designed in traditional Japanese style, with shoji paper screens and futon mattresses laid out on tatami-mat floors. They do not have attached bathroom facilities or toilets.

The guesthouse's prime feature is its indoor and outdoor onsen baths, fed by natural volcanic hot spring water. Bathing facilities at the guesthouse are shared, (as is the norm in Japanese-style inns), but you can book the baths for private use.

Grand Mercure Biwako Resort & Spa, Lake Biwa

Grand Mercure Lake Biwa Resort & Spa offers a tranquil lakeside retreat in Nagahama, overlooking lake Biwa, Japan's largest freshwater lake. The resort includes a buffet restaurant featuring dishes made with local ingredients. Spa facilities consist of natural hot spring baths, including open-air rock baths, and saunas; the hot spring waters contain iron. Coin-operated laundry is available, and a shop sells drinks, snacks, and local souvenirs.

Elicient Kyoto Kyoto

Hotel Elicient Kyoto offers a comfortable stay just a two-minute walk from Kyoto Station's south side. Its clean, compact rooms provide a convenient base for exploring the city's cultural sites and shopping districts.

The restaurant provides a buffet breakfast of Japanese and Western dishes to set you up for the day, and once you get back in the evening you can soak away any aches and pains in the communal baths on the 2F.

Shinjuku Washington, Tokyo

Shinjuku Washington Hotel is conveniently located in the heart of Shinjuku, next to the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building and just a short walk from Shinjuku Station - putting Tokyo's major attractions within easy reach.

This modern high-rise hotel offers compact but well-equipped rooms with all the essentials for a comfortable stay. Facilities include a coin-operated laundry on the first floor of the main building.

Important Tour Information

Fitness

Even when not using public transport, sightseeing in Japan often involves walking between sights, climbing up steps in temples and being 'on the go' for much of the day. To enjoy any of our Small Group Tours you should be of moderate fitness, able to walk and climb stairs without difficulty and able to maintain a pace that is comfortable for the majority of the group.

Dietary Requirements

There are a number of meals included on all our tours. Please let us know in advance if you have any special dietary requirements and we will try to ensure that included meals meet these needs.

In addition, please note that dietary requirements (such as vegetarianism, gluten-free diets and even some allergies) are very uncommon in Japan so meals for those with specific requirements may be simpler and less varied.

En-Suite / Shared Facilities

We aim to secure rooms with en-suite facilities at all Western-style accommodations. On this tour, you'll stay at one Japanese-style accommodation that does not have attached bathrooms or toilets. Culturally, communal bathing is common practice in Japan. Shared facilities (when included) will always be separated by gender.

Policy on single rooms

There is no single supplement for this tour. Single travellers will have a single room free of charge at all of the western style hotels (at least seven nights). They will be asked to share with another single traveller of the same sex at the Japanese style stays (maximum two nights).

Double rooms

Please note that in Japan, twin rooms are very much the norm, and there are far fewer double rooms available. Please understand that on this tour we are not able to offer double rooms at any of the locations.

Your tour leader

Our tours are led on the ground by a fluent English speaker, now a resident of Japan and able to speak in Japanese. They are there to ensure that you get the most out of your trip and that the whole adventure goes smoothly. The tour leader travels with the group and stays at the same hotels and ryokan, so please feel free to ask for help or advice at any time.

Your tour leader is not a guide so may not know every historical detail of every shrine, temple or palace, yet they are available pretty much all day every day and will even be happy to accompany tour members out at night on occasion!

Please note that the tour leader reserves the right to deny participation in an activity if they feel that it is in the safety or best interest of you and/or any other members of the group (e.g. for any Mount Fuji climb, proper hiking gear and a reasonable level of fitness are required - both being generally assessed by the tour leader. Similarly, dangerous weather conditions may lead to cancellation of such an activity.)

Luggage

We highly recommend that to make your stay more enjoyable you pack reasonably light. Large suitcases will be an inconvenience to you as you will have to carry your bags for short distances at times and some stations do not have escalators or elevators/lifts.

For ease of transit, we will be forwarding your luggage on one occasion and please note you will be without your main bag for 2 nights in Hakone, and 1 night at Lake Biwa ..

You will need a small overnight bag (e.g. backpack) for use when we forward our main bags to the next location.

Transport on tour

Please note that all transfers are by public transport, making use of Japan's first-rate transport network

International Flights

This tour starts and finishes in Tokyo for arrivals and departures at Tokyo Narita or Tokyo Haneda Airport.

Please note that the included meet-and-greet and arrival transfer to the first hotel is ONLY available from these two airports

If you wish to upgrade your departure transfer to a shared shuttle bus service, please speak to your travel consultant.

Check-in

Upon arrival you will probably be tired after a long international flight. Please note that rooms at the Tokyo hotel are only available from 2pm.

Hotels in Japan operate strict check-in policies. If you have an early arrival you can either book an extra night for any-time check-in, or the hotel will be happy to securely store your luggage for you whilst you go for a drink or explore the local area.

