INSIDE JAPAN

by Inside Travel

SMALL GROUP TOUR

Classic Japan

CLASSIC

13 NIGHTS

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Tour overview

Imagine basking in a hot spring bath at the foot of Mount Fuji, drinking sake with an apprentice geisha in Kyoto or exploring tranquil gardens in the heart of the Tokyo metropolis. This tour collects the best of Japan's classic cultural and natural locations.

Discover some of the locations that have given Japan its reputation as a land of mysterious spirituality and exquisite aesthetics, as you ride cross-country on the world-famous bullet train and stay in some lovely traditional accommodation.

Your journey will be gastronomic too – sample local specialities from melt-in-the-mouth Hida beef in the alpine regions to super-fresh sushi in Tokyo, quick bites from street vendors in Osaka and multi-course kaiseki feasts in Takayama. In each destination you'll enjoy an expertly planned range of experiences, from learning about the history of the magnificent Osaka Castle, to wandering through the thatched farmhouses of Takayama's Hida no Sato Folk Village.

In Kyoto, we will be joined by a local expert guide for a tour of the city and enjoy an exclusive audience with a trainee geisha. In Tokyo, we will stroll through the calm and beautiful Hamarikyu Gardens, hidden in the heart of one of the capital's skyscraper districts.

Along the way you'll visit two stunning national parks: Chubu-Sangaku and Fuji-Hakone-Izu. The former is home to Japan's most magnificent mountain scenery and a thriving population of Japanese macaques, whilst the latter offers a pirate ship ride across Lake Ashi and the chance to try boiled eggs in volcanic hot springs.

Accompanying you throughout will be your tour leader, who will introduce history and culture, guide you on excursions, demystify the local etiquette and generally make sure you get the best from your Classic Japan tour.

Highlights

Get an introduction to feudal history at the magnificent Osaka Castle

Wander among traditional thatched roof houses at the Hida-Takayama Folk Village

Stroll in the peace of Tokyo's Hamarikyu Gardens

Explore Kyoto the 'city of a thousand temples'

Stay in *ryokan* inns and immerse yourself in hot spring baths

Meet a trainee geisha in Kyoto's Gion district

Visit Kamikochi, one of Japan's most beautiful regions

Classic tours

Mid-range tours that cover Japan's classic sights or interest-specific itineraries (e.g. hiking, cultural activities, specific regions)

- Three /four-star accommodation
- En suite rooms in all locations (except at some unique traditional accommodation)
- Airport meet-and-greet and transfers
- Breakfast every day plus some lunches & dinners
- Selected entrance fees include
- Solo travellers: a single room is available throughout on payment of a mandatory supplement

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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

On arrival in Tokyo, you will be met by your driver, and travel by shared shuttle bus to your hotel in the Asakusa district. Your tour leader will be waiting in the lobby to meet you and help you to settle in.

Our hotel is situated in the Asakusa area, the historic downtown and entertainment district of old Edo (as Tokyo was formerly known). This friendly area still maintains a traditional atmosphere and is home to Senso-ji, the city's oldest temple.

Tonight, we will be indulging in an included first night dinner of your tour leader's choice.

Day 2 – Tokyo

We embark on a tour of the city today. As part of the tour we'll take a relaxing stroll through Hamarikyu, a tranquil Japanese garden of shogunate and Imperial significance. We can take tea in the teahouse that serves as the centerpiece of the garden, where the Meiji Emperor used to take tea with Japanese and foreign dignitaries. From there, we'll head to the trendy Harajuku district to check out all of the latest crazy fashions, ensuring time to explore the verdant precincts of Meiji Shrine. If exploring independently is more your thing, feel free to ask your tour leader for suggestions for the day.

Day 3 – Hakone

After enjoying breakfast at our hotel we will move on to Hakone. This tour includes a Hakone Free Pass, which allows you unlimited travel on all of the many modes of transport in the Hakone region: buses, funicular railway, cable car, and even the sightseeing "pirate" boat that crosses Lake Ashi. If we're lucky, clear skies will afford us stunning views of Mount Fuji. Then we will visit the Open-Air Museum that features pieces by many world-renowned artists, such as Henry Moore and Picasso, and is set against a stunning mountain backdrop.

Our hotel has an extremely pleasant outdoor hot spring rotenburo bath, so you can relax after a hard day's sightseeing with a soak under the stars. Dinner is included at the hotel tonight.

Day 4 – Hakone

Enjoy more time to explore Hakone. You may like to take the funicular and ropeway up to Owakudani, where – weather permitting – you'll have stunning views of Mount Fuji. From there, continue down to Lake Ashi and board a pirate ship to Hakone Machi, a scenic journey across the water. Other options include visiting the historic Sekisho checkpoint, strolling along the old Tokaido cedar avenue, or stopping by a local woodcraft shop to see Hakone's famous trick boxes. If you're feeling adventurous, you may also enjoy a short hike to the charming Amazake Tea House, a 13th generation teahouse serving traditional sweet rice drinks and seasonal treats

Day 5 – Osaka

After breakfast we'll be moving on to Osaka, taking a three-hour ride on the World-famous bullet train. Osaka is the modern pulse of the Kansai region, and home to some of the best food, drink and entertainment in all of Japan. The hotel is right in the heart of the city, and so perfectly placed for sightseeing. We will head to the Osaka Castle this afternoon, to learn about the history behind this modern city.

Day 6 – Osaka

Today you'll have the option of taking an excursion of your choice. One popular destination is Nara, where you will find the massive "Big Buddha" at Todai-ji Temple, and roam the expansive parkland populated by friendly local deer. Alternatively, you could opt to visit Hiroshima to see the Peace Park and museum, including perhaps a visit to the stunning nearby Miyajima Island. A third great option is Himeji, famous for its splendid original castle.

Whichever you choose, railway transport is covered by the included Japan Rail Pass, so it will not cost you a penny! Of course, you may like to remain in Osaka to explore this exciting city further. There is fantastic shopping, one of the world's best aquariums and an enormous proliferation of video game arcades and karaoke parlours to keep you busy if you do decide to stay. Tonight, make the most of Osaka's great food and night life!

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Day 7 – Kyoto

We'll head off to Kyoto reasonably early this morning so as to allow a full day of sightseeing in this historic city. Kyoto is a great city to explore on foot and it boasts dozens of major attractions. The tour leader will be able to put together the best itinerary based on the season, weather conditions, and of course the group's interests.

This afternoon we will be heading to Gion and the geisha districts to visit a teahouse, for afternoon tea with a geisha, giving a truly unique insight into this hidden world. Later we will head out for an included meal at one of our favourite restaurants.

Day 8 – Kyoto

On day eight we will have a private coach available for today's sightseeing. We will also be joined by an expert local guide in addition to the tour leader. This will allow you to get the most out of the amazing places you will visit. These include the rustling bamboo groves of Arashiyama, Japan's famous rock garden Ryoan-ji, and the Golden Pavilion of Kinkaku-ji.

Day 9 – Takayama

Today it's on by bullet and express trains to Takayama. We'll be arriving in the afternoon with enough time to start exploring this intriguing mountain town. Our lovely Japanese-style ryokan inn is just a short walk from the historic old town area, which is great for craft shops and sake breweries! Dinner is included at our accommodation tonight.

Day 10 – Takayama

Takayama is packed with things to see and do. Our top recommendation is the Hida-Takayama folk village. This fantastic outdoor museum is made up of a collection of old traditional-style houses from all around the Hida region – a rare chance to catch a glimpse of what rural life was like for ordinary folk before industrial advancement was undertaken by the new Meiji regime in 1868.

Another unmissable spot is Takayama's riverside morning market, filled with craft goods and local produce, such as fruit and pickles. In the afternoon you might like to check out some of the museums in the area or perhaps take a stroll among the beautiful shrines and temples. Sake tasting at a brewery is also a popular option!

Tonight you may like to join your tour leader for an optional dinner at a local restaurant in town, and a visit to a bar to take in a little local night life.

Day 11 – Japan Alps

After breakfast we will travel by private bus into the heart of the Japan Alps. The area is 1,500m (approx 5,000ft) above sea level, so even in summer it can be quite cool. If you are coming in autumn, remember to bring warm clothing for nighttime, as temperatures can fall below freezing.

This afternoon we'll be taking a ride on a unique 'double-decker' cable car ascending Mt Hotaka for stunning views of the mountain scenery; we'll then continue to the small hot spring town of Hirayu Onsen for an optional hike to a beautiful waterfall before checking in and enjoying the hot spring baths. Dinner at our accommodation will be buffet style, perfect for unwinding after a day of exploring.

Day 12 – Japan Alps

A short bus ride from our accommodation this morning will take us into Kamikochi, in the heart of the Chubu-Sangaku national park. We'll be starting at the tranquil Taisho Pond and hiking approximately 6km to the Myojin Pond, home to an ethereal Shinto shrine in the mountainous forested environs. There is an opportunity to break off along the way for those who prefer a shorter hike. Traversing the mostly flat route along the river through the valley, we may even spot some of the area's resident wild monkeys! Another dinner is included tonight.

Day 13 – Tokyo

We'll be taking an early bus down to Matsumoto, from where we will transfer by express train back to Tokyo. The journey is stunning, as the road twists and turns down the Azusa River Valley through a series of seemingly never-ending tunnels and dams. Once we reach Matsumoto, we will have time to stop off for a couple of hours to visit the famous castle, before grabbing some lunch and heading back to Tokyo. We will arrive late afternoon at Shinjuku Station – seemingly a world away from the peace and tranquility of Kamikochi.

As our once-in-a-lifetime tour comes to an end, join your tour leader and travel companions for the included farewell meal, for one last night of good food and drink before heading home.

Day 14 – Sayonara

Alas time to head home, a shared shuttle bus service is included and will take you to the airport for your flight home, a shared shuttle bus service is included to get you to the airport in good time for your flight home.

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.

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Where you'll stay

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.

● TOKYO

The Gracery Asakusa

The Gracery Asakusa is a great location for sightseeing, based just a few minutes' walk from the main attractions in the area; Kaminarimon Gate, Senso-ji temple, Kappabashi Kitchenware Street as well as many restaurants. The Ginza and Asakusa subway lines are also just a short walk away, allowing for easy access to the rest of Tokyo.

The hotel has modern ensuite rooms and a convenient coin operated laundry room. The breakfast is buffet style with Western dishes.

● HAKONE

Laforet Club Hakone Gora Yunosumika

We're sure your stay at Laforet will be one of the highlights of your trip. This Japanese-style hotel is in one of the best locations in Hakone, close to Gora station which has links by cable car and mountain railway to the rest of the area.

The rooms here are very generously sized with modern comforts like low beds, but with lovely Japanese design throughout. After a day of sightseeing, there's no better way to relax than by taking a soak in the communal hot spring baths with indoor and outdoor pools.

We've included breakfast and dinner on both nights. Meals feature local seasonal ingredients and are served in the dining room with views out over the mountains of Hakone.

● OSAKA

Cross Hotel

The Cross Hotel is a smart hotel located in Dotonbori, one of the liveliest and most famous streets in all of Japan.
The hotel has recently been refurbished and boasts sleek, modern design both inside and out, giving it something of a boutique feel. Rooms are stylishly decorated and surprisingly generously sized for a city- centre hotel, and each bathroom offers a deep soaking tub, separate shower and a small "powder room" The Cross has its own restaurant and bar, but its great location also means that there are a plethora of establishments to choose from.

What's included

- Your comprehensive InsideJapan Info-Pack
- Arrival and departure transfers by shared shuttle bus
- IC transport card with 5,000 yen credit for citytransport
- Hakone Free Pass for local transport in Hakone
- Full time services of your expert InsideJapan tour leader
- 13 nights' accommodation including traditional Japanese-style stays
- Breakfast every day and eight evening meals
- Selected entrance fees & local transport at most destinations
- Entrance to Osaka Castle
- Audience with an apprentice geisha at a Kyoto teahouse
- Full day private guide in Kyoto with private bus
- Entrance to Takayama Hida Folk Village
- Entrance to the Hakone Open-Air Museum
- Shared portable Wi-Fi access throughout the trip
- Luggage forwarding from Tokyo to Osaka, Osaka to Takayama & Takayama to Tokyo

Not included

- International flights
- Any local transport (subways, taxis, buses) unless covered by the included transport passes
- Any entrances fees (including those for museums, temples & shrines) unless otherwise specified
- Baggage handling and luggage forwarding unless otherwise specified – you will be expected to carry your own luggage

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Where you'll stay

● KYOTO

Mitsui Garden Shinmachi Bettei

The Mitsui Garden Shinmachi Bettei is a small scale hotel located on a pretty backstreet a few minutes' walk from Shijo station on the Karasuma subway line. The hotel's wooden facade complete with noren curtains gives the illusion of a traditional Kyoto townhouse. Inside, paper lanterns and screens at the windows are complemented by light, natural colours and local Nishijin kimono fabrics, reflecting the site's history as a former weaving museum. The half buffet style breakfast is a highlight of a stay here, featuring a mix of Japanese and Japaneseaccented western dishes that change daily. After a busy day of sightseeing, you may also wish to take advantage of the hotel's gender segregated soothing public baths, available to staying guests at no extra cost.

● TAKAYAMA

Tanabe Ryokan

A short walk or even shorter taxi ride from Takayama Station, this is a high-quality traditional inn located in the old town area of the city.

During your stay here you'll be conveniently close to the morning markets and within easy walking distance of both temple area and town museum – a great location for sightseeing. As is usual at traditional ryokan accommodation, you will be sleeping on thick futon placed directly on the matted floors. The rooms all have attached bathroom facilities, but the inn also boasts really nice, large communal baths, which are a great way to relax after a day of sightseeing. Meals here are traditional Japanese, with coffee freely available in the lobby lounge. The owners, Mr and Mrs Tanabe, are gracious hosts and will do their very best to ensure you have a fabulous stay.

● JAPAN ALPS

Hirayukan

Located in the small onsen town of Hirayu Onsen, Hirayukan offers large en suite Japanese style rooms (with western beds) and the chance to take a dip in one (or all!) of its large indoor and outdoor hot spring baths. The hotel has a small shop in the lobby area selling drinks and snacks, and even has table tennis and karaoke facilities available for an extra fee. The hotel's restaurant, Yumeguri Yokocho serves a wide variety of local dishes for breakfast and dinner. A short hike from the accommodation leads to the scenic Hirayu Otaki waterfall.

● TOKYO

Millennium Mitsui Garden Hotel

The Millennium Mitsui Garden Hotel is a stylish, contemporary hotel in the heart of Ginza, one of Tokyo's most vibrant shopping and entertainment districts. Just a short walk from Ginza and HigashiGinza subway stations, the hotel offers excellent access to the rest of the city. Rooms are modern and well-designed, featuring large windows, comfortable beds, and sleek bathrooms.

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Important tour information

Mount Fuji Climb

Our July and August departures offer an optional Mount Fuji climb. You will need to be fit and determined and have suitable wear and equipment for this fantastic experience. Please ask us for more details. The tour leader will lead the climb; those not climbing will have a guide at their service for their full day in Hakone.

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.

On this tour you'll stay at a number of Japanese style accommodation, you will be served a traditional dinner, as well as a Japanese breakfast in the morning.

En suite / shared facilities

Culturally, communal bathing is common practice in Japan. Please note that in some traditional accommodations fully private en suite facilities may not be available. We will do our best to secure rooms on tour with private toilet and sink however some accommodations are not able to offer private bathing facilities. Shared facilities (when included) will always be separated by gender.

Policy on single rooms

Single rooms are guaranteed at all night stops on this tour through payment of a mandatory single supplement.

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 we will not be able to offer a double in every hotel on this tour.

A double grade does not guarantee double rooms throughout.

Your tour leader

Our tours are led on the ground by a fluent English speaker, now a resident of Japan and able to speak 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. 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 two occasions and you will be without your main baggage for 2 nights in Hakone and 2 nights in the Japan Alps. Guests now have an additional luggage forwarding service from Osaka to Takayama.

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 most transfers are by public transport making use of Japan's first-rate transport network. This tour uses a mixture of trains, taxis, public buses, boats, as well as private coaches for some transfers and sightseeing.

International Flights

This tour starts and finishes in Tokyo for arrivals and departures at Tokyo, Narita or Haneda. Please note that the included meet-and-greet and airport transfer to the first hotel is ONLY available from these two airports.

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.

The tour leader will be staying at the first hotel for two nights before the tour starts so they will be available for advice if you choose to book pre tour nights. We recommend booking at least one extra night to check in and relax before the tour begins.