



CLASSIC

# Hands on Japan

14 Nights

Tokyo &gt; Togari Nozawa Onsen &gt; Matsumoto &gt; Kyoto &gt; Takefu &gt; Tokyo



Watch a major sumo wrestling tournament in Tokyo's revered Kokugikan Arena

Sip traditional tea in the city's serene Hamarikyu Gardens

Visit Zenko-ji Temple, one of Japan's most important religious sites

Enjoy the wonderful castle and *ukiyo-e* woodblock print museum in Matsumoto

Try your hand at traditional Japanese crafts: papermaking, cloth dyeing and more

Prepare your own soba noodles and learn the art of *taiko* drumming with an expert

Visit a traditional *machiya* townhouse for lunch in Kyoto

Try your hand at pottery where postage of your masterpiece back home is included

## IJT CLASSIC TOURS

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

### Style Facts

- Three-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

## Tour Overview

All in a single trip: try your hand at soba noodle-making, *taiko* drumming and pottery, and experience a range of Japanese accommodation: comfortable hotels and traditional Japanese *ryokan* inns. This tour is practically overflowing with unforgettable experiences! Of course, you will get to savour the bright lights and awesome energy of Tokyo, even viewing the city from the water on a riverboat cruise.

Japan is famous for its rich traditional heritage, and this tour offers you a window into a wide variety of cultural institutions. In Tokyo you'll attend a sumo tournament for a glimpse into a strictly regimented world that is much more spiritual than most outsiders realise.

Food is one of the highlights of any trip to Japan, and this tour is no different. Besides a range of superb meals, including a unique welcome meal aboard a traditional Tokyo Riverboat and a *kaiseki* feast in Kyoto, you may enjoy something completely new with a taste of *wasabi* (Japanese horseradish) ice cream at the Daio Wasabi Farm! In Takefu, you'll learn to make your own soba with a soba noodle-making class.

The creative arts are well represented, and as you continue your adventure you'll test your skills at pottery and *roketsu* cloth dyeing in Kyoto, traditional papermaking in Takefu and *taiko* drumming in Tokyo.

Enjoy superb natural scenery as you canoe through valleys and help farmers with their crops in Togari Nozawa Onsen, and attempt to achieve enlightenment during Zazen meditation in Eihei-ji.

Matsumoto offers the chance to climb to the top of the imposing "Black Crow" samurai castle, whilst in Kyoto you'll try Japanese green tea and be entertained by a *maiko* (apprentice geisha).

Immersion is the key word for this trip, so if you are the type of traveller who likes to get involved rather than watch from the sidelines, this itinerary is for you.



## 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 (D)

On arrival in Tokyo, you will be met by your driver and travel by shared shuttle bus to your hotel. Your tour leader will be waiting in the lobby to meet you, help with settling in and give local orientation. With everyone in the group gathered, in the evening you'll head out for a delicious meal at a local restaurant.

### Day 2 Tokyo (B, D)

Today begins with a *taiko* drumming lesson: a mixture of drumming, choreographed movement and aerobic exercise that always provides an invigorating start to the day!

Next you'll relax as you take a river bus to Hamarikyu Gardens, a beautiful park in the centre of Tokyo's skyscraper district. Here you'll stop for a cup of *matcha* green tea before going on to visit the eccentric shopping district of Harajuku and finally Meiji Shrine, set in the midst of a forested park. Dinner and drinks this evening will take place on a traditional *yakatabune* riverboat, floating serenely along the Sumida River.

### Day 3 Tokyo (B, L, D)

A bright and early start with a visit to Tsukiji Fish Market – the largest of its kind in the world and one of Tokyo's most fascinating attractions. Here you'll wander stalls selling all manner of fresh seafood and see skillful fishmongers slicing up tuna before you tuck in to a delicious sushi brunch. After brunch you'll have some free time to explore the city before you meet with your group to see a sumo tournament at Tokyo's Ryogoku Kokugikan Arena. Your tour leader will be able to explain the strict rituals and religious background of this fascinating sport as you enjoy the action. Then, after the bouts conclude, it's out to a nearby restaurant for some delicious *chanko nabe* hotpot – the staple of every sumo wrestler!

***\*Please note that as of October 2018, Tsukiji's Inner Market relocated to a new site in Toyosu. The Outer Market, home to dozens of restaurants and market stalls, has remained and is still very much in use.***

### Day 4 Togari Nozawa Onsen (B, D)

Today you'll hop aboard the *shinkansen* bullet train and watch the skyscrapers melt away as it speeds into the Japanese Alps, arriving in Nagano at around midday. Nagano is famous as the location of the 1998 Winter Olympics and as the home of Zenko-ji, one of Japan's most important Buddhist temples. You will pay a visit to the temple, where visitors are invited to search for the "key to paradise" in a pitch-black tunnel underneath the main hall. If you find the key, legend has it that you will find your way to Buddhist heaven.

After your visit to Nagano, you'll catch a pleasant train to the lovely alpine village of Togari Nozawa Onsen, where you'll spend the next two nights in a traditional *ryokan* inn, with a delicious *kaiseki* dinner included on both evenings.

### Day 5 Togari Nozawa Onsen (B, L, D)

Today you'll rise early again, this time to help out on the local farm before making your own bamboo leaf sushi for lunch. Later, if the weather is good, you'll make your way up to the beautiful Lake Hokuryu for some canoeing with a local instructor. If raining, we'll stay indoors and learn the traditional way to make a pair of chopsticks. Then it's back to the traditional inn for an evening of warm hospitality and great food.

### Day 6 Matsumoto (B, D)

Leaving rural Togari Nozawa Onsen behind, today you'll head to the small, pristine alpine city of Matsumoto – famous for its original "Black Crow" samurai castle. Entrance to the castle will be included, so you'll have a chance to explore the wooden corridors, narrow staircases and hidden floor of this wonderfully preserved historical monument. The surrounding parkland of the castle grounds is a great place to stroll and people watch, and don't miss the riverside Nawate Street and the city's historic quarter.

Dinner will be included tonight at one of your tour leader's favourite Matsumoto restaurants.

### Day 7 Matsumoto (B, L)

It's back to the countryside by train today, for a tour around the Daio Wasabi Farm. Here you'll see how Japan's famous spicy green horseradish is cultivated and have a chance to try an assortment of wasabi-flavoured treats – including wasabi ice cream! Lunch will be included after a tour of the farm.

Later in the day you'll visit Matsumoto's superb ukiyo-e museum, home to the world's largest collection of traditional woodblock prints, and the nearby Court Museum, housed in the only wooden courthouse building left in Japan. Matsumoto has an array of eateries to satisfy all tastes so be sure to ask your tour leader for dinner suggestions for tonight.

### Day 8 Kyoto (B, D)

It's time to leave the Japanese Alps behind and journey to Kyoto, Japan's cultural heartland and the imperial capital of the country for over a thousand years. This illustrious history has left Kyoto with a legacy of beautiful ancient shrines, temples and gardens – as well as a wealth of traditional arts and crafts to get stuck into.

Later this afternoon, you'll enjoy an exclusive audience with one of Kyoto's *maiko*, or trainee geisha, giving you a rare and privileged window into this famously secretive world. Afterwards, your tour leader will take the group out to one of the great local restaurants for a delicious included evening meal.

### Day 9 Kyoto (B)

Your first full day in Kyoto will begin with a pottery experience at a local potter's studio in the Higashiyama district – you'll get keep your creation as it will be delivered to your home. Whilst in Higashiyama you'll explore the hall of the famous Sanjusangendo – a hall filled with one thousand life-sized statues of the temple's deity.

In the afternoon your tour leader will head off to visit a few more fascinating sites in this incredible city. 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. In the evening, your tour leader will also be happy to give you suggestions about Kyoto's great restaurants.

### Day 10 Kyoto (B, L)

With one final day left in Japan's "City of Ten Thousand Temples", you'll head to the Tondaya Machiya, a Meiji period (1868–1912) merchant house where you'll take a tour, learn the correct way to wear a kimono, participate in the tea ceremony ritual and sit down to a delicious *bento*-style lunch.

You'll also try a *roketsu* cloth-dyeing experience – a technique unique to this area.

Later in the afternoon, we will continue to explore the city, maybe taking in some of the beautiful gardens and fascinating temples of Kyoto.

### Day 11 Kyoto (B)

Today is free day in which to continue exploring Kyoto, or to take a day trip out of the city. You might choose to take the bullet train to Hiroshima,

visit the nearby ancient city of Nara to marvel at the giant Buddha, or perhaps head to the exciting city of Osaka with its fabulous street food and outgoing inhabitants.

Either way, your tour leader will be available to help you plan a great day.

***\*\*Please note the torii gate at Itsukushima Shrine (on Miyajima) will undergo renovation works from June 2019 for at least a year, to repair salt water damage. The torii gate may be partially covered with vinyl sheets during this time.***

### Day 12 Takefu (B, L, D)

After breakfast, you'll make your way by train to Takefu, a small town in Fukui Prefecture known for its arts and crafts. Today will include a lesson in making soba noodles, a specialty of the area – and you will of course get to eat the result.

This afternoon you'll visit the Takefu Knife Village, with the opportunity to sharpen a knife and take it home as a souvenir. Considering Japan's illustrious history of blade-making, this is sure to provide a great insight into the skill. Tonight's stay is in a local Japanese-style hotel known for its friendly staff and excellent seafood, which you'll have the privilege to sample for dinner.

### Day 13 Takefu (B, L, D)

On your second day in Takefu you'll try your hand at papermaking. The making of *washi*, Japanese traditional paper, is one of Takefu's signature crafts and to start the day you'll visit a local workshop for a hands-on papermaking session with a local expert. After this you'll stop by a charming local restaurant for lunch before heading on to Eihei-ji Temple. Here you will clear your mind with a guided *zazen* meditation session from one of the temple's monks. To make the most of the day you'll also have a private coach at your disposal for the whole day.

Dinner will be provided at your accommodation again this evening.

### Day 14 Tokyo (B, D)

Today you'll catch the train back to Tokyo for your final day in the nation's capital. Your hotel will be in the heart of the Shinjuku district, known for its bright neon signage, towering skyscrapers and vibrant nightlife. With such a vast array of entertainment options on your doorstep, this is the perfect place to spend your last day in Japan. This evening, your tour leader will take the group to one of the city's thousands of excellent restaurants for a final meal and a chance to reflect on the fantastic experiences of the past two weeks.

### Day 15 Tokyo (B)

Finally, your adventures must come to an end. A shared limousine bus service will take you to your departure airport in plenty of time for the 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.***

## What's included

- ✓ Your comprehensive InsideJapan Info-Pack
- ✓ Arrival transfer by shared shuttle bus & departure transfer by airport limousine bus
- ✓ Full-time services of your InsideJapan tour leader
- ✓ 14 nights' accommodation
- ✓ Breakfast every day, ten evening meals and six lunches
- ✓ Breakfast every day and one evening meal
- ✓ 14-day Japan Rail Pass
- ✓ IC transport card with 2,500 yen credit for city transport
- ✓ *Taiko* drumming lesson
- ✓ Sumida River boat ride, entrance & tea at Hamarikyū Gardens
- ✓ Yakatabune boat ride with dinner in Tokyo
- ✓ Stadium tickets to a sumo wrestling tournament
- ✓ Farming experience (if the weather allows)
- ✓ Canoeing (fine weather) OR chopstick-making (wet weather)
- ✓ Visit to Daio Wasabi Farm including lunch
- ✓ Afternoon tea with a trainee geisha in Kyoto
- ✓ Pottery experience and delivery fee
- ✓ Roketsu cloth dyeing experience
- ✓ *Tondaya machiya* visit in Kyoto with bento lunch
- ✓ Knife sharpening and papermaking experiences
- ✓ Soba noodle-making lesson
- ✓ Shared portable Wi-Fi access throughout the trip
- ✓ Luggage forwarding from Tokyo to Matsumoto & from Kyoto 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

## 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.*

### Ryogoku View, Tokyo

Conveniently located close to JR Ryogoku station this hotel is a perfect base for sightseeing. The hotel offers 24-hour reception desk, free Wi-Fi throughout and a restaurant and café. This lively neighbourhood is home to Ryogoku Sumo Hall and in the nearby streets you can find restaurants specializing in *chankonabe*, a dish popular with sumo wrestlers.

Ryogoku Sumo Hall, Edo Tokyo Museum and Sumida Hokusai museum are all just a short walk from the hotel and there are easy public transport links to many of Tokyo's main sights.

### Shikisai no Yado Kanoe Ryokan, Togarinozawa Onsen

The Kanoe Ryokan is situated on farmland and offers excellent views of the surrounding mountains. The rooms have Japanese *tatami* flooring but with Western-style beds. All rooms have a toilet and sink and bathing is communal (single sex) and there are NO private facilities.

Meals prepared here include locally grown vegetables, and the owner is able to adjust dishes to Western tastes. There is a traditional Japanese-style common room where you can relax and meet other guests after dinner.

### Hotel Kagetsu, Matsumoto

The Hotel Kagetsu has been a part of the fabric of Matsumoto for over a hundred years. It is located just a short walk from Matsumoto Castle and has a lovely Meiji-era atmosphere with folk-craft furniture and turn-of-the-century décor. There is an excellent restaurant, café and large single-sex communal bathhouse, as well as fully en suite rooms.

### Karasuma Kyoto Hotel, Kyoto

The Karasuma Kyoto Hotel has one of the most convenient locations in the city, with good transport links to all major sightseeing areas. The hotel has its own restaurant and coffee shop as well as several other options very close by. Wi-Fi is available in all the guest rooms.

### Akaboshitei Hotel, Takefu

The Akaboshitei is a traditional Japanese ryokan complete with onsen (hot spring) bathing and sauna facilities to add to a relaxing stay. The hotel is known for its friendly staff and great seafood (vegetarian options also available).

### JR Kyushu Hotel Blossom Shinjuku, Tokyo

Blossom Shinjuku is a lovely mid-range hotel in a great location just a short walk from JR Shinjuku Station. The hotel has bright and modern reasonably sized rooms.

Free Wi-Fi internet is available throughout and there is a PC corner available on the first floor. The hotel's restaurant is a branch of the 'Akasaka Umayu' chain and serves a good buffet breakfast and a range of Japanese cuisine for lunch and dinner.

## 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.

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 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 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 bag for 2 nights in Togari Nozawa Onsen and 2 nights in Takefu.

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 and 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 Airport or Tokyo Haneda Airport. 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 3pm**.

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.

