



CLASSIC

Rural Japan Explorer

13 Nights

Kyoto > Mt Mitoku > Misasa Onsen > Oki Island > Matsue > Hagi > Hiroshima > Kyoto

Spend the night in a remote temple lodging on Mount Mitoku

Bathe in hot springs at Misasa Onsen

Visit the beautiful Oki Islands for a day of exploration

View the "floating" torii gate of Itsukushima Shrine on sacred Miyajima Island

Take afternoon tea with a trainee geisha in Kyoto

Explore Meiji and Taisho era architecture in the small rural town of Joge

Visit Japan's best landscape garden at the Adachi Museum of Art in Matsue

Tour Overview

Step away from the masses, mix with rural folk and explore a region of Japan rich in history and brimming with myths and legends, all set in some of the most beautiful scenery in the country.

The highlights of Rural Japan Explorer are many and varied: temples built into cliff faces; healing hot springs; a renowned landscape garden; Japan's oldest and most important shrine; and an island believed to be home to the gods - to name but a few.

This IJT Classic tour of Japan commences and concludes in Kyoto, considered to be the cultural heart of the country, and considered by many to be one of the world's finest tourist destinations. Having served as Japan's imperial capital for over a millennium, Kyoto's plethora of ancient temples, shrines and gardens is enough to keep even the most enthusiastic visitor busy indefinitely.

In between city stays in Kyoto, Matsue and Hiroshima, we will be exploring the rugged natural elements of Honshu Island, in locations that provide a vivid and powerful counterpoint to city life.

These will include the picturesque historic town of Hagi; the hot spring town of Misasa Onsen with its healing waters; Mount Mitoku, a remote mountain in the depths of Tottori Prefecture; and the lush Oki Islands off the coast of Matsue.

Rural Japan Explorer is a varied, fascinating and original tour that promises a mixture of classic sights and little-visited gems that lie far from the beaten path – perfect for any traveller who wants to see a side of Japan that most tourists miss.



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

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 Kyoto (D)

The tour commences in the historical city of Kyoto. Upon arrival at Kansai or Osaka International Airport you will be met by our representative and take a shared shuttle bus transfer to your hotel in Kyoto. Your tour leader will be waiting to greet you in the lobby and help with checking in and orientation.

For those who choose to arrive early, there's plenty of temples, shrines and museums just waiting to be explored – and your tour leader will be able to give you some great tips on how to spend your

first day. Dinner on the first night is included at a local restaurant, providing the chance to meet your fellow adventurers and sample some of the delicious local cuisine.

Day 2 Kyoto (B)

Kyoto, the former capital of Japan from 794 to 1868, is home to 17 UNESCO World Heritage sites and over a thousand temples and shrines. Your tour leader will take the group on a tour of Kyoto using public transport and introduce you to a few of their favourite locations. You can stroll along the Philosophers' Path or perhaps gaze at Ginkakuji's resplendent Silver Pavilion to name a few highlights.

In the afternoon you will be a privileged guest, attending a traditional tea ceremony, performed by a genuine Gion maiko (trainee geisha). There will be plenty of opportunity for questions and photos after some traditional dance performances. This is a rare and fascinating opportunity to learn more this enigmatic world.

Day 3 Mount Mitoku (B, D)

Today we'll head deep into the Japanese countryside by train and private bus to Mount Mitoku. The journey will take us through Tottori Prefecture, offering great views of the stunning scenery along the way. On arrival we'll visit the historic quarter of Kurayoshi with its distinctive, white plaster storehouses from the Edo Period, before travelling on to Mitoku Temple complex, where we'll be staying the night. From the temple, we can hike up through the forest to Nageiredo, a beautiful and mysterious temple built into a cliff face. In the late afternoon we will return to a delicious included dinner of *shojin ryori*: traditional Buddhist cuisine at our accommodation.

Day 4 Misasa Onsen (B, D)

It's an early start today as you rise to observe the morning rituals and partake in some zazen meditation with the monks of the temple.

After a wonderfully healthy vegan breakfast we'll spend the day visiting traditional local residences, storehouses and businesses, trying our hand at various arts and crafts along the way. We will have the use of a private minibus for the day. Amongst other experiences, we will take a cooking class, practice traditional weaving and we can even dress up in traditional handmade samurai armour! An active day merits a little relaxation too: our homely Japanese-style inn offers a warm welcome and even warmer, soothing hot spring baths. The inn is situated in the popular spa town of Misasa, with its renowned healing waters. There are a large number of bathhouses here for you to try, and our meal tonight will be included at our accommodation.

Day 5 Oki Islands - Nishinoshima (B, D)

Today we'll enjoy a leisurely start before a fairly long but stimulating travel day. A private bus will take us to Matsue's Sakaiminato port in time to catch a relaxing ferry to the Oki Islands, collectively designated as a UNESCO Geo-Park. These rugged islands are a further step away from the crowds and will give insight into deep, rural Japan. We are sure you will enjoy the pleasant ferry ride to the islands.

The journey will take us through the stunning Daisen-Oki National Park, dominated by Mount Daisen – a volcano formerly known as Okami-take: "Mountain of the Great God".

Tonight we'll stay on Nishinoshima Island in a Japanese inn that has a great bathhouse with sea views. After another delicious included dinner this evening, you'll board a private night cruise. Look out for the incredible stars on a clear night, as well as the natural illumination caused by fluorescent plankton in the water.

Day 6 Oki Islands – Dogo (B, L, D)

On our second day in the Oki Islands we'll explore the region's rich nature and history with a local guide. We'll follow a glorious coastal path to take in natural formations such as Matengai Cliff and capture the perfect shot at the glorious Akao Lookout. Later in the day, we will have the chance to sample the area's sake and learn about the production of Japan's signature drink. Lunch and dinner will be included today.

In the afternoon we hop over to Dogo Island for an overnight stay.

Day 7 Matsue (B, L)

On the morning of day seven it's time for some more sightseeing and scenic walks on Dogo Island before an included lunch and our journey by ferry and bus to Matsue, back on Japan's mainland.

In Matsue, we will be staying in a Western-style hotel and your tour leader will no doubt be able to take you out for a lively night in town.

Day 8 Matsue (B)

Matsue is situated between Lakes Nakaumi and Shinji, on the banks of the Ohashi River, so it's not difficult to see why it is sometimes known as "The Water City". One of its most prominent attractions is its impressive castle, one of only 12 remaining original feudal castles in Japan, often known as the "Black Castle" or "Plover Castle".

Starting by taking in the views from the top of the castle keep, next we'll stroll through its attractive grounds to the former residence of one of the city's most famous sons: the writer Patrick Lafcadio Hearn. Also known by his Japanese name, Koizumi Yakumo, Hearn is best known for his collections of Japanese legends and ghost stories. After lunch we'll head a little way out of town to visit the Adachi Museum of Art. Although the art collection is impressive, this museum is most renowned for its award-winning garden – voted the best in Japan every year since 2003. We think you'll understand why! For dinner, ask your tour leader for ideas, as there are plenty of choices nearby.

Day 9 Hagi (B, L, D)

In the morning we will head along the Sea of Japan in the direction of the eighth-century Izumo Taisha (Izumo Grand Shrine), one of Japan's oldest, by private bus.

Okuninushi no Okami, the deity believed to have created Japan, is enshrined here, therefore it is a Shinto shrine of major cultural and spiritual significance to the Japanese. After exploration and contemplation within the shrine complex and a short visit to the local history museum, our journey continues to Hagi, a wonderfully preserved former castle town.

Day 10 Hagi (B, D)

This morning we'll have the chance to explore this former castle town, which was once the seat of the Mori Clan – one of the most powerful families of the feudal era. We'll take in the remarkably well-preserved samurai district on foot, visiting former samurai residences and strolling through the white-walled streets to get a taste of how life must have been for the warrior classes of the area. Our meal tonight will once again be included at our accommodation.

Day 11 Hiroshima (B, D)

In the morning we set off by bus to visit the spectacular Akiyoshido Cave, the nation's longest and largest limestone cave, packed with impressive stalagmites and stalactites. Then it's time to bid goodbye to the Sea of Japan and head inland by bullet train to Hiroshima. Despite its association with one of the darkest days in mankind's history, modern Hiroshima is a vibrant, attractive city with wide boulevards, an abundance of art museums and a bustling downtown area.

You'll head out tonight for Hiroshima's most famous dish, *okonomiyaki*: a savoury pancake cooked on a grill in front of you.

Day 12 Hiroshima (B)

Today you'll pay a visit to the haunting Peace Memorial Museum and surrounding Peace Park, which commemorate the devastating effects of the atomic bomb and Hiroshima's remarkable recovery.

Following this we'll take fifteen-minute express ferry to nearby Miyajima Island, a beautiful, sacred location famous for its shrines, temples and friendly resident deer. Here, we'll catch the cable car to the top of the island's highest peak, Mount Misen, which has been worshipped by locals since as far back as the sixth century. After taking in the spectacular views from above the Seto Inland Sea, you can opt to walk back down through Momijidani's maple forest, to the island's most recognizable sight: the "floating" torii gate of Itsukushima Shrine. Of course, there will be plenty of time to browse the incredible wood carvings in Omotesando street and try the locally farmed oysters too!

****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 13 Kyoto (B)

Before heading back to Kyoto, we will drop by Joge, a historic town rarely visited by foreign tourists. Joge is renowned for its fine examples of original Meiji & Taisho era architecture and a walk down the main street really does feel like stepping back in time. We've arranged a full day of cultural activities with local guides and you will have plenty of opportunities to meet and interact with members of the local community.

Late in the afternoon you'll be whisked back to Kyoto on a super-fast Nozomi shinkansen bullet train, leaving you time to freshen up and head out to a local restaurant for an (optional) farewell evening meal with your tour leader and group.

Day 14 Tour Ends (B)

It's time to say sayonara! A shared taxi will take you from Kyoto to Kansai Airport, in plenty of time for your onward flight.

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
- ✓ Full-time services of your InsideJapan tour leader
- ✓ 13 nights' accommodation
- ✓ All transport between destinations in Japan including airport transfers
- ✓ Meet-and-greet on arrival at Osaka Kansai Airport
- ✓ Breakfast every day, eight evening meals and three lunches
- ✓ A day of hands-on experiences in Misasa Onsen
- ✓ Full day private guide service in the Oki Islands
- ✓ Entrance to Matsue's Adachi Museum
- ✓ Private coaches for ease of transport in Mount Mitoku, Misasa Onsen and Akiyoshi-dai
- ✓ Entrance to Hiroshima Peace Park and Museum
- ✓ Local guide & cultural experiences in Joge with a private coach
- ✓ Afternoon tea with a maiko in Kyoto
- ✓ Luggage forwarding from Kyoto to Misasa Onsen, Misasa Onsen to Matsue, Matsue to Hiroshima & Hiroshima to Kyoto
- ✓ Shared portable Wi-Fi access throughout trip

NOT Included

- ✗ International flights
- ✗ Local transport (buses, subways, taxis) unless otherwise specified
- ✗ 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.

Royal Park Kyoto Sanjo, Kyoto

The Royal Park is a modern, stylish hotel in a great location in central Kyoto. Rooms are of a good size and the hotel features its own restaurant and bakery cafe as well as a useful concierge service. The hotel is just a short walk from the City Hall subway stop and there are a wide choice of restaurants in the surrounding area. Kamogawa River is also close by and an evening stroll along its banks provides a fascinating view of the city.

Sanbutsu-ji Shukubo, Mount Mitoku

A stay in this *shukubo* (traditional temple lodging) comes complete with included vegetarian shojin ryori meals. In the morning, the head monk will invite you to watch the daily temple ceremonies and to take part in meditation.

As you would expect of a temple, the facilities for your stay are simple, baths are shared (single sex) and toilets are not attached to the rooms. However, the atmosphere and experience are truly unique and not to be missed! The temple complex itself dates back to the year 849.

Ryokan Kiya, Misasa Onsen

Ryokan Kiya has been welcoming guests for over 150 years and has mastered the art of omotenashi, ensuring a warm welcome and great customer service. Rooms are simply decorated in the traditional Japanese style with lovely tatami flooring and thick comfortable futons.

Not all rooms include a bathroom, but we do our best to secure rooms with private toilet and sink. The *ryokan* has six different onsen baths to choose from, including private baths for couples or families (small extra charge payable locally). The main Misasa public baths is a five-minute walk away, Misaki Art Museum is less than a ten-minute walk and Mount Mitoku is a 15-minute drive.

Multi-course *kaiseki*-style meals are served in the evening, adding to that authentic ryokan experience. Spa treatments and a sauna are also available.

Kuniga-so, Oki Islands

Kuniga-so is located in Urago Village on Nishinoshima Island. This retro-style hotel, perched on the cliff top, boasts sweeping views across Nishinoshima and Chiburijima. All rooms are en suite, but the hotel also has excellent communal baths looking out across the bay.

Dinner is included in your stay here and will be an Oki-style feast. On the menu may be rock oysters (Nishinoshima was the first place to successfully carry out rock oyster farming) as well as other fresh seafood.

Oki Plaza Hotel, Oki Islands

Located on the south side of Oki Island, the Oki Plaza Hotel is an easy 5 minute walk from Saigo Port, making it a convenient base for your stay on the island. While the communal areas of the

hotel might look a little dated, it more than makes up for it with the sweeping views of the harbour and the sea beyond from the guestrooms and the 10F restaurant. The rooms have western style beds and a small Japanese seating area with tatami mat floors, and cotton yukata robes are provided for you to wear around the hotel. After a day of sightseeing, you can relax in the communal gender-separated baths or the Jacuzzi which provides fantastic sea views.

The proximity to the sea means an abundance of fresh seafood throughout the year, such as oysters and abalone which are plucked from the sea by the hotel's own fisherman divers, and you can also try some of the locally produced sake to round off your meal in the evening.

Hotel Route Inn, Matsue

This is a comfortable budget hotel 5 minutes by taxi or a 15 minute walk across the Ohashi River from Matsue Station. Rooms are clean and compact with a small desk and flat screen TV, and the en suite bathroom has regular amenities like soap and shampoo. WiFi is available throughout the hotel, and there are coin-operated laundry and vending machines for you to use. The breakfast buffet has a range of Japanese dishes as well as a small European-style selection. There is no restaurant onsite, but nearby there are lots of restaurants to choose from.

Hagi Honjin, Hagi

Hagi Honjin is a smart Japanese-style hotel located on a hillside overlooking the town and is known for having the best hot spring baths in the area.

Built on a 2,000-metre-deep subterranean natural spring, there is a wide range of indoor and outdoor baths situated around Japanese rock gardens.

Exclusive, private baths can be reserved at an extra cost. The hotel has its own monorail which ascends the hillside, offering great views of the city and coastline.

Hiroshima Sunroute Hotel, Hiroshima

The Hiroshima Sunroute Hotel is a high standard business hotel in one of the best locations in the city: opposite the Peace Memorial Museum and Peace Park.

The hotel's level of service is excellent, with en suite rooms throughout. Many rooms have views over the Peace Park below, and should you wish to eat at the hotel, there are two restaurants to choose from, serving Japanese and Italian cuisine respectively.

It is just five minutes by taxi from Hiroshima Station and fifteen minutes' walk from Okonomi Mura, a popular location packed with restaurants serving the local speciality: okonomiyaki savoury pancakes.

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.

However, under certain circumstances, single travellers may need to share with another traveller of the same sex (maximum one night).

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 (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 three occasions and you will be without your main baggage for 1 night at Mount Mitoku, 2 nights on the Oki Islands and 2 nights in Hagi.

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, boats, taxis, trams, as well as private coaches for some transfers and sightseeing.

International Flights

This tour starts and finishes in Kyoto for arrivals and departures at Osaka, Kansai or Itami airports. 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 Kyoto 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.

