



CLASSIC

Spring Elegance

13 Nights

Tokyo > Matsumoto > Takayama > Kanazawa > Kyoto > Hakone > Tokyo

Visit Tokyo's beautiful Rikugien Gardens

Follow in the footsteps of samurai by visiting one of Japan's best-preserved castles in Matsumoto

Explore traditional thatched farmhouses at the Hida no Sato folk village in the Japanese Alps

Admire the world-famous Kenrokuen Garden in Kanazawa

 Meet a *maiko* (trainee geisha) and attend a performance of the spring geisha dances in Kyoto

Ponder Picasso and wander amongst the sculptures at Hakone's Open-Air Art Museum

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 / 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 included
- Selected luggage forwarding included
- Solo travellers: a single room is available throughout on payment of a mandatory supplement

Tour Overview

Spring is when Japan casts off its winter blanket and really lets its hair down. Every park is packed with revelers gathered beneath the cherry blossoms, festivals are underway across the country and nearly everyone embraces the party-like atmosphere. This really is a wonderful time to travel.

No trip to Japan would be complete without seeing something of the big city, and your tour will be bookended by stays amongst the skyscrapers of Tokyo. You'll receive an introduction to Japanese cuisine at a local restaurant and experience Tokyo old and new. Teahouses, shrines, temples and gardens give respite from the bustle of this great metropolis, providing a contrast with the futuristic cityscape for which the city is famous.

In the Japanese Alps, the city of Matsumoto and the craft town of Takayama offer a trip to the iconic Black Crow castle and an excursion to Hida no Sato Village respectively. The former is one of Japan's most impressive samurai castles, whilst the latter is an open-air museum showcasing the steeply thatched, "praying hands" farmhouses typical of the region.

Kanazawa offers a glimpse of life in a small, beautifully preserved traditional city, which has embraced the arts for centuries. Three days in Kyoto, meanwhile, will induct you into Japan's other great cultural city. The highlights here include an audience with a *maiko* (apprentice geisha) and tickets to the Miyako Odori: the annual geisha dances given to celebrate the onset of spring. You will have plenty of time to visit some of the city's 17 World Heritage Sites too, of course.

Within a couple of hours of Tokyo, the Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park is a haven of natural splendour. With stunning views of Mount Fuji across Lake Ashi and a profusion of volcanic hot springs, you'll have the chance to relax and unwind in a traditional onsen bath stay in traditional Japanese accommodation and visit a world-class sculpture park in an unbeatable setting.

This is an active tour packed with opportunities for exploration, good value mid-range accommodation and a variety of meals included. With your tour leader to steer you through the most fascinating aspects of these superb destinations, this tour offers a classic sightseeing experience in comfort, at a fantastic time of year.



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 at the airport by your driver and travel by shuttle bus to your hotel in the Asakusa district where your tour leader will be waiting to meet you in the lobby. The rest of today will be free for you to explore the low-rise market stalls and beautiful red temple of Senso-ji, a few minutes' walk from the hotel, before a welcome meeting this evening. This will be followed by an included group meal at one of the area's excellent restaurants.

Day 2 Tokyo (B)

Your day begins with a walk to Senso-ji, Tokyo's oldest and most revered Buddhist temple. You'll experience traditional customs like drawing omikui fortunes, using the purification font, and learning the meanings behind omamori charms, the five-story pagoda, and the Kannon statue.

Next, meet your private driver and head to Sugamo for a guided food tour. Known for its nostalgic charm, Sugamo offers a quieter, local side of Tokyo. Visit family-run shops and sample regional treats while connecting with the community.

The day ends with a visit to Rikugien Gardens, a beautifully preserved Edo-era retreat. Stroll winding paths, enjoy views of seasonal scenery reflected in tranquil ponds, and unwind in this peaceful oasis.

Day 3 Tokyo (B)

Today you will be free to accompany your tour leader on an excursion to Kamakura or Nikko, spend some more time exploring Tokyo, or perhaps branch out on an independent day trip.

Kamakura is a lovely seaside town, famous for its giant Buddha and numerous sacred sites, craft shops, boutiques, nature walks and pleasant beaches. If weather permits, your leader will offer a short, two-hour hike to some of the famous sights, such as the giant Buddha. Alternatively, you can head to the same sights by taxi, bus or train. If Kamakura doesn't tickle your fancy, you might opt to go it alone and visit Nikko, home to a wonderfully elaborate shrine complex and resting place of Japan's most important shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu. Your tour leader will be happy to help you plan your day.

Day 4 Matsumoto (B)

Today you'll begin your journey to the city of Matsumoto, a river plain city close to the Kita Alps mountain range. Our journey heads northwesterly from Tokyo by express train, passing close to Mount Fuji and the Minami Alps. Matsumoto is famous for its impressive "Black Crow" castle, one of the few remaining original samurai castles in Japan. Make sure you take the time to explore the *donjon* (main keep) and its museum.

The city also has a very relaxed atmosphere with a beautiful riverside merchant's quarter to wander. If you are interested in the *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints of masters such as Utamaro, Hiroshige and Hokusai, a visit to the Matsumoto Ukiyo-e Museum would be well worth your while!

This evening, your tour leader will arrange an optional group meal at one of their favourite local restaurants. If you prefer to explore independently, soba noodles are a regional speciality, or for the more adventurous, basashi—raw horse—is a local delicacy. After dinner, consider taking a stroll back towards the castle area, where the illuminated grounds provide a stunning backdrop.

Day 5 Takayama (B,D)

On day five, enjoy a leisurely morning exploring Matsumoto, with plenty of time to appreciate the charming atmosphere of the town.

Afterward, continue your adventure through the Japanese Alps on a spectacular bus ride as you wind your way to Takayama, a town traditionally known for the high quality of its craftsmen. In fact, Takayama's craftsmen were responsible for building some of the greatest temples and shrines in Kyoto.

Upon arrival, drop your bags at your traditional ryokan and head into the old town. You'll have time to explore the Sanno-machi district, where you can peruse the craft shops and perhaps indulge in a sake-tasting session at one of the local breweries.

This evening you'll return to your homely traditional ryokan inn for an elaborate, multi-course kaiseki dinner, served Japanese-style. We absolutely recommend taking advantage of the ryokan's hot spring baths before bed this evening!

Day 6 Takayama (B)

A local guide will be at hand to lead you through this charming historic town today. You will be sure to take in the wonderful riverside morning market, where you'll get a look at the fresh local produce and crafts. Hida no Sato Folk Village, just out of town, is an open-air museum where you can wander amongst traditional, thatched *gassho zukuri* farmhouses – a great opportunity catch a glimpse of Japanese mountain life, pre-industrialisation.

Dinner is not included tonight, so we suggest heading out to try some succulent Hida beef, the pride of the local people. It may not be as well-known as the Kobe variety, but by all accounts it's just as tasty!

Day 7 Kanazawa (B)

Today you will leave the mountains behind in exchange for a day in Kanazawa on the Japan Sea Coast. Travelling by private coach the journey will take us through stunning scenery. Like Kyoto, the city of Kanazawa escaped bombing during World War II thanks to its wealth of historical buildings and cultural achievements – meaning that today it is one of Japan's best-preserved historical cities. Wander the geisha districts, visit Edo-period houses in the samurai quarter, – and whatever you do, don't miss Kenrokuen – one of Japan's top three landscape gardens.

In the evening, why not sample some fresh sushi from the market or head to a fish restaurant? Kanazawa is renowned for its great seafood, so don't miss out.

Day 8 Kyoto (B,D)

Midmorning, we will be heading to Kyoto on another beautiful train journey, passing Japan's largest lake (Lake Biwa) along the way. This afternoon you will have time to rest or may join your tour leader in exploring the historic Higashiyama district, before a late afternoon stroll to Gion, the city's traditional geisha quarter. Here you will enjoy a private audience with a *maiko*, a trainee geisha, where you'll have the chance to learn about the mysterious and elegant world of the geisha. Afterwards, we will be heading out to one of the city restaurants for an exquisite included group meal, Kyoto-style.

Day 9 Kyoto (B)

On day nine we will have a private minibus and a local guide at our disposal, ready to demonstrate why Kyoto is known as the "City of Ten Thousand Temples". It's not about all religious sites, however, as you may also get a chance to see the "nightingale floors" of Nijo Castle and enjoy the bamboo groves of Arashiyama.

We have tickets for the Miyako Odori geisha dances later this afternoon, so we will aim to get you back to the hotel in time to freshen up.

Day 10 Kyoto (B)

Day ten of your tour will be free for you to continue exploring Kyoto's myriad sights, or to make a day trip out of the city. Your tour leader will be heading out to one of their favourite day-trip spots – perhaps the nearby ancient city of Nara or the spectacular samurai castle at Himeji. You may even want to head (unguided) as far away as Hiroshima and the wonderful Miyajima Island, famed for its huge red Shinto gate in the sea, roaming deer and maple forests. If there is somewhere you would particularly like to visit, your tour leader will be happy to help you make independent arrangements for today.

Day 11 Hakone (B, D)

It's all aboard the bullet train for the journey to Hakone, one of Japan's most popular hot spring resorts, and part of the Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park. This afternoon we've included tickets to the Chokoku no Mori Open-Air Museum, where you'll find sculptures by Moore, Rodin, Kusama and Picasso amid beautiful scenery. Take your time to absorb the great works of art and alpine setting. After you've worked up a healthy appetite in the fresh mountain air, relax for the evening as we treat you and the group to a scrumptious dinner included at your accommodation.

Day 12 Hakone (B, D)

Your included "Hakone Free Pass" tickets allow unlimited travel on nearly all of the diverse transport in the Hakone region. With a full day to explore the sights with your tour leader you'll use the pass to travel by, amongst others, cable car, funicular railway and even a pirate ship! On today's itinerary is a visit to an old samurai checkpoint to find out about Hakone's past as a post-town on the ancient Tokaido trail, a visit to Owakudani volcano and if the weather obliges, spectacular views of Mount Fuji! There will, of course, be time to look at the area's famed marquetry crafts, on offer in Hakone town.

Dinner is included again at your accommodation.

Day 13 Tokyo (B, D)

After a delicious breakfast, a private coach will take us back down to Hakone Yumoto Station, where we'll board the train for our final destination, Tokyo. Our stay in Nihonbashi places us in the heart of a historic district that blends Edo-era charm with modern sophistication.

With the afternoon free, why not take a moment to explore nearby sights? Stroll through the elegant gardens of the Imperial Palace or immerse yourself in the bustling atmosphere of Nihonbashi, once the centre of Edo-period commerce, and now home to elegant department stores, traditional craft shops, and some of Tokyo's finest dining. For any last-minute shopping, Nihonbashi won't disappoint.

To round off the tour, we have included a final dinner with your group—a chance to reflect on an incredible two weeks and share memories of your journey through Japan.

Day 14 Tour Ends (B)

Finally it's time to say goodbye, and you'll make your way back to the airport, by arranged transfer, in time for your flight home. If you are continuing your holiday, enjoy the rest of your Japanese adventure!

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
- ✓ Airport transfers and all transport between destinations in Japan
- ✓ IC transport card with 3,000 yen credit for city transport
- ✓ Full-time services of your InsideJapan tour leader
- ✓ 13 nights' accommodation
- ✓ Breakfast daily, one lunch and six evening meals
- ✓ Tokyo foodie tour and entrance fee to Rikiguen Gardens in Tokyo
- ✓ Half-day guide & private coach in Tokyo
- ✓ Takayama bus pass
- ✓ Transfer from Takayama to Kanazawa by private coach
- ✓ Entrance to the Hida no Sato folk village and full-day guide in Takayama
- ✓ Private afternoon tea with a *maiko* (trainee geisha)
- ✓ Tickets to the Miyako Odori spring geisha dances
- ✓ Hakone Free Pass for transport in the Hakone region
- ✓ Entrance to the Hakone Open-Air Museum
- ✓ Luggage forwarding from Tokyo to Takayama, Takayama to Kyoto and from Kyoto to Tokyo
- ✓ Full day guide in Kyoto
- ✓ Shared portable Wi-Fi access throughout trip

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.

The Gracery Asakusa, Tokyo

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.

Matsumoto Marunouchi Hotel, Matsumoto This modern hotel is, in part, a conversion of a classic Meiji-era bank building giving the whole place a sense of history and meaning the location is something only a bank could afford! The hotel offers comfortable rooms, modern in style and with bathrooms more spacious than at many mid-range hotels. Matsumoto Marunouchi Hotel also has its own restaurants and English speaking staff are available

Tanabe Ryokan, Takayama

Just a short walk or even shorter taxi ride from Takayama Station, Tanabe Ryokan is a high-quality traditional inn on the fringe of Takayama's old quarter.

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

Mitsui Garden Kanazawa, Kanazawa

The Mitsui Garden Hotel Kanazawa is a stylish mid-range hotel located right in the centre of Kanazawa, with the main train station, the famous Kenrokuen Garden, and the shopping and dining district of Korinbo all within easy walking distance of the hotel. Rooms combine clean, modern style with traditional Japanese touches, with décor showcasing dyed kimono fabrics in the local Kaga Yuzen style. Head to the top floor for panoramic views of Kanazawa Castle Park from the communal hot spring baths, the ideal way relax at the start or end your day of sightseeing.

Intergate Kyoto Shijo Shinmachi Kyoto

From the outside, Hotel Intergate Kyoto Shijo Shinmachi evokes the charm of a traditional townhouse, while inside, it offers a sleek, modern stay infused with elegant Japanese touches. Thoughtfully designed, its compact yet comfortable rooms feature soft lighting and natural materials, creating a tranquil retreat. The hotel's communal lounge is a particular highlight, offering complimentary refreshments throughout the day. A great base for exploring Kyoto, the hotel is within easy reach of the downtown Karasuma area, Nishiki Market, and the historic Gion district.

Laforet Club Hakone Gora Yunosumika, Hakone

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.

Mitsui Garden Hotel Nihonbashi Premier, Tokyo

Situated in Tokyo's historic Nihonbashi district, the Mitsui Garden Hotel Nihonbashi Premier blends contemporary design with subtle nods to the area's mercantile past. The stylish rooms are modern and well-equipped, offering a comfortable base from which to explore the city. The hotel's location is excellent, with easy access to Tokyo Station, the upmarket shops of Ginza, and the cultural sights of Asakusa. After a busy day, guests can unwind in the hotel's elegant communal baths, which offer a moment of calm amid the energy of the capital.

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 Japanese style accommodation, you will be served a traditional dinner, as well as a Japanese breakfast in the morning.

En suite / shared facilities

We aim to secure rooms at all accommodation with attached en-suite facilities. Culturally, communal bathing is common practice in Japan. 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 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 three occasions and you will be without your main bag for 1 night in Matsumoto, 1 night in Kanazawa and 2 nights in Hakone.

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, shared shuttle 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. Check-in will be at three or four in the afternoon for most accommodations. 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.

We recommend booking at least one extra night to check in and relax before the tour begins.

