



ESSENTIAL

# Walking the Nakasendo & Beyond

11 Nights

Tokyo > Iiyama > Togarinozawa Onsen > Matsumoto > Kiso Fukushima  
> Tsumago > Magome > Kyoto



Spend six days hiking in rural Japan

Get off the beaten track on the Shin-Etsu trail

Follow the old Nakasendo samurai route

Visit Matsumoto's spectacular Black Crow castle

Explore temples, shrines and gardens in Kyoto

Pray for good walking weather at Senso-ji Temple

## 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

- Two - three-star accommodation
- En suite rooms in Western-style hotels, shared single-sex bathroom facilities in Japanese-style inns and mountain huts
- No airport transfers (but a city transport pass and detailed airport transfer instructions are provided)
- Breakfast every day plus one or two evening meals
- Entrance fees not included
- Carry your own luggage

## Tour Overview

Nothing beats exploring a new culture on foot. Slowing down to walking pace allows you to absorb the sights and sounds in technicolour detail, helping you get under the skin of a new place.

That's the beauty of our new Small Group Tour. It'll take you off the beaten track into rural Japan where signposts are only in Japanese, the scenery is unspoiled and the welcome is warm.

After a couple of days in Tokyo, we start with the Shin-Etsu trail where the route is maintained by volunteers and walked by just a handful of people a year. It's a challenging hike through beech forest, following an 80km ridge that marks the border between Niigata and Nagano Prefectures. Over three days, we'll hike the most scenic sections, with views of mountains to the north, farms and rice paddies to the south.

The Nakasendo Way sees greater numbers of visitors on its old paved roads, for this was once a major highway for samurai travelling from Kyoto to Edo, now modern-day Tokyo. The trail is dotted with post towns where weary travellers used to stay in guesthouses, rest their horses and get a good meal. We'll spend three days walking on the Nakasendo between some of the most well-preserved, picturesque post towns including, Tsumago and Magome.

In between, we'll pause in Matsumoto, home of the Black Crow castle, soba noodles and a museum dedicated to woodblock prints. And our journey will end in Kyoto, where we'll follow the Philosopher's Path (on foot of course) from the Silver Temple to the gardens and shrines of the Higashiyama district. We'll also make a day trip to Nara to walk the Yamanobe-no-Michi trail.



## 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

Our group tour kicks off in Tokyo, where else? Our hotel is in the Asakusa district where there's lots to explore right on our doorstep, from Senso-ji Temple, Kaminarimon Gate and the Sumida River to endless ramen joints, *izakaya* gastropubs and street food stalls, not to mention shops selling everything from vintage kimono to kitschy key rings and Hello Kitty souvenirs.

## Day 2 Tokyo (B)

Our tour leader will take us on a morning walking tour around some of the city's old town districts including Yanaka, a largely residential district with family-run shops, an interesting cemetery and a temple. The afternoon is free for you to explore further at your leisure, but don't worry, the tour leader will have lots of recommendations to help you make the most out of your time. Of course, you might like to just rest your legs and sleep off any jetlag in preparation for the hiking to come!

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

*Hike section 2 of the Shin-Etsu trail  
(10.7km, 5 hours, elevation 459m)*

This morning we'll take the world-famous shinkansen bullet train from Tokyo to Iiyama, entry point for the Shin-Etsu Trail. On arrival in Iiyama we'll have an orientation meeting with the NPO who maintain the trail and meet our local hiking guide who'll be accompanying us for the next three days.

After a short bus ride to our accommodation to drop off our luggage, we'll start our first hike. Section 2 of the Shin-Etsu trail is the least demanding walk in the region, a nice warm up for our legs. First, we'll walk through beech forest until we reach Numanohara Marshland which is covered in white and yellow skunk cabbage flowers – much prettier than they sound!

Mount Kenashi at 1,022m is the highest point of today's hike, and offers views of the whole area. We should be able to see Mount Amamizu in the distance which marks the very end of the Shin-Etsu Trail. On the last part of today's hike, we'll walk through larch tree forests and along farm roads until we reach Wakui Village.

## Day 4 Togarinozawa Onsen (B, L, D)

*Hike section 4 of the Shin-Etsu trail  
(8.2km, 6 hours, elevation 458m)*

Our hike has a steep start for the first hour today, from Togari Onsen ski resort up a grassy slope to the ridgeline. After Kozawa Pass with its 100-year-old beech trees, we'll follow a narrow ridge trail up to Mount Nabekura (so-called because it's supposedly shaped like a nabe hotpot dish). All the while we'll have views of Niigata Prefecture to the north on our left side, and the mountains of Nagano Prefecture on our right.

The descending trail from Mount Nabekura down to Sekida Pass is home to some funky-shaped beech trees with branches twisted by the exceptionally heavy snowfall that Iiyama experiences. During some winters they get 4m (13 feet) of snow!

Although Section 4 is the shortest part of the Shin-Etsu trail in distance, due to the undulating nature of the trail it will take us roughly 6 hours to complete, not including a few breaks along the way.

## Day 5 Togarinozawa Onsen (B, L, D)

*Hike section 5 of the Shin-Etsu trail  
(12.4km, 6 hours, elevation 170m)*

We'll cover ground more quickly today as we continue the ridge walk through rolling terrain and one of the wildest sections of the trail. Along the way our local guide will tell us about the history

of the area, as well as the flora and fauna of the region.

Towards the end of this section we'll pass Maboroshi-no-ike, Lake of the Phantom, which is home to green tree frogs and Japanese salamanders in late June/early July. And then At Busuno Pass right at the end of today's hike, weather permitting, we'll turn around to see how far we've come. With a bit of luck will be able to see the two peaks of Mount Myoko and Mount Hiuchi in the distance.

At the start and end of each hike on the Shin-Etsu trail we'll have shuttle buses to and from our accommodation.

## Day 6 Matsumoto (B, D)

We'll say goodbye to the Shin-Etsu trail today and take two trains to reach Matsumoto City, a journey of around two hours 30 minutes.

Matsumoto is an alpine city surrounded on all sides by the towering peaks of the Japan Alps. It's famous for its original castle built between 1592 and 1615. Surrounded by a moat with a traditional red bridge, the castle is unusual for its black colour. We'll explore the castle including climbing the steep stairways inside up to the top of the tower.

Matsumoto also boasts a number of sake breweries, hidden in the backstreets amongst the traditional buildings, a good museum of woodblock prints, and is the home of soba noodles, the local specialty which is particularly delicious.

Tonight, we'll take a break from Japanese food and kick back with pizza, beer and a spot of karaoke. When in Japan...!

## Day 7 Kiso Fukushima (B, D)

*Hike the Nakasendo Way from Kiso Hirasawa to Yabuhara (9km, 3.5 hours, elevation 253m)*

An hour on the train will take us to the Nakasendo Way. This was once an important route linking Kyoto with Edo, now Tokyo. There were 69 staging posts along the route and we'll visit several of them over the next three days as we walk the most scenic sections of this historic trail.

First up, we'll tackle the Torii Pass from Kiso Hirasawa to Yabuhara. This is one of the highest sections of the Nakasendo Way and will have us climbing from 900 to 1,200m with some steep switchbacks. Along the way we'll hike through larch forests, past little mountain shrines and an old teahouse rest stop. There are some great views to be seen along the way, as well as a potential lacquerware shop visit.

After reaching Yabuhara we'll take a train for 15 minutes to reach tonight's accommodation in the postal town of Kiso Fukushima.

## Day 8 Tsumago (B, D)

*Hike the Nakasendo Way from Nenoue Toge to Tsumago (14km, 4.5 hours, elevation 344m)*

Our next section of the Nakasendo Way is the longest distance of our trip, 14km, but very flat compared to everything we will have done by this point! First a 30-minute train ride will take us to Nojiri.

From Nojiri we take a 30-minute taxi journey to Nenoue Toge, where we will start the walk today. The hike to Tsumago takes us past cedar trees and forests of bamboo, tea plantations, rice paddies and pretty, wooden houses. Tsumago is the jewel in the Nakasendo crown, thanks to the residents' efforts to preserve its Edo Period ambiance. Power lines are hidden away, and cars banned from the main roads during the daytime so that the beautiful, traditional buildings and flag-stone streets can be seen in their true glory.

*Please note there is a get out clause today if you don't fancy doing quite such a long walk. It's possible to stay on the train longer this morning, getting off at Nagiso. From there it's just a 5km walk to Tsumago.*

## Day 9 Magome (B, L)

*Hike the Nakasendo Way from Tsumago to Nakatsugawa (12km, 5 hours, elevation 355m)*

On the final day of our Nakasendo walk, we'll continue on from our accommodation just outside Tsumago along the most well-trodden section of the trail to Magome. The route passes quaint farmhouses and gardens.

We'll have lunch in Magome, another beautifully preserved post town, before walking on to Nakatsugawa Station, and taking the train on to Kyoto.

## Day 10 Kyoto (B)

And finally, we reach Kyoto, the cultural epicentre of Japan that was once the capital for a thousand years. Here you'll find Japan's most glorious temples, ancient shrines and picture-perfect gardens. Our tour leader will take us on a city tour with a walk down the Philosopher's Path from Ginkakuji Silver Temple to the beautifully preserved Higashiyama district.

## Day 11 Kyoto (B)

If city sightseeing isn't your thing, fear not, Kyoto is surrounded by mountains on three sides which offer plenty of hiking options if you've still got energy in your legs. We can also recommend a day trip to nearby Nara to walk the Yamanobe-no-Michi trail if you prefer.

After the tour finishes, perhaps you'd like to extend your time in Japan? We'd be delighted to arrange extra post-tour nights in Kyoto, or further arrangements elsewhere.

*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
- ✓ The full-time services of your IJT tour leader
- ✓ Breakfast every day, four lunches and six evening meals
- ✓ Seven-day Japan Rail Pass
- ✓ 11 nights' accommodation
- ✓ IC transport card with 4,500 yen credit for city transport
- ✓ Private guide for the Shin-Etsu trail walk
- ✓ Donation to Shin-Etsu trail preservation fund
- ✓ Luggage forwarding on the Shin-Etsu trail, Matsumoto to Tsumago & from Tsumago to Kyoto
- ✓ Day trip to the Yamanobe-no-Michi walk from Kyoto
- ✓ Entrance to Matsumoto Castle
- ✓ Shared portable Wi-Fi access throughout trip

### NOT Included

- ✗ International flights
- ✗ Arrival and departure airport transfers
- ✗ Any local transport unless covered by the included transport passes
- ✗ Entrance fees (including those for temples, shrines & museums) 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.

### Madarao Kogen Hotel, Iiyama

The Swiss chalet-inspired Madarao Kogen Hotel is located at the base of Mount Madarao. In winter it becomes a hotspot for powder ski enthusiasts, while in the summer it offers a cool respite from the heat. The rooms are a generous size and offer views of the mountains. One of the best features of the hotel is the communal hot spring baths - perfect for soaking in after a day on the ski slopes or hiking the Shin-Etsu Trail. For dinner you can look forward to either a Japanese or Western course meal, and breakfast features standard Western-style dishes served in the main dining room.

### Shikisai no Yada 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 beds.

All rooms have a toilet and sink and there are onsen baths for bathing. Meals prepared here include locally grown vegetables and the owner is well aware of western tastes and can adjust the meals accordingly. Paper making, sushi making and kayaking are available nearby and there are also opportunities to help out on the farm. There is a traditional Japanese style common room where you can relax and meet other guests after dinner.

### Alpico Plaza, Matsumoto

The Alpico Plaza is handily located right in front of JR Matsumoto Station.

Rooms at this mid-range hotel are compact and rather beige in décor, but they're certainly clean and comfortable. Breakfast is buffet style.

Matsumoto is easy to explore on foot. The town's main cluster of restaurants is just a few minutes' walk away, while the castle is 15 minutes. Alternatively, the hotel has bikes you can borrow for free.

### Komanoyu, Kiso Fukushima

The Komanoyu Ryokan is hidden away in the hills above the Kiso Valley, surrounded by beautiful gardens, ponds and waterfalls. Rooms are Japanese-style with tatami mat flooring and futon mattresses. All rooms are en-suite, but the inn is very proud of its communal baths with

natural hot spring water. Meals are freshly prepared on site and are made using the finest local seasonal ingredients.

### Hanaya, Tsumago

The Hanaya is a simple Japanese inn located on the walking route between Tsumago and Magome.

The inn is the first of a few small traditional style buildings which make up the O-Tsumago area, about a 15 minute walk from the centre of Tsumago village. The inn has its own traditional baths and the friendly owners speak some English. Breakfast and dinner are included as standard.

### Intergate Kyoto, Kyoto

The Intergate Shijo Shinmachi, located a short walk from the downtown Karasuma area with its shops, restaurants, and cafes. The Intergate looks like a traditional townhouse from the outside, while on the inside it combines functionality with elegant Japanese touches. After a day of sightseeing you can take advantage of the communal bath facilities and enjoy a relaxing soak.

The Intergate prides itself on its healthy buffet breakfast with an array of Japanese and Western dishes. Other convenient facilities at the hotel include coin-operated laundry machines, and the 'Intergate Lounge' which offers coffee and soft drinks throughout the day. Our favourite touch is the daily "Happy Hour" from 5 to 7pm which offers wine and cocktails completely free of charge! A great way for us to round off the tour.



# Important Tour Information

## Fitness

You will need to be of considerable fitness to manage the hiking involved in this tour. The six hikes are 8.2 to 14km (5 to 8 miles) in length over sometimes steep uneven terrain. The forested Shin-Etsu trail is minimally maintained by volunteers, so you must be prepared to climb over tree roots and trunks, and duck under branches. You'll need to pack wet weather gear and decent hiking boots that are well worn in. When not hiking, sightseeing in Japan often involves walking between sights, climbing up steps in temples and being 'on the go' for much of the day.

## 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. Shared facilities (when included) will always be separated by gender. The hotels in **Tokyo, Iiyama, Matsumoto, Kiso-Fukushima** and Kyoto are equipped with full en-suite facilities (attached bath, shower and toilet). The traditional *ryokan* inn in **Togarinozawa Onsen and Tsumago** do not have en-suite bathrooms. In Togarinozawa Onsen rooms have attached toilets but bathing facilities are shared. In Tsumago toilets and bathing facilities are shared (single sex).

## 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 four 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 two occasions and please note you will be without your main bag for 1 night in Kyoto.

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 in Tokyo for arrivals at Tokyo Narita or Tokyo Haneda Airport. We finish in Kyoto for departures from Osaka Kansai Airport. If you wish to upgrade to a shared shuttle airport transfer service please talk 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 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.

