

INSIDE JAPAN

SMALL GROUP TOUR

Hidden Japan

12 NIGHTS

CLASSIC



Tour overview

Are you looking for more depth of cultural insight, with experiences that take you away from the tourist trail? This tour gives you both. Although a number of World Heritage sites are incorporated in the trip, you can still feel liberated from the pressure of merely ticking destination boxes, as we steer you towards the road less travelled.

Skipping Tokyo allows more time to discover Japan's intriguing south-central regions, which is why this tour begins and ends in Kyoto: Japan's historic and cultural capital. Here, you'll get to know your group and meet a trainee geisha, as well as exploring the temples and gardens that reveal themselves behind every sliding screen, and around every corner in this incredible city.

A private bus ride south of the former capital brings us to sacred Mount Koya. We offer an overnight stay in a shukubo temple lodging, with a meal of vegetarian Buddhist cuisine and the chance to join the monks in their morning prayers. A ferry ride then brings us to Tokushima, on Shikoku Island, where you'll be able to witness and participate (if you dare!) in the colourful and vibrant Awa Odori dance festival. Then take in the beautiful views from atop Mount Bizan, and catch a traditional Bunraku puppet show, where you can even meet the master puppeteers.

Takamatsu boasts a top-class Japanese garden and is the gateway to Naoshima Island and its Art House Projects, which you will uncover with an expert local guide. We then head inland to Kotohira, home to the island's most famous shrine, Konpira-san, located atop 1,368 steps. Our stay here is in a wonderful ryokan inn, complete with outdoor hot spring baths. This is a great base from which to explore the beautiful Iya Valley region, steeped in samurai history and raw natural beauty. Our last stop on Shikoku Island is in Matsuyama, home to a magnificent original samurai castle and the oldest bathhouse in Japan.

We then take a ferry back to the main island of Honshu to visit the sobering Peace Memorial Museum and inspiring Peace Park in Hiroshima. The following day we will take a trip out to the "floating" torii gate on Miyajima Island, inhabited by friendly shika deer.

Finally, before whizzing back to Kyoto by bullet train we will visit the historic town of Joge for a day of cultural activities with the locals. Among the famous sights and less-frequented destinations, your full-time tour leader will be ever-present and prove to be worth their weight in gold, as they explain the finer points of local custom in these fascinating and contrasting locations.



Highlights

Visit Kyoto's famous UNESCO Heritage sites and Hiroshima's peace museum

Spend the night in a traditional Buddhist temple lodging on spiritual Mount Koya

Visit Joge, a small rural town for a real peek into Japanese way of life

Watch and participate in a traditional festival dance performance in Tokushima

Explore the verdant Iya Valley, with its rugged gorges and rivers, straddled by vine bridges

Explore Naoshima "Art Island" with an expert local guide

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

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

Welcome to Japan! Upon arrival at Osaka airport, you will be met by our representative and take a shared taxi transfer to your hotel in Kyoto. Your tour leader will be waiting to greet you in the lobby, and this evening you'll convene with your group at a welcome meeting before you all head out for a delicious included meal at one of the area's fantastic restaurants.

Day 2 – Kyoto

Refreshed after a relaxing arrival day, your tour leader will take the group on an extensive tour of Kyoto using public transport. Aply known as the "City of Ten Thousand Temples" – Kyoto is bursting with history, culture and incredible sights.

Your tour leader will introduce you to their favourite locations and a number of entrance fees will be included today. You will stroll the Philosophers' Path, and gaze on Ginkakuji's resplendent Silver Pavilion. You are sure to have a fascinating day. In the afternoon you will enjoy afternoon tea with a *maiko* (trainee geisha) in the traditional Gion district.

Day 3 – Mount Koya

Today you will leave the beaten track and travel by private coach, heading south to Mount Koya, a remote mountaintop temple community and the spiritual home of Shingon Buddhism. Mount Koya is located deep in the mountains of Wakayama Prefecture and is home to a collection of ancient temples, shrines and pagodas – not to mention Okunoin, the largest cemetery in Japan. Located within a towering Japanese cedar forest, this atmospheric graveyard is a real wonder, seemingly extending interminably through the early morning mist. Today you will have the services of a local guide to explain the history and significance of these sites, with lunch and entrance fees included. This evening, you will be staying at a traditional Buddhist temple lodging, where you will be served *shojin ryori* – vegetarian Buddhist cuisine.

Day 4 – Tokushima

Today, it's early to rise for optional (but highly recommended!) morning prayers at the worship hall of your temple lodging. This is

a unique opportunity to witness ancient rituals being played out as the new day breaks. After a healthy breakfast, we head by private coach to Wakayama Port, from where we board the ferry to Tokushima on Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's four main islands.

Tokushima is most famous as the location of the largest dance festival in Japan, the Awa Odori. You will visit the Awa Odori Kaikan Museum to learn about the nationally revered festival, watch a dance performance and then have the opportunity to show off your festival dance moves, under the friendly guidance of the professionals. Then it's a cable car to the top of nearby Mount Bizan for fantastic views across the city and coast.

Day 5 – Takamatsu

We will spend the morning at the Awa Jurobe Yashiki puppet theatre, where you'll have the rare opportunity to see traditional bunraku puppet theatre in an authentic setting, and then meet the master puppeteers. Afterwards, we make our way to Takamatsu, where you'll have plenty of time to wander the beautiful Ritsurin Gardens, some of the best landscape gardens in Japan. Your tour leader is sure to take you out in town for a fabulous optional meal tonight.

Day 6 – Takamatsu/Naoshima

On day six you will be making a day trip from Takamatsu to the nearby island of Naoshima, internationally known for its world-class art, set in beautiful natural scenery. You'll have the benefit of a local guide, who will explain the history of the island's art projects and introduce you to some of its most impressive sights. We will be sure to stop for lunch before visiting both Benesse House and Chichu Art museums, home to works by famous artists such as Yayoi Kusama and Claude Monet. A late afternoon ferry will bring you back to Takamatsu, where you will spend a second night.

Day 7 – Kotohira

Today you'll be making the scenic train ride from Takamatsu to Kotohira, a town best known as the location of Shikoku's largest shrine complex – Konpira-san. In the afternoon you'll have the chance to visit a small sake brewery and museum, then scale the 1,368 steps to Konpira-san's inner shrine, a climb that's

well worth the effort, as you'll be rewarded with spectacular views across the area. There is also a kabuki theatre next to the accommodation, where you can explore back- and under-stage areas, to marvel at the mechanics of one of Japan's traditional theatre forms. Tonight, you'll be staying at a beautiful ryokan inn with its own hot spring baths and fabulous Japanese-style evening meal.

Day 8 – Kotohira

Today, you take a private bus bound for the Iya Valley, a lush and undeveloped area of natural beauty, particularly famous for its imposing gorges, clear rivers and vine bridges. We'll take a boat ride, have a delicious included lunch perched on a precipice above, and cross the centuries-old Kazurabashi vine bridge, apparently used by the defeated and retreating Heike samurai clan in the 12th century. We will also have time to visit a charming rural samurai residence before making our way back to Kotohira, where a second night of hot spring baths and feasting awaits.

Day 9 – Matsuyama

After breakfast we will transfer by train across Shikoku Island to Matsuyama, home to the oldest hot spring baths in Japan, and one of the country's finest samurai-era castles. Later, we'll visit the castle and its grounds, then you'll have free time to explore the city at your leisure. Dogo Onsen, the town's famous bathhouse, is conveniently located right next to your hotel. It is said to have existed for over 3,000 years, and currently undergoing a 7 year long restoration period for us to enjoy for many more generations to come. It is still accessibly by the public and even has a set of baths reserved exclusively for the use of the royal family. But don't worry – there are separate baths for common folk, so you'll also have a chance to bathe in the restorative waters this evening if you choose.

Day 10 – Hiroshima

We will transfer to Matsuyama Port and then take a ferry to Hiroshima, back on Japan's main island. Hiroshima will always be remembered for the tragic events of 1945, and today you will visit the inspiring Peace Park and sobering museum for an insight into the dropping of the world's first atomic bomb. Informative and even-handed, this museum is a must-see on any visit to Hiroshima. After a thought-provoking afternoon, the perfect antidote is to stroll the splendid riverside, take a waterside coffee, or hit lively Hondori shopping arcade. For our included meal, we'll opt for okonomiyaki, Hiroshima's best-known dish. This savoury noodle- and cabbage-based pancake comes with a variety of fillings and is cooked on a hot plate in front of you, offering a culinary show and great food.

Day 11 – Hiroshima

The destination today, only a short ferry ride away, will offer a laid-back alternative to the bustle of Hiroshima. Miyajima, a tiny island known for its friendly resident population of deer and Itsukushima Shrine, boasts one of Japan's most iconic views. We recommend hiking (or catching the cable car!) to the top of Mount Misen for

fabulous views across the Seto Inland Sea, a national park in its own right. Whilst the Omotesando shopping street is full of great local crafts and confectionary, the shrine will offer spirituality and the forest of Momijidani Park some peace amongst the foliage. If you wish to stay longer, your tour leader will be at hand to give you guidance and tips.

Day 12 – Kyoto

Today you will take a side trip to Joge, a small historic town which has proved a perfect match for our 'Hidden Japan' concept.

Little known to foreign tourists, Joge is renowned for its wonderful examples of original Meiji & Taisho era architecture and taking a walk down Joge's main street really does feel like you've stepped 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.

You'll try yourself at the traditional martial art of Kendo, and after lunch you'll have a tour of the town with a local guide. You'll then 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 a farewell evening meal with your tour leader and group. We suggest an evening of karaoke to really see out the tour with a bang!

Day 13 – Tour ends

It's time to say goodbye and make your way by private car transfer to one of Osaka's airports, Itami or Kansai International, for your flight home, or to start your onward journey. Stay in touch – we hope to see you again soon!

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.

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.

● KYOTO

Royal Park Kyoto Sanjo

The Royal Park Hotel is a modern, stylish hotel in a great location in central Kyoto. Rooms are Western-style, en suite and generally quite generously sized. The hotel has its own restaurant (with meals made using seasonal produce), bar and bakery-café as well as a useful concierge service. All rooms also feature free Wi-Fi internet and there is a coin laundry and massage service should you have need of either. The hotel is conveniently located just a short walk from both City Hall (Shiyakusho) Station and Sanjo Station (about 15 minutes by taxi from JR Kyoto Station), making this a great base for a very comfortable and convenient stay in Kyoto.

● MOUNT KOYA

Renge-in Shukubo

Renge-in is a traditional temple on Mount Koya dedicated to Shingon Buddhism. The temple has a long history and connections to the Tokugawa clan who ruled Japan from 1603 to 1867. As befits a place dedicated to meditation, the temple's lodgings are simple and classic Japanese style with tatami mat floors and futon mattresses to sleep on. Bathing facilities are shared but all rooms have their own toilet. Dinner and breakfast are included in your stay at Renge-in so you can look forward to sampling shojin-ryori (Buddhist cuisine) – strictly vegetarian home cooking. Guests are welcome to attend morning devotional exercises along with the monks. The ceremony will of course be in Japanese, but it is a truly unique and atmospheric experience nonetheless – not to be missed.

● TOKUSHIMA

Hotel Sunroute

Hotel Sunroute is a great base for your time in Tokushima. Rooms are simply decorated, with a television, en suite bathroom, toiletries, a fridge and a hairdryer. On the top floor of the hotel are communal hot spring baths with great views across the city. There is a convenience store and coin-operated laundry facilities within the hotel should you need them, along with a Japanese and Chinese restaurant. Wi-Fi is available throughout.

Sunroute is a Japanese hotel chain with numerous properties across the country. With friendly service, comfortable rooms and excellent locations (all within walking distance of a main train station), the Sunroute is a great moderate accommodation option.

What's included

- ⊙ Your comprehensive InsideJapan Info-Pack
- ⊙ Airport transfers by private car and driver
- ⊙ 12 nights' accommodation
- ⊙ Breakfast every day, four lunches and six evening meals
- ⊙ Full-time services of your InsideJapan tour leader
- ⊙ All transport between destinations
- ⊙ Selected entrance fees & local transport in Kyoto
- ⊙ Afternoon tea with a *maiko* in Kyoto
- ⊙ Full-day private guide in Mount Koya, including lunch & entrance fees
- ⊙ Tickets to Awa Odori Kaikan Museum, Mount Bizan Ropeway, Awa Jurobe Yashiki Puppet Theatre in Tokushima & Ritsurin Gardens in Takamatsu
- ⊙ Iya Valley entrance fees & lunch
- ⊙ Full-day private guide service in Naoshima
- ⊙ Hiroshima Peace Museum & Park
- ⊙ Okonomiyaki dinner in Hiroshima
- ⊙ Visit to Miyajima Island including entrance fees and cable car
- ⊙ Luggage forwarding from Kyoto to Tokushima and from Kotohira to Hiroshima
- ⊙ 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

Where you'll stay

● TAKAMATSU

JR Clement Hotel

The Clement is a superior hotel located near the waterfront in the attractive harbour town of Takamatsu. The hotel enjoys great views over the sea and town. Rooms are well-sized and there is a choice of restaurants, including a good bakery. Wired internet is available in the rooms and rental laptops are also available. Takamatsu's stunning Ritsurin Gardens are just a short distance away and there are ferries on your doorstep for an easy day trip to Naoshima "Art Island".

● KOTOHIRA

Sakura No Sho

The Sakura no Sho is a modern hotel with traditional Japanese rooms and excellent service. Located at the foot of the pilgrims' steps to Konpira-san shrine, this is certainly the best place in town to relax, with inviting indoor and outdoor hot spring baths. The food at the Sakura no Sho is first class, with an array of Japanese- and Western- style dishes available to suit all tastes.

● MATSUYAMA

Candeo Matsuyama

Candeo Matsuyama Okaido is a smart Western hotel located in a prime spot in Matsuyama city, just across the road from the tram stop and with the shopping and dining area on your doorstep. Rooms are compact but comfortable and modern. A real highlight is the top-floor Sky Spa, with indoor and open-air hot spring baths offering views out towards Matsuyama Castle, ideal for relaxing after a busy day of sightseeing.

● HIROSHIMA

Intergate Hotel

Hotel Intergate Hiroshima combines comfort with cultural immersion in the heart of the city, just a 5minute walk from Hatchobori Station. Its 233 guest rooms feature premium Simmons mattresses and original loungewear to ensure a restful night's sleep.

The top-floor Intergate Lounge offers panoramic views of the city and surrounding mountains, serving specialty coffee, cocktails, and showcasing local books and art. Guests can also unwind in the communal baths, which provide a space to relax after a day of exploration.



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 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 as 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 1 night on Mount Koya and 1 night in Matsuyama.

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, trams, and ferries 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.

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