



SmallGroup Travel tour of Japan 2023

Another side of Japan

Autumn in Japan is one of colour and contrast.

Japan is a country of amazing contrasts – from modern cosmopolitan cities to historic and cultural sights and traditions. Japan is home to some of the most magnificent Heritage sites in the world and it is also the destination to give you an insight into the fascinating world of the geishas and the age old tea ceremonies. Truly a land of raw beauty and rich in culture, with gastronomy to die for, Japan will not disappoint.

The tour is designed for those who want to experience traditional Japan away from the buzzing cities, walking along one of Japan's oldest trails through paddy fields and villages, ancient burial sites, temples, shrines and amazing Mountain scenery. You will experience traditional ryokans and savour the cuisines of the various areas visited.

To live is to Travelshare the experience!

Day 1: 14th November 2023 Arrival Day: KIX to Osaka

Welcome to Japan! On arrival at Kansai International Airport (KIX), you will make your way by train to Osaka City, Japan's commercial centre located in the Kansai area.

Upon arrival at Tennoji Station, exit from the platform via the gate and you are in Tennoji Station. From inside the station it is a short walk to the hotel using the Tennoji Station EAST EXIT. For directions, please ask the JR staff at the gate who will direct you. The hotel is right in front of the East Exit.

Three nights Tennoji Miyako Hotel or similar

Day 2: 15th November 2023 Osaka

As you arrived quite late last night, today will be a day at leisure. Enjoy a sleep in and leisurely morning. Why not explore the surrounds of your hotel? This evening, you will meet your guide for a short briefing meeting heading out for dinner in Osaka. Osaka is famous for Okonomiyaki, Takoyaki and Kushikatsu and we will try to sample all these dishes during our short stay in the "food capital" of Japan. (D)

Day 3: 16th November 2023 Osaka

Enjoy breakfast in your hotel before setting off to visit the Namba and Dotonburi area of Osaka, a centre of youth culture, nightlife and shopping. Osaka's food scene is famous for Takoyaki Kushikatsu. Here, you will visit the Kuromon Market. This is Osaka's food market. Appropriately, nearby is the "Kitchenware Street" where anything and everything related to cooking. (B,L,D)

Day 4: 17th November 2023 Nara

After breakfast at your hotel, catch the JR (Japan Rail) train that takes you to Nara which was the capital of Japan in the 9th century. Nara feels provincial after the hustle and bustle of Osaka and is the perfect bridge to visiting more rural places in the Nara area later in this trip.

Explore some of the most famous sights in Nara and start today with visiting Todai-ji temple, which houses the Great Buddha. You will notice many deer (shika) in Nara Park which roam around here freely.

Lunch will be at a local restaurant. For example, at Kamameshi Shizuka near Nara Park. Here they specialize in Kamameshi, literally "kettle rice." It is traditional Japanese rice dish cooked in a hot pot (kama).

In the afternoon, stroll through the old quarters in Naramachi centered on Gango-ji temple where many machiya, merchant town houses, still remain. Visit a couple of these houses, such as the Koshino

le and learn about the characteristics of the exterior and interior of these houses. They now host shops, cafes and restaurants. You will see some of the oldest shops in Nara, such as Yoshida Kaya: Hand towels using Nara-made mosquito net cloth.

In the evening, you will have a personal geisha and maiko experience in the former geisha quarter of Gariin. Nara, like Kyoto, had once a prosperous geisha quarter and geisha Kikuno is now trying to revive this culture and pass on her skills to young women who wish to become a geisha.



This evening, enjoy a ryoutei dinner at the Tsuruya Tea House and are hosted by geisha Kikuno.

Note: this is a small tea house which can host only 8 people at the time. One group per night while the other group will go to another local restaurant with the guide.

Due to COVID, there are actually not many maiko left as they have had to secure other jobs! We will hopefully be able to confirm this prior to the tour but it is important to note.

Two nights at Hotel Setre Naramachi Hotel (3-star) chic rooms, rooftop terrace, refined dining). (B,L,D)

2 nights Hotel Setre Naramachi or similar

Day 5: 18th November 2023 Nara

In the morning, continue your exploration of famous sights around Nara Park and take a stroll through Kofuku-ji temple and walk through the park to Kasuga Grand Shrine.

For lunch, return to Naramachi and enjoy lunch in a machiya. The lunch is made up of Yamato traditional vegetables. Yamato is the old area name for Nara.

In the afternoon, there will be some free time to stroll around by yourself or enjoy shopping for local souvenirs.

We will meet up again for a sake tasting in Naramachi, where we will visit Harushika Sake Brewery. Harushika began brewing sake in 1884. The brand's name comes from the sacred animal of Kasuga Grand Shrine is the deer, or shika in Japanese.

In the evening, one group will enjoy the geisha dinner while the other group will visit a local restaurant with the guide. (B,L)

Day 6: 19th November 2023 Yamanobe no Michi

Take a local train out of Nara and to Tenri City, which is the starting point of walks along the Yamanobe no Michi, one of Japan's oldest trails. Spend the whole day walking along this trail and end your walk at Miwa Shrine in Sakurai City. The trail runs along mountains in the Nara Basin.

There are several shrines and temples located along the trail, such as Isonokami Shrine and Chogakuji temple, which leads you through paddy fields and villages. The area is famous for growing persimmon and there are persimmon orchards along the trail. Farmers sell their local fare at small stalls along the trail. The walk will take you passed several kofun, which are the burial sites of former emperors and empresses in the early times of Japanese century dating back to the 3rd to 5th century, well before Nara, which we visited the day before, became the capital of Japan.



For lunch today, you will have famous Miwa somen. Somen are a kind of noodles and they are said to have originated in the Miwa area.

This walk will take about 5 hours at a leisurely pace. Private transportation will transfer you to your hotel for the night. (B,L,D)

Overnight at The Kashihara (hotspring baths on premise) or similar

Day 7: 20th November 2023 Kashihara/Asuka Village

Today you will walk to the Kashihara Jingu, a grand shrine that is dedicated to the very first emperor of Japan, Emperor Jimmu. One of the shrine priests will do a Shinto ceremony for us (Seshiki Sanpai).

Next, you will move on to historic Imaicho, an area with well-preserved machiya townhouses, which will already be familiar to you from Nara. Stroll through the streets of Imaicho where locals still live today. Visit one of the old houses and also have lunch there. This unique cityscape has been designated as an important traditional building preservation area.



In the Imaicho district, you will have Kaiseki lunch at a local restaurant, for example Yamato Yayu or Kifu. Kaiseki is an upmarket Japanese dining experience.

In the afternoon, transfer by private transport to the nearby Asuka Village and start exploring on foot. The area is famous for kofun, the burial tombs already seen at the Yamanobe no Michi. Visit the Ishibutai tomb and then stroll back through the paddy fields and gardens to our accommodation at a minshuku, a family-run pension in a traditional Japanese house where we will have a traditional dinner. (B,L,D)

Overnight at Asuka Minshuku or similar (shared facilities)

Day 8: 21st November 2023 Yoshinoyama

Yoshino is a village on top of an 800m mountain in the middle of Nara Prefecture. It is the centre of Shugendo, ‘the way of acquiring power’, a mountain ascetic tradition that is reaching back over 1,300 years. Yoshino has been a centre of mountain worship and ascetic training since the 7th century.

Travel to Yoshino by local train from Asuka. Your host for tonight, Taikoban KamKam, will pick you up from Yoshino Station and take you up the mountain to the entrance of Yoshino just below Kimpusen-ji Temple.

Yoshino is widely acknowledged to be Kansai’s No 1 cherry blossom spot. Tens of thousands of people visit here in April each year to admire what are said to be 30,000 cherry trees blooming all around on the mountain slopes of Yoshino. In autumn, when it is much quieter in Yoshino, the leaves of these cherry trees turn color alongside the more colorful maple trees making for beautiful views.



The Zao-do hall is Kimpusen-ji temple’s impressive main hall. It was built in its current form in 1592 and is said to be the second largest wooden building in Japan after the Big Buddha Hall at Todai-ji temple in Nara. Tour the grounds of this temple and learn about Shugendo in past and present.

Walk to Yoshimizu Shrine nearby which you will tour inside and learn more about important historical figures related to Yoshino. These include the 12th century samurai Minamoto Yoshitsune, the 14th century Emperor Go-Daigo and the 16th century warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi.

For lunch, enjoy a local fare at Shizukatei local restaurant. The local specialty is kaki no ha zushi, this is a traditional kind of sushi wrapped in persimmon leave. You will also have a chance to try kudzu mocha, another specialty of Yoshin. This is a traditional Japanese sweet made of kudzu powder and topped with syrup.

After lunch, continue walking through the village at a leisurely pace to reach Sakuramotobou Temple. This temple dates back to the 7th century and was set up by Emperor Tenmu. He was succeeded by his wife who became Empress Jito. She came to Yoshinoyama often after the death of Emperor Tenmu. They even had a palace here. Their grandson, Emperor Monmu, reigned when En no gyoja was active in the Yoshino area. First we will tour the five halls of this temple. Each hall is dedicated to another Buddhist deity. Here will also enjoy the experience of Shabutsu, or tracing of a Buddha image.

In the evening, settle into your accommodation and enjoy a traditional Japanese bath before having dinner at the accommodation (B,L,D)

Overnight Taikoban Kamu-Kamu or similar (shared facilities and limited rooms with private facilities) – note this property only has 5 rooms so 3 additional rooms next door at Taikoban Honkan next door will be secured

Day 9: 22nd November 2023 Dorogawa Onsen

In the morning, rise early to attend the morning prayer at the Zao Do. The Shugendo monks play the hora conch shell and play a taiko drum to accompany their chanting. This is a unique experience to get a glimpse of the Shugendo spirituality.

After breakfast at the minshuku, depart by private transport to Dorogawa Onsen located deep in the Omine Mountains. This secluded village is also famous for Shugendo but we are unlikely to see any Yamabushi, as the followers of Shugendo are called, in this season. Explore the village and its surroundings and learn more about Shugendo and visit some of the former practice sites. Explore the village on foot at a leisurely pace.



Lunch will be simple udon or soba, two types of Japanese noodles, which are a common fare all across Japan and very popular with Japanese people.

The afternoon is free to relax at your ryokan or stroll around some more. The main street of Dorogawa is lined with many ryokan and we will stay at one of them. Lantern-lit in the evening, it is a very atmospheric place and has a hot spring bath on premise.

Dinner will be a lavish affair of many wonderful dishes, presented one after another in Japanese banquet style. (B,L,D)

Overnight Dorogawa Ryokan Onsen or similar (shared facilities)

Day 10: 23rd November 2023 Mitarai Gorge/Kyoto

After another wonderful breakfast at the ryokan, start another walk (approx. 4 hours) which takes you through the Mitarai Gorge near Dorogawa Onsen. This gorge is known for its wonderful autumn scenery and for its dramatic landscape. There are several waterfalls and a suspension bridge for panoramic photo spots. The walk will take about 4 hours and is easy.

Enjoy lunch at Kadoya, a local restaurant that serves lunch sets, a popular option in Japan. A lunch set typically contains the main dish but also a side dish, a soup and a desert.

After lunch, catch a local bus that takes you back to Kintetsu Station (1 hour bus ride) from where you catch a train that takes us to Kyoto, the final destination of this tour. Upon arrival in Kyoto, freshen up before going out for early dinner at a local restaurant and then enjoy a two hour night tour of Kyoto, including Kyoto's famous geisha districts and Kyoto's downtown. (B,L,D)

4 nights Mitsui Garden Shinmachi Bettai or similar

Day 11: 24th November 2023 Kyoto

Your first full day in Kyoto will be spent with touring some of Kyoto's most iconic places, all listed as UNESCO Heritage Sites, including Nijo Castle, seat of the Shogun during Japan's feudal period when he visited Kyoto, and Kinkaku-ji temple with its Golden Pavilion, followed by Ryoan-ji, famous for its rock garden.

Enjoy lunch at kaiten Sushi restaurant near these temples. Kaiten Sushi is a fun experience for all ages.

Continuing on, you will visit Ryoan-ji Temple, famous for its rock garden. Take a local train through suburbs to Arashiyama, a forested area in the West of Kyoto. We will walk through the local neighborhood to the famous bamboo forest and spend some time there taking in this tranquil scenery.

Nearby are two places that lovers of traditional Japanese gardens will love.

It is optional to visit one or both places in your own time and at your own expense. Alternatively, your guide will take those who would like to enjoy a mid-afternoon cup of tea or coffee back to the main street.

Your guide will set a meeting time and place for everyone to meet up again for the return journey to down-town Kyoto by train. Return to your hotel to freshen up before meeting up again and head out for dinner. (B,L)

Day 12: 25th November 2023 Kyoto

Today you travel by local bus to visit two more iconic temples in Kyoto: Kiyomizu-dera and Ginkaku-ji (the Silver Pavilion Temple). Kyoto's Philosopher's Path starts near Ginkaku-ji Temple. Walk this path following a canal in the Higashiyama quiet neighborhood and end at Nanzen-ji, another famous temple in Kyoto.

Enjoy lunch independently in small groups in the Ginkaku-ji neighborhood. Your guide will help you to find a restaurant.

If time permits in the afternoon, your guide will take you to the centre of Kyoto and introduce you to some shopping areas and local cafes. You will have some time to explore by yourself before meeting up again for dinner at a restaurant near the hotel. (B,D)

Day 13: 26th November 2023 Kyoto

Today you will take a short train ride to the other side of the Eastern Hill Mountains that are a natural border between Kyoto and neighboring Shinga Prefecture, where Japan's largest fresh-water lake is located. The train takes you to Ishiyama where you will catch a bus (approx. 50min) to the Miho Museum (closed on Mondays). Spend a couple of hours visiting the museum and surrounds before returning to Kyoto.

The afternoon, enjoy the Sagano Scenic Railway. This is a wonderful way to tour and enjoy the natural beauty of this rural region. The train has come to be known as the Sagano Torokko,



or Romantic Train, because its passage takes guests sightseeing through such romantic scenery. Tonight, explore many options for dinner independently. (B)

Day 14: 27th November 2023 Kyoto to Tokyo

After breakfast, make your way to Kyoto Station and catch the Shinkansen, the Bullet Train, which will take you to Tokyo, the capital of Japan. On arrival at Tokyo Station, take the subway to your hotel in the Ueno area of Tokyo. Drop off your luggage and head out for lunch in the Asakusa area.

Following lunch, take a leisurely walk through Asakusa taking in sights such Sensoji Temple until it is check-in time at your hotel.

Freshen up and re-group in the late afternoon and take a short train journey to the Shinjuku area of Tokyo for a tour of Tokyo's neon lights. Enjoy an early dinner at a local izakaya, local "pub" in the Shinjuku area.

After dinner, start your exploration of Shinjuku, one of Tokyo's most popular areas for nightlife. Walk through Omoide-Yokocho alley where many small restaurants serve yakitori, or grilled chicken, then head to Kabukicho, a well-known nightlife and entertainment area, and to Golden Gai, a small nostalgic-looking alley where there are many small bars once frequented by Tokyo's literati. This walk will end late in the evening and you will return to your hotel. (B,L,D)

2 nights The Gate Hotel Kaminarimon or similar

Day 15: 28th November 2023 Tokyo

Today you will head to the nearby Asakusa area, where Sensoji Temple is found. It is one of Tokyo's biggest and best-known temples. Explore the area before heading to the other side of the Sumida River. A short train ride will take you to the Tokyo Sky Tree, the largest building in Tokyo. You will have the chance to view Tokyo from the top of this iconic building. Enjoy have lunch in the local area before heading back by train to Asakusa to catch a water taxi that takes you down the Sumida River to the Hamarikyu Gardens, once a hunting ground of the Shogun's family in the feudal period of Japan, the park has remained its classic flair despite being surrounded by skyscrapers now.

You will have a cup of green tea and a Japanese sweet sitting by the Shio-iri pond in the park before heading back to the Japan Rail train station.

The Yamanote loop line runs all around the inner part of Tokyo. You will take the Yamanote line to Shibuya, an area popular with young people, and have a look at the famous scramble crossing in front of the station. The metro will take you back to Ueno and your hotel where you will freshen up before going out for farewell dinner at a local restaurant. (B)

Day 16 – 29th November 2023 Departure

Your tour ends after breakfast this morning. Depending on your flight schedule, you can make your way to Tokyo's Narita or Haneda Airport or extend your stay in Tokyo by a few days. (B)

End of services

Cost per person based on a minimum of 12 people.

Twin Share : \$7995 per person

Single supplement \$1800 (not available on ryokan/minshuku nights.

Inclusions:

- Return airport transfers (based on group arrival)
- Private transfers to/from train stations
- All train tickets as per the itinerary in regular and economy class on a mix of Shinkansen and local/regional trains
- Meals as per the itinerary
- 15 nights accommodation
- Fully escorted English speaking guide
- Osaka Food Market - tour and tasting
- Nara Sights - we visit 4 sights in our time in Nara including the Daibutsu and Nara Park area, Nara Sake Brewery
- Kashihara/Asuka sightseeing
- Kashihara Shingu Prayer
- Yoshino sightseeing
- Yoshino morning prayer
- Mitarai walk
- Kyoto Night and Geisha District Walk
- Kyoto sights - over two days we spread out 5 of the best seasonal sights in this city full of history and options
- Miho Museum
- Shinjuku Night Walk
- Tokyo Sky Tree
- Water Taxi Asakusa to Hamariky Garden
- Hamariky Garden Entrance
- Geisha Dinner
- Kaiseki Lunch at Imaicho in Kashihara
- Hamariky Tea and local snack
- Osaka Metro One-Day Pass
- Jumbo Taxi : Kashihara, Asuka, Yoshino and Dorogawa
- Kyoto Bus Pass
- Shinkansen Kyoto to Tokyo
- Sagano Scenic Train
- Tokyo JR One Day Pass

- Luggage forwarding is included between each location but we note that it will not be same day delivery of the luggage and needs overnight delivery by Yamaneko/Post Office.

Exclusions:

- International flights to and from Japan
- Entrance fees to museums, temples, etc not indicated in your itinerary
- Alcoholic drinks with meals, additional snacks and miscellaneous items or items of a personal nature or items not listed as included
- Meals not indicated in your itinerary
- Visas
- Travel insurance

DEPOSIT

A non refundable deposit of \$700 per person is to be paid at time of confirmation of the group. Full payment due 75 days prior to travel

Please read the terms and conditions of this tour. Payment of deposit indicates acceptance of the terms and conditions.

Please note

Duration for excursions mentioned in the descriptions are approximate and can vary for operational reasons.

You must be physically able to participate in this tour.

When staying in the regional areas you will be experiencing traditional Japanese accommodation. You will not always have private facilities.

SmallGroup Travel is not responsible for visa and vaccination regulations.

Travel Insurance is mandatory to travel on a SmallGroup Travel tour. I can help you with this.

Conditions of Payment:

You are required to fill in a signed SmallGroup Travel Booking Form. This booking form acknowledges that you have read and accepted the Terms and conditions. Once completed you will receive an invoice with payment details. Credit card payments will incur a fee of 1.1% for Visa and 3% for American Express.

A non-refundable deposit of \$1000 per person is required to secure your reservation.

Full payment is required by 27 January,2022.

Please ensure you have read and understand SmallGroup Travel Privacy Policy and Booking Conditions.

<https://www.travelmanagers.com.au/terms-and-conditions/>

Please contact me if you have any questions.



I look forward to experiencing traditional Japan with you!

Sue Kuti

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