



SAMURAI TOURS

Adventures in Discovering Traditional Japan

www.samuraitours.com

Tohoku Rail and Drive



15 Days / 14 Nights

Tohoku Rail and Drive

Tour Overview

Tohoku may share the main island of Honshu, but Tohoku is a world apart from the crowded and busy south. The mountain villages are more remote, the forests more untamed, the traditional onsens more secluded and the people friendlier. And yet, Samurai history lives on in the well-preserved homes and warehouses in Kakunodate, and in Aizu Wakamatsu, a castle town with a long Samurai tradition.

Destinations

Jodogahama, Sanriku Coast, Lake Towada, Hachimantai, Nyuto Onsen, Kakunodate, Yamadera, Dewa Sanzan, Lake Tazawa, Zao Onsen, Sendai, Matsushima, Aizu Wakamatsu, Oichijuku, Kinugawa Onsen, Nikko

Tour Factors



Cultural Immersion



Pace



Physical Activity



Tour Details

You will soak in the thermally-heated waters of the remote and rustic Nyuto Onsen. Bathing at this onsen gives the bather the sense of what it was like to use an onsen hundreds of years ago. And you will also bathe at Zao Onsen, with its sulfuric waters that are among the most acidic in Japan with a PH value of close to 1.

Follow in the footsteps of countless “yamabushi” along the Dewa Sanzan, Japan’s oldest pilgrimage established almost 1,500 years ago. Climb the 1,000 steps to Yamadera, a mountainside temple founded in the 9th century.

You will enjoy the natural areas of Lake Towada and the Oirase River, Hachimantai and Matsushima, ranked as one of the three most scenic spots in Japan. You will walk along the crater of Mt. Zao, an active volcano.

You will visit Nikko, one of the most elaborate shrines in Japan dedicated to the memory of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first of the Tokugawa Shoguns who ruled Japan for more than 250 years.

Rail and Drive Tours

The Japan public transportation system in Japan is one of the best, if not the best in the world. However, if you want to travel to the remote areas of Japan, public transportation is sometimes either non-existent, too infrequent or too slow to be practical. Automobiles are the best way to access these remote areas. Our Rail and Drive tours are a convenient combination of public transportation and chartered taxis or chartered vans, allowing us to really get “off the beaten path”. And because we keep the group sizes smaller, it allows us to go where tour buses cannot. (Because of seat limitations, these tours are limited to a maximum of 8 people.)

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Sanriku Coast
- ✓ Walk along Oirase River
- ✓ Nyuto Onsen
- ✓ Dewa Sanzan, Hagurosan and Yudonosan
- ✓ Sokushinbutsu - Mummified Buddhist Monks
- ✓ Yamadera
- ✓ Zao Onsen
- ✓ Matsushima - Rated as one of the three most scenic locations in Japan
- ✓ Aizu Takamatsu

Tour Inclusions

- ✓ Travel Guard Gold Policy (for American tour members only)
- ✓ Reserved Seat Train Tickets on all Inter-City Travel or Travel by Private Vehicle
- ✓ Two separate rides on a Shinkansen (bullet train)
- ✓ Meeting service at the arrival airport
- ✓ Sending service to the appropriate train station
- ✓ Baggage transfer from city to city
- ✓ Electronic version of Tour Handbook and Japanese History

Tour Exclusions

- × International airfare is NOT included.
- × A printed itinerary is not included
- × Alcoholic beverages, soft drinks and desserts are NOT included

Map



Tour Destinations

- 📍 Tokyo
- 📍 Jodogahama
- 📍 Kitayamazaki
- 📍 Lake Towadako
- 📍 Oirase River
- 📍 Mt. Hachimantai
- 📍 Goshogake Onsen
- 📍 Tamagawa Onsen
- 📍 Nyuto Onsen
- 📍 Dewa Sanzan, Hagurosan and Yudonosan
- 📍 Yamadera
- 📍 Zao Onsen
- 📍 Okama
- 📍 Sendai
- 📍 Matsushima
- 📍 Aizu Takamatsu
- 📍 Oichujuku
- 📍 Kinugawa Onsen
- 📍 Nikko

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive Tokyo

You will be met at Tokyo's Narita airport by a Samurai Tours meeting staff member. They will help you board a shuttle bus to the hotel next to the airport where you will be staying for the night. No meals included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours; Walking: Light

Day 2 Travel to Jodogahama

We will begin our adventure today by taking an express train and Shinkansen (bullet train) to the city of Morioka in northern Japan. There, we will pick up the rental van, and drive to Jodogahama on the eastern sea coast of Tohoku. Jodogahama Beach (Pure Land Beach) is a beautiful beach on a scenic peninsula that features a white pebble shoreline and calm, clear waters with small, jagged, rocky islands. The landscape invokes images of the "Pure Land", a Buddhist concept of paradise, which the beach derives its name from. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at the ryokan is included.

Travel: 6 Hours; Walking: Light

Day 3 San-no-iwa Rock, Kitayamazaki Coast; Travel to Lake Towadako

After breakfast, we will then drive north along the coastline, where we will witness many areas damaged by the huge tsunami in 2011. First, we will stop at the San-no-Iwa along the coastline. These three rocks were once connected to the mainland, but were carved by waves and winds over thousands of years. Our morning destination is the Kitayamazaki coastline, and 8km long (about 5 miles) stretch of coastline featuring sheer, 150 to 200 meter high cliffs (about 500 to 700 feet) . We will stop for some free time at the Kitayamazaki Observatory Park, where there are three observation decks from which to take in the breathtaking views. Next, we will drive to Lake Towada, where we will be staying for the night. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokans are included

Travel: 3 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 4 Walk along the Oirase River, Lake Towadako Boat Cruise

The Oirase River flows along the floor of Oirase Gorge, winding among trees and passing more than a dozen waterfalls cascading into the river from the walls of the gorge. An easy-to-walk hiking trail leads along the most scenic section of the gorge. The trail is about 9 kilometers long (about 6 miles). There are numerous bus stops along the way, and if you are not able to finish the walk you can take a bus to end of the trail. Next, we will tour Lake Towada by taking a sightseeing boat back to the hotel. Lake Towada is the largest caldera lake on Honshu, Japan's main island, and is characterized by two large peninsulas which extend nearly a third of the way across the lake. The best way to see the lake is by sightseeing boats, which offer close-up views of the peninsulas that are otherwise difficult to see. Breakfast at the ryokan and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: 1/2 Hour; Walking: Heavy

Day 5 Travel to Hachimantai; Hachimantai, Goshogake Onsen, Tamagawa Onsen; Travel to Nyuto Onsen

We will start the day by driving to Hachimantai. Hachimantai is a flat topped mountain with a summit at 1613 meters above sea level (about 5,000 feet). A network of walking trails provides access to the summit of Mount Hachimantai and offers easy walks from 40 minutes to two hours. The trails pass by numerous ponds and cut through a forest of evergreen trees. From here, we will drive to Nyuto Onsen. Nyuto Onsen is a collection of mostly traditional and rustic onsen ryokan in the mountains of eastern Akita Prefecture. The name Nyuto Onsen means “nipple hot spring” and comes from the suggestive shape of nearby Mount Nyuto rather than the milky/cloudy appearance of the area’s hot spring water. Breakfast at the ryokan and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: 4 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 6 Travel to Kakunodate; Kakunodate - Kakunodate Denshokan Museum, Samurai Residences

After breakfast, we will continue our adventure by driving to Kakunodate. Along the way, we will make a brief stop at Lake Tazawa. Tazawako is a caldera lake, and is the deepest lake in Japan. Kakunodate is a former castle town. And while the castle no longer exists, the samurai tradition is still strong. There were two distinct sections of Kakunodate: the merchant district and the samurai district as designed in the Edo Period. Today, the samurai district has some of the best preserved examples of samurai architecture anywhere in Japan. We will tour two homes: the Aoyogi and the Ishiguro homes. The Aoyogi home is the largest in Kakunodate, and includes multiple buildings with museum collections documenting the samurai traditions and history in Kakunodate. The area open to visitors at the Ishiguro home is limited because the Ishiguro family still maintains a residence in the home. We will finish the day at the Denshokan museum. This museum has numerous local arts and handicrafts on display, the most prominent being items made from cherry tree bark. During the cold winter months, the samurai would earn extra income by making these items. Breakfast at the ryokan, lunch at a local restaurant, and dinner is included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 7 Travel to Dewa Sanzan; Hagurosan; Travel to Tsuruoka

We will start the day by driving to the Dewa Sanzan. Dewa Sanzan (“three mountains of Dewa”) are three sacred mountains each with a shrine on or near its peak. Dewa Sanzan is a center of Shugendo, a folk religion based on mountain worship, blending Buddhist and Shinto traditions. Shugendo practitioners, called yamabushi, perform feats of endurance as a means of transcending the physical world. Training includes such tasks as long pilgrimages and endurance of the elements. We will first tour the Ideha Museum, documenting the 1,500 year history of the Dewa Sanzan. Next, we will climb a walking trail to Hagurosan, (the first of the Dewa Sanzan), which leads through a cedar forest over 2446 stone steps from the base to the summit of the mountain. Along the way, 33 figures carved into the stone steps bring prosperity to anyone who can find them all. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at the hotel or local restaurant is included.

Travel: 3 1/2 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 8 Travel to Churenji; Churenji; Travel to Yamadera; Yamadera; Travel to Zao Onsen

We will start the day by driving to Churenji temple. Churenji is one of the few sites in Japan where you can see sokushinbutsu (men who transformed their own bodies in mummies while still living). This practice is an example of Shugendo, an ancient religion closely related to the Dewa Sanzan. Shugendo is based on mountain worship and combines elements of Buddhism and Shinto. Physical and mental endurance is an important part of Shugendo. Self-mummification is the most extreme form of this endurance and those monks who succeeded are now revered as Buddhas. Next, we will drive to Yudonosan. Yudonosan is the last of three mountains of the Dewa Sanzan. Yudonosan

is considered to be so sacred, that no one can talk about what happens inside the shrine. Upon entering the shrine, people are asked to remove their shoes to begin the purification rites in their bare feet. Next we will drive to Yamadera. Yamadera is a scenic temple located in the mountains northeast of Yamagata City. The temple grounds extend high up a steep mountainside (the name Yamadera literally translates to “mountain temple”), from where there are scenic views overlooking the valley below. The temple was created over a thousand years ago in 860 as a temple of the Tendai sect. To finish the day, we will drive to Zao Onsen. Zao Onsen is at an altitude of about 900 meters (3000 feet) on the slopes of Mount Zao, an active volcano. During the winter months, Zao is one of Japan’s leading ski resorts. The sulfuric waters at Zao Onsen are among the most acidic in Japan with a pH value close to 1. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at the ryokan is included.

PLEASE NOTE: There are between 800 to 1,000 steps at Yamadera. If you are not able to do climb this many steps, there are many shops near the temple.

Travel: 36 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 9 Travel to Okama Crater; Okama Crater; Travel to Matsushima; Matsushima - Zuiganji, Godaido, Karantei, Matsushima Bay Cruise; Travel to Sendai

We start the day by driving to Mt Zao. At a height of 1841 meters (about 6000 feet), Mt. Zao is one of the most prominent mountains in Tohoku. Mt. Zao is also an active volcano with a beautiful crater lake, known as Okama due to its resemblance with a traditional cooking pot. We continue by driving to Matsushima. For hundreds of years, Matsushima has been celebrated as one of the Japan’s three most scenic view along with Miyajima and Amanohashidate. Matsushima Bay has more than 200 small islands covered with pine trees, and the best way to see these is by boat. After arriving at Matsushima, we will tour Zuiganji. Zuiganji was a former Tendai sect temple founded in 828, but later changed to a Zen temple in the 13th century. After years of decline, Zuiganji was restored to prominence by the feudal lord Date Masamune who rebuilt it as his family temple in 1609. We will then visit Godaido. Godaido was originally built in 807 and contains five statues which were enshrined there by the same priest who founded Zuiganji. The statues are displayed to the public only once every 33 years, and were last displayed in 2006. The present building is a 1604 reconstruction by Date Masamune. We will finish our visit at Matsushima by enjoying tea and sweets at Kanrantei. Kanrantei is a Momoyama style tea house originally built in Kyoto by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who gave it to Date Masamune for his service. Date’s son eventually moved it to its current location on a hill overlooking Matsushima Bay. From here, you will board the boat for a cruise around Matsushima Bay. We will finish the day by driving to Sendai where we will drop off the van and stay overnight. Breakfast at the ryokan and lunch at a local restaurant included.

Travel: 4 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 10 Free Day in Sendai

Today is a free day to explore Sendai. The modern city of Sendai was founded around 1600 by Date Masamune, one of feudal Japan’s most powerful feudal lords. Many of Sendai’s tourist attractions are related to Masamune and his family. Visit one of the many temples and shrines started by the Date family, or the site of the Sendai Castle. Or, just stay near the hotel and enjoy Sendai’s city center. The broad streets and abundance of greenery have resulted in Sendai’s nickname, “the city of trees”. An aerial view of the entire city is available for free from the observation deck of the AER Building next to the station. The Ichibancho Arcade covered mall connects several streets together to create the largest arcade in the Tohoku region. Shops along the arcades range from the budget 100 yen chains, to an Apple store and a full range of restaurants, clothing and souvenir stores in between. Or visit the asaichi (“morning market”) where they sell local, seasonal fish and produce. A few stalls sell prepared foods such as onigiri, while

flower vendors have seasonal plants and cut flowers. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: N/A; Walking: TBD

Day 11 Travel to Aizu-Wakamatsu; Aizu-Wakamatsu - Suehiro Sake Brewery, Samurai Mansion

After breakfast, we will continue our adventure by traveling to Aizu Wakamatsu. Aizu Wakamatsu is a former castle town with a long Samurai tradition. First, we will visit the Suehiro Sake Brewery, the largest and most famous sake maker in Tohoku, and their sake is well known throughout Japan. Next, we will visit the Samurai Bukeyashiki (Samurai Mansion). This reconstruction is an excellent view into the life of a high-ranking samurai in the Edo Period. We will be staying at the nearby Highashiyama Onsen located on the edge of Aizu Wakamatsu. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: 5 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 12 Aizu-Wakamatsu - Tsuruga Castle, Sazedo Pagoda, Imoriyama, Nisshinkan Samurai School

Today we will be exploring the Samurai city of Aizu Wakamatsu. We will start at Sazedo. Built in 1796, it features a double helix staircase similar to the famous Chateau de Chambord, the French castle designed by Leonardo da Vinci. Visitors ascending the slope in a circular direction and reaching the top story are considered to have completed the Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage to 33 Buddhist temples. It is now a nationally designated Important Cultural Property. We will also visit the nearby Imoriyama, where 19 teenaged samurai killed themselves during the Boshin War. This infamous event in Japanese history has been retold in numerous movies, television shows and manga. Next, we will visit the Nissin-kan Samurai School. It was established in 1803 by the Aizu Domain for the purpose of fostering Japan's next generation of samurais. Children of samurai families entered this school at the age of ten and worked on academic studies and physical exercises to instill both physical and mental discipline. We will finish the day by visiting Tsuruga Castle. Tsuruga Castle was originally built in 1384, however, it was destroyed after the Boshin War of 1868, a rebellion against the newly formed Meiji government by Samurai still loyal to the Tokugawa Shogunate. Tsuruga Castle was one of the last strongholds of the Boshin War. The castle was rebuilt as a concrete reconstruction in the 1960s. Renovation was completed in 2011, and the color of the roof tiles was changed from grey to the original red tiles. The inside of the castle houses a museum with displays depicting the history of the castle and the Samurai lifestyle. Breakfast at the ryokan and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: 1 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 13 Travel to Ouchijuku; Ouchijuku; Travel to Kinugawa Onsen

After breakfast we will travel to Ouchijuku. Ouchijuku is a former post town along the Aizu-Nisei Kaito trade route, which connected Aizu with Nikko during the Edo Period. Restrictions set by the shogunate required travelers to make their long journeys on foot, and as a result, post towns developed along the route to provide travelers with food, accommodations and rest. Today, Ouchijuku has been restored to look as it did in the Edo Period with telephone and electrical wires buried. The unpaved main street is lined by thick thatched roof buildings which house shops, restaurants and inns. We will continue to Kinugawa Onsen. Before leaving for the day, we will be forwarding your main luggage to Tokyo. You need to prepare your luggage for 2 days and 1 night. You will travel to Kinugawa Onsen, Nikko and Tokyo with an overnight bag only. Breakfast at the ryokan and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: 3 1/2 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 14 Travel to Nikko; Nikko - Rinnoji, Toshogu Shrine, Taiyuin; Travel to Tokyo; Sayonara Dinner

After breakfast we will travel to Nikko. In the past, Nikko was a center of Shinto and Buddhist mountain worship for many centuries before Toshogu Shrine was built in the early Edo Period. Toshogu Shrine is the final resting place of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate that ruled Japan for over 250 years between the years of 1603 and 1868. The lavishly decorated shrine complex consists of more than a dozen buildings set in a beautiful forest. Countless wood carvings and large amounts of gold leaf were used to decorate the buildings in a way not seen elsewhere in Japan, where simplicity has been stressed in shrine architecture. In addition to touring Toshogu Shrine, we will also tour Rinnoji and Taiyuinbyo. Rinnoji is Nikko's most important temple, and was founded by Shodo Shonan, the Buddhist monk who introduced Buddhism to Nikko in the 8th century. The temple's main building houses 3 large, gold lacquered wooden statues of Amida, Senju-Kannon (Kannon with a thousand arms) and Bato Kannon (Kannon with a horse head). The three statues are regarded as Buddhist manifestations of Nikko's three Shinto mountain deities which are enshrined at the nearby Futarasan Shrine. Taiyuinbyo is the mausoleum of the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu, the grandson of Ieyasu. Iemitsu's lavish mausoleum complex resembles Toshogu Shrine in its layout and architecture, but it was intentionally built somewhat more modest than Toshogu, due to Iemitsu's deep respect for his grandfather. Later in the afternoon, we will travel by local train and shinkansen to Tokyo and enjoy our Sayonara dinner. Breakfast at the ryokan and lunch and dinner at local restaurants included.

Travel: 2 1/2 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 15 Return Home

It is time to say Sayonara. You will meet the sending service in the lobby of the hotel, and they will help you board the appropriate transportation to the airport. Breakfast at the hotel included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours; Walking: Light

Walking level descriptions:

Light - 0 to 2 miles on level ground

Medium - 2 to 4 miles on level ground or 0 to 2 miles on hilly ground

Heavy - 4 to 6 miles on level ground or 2 to 4 miles on hilly ground

Dates & Pricing

Dates	Price (land only) / Single Supplement (All prices are per Person)	Status
Jun 14, 2020 - Jun 28, 2020	\$4,744.00/ \$694.00	Closed
Jul 12, 2020 - Jul 26, 2020 Olympic	\$4,744.00/ \$694.00	Closed
Sep 6, 2020 - Sep 20, 2020	\$4,744.00/ \$694.00	Closed
Oct 11, 2020 - Oct 25, 2020	\$4,744.00/ \$694.00	Filling Fast! Only 4 seats left
Jun 13, 2021 - Jun 27, 2021	\$4,744.00/ \$694.00	Available
Jul 11, 2021 - Jul 25, 2021	\$4,744.00/ \$694.00	Available
Sep 5, 2021 - Sep 19, 2021	\$4,744.00/ \$694.00	Available
Oct 10, 2021 - Oct 24, 2021	\$4,744.00/ \$694.00	Available

Inclusions

- **Travel insurance from Travel Guard**, one of the world's largest travel insurance providers, will be provided to everyone from the United States. All others will receive a \$100 per person credit and will be responsible for obtaining their own travel insurance in their own home country. (The insurance provided by Samurai Tours will cover the land portion only. Insurance to cover airfare and other additional expenses is the tour member's responsibility.)
 - Exact coverage dependent on state
 - For residents of the following states please click here for your available plan. CO, FL, IN, KS, MN, MO, MT, NY, and WA
 - For all other states and the District of Columbia click here
 - **Travel Insurance Surcharge:** Depending on your age at the time the travel insurance is purchased, you may be subject to the following surcharge for your travel insurance. Travel insurance surcharges will be due at the same time as your tour deposits. (the surcharge itself is not insured)
 - Up to 69 - \$0
 - 70-74 - \$100
 - 75-79 - \$200
 - 80-84 - \$350
 - 85+ - \$550
 - **Travel Insurance Opt-Out:** If you would prefer to opt out of the travel insurance, please note this at the time of registration. You will receive a \$100 credit per person, which will be reflected on your invoice. In the event that you would need to cancel your tour, cancellation penalties may apply. See the Terms and Conditions page for the Cancellation Fees Schedule.
- Local, licensed, English-speaking, Japanese guides
- Electronic version of itinerary
- Meeting service at Tokyo's Narita Airport or Haneda Airports
- Sending service to Tokyo's Narita Airport or Haneda Airports
- For those requiring meeting or sending services on dates other than the scheduled arrival/departure dates, there will be a \$100 fee for the meeting service from the airport into Osaka or the sending service to Kansai Airport.
- Lodging for 14 nights in Japanese-style ryokans and western style hotels
- Meals
 - Japanese-style or Western-style breakfast every morning (Please Note: Some ryokans offer Japanese breakfasts only.)
 - Two Japanese-style lunches
 - Twelve Japanese-style or western style dinners
- The appropriate amount of free time to allow you to explore and discover your own personal Japan.
- All transportation costs when traveling with the group. (Transportation costs during scheduled free times are the tour member's responsibility.)
- Admission fees to the destinations and activities listed in the Tour Highlights column on the right. (Itinerary specifics subject to change)
- Sayonara dinner at the end of the tour
- Baggage transfer from Tokyo to Lake Towada (one bag only).
- Baggage transfer from Sendai to Aizu Wakamatsu (one bag only).
- Baggage transfer from Aizu Wakamatsu to Tokyo (one bag only).

Each tour member receives an electronic copy of our tour handbook. This handbook is full of tips and suggestions taken from our Japan travel experiences that allow you to better plan and prepare for your trip, and therefore enjoy your trip even more. The tips and suggestions included cover

everything from how to save while exchanging money, what to pack, some basic Japanese-language tips, general etiquette do's-and-don'ts, ryokan customs, etc.

Exclusions

- Airfare is NOT included.
- Alcoholic beverages, soft drinks and desserts are NOT included
- A printed itinerary is not included

Thank you for downloading this PDF version of our tour. Please visit our website at www.samuraitours.com/tours for the most current dates, prices and information.

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MEMBERSHIPS/ASSOCIATIONS

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