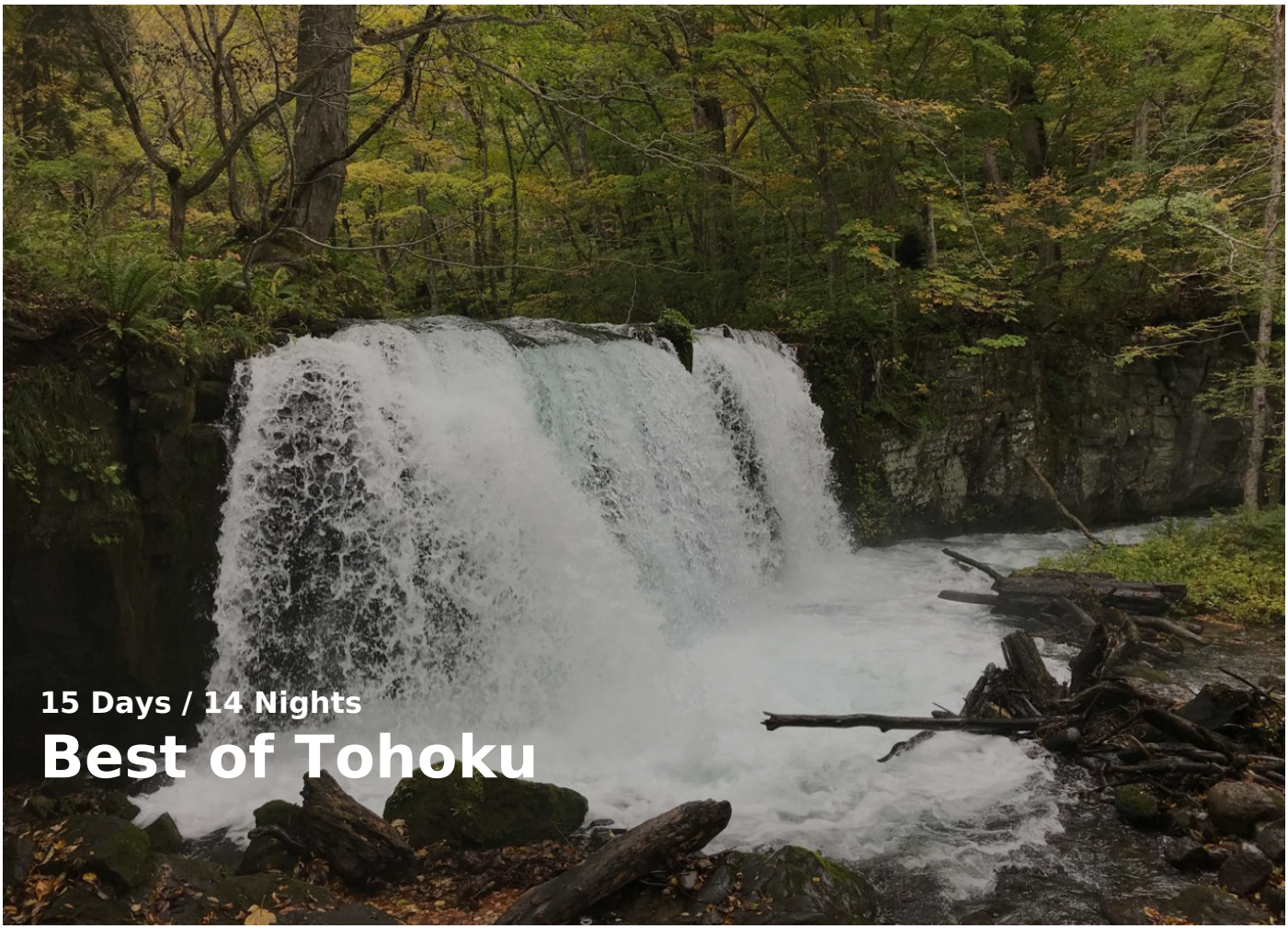
SAMURAI TOURS

Adventures in Discovering Traditional Japan

www.samuraitours.com

Best of Tohoku



15 Days / 14 Nights

Best of Tohoku

Tour Overview

The Best of Tohoku tour focuses on the area north of Tokyo. 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

Aomori, Lake Towada, Tsunagi Onsen, Kakunodate, Yamadera, Dewa Sanzan, Zao Onsen, Sendai, Matsushima, Aizu Wakamatsu,

Tour Factors

Cultural Immersion

★★★★☆

Pace

★★★★☆

Physical Activity

★★★★☆

Tour Details

You will soak in the thermally-heated waters of some of Japan’s best onsen, including 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 and Matsushima, ranked as one of the three most scenic spots in Japan.

You will visit Aizu Wakamatsu with it’s hundreds of years of Samurai history and tradition. In Aomori, you will enjoy a shamisen performance. And purchase seafood directly from the vendors at the local fish market to create your own shinsendon (seafood rice bowl).

Tour Highlights

- ✔ Tsugaru Shamisen Performance
- ✔ Walk along Oirase River
- ✔ 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 Wakamatsu

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

Aomori

Lake Towadako

Oirase River

Tsunagi Onsen

Dewa Sanzan, Hagurosan and Yudonosan

Yamadera

Zao Onsen

Sendai

Matsushima

Aizu Wakamatsu

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 Aomori, Tour Aomori

We will begin our adventure today by taking a Shinkansen (bullet train) to the city of Aomori, at the northern tip of northern Japan. There, we will begin our adventure at the Sannai Maruyama Archaeological Site. It is the largest and one of the most complete and best preserved Jomon Period (13000-300 BC) villages in Japan. Unearthed by accident while surveying land to build a community baseball field, the former Sannai Maruyama Village once included over 700 structures and dwellings including long houses, storage structures, roads, and trash and burial pits. After checking into our hotel, we will eat dinner while enjoying a Tsugaru Shamisen performance. This style of playing the Shamisen originated in the nearby Tsugaru Peninsula hundreds of years ago. Before leaving Tokyo, you will send your main luggage ahead to Lake Towada. You will need enough items for 2 days and 1 night. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at a local restaurant is included.

Travel: 4 1/2 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 3 Aomori - Nebuta Warase Museum, Furukawa Fish Market, Travel to Lake Towada

After breakfast, we will visit the Nebuta Warase Museum. The museum is dedicated to the city's famous Nebuta Matsuri, held annually in early August. The museum attempts to capture the spirit of the festival and gives visitors a taste of its lively atmosphere, history and traditions. For lunch, we will go to the Furukawa Fish Market. Here you can create your own seafood donburi (called nokkedon) from the fresh seafood sold at the market. Next, we travel to Lake Towada, where we will be staying for the night. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokans are included

Travel: 2 1/2 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 Tsunagi Onsen

You will have a free morning to enjoy the quiet and beauty of Lake Towada. In the afternoon, we will travel to Tsunagi Onsen. With a history stretching back 900 years, Tsunagi Onsen is a popular hot spring on the outskirts of Morioka. The onsen was named “Tsunagi” (tether) from when the famous samurai warrior Minamoto no Yoshiie took a bath while his horse was tied to a stone. The stone came to be known as Tsunagi Stone and can now be seen at the Tsunagi Onsen Shrine. Before leaving Lake Towada, you will send your main luggage ahead to Tsuruoka. You will need enough items for 3 days and 2 nighst. Breakfast at the ryokan and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: 3 1/2 Hours; Walking: Light

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

After breakfast, we will continue our adventure by traveling to Kakunodate. 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 musuem 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 at the hotel 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 traveling 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: 4 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 8 Travel to Churenji; Churenji; Travel to Yudonosan: Visit Yudunosan; Travel to Zao Onsen

We will start the day by traveling 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. To finish the day, we will travel 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. Before leaving Tsuruoka, you will send your main luggage ahead to Sendai. You will need enough items for 2 days and 1 night. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at the ryokan is included.

Travel: 36 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 9 Travel to Yamadera: Visit Yamadera; Travel to Sendai

We start the day by traveling to Yamadera. 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. We will finish the day by traveling to Sendai where we will stay overnight. Breakfast at the ryokan 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: 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 fuedal 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 vist 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 Matsushima - Zuiganjui, Godaido, Matsushima Bay Cruise; Overnight at Matsushima

After breakfast, we will continue our adventure by traveling 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. Later in the afternoon, you will board the boat for a cruise around Matsushima Bay. Before leaving Sendai,

you will send your main luggage ahead to Aizu Wakamatsu. You will need enough items for 2 days and 1 night. Breakfast at the hotel, lunch at a local restaurant, and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: 1 Hour; Walking: Medium

Day 12 Travel to Aizu-Wakamatsu; Aizu-Wakamatsu - Samurai Bukeyashiki; Overnight Higashiyama Onsen

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. 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: 3 1/4 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 13 Aizu-Wakamatsu - Suehiro Sake Brewery, Tsuruga Castle, Sazaedo Pagoda, Iimoriyama, Nisshinkan Samurai School

Aizu-Wakamatsu – Suehiro Sake Brewery, Tsuruga Castle, Sazaedo Pagoda, Iimoriyama, Nisshinkan Samurai School
Today we will be exploring the Samurai city of Aizu Wakamatsu. We will start at 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 Sazedo. Built in 1796, it features a double helix staircase similar to the famous Château 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 IImoriyama, 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. Before leaving for the day, you will send your main luggage ahead to Tokyo. You will need enough items for 2 days and 1 night. Breakfast at the ryokan and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours; Walking: Heavy

Day 14 Travel to Tokyo; Sayonara Dinner

We will travel by local train and shinkansen to Tokyo and enjoy our Sayonara dinner. Breakfast at the ryokan and dinner at local restaurants included.

Travel: 2 1/2 Hours; Walking: Light

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 13, 2027 - Jun 27, 2027	$6,553.89/ $891.98	Available

Add-On Tours

Our tours and tour itineraries are the best, but as the saying goes, “you can’t make everyone happy all of the time”. There may a specific destination or a specific experience you may want to include in your visit to Japan that may not be included your tour. Choose from our Add On tours to include your interests and make your Japan tour even better.

Click HERE **to view all of the Add-On Tours.**

Or, use the arrows to scroll though the recommended list of Add-On Tours for this tour.
















金龍山
門
ホテル雷門





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. FL, 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 or western style lunches
  - Eleven 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 Lake Towada to Tsuruoka (one bag only).
- Baggage transfer from Tsuruoka to Sendai (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.

Contact Samurai Tours

WEBSITE/EMAIL
www.samuraitours.com
info@samuraitours.com

USA CONTACT INFO
Toll-free: 1-866-316-SAMURAI
or 1-866-316-7268
Fax number: 720-210-5423

Samurai Tours
7900 East Union Ave, Suite 1100
Denver CO 80237

JAPAN CONTACT INFO
Call us: 075-361-7303

Samurai Tours
307 Yodokizu
Fushimi
Kyoto 613-0911 Japan

Kyoto-fu Chijitoroku Ryokogyo 3-576/
Japanese Travel Agency License:
Kyoto Prefecture #3-576

MEMBERSHIPS/ASSOCIATIONS
Better Business Bureau
American Society of Travel Agents
National Tour Association
Japan National Tourist Organization
JNTO-approved Japan Travel Specialist