

SAMURAI TOURS

Adventures in Discovering Traditional Japan

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Best of Japan Self Guided



14 Days/13 Nights

Best of Japan Self Guided

Tour Overview

More than any other country, the Japanese have managed to integrate ancient traditions and bleeding-edge technology harmoniously into their daily lives. With the perfect mix of new and old, and our most popular itinerary, the well-rounded Best of Japan Self Guided tour has something for everyone.

📍 Destinations

Tokyo, Kamakura, Hakone, Takayama, Koya-san, Osaka, Himeji, Miyajima Island, Hiroshima, Kyoto

📄Tour Details

In the best that Japan has to offer, you'll enjoy a colorful mix of large cities like Tokyo and Osaka, quaint and traditional Takayama, the religious center of Koya-san, the ancient shrines and temples of Kyoto, the testament to peace of Hiroshima, and more.

You'll stay overnight at a mountain-top Buddhist temple where Buddhist monks will serve you meals of Shojin Ryori (the traditional Buddhist vegetarian cuisine), attend prayer services at the

temple early the next morning, and much, much more. You'll visit Tokyo where the sheer energy will carry you away. From the Hakone area, you will get a view of the iconic Mt. Fuji (weather permitting).

You'll explore Takayama where the locals have managed to maintain its traditional charm and where time seems to stand still. Finally, you'll tour Kyoto. Kyoto with its Geishas dressed in their colorful kimonos and its narrow, cobblestone-paved alleys evokes the very image of Japan. A walk through Kyoto is a walk through over 1,000 years of Japanese history.

Tour Highlights

- ✔ Overnight at a Buddhist temple and attend morning prayer service
- ✔ Seven separate rides on a Shinkansen (bullet train)

Tour Inclusions

- ✔ 14 Day JR Rail Pass
- ✔ Meeting service at the arrival airport
- ✔ Baggage transfer from city to city
- ✔ Electronic version of Tour Handbook and Japanese History
- ✔ Detailed, easy-to-follow directions on how to travel between cities
- ✔ Bi-lingual maps, addresses and phone numbers for all your lodging
- ✔ English-speaking emergency contact number in Japan
- ✔ SUICA card pre-loaded with 2,500 Yen to be used on the subways in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka and the streetcars in Hiroshima
- ✔ Nankai Koya-san World Heritage Tickets (includes round-trip reserved seats on the express trains to and from Koya-san, round trip cable car tickets and bus passes on Koya-san
- ✔ Hakone Free Passes for travel in and around Hakone Yumoto Onsen

Tour Exclusions

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

Map



Tour Destinations

Tokyo

Hakone

Takayama

Koya-san

Osaka

Himeji

Miyajima Island

Hiroshima

Kyoto

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive in Tokyo

You will be welcomed at Tokyo's Narita Airport by a Samurai Tours representative who will help you with your rail pass exchange, obtain your limousine bus ticket into Tokyo, and assist with boarding the bus to your hotel in Tokyo. No meals included.

Travel: 1-1/2 Hours; Walking: Light

Day 2 Tokyo – Tokyo Tower, Ginza, Asakusa

After breakfast, the licensed, English-speaking guide will meet you in the lobby of your hotel/ryokan. The guided tour will start with traveling to Tokyo Tower. The Tokyo Tower is a communications and observation tower in the center of Tokyo. At 332.9 metres (1,092 ft), it is the second-tallest structure in Japan. The structure is an Eiffel Tower-inspired lattice tower with a main observatory at 150 meters that is reached via elevator or a 600-step staircase. Thanks to the tower's central location, the observatory offers an interesting view of the city despite being only at a relatively moderate height. Afterwards we will travel to the famous Ginza district. Ginza is recognized by many as one of the most luxurious shopping districts in the world, attracting visitors and regulars alike from across the globe. Before continuing we will stop for a Kushiage lunch (fried meat and vegetables on bamboo skewers). Next we will travel to the nearby Asakusa area. Here we will tour the Nakamise-dori, Senso-ji Buddhist Temple and the Asakusa Shrine where you will learn about Buddhist and Shinto Japanese religious practices. Breakfast at the hotel and lunch at a local restaurant include

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 3 Tokyo

Today is free to explore Tokyo. We recommend starting the day by traveling to Tsukiji Market, the world's largest fish market. It is estimated that 20% of all the fish caught in the world pass through this market. There are two parts to the Tsukiji Market- the inner market and the outer market. The inner market is for wholesale business and the outer market is for retail. There are so many more exciting places to visit in Tokyo. You may want to go shopping for that perfect souvenir, visit the Meiji Shrine dedicated to the Japanese emperor of the 19th century, or wander through the trendy Shibuya or Harajuku districts where you will more than likely see interesting and far-out fashions. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: TBD

Day 4 Travel to Kamakura; Tour Kamakura; Travel to Hakone

Before checking out, you will transfer your main luggage to Takayama, and will be traveling to Hakone and Takayama with overnight bags only. You will travel by local trains to the ancient city of Kamakura, the former capital of Japan in the 13th century. You can visit Hase-dera temple, originally established in the 8th century which houses a famous Kannon statue made from wood and gold leaf, and also has a commanding view of the nearby ocean. Next you can visit Kotokuin, the home of the famous Kamakura Great Buddha. This 40-foot tall bronze statue of Buddha, built in the 13th century is an icon of Japan. Later in the afternoon, you will travel by local trains to Hakone Yumoto onsen. Here you can rest and relax the in thermally-heated mineral waters of the bath at the ryokan. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 2 1/2 Hours

Day 5 Tour Hakone; Travel to Takayama

After checking out, you will tour the Hakone area. Hakone is famous for its natural beauty and the view of nearby Mt. Fuji (weather permitting). Be sure to stop at the Owakudani. Owakudani offers magnificent views of Mount Fuji in what is still an active volcanic region. Here at Owakudani, you will have free time to explore the thermally-heated pools and mud pots. You can try one of the "black eggs" which are eggs hard-boiled in the thermally-heated mineral waters. It is said that if you eat one of these eggs it will add seven years to your life (it is probably said by the people who sell the eggs). Late in the afternoon, you will travel by local train, bullet train and express train to Takayama. Takayama, in the middle of the Japan Alps, with its traditional inns, shops, and sake breweries, has managed to retain its traditional charm. After checking in you can enjoy dinner at one of the many restaurants specializing in Hida Beef. Hida Beef is the same thing as the more famous Kobe Beef. You will retrieve your main luggage from your hotel in Takayama. Breakfast at the ryokan is included.

Travel: 5 Hours

Day 6 Tour Takayama

We recommend starting the morning at the farmers market strolling past the vegetable stands and stalls selling herbs, pickles, and souvenirs, sampling the numerous options as you go. In the afternoon, the choices for what to do are abundant. You can explore the Takayama Jinya, visit the many temples, see numerous shrines and museums, rummage through antique shops, or relax at one of sake breweries. You may also take the bus to the Hida-no-Sato Open Air Museum with its traditional, thatched-roof homes from the surrounding area, or visit the Yatai Kaikan, a museum chronicling the famous festival held every April and October in Takayama. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: N/A

Day 7 Travel to Koya-san; Overnight at a Buddhist Temple

Before checking out, you will transfer your main luggage to Osaka. You will board an express train and Shinkansen bound for Osaka, and continue on to Koya-san by train and funicular. Koya-san is the world headquarters of the Shingon school of Esoteric Buddhism. Kobo Daishi, considered by many to be the most influential religious person in Japanese history, established a religious community here in the year 816. After checking into your shukubo (Buddhist temple lodging), you are free to roam and visit one of the 110 temples in the area, wander through the nearby ghostly cemetery at the famous Okuno-in temple, or just rest in the garden at the shukubo. Your dinner of shojin-ryori (traditional Buddhist vegetarian cuisine – no meat, fish, onions or garlic) will be served. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at the temple included.

Travel: 7 Hours

Day 8 Tour Koya-san; Travel to Osaka

Very early in the morning, you can attend o-inori (Buddhist prayer service). After the prayer service, a shojin-ryori breakfast is served. Following breakfast you can tour the Garan and Kongobu-ji Temples, or wander through the huge cemetery leading up to the Okuno-in Temple, where Kobo Daishi is buried. Many Japanese still believe that Kobo Daishi is not dead, but merely in a very advanced state of meditation, waiting to awaken at the appropriate time. In the afternoon, you will travel by funicular and train back to the city of Osaka. In the evening, you can

enjoy the famous South Osaka entertainment districts of Dotombori, Shin-Sekai and Namba. You will retrieve your main luggage from your hotel in Osaka. Breakfast at the temple is included.

Travel: 3 Hours

Day 9 Travel to Himeji; Tour Himeji; Travel to Hiroshima (optional Miyajima Island upgrade available)

Before leaving in the morning, you will transfer your main luggage to Kyoto. On your way from Osaka to Hiroshima you can tour the Himeji Castle, a significant piece of architecture from the Feudal Period. Built about 400 years ago, Himeji Castle is one of the largest and oldest original castles, and is one of only four castles designated as a national treasure and is also designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In the afternoon, you will travel by Shinkansen to Hiroshima, or you can choose to upgrade to the Miyajima Island option and travel by ferry across the bay where you will stay on the island. Breakfast at the hotel is included (dinner at the ryokan included for the upgrade option).

Travel: 3 Hours

Day 10 Tour Miyajima Island

Today you will visit Miyajima Island, considered by the Japanese to be one of the three most beautiful spots in Japan. You can ride the cable car to the top of the mountain on Miyajima Island, visit the Itsukushima-jinja shrine which was built in its present form in 1168, or just take in the beauty and ambiance of Miyajima Island while enjoying grilled oysters, the island's specialty. Breakfast at the hotel/ryokan included.

Travel: TBD

Day 11 Tour Hiroshima; Travel to Kyoto

In the morning you can tour the Peace Memorial Museum and the Peace Memorial Park, both sobering testaments to the dropping of the A-bomb on August 6, 1945. In the afternoon, you will travel by Shinkansen (bullet train) to the city of Kyoto. For many, just the name of Kyoto conjures up the classic images of Japan: streets of traditional wooden houses, the click-clack of geta (wooden sandals) on the paving stones, geisha in a flourish of brightly colored silks, and a tea master warming water and making tea. You will retrieve your main luggage from the hotel in Kyoto. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 3 Hours

Day 12 Tour Kyoto

Today is free to explore Kyoto on your own. Steeped in history and tradition, Kyoto has in many ways been the cradle of Japanese culture. A stroll through Kyoto today is a walk through 11 centuries of Japanese history. Here you can visit Kinkaku-ji. Kinkaku-ji, also known as the Golden Pavilion, is one of Kyoto's, as well as Japan's, most recognizable attractions. The gleaming building covered in gold leaf seems to float on the aptly named Mirror Pond, especially on a sunny day. If you would like, visit Nijo Castle next. Built in 1603, it was the Kyoto home of Tokugawa Ieayasu, the first Tokugawa Shogun. The ostentatious style of construction was intended as a demonstration of Ieyasu's prestige, and to signal the demise of the emperor's power. The finest artists of the day filled the castle with delicate transom woodcarvings and paintings by the Kano School on sliding doors. One of the castle's most intriguing features is the so-called "nightingale" floors. To protect the Shogun from real or imagined enemies, these floorboards creak when stepped on. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: N/A

Day 13 Tour Kyoto

Today we suggest you travel by train to the nearby city of Fushimi, one of the largest sake producing regions of Japan. Here you can visit the Fushimi Inari shrine. This Shinto Shrine, established in the 8th century, is famous for the long tunnels of vermilion torii gates straddling a network of trails leading to the top of the heavily forested Mt. Inari. Next, you can visit the famous Kiyomizu-dera temple. Kiyomizu-dera literally translates to “Pure Water Temple”. For centuries, visitors and pilgrims have climbed the hill to the temple standing on a steep hillside with fine views of the city of Kyoto. Supported by 139 pillars, the temple juts out over the valley. Finding the courage to set out on a daring, new adventure is likened to “taking a leap from the veranda of Kiyomizu”. From Kiyomizu, you can walk through the Higashiyama District of Kyoto. This area of narrow, cobblestone alleys with its numerous shops and restaurants is truly enjoyable and relaxing. Next, walk to the famous Gion Geisha District. Here, you will see where the Geisha live and work. You may even see one on their way to one of their appointments. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: N/A

Day 14 Return Home

It’s time to say “sayonara” (goodbye) to Japan. You will take the express train to the Kansai International Airport (Osaka), or return to Narita Airport (Tokyo) by Shinkansen and express train for your flight back home (if you are flying out of Narita Airport, be sure to schedule a flight after 15:00) If you sent your luggage ahead, you will need to retrieve the luggage in the Departure lobby of the airport. Breakfast at the ryokan included.

Travel: 4 Hours

Dates & Pricing

Low Season-
$3,742.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)
January 6 – February 28
June 16 – August 10
August 19 – August 31
November 16 – December 24

Regular Season-
$3,994.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)
March 1 – March 16
May 7 – June 15
September 1 – October 14

Peak Season-
$4,275.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)
March 17 – May 6 (Cherry Blossom & Golden Week)
August 11 – August 18 (Obon Holiday)
October 15 – November 15 (Fall Foliage)
December 25 – January 5 (New Years)

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.












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Inclusions

- Accommodations in 3 Star hotels or ryokans including all taxes, fees and breakfast every morning (contact us about accommodation upgrades)
- Tokyo: Western-style hotel such as Shinagawa Prince Hotel
- Hakone Yumoto: Japanese-style ryokan such as Hakone Tenseien
- Takayama: Modern Japanese-style hotel such as Takayama Ouan
- Koya-san: Japanese-style Buddhist Temple such as Shojoshinin Temple
- Osaka: Western-style hotel such as Cross Hotel Osaka
- Hiroshima: Western-style hotel such as Hotel New Hiroden
- Kyoto: Western-style hotel such as Kyoto Hatoya Hotel

- Detailed, easy-to-follow directions on how to travel between cities
- Bi-lingual maps, addresses and phone numbers for all your lodging
- 14 Day Ordinary Car JR Rail Pass
- English-speaking emergency contact number in Japan
- Meeting service at the airport (for Narita Airport arrivals only)
- Airport transfers
- 8 Hours of guiding service from a licensed, English-speaking guide
- Suggested train schedules including train schedules for 2 hours prior and 2 hours after the suggested time to allow you to choose your own times
- SUICA card pre-loaded with 2,500 Yen to be used on the subways in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka and the streetcars in Hiroshima (2,500 Yen will allow as many as 7 or 8 trips depending on the length of the trips)
- Nankai Koya-san World Heritage Tickets (includes round-trip reserved seats on the express trains to and from Koya-san, round trip cable car tickets and bus passes on Koya-san
- Hakone Free Passes for travel in and around Hakone Yumoto Onsen
- Breakfast every day
- Electronic version of itinerary
- A copy of our “Gaijin on Getas” tour handbook (this is the same popular handbook our escorted tour members receive) which contains 180 pages of Japan travel tips, Japanese language tips, Japanese customs and etiquette and Japanese history to prepare you properly for your trip and allow you to enjoy Japan even more once you arrive
- Baggage transfer forms (we will provide the necessary forms in Japanese to transfer your main baggage ahead, allowing you the freedom of traveling light. Baggage transfers take one full day and night, so you will travel with an overnight bag. The actual transfer fees are not included and will be paid by you at the time of transfer. These fees normally run between 1,250 Yen and 2,500 Yen)

What’s Not Included

- Airfare is not included
- Local transportation (subways, buses, taxis, etc.)
- All admission fees
- Lunches and dinners (except where noted)
- Desserts at any included meals (except where noted)
- Drinks other than water and tea at any included meals (except where noted)
- A printed itinerary is not included

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