SAMURAI TOURS

Adventures in Discovering Traditional Japan

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Best of Central Japan Self Guided

13 Days/12 Nights

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Tour Overview

Between the imperial city of Kyoto, and the shogun’s city of Tokyo, lies Central Japan. The Central Japan Self Guided tour epitomizes the extremes and contradictions of Japan today. The densely populated coastal belt city of Tokyo is a stark contrast with the beautiful natural scenery of the mountainous central area. Though readily accessible, central Japan is still remote enough to have retained traditional lifestyles and architecture.

📍 Destinations

Tokyo, Kamakura, Hakone, Takayama, Shirakawago, Kanazawa, Hiroshima, Miyajima Island, Kyoto

Tour Details

In the best that Japan has to offer you’ll enjoy a colorful mix of historical beauty and modern excitement. Experience large cities like Tokyo, complimented by quaint and traditional Takayama and Shirakawa-go. You’ll also enjoy the ambiance and solitude of Miyajima Island, the ancient shrines and temples of Kyoto, the testament to peace of Hiroshima, and the natural beauty of Hakone, and much more!

Tour Highlights	✔ Shirakawago - A UNESCO World Heritage Site ✔ Kanazawa ✔ Five 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 ✔ SUCIA card pre-loaded with 2,500 Yen to be used on the subways in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, and the streetcars in Hiroshima ✔ 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
Kamakura
Hakone
Takayama
Shirakawago
Kanazawa
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

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 included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours; Walking: Medium

Day 3 Tokyo

We recommend starting the day by traveling to Tsukiji Outer Market. Or, 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 can 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 Takayama, Shirakawa-go, Kanazawa

After breakfast, you will take a highway bus to the valley of Shirakawa-go. Shirakawa-go is the home of many Gassho-zukuri (Praying Hand) style homes, which have been moved there from the surrounding area. These homes were first used as far back as the 18th century and are still being used today. You can tour the open-air museum where you can explore 25 of these traditional farmhouses, or just enjoy the small village atmosphere of Shirakawa-go. In the afternoon you will take another bus to the city of Kanazawa. Kanazawa, located on the northern coast of Japan, was once controlled by one of the wealthiest families in Japan, the Maeda Clan. They were admirers and sponsors of many traditional arts, and these arts flourished under their sponsorship. Many of these arts are still being practiced today in Kanazawa. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 3 Hours

Day 8 Kanazawa

We recommend starting your day touring the Kenrokuen Garden. This garden is considered to be one of the three best gardens in Japan and was initially constructed in the 17th century. After enjoying the garden, you can tour the Kanazawa Handicrafts Museum to learn how the local Kanazawa handicrafts are made, then venture to the Naga-machi Samurai District. This area of Kanazawa, located at the foot of Kanazawa Castle, was the residential district for the samurai serving the castle. The area preserves a historic atmosphere with its remaining samurai residences, earthen walls, private entrance gates, narrow lanes and water canals. Here, you can also tour the Nomura House. The Nomura family was a high-ranking retainer for the Maeda family. Breakfast at the hotel and lunch at a local restaurant are included.

Travel: N/A

Day 9 Kanazawa, Hiroshima

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: 4 Hours

Day 10 Tour Miyajima Island

Today you will visit Miyajima Island, considered by the Japanese to be one of the 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: 1 Hour

Day 11 Hiroshima; Kyoto

Today 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. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 2 Hours

Day 12 Kyoto

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 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, you can 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 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).

Travel: 4 Hours

Dates & Pricing

Low Season-
¥545,495 (per person, based on double occupancy)
January 6 – February 28
June 16 – August 10
August 19 – August 31
November 16 – December 24

Regular Season-
¥587,614 (per person, based on double occupancy)
March 1 – March 16
May 7 – June 15
September 1 – October 14

Peak Season-
¥627,689 (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
  - Kanazawa: Western-style hotel such as Dormy Inn Kanazawa
  - 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
- Nohi Bus tickets to Shirakawago and Kanazawa
- 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
- SUCIA 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)
- 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
- Baggage transfer 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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