

SAMURAI TOURS

Adventures in Discovering Traditional Japan

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Best of Kyoto and Beyond Self Guided



Tour Overview

Experience more of Kyoto on the Best of Kyoto and Beyond Self Guided Tour. 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.

📍 Destinations

Kyoto, Himeji , Nara

Tour Details

Kyoto is endowed with an almost overwhelming legacy of ancient Buddhist temples, majestic palaces, and gardens of every size and description. 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 deliberately warming water and making tea.

You may even meet a “maiko” (geisha-in-training) face-to-face, climb to the top of a Samurai castle, participate in an authentic tea ceremony, copy a Buddhist Sutra in the middle of one of the

most beautiful gardens in Japan, marvel at the world’s largest bronze Buddha statue built in the 8th century, and much, much more.

Tour Highlights	✔ Ginza ✔ Akihabara ✔ Hakone ✔ Nikko ✔ Kamakura
Tour Inclusions	✔ Meeting service at the arrival airport ✔ Electronic version of Tour Handbook and Japanese History ✔ Bi-lingual maps, addresses and phone numbers for all your lodging ✔ English-speaking emergency contact number in Japan
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

Kyoto
Himeji
Nara

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive in Osaka

After clearing customs and immigrations, you will check in at the MK Taxi counter where you will travel by shuttle to your Kyoto hotel. No meals are included.

Travel: TBD

Day 2 Tour Kyoto with a Guide

After breakfast, you will meet the licensed, English-speaking guide in the lobby of the hotel. We will start the day by touring Ryoan-ji, a famous Zen temple belonging to the Myoshin-ji school of Buddhism. The garden consists of a rectangular plot of pebbles surrounded by low earthen walls, with 15 rocks laid out in small groups on patches of moss. An interesting feature of the garden's design is that from any vantage point at least one of the rocks is always hidden from the viewer. Next we will 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. Following lunch, we will participate in an authentic tea ceremony. The regimented discipline of the tea ceremony has been practiced for more than 400 years, and at one time was considered mandatory for Samurai as an aid to train the mind. You will even have an opportunity to make your own tea. To finish the tour we will visit Nijo Castle. 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: 1 Hour

Day 3 Fushimi Inari

After breakfast, we recommend taking the 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. Nearby you can travel to the Higashiyama District. This area of narrow, cobblestone alleys with its temples, shrines, numerous shops and restaurants is truly enjoyable and relaxing, and is a great place to stop for lunch. The rest of the day can be spent exploring other areas of Kyoto such as the Gion Shrine or the Gion Geisha District. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 1 Hour

Day 4 Arashiyama

Today would be a great day to travel by train to the nearby town of Arashiyama. Once a favorite relaxation spot of the Emperors, Arashiyama is located on the hillsides bordering the banks of the Katsura River northwest of Kyoto. You can visit the bamboo gardens which Arashiyama is famous for, located just outside the north gate of Tenryu-ji. This dense bamboo forest with its rows upon rows of long, ringed, smooth stems, provides a feeling of composure and tranquility. The sound of the wind blowing through the bamboo, the stems knocking against each other, and the rustling of

the leaves is revered in Japan. Next, you can visit Tenryu-ji Temple. Tenryu-ji is part of the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism, and was originally built in 1339 on the former site of Emperor Go-Daigo's villa. A priest once had a dream of a dragon rising from the nearby river, hence the name which means "Heavenly Dragon". The garden represents a transition between earlier pond gardens and the karesansui (dry landscape) gardens that later became popular in Zen temples. The focus of the garden is a pond that lies at the base of the hills rising to Mount Arashi, which is incorporated in to the design of the garden in the earliest known example of borrowed scenery (shakkei). At the far end of the pond are two rock groupings. These rock groupings are orientated on a vertical alignment, which was a departure from the horizontal alignments in earlier gardens. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 2 Hours

Day 5 Himeji

Today you will take a Shinkansen (bullet train) to the nearby city of Himeji. Himeji Castle, also known as White Heron Castle due to its elegant, white appearance, is widely considered Japan's most spectacular castle for its imposing size and beauty and its well preserved, complex castle grounds. The castle is both a national treasure and a world heritage site. Unlike many other Japanese castles, it was never destroyed by war, earthquake or fire, and survives to this day as one of the country's twelve original castles. The castle recently underwent extensive renovation over several years and was fully re-opened to the public in March 2015. Himeji Castle lies in a strategic point along the western approach to the former capital city of Kyoto. The first fortifications built on the site were completed in the 1400s, and were gradually enlarged over the centuries by the various clans who ruled over the region. The castle complex as it survives today is over 400 years old and was completed in 1609. It comprises over eighty buildings spread across multiple baileys, which are connected by a series of gates and winding paths. After touring the castle, you can visit the nearby Kokoen Garden. Kokoen is a relatively recently constructed Japanese style garden, which was opened in 1992 on the former site of of the feudal lord's west residence (Nishi-Oyashiki). It consists of nine separate, walled gardens designed in various styles of the Edo Period. Among these gardens is the garden of the lord's residence which features a pond with a waterfall, a tea garden where visitors can enjoy green tea in a tea ceremony house, a pine tree garden, a bamboo garden, and a flower garden. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 2 Hours

Day 6 Nara

Today you can take a train to the original capital of Japan, Nara. Nara was the capital of Japan in the 8th century before it was moved to Kyoto. We recommend beginning your visit at the Kasuga Shrine. This shrine was first established in the 8th century, and was completely rebuilt every 20 years according to Shinto tradition until the 19th century. There are thousands of stone lanterns lining the entrance to the shrine. You can even walk through Nara Park on your way to Todai-ji where you will run into the famous Nara deer. These deer have been here since the 7th century, and roam at their free will protected by Buddhist traditions. Todai-ji is the largest wooden building in the world, and houses the world's largest bronze statue of Buddha. In the late afternoon, we recommend traveling back to Kyoto to the Gion Geisha district where you can walk around and see where the Geisha and Maiko live and work. You may even see one on their way to an appointment. Breakfast at the hotel included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours

Day 7 Kyoto

Today is a totally free day to discover Kyoto on your own. You can visit Daitoku-ji, a temple

including an extensive complex of 24 subtemples belonging to the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism. The original temple was established in 1319, but fires during the Onin Civil War destroyed all of the buildings. Most of the buildings you see today were built under the patronage of Toyotomi Hideyoshi in the late 16th century. A few of the subtemples are open to the public, and certainly worth seeing. Later you can visit Ginkaku-ji, also known as the Silver Pavilion. It was built in 1474 by the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa, who sought to emulate the golden Kinkaku-ji commissioned by his grandfather Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. Like
Kinkaku-ji, Ginkaku-ji was originally built to serve as a place of rest and solitude for the Shogun. We also recommend visiting Kiyomizu-dera, literally translating to “Pure Water Temple”. For centuries visitors and pilgrims have climbed the hill to Kiyomizu-dera standing on a steep hillside with fine views of the city. Supported in part 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”. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: TBBD

Day 8 Sayonara

It’s time to say “sayonara” (goodbye) to Japan. You will take the express train to the Kansai International Airport (Osaka), or travel 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: TBD

Dates & Pricing

Low Season-
$2,399.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)

January 6 – February 28
June 16 – August 10
August 19 – August 31
November 16 – December 24

Regular Season-
$2,669.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)

March 1 – March 16
May 7 – June 15
September 1 – October 14

Peak Season-
$2,936.00 (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 hotel including all taxes, fees and breakfast every morning (contact us regarding accommodation upgrades)
  - Kyoto: Western-style hotel such as Dormy Inn Kyoto

- Detailed, easy-to-follow directions on how to travel between cities
- Bi-lingual maps, addresses and phone numbers for all your lodging
- Reserved seat reservations instructions for tickets on the following segments:
  - Shinkansen to and from Himeji
  - Express train from Kyoto to Kansai Airport
- English-speaking emergency contact number in Japan
- MK Shuttle from Kansai Airport to Kyoto hotel
- 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 for local trains/subways/buses around Kyoto
- 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 after you arrive.

What’s Not Included

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

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