

## JAPAN – TOKYO, KYOTO, NARA & THE NAKASENDO PATH

11-days / 10-nights guided sightseeing & walking tour with optional extension to Hiroshima



This magical journey through Japan takes us from the bustling streets of Tokyo through rural Japan and along the historic Nakasendo Path to the historic capital of Kyoto, with a stay in Nara. Experience the ultramodern Japan of today, combined with ancient Japanese traditions in this fascinating country.

As well as many of the 'must-see' highlights, we explore parts of Japan seldom visited by tourists – the hot springs and onsens of Nagano and the small post-towns and villages on the 'road through the middle mountains'. Our multi-day walk on part of the Nakasendo Path offers lovely mountain scenery in the Japan Alps, and we stay in traditional inns (ryokan) and guesthouses (minshuku) for a taste of traditional Japan.

### Highlights:

- Walk on the historic Nakasendo Path through the Japan Alps
- Explore the gardens and shrines of ancient Kyoto
- UNESCO World Heritage temples and shrines of historic Nara
- See the modern side of Japan in Tokyo and Kyoto
- Stay in ryokan and minshuku, traditional Japanese inns and guesthouses, for an authentic experience
- Try delicious and varied Japanese food

**Dates:** 8<sup>th</sup> April, 13<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> May, 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 14<sup>th</sup> October, 2020

**Cost from:** \$9,985 per person twin share. Single room supplement on request, only available in city hotels

**Includes:** 10 nights' of comfortable 3 or 4-star accommodation in en-suite rooms (except in ryokan and minshuku, which usually have shared facilities), meals as per the itinerary, full program of guided walks led by an experienced local leader, sightseeing and entrance fees, travel by coach/minivan, train and public transport, tips/gratuities

**Not included:** International flights, other meals, drinks, visa or passport charges, personal expenses.

**Grading:** Easy to Moderate, a mixture of part-day walks, moderate trails and city sightseeing. Walking over easy to moderate terrain, ranging from level countryside paths to trails of up to 8km with 510m of ascent. Days on the Nakasendo Path are unhurried with plenty of time to enjoy the scenery.

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## Suggested itinerary:

**Day 1: Arrive in Tokyo.** Afternoon arrival and transfer to our accommodation in central Tokyo (2 nights). There will be some free time to explore before a welcome dinner. (D)

**Day 2: Tokyo** – We have a full-day guided walking tour of Tokyo, which is a huge metropolis with many different districts, each with their own individual character. From the ultra-modern neon lights and skyscrapers and to historic temples, gardens and shrines, our guided walk gives us an insight into Japanese life. (B,D)

**Day 3: Yudanaka Onsen and the ‘snow monkeys’** – Journey from Tokyo into rural Japan to the traditional hot spring village nestled in the mountains of Nagano. A short walk takes us to visit the ‘snow monkeys’, bathing in the hot springs. The monkeys started coming to warm themselves in the outdoor springs here around fifty years ago, and a local lodge owner built them their own bath after feeling sorry for them during the cold winters. Our accommodation in nearby Yudanaka, in a long-established ryokan, has its own natural hot springs (humans only!), where you can relax this evening. (B,D)

**Day 4: The Nakasendo Path** – Over the next two days we walk in the remote Kiso valley, exploring rural Japan, an area of the country that few overseas visitors reach. We walk from village to village and stay by night in a small, family-run country guesthouse (minshuku). We carry our overnight items in a small daypack, while our luggage is taken ahead to Kyoto. We start near Midono, one of the 11 ‘post-towns’ along the Kiso valley section of the Nakasendo, at Nagiso. Post-towns were resting places, where travellers could find accommodation as they walked between Kyoto and Edo (now Tokyo). In days past this route was used by traders, feudal lords, and samurai as they made their way to and from the imperial capital. We walk to Tsumago, a charming post-town which has been restored over the last forty years by its residents. We stay in an authentic minshuku, a family-run guesthouse, in Tsumago or the nearby village O-Tsumago. (B,D)

**Day 5: Nakasendo Path** – A lovely walk today from Tsumago, past fields and houses, through forest and over the Magome Pass, to the sleepy village of Magome. We then continue on by bus, train and shinkansen (bullet train) to Kyoto, where we are reunited with our luggage. We stay four nights in Kyoto. (B,D)

**Day 6: Kyoto** – Kyoto, the western end of the Nakasendo Way, was the capital of Japan from the 8<sup>th</sup> Century until 1868 when the capital was moved to Edo (now Tokyo). It was not bombed as heavily during WWII as other parts of Japan so it has retained more of its historic buildings and gardens. In the morning, we stroll the ‘Philosopher’s Path’, a delightful walk beside a canal lined with cherry trees in eastern Kyoto, then in the afternoon we walk in Gion, Kyoto’s geisha district, where there is always the possibility of seeing a geisha or maiko (apprentice geisha) making their way through the narrow streets. (B,L, D)

**Day 7: Kyoto** – In the morning we visit the Myoshin-ji temple complex, a real ‘hidden gem’ of Kyoto, then Kinkaku-ji, the Golden Pavilion, surrounded by a Japanese garden, which was originally built by the Ashikaga Shogun at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. We also visit Ryoan-ji to see its famous Zen rock garden of gravel and boulders – if you can see all fifteen boulders at one time then you have achieved enlightenment! (B,D)

**Day 8: Kyoto** – Free day to explore Kyoto. Your guide can suggest places to visit, such as Nijo Castle, the former residence of the Shogun, or Kiyomizu Temple with its wonderful view of Kyoto. (B)

**Day 9: Nara** – We send our luggage ahead and travel by train to Nara, Japan’s first permanent capital. Established in 710 and known as Heijo, Nara abounds in cultural heritage – it is home to a number of stunning UNESCO World Heritage temples and shrines - and easy access to wonderful nature. We’ll explore the town and visit the UNESCO-listed Todaiji Temple, with its enormous bronze Buddha, and the wooden temple building is the largest of its kind – even though its current structure is only a fraction of its original size.

We also spend some time in Nara Park, where tame deer – seen as messengers from the gods – wander freely and walk at Wakakusayama. If time permits, we'll walk the approach to Kasuga Taisha or we may visit the Naramachi district, where we can see craftspeople producing traditional items. (B,D)

**Day 10: Nara** – Today we explore the area around Nara with a 10km walk along a section of one of Japan's oldest roads. Celebrated in the Nihon-shoki – the ancient histories of Japan, similar to the Domesday Book – the Yamanobe no-Michi Trail skirts the mountains and meanders through villages and past ancient temples and shrines. Walking on a mixture of paved and dirt trails and village roads, we'll take a step back into another element of Japan's fascinating heritage. We return to the hotel, before a final dinner together. (B,D)

**Day 11: Departure day** - Morning coach transfer from Nara to Osaka Kansai Airport where the tour ends. (B)

**Optional extension to Hiroshima & Miyajima (at extra cost – ask for details):** If you only plan to visit Japan once in your life, we highly recommend adding this extension to your Japan holiday. It offers you the chance to visit an iconic place, not only in Japanese but also world history; and contrast this sombre and moving experience with a visit to a location rich in cultural heritage and opportunities for quiet reflection. Largely destroyed by an atomic bomb during World War II, Hiroshima is now home to a poignant memorial to this event. Miyajima – or Itsukushima – is a small island in Hiroshima Bay known for its forests, ancient temples and the giant Great Torii Gate which appears to float on the waters.

**Included in Hiroshima & Miyajima extension:** 2 nights in western style hotels, meals as listed in the itinerary, guide services, entrance fees, travel by coach, train and public transport, tips/gratuities.

**Day 11:** Travel from Nara to Hiroshima on both local and Shinkansen trains. There'll be time for lunch on arrival in Hiroshima, before you'll travel by tram with your guide to the Peace Park and Museum, to see the area's monuments, including the A-Bomb dome, the Children's Memorial and the Cenotaph. Following this tour, your guide will accompany you to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and give you an introduction before allowing you to explore and experience the museum independently. We'll then transfer to the hotel – it may be that we walk there – accompanied by the guide. Dinner tonight will be in a local restaurant. (B,D)

**Day 12:** Following breakfast, we'll depart Hiroshima for a visit of Miyajima Island. On arrival, stroll along the waterfront where you can view the Great Torii and get an introduction to the town and the Itsukushima Shrine. As in Nara, there are several free roaming deer on the island. For fantastic views over the Seto Inland Sea, we'll ascend by ropeway to a viewpoint overlooking the sea. Returning via the ropeway to the town, there'll be time to stroll through the streets on the way back to the ferry. Depart mid-afternoon and then travel by train to our hotel near Osaka Kansai airport, arriving early evening. Enjoy a final dinner together this evening. (B,L,D)

**Day 13: Tour ends after breakfast.**



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**Contact Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations:**

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