

Day 1: Arrive in Tokyo

Upon arrival at one of Tokyo's two international airports, you will be met and escorted to Tokyo, a metropolis like no other in the world.

Stay: Mandarin Oriental or Aman

Our Japanese guides will accompany you on your journey throughout Japan. Our guides are among the best anywhere in the world. They are experienced, knowledgeable, engaging and flexible. They understand that this is your trip and will do everything possible to accommodate your specific interests and wishes. We cannot begin to tell you how many times our clients have called us upon their return from Japan to tell us how much they loved being with their guide.

In each destination, we will introduce you to local experts that we have cultivated relationships with for years so you can get you close to the real culture of Japan, meeting some fascinating people along the way. To experience Japan, we encourage you to interact with Japanese as often as possible who will share their kindness, knowledge, and unique ways of a country steeped in strong traditions. We offer a myriad of special experiences across the country, a small sampling of which is illustrated within this itinerary.

From little known neighborhood restaurants serving exquisite Japanese

cuisine, to world-renowned French and Italian restaurants, Japan offers the finest selection of indigenous and international dining experiences in the world. Access to the smaller, quintessential local restaurants – which often serve the finest Japanese food and sake – is often difficult (if not impossible) unless one speaks Japanese. Our wealth of experience in Japan however has provided us with a network of restaurants, where chefs will treat our customers as if they are regular clientele – thereby allowing you to experience Japanese cuisine at its finest.

Day 2: Tokyo

Discover Tsukiji Outer Market, a mixture of wholesale and retail shops along with numerous restaurants lining the streets and where new culinary trends are born. Try some of its street foods as you explore the market.

A short distance from Tsukiji lies Hamarikyū Garden, a vista of delicately shaped pine trees and tea houses that greet the eyes as you walk inside. An atmosphere of dignity and refinement seems to pervade the air as might be expected of the former garden of a *daimyo*.

Head to the Asakusa district and Senso-ji Temple, in the very heart of Shitamachi, Tokyo's old merchant district. Asakusa remains Tokyo's most colorful and traditional neighborhood, with a fun atmosphere and many food stalls preparing *senbei*, traditional and delicious rice crackers, and many varieties of Japanese sweets.

Learn about sushi-making with a top sushi chef at his private restaurant as you dine on a delicious sushi lunch. During the meal, you may try your hand at creating exquisite sushi or spend time with a well-known cooking instructor at her home for a late afternoon to learn the art of Japanese cooking, enjoying a wonderful meal and delightful conversation.

Explore Tennozu Isle, fast becoming a destination for contemporary art and design including the Terrada Art Complex, a constellation of artist studios, galleries, and an art warehouse or venture to the MORI Building Digital Art Museum: teamLab Borderless, a group of artworks that form one borderless world.

Stay: Mandarin Oriental or Aman

Day 3: Tokyo

Stroll through the beautiful wooded grounds of Meiji Shrine, Tokyo's premier Shinto shrine and forested area. Nowhere can the blend of modern and traditional that make up Tokyo today be better seen than in the juxtaposition of the Meiji Shrine to nearby fashionable Aoyama district.

While in the Aoyama area, a professional architect will curate and explain some of Tokyo's fabulous contemporary architecture that is particularly pronounced in this area. Omotesando is a prime location for haute couture

brands and architecturally ambitious buildings with many side streets that are fun to explore.

Nearby Omotesando lies one of the city's unique treasures, Nezu Art Museum with its vast rotating collection of Japanese and East Asian art. You will be intrigued by Nezu's exquisite Japanese garden replete with stepping stones, tea houses and an extensive collection of stone lanterns perfectly placed throughout the colorful fauna.

Wander through the quaint local neighborhood of Azabu Juban and enjoy its lovely shopping street, giving you a taste of a resident's everyday life. Stop by some local shops and even a grocery store to see the different foods available.

Meander around the Imperial Palace grounds, where their Majesties the Emperor and Empress reside. The palace, surrounded by a water-filled moat with tree-covered grounds, is a precious taste of nature within Tokyo.

This evening, dine in the Ginza with its many side streets filled with shops, amazing restaurants and some of the most exquisitely displayed goods anywhere in the world.

Stay: Mandarin Oriental or Aman

Day 4: Kanazawa and Yamashiro Onsen

Whisk away on the *Shinkansen*, Japan's bullet train, to Kanazawa (literally, "marsh of gold") in Western Japan. Once governed by the Maeda clan, great patrons of the arts, Kanazawa developed a rich heritage that is reflected in its well-preserved Geisha and Samurai quarters, beautiful gardens, and its distinctive arts, including pottery, lacquerware and gold leaf.

Meander through one of Japan's few remaining samurai neighborhoods, Nagamachi, and visit the Nagamachi Samurai Residence. Wander through Kanazawa's renowned Omicho Market with shops that specialize in foods from this seacoast town and check out its world-class Wajima lacquerware. Wander through Kenroku-en Garden, one of the top three stroll gardens in Japan, before visiting the majestic Seisonkaku Villa.

End your day in Higashi Chaya, the largest of Kanazawa's remaining Geisha districts, to visit a historic *ochaya* (tea house). Afterward, you will transfer to your ryokan in Yamashiro Onsen, just south of the city. A ryokan (or Japanese inn) stay is a quintessential Japanese experience of ultimate *omotenashi* or hospitality. Imagine being greeted at a curtained entrance by a kimono-clad lady who will first request that you remove your shoes before stepping on soft tatami-matted floors and be escorted through a Zen-like atmosphere to your room to enjoy matcha green tea and a soak in your private hot spring bath before dinner.

Dress in the comfort of a *yukata* or cotton robe while you feast on a *kaiseki* dinner of 12 or more courses that is presented for the eyes first then the palette.

Stay: Araya Totoan or Beniya Mukayu

Day 5: Yamashiro Onsen and Shirakawa-go

Relax this morning in natural hot spring baths, then visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Shirakawa-go, a cluster of hamlets over 800 years old nestled in a valley in the Japanese Alps. Stop in Ogimachi with its nearly sixty *gassho tsukuri*, or thatched roof farmhouses, standing amid vegetable gardens and paddy fields.

After, enjoy an exclusive private visit to one of the world's most famous *taiko* drum makers where you can see how these magnificent instruments are crafted. You may also see a professional taiko drummer rehearsing, and will have an opportunity to try beating the mighty drums yourselves.

Stay: Araya Totoan or Beniya Mukayu

Day 6: Kyoto

Board a train to Kyoto, Japan's former capital sprawling with imperial properties and Zen temples. Upon arrival, discover Kiyomizudera, a magnificent seven pavilion temple built on different levels of the Higashiyama hillside then explore the fun and colorful area around Ninen-zaka and Sannen-zaka, a pair of pedestrian-only lanes that make for some of the most atmospheric strolling in the whole city. Take a short walk to a beautiful temple where you will enjoy a private tea ceremony with a tea master.

Stroll through the Shijo-Kawaramachi District and its traditional shops selling local foods and crafts. Your walk will end at Yasaka Shrine, located at the epicenter of Gion, the city's Geisha district and considered to be one of the most delightful downtown areas in Japan. The streets boast of stores selling traditional Kyoto crafts and maybe you will catch a glimpse of an elegant *maiko* or apprentice Geisha who can often be seen strolling through the area.

Stay: The Ritz-Carlton or Park Hyatt

Day 7: Kyoto

Explore Nijo Castle, a magnificent early Edo castle. Outside of the castle extends the Ninomaru Garden, a traditional Japanese landscape garden with a large pond, ornamental stones and manicured pine trees. Following,

participate in a private Zen session with a Buddhist monk while contemplating a beautiful and tranquil Zen garden, followed by a private walk-through of the temple.

Head to Kinkakuji, the famous Temple of the Golden Pavilion. Experience Ryoanji, a beautiful and tranquil fifteenth century rock garden, before exploring Nishiki-koji Market often referred to as 'Kyoto's Kitchen' where hundreds of vendors have their stalls selling colorful foods and goods. Taste special Japanese delicacies, vegetables, fresh fish, dry goods, pickles, and sweets.

Stay: The Ritz-Carlton or Park Hyatt

Day 8: Kyoto

Head to the rural and wooded area of northwest Kyoto and discover Gio-ji Temple, one of the finest sights in Arashiyama. Gio-ji's simple thatched-roof main hall overlooks a landscape of luxurious moss.

Enjoy your time in Arashiyama, including the surreal Sagano Bamboo Forest. Visit Tenryu-ji (Heavenly Dragon Temple) and its splendid garden. In the autumn, see a colorful array of beautiful maples or cherry trees lining the Hozugawa river during spring.

Explore Okochi Sanso Villa, the former villa of the popular actor Okochi Denjiro

with several beautiful gardens, buildings and panoramic views of Kyoto. Expand your knowledge of sake and visit a Kyoto-based micro-brewery to learn how sake is made. You will also have the opportunity to sample some of their delicious products in a private tasting.

Attend a unique evening at a Japanese *ochaya* for a private dinner with Geisha entertainment. An *ochaya* only accepts guests through an introduction from its trusted clients. This experience will take you back in time, and is so special that most Japanese will not even have the opportunity to try it.

Stay: The Ritz-Carlton or Park Hyatt

Day 9: Nara

Waking up early, discover Fushimi Inari Shrine, a Shinto sanctuary. At the foot of the mountain, the many gates, halls and stairways compose an unusual spatial situation. Up along the forested hillside, space tunnels of thousands of vermilion-painted *torii* gates makes a visit an extraordinary experience.

Journey onward to Nara, Japan's first permanent capital established during the early 8th century. Nara's aesthetic, architecture and history differ considerably to Kyoto and is well worth a visit. Your sojourn begins at Nara Park, where deer, considered to be messengers of the Shinto gods, roam free as they have done since ancient times.

Nara can be easily traversed on foot, and most of your day here will be spent walking. After visiting Todaiji Temple, which contains a nearly 50-foot tall great Buddha, visit Kasuga Taisha, an 8th century Shinto shrine, and Kofuku-ji which houses the subliminal statue of Ashura, the guardian of the Law and a National Treasure.

Heading off to rural Nara, visit the house of a 20th generation craftsman whose family has made tea whisks for the Japanese tea ceremony for over 500 years. He will demonstrate how these whisks are made by hand-carving bamboo and represent an integral part of *The Way of Tea*.

This evening, stay at Sasayuri-Ann, a unique thatched roof luxurious rice terraced villa in a gorgeous and rural area of Uda in Nara Prefecture. Dinner can be prepared by a Michelin-starred chef or sit around the hearth and cook your own shabu-shabu.

Stay: Rice Terrace Villa Sasayuri-Ann

Day 10: Nara

Before breakfast, enjoy light hiking with a Shingon Buddhist priest in Akame (where *ninja* began), a beautiful and forested area with 48 waterfalls.

Being away in rural and agricultural Nara is one of the most timeless retreats in Japan. Discover its soft rolling plains, traditional towns and ancient walking paths. Sasayuri-Ann offers some really fun and special experiences in an intimate setting, including private yoga lessons, farming and local fruit picking excursions, music workshops, hikes, and bicycling.

If you wish, a day in Mt. Koya, Japan's premier Buddhist pilgrimage area, via helicopter can be arranged as an unforgettable way to see the mountains of Wakayama and the mountainous terrain in the region.

Stay: Rice Terrace Villa Sasayuri-Ann

Day 11: Naoshima and the Inland Sea

At Shin-Osaka, take a *shinkansen* to Okayama Station. A short drive to the Port of Uno will follow to board a private water taxi for a few minute ride to the island of Naoshima, a center of contemporary art in Japan.

This afternoon, take a walk-through of the must see Chichu Art Museum – built specifically to house the works of Claude Monet, Walter De Maria, and James Turrell. Visit the Lee Ufan Museum, designed by Tadao Ando which features works by the contemporary artist Lee Ufan, who was born in Korea but has been working and teaching in Japan.

Transfer to your accommodation at Benesse House, a museum hotel also designed by Tadao Ando, and explore its beautiful environs and contemporary art installations.

Stay: Benesse House

Day 12: Naoshima and Teshima

Island hopping will be on tap today beginning with a private water taxi to the Island of Teshima. Visit Teshima Yokoo House, Teshima Art Museum, and Les Archives du Coeur all of which are installations that abound the island.

Afterward, board a private water taxi for a short ride to the Island of Inujima where you will experience the Inujima Seirenscho Art Museum and the Inujima Art House Project.

Stay: Benesse House

Day 13: Naoshima, Shikoku, and Tokyo

Before leaving the Inland Sea, explore the Naoshima Art House Project which is an art project in the Naoshima Honmura district. Here, artists took empty houses scattered about residential areas in a fishing village and turned the spaces into works of art, weaving in history and memories of the period when the buildings were lived in and used.

Depart Naoshima via private water taxi across the Inland Sea to Shirobana Koen on the island of Shikoku. Visit the village of Mure and the Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum, which houses 150 sculptures – many of which are still unfinished, preserving the working atmosphere of Noguchi's studio.

Fly to Tokyo, and enjoy your final evening in Japan at one of Tokyo's great eateries.

Stay: Mandarin Oriental or Aman

Day 14: Depart Tokyo

You will be picked up at your hotel and driven to one of Tokyo's international airports for your flight home.