



Women's Travel Club
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Signature Japan 2024 Itinerary

Mar 23, 2024 - Apr 3, 2024

Journey to the land of the rising sun, a country rich in history. Experience a taste of Japanese culture while staying in a traditional ryokan. Wander through fantastic gardens and be in awe of the abundance of serene temples and shrines. This lovely tour is planned during the famous Cherry Blossom Festival.

March 23 - Pre-Tour Day



Pre-night accommodation at Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo

2-2-1 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-Ku, Tokyo 160-8330 Japan

Phone: +81 3 3344 0111

Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo check-in time: 3:00 PM (local time)

March 24 - Day 1



Welcome to Japan

On arrival at Narita or Haneda airport, you will be met by an English-speaking driver in the arrival lobby after you exit the security zone. Then you will be transferred to your hotel by private vehicle. Later, we will be met by our English-speaking guide. After a brief welcome meeting we will walk to our welcome dinner at a local restaurant (not included).



Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo

2-2-1 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-Ku, Tokyo 160-8330 Japan

Phone: +81 3 3344 0111

Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo check-in time: 3:00 PM (local time)

March 25 - Day 2



Tokyo

Today experience the traditional and modern side of Japan, starting with a hands-on activity. Meet your guide in the lobby of the hotel and travel together to the venue for your taiko lesson in Akihabara. Taiko is a Japanese drum used in ceremonies, festivals, sports and other events in Japan. Japanese students learn how to play the taiko drum in elementary school. Enjoy a lesson to learn the rhythm and technique of taiko drumming and a live drum demonstration by the teachers.

After the lesson, you will be taken to a Sushi Cooking Class in Ueno district. During the class, you will make your own Sushi and rolled sushi! The lunch comes with Tempura and Miso soup as well!

After the lunch, 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. Visit Asakusa Kannon Temple, an active place of worship where you can see the largest paper lantern in Japan. Here, discover the difference between a Shinto Shrine and a Buddhist Temple, and then explore Nakamise Market, which resembles a traditional style shopping street of a bygone era.



Breakfast, Lunch



Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo

March 26 - Day 3



Tokyo

After breakfast, meet with your guide in the hotel lobby for departure on a full day Tokyo city tour by private coach. Begin your exploration of Tokyo with a visit to Meiji Shrine, a shrine dedicated to the deified spirit of Emperor Meiji and a popular place for traditional Japanese weddings.

Then continue to the 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. 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. The Ginza is one of the most upmarket shopping, dining and entertainment districts in Japan, attracting visitors and regulars alike from across the globe. Before continuing, we will stop for a lunch of Kushiage (fried meat and vegetables on skewers).

Shibuya Crossing is the birthplace of many of Japan's fashion and entertainment trends. We will cross the Shibuya Crossing, which is said to be the busiest pedestrian crossing in the world. In addition, we will visit an observation deck where you can watch everyone crossing from above. The intersection is heavily decorated by neon advertisements and giant video screens and gets flooded by pedestrians each time the crossing light turns green, making it a popular photo and movie filming spot.



Breakfast, Lunch



Keio Plaza Hotel Tokyo

March 27 - Day 4



Hakone

After breakfast, meet with your guide in the hotel lobby and walk to Shinjuku station. Take the train to Hakone. Ride the Hakone Ropeway (cable car) for views of Lake Ashi and, if the day is clear, catch a glimpse of Mt Fuji.

We will take a 20-minute ropeway ride from Togendai to Owakudani. Most of the area around Owakudani was formed from volcanic eruptions around 3,000 years ago, allowing you to see the continuous active volcanic activity in Hakone. White smoke from the ground billows around this area. Due of its unique landscape, it was called the "Valley of Hell" back in the Edo Period. The black hard-boiled egg, prepared in the hot spring water, is a popular souvenir and must-try snack. Volcanic gas causes the eggshells to oxidize, turning them black naturally. It is said you will increase your lifespan by seven years if you eat an egg. The eggs are sold by multiple shops in the area by Owakudani Station, so you should try one when you visit.

Sail across the waters of Lake Ashi, created from an ancient volcano eruption and the largest lake in Kanagawa Prefecture. One of the best ways to enjoy the lake is on a pirate-themed boat that lets travelers see the view around the lake. Located close to Moto-hakone-ko, a stop on the cruise is Hakone Shrine. It is a particularly famous shrine with its enormous torii gate by the lake. Make sure to stop by for pictures and to feel the tranquil atmosphere of this shrine.

Now we will be transferring to your accommodation, a traditional Japanese ryokan. Check in at Ryokan and soak in the onsen, enjoy a delicious dinner and sleep on a futon mattress in a tatami-floored room.

PLEASE NOTE: High winds and/or heavy rain can, and will often cause cessation of services on the sightseeing boat cruise and/or ropeway. Should this occur, we will not be able to operate the itinerary as listed above, and will replace it with the best possible alternative given the weather conditions. Also, in the case of bad weather, even if the boats are still operating, we may alter the itinerary for your comfort and safety as Mt. Fuji will more than likely not be visible anyway.



Breakfast, Dinner



Hotel Green Plaza Hakone

Sengokuhara 1244-2, Hakone-machi, Ashigarashimogun, 250-0631, Japan

Phone: +81 460-84-8611

Hotel Green Plaza Hakone check-in time: 3:00 to 8:00 PM (local time)

March 28 - Day 5



Hakone – Hikone – Kyoto

After breakfast at the hotel, taking a Hakone railway to Odawara station. Then you will experience a Shinkansen bullet train ride from Odawara station to Maibara Station, which can reach speeds of up to 300 km/hr.

After getting off at Maibara station meeting with your private coach and transfer to Hikone Castle (about 3min ride). Visit the Hikone Castle, an attractive hanami spot during the cherry blossom season. Hikone Castle is an original castle, i.e. it survived the post feudal era without undergoing destruction and reconstruction, considered one of the four most beautiful castles in Japan with its three-layered chalk tower. Hikone Castle has a backdrop of Lake Biwa and Konki-zan Hill, and is regarded as one of four national heritage castles, along with Inuyama Castle in Aichi, Himeji Castle in Hyogo, and Matsumoto Castle in Nagano.

After Hikone Castle, depart for Miho museum by private coach (about 1hr and 30min ride without traffic). Arrive at Miho Museum, a stunning architecture that accentuates the surrounding nature while exhibiting a variety of items from different ancient civilizations. There is a tunnel that leads from the museum to a road lined with hundreds of cherry blossom trees. It was designed by the renowned architect, I. M. Pei, and is named after Koyama Mihoko, one of the richest women in Japan and the founder of the museum. Moreover, the museum has been listed as one of the “1000 Places To See Before You Die”.

Afterwards, we will proceed to Kyoto for two nights.



Breakfast



Kyoto Tokyu Hotel

Gojo-sagaru, Horikawa-dori, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto-shi, Kyoto 600-8519

Phone: +81-75-341-2411

Kyoto Tokyu Hotel check-in time: 2:00 PM (local time)

March 29 - Day 6



Kyoto – Geisha Makeover

Today we will start our tour of Kyoto, once the capital of Japan and still considered its cultural center. First is a visit to the Kinkakuji Temple (Golden Pavilion) covered with 18-carat gold leaves. The Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu originally built this three-story structure in 1397. Next is the Ryoan-ji Rock Garden, famed for its exceptional rock and sand garden (seki-taki).

Proceed to Nishiki Market, a narrow, five block long shopping street lined by more than one hundred shops and restaurants. Known as “Kyoto’s Kitchen”, this lively retail market specializes in all things food related, like fresh seafood, produce, knives and cookware, and is a great place to find seasonal foods and Kyoto specialties, such as Japanese sweets, pickles, dried seafood and sushi.

Then, we will visit the famous Kiyomizu Temple, which is best known for its wooden stage that juts out from its main hall, 13 meters above the hillside below. The stage affords visitors a nice view of the numerous cherry and maple trees below that erupt in a sea of color in spring and fall, as well as a beautiful scene of Kyoto City in the distance. From Kiyomizu Temple, we will head to Maruyama Park, which is one of the most popular places for cherry blossom viewing (hanami) in Kyoto. Lastly, we will tour Gion, the old Geisha Quarters, and Pontocho, whose cobblestone alleys vibrate with nightlife.

This afternoon is a true highlight. During the Geisha makeover experience you will be transformed into a beautiful Geisha. The photo shoot of this experience will be great memories for years to come.



Breakfast



Kyoto Tokyu Hotel

March 30 - Day 7



Kyoto – Nara – Osaka

The day begins with a visit in the scenic and historic Fushimi district, which is also one of the brewing capitals of Japan. We continue to the stunning vermilion colored Fushimi Inari Shrine, whose 4km long tunnel of scarlet torii gates was featured in the film *Memoirs of a Geisha*. This complex wraps around a bamboo wilderness that includes mountains, streams, and ponds, the perfect backdrop for a scenic hike.

At the Gekkeikan Okura Sake Museum, you will learn the fascinating history of sake brewing with its nostalgic buildings, tasting experience, and valuable collection of traditional brewing tools. From there we continue to Nara, the oldest capital city of Japan. We will visit Todaiji Temple, the largest wooden building in Japan. The temple also houses the largest bronze statue of Buddha at 16.3 meters high, and the surrounding park is filled with over 1,000 Sika Deer.

In the afternoon, we will travel to Osaka by private coach. Our last visit for the day is Dotonbori, which runs parallel to the Dotonbori canal. A popular shopping, entertainment, and food district, Dotonbori is known for the hundreds of neon and mechanized signs that line the street, including the famous Glico Running Man and Kani Doraku Crab signs.



Breakfast



Hotel New Otani Osaka

1-4-1 Shiromi, Chuo-ku, Osaka 540-8578

Phone: +81-6-6941-1111

Hotel New Otani Osaka check-in time: 3:00 PM (local time)

March 31 - Day 8



Osaka – Himeji – Kurashiki – Hiroshima

Today we take a 2-hour ride on a coach to Himeji to visit Himeji Castle. It is known as “White Egret Castle” and “White Heron Castle” because of its brilliant white exterior, resembling a bird taking flight. Himeji Castle is the largest and most visited castle in Japan, and is one of the few remaining original castles in Japan. This splendid example of traditional architecture was declared one of the first UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Japan.

Continue to 2hrs bus journey to Kurashiki. In merchant days, this scenic town thrived as a port for rice shipments. Several old rice granaries and examples of historic architecture still remain, in addition to the stone lined canal. Taste sake as you stroll along the streets of Kurashiki.



Breakfast



RIHGA Royal Hotel Hiroshima

6-78 Motomachi, Naka-ku, Hiroshima 730-0011, Japan

Phone: +81(0)82-502-1121

RIHGA Royal Hotel Hiroshima check-in time: 3:00 PM (local time)

April 1 - Day 9



Hiroshima – Shimanamikaido – Imabari

Today we will visit the Peace Memorial Park and Atomic Bomb Museum. After visiting the museum, lunch at local restaurant, Okonomiyaki.

After lunch, we will take a short ferry ride to the island of Miyajima; the cherry blossoms on the Island are spectacular to behold. At high tide, the famed vermilion torii gate of the Itsukushima Shrine looks like it's floating in the middle of the sea. The shrine complex is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and Miyajima has been selected as one of Japan's three most scenic places (nihon sankei).

In the afternoon, we will drive through the Shimanamikaido to Shikoku Island to your hotel. The Shimanamikaido is a 60-kilometer long toll road that connects Japan's main island of Honshu to the island of Shikoku, passing over six small islands in the Seto Inland Sea. It is also known as the Nishiseto Expressway.



Breakfast, Lunch



Imabari Kokusai Hotel

2-3-4 Asahi-Cho, Imabari-chi, Ehime 794-8522, Japan 794-0042

Phone: +81-898-36-1111

Imabari Kokusai Hotel check-in time: 1:00 PM (local time)

April 2 - Day 10



Imabari – Kotohira

After a Japanese style breakfast, we continue our journey to Oboke Gorge (2.5hrs ride), one of three hidden mountain regions of Japan. Oboke is the valley located upstream of the Yoshino-gawa River. "Boke" means "dangerous to walk along," and Oboke (big boke) was named for its jagged V-shaped rocks and narrow path which, no matter how carefully or slowly you walk, makes walking dangerous. Enjoy a relaxing boat ride and take in the panoramic view of the valley. Please note that the boat ride may cancelled due to heavy rain, flooding and strong wind. Then, climb the 1,368 stone steps to the Kotohira-gu Shrine, a Shinto shrine.

Next, transfer to Takamatsu, we will visit Ritsurin Park , a masterpiece of Japanese landscape 100 years in the making. This sprawling park features beautiful ponds and pavilions, with Mt. Shiun as the perfect backdrop.

From there, our private coach takes us across Awaji Island through a series of spectacular bridges. In the evening we continue to Kobe, where we will savor the world famous Wagu beef or have a Sayonara Dinner.



Breakfast, Dinner



Hotel Nikko Kansai Airport

1 Senshu-kuko kita Izumisano-shi Osaka 549-0001 Japan

Phone: 81-72-455-1111

Hotel Nikko Kansai Airport check-in time: 2:00 PM (local time)

April 3 - Day 11



Depart Japan

Time to say good-bye to this beautiful country and fabulous friends you have made along the way. Transfer to the airport for your flight home as needed.



Breakfast



Post-night accommodation at Hotel Elseraine Osaka

1-5-25 Dojima, Kitaku, Umeda, Osaka, Japan, 530-0003

Phone: +81 6-6347-1484

Hotel Elesreine Osaka check-in time: 3:00 PM (local time)