

Day 1: Tokyo, arrival and introduction to Japan

Arrive at Narita International Airport and transfer to hotel in Tokyo by private car with English-speaking driver. Check-in at hotel and time to refresh at your room.

Informal introduction to Japanese culture and language

Meet with your English-speaking guide and get a brief introduction on Japanese culture and language, over a cup of tea at a chic café in Omotesando boulevard or at a café at Roppongi Hills Observatory with stunning view over Tokyo.

Return to the hotel and rest of the day at leisure.

Accommodation: Palace Hotel Tokyo / Peninsula Tokyo |
Meals: n/a | Transportation: private A/C-vehicle.

Day 2: Tokyo highlights

Highlights of Tokyo by private car with English-speaking guide, including Tsukiji Fish Market, Hamarikyu Garden, Asakusa, Skytree and Ginza.

Tsukiji Fish Market

Dubbed "Tokyo's Kitchen", the Tsukiji Market is in terms of floor area and sales volume the largest such market on earth, providing the millions of residents of the city with fresh produce of every type, including vegetables, meat and fish. The market is most famous for fresh fish, for which it has a history stretching back 500 years. Each day over 400 different varieties of fish and shellfish are sold, totaling well over 2000 tons.

Hamarikyu Garden

Hama Rikyu is a large, attractive landscape garden in central Tokyo. Located alongside Tokyo Bay, Hama Rikyu features seawater ponds which change level with the tides, and a tea house on an island where visitors can rest and enjoy the scenery. The traditionally styled garden stands in stark contrast to the skyscrapers of the adjacent Shiodome district.

Take a boat ride to Asakusa along Sumida River.

Asakusa Kannon Temple

Asakusa Kannon Temple is the oldest and most impressive temple in Tokyo. The main hall was first built in 645 to house a tiny golden statue of Kannon, the goddess of mercy, that had been repeatedly hauled up in fishing nets despite being thrown back into the river. The statue was enshrined in the main hall where it ostensibly remains today.

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Tokyo Skytree

The Tokyo Skytree is a new television broadcasting tower and landmark of Tokyo. With a height of 634 meters (634 can be read as "Musashi", a historic name of the Tokyo Region), it is the tallest building in Japan and the second tallest structure in the world at the time of its completion. The highlight of the Tokyo Skytree is its two observation decks which offer spectacular views out over Tokyo. The two enclosed decks are located at heights of 350 and 450 meters respectively, making them the highest observation decks in Japan and some of the highest in the world. Tembo Deck, the lower of the two decks is 350 meters high and spans three levels with great views from all of its floors. The top floor features tall, broad windows that offer some of the best 360 degree panoramic views of the city.

Ginza

The Ginza is Tokyo's most famous upmarket shopping, dining and entertainment district, featuring numerous department stores, boutiques, art galleries, restaurants, night clubs and cafes. Here, you can find "Depa Chika", food hall in Tokyo department stores usually found on the basement floor. No account of Tokyo's food culture would be complete without a "Depa Chika" where you will find products from famous food brands, bento (meals in a box), Japanese sweets from Kyoto, all made by star food market.

Transfer back to the hotel

Optional Evening Activities

Gourmet Tour

Tokyo now has the world's most Michelin stars, surpassing even Paris. We will take you to the gorgeous Michelin starred restaurant or good restaurant which only locals know. After that let's have sake at local standing bar with retro atmosphere currently enjoying a boom in Tokyo or fancy cocktails at bar with romantic night view of Tokyo.

Viewing Kabuki Performance

The classic of traditional Japanese theater coming down from the Shogun's period, known for stylized performance and beautiful make-up and kimono costumes, an integrated art form consisting of drama, dance, music and recitation. Most of the stories were written about 300 years ago and give you some idea of people's life on Shogun's days.

Baseball game (seasonal option)

In the right season, do what the Japanese do: go for a game of baseball, the most popular sport in the country.

Accommodation: Palace Hotel Tokyo / Peninsula Tokyo |
Meals: breakfast | Transportation: private A/C-vehicle.

Day 3: Tokyo at your own pace

Your day is free at leisure. A vehicle with an English speaking driver are at your disposal to discover the city at your own pace. Here are some recommendations:

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Omotesando, Harajuku and **Aoyama** area are a great place to discover during a leisurely stroll. The area is known for being one of the most sophisticated and fashionable towns in the world. There are many chic shops on the main street as well as in the back alleys, unique buildings designed by famous architects, hip cafes and people in unique and hot design clothes. This is the open museum of modern Tokyo.

Roppongi is a district in Tokyo that is well known as the city's most popular nightlife district among foreigners, offering a large number of foreigner friendly bars, restaurants and night clubs. Roppongi and the surrounding districts of Azabu, Hiroo and Akasaka are home to many embassies and a large expat community. Two of Tokyo's largest recent redevelopment projects, Roppongi Hills and Tokyo Midtown changed the district's face over the past decade and expanded Roppongi's appeal to a wider range of visitors and residents with their elegant retail, leisure and residential space, offices and luxury hotels. Thanks to the appearance of several art museums, Roppongi has also developed a reputation as a cultural center. The National Art Center is Japan's largest art museum, and together with Roppongi Hills' Mori Art Museum and Tokyo Midtown's Suntory Museum of Art forms the "Art Triangle Roppongi".

Or if you prefer, plan one of our optional activities.

Bonsai

Bonsai is a Japanese art form using miniature tree grown in containers. The Japanese tradition dates back over a thousand years, and has its own aesthetics and terminology. A Bonsai Master will demonstrate and teach how to grow and maintain the bonsai. Through this program, you can learn Japanese aesthetics.

Trendy hair cut

Have your hair cut at hair salon in Harajuku, one of the most fashionable towns in the world.

Art Tour

A specialist art guide takes you to the museums and galleries which are selected according to your taste.

Watching Sumo tournament (Seasonal Option)

Sumo is the traditional national sport of Japan. Two wrestlers fight each other to try to throw or push the opponent out of the small 18 square 12 feet ring. Watch the matches at stadium, where the atmosphere is really exciting and unique. Unique! Because it has a strong ceremonial aspect which is as interesting as the bouts themselves. Sumo was originally a form of religious ritual dedicated to the Japanese Gods.

Visiting sumo stable in the morning (Seasonal Option)

There are now about 800 sumo wrestlers including apprentices. They belong to one of the 105 stables, most of which are located in an area called Ryogoku in Tokyo. You can visit their morning training and have a breakfast, named Chanko, which is food especially for sumo wrestlers, at the stable with the wrestlers.

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Cooking class with Michelin star chef

Getting ingredients at grocery store with Michelin star chef, you will have an experience of making Japanese home cooking or “Temari sushi” (small and ball-shaped sushi) lectured by Michelin star chef.

Accommodation: Palace Hotel Tokyo / Peninsula Tokyo |

Meals: breakfast | Transportation: private A/C-vehicle.

Day 4: Hakone

Check-out from the hotel and depart for Hakone by private car with an English-speaking guide. Hakone is famous for hot springs, natural beauty and the view of nearby Mt. Fuji. Hakone is one of the most popular destinations among Japanese and international tourists looking for a break from Tokyo.

Upon arrival in Hakone, enjoy a cruise on Lake Ashi for stunning view of the symbol of Japan, Mt. Fuji.

Ropeway ride to Owakudani valley

Owakudani is the area around a crater created during the last eruption of Mount Hakone some 3000 years ago. Today, much of the area is an active volcanic zone where sulfurous fumes, hot springs and hot rivers can be experienced. A short walking trail leads from the ropeway station into the volcanic zone to a number of steam vents and bubbling pools. Here you can purchase eggs, cooked in the naturally hot water, whose shells are blackened by the sulfur and which are said to prolong one's life by seven years.

Check-in at Gora Kadan, a traditional Japanese ryokan. The rest of the day is at leisure. Enjoy the Japanese ryokan experience by using the hot spring, Shiatsu massage in the room, and an authentic Japanese full-course dinner.

Accommodation: Gora Kadan Ryokan |

Meals: breakfast, dinner | Transportation: private A/C-vehicle.

Day 5: Takayama, back in time¹

Check-out from Gora Kadan and transfer to Odawara station by private car. Take the Shinkansen, Super Express Train, ride to Nagoya station (1h12mins), and change for the Super Express Hida to Takayama (2h).

Takayama is a city in the mountainous Hida region, which has retained a traditional touch like few other Japanese cities, especially in its beautifully preserved old town.

Upon arrival, stroll in Takayama historical town, visiting Kami Sannomachi Street and Takayama Jinya.

Sannomachi Old Town Street

Sannomachi, the east side of a Miyagawa river in Takayama is an old castle town, apparent by its history-filled streets with the latticed bay windows and linked eaves

¹ Baggage will be shipped from Tokyo to Kyoto by courier. Therefore, please travel to Takayama with overnight bag for two nights.

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of merchants' houses from the Edo period (17c-19c). Visitors can fully enjoy the feel of a quiet and idyllic atmosphere.

Takayama Jinya

The Takayama Jinya building was used as a public office for about 270 years from 1695 to 1969. Then, restoration was carried out to revive the atmosphere of the Edo period. Pine trees and gravel lanes, contrast favorably with beautiful white walls.

Transfer to WanoSato ryokan and rest of your day at leisure.

After dinner² guests are invited to sit by an open built-in fireplace called "Irori", where you can enjoy the unique drinks that are offered in the evening.

Accommodation: WanoSato Ryokan |

Meals: breakfast, dinner | Transportation: private A/C-vehicle.

Day 6: Takayama

In the morning, you will visit Takayama morning market. Communicating with friendly locals, you can enjoy shopping of local crafts and farm products such as vegetables, pickles and flowers.

After the morning market, transfer to Ainokura world heritage village in Gokayama.

Ainokura Village

Set far back in the valley, Ainokura is the most remote village in the Gokayama region. It is also the largest of the villages with nearly 20 gassho-zukuri farmhouses. Many of them remain private residences, although a few have been converted into restaurants, and museums. Ainokura, along with Suganuma and Ogimachi, was declared a UNESCO world heritage site in 1995. Although it is less developed and harder to get to than Shirakawago (another famous world heritage village), Ainokura is quieter and sees less tourist traffic, and offers similar attractions.

Iwase-ke House

This well preserved gassho-zukuri farmhouse is the largest one of its kind in the region. The first floor has rooms which were designed to entertain visiting lords, while the spacious upper floors display tools and household items used for farming and raising silkworms.

Transfer back to the ryokan and enjoy the rest of your day, using the ryokan's facilities.

Accommodation: WanoSato Ryokan |

Meals: breakfast, dinner | Transportation: private A/C-vehicle.

Day 7: Kyoto

Check-out from WanoSato in the morning, and transfer to Takayama station by private car with your guide.

² Dinner menu can be changed from Japanese full-course dinner to Shabu-Shabu, Sukiyaki or grilled Hida beef dinner.

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Take the express train Hida to Nagoya station (2h), where the guide will see you off. Continue by Shinkansen super express train Nozomi to Kyoto (40mins). In Kyoto your Kyoto-based English-speaking guide will meet you at the station's platform.

Upon arrival, visit one of the most famous World Heritage Temple in Japan, **Kiyomizu Temple**. VIP entrance will be arranged and a priest will greet you and show you around the temple, including a closed hall and restricted areas.

Established in 778, this temple has continuously attracted worshippers from among the populace since the Heian Period as "Kiyomizu-Kannon." The main hall (Hondo), built in the "stage" style, is noted for its beautiful background scenery which changes with the four seasons – including the cherry blossoms and greenery of spring, and the colourful leaves of autumn. Built atop a precipice, the main hall, which is a National Treasure, is famous as the "Kiyomizu Stage" – affording a magnificent view of the city below.

After the visit of Kiyomizu-Dera, refresh yourself Kyoto's famous seasonal sweets. While having sweets, guide will give you brief story of Kyoto and its unique culture.

Transfer to the hotel and rest of the day at leisure.

Accommodation: Hyatt Regency Kyoto |
Meals: breakfast | Transportation: private A/C-vehicle.

Day 8: Kyoto highlights

Today you'll visit some of Kyoto's amazing sites, and experience part of Japanese traditional culture.

Kinkakuji Temple

Kinkakuji is the famous structure dating from the Muromachi period (1336-1573) and was listed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1994. The upper stories are covered in gold leaf and the roof is topped by a bronze phoenix. The reflection of the temple shimmers majestically in the water of a rock-studded pool.

Nijo Castle

Nijo Castle, built in 1603, is UNESCO world heritage site and its Ninomaru Palace is designated as a National Treasure on the account of its splendid architecture and magnificent interior decoration. The floorboards of corridors creak underfoot. Called "bush warbler boards", they warned of the approach of an assassin.

Ryoanji Temple

Ryoanji Temple is the site of Japan's most famous rock garden, which attracts hundreds of visitors every day. Originally an aristocrat's villa during the Heian Period, the site was converted into a Zen temple in 1450 and belongs to the Myoshinji school of the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism, whose head temple stands just a kilometer to the south. As for the history of Ryoanji's famous rock garden, the facts are less certain. The garden's date of construction is unknown and there are a number of speculations regarding its designer. 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.

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After your visits, it's time for a more cultural experience at a master's residence. You can choose one of the following:

Tea Ceremony

The tea ceremony is a ceremonial way of preparing and drinking tea. The custom has been strongly influenced by Zen Buddhism. Tea ceremonies are held in traditional Japanese rooms, cultural community centres or private houses. The ceremony itself consists of many rituals that have to be learned by heart. Almost each hand movement is prescribed and meaningful.

Kimono wearing

Kimono is Japan's national costume and until about 100 years ago, it was the everyday clothes of the Japanese. Today it is mostly worn by women on special occasions. There are also kimono for men. Putting on a Kimono is not a piece of cake. It requires literally quite a number of strings. With the help of a kimono specialist, you will change to a real Japanese beauty or Samurai in 10 minutes.

Calligraphy

The art of calligraphy is widely practiced in Asian countries where Chinese characters are used. In Japan brush and ink writing was brought from China in the old days and through its long history, has become an inseparable part of Japanese culture. Correct stroke order and proper balance are essential in calligraphy.

Flower Arrangement

Flower arrangement is the art of arranging seasonal flower, developed from the Buddhist ritual of offering flower to the altar. Different from Western flower arrangement, in which the emphasis is on the bloom, Japanese flower arrangement is based on lines made by twigs, stems, leaves and the number of blooming flowers is comparatively small.

Accommodation: Hyatt Regency Kyoto |
Meals: breakfast | Transportation: private A/C-vehicle.

Day 9: Hidden Kyoto

Today visit the lesser known temples of Kyoto, Genko-an Temple, Arashiyama Bamboo groves and the Gion Shirakawa area.

Genko-an is a temple on Takagamine mountain in the northwestern part of Kyoto. This area is one of the best places to experience the four seasons in Kyoto, with picturesque scenery surrounded by mountains. The temple has two famous windows – one is round and the other square, and they symbolize Zen awakening and deep human afflictions.

Stop by Matsuno soy sauce shop, the oldest soy sauce factory and shop in Kyoto preserving unaltered taste from generation to generation.

Continue for a stroll in the Bamboo groves of Arashiyama, and visit the Gion Shirakawa area.

Gion is Kyoto's most famous geisha district. It is filled with shops, restaurants and ochaya (teahouses), where geiko and maiko entertain. Gion Shirakawa area runs along the Shirakawa Canal parallel to Shijo Avenue. The canal is lined by willow trees, high class restaurants and ochaya, many of which have rooms overlooking

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the canal. As it is a little off the beaten path, the Shirakawa Area is typically somewhat quieter than Hanami-koji Street, the main street of Gion.

Optional activities in Kyoto

Cycling tour of Kyoto

Kyoto is known for having many narrow streets which do not allow the car to enter. Pedaling along the backstreets and paths by the rivers, you can find many new things about Kyoto.

Fight like a Samurai!

A sword fighting class at private temple! Sword fighting is a specialized technique to create the illusion of physical sword fight without causing harm to the performers. Those who are aiming at becoming Samurai drama performers learn this technique of mock sword fighting. There are also people who take up stage sword fighting as a form of exercise of the mind, body and soul as a martial art. This technique will help you become the strongest Samurai on stage. The sword is fake, of course, and the instructors are professional enough to know to become a victim of your sword without being really harmed. This is the best way to feel like a real Samurai!

Exotic Dinner with Geiko and Maiko at prestigious Ochaya

Dinner at prestigious a ochaya, with geiko and maiko entertainment is arranged. The geiko and maiko (better known as geisha) are still a symbol of Japan. During dinner, geiko and maiko will show you Japanese dances, play traditional musical instruments in their traditional costume, and serve drinks in the Japanese way, and playing very entertaining games with you.

The term ochaya, is often translated into English as "tea house". However an establishment of ochaya is not a place for drinking tea. This is a very exclusive, invitation-only, place of entertainment where if you need to know the price, you probably won't be able to afford it.

Accommodation: Hyatt Regency Kyoto |
Meals: breakfast | Transportation: private A/C-vehicle.

Day 10: Departure

Morning at leisure until check out and departure transfer to the airport for your flight onwards.

Accommodation: n/a |
Meals: breakfast | Transportation: private A/C-vehicle.

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Local Festivals in Kyoto

Kyoto has three big annual festivals. If you are in Kyoto during one of the festivals, spectator seats can be arranged.

Gion Matsuri (1 to 29 July, main festival takes place on 17 July)

Festive events of the year for towns folk, and an occasion to reconfirm their pride, tradition, power and solidarity as townspeople. On the 17th of July a parade of 32 floats makes its way along the main streets of the city.

Website: <http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/gion.html>

Aoi Matsuri (15 May)

Annual festival of Shimogamo and Kamigamo shrine, featuring a gorgeous parade in the style of the ancient Heian Court. Everything in the parade is adorned with the hollyhock leaf crest, also called "aoi", after which the festival is named.

Website: <http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/aomatsuri.html>

Jidai Matsuri (Festival of the Ages) (22 October)

Annual festival of Heian Jingu Shrine. Featured at this festival is a parade of approximately 2000 people dressed in traditional costumes ranging from the Heian Period to the Meiji Period.

Website: <http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/spot/festival/jidai.html>

Accommodation

Tokyo

Palace Hotel Tokyo

Having just opened in May 2012, Palace Hotel Tokyo is a beautifully designed luxury hotel, quickly gaining popularity due to its excellent service and its close proximity to Tokyo station and the Imperial Palace. The hotel offers spacious, comfortable guest rooms, 10 restaurants and bars, an Evian spa and various other facilities.

Website: <http://www.palacehoteltokyo.com/en/>

Peninsula Tokyo

The Peninsula Tokyo is superbly located in the prestigious financial district of Marunouchi, opposite the Imperial Palace and a three-minute walk from the shopping capital of Ginza. Modern and contemporary with Japanese accents, this gracious free-standing hotel offers spacious guestroom, including 47 suites, give unique restaurants, a modern lounge bar, two ball rooms, six elegantly designed function rooms, a fitness center and the award-winning Peninsula Spa.

Website: <http://www.peninsula.com/tokyo/en/default.aspx>

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Hakone

Gora Kadan Ryokan

A perfect union of past and present, the magnificent Gora-Kadan is set amid the Beautiful mountains of Hakone National Park near Tokyo. Once a retreat for the Kaninnonmiya Imperial family, this noble estate is now one of the area's most revered treasures, a historic hideaway that offers an unforgettable experience. This historic ryokan exemplifies a fusion of tradition and custom with captivating Japanese charm. Gora Kadan boasts a full-service spa, offering an international menu of aromatherapy, thalasso-therapy, Italian foot and leg treatments, and Dead Sea salt therapy.

Website: http://www.gorakadan.com/index_english.html

Takayama

WanoSato Ryokan

There is something magical riding through the mountains of Takayama and catching your first glimpse of Wanosato's quaint and majestic 160-year-old *minka* traditional house with its beautiful thatched roof. Tucked away in the forest, a short walk from the main building, are the minka with their lichen covered thatched roofs and earthen walls, looking like a backdrop from a tale of old Japan. The love of nature instilled by Japan's religious beliefs, along with an abundance of forests, have resulted in Wanosato becoming a well-known hot spring and nature retreat.

Website: <http://wanosato.com/>

Kyoto

Hyatt Regency Kyoto

Hyatt Regency Kyoto is a stylish design hotel located in the traditional and historic area of Higashiyama Shichijo, in the heart of Kyoto, Japan. Located just a few minutes away from Kyoto Train Station, this Kyoto hotel features spacious rooms and luxury suites suitable for business and leisure travelers alike.

Website: <http://kyoto.regency.hyatt.com/>

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