



The Very Best of Japan

20 days

From the kimono-clad geisha who grace Kyoto's streets, to Tokyo's modern neon-lit metropolis, what makes Japan so unique is its ability to hold on to age-old customs and timeless traditions, yet entwine them seamlessly into modern day living.

With stunning landscapes and delicious regional cuisines, a plethora of historic shrines and temples and an intriguing culture and people, it's no wonder Japan is considered one of the world's great touring destinations.

Our leisurely 20-day tour has been carefully crafted to blend Japan's fascinating mix of ancient and modern along with all of the country's major attractions. Add to this the magnificent beauty of the Japanese Alps, picturesque gardens, ancient castles and unique Japanese experiences, this tour combines the very best this country has to offer.

With quality accommodation, all breakfasts and many other meals included, this tour really does showcase The Very Best of Japan.



Your holiday includes

Flights with leading scheduled airlines

- Return economy class flights
- Fly with Cathay Pacific via Hong Kong from London Heathrow or Manchester
- Alternatively, fly with Japan Airlines from London Heathrow
A supplement from £295 per person return will apply
- All airport charges, security charges and any applicable fuel surcharges
- UK Air Passenger Duty

Carefully selected hotels

- Superior hotels in great locations
- All hotel portorage
- Applicable hotel taxes

Many meals worth £536 per person

- 17 breakfasts
- 3 lunches
- 3 dinners

Unforgettable experiences

- Sightseeing tours in Tokyo, Takayama, Kanazawa, Kyoto, Hiroshima, Miyajima Island and Nara
- Learn how to make sushi
- Spend two nights within the region known as Fuji Five Lakes
- View Matsumoto Castle and visit the UNESCO World Heritage Himeji Castle
- Visit a miso factory and sake factory
- Explore the UNESCO World Heritage site of Shirakawa-go
- Discover the Japanese gardens of Kenroku-en and Koraku-en
- Watch a Maiko performance
- Ride the Bullet Train
- Visit historical Bikan Chiku, Kurashiki

On the ground

- Services of an experienced Tour Manager and local guides
- All overseas transfers
- Modern, air-conditioned coaches throughout

100% confidence

- Your holiday is covered by our Price Promise*
- Your holiday is fully ATOL protected

* For more information on our Price Promise, please see our Terms & Conditions on pages 112-114 of our Asia brochure.





Himeji Castle



Japanese Tempura

The Very Best of Japan

Days 1 to 5: UK - Osaka - Nara - Kurishiki - Hiroshima

Day 1: Depart UK

Depart with Cathay Pacific from London Heathrow or Manchester. Please note, flight schedules and airline carriers are subject to change. **In-flight meals and drinks included**

Alternative airline – ANA

Should you prefer, fly to Osaka, from London Heathrow via Tokyo with ANA. Supplement from £295 per person return

Day 2: Osaka, 2 nights

All flights with Cathay Pacific to Osaka travel via Hong Kong. On arrival into Osaka, we transfer to the delightful Hotel Nikko Osaka, our home for next two nights. **In-flight meals and drinks included**

Day 3: Nara

We start our Japanese adventure with a visit to Nara, Japan's first permanent capital. One of the first sights we will experience is the thousands of sacred deer that roam freely throughout the city, and have learned to bow for treats! We visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Todaiji Temple. Founded in AD745, the vast temple took over 15 years to complete. The main hall houses a colossal bronze Buddha statue and remains the world's largest wooden building. After a morning of sightseeing, we return to Osaka, where our afternoon has been left free to relax. Later, we meet with our Tour Manager and fellow travellers for a welcome drink, where we will have the opportunity to become better acquainted for our adventures ahead. For those that wish we may take a stroll to Osaka's vibrant neon-lit Dontonbori Street **Breakfast included**

Day 4: Himeji Castle - Kurishiki, overnight Tour Highlight

This morning, we journey to the city of Himeji, famous for Japan's finest surviving feudal castle, Himeji Castle. The first fortifications of this UNESCO World Heritage Site were completed in the 1400's. Gradually enlarged over the centuries, the castle complex, as it survives today, is over 400 years old and is an imposing and majestic site. After exploring the castle and grounds, we make our way to the old merchant settlement of Kurishiki, where we stay overnight at the Kurashiki Royal Art Hotel. This evening, should you wish, there is an opportunity to dine in a French Japanese restaurant in the town's Bikan district.

Breakfast and lunch included

Day 5: Hiroshima, 2 nights

We begin our day exploring the historical Bikan district of Kurashiki with its beautiful willow-lined canal. Many former storehouses have been converted into museums, boutiques and cafes, providing the perfect backdrop for a leisurely stroll. We continue our journey to Okayama, home to the Koraku-en Garden, one of Japan's top three gardens. It is most aptly described as a "strolling garden", due to its variety of views from the pathways which wind through the pond, stream, lawns and teahouse. Following our visit, we continue south to Hiroshima where we spend the next two nights at the Rihga Royal Hotel, ideally located for exploring the city. **Breakfast included**



Fushimi Inari Shrine Miyajima Island

The Very Best of Japan

Days 6 to 8: Miyajima Island - Kyoto - Fushimi Inari Shrine

Day 6: Miyajima Island

A morning visit takes us to the peaceful and pretty island of Miyajima, famous for its giant tori gate and home to the UNESCO World Heritage listed Itsukushima Shrine, sacred to the Japanese for over 1,500 years. As we stroll round this pretty island, watch out for the many wild deer that wonder through the streets. Tonight, we have the opportunity to visit a local Okonomiyaki restaurant and try this famous and delicious dish, associated with the Hiroshima area.

Breakfast included

We Recommend

Okonomiyaki Pancakes

With some 2,000 Okonomiyaki restaurants in Hiroshima alone, this dish is adored by locals.



Day 7: Bullet Train - Kyoto, 3 nights

Following breakfast, we visit the Memorial Peace Park and its moving museum, as well as the Atomic Bomb Dome site which was dropped during the Second World War. After a thought-provoking morning, we transfer to the station for our journey on Japan's iconic Bullet Train. Travelling at speeds of up to 200 miles per hour, the train smoothly whisks us across the country to our next port of call, Kyoto. Our hotel for the next three nights is the Kyoto Tokyu Hotel. Tonight, there is an opportunity to experience a Japanese barbecue at a local restaurant. **Breakfast included**

Day 8: Fushimi Inari Shrine

This morning we head out of the city to the Fushimi Inari Shrine, famous for its tunnels of more than 10,000 closely-spaced torii gates, each of which has been individually donated. We visit a sake brewery to discover the brewing and production process of this famous Japanese rice wine. Later, return to the city for an afternoon at leisure. If you prefer, you can join an optional tour of Sanju-Sangendo, with an opportunity to paint and take away your own paper fan. Tonight, there is the option to sample Japanese shabushabu at a local restaurant. **Breakfast included**



Kiyomizu-dera Temple, Kyoto



Geisha, Kyoto

The Very Best of Japan

Days 9 to 12: Kyoto - Kanazawa - Shirakawago - Takayama

Day 9: Kyoto

Tour Highlight

The capital of Imperial Japan for over 1,000 years, Kyoto is Japan's cultural capital. We begin our day of sightseeing at the impressive UNESCO World Heritage Site of Kinkaku-ji Temple. Fondly referred to as the Golden Pavilion, this richly decorated golden temple is truly a beautiful sight to behold. Our next stop is another UNESCO World Heritage Site, the rock garden of Ryoanji Temple. The garden's fifteen stones are cleverly arranged so that there is always one rock that is hidden from view. Our final and third UNESCO World Heritage Site of the morning is Kiyomizu-dera Temple. Founded in AD778, the most famous feature of the temple is its wooden veranda, standing some 13 metres above the ground. We head to Gion, Kyoto's famous geisha district, to take part in a traditional tea ceremony. Tonight, we have arranged a traditional Japanese meal and we will be joined by a maiko, our apprentice geisha, who will perform traditional song and dance.

Breakfast and dinner included

Day 10, Kanazawa, 2 nights

This morning we head to Arashiyama and its famous Bamboo Grove, where there will be time to wander through the impressive towering alley of Bamboo. We then make our way to Kyoto Station for our train journey to Kanazawa. Our hotel for the next two nights will either be Kanazawa Tokyu, Nikko Kanazawa, or Hyatt Centric dependent on your departure date.

Breakfast included

Day 11: Kanazawa

We begin our morning with a visit to the delightful Kenroku-en garden, considered by the Japanese as one of the top three gardens in the country. The name Kenroku-en means the "garden combining six", referring to the six attributes all gardens should include: seclusion, antiquity, spaciousness, human ingenuity, water and scenic views. The city is also famed for gold leaf and it is used in abundance. We visit a local establishment to learn about gold leaf production, and decorate our own chopsticks in gold leaf - we even have the opportunity to purchase a gold leaf ice-cream. We head to the Higashi Chaya area of the city with its lovely neighbourhood of beautifully-preserved geisha houses. Many have now been converted into restaurants or teahouses, although some are still open to the public. The afternoon is free to continue exploring Kanazawa at your own pace. There is a plethora of museums and local arts and crafts to explore. Alternatively, there is the option to join an afternoon tour which visits the Kutani Pottery and Kagayuzen Kimono Centre. **Breakfast included**

Day 12: Shirakawago – Takayama, 2 nights

We start our day with a visit to Nagamachi, where in days gone by the samurai of Kanazawa lived with their families and we visit Normura Samurai House, a restored samurai residence. We continue to the Omicho Market, a lively food market famous for its abundance of fresh seafood, which has been in operation since 1721. Leaving Kanazawa behind, we travel to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Shirakawa-go. The villages, mostly cut off until as recently as the 1960s, are today famous for their traditional style of housing, the Gassho-zukuri, which means "like praying hands". Finally, we arrive in Takayama, where we spend our next two nights at the Takayama Green Hotel.

Breakfast and dinner included

Stay in a Ryokan

Overnight from £95 per person



During our time in Takayama, for those who want to experience traditional hospitality, there is an opportunity to spend a night in a Ryokan (traditional Japanese Inn). Enjoy delicious local cuisine, relax in your yukata (casual kimono) and maybe even try the onsen (hot spring bath). Please call for details.



Mount Fuji

The Very Best of Japan

Days 13 to 17: Takayama - Lake Yamanaka - Mount Fuji - Tokyo

Day 13: Takayama

Tour Highlight

Takayama is best explored on foot and we begin our day with a visit to the morning market. Afterwards we make our way to the Takayama-Jinya, which served as government headquarters under the Tokugawa shogunate of 1692 to 1871. We end our morning in the heart of Takayama's picturesque old town, lined with traditional houses, shops, restaurants, sake breweries and cafes. Our afternoon is at leisure to enjoy this delightful area. Perhaps sample some of the many delicious delicacies, try some locally-brewed sake, or visit one of the many museums, such as the Festival Floats Exhibition Hall. Tonight, there is the opportunity to dine on Japan's famous Hida beef, a variety of wagyu beef local to this area. **Breakfast Included**

Day 14: Lake Yamanaka, 2 nights

We travel through the majestic Japanese Alps, stopping at Matsumoto castle, the oldest existing castle in Japan, for a fabulous photo opportunity. We visit a miso factory, to discover more about this staple Japanese food. We continue our journey through picturesque landscapes to the area known as Fuji Five Lakes, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Our home for the next two nights is the Fuji Marriott Hotel, Lake Yamanaka. **Breakfast and dinner included**

Day 15: Mount Fuji and Fuji Five Lakes Tour Highlight

Mt. Fuji, or Fuji-san as it is more affectionately known, can be a little shy, but fingers crossed a clear sky will reward us with some impressive views. Our first stop is the small, but delightful, Kubota Icchiku Art Museum. Kubota revived the lost art of Tsujigahana silk dyeing and the museum exhibits several of the artist's stunning kimono creations, which depict themes of nature, the cosmos and the seasons. Our next stop a visit to the Oishi Tsumugi craft museum which demonstrates a 300 year old method of weaving, unique to this region. Following a lunch of Hoto noodles, we continue to the Fuji-san World Heritage Centre which showcases traditional artwork and videos of this sacred mountain. Our final stop is the shores of Lake Kawaguchi where there is time for a stroll along this picturesque lake. This evening we dine together in our hotel. **Breakfast, lunch and dinner included**

Day 16: Tokyo, 3 nights

This morning we head to Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park, famous for its hot springs and views of Japan's most iconic image, Mount Fuji. Our first stop is Lake Ashi, a crater lake formed over 200,000 years ago. We board our boat for a short cruise on this beautiful lake and take a cable car into Owakudani Valley. The result of a volcanic eruption over 3,000 years ago, the area is still active with many sulphur vents and bubbling hot springs. Afterwards we continue our journey to Japan's metropolitan capital, Tokyo. We spend our final three nights in Japan at the centrally located Keio Plaza Hotel. **Breakfast Included**

Day 17: Tokyo

After breakfast we make our way to Tokyo Tower. Standing at 333m, it's 13m taller than the Eiffel Tower, which was the inspiration for its design. Although surpassed in height by Tokyo Skytree in 2012, Tokyo Tower remains a beloved symbol of the city. After a brief photo stop at the impressive Imperial Plaza, we make our way to Japan's most famous Shinto Shrine, Meiji Jingu. Dedicated to Emperor Meiji, the shrine sits in a large forest area that contains more than 100,000 trees, gifted by the people to their beloved emperor. We return to our hotel, where the remainder of the day is at leisure. This evening is our opportunity to see Tokyo from a different perspective with an optional dinner cruise along the Sumida River. **Breakfast included**



Tokyo Tower, Tokyo



Sushi

The Very Best of Japan

Days 18 to 20: Tokyo - UK

Day 18: Tokyo

We begin our Tokyo adventure in the district of Asakusa, home to Tokyo's oldest temple, Sensoji. Founded in AD645, the temple enshrines a golden image of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy. The approach to the temple is through the Kaminarimon Gate, which leads to the Nakamise, a shopping street which has been providing temple visitors with a variety of traditional local snacks and tourist souvenirs for centuries. We make our way to a local restaurant where we learn the art of Japanese sushi making, and enjoy our own culinary creation for lunch. We finish our day with a visit to Tokyo National Museum. **Breakfast and lunch included**

Day 19: Depart Tokyo

There is time this morning to explore Tokyo further and perhaps purchase some last-minute souvenirs. In the afternoon we depart for Osaka Airport for our early evening flight to the UK. All flights will travel via Hong Kong. Alternatively, if flying Japan Airlines, you will travel to the UK via Tokyo. **Breakfast and inflight meals and drinks included**

Day 20: Arrive UK

After 20 spectacular days, we arrive into the UK, bringing our incredible Very Best of Japan tour to an end. **In-flight meals and drinks included**



Nara Park