



2010 Secrets of Japan

15 days / 14 nights

Highlights

Tokyo, Hakone, Nagoya, Kiso villages, Takayama, Shirakawago, Kanazawa, Nara, Hiroshima, Himeji Castle, Kyoto

Secrets of Japan

A journey for those who want a comprehensive snapshot of Japan, with its highlights and diversities, taking you to famous cities, rural towns, traditional villages, and ancient wonders in Kyoto and rustic Takayama. Hotels are modern and reliable, centrally located, solid three-star with private, Western style bathrooms, air-conditioning and TV. Pools are not common.

Your tour cost includes a two-week Japan Rail Pass to enable us to cover longer distances between cities, using the famously efficient Japanese rail system. All rail travel is in comfortable soft-seating in air-conditioned carriages. Within cities and over shorter distances, your group will travel in comfortable minibuses or mid-sized coaches. Your journey is escorted by both a Western tour leader, based on a minimum of ten travellers, and a local English-speaking guide in each location. Groups are never more than 18 travellers in size.

Tour grading - Moderate

This journey is suitable for travellers with an average level of fitness and independent mobility. The tour involves plenty of walking and stair climbing, sometimes over uneven surfaces and in the heat. There are also rides on ferries, public trams, taxis, comfortable vehicles and trains, and day walking tours (up to 4 kms). You need to be able to board and disembark vehicles independently. You will also need to be able to handle your own luggage boarding and disembarking trains, and while walking and climbing stairs within stations. There are no particularly lengthy travel times; the longest drive or rail journey should take about three hours, however there are some busy days of travel. You will need to bring an overnight bag (used for four nights, three of which are consecutive) and on two occasions your main luggage piece will be couriered to your onward destination. Note that room and bathroom sizes in Japan are generally smaller than in other countries.

While accommodation is solid three-star, this is not 'sanitised' travel; by day you will walk through markets and villages, meet local people, and sample local food.

What's Included

- 14 nights accommodation
- Breakfast daily and one dinner
- A two-week Japan Rail Pass
- Tour arrival and departure transfers (Day 1 and 15 only)*
- All road transport in modern, air-conditioned vehicles
- All sightseeing as specified, including entrance fees
- Expert Western tour leader (group size ten minimum) and local guides throughout
- Courier of your main luggage piece only, to your onward destination (two times)

* Please note: *Arrival and departure transfers on any other days must be organised independently or are available for an additional cost and must be booked in advance* *

Climate

Spring (March to May) and autumn (August to October) are the best times to visit Japan. For a fleeting time in spring, the cherry blossoms are in bloom, and autumn also turns the trees a spectacular shade of red. Both seasons usually experience a pleasant 20°C with low humidity. The wet season is from June to August and is marked by occasional heavy downpours (these rarely affect touring) and high humidity. Winter (December to February) is very cold and most areas north of Central Honshu and on the Western seaboard see snow.

Itinerary

Day 1 - Arrive Tokyo

Upon arrival in Tokyo you will be met by your tour leader or guide, who will escort you to the airport bus (a shared service) to transfer to your hotel. Tonight join your tour leader (or local guide) for welcome drinks and a tour briefing.

Three nights **GRAND PRINCE TAKANAWA**

Day 2 - Tokyo

Explore some of the vibrant capital's most intriguing sights, by foot, boat and rail. Included today is tea-drinking in a Japanese garden, and a cruise along the Sumida River to bustling Asakusakannon, the oldest and most beloved temple in the city. Explore beautiful Meiji Jingu Shrine and - at Harajuku - mix with young locals dressed up in cult fashions. Marvel at skyscraper views of Japan's major city from the heights of iconic Tokyo Tower, and return to your hotel late afternoon, in time for evening exploring.

Day 3 - Tokyo in depth

Today is at leisure for discovery of invigorating Tokyo. Your tour leader will have some ideas in mind, or you may like to do your own exploring.

Day 4 - Tokyo to Hakone

Before dawn this morning we head to the fascinating bustle of Tsukiji Fish Market, the largest fish market in Asia. Later, travel by train to picturesque Hakone, site of our Japanese inn. Enjoy a cruise on peaceful Lake Ashi-no then return to your lodging for a traditional Japanese meal and the option of an outdoor dip in a hot spring.

One night **HAKONE YUMOTO HOTEL**

Day 5 - Hakone to Nagoya

Travel to friendly Nagoya to visit the futuristic Toyota Motor Plant, and marvel at modern Japanese technology.

One night **NAGOYA CASTLE PLAZA**

Day 6 - Nagoya & Kiso Villages, to Takayama

Today you will travel to Magome and Tsumago, in the forested Kiso Valley. These beautifully preserved trading towns lie along the ancient Nakasendo Highway, which linked Kyoto and Edo (Tokyo) during the Edo Period. Late afternoon you will traverse the Japanese Alps en route to beguiling Takayama.

Three nights **BEST WESTERN TAKAYAMA**

Information in this dossier was correct at the time of its preparation.

Travel Indochina reserves the right to make itinerary changes as operational or other circumstances require.

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Day 7 - Takayama on foot

Takayama is a treasure chest of Japanese architecture and traditions. Explore the old town and its myriad of narrow streets, shrines and sake stalls. See the Festival Floats Hall, Takayama Jinya, historic wooden houses, and more.

Day 8 - Takayama at leisure

Today is at leisure to wander the streets of the morning market and soak up the atmosphere of the old town.

Day 9 - Takayama to Kanazawa

Travel by vehicle today to World Heritage Listed Shirakawago. This fascinating area is dotted with large thatch roof dwellings which keep out heavy snow during winter, and keep in the cool during summer.

One night KANAZAWA CENTRAL HOTEL

Day 10 - Kanazawa to Nara

A former castle town and samurai headquarters, Kanazawa is also home to one of Japan's most famous gardens - Kenrokuen. We will explore the garden as well as the Higashi geisha district and the interesting Omicho Market. At the end of the day we board our train for the journey to ancient Nara.

One night NARA WASHINGTON HOTEL PLAZA

Day 11 - Nara to Hiroshima

Nara was the site of Japan's first capital and is home to magnificent Todaiji, the world's largest wooden building. We also encounter free-roaming deer. Later, we train to Hiroshima - infamous as the first atomic bomb target - and explore nearby Miyajima Island and its famous 'floating' gate.

One night MITSUI GARDEN HIROSHIMA

Day 12 - Hiroshima & Himeji Castle to Kyoto

Nowadays Hiroshima is home to a million people and is a city devoted to peace. This morning visit the renowned Peace Park Museum and Memorial, and the Atomic Dome. Late morning we get the train to Himeji Castle, the largest and most spectacular in Japan, then continue to magical Kyoto.

Three nights MITSUI GARDEN KYOTO, SANJO

Day 13 - Kyoto

See Nijo Castle and the Golden Temple, a sparkling highlight of any Kyoto visit. Enjoy the atmosphere of Higashiyama district's old streets and at Kiyomizudera Temple, then walk down 'Pontocho', perhaps the world's quaintest lane and home to local eateries and tea houses. End with a visit to Gion, famous for its geishas - some of which you might see.

Day 14 - Kyoto

This morning's excursion takes us to western Kyoto. Here, board a small train for a scenic ride near the bamboo forests of Arashiyama. Have the afternoon at leisure to explore the boutique shops and stalls of Japan's most historic city.

Day 15 - Depart Kyoto

Your tour leader or guide will organise your transfer by train to the airport, for your onward travels.

Hotel Brief

Grand Prince Takanawa in Tokyo

Modern-style hotel in a quiet area of Tokyo within easy walking distance to public transport - comfortable.

Hakone Yumoto Hotel in Hakone

Inn-style accommodation combining Japanese tatami bedding with hot water baths, as well as Western, private bathrooms.

Nagoya Castle Plaza in Nagoya

Near the train station, this hotel offers excellent three-star accommodation with access to a plethora of restaurants.

Best Western Takayama in Takayama

Best Western Takayama offers simply furnished but comfortable rooms, and a three-star range of amenities.

Kanazawa Central Hotel in Kanazawa

With a good location, this property is solid 3 star and has comfortable, well maintained rooms.

Nara Washington Hotel Plaza in Nara

A short stroll from picturesque Nara Park, this is a comfortable hotel with great access to a range of quaint shops.

Mitsui Garden Hiroshima

A short walk from the Peace Park, and a modern property with a relaxed atmosphere and friendly service.

Mitsui Garden Hotel Sanjo in Kyoto

A modern hotel, with smart Western-style rooms and some nice Japanese touches (a Japanese reception garden, and an atmospheric Japanese breakfast area).

Visa Requirements

Holders of Australian, British, American, Canadian and New Zealand passports can obtain a free 90-day temporary visa on arrival at any of Japan's international airports (no photo required). Foreigners arriving in Japan are also fingerprinted at immigration, in a simple process. If you have additional travel arrangements outside the 'Secrets of Japan' itinerary, please note that it is your responsibility to make sure that visa requirements are fulfilled. More detailed visa information is available in our pre-departure information.

Health Issues

Japan is a developed, wealthy nation, so medical facilities throughout the country are of a high international standard. Diseases such as malaria, dengue fever and cholera do not exist in Japan. We suggest however that you consult with your doctor to discuss health care needs specific to your holiday.

Insurance

You must be comprehensively insured as a condition of travelling with Travel Indochina. Insurance should include cover for personal accident and medical expenses, evacuation and repatriation, baggage loss, and cancellation or curtailment of your holiday. Your booking will not be confirmed if you cannot confirm possession of appropriate insurance, and our ground operations have the right to prevent you from travelling in the event that you cannot present your insurance details at the start of the tour. Your travel agent can organise travel insurance for you.

Recommended Reading

- Memoirs of a Geisha - Arthur Golden
- Lost Japan - Alex Kerr
- The Tale of Genji - Murasaki Shikibu
- Culture Shock Japan - Rex Shelly
- Shogun - James Clavell

A Responsible Travel Indochina

Travel Indochina practices a thorough, realistic Responsible Travel Policy, full details of which can be found in our website. Our policy includes our downloadable 'Tread Lightly' booklet, full of useful pointers which will make you a more 'responsible' traveller in Asia.

Pre and post tour arrangements

If you would like to book pre or post tour arrangements, either contact Travel Indochina or your local travel agent.

What next

Once your booking has been confirmed and you have paid in full you will receive a detailed itinerary for this tour, detailing day by day arrangements, as well as a pre-departure guide containing valuable information designed to help you get the most out of your holiday.

About Travel Indochina

Travel Indochina has been operating small group journeys to Asia since 1993. Based in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, our idea is simple - escape the tourist traps to explore the essence of Asia's history, culture, natural beauty and most importantly, Asia's people. Another feature is the quality, character and location of our accommodation. Our travellers enjoy the combination of well thought out itineraries, tasteful accommodation, insightful Western and local leaders, value for money, and our experience and base in the region.

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