

THE ESSENCE OF JAPAN TOUR



Day 1 Welcome to Honshu Island **Meals D**

Your tour begins at The St. Regis Osaka at 6:30 PM. A transfer is included from Osaka's Kansai Airport to The St. Regis Osaka, located in the heart of the Champs Élysées of Osaka. Spend two nights enjoying one of the most prestigious neighborhoods of this ancient port city, surrounded by natural beauty and cultural grace. Join us for a welcome reception and dinner tonight. The St. Regis Osaka

Day 2 Poignant visit to Hiroshima **Meals B, L, D**

It's all aboard the super-fast *Nozomi Super Express* (speeds up to 186 mph) for a visit to Hiroshima. A ferry takes you to Miyajima Island (holy site of Shinto) for a walk to view the oft-photographed Itsukushima Shrine and its "floating" torii gate. Have lunch on the island and return by ferry to Hiroshima for a visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, where the first atomic bomb fell on August 6, 1945; today it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Your visit is poignant, the story described in words, pictures and artifacts – and optimistic hope in the peace flame that burns outside the museum. Dine tonight at your hotel. The St. Regis Osaka

Day 3 Pleasures of Osaka and on to Kyoto **Meals B, L, D**

City sightseeing this morning includes two of Osaka's most popular landmark sights. Once the largest castle in Japan when it was first built in the 1580s by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, magnificent Osaka Castle has been destroyed – and restored – several times, with its most extensive refurbishment completed in 1997. A guided tour reveals its massive stone walls, gold-leaf trim, copper roof and panoramic views, including a fascinating on-site museum that chronicles its tumultuous history. Running alongside a canal of the same name, Dotonbori Street pulses with lively energy, from its shops to its dining venues; enjoy a stroll and lunch at a local restaurant before your Japan travel continues on to enchanting Kyoto this afternoon for a four-night stay. Kyoto Hotel Okura

Day 4 Centuries unfold in enchanting Kyoto **Meals B, L**

Enjoy a full day of Japan travel delights in historic Kyoto, founded in the 7th century and an early capital of Japan. Visit Kinkaku-ji Temple this morning; this Golden Pavilion was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site and astounds with gold-leaf gilding on its top two stories. Continue on to Nijo Castle for an inside visit – shoes off. Best known for its ornate interiors and nightingale floors, it was built of Japanese cypress by the first Tokugawa shogun in 1603 and is a wonderful example of Momoyama architecture. Following time to explore as you wish, have dinner on your own tonight; Kyoto offers many fine restaurants to choose from. Kyoto Hotel Okura

Day 5 Origami, tea and a Maiko performance **Meals B, D**

Kyoto abounds with a rich legacy of ancient treasures, cultural gems and natural beauty that spans the centuries. “Take the plunge,” Kyoto-style, today on a visit to Kiyomizu Temple; the expression comes from the views you will see from the cliff-top verandah off the main hall. Try your hand at Origami, the traditional Japanese art of paper folding, when you visit a private home for a tea ceremony (shoes off again!). The afternoon is free to enjoy as you wish, along with lunch on your own. Join us for a special dinner tonight featuring a Maiko (Geisha in training) performance, reflecting the true essence of Japanese culture. Kyoto Hotel Okura

Day 6 Temples of tranquil Nara **Meals B, L**

Tour Kyoto's Sanjusangendo Temple this morning, home to 1,001 wooden cypress statues of Kannon-Bosatsu dating back to the 13th century. Then embark on an excursion to Nara, where you'll savor an unforgettable glimpse of old Japan on visits to ancient temples, shrines and gardens and during lunch at a Japanese restaurant. See the Daibutsu (Great Buddha) at the Todai-ji Temple in Nara Park; at more than 50 feet high, the huge statue is the largest bronze Buddha in all of Japan. Stroll the wooded grounds of the vermilion-colored Kasuga Grand Shrine, adorned with some 3,000 stone and bronze lanterns, before returning to Kyoto, where you'll have dinner on your own tonight. Kyoto Hotel Okura

Day 7 Garden charm on the Noto Peninsula **Meals B, L, D**

It's all aboard the *Thunderbird* train for a rail journey to Kanazawa on the Noto Peninsula, home to winding cobblestone streets, Samurai residences, Geisha houses, museums, gardens, and a flower-filled open-air market. After lunch at a local restaurant, visit the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art in Kanazawa, then stroll through Kenroku-en Garden, among the country's top three gardens; translated, its name means “a refined garden incorporating six attributes: spaciousness, careful arrangement, seclusion, antiquity, elaborate use of water and scenic charm.” Continue on to Wakura Onsen, a hot spring resort on Nanao Bay, and spend tonight at a *ryokan* (inn), where the dress code is a traditional kimono, mats double as chairs, and dinner features regional specialties. Kagaya Hotel

Day 8 Shirakawa-go and a mountain resort **Meals B, L, D**

Travel to Shirakawa-go, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that is well-known for its villages of thatched *gassho-zukuri* (praying hands) farmhouses. Visit a private 300-year-old family home (shoes off!) and explore the historic village of Ogimachi, the largest village with 59 intact gassho houses. See the Miboro Dam en route to your mountain resort in the 16th-century town of Takayama. Hotel Associa Takayama Resort

Day 9 A little history and sake in Takayama **Meals B**

Takayama is renowned for its artisans and woodworkers (whose traditions go back to the 9th century), its remarkably preserved Edo-period merchants' shops and houses, its sake, and its quaint village streets best explored on foot. A walking tour with a local guide visits the farmers morning market, the Festival Float Museum and the historic Takayama Jinya, a government building dating from 1692. There are more than 2,000 different brands of sake produced throughout Japan – taste a representative sampling today when you visit a local sake brewery. The remainder of the day is free. Dine as you please for lunch and dinner. Hotel Associa Takayama Resort

Day 10 Through the Japanese Alps to Hakone **Meals B, L, D**

Today your Japan travel adventure takes you on a remarkable drive across Honshu from Takayama through the breathtaking Japanese Alps – which divide the island in two – to Fuji-Hakone National Park and on to Hakone on the Pacific coast. Rice farms dominate the valleys, while lush forests blanket the mountains. En route, visit the Itchiku Kubota Museum, showcasing Japanese textiles and exquisite kimonos dyed using the centuries-old *tsujighana* technique. Arrive for an overnight in the hilly hot springs town of Hakone; enjoy dinner at your resort. Hyatt Regency Hakone Resort & Spa

Day 11 Fuji-Hakone National Park & on to Tokyo **Meals B, L, D**

Weather permitting, get a glimpse of Mt. Fuji as you travel by gondola on the Hakone Ropeway over the mountains, and ride a funicular back down for a cruise on Lake Ashi. After lunch, visit the Hakone Open-Air Museum to view sculpture from the post-Rodin period and art by Pablo Picasso, Renoir and Miro. Continue your Japan travel adventure by journeying to Tokyo for a three-night stay at Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo – named the 2012 "Top Hotel in Japan" by the readers of *Travel + Leisure*. Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo

Day 12 Discover Tokyo sights, past and present **Meals B, L**

Discover the heart and soul of Tokyo today – a complex blend of ancient traditions and dynamic modern city, you'll explore its many contrasts and learn a little about Tokyo's past and present. Guided city sightseeing includes the Edo Tokyo Museum, which reveals more about the historical heritage of Edo (Tokyo); Asakusa Kannon Temple and the Nakamise Shopping Arcade, one of the oldest shopping centers in Tokyo. Lunch at a local restaurant is followed by an exhilarating *Taiko* performance. *Taiko* means "drum," and it's an art form all to itself – rhythm, melody, and movement are woven together into a musical experience that will be long remembered. The rest of the day in Tokyo is free to spend as you please; enjoy dinner on your own tonight. Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo

Day 13 A taste of Japanese history & culture in Tokyo **Meals B, L, D**

Your Tokyo sightseeing today includes a visit to the Imperial Palace Plaza and Meiji Shrine (shoes off!) honoring the spirits of the Emperor Meiji and his Empress Shoken with eternal serenity and tranquil manicured gardens. As a special treat, see a live performance showcasing age-old Shinto music with the ancient Kagura dance. Sushi making is an art here; see how it's done at a culinary demonstration, followed by lunch, then spend the afternoon as you wish. Your journey ends with a flourish at our farewell reception and dinner at the hotel tonight. Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo

Day 14 Sayonara... as your Japan travel ends **Meals B**

Tour ends at Tokyo's Narita Airport. Fly home anytime. An airport transfer is included from Mandarin Oriental, Tokyo to Narita International Airport. Allow a minimum of 3 hours for flight check-in.

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