



Shogun & Samurai

Day 1 – Arrival in Tokyo

Konichiwa and welcome to Tokyo, Japan! You will be met at the airport and transferred to your hotel. The remainder of the day is free at leisure. A sprawling city with a diverse collection of neighbourhoods and where no two experiences are ever the same. Futuristic sleek structures piece the skyline, then turn a corner and stroll past low-slung wooden buildings with glowing lanterns. Search for hidden art galleries and cocktail bars – every street is there to explore. This evening, you will enjoy a welcome dinner with your group tour and taste monjayaki, a pan-fried batter and a popular dish in Tokyo. (D)

Overnight at Metropolitan Marunouchi or similar

Day 2 - Tokyo - Yamadera - Ginzan Onsen

This morning, you will depart to the train station to experience the ‘bullet train’. In order to travel light on the shinkansen (bullet train), you will leave your main luggage at the front desk and take a small overnight bag with you to Ginzan Onsen. Your main luggage will be delivered to your hotel in Tsuruoka the following

day. Walk to Tokyo station and take the shinkansen to Yamagata (approx. 2.45hrs). Here you will be met and transferred to Yamadera.

Founded in 860, 'Risshakuji' is more commonly known as 'Yamadera', which means 'mountain temple'. The mountain section consists of a thousand-step staircase through a serene forest, past interesting stone sculptures, intimate prayer halls, and rock formations. When you reach Godaido near the top, an observation platform offers a breathtaking view of the valley. Lunch is on your own accord from one of the many food stalls. In the afternoon, enjoy a small and local festival. Every year on May 17, a local fire brigade transports three mikoshi (a portable Shinto shrine) from this temple, descending the stone steps from the Konpon Chudo stairs to the Risshakuji entrance and running along the main street of town.

Continue to Ginzan onsen, one of loveliest onsen villages in Japan. Here you will have free time to explore this pedestrian only village at your own pace. The inns and traditional shops along the river create a picturesque landscape and are reminiscent of a novel from the Taisho era. At night, the main street is illuminated by gas lamps in a dreamlike atmosphere. (B,D)

Overnight at Notoya ryokan or similar

Day 4 - Ginzan Onsen - Sakata - Tsuruoka

Your journey continues by private vehicle to Sakata (1.30hrs). Sakata was a prosperous port during the Edo era thanks to its perfect position in the Sea of Japan. Today, a provincial town far from the tourist routes, it retains many attractions for those keen to get off the beaten track.

For lunch, enjoy the local delicacies of Yamagata with a private performance by a maiko (apprentice geisha). This is a great opportunity to enjoy the beautiful dancing and singing of the maiko without the crowds of the regular performance.

Once dominated by the Honma clan, a healthy local merchant family, the Sakata and Shonai plain is still a major producer of high-quality rice. Learn more about the history of rice cultivation at the well-preserved Sankyo Storehouse, which today is a museum. Visit one of the Honma residences, a samurai-style house, and the Honma museum. The picturesque garden, which on a clear day often showcases glimpses of Mt. Chokai will take your breath away. You can also savour bitter matcha tea with an artistic sweet wagashi confectionary, whilst being absorbed in this scenic atmosphere. (B,L)

2 nights at Shonai Suiden Terrasse or similar

Day 5 - Tsuruoka - Haguro san - Tsuruoka

After breakfast at your hotel, a short 30-minute drive will take you to Dewa Sanzan. Dewa Sanzan is home to the three sacred mountains of Haguro-san, Gas-san and Yudono-san, representing the present, the death and rebirth. A major place of pilgrimage for over 1,500 years, it is not uncommon to come across yamabushi (mountain monks) practicing Shugendo, a thousand-year-old tradition of seeking spiritual powers through ascetic practices.

Haguro-san is the first of the sacred mountains. Start with a visit to the Ideha museum which displays items used by the yamabush. With a yamabushi and your tour leader, enter the mystical cedar forest dotted with small shrines and above all, a superb five-storey pagoda. It takes an hour to climb the 2,446 steps to the summit of Mount Haguro and admire the main shrine in bright vermilion red.

Lunch today is at a farmer's restaurant that focuses on local products and serves its own vegetables for a 'paddock to plate' experience. From here, you will visit a samurai silk farm registered as part of 'Japan's Heritage.' You will see the machines used for over 150 years and discover how the samurais once used to work. (B,L)

Day 6 - Tsuruoka - Kakunodate

A 3-hour ride will take you to Kakunodate, a fortified town founded by the local Lord Ashina in 1620. Nowadays, this charming town, called 'the little Kyoto of Tohoku' has many samurai residences dating back more than 350 years and can be easily explored on foot.

After lunch, head to Dakigaeri Valley with your local guide and her famous companions, two incredible Akita inu dogs. The Akita is a muscular, double-coated dog of ancient Japanese lineage famous for their dignity, courage, and loyalty. In Tohoku, they're venerated as family protectors and symbols of good health, happiness, and long life. You will have plenty of quality time with the dogs and a great chance to enjoy the best of Japanese nature scenery, especially during the fall. (B,L)

2 nights at Hotel Folkloro Kakunodate or similar

Day 7 - Kakunodate - Tazawako - Kakunodate

Your Tohoku journey continues to Lake Tazawa, the deepest and clearest lake in Japan. With its very deep blue waters and a mystical aura, it offers a spectacular view of the surrounding nature. A boat cruise will bring you to the most iconic landmarks of Lake Tazawa, including the statue of Tatsuko and the torii gate of Goza-no-ishi shrine.

After lunch, start a cycling tour with your guide. It's a unique opportunity to interact with the local community, drop in on local farms and village shops and gather the finest seasonal produce for a BBQ as the sun sets over the lake. A perfect way to take in the stunning scenery and get under the skin of rural Japanese life. (B,L,D)

Day 8 - Kakunodate - Oga

Today you will discover the most untouched, idiosyncratic, natural Japan in the farthest reaches of the country. Formed by volcanic activity in ancient times, Oga peninsula flourished as a key trading port in medieval Japan. See a side of Japan that is truly at one with its pristine natural environment and traditional way of life.

Start your Oga tour with a visit to the Ineto Agave Brewery completely devoted to sustainability. The experience offered here, is a homage to Oga, pairing his exquisite sake with the finest locally-sourced

ingredients all served on locally produced crockery.

Continue to the Namahage museum. The story of Namahage is woven into the fabric of the Oga peninsula culture. A beautifully curated museum, tucked away in the mountains, which gives you special insight into this unique legend. To end your day in the Oga peninsula, head to Godzilla Rock, made of lapilli tuff from a volcanic eruption about 30 million years ago. The best time to see Godzilla is at sunset to capture a picture of him 'breathing fire'. (B,L,D)

Day 9 - Oga - Noshiro

Basing yourself in the provincial and charming coastal town of Noshiro, spend a full day trekking and foraging with a highly experienced local guide, professional forager and native to the Shirakami region. He will teach you about the divinity, folklore, wildlife and natural bounty of this primeval beech forest, as you forage for wild vegetables, mushrooms and berries – all of which will make up part of your dinner. Your guide, who sources food for some of the region's top Michelin starred restaurants, will ensure you have plenty to take with you back to Noshiro, where a legendary local izakaya chef will add your ingredients to your evening meal. (B,L,D)

Overnight at Berabou Inn or similar

Day 10 - Noshiro - Juniko - Hirosaki

Today, you will take the resort liner, a scenic train, to Juniko station, a region with 33 ponds and lakes, deep in the forest. Head out on a walk on the main Shirakami hiking route with your local guide. You'll certainly be sure to tick off Ao-ike Pond, all the while looking out for the many wild birds and animals living deep in this old growth beech forest. Lunch is included in a local village restaurant.

In the afternoon, take the train to Hirosaki. Dinner this evening is at leisure. (B,L)

Overnight at Art Hotel or similar

Day 11 - Hirosaki - Hiraizumi

This morning, discover Hirosaki, a castle-town famous for its samurai residences and its summer festival, the Neputa Matsuri. From here, continue by road to Hiraizumi (approx. 3h), a World Heritage city since 2011. Once a powerful city when Kyoto was the capital of Japan, Hiraizumi collapsed with the rise to power of Minamoto no Yoritomo, Japan's first shogun.

Established in 850, Chuson-ji is said to be the first temple of the Tendai Buddhist sect in northern Japan. Chuson-ji had up to forty buildings and more than three hundred monk tenants. Today, the few preserved pavilions pay wonderful homage to the golden age of this monastery. After a gentle walk in the forest, you'll reach Konjiki-do, the most spectacular building often compared to the Golden Pavilion in Kyoto. This small wooden building houses statues of Buddha finely gilded. Under the central altar, you'll see the remains of three great leaders of the Fujiwara family. The temple grounds also house a superb open-air Noh scene and a museum with thousands of national treasures. (B,L,D)

Overnight at Shizukatei or similar

Day 12 - Hiraizumi - Matsushima - Sendai

In order to travel light in the shinkansen, you'll leave your main luggage at the front desk and take an overnight bag for the night in Sendai. Your main luggage will be delivered the day after to your hotel in Tokyo.

This morning, you'll have the chance to discover the pine-covered islands of Matsushima Bay, considered to be one of the three best views in Japan. Before enjoying the view of the bay from your boat cruise, you'll visit Zuiganji, one of the largest Zen temples in Tohoku, built by the Date clan of Sendai.

This afternoon, visit Zuihoden, mausoleum of Masamune Date, the founder of Sendai and one of the most charismatic feudal lords of the sixteenth century. Composed of several richly decorated pavilions and numerous lanterns, the historic site also includes the tombs of his descendants. Dinner this evening is at leisure. (B,L)

Overnight at Mitsui Garden or similar

Day 13 - Sendai - Tokyo

After breakfast, transfer to Sendai station where a shinkansen will take you to Ueno Tokyo in approx. 1h30. Enjoy free time in Tokyo. The eastern part of the city offers a traditional atmosphere like Yanaka and Asakusa.

Tonight, your farewell dinner will be on a yakatabune, a boat cruising on Sumida River from Asakusa to Odaiba. After dark, take in the spectacular sight of the bright city lights and the famous Rainbow Bridge from the deck of your cruising yakatabune. (B,D)

Overnight at Gracery Asakusa or similar

Day 14 - Departure

Today is yours at leisure until it is time to transfer to the airport for your onward flight. If time permits, why not discover the highlights of the western part of Tokyo such as Meiji Jingu, Harajuku and the famous Shibuya crossing at your leisure? (B)

End of Services

Inclusions:

- Meet & greet service on arrival
- Return airport transfers
- 14 nights accommodation at hotels/ryokans
- All Breakfasts, 9 Lunches, 7 Dinners
- Services of an English speaking leader/guide and a local guide

- Entrance fees as per the itinerary
- Boat cruise in Matsushima bay
- Cycling tour Tazawako
- Lunch with maiko in Sakata

- Akita inu tour Kakunodate
- Hiking Haguro san with a yamabushi
- Yakatabune cruising in Tokyo (dinner + all you can drink)
- Private coach and public transportation (shinkansen) as per the itinerary
- Luggage transfers

Exclusions:

- International & domestic air tickets not mentioned above
- Meals and beverages not mentioned above
- Early check-in and late check out charges from the hotel
- Visas
- Personal travel insurance
- Expenditure of a personal nature such as drinks, souvenirs, laundry, tipping etc