

Definitive Cultural Tour of Japan

Castles, temples, mountains and tea ceremonies - all the must-see sights and cultural experiences on this immersive guided tour of Japan.



Group departures

See overleaf for departure dates

Holiday overview

Style	Tour
Accommodation	Hotels, Ryokan, Minshuku, Temple
Grade	Tour
Duration	17 days from London to London
Min/Max group size	5 / 12. Guaranteed to run for 5
Trip Leader	Japan Local Leader
Land only	Joining in Tokyo, Japan

Private Departures & Tailor Made itineraries available



Watch related videos online: **Definitive Cultural Tour of Japan**

tel: +44 (0)1453 844400 fax: +44 (0)1453 844422 info@mountainkingdoms.com www.mountainkingdoms.com

Group Departure Dates and Prices

Group departures

2027 Dates:

Wed 14 Apr - Fri 30 Apr

Thu 11 Nov - Sat 27 Nov

Group prices

Visit the holiday page of our website for up-to-date land only and flight inclusive prices for all group departure dates <https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/holiday/definitive-cultural-tour-of-japan>.

Single supplement options can also be found here.

No Surcharge Guarantee

The flight inclusive or land only price will be confirmed to you at the time you make your booking. There will be no surcharges after your booking has been confirmed.

Will the trip run?

This trip is guaranteed to run for 5 people and for a maximum of 12. In the rare event that we cancel a holiday, we will refund you in full and give you at least 6 weeks warning. Many trips do fill up quickly - we advise you to book early if you want to secure a place(s) on the dates of your choice.

Insurance

We offer a travel insurance scheme - please contact us for details.

Private Departures

We can also offer this trip as a private holiday. A Private Departure follows exactly the same itinerary as the group departure but at dates to suit you (subject to availability) - please contact us with your preferred dates.

Tailor Made service

We pride ourselves on the level of quality and choice we provide for our clients who want a fully tailor made holiday. A holiday will be created especially for you by one of our well-travelled experts. They will be able to advise on the accommodation best suited to your needs, the sights you should visit (and those to avoid!) and the best walks and activities matched to your ability. In short, we will work together with you to create your perfect holiday. If you would like to explore the idea of a Tailor Made holiday with Mountain Kingdoms then please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or see the Tailor Made pages of our website for further inspiration.

Your guide



Your trip will be led by an English-speaking Japanese guide. They are all highly experienced, and will greatly enhance your experience on holiday. They will both guide you on the trail, and accompany you on all train and road journeys.

Your trip highlights

- Explore the cultural city of Kyoto, and the historic castles of Matsumoto, Himeji and Nijo
- Gain a unique insight into Japanese culture; join a maiko (apprentice geisha) for a tea ceremony in Kyoto and stay in traditional ryokan and minshuku.
- See the snow monkeys of Yudanaka Onsen and spend a night with the monks in a temple on Mount Koya
- Enjoy remarkable views of iconic Mount Fuji from Lake Ashinoko - weather permitting
- Visit Narai, one of the best-preserved post towns on the Nakasendo Trail, and UNESCO-listed Takayama, the gateway to the Japanese Alps.
- Experience modern Japan; high-rise Tokyo, Hiroshima Peace Park, bullet trains and the neon lights of Osaka

At a glance itinerary

Days 1-2	Fly to Tokyo. Transfer to hotel. Welcome dinner.
Day 3	Sightseeing tour of Tokyo.
Day 4	Excursion to Hakone for views of Mount Fuji. Cruise on Lake Ashi.
Day 5	Transfer to Obuse, visit museum and brewery. Travel to nearby Yudanaka hot springs to see the snow monkeys.
Day 6	Train to Matsumoto. Visit castle. Continue train journey to Narai post-town.
Days 7-8	Transfer by train and bus to Takayama. Explore local area, saké tasting and time at leisure.
Days 9-10	Catch train to Kyoto. Walk through the Gion District, city tour and visit to Nijo Castle.
Day 11	Day trip to Nara with visit to Todaiji Temple.
Days 12-13	Sightseeing and temple stay at Mount Koya. Transfer to Himeji and Miyajima.
Days 14-15	Tour of Himeji Castle. Bullet train to Hiroshima. Sightseeing in Hiroshima. Train to Osaka. Evening tour and farewell dinner.
Day 16	Day at leisure in Osaka.
Day 17	Transfer to Osaka airport and fly home.

Trip summary

Take a journey through Japanese history as you travel from modern Tokyo, west through the beautifully preserved villages of the Japanese Alps and scenic central heartlands to Hiroshima and Osaka. Perfect for the first-time visitor, this once in a lifetime trip through Japan has been carefully designed to include all the must-see sights and experiences on Honshu Island including six UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

You arrive into the dazzle of Tokyo, Japan's capital city, with its bright lights and futuristic nature. Here you explore the old and the new, take a walk through the Sumo district, and head out on a day trip to nearby Hakone for iconic views - weather permitting - of snow-capped Mount Fuji.

Heading north into the more tranquil Japanese Alps you visit a museum to view woodblock paintings by the master artist Hokusai Katsushika, watch the famous "snow monkeys" bathe in the hot springs at Yudanaka and step inside the imposing black and white walls of Matsumoto 'Crow' Castle, one of the oldest in Japan. From here you continue your journey west to Narai, one of the best preserved post towns on the ancient Nakasendo Trail, enjoying glimpses of the snow-capped Alps as you travel by train through the mountains. In historic Takayama you explore the quaint Sanmachi-suji district, sample some saké and shop at the lively morning market, before continuing on to Kyoto and Nara - the cultural heartlands of Japan.

Only a privileged few get to experience a genuine tea ceremony hosted by an elegant maiko (an apprentice geisha) as you will today in Kyoto, alongside a visit to the World Heritage Nijo Castle and a day-trip to Nara. Next is Mount Koya, a mountain monastery home to over a hundred temples. Here you spend the night at a shukubo in a working Buddhist temple, joining the monks for prayers in the morning before visiting beautiful, UNESCO-listed Himeji Castle. Travelling on by bullet train you explore the modern city of Hiroshima and visit scenic Miyajima, a sacred island in the Seto Inland Sea.

Your tour concludes in lively Osaka with a free day to explore this vibrant, neon-lit city.

Special notes

Luggage

During this trip you will be immersed in Japan's culture by using local transport for the majority of travel around the country. To make this travel as easy as possible for you your luggage will be transferred by courier.

Your main luggage will be transported on four occasions, allowing you to carry just an overnight daypack. This means that on four nights you won't have access to your main luggage, but the traditional Japanese accommodation you will be staying in provide cotton robes, warm jackets, slippers, towels, toothbrushes and paste, soap, shampoo and conditioner. It is normal to wear the cotton robes to eat dinner in, relax in your room and even wear outdoors, so you really can travel light! Please speak to Harry Gray in the office for further information.

On these days your luggage will be transported:

Day 5 depart from Tokyo - Day 7 arrive in Takayama

Day 9 - Same day transfer to Kyoto

Day 12 depart from Kyoto - Day 14 arrive in Hiroshima

Day 15 Same day transfer to Osaka.

Airport transfers

The cost of a transfer to/from the airport is included in the price of your holiday. This is a shared taxi service that will coincide with the arrival of your flights. On departure a limousine bus service will pick you up from your hotel and transfer you to the airport. If you have booked as a land only customer please provide your flight details so that your transfers can be arranged.

Please note, if booking your own flights shared taxi services will be provided only from Haneda and Narita airport in Tokyo.

Flights to the UK from Kyoto/Osaka

Please note that there are normally two daily flights from Kyoto/Osaka back to the UK.

- An early morning flight arriving in the UK the same day.
- An evening flight arriving back to the UK the following day. Please note that this will extend the trip duration from London to London by one day.

Group flights will be based on the best available option. All flights will remain subject to change.

Our grading system

This Definitive Cultural Tour of Japan is graded as a Tour, as described below.

Tours

Tours may include any of the following activities: sightseeing, visiting local villages, exploring temples, game viewing, birdwatching, husky sledding, mountain flights, city tours and dramatic journeys by road, rail, or river. Occasionally there will be short, gentle walks so that you can properly explore the cultural sites you are visiting.

Your trip itinerary

Day 1: Fly London to Tokyo

Fly overnight London to Tokyo.

Overnight: In flight

Day 2: Arrive Tokyo. Transfer to hotel. Welcome dinner.

You fly into Tokyo where you will be met and join your shared taxi transfer to your centrally located hotel. In the evening you will head out to dinner at a local restaurant with your guide. Welcome to Japan!

Overnight: Asakusa View Hotel Annex Rokku, Tokyo (Meals: D)

Day 3: Sightseeing in Tokyo.

You will get to visit several of Tokyo's key sights today giving an insight into Japan's fascinating culture and history, both ancient and modern. During the day you will travel by train and underground and have time to explore areas on foot with your guide. The order in which you visit the attractions may change but will include the following (depending on the month you are travelling):

The Hama-Rikyu Garden - The garden originated as falconry ground and has had many incarnations since including a recreational ground for the 6th Shogun. It is now open to the public and the calm and serenity offers a welcome contrast to the surrounding concrete jungle.

The Meiji shrine - Dating back to 1920, the Meiji Shrine complex is a Shinto shrine dedicated to the spirits of Emperor Meiji and his wife. Surrounded by a forest of over 100,000 trees it is a place where people come both to worship and to enjoy the peace and green space.

Sumida River Cruise - The waters of the Sumida River are not just a busy trade route but also home to the 'suijo bus' or water buses. You will enjoy a scenic boat journey along the river from Hinode port to Asakusa port. Along the way you will take in the views of Tokyo landmarks such as Tokyo Skytree, Rainbow Bridge, and the unusually shaped Asahi Group Headquarters Building, among many others.

Mitsubkoshi Store - You will end your day at Mitsubkoshi in Ginza. You will have chance to go shopping or you can return back to the hotel.

Overnight: Asakusa View Hotel Annex Rokku, Tokyo (Meals: B)

Day 4: Day trip to Hakone Mount Fuji area. Cruise on Lake Ashi.

Today, your tour takes you to the Hakone area, where you can enjoy scenic views of Mount Fuji (weather permitting). Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2013, Mount Fuji is also Japan's tallest mountain at 3,776m high. The hot spring area of Hakone, out along the Tokaido from Tokyo, is famed for its views of Mount Fuji, and today you will spend the day exploring the area and trying to catch a glimpse of Fujisan.

Mount Fuji is so emblematic of Japan that it appears in countless woodblock prints, paintings, and even public bathhouses in Japan. Travelling by train, cable cars and gondolas you will explore Hakone and also take a short cruise on Lake Ashi, or Ashi-no-ko. From the cruise you will be able to see views of Hakone-Jinja, and if you are lucky you will have views of Mount Fuji over the waters. Please be aware though that clouds and poor visibility may obscure the view of Mount Fuji, and you have to consider yourself lucky if you get a clear view of the mountain.



The weather conditions mean that you should prepare to be flexible today, and in the event you cannot see Mount Fuji, your guide will manage the itinerary to cater for the interests of the group. For example, you may be able to peruse Hakone-Yumoto filled with many craft and souvenir shops. In particular you may see items of Yosegi-zaiku, a form Japanese marquetry originating in the Edo period. This commonly comes in the form of

puzzle boxes which are traditional to Hakone and make a lovely souvenir. Also, there may be the chance to visit Hakone Gongen: standing at the base of Mt Hakone the shrine is hidden in dense forest. As you make your way along the path lined with lanterns, the shrine emerges surrounded by tall 600 - 800 year old cedar trees. The shrine used to be a place of worship for prominent warriors and is now open to the public. Finally, you may visit kyukaido suginamiki, located only a short walk away this historic and preserved segment of the old Tokaido road is lined with 400 year old cedar trees soaring towards the sky.

Overnight: Asakusa View Hotel Annex Rokku, Tokyo (Meals: B)

Day 5: Travel to Obuse. Visit the Hokusai-kan museum and sake brewery. Continue to the hot springs at Yudanaka Onsen to see the snow monkeys.

Today your main luggage will be couriered to Takayama. An earlier start today as you travel to Obuse in the Nagano Prefecture northwest of Tokyo and your first chance to experience a high speed bullet train. As you reach a speed of 150 mph the city rushes past and you make your way out through the suburbs until a more rural Japan emerges, with fields all around and mountains looming in the distance.

After 90 minutes you disembark at Nagano and take a short local train ride to the small, attractive town of Obuse. Here you get your first real views of the mountains of northern Shinano which provide a scenic backdrop to the town. Obuse is closely associated with the artist Hokusai, famed for his woodblock prints and paintings which include the internationally renowned 'The Great Wave'. Hokusai lived in Obuse in his later years where he was known as the "old man mad about painting". During these years he created a number of masterpieces which can be found on display at the Hokusai-kan Museum which you will visit. There will also be time in Obuse to visit the Matsubaya Honten Sake Brewery. The brewery is over 200 years old and has a tasting room.

After lunch you continue by private vehicle to Yudanaka Onsen, a hot spring village famous for its snow monkeys. The Japanese macaques originally came here to warm themselves in the outdoor hot spring bath during the cold winters, and now come all year round.

Tonight's accommodation will be your first chance to experience a traditional Japanese room. With tatami mat floors the rooms are minimalist yet elegant. Remembering to take your slippers off before entering, you slide open the wooden doors to reveal the bedroom. A low table is placed in the middle of the room, and traditionally one would sit on a pillow whilst taking green tea, however now low chairs have been provided to give back support. You may notice that your bed has not been made, do not worry, this will be prepared as you have dinner and your futon will be ready on your return. Your ryokan will provide cotton robes, warm jackets, slippers, towels, toothbrushes and paste, soap, shampoo and conditioner. It is normal to wear the cotton robes to eat dinner in, relax in your room and even wear outdoors, so you really can travel light.

This evening there is the chance to try a nice relaxing Japanese Onsen (hot spring bath) in your ryokan before dinner. Traditional multi course dinners in the ryokans and minshuku are a sight to behold. There are many small and intricate dishes provided giving a large array of different foods and tastes. The main staple is sticky rice which will also be joined by miso soup. The rest will depend on the area you are staying and the local delicacies, but may consist of fresh and dried fish as well as mushrooms, pickled vegetables and a fresh desert.

Overnight: Biyu No Yado Ryokan or Similar, Yudanaka (Meals: B D)

Day 6: Train to Matsumoto. Visit castle. Continue by train to Narai post-town on the Nakasendo Trail.

As the sun rises and warms the peaks you enjoy a typical Japanese breakfast and then take the train to Matsumoto. Your journey takes you through apple orchards and grape plantations until after two hours you reach the city of Matsumoto and disembark to visit the beautiful black 16th century castle. With three turrets, six ornate floors and authentic wooden interiors, Matsumoto Castle is justly designated as one of the 'National Treasures of Japan'. It was built at the beginning of the Eisho era and is over 400 years old. After exploring the castle and taking in the panoramic views from the top there will be time to explore the gardens and maybe buy a souvenir before you board your next train to the small town of Narai in the Kiso Valley.



Narai is a charming post town on the ancient Nakasendo way - literally 'the path through the mountains'. It marks the mid-point between Kyoto and Tokyo and during the Edo feudal period was the wealthiest of the many post-towns where travellers stopped to rest their weary feet

Narai retains much of its historic charm with wooden buildings lining the 1km main street which is the longest in Japan's post towns. You will walk a short section of the Nakasendo Trail before making your way along the main street to your traditional minshuku accommodation - a small family run guesthouse. Once again cotton robes and slippers will be provided and most guests will wear these in the evening.

Overnight: Iseya Minshuku or Shimade Minshuku or Similar, Narai (Meals: B D)

Day 7: Travel by train and bus to Takayama. Local exploration.

This morning after breakfast you will have the chance to try a traditional coffee brewed in a 180 year old building. Here you may wish to buy coffee or just enjoy the wonderful atmosphere. A great way to start the morning! You may also be able to visit the Narai Kiso-no-Ohashi bridge, a beautiful bridge constructed of cypress trees before catching the train along the Kiso Valley to Takayama.

Although it has expanded in recent years the small city of Takayama, gateway to the northern Japan Alps, has retained much of its traditional architecture and is well-known for its crafts, particularly yew-wood carving, Shunkei lacquerware, pottery and furniture.

After arriving at your accommodation, there will be time to relax in a hot-spring bath before dinner. Tonight's meal will include Hida beef, a regional delicacy.

Overnight: Tokyu Stay Musubinoyu or Similar, Takayama (Meals: B D)

Day 8: Morning sightseeing in Takayama including a visit to the Kusakabe Mingekan Folklore Museum. Time at leisure.

Today you have a full but relaxed day in Takayama, starting with a visit to the morning market. Run by the women of Takayama, the small market lies by the river and offers fresh produce as well as small trinkets and souvenirs. Sanmachi Suji - the three main streets that comprise the heart of the historic Old Town - has rows of old merchant houses which date back to over 300 years ago when the city was an important Edo merchant town. Some of the houses open as small museums including the fascinating Kusakabe Mingekan Folklore Museum which you will visit. It has been designed to represent a townhouse of the Edo period with many interesting exhibits from the time.



In the afternoon there will be free time for you to wander at leisure and maybe hunt for special treasures to bring home. This is a great place for handicraft shopping with everything from handmade wooden clogs to intriguing red Sarubobo dolls available. You may like to visit the Takayama Float Exhibition Hall where you can view some of the floats that are used in the Takayama festival Matsuri. The festival began around 350 years and as the town grew so did the floats becoming more and more magnificent. When not in the museum the floats are housed throughout the city.

Overnight: Tokyu Stay Musubinoyu or Similar, Takayama (Meals: B D)

Day 9: Time in Takayama. Transfer by train to Kyoto - 3 hours. Walk through the Gion District. Tea ceremony with apprentice Geisha.

Please note that your luggage will be transferred from Takayama to your hotel in Kyoto today. You will have a brief morning in Takayama before departing for Kyoto.

A lunchtime train will carry you through the rice paddies to your next stop, Kyoto, where you head out into the city. Here you explore the small streets awash with tiny glowing lanterns and scented with the heady smell of Japanese cuisine. Gion is renowned for its Ryotei - exclusive private restaurants - and traditional teahouses (ochaya) where geisha entertain guests.

Kyoto as the cultural capital of Japan is home to the three tea ceremony schools, and the highlight of today is a special tea ceremony with a maiko (apprentice geisha) or geiko. Most visitors are lucky if they catch a passing glimpse of a genuine geiko (the local name for a geisha) and/or maiko whilst in Kyoto, making this experience even more special. The formal tea ceremony, or the Way of Tea, dates back to the 16th century and is rooted in Zen Buddhist philosophy. It is one of the classical arts of refinement which the maiko will learn as part of her geisha training. The ceremony follows simple rules but there is a strict etiquette to be observed - this is a not a

relaxing cuppa, more a spiritual process. The rest of the evening is free for you to explore or try one of Kyoto's many restaurants.

Overnight: Daiwa Roynet Kyoto Shijo Karasuma Hotel or Similar, Kyoto (Meals: B)

Day 10: Morning tour of Kyoto. Afternoon visit to Nijo Castle.

Your day starts with a visit to the famous Kinkaku-ji, the beautiful golden pavilion whose top two floors are completely covered in gold leaf. In 1397 Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, the third shogun of the Muromachi period bought the land here and built a villa on it for rest and contemplation. The villa was used as a guest house for emperors and other members of nobility until after Yoshimitsu died when, as per his wishes, it was converted into a temple. In 1994 the temple was registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Next you walk a short distance to Ryoanji to view the famous rock garden of raked gravel and fifteen moss covered boulders.



You then cross Kyoto to visit Nijo castle, another World Heritage Site. Built in 1603 as the Kyoto residence of Tokugawa Iyeyasu - the first shogun of the Edo Period - the Ninomaru Palace was later expanded by his grandson, though the castle itself remained a two-storey structure. After the fall of the shogunate in 1867, the building was used as the Imperial Palace before it was donated to the city. It remains one of the finest examples of castle palace architecture from Japan's feudal era. The castle buildings are surrounded by delightful gardens planted with many examples of native trees including nearly 400 cherry trees.

Overnight: Daiwa Roynet Kyoto Shijo Karasuma Hotel or Similar, Kyoto (Meals: B)

Day 11: Train to Nara including Todai-ji Temple and Nara Park.

This morning you will take a day trip from Kyoto to Nara, only an hour away by train. Nara was the first permanent capital of Japan, before Kyoto, in the period between 710 and 784. The city has plenty of UNESCO historical treasures but your first stop is Todai-ji, which with its vast temple building and large bronze Buddha is one of Japan's most famous temples. The elegant wooden structure is said to be the largest in the world, and the grounds of the temple are also home to a large number of wild deer who roam the area freely and are tame.

You return to the centre of town for lunch, and should have time afterwards to visit the old merchant quarter where you can explore the narrow streets with their little shops and cafes.

Back in Kyoto you have the evening at leisure, your last night here before a change of scenery at Mount Koya.

Overnight: Daiwa Roynet Kyoto Shijo Karasuma Hotel or Similar, Kyoto (Meals: B)

Day 12: Bus ride to Mount Koya. Walk through the Okuno-In Cemetery.

Your luggage will be sent ahead this morning to Hiroshima while you travel with just your overnight essentials for Mount Koya and Himeji.

You travel by bus to Mount Koya (Koyasan) - a bowl-shaped valley filled with cedars high in the mountains of the Kii Peninsula. Since the 9th century Koyasan has been a place of religious devotion and ceremony. Today there are more than 100 monasteries, many of which have Shukubo (Pilgrim's lodging). You will stay in one of these elegant Buddhist temples tonight. Before then, you will walk through the vast Okuno-in cemetery, with thousands of graves and memorials to feudal lords and other past luminaries.

At the Shukubo you will have some time to relax in the communal bath, and in the robes and slippers provided, before your evening meal. Tonight's delicious temple meal will be vegetarian in keeping with Buddhist philosophy.

Overnight: Yochiin Temple or Similar, Mount Koya (Meals: B D)

Day 13: Morning prayer service. Visit Kongubu-ji Temple. Bullet train to Himeji.

This morning we recommend you to rise early for the prayer service at your shukubo. This is a fascinating, almost meditative experience where you sit and silently observe as the monks chant their morning prayers for around an hour. There may also be a short explanatory talk afterwards

After a shojin ryori - Buddhist vegetarian - breakfast there is time this morning for further exploration of Mount Koya, maybe to see the red Konpon Daito pagoda or explore the Danjo Garan temple complex, before you travel onwards to Himeji via Osaka. You will enjoy a scenic cable car ride to descend from Mount Koya, before taking the train to Himeji.

Himeji is a large city famous for its magnificent castle, which you will visit tomorrow. The castle is one of the finest surviving examples of early 17th-century Japanese architecture, and was Japan's first UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site.

Overnight: Hotel Monterey or Similar, Himeji (Meals: B D)

Day 14: Visit to Himeji Castle. Bullet train to Hiroshima. Visit Peace Memorial Park and Museum.

This morning you visit Himeji Castle, known as the "White Heron" Castle for its walls covered with white plaster which resemble a heron in flight. Himeji Castle is famous for both its huge main tower and its maze-like design. The castle has undergone extensive restoration works. You will pass through the Hishi-No-Mon gate and take a guided tour of the castle. Throughout the tour you will observe the incredible beauty and detail of the castle from the vast gardens to the intricate ornamentation of the Gegyo; it really is a stunning site.



You then continue on by bullet train to Hiroshima. Known throughout the world as the first city to suffer the impact of atomic weapons, today Hiroshima is a vibrant, modern city. Throughout the Peace Memorial Park are a number of touching memorials, including the Children's Peace Monument, festooned with brightly coloured strings of origami cranes, left by children from all over the world to express a desire for peace. The Peace Memorial Park and Museum provides context to the impact of the bombing on the city, the country and the world. You will be able to see the A-Bomb Dome, the only structure that was left standing in the hypocentre of the bombing. Within the museum there are many different artefacts and works of art providing context and stories of those who suffered at the time of the bombings. The museum experience is undoubtedly extremely sobering but also reflects the resilience of Hiroshima and its people.

If you prefer not to visit the Peace Memorial Museum and Peace Park there is still plenty to do and see in Hiroshima, from the bustling downtown area to the Shukkeien sunken garden which dates back to 1620.

Overnight: Washington Hotel or Similar, Hiroshima (Meals: B)

Day 15: Train and ferry to Miyajima Island. Sightseeing. Train to Osaka. Evening tour and farewell dinner.

Please note that your luggage will be transferred to your hotel in Osaka today.

This morning you travel by train and ferry to the sacred island of Miyajima, one of the most scenic spots in Japan. Here you will walk along the waterfront and view the famous floating Great Torii and the Itsukushima Shrine. As in Nara there are a number of free roaming deer on the island which are considered to be sacred messengers of the gods. You can also enjoy strolling the streets and visiting the traditional shops that line the route back to the ferry.

You depart the island mid-afternoon and travel back by train, arriving late afternoon/early evening at the hotel in Osaka. You then venture out into the thick of the bright lights and hustle and bustle of Osaka - the very epitome of modern Japan. It is considered to be the commercial hub of the country.

The evening tour of the Dotonbori will overload your senses; with its numerous restaurants, delicious aroma of fresh food and quirky signs, it really is a haven for foodies. It is also the perfect place to conclude your tour with a final farewell dinner.

Overnight: Monterey Grasmere Hotel or Sotetsu Grand Fresa Namba, Osaka (Meals: B D)

Day 16: Day at leisure in Osaka.

You have the day to yourself to explore Japan's third largest city, and there is much to discover, both by day and by night. Top sights include: the Umeda Sky Building for fabulous views and a 'floating garden'; Osaka Castle (actually a 1930s reconstruction similar to the White Castle) with its picturesque gardens and interesting artefacts; and Shitenno-ji Temple - one of the oldest temples in Japan. Osaka also has several good museums as well as an excellent aquarium and Japan's Universal Studios theme park. Away from the main tourist sights, Osaka's bustling streets, markets and pretty riverside area make exploring on foot a real pleasure. And, when it gets dark, head to the Dotonbori area. Like a scene from Blade Runner, it lights up the night skies with a wall of dazzling neon signs, whilst its busy streets are lined with great restaurants, shops and bars. A fantastic place to end your tour of Japan.

Overnight: Monterey Grasmere Hotel or Sotetsu Grand Fresa Namba, Osaka (Meals: B)

Day 17: Transfer to Osaka airport. Fly to London.

Time to bid goodbye to Japan as you transfer to the airport for your flight home. Please note that there are normally two daily flights back to the UK: an early morning flight, arriving back in the UK on the same day, and an overnight flight. If booked on an overnight flight, you will have time at leisure this morning before an afternoon transfer to the airport. You will then depart Japan this evening and arrive back in the UK tomorrow.
(Meals: B)

What the price includes

What's included:

- ✓ 15 x breakfasts and 8 x dinners
- ✓ Good standard hotel accommodation in the main towns
- ✓ Staying in traditional minshuku, ryokan and shukubo (temple), on a twin-sharing basis, in outlying places
- ✓ Baggage transfer service so you will have your baggage with you for all except four nights when you stay in traditional accommodation where robes and slippers (expected attire) are provided
- ✓ An English-speaking Japanese leader
- ✓ Economy class return air fares from the UK & UK Departure Tax (flight inclusive only)
- ✓ Shared taxi airport transfer for international flights on arrival and limousine bus on departure
- ✓ All transport by private vehicles, buses, ferries and trains (bullet and local)
- ✓ Sightseeing and activities where specified in this Japan tour itinerary
- ✓ Carbon offsetting with the Ecoan Tree Planting Project (for clients taking our flight inclusive option)
- ✓ A free Mountain Kingdoms gilet

Airport transfers

The cost of a transfer to/from the airport is included in the price of your holiday. This is a single group transfer which is arranged to coincide with the timings of the group flights. If you book your own flights which arrive/depart at different times to this, or we book flights at your request that have different timings, we will be happy to provide a quote for a separate transfer. Please contact us should you require any further information.

What's not included:

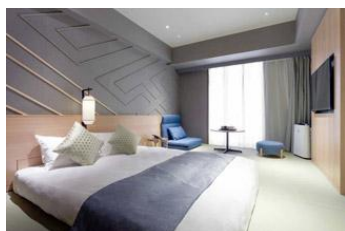
- ✗ Visa fees for Japan
- ✗ Lunches and 6 evening meals
- ✗ Travel insurance
- ✗ Tips

Your accommodation

We will endeavour to secure the hotels named in the itinerary but if our first choice of hotel is not available we will book a suitable alternative of a similar standard.

Accommodation in the main cities is in western style hotels, with twin or single rooms available. In more outlying towns we use traditional ryokan and minshuku inns as well as one night in temple (shukubo) accommodation. Many have communal hot spring style baths, and all serve delicious, authentic Japanese food. Rooms have tatami mat flooring, futon beds, and western bathrooms either en suite or shared. In the ryokan or minshuku single rooms are not generally available and single travellers will be paired with another traveller of the same sex from the Mountain Kingdoms group.

Please be aware that in Japan double rooms are much smaller than twin rooms. We will therefore automatically book a twin room for couples. If you would prefer one of the smaller double rooms, you just need to inform us when you make your booking.



Asakusa View Hotel Annex Rokku, Tokyo

Centrally located with several sights within easy walking distance, the Asakusa View offers a high standard of convenience and comfort. Spacious, contemporary rooms have air-conditioning, refrigerators, kettles and free Wi-Fi. The hotel has a fitness centre and its own restaurant serving both Japanese and western dishes, and an extensive breakfast buffet.



Biyu No Yado Ryokan or Similar, Yudanaka

Ryokans always have Japanese style accommodation, with tatami mat flooring and futons laid out in the evening for sleeping. Some ryokan rooms have en-suite bathrooms, although older style ones will have shared bathrooms.



Iseya Minshuku or Shimade Minshuku or Similar, Narai

Minshuku are either traditional wooden buildings, or more modern constructions. The rooms are traditional Japanese style, with tatami matting floors and futons laid out in the evening. The food is Japanese and always beautifully presented and delicious! Bathrooms are generally shared, and there are often communal hot spring style baths segregated by gender.



Tokyu Stay Musubinoyu or Similar, Takayama

This new hotel offers sleek, contemporary styling and modern conveniences whilst still referencing Japan's connection to nature. It has a restaurant serving Japanese and western dishes, and a large hot-spring bath designed to give the sense of being in a tranquil garden rather than a busy city. Rooms are spacious and boast locally made furnishings and a full range of amenities.



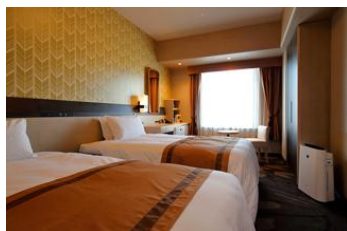
Daiwa Roynet Kyoto Shijo Karasuma Hotel or Similar, Kyoto

A typical, modern Japanese hotel the Daiwa Roynet in Kyoto offers a comprehensive range of amenities and a good standard of comfort. Good-sized rooms have air-conditioning, kettles and humidifiers, plus there is sleepwear available for a cosy night. A generous buffet breakfast is available in the restaurant and Wi-Fi is freely available throughout. The hotel is situated next to the Shijo Subway making it a convenient option in central Kyoto.



Yochiin Temple or Similar, Mount Koya

The Yochiin is a peaceful, historic, Buddhist temple with tatami mat rooms with futons. Bathrooms are shared. It has a large, communal spa bath and jacuzzi, and serves delicious vegetarian food. You are welcome to join in with the Buddhist ceremonies that the monks perform daily, but there is no pressure to do so. We may also use the Ekoin or the Shojoshinin Temples which have very similar facilities.



Hotel Monterey or Similar, Himeji

All rooms in this modern, hotel offer fridges, kettles, free Wi-Fi and a smartphone that can be used for free inside and outside the hotel. A generous breakfast buffet of Japanese and western dishes is served daily. The hotel is less than a mile from Himeji Castle and just a short walk from the station.



Washington Hotel or Similar, Hiroshima

Only a short walk from the Peace Memorial and Hiroshima Castle, the Washington Hotel is well situated to take advantage of Hiroshima's key attractions. Rooms at the hotel are modern and well-equipped with air-conditioning, kettles and fridges. Free Wi-Fi is available throughout and the hotel has its own restaurant where a western and Japanese buffet breakfast is served daily.



Monterey Grasmere Hotel or Sotetsu Grand Fresa Namba, Osaka

Conveniently located in the central Namba district, the Monterey Grasmere is a modern hotel within walking distance of many popular areas within the city. The hotel is also directly connected to Namba Station. The guest rooms are located on floors 24 through 31 and have air-conditioning, Wi-Fi and great views over the city. We also use the Sotetsu Grand Fresa in Namba which is a modern, business-style hotel located close to a subway station and a lively shopping area. Facilities in the brightly decorated rooms include a fridge, air-conditioning, and a kettle. Wi-Fi is available free of charge throughout the property.

Meal arrangements

All breakfasts and 8 dinners are included. Lunch is not included and your guide will help you organise your lunches which may be picnics or meals taken in local restaurants or cafes.

Flight arrangements

Flight inclusive from price

Our 'Flight inclusive from' price is based on the best fare available at the time of printing. As airfares change on a constant basis, this should be used only as a guide price. Rest assured that, at the time of booking, we will endeavour to get the best possible price for the flights you need. Remember, the earlier you book the greater your chances of securing the best fare.

Flight inclusive packages booked through Mountain Kingdoms are protected through our ATOL bonding scheme.

Flight upgrades and regional Airports

Please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 for flight options from regional UK airports, Business Class upgrades, alternative airlines and stopovers. Please also check our website for the most up to date flight inclusive 'from' prices.

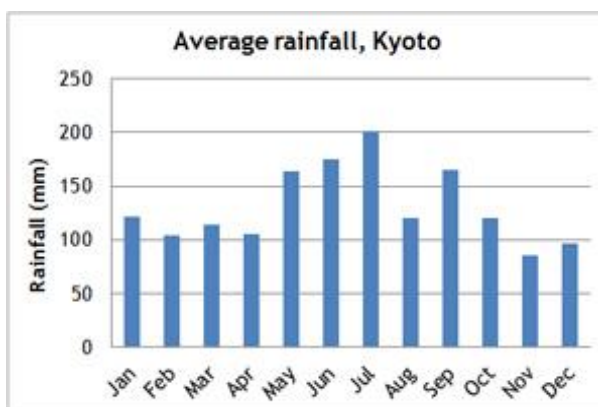
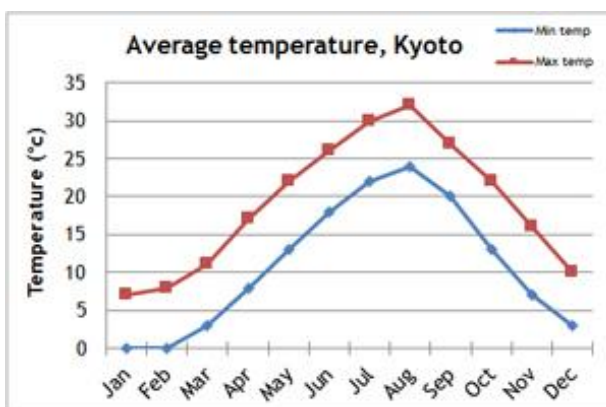
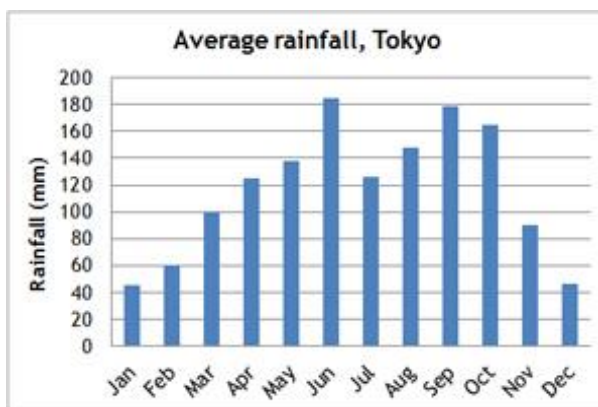
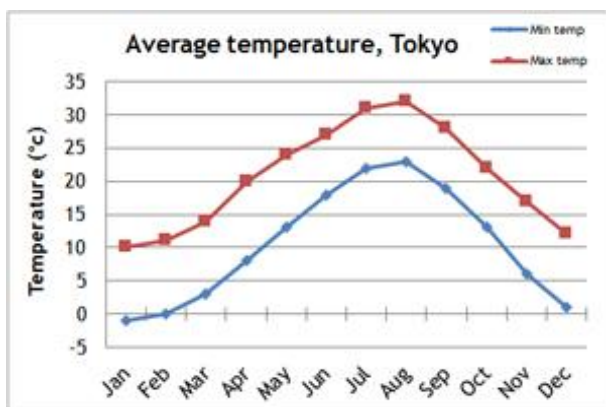
Further information

When we receive your booking, we send you a full Trip Dossier which contains details of any visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. If you do have queries at this initial stage do call us on 01453 844400 and we will be pleased to offer advice.

The nature of adventure travel

Every effort will be made to keep to this itinerary but we cannot guarantee that things may not change, either before you travel or while you are away. By its very nature, adventure travel involves an element of the unexpected, particularly in more remote areas. A variety of factors such as adverse weather conditions, changes to local schedules and difficulties with transportation can all contribute to the need to make changes to the itinerary, often at the very last minute. Our Operations Manager and your Trip Leader will make every effort to maintain the integrity of the original itinerary and minimise the impact of any changes, but an easy-going and flexible nature is a real asset! Please note that all timings and distances given are approximate.

Climate information



Extensions

Extending your holiday

If you would like additional inspiration on how or where to extend your holiday please call us on 01453 844400.



There are many ways you can extend your holiday in Japan with Mountain Kingdoms: you could book extra nights at a hotel at the start or end of your trip, take a personal sightseeing tour or enjoy some other exciting activity. In fact whatever's available, we can help make it happen. We're happy to suggest ideas, provide quotes and make all the arrangements. We can also assist with flight and hotel upgrades.

Why book this holiday with Mountain Kingdoms?

- We have carefully designed this 'dream' tour to tick-off as many must-see sights and experiences as possible, including six UNESCO World Heritage sites and a maiko (apprentice geisha) hosted tea ceremony.
- You will try freshly grown produce and an array of Japanese culinary delights in nightly feasts.
- You stay in quality hotels in main towns, and traditional inns of character in the country, including lodgings at a Buddhist temple.
- You travel by the efficient public transport system in Japan giving you a real sense of immersion into modern-day life in the country.
- You will be accompanied by a top English-speaking Japanese guide throughout.
- We apply a maximum group size of 12, thereby offering a genuine small group trekking experience.
- Harry Gray researched this tour first-hand in the spring of 2019, so if you want to talk to someone in the office with experience of the trip, call Harry on 01453 844400.
- As part of our responsible tourism commitment, we will be carbon-offsetting all international flights booked through us by donating funds to the Ecoan Tree Planting Project in Peru.
- If you wish to fly with a specific airline, from a regional UK airport or on alternative dates to the main group we would be happy to arrange this for you. Please contact our Flights team for flight options, quotes and further information.

If we've tempted you to take your next holiday with us, we advise you to check availability and you can do this via our website: www.mountainkingdoms.com or by calling the team on +44 (0)1453 844400. Bookings can be made online, by phone or by completing a booking form and returning it to us. We can also provisionally hold places if you need time to consider your options.

What our clients say



Fantastic trip. Lots of interesting places to visit and no unnecessary visits to 'tourist shops' and the like that spoil many guided tours. We loved that we used public transport everywhere. Our guide was absolutely terrific, and did her very best to accommodate our wishes whenever possible. Despite struggling with Japanese food and the traditional style hotels, we are glad we tried them. It was intensive and tiring at times, but we prefer that to lots of 'free time'. Highly recommended.

-Roger & Marion, Bucks



A fantastic holiday covering a wide range of cultural and tourist highlights, excellent organisation, great food and accommodation, faultless, perfect for first time visitors to Japan, highly recommended.

-PS

We enjoyed the variety and comprehensive experience of Japan, it's history and culture.

-Antony Marris, Worcs



All the Japanese people were unfailingly friendly, helpful and polite.

-M&T, Kent

The programme for this cultural tour is excellent, with a range of experiences from watching Sumo wrestlers at their daily training, to spending the night in a Buddhist shrine, where we attended their prayers at daybreak. From a mountain trip to watch macaque monkeys playing in the snow, to boat trips on Lake Ashi, where we saw Mount Fuji, and to Miyajima Island to admire the stage setting for the No theatre productions. We returned truly different - with so many unique memories, really healthy after the cuisine. and mindful that a holiday can make such a difference. This was a holiday to bear comparison with any other in the pantheon of outstanding experiences. We both thank you as the originator of this trip. You had the imagination to appreciate what it could be, and the efficiency to realise the dream so effectively. You can be proud of your work!

-Mr C W, Bucks



This is a fantastic trip, whether it is your first trip or not. With its varied itinerary, this trip sets to hit all of the main spots as well as those that many tours don't get to see. Japan really is a country that keeps on giving.

- Harry Gray, Operations Manager, Mountain Kingdoms

Mountain Kingdoms - distinctly different

Truly independent

In an age where many so-called 'independent' travel companies have in fact been bought out by multi-national giants, we remain fiercely independent with all the benefits this offers our clients.

Value for money prices with an emphasis on quality

We are not in the business of cutting our itineraries and services to the bone to offer eye-catching cheap prices. We use some of the best airlines, and typically 3 or 4 star hotels in cities. We include the majority of meals and private transport for road travel. We use excellent equipment and appoint well-trained staff and leaders. Last year, over 98% of our clients rated their Mountain Kingdoms holiday as 'excellent' or 'good'. We are members of AITO and bound by their quality charter.

Complete financial security

You can book with us confident that your holiday has full financial protection. Flight inclusive holidays are financially protected by the Civil Aviation Authority under ATOL licence number 2973 and 'Land Only' holidays are covered by a bond secured with ABTOT.

No Surcharge Guarantee

Your peace of mind is important to us so we have a No Surcharge Guarantee on all Land Only and Flight Inclusive bookings. This means that there will be no change to the price of your holiday once we have confirmed your booking, regardless of fluctuations in exchange rates or fuel prices.

Award winning Responsible Tourism

We feel strongly that all our holidays should benefit local communities, protect the environment and respect local traditions, religion and heritage. You can read more about the charities we support and our Responsible Tourism commitments and initiatives on the following page or at www.mountainkingdoms.com.

Genuine small group travel

Almost all of our holidays have a maximum group size of just 12, plus leader. This provides more contact with your leader, readier access to off-the-beaten-path areas, greater interaction with local communities and a reduced environmental impact.

Loyalty Discount

If you have previously travelled with us we recognise your loyalty with a discount on future trips.

Booking your holiday - it couldn't be easier

Once you've chosen your Mountain Kingdoms holiday you can book online, call the office or complete and post a booking form which can be found in our brochure or downloaded from our website. If you would like to hold a place on one of our trips, whilst you make up your mind, please give us a call to make a provisional booking. This is a no-obligation, no-cost booking and we will hold your place until space comes under pressure or we need your decision.

Comprehensive information

When we receive your booking we send you a full trip dossier which contains details of visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. In fact, everything you need to know to give you peace of mind and allow you to prepare for your trip of a lifetime.



RESPONSIBLE TOURISM STATEMENT

For almost four decades, Mountain Kingdoms has been offering people the chance to visit amazing places on this extraordinary planet. We now have trips to all corners of the globe but are conscious that our holidays can have a detrimental impact on the world around us and want to do all we can to reduce that.

We have focused our main responsible tourism efforts on reducing the carbon emissions produced by our holidays, and counterbalancing this carbon by supporting carbon offset measures. Here are some of our current and future plans to minimise the impact of our business as a whole.

Carbon offsetting

Since 2007, we have donated a percentage of our client and staff flight costs to the Ecoan tree planting project in Peru. Ecoan are a trusted local NGO who use the funds directly to purchase seedling trees with the long-term goal of restoring 2.5 million acres of Andean land.

Ecoan maintains over 100 tree nurseries across Peru where their tree saplings are grown and then transported to planting sites during the rainy season. They use native trees such as the Polylepis, as these can survive at high altitudes. As well as sequestering carbon, they help protect against soil erosion, landslides and the effects of extreme weather on local crops. As such, they are enormously beneficial to the economic well-being of the surrounding communities. This is very much a community-led conservation project, with the local Quechuan people coming together to plant tens of thousands of saplings in the Andean highlands where they live. During the annual Queuña Raymi (tree festival), over 150,000 native trees can be planted in a single day!

For every person booking a long-haul, flight inclusive holiday with us, Ecoan can purchase and plant 20 trees in Peru, and for short-haul flights, 7 trees. Typically, we send over \$7,000 per year to Ecoan, which is over 7,000 trees.

Reducing carbon emissions

- ✓ We offer the majority of our clients a free, filtered Water-to-Go bottle to help reduce the need for single-use plastic bottles during their travels.
- ✓ We predominantly use locally-owned hotels and guesthouses rather than multinational chains. In some of our destinations, such as Bhutan, we use homestays. Not only does this type of small-sized, locally-owned accommodation have a much-reduced carbon footprint, but it also helps support communities.
- ✓ We evaluate our flights to make sure we are using the most fuel-efficient airlines with the youngest fleets and, where possible, choose direct flights for each trip.
- ✓ We have stopped offering unnecessary optional flights, such as Everest sightseeing. We try to minimise internal flights where possible.
- ✓ We recycle as much of our office waste as possible and have introduced a client portal to reduce paperwork and to make it easier for clients to manage their trips online.

Wider commitment to responsible and sustainable tourism

- ✓ We are signatories to the Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency initiative to stand alongside other like-minded travel companies to initiate best practices to make tourism as sustainable as possible.
- ✓ We will continue to support several charities with whom we have a long-standing relationship, such as Shiva Charity in Nepal.
- ✓ Over the years, we have given sizeable payments to emergency relief when a disaster has occurred in the countries we operate in. We always try to ensure that these funds go directly to those who need them most to help rebuild their lives.

