

## Definitive Cultural Tour of Japan

Castles, temples, mountains and tea ceremonies - all the must-see sights and cultural experiences in the Land of the Rising Sun.



### Group departures

See overleaf for departure dates

### Holiday overview

Style	Tour
Accommodation	Hotels, Ryokan, Minshuku, Temple
Grade	Tour
Duration	16 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

Mountain Kingdoms Ltd, 20 Long Street, Wotton-under-Edge, Gloucestershire GL12 7BT UK  
Managing Director: Steven Berry. Registered in England No. 2118433. VAT No. 496 6511 08

# Departures

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## Group departures

### 2024 Dates:

Wed 10 Apr - Thu 25 Apr

Wed 28 Aug - Thu 12 Sep

Wed 13 Nov - Thu 28 Nov

### Group prices and optional supplements

Please contact us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or visit our website for our land only and flight inclusive prices and single supplement options.

### 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

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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

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- Explore the cultural city of Kyoto, and the historic black and white castles of Matsumoto and Himeji
- 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

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Days 1-2	Fly to Tokyo. Transfer to hotel. Welcome dinner.
Day 3	Excursion to Hakone for views of Mount Fuji. Cruise on Lake Ashi.
Days 4-5	Tour of Tokyo. Transfer to Obuse and travel to nearby hot springs.
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 Fushimi Inari.
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	Transfer to Osaka airport and fly home.

## Trip summary

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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 walk through the much-photographed 5,000 red torii gates to Fushimi Inari Shrine and a day-trip to Nara. The scenic Nankai railway brings you to 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 where you enjoy a farewell meal and a chance to reflect on your wonderful experiences in the Land of the Rising Sun.

## Special notes

### Luggage

Your main luggage will be transported on four occasions, allowing you to carry just an overnight daypack. This means that on three 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 - from Tokyo to Takayama

Day 9 - from Takayama to Kyoto

Day 12 - from Kyoto to Himeji

Day 14 - from Himeji 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.

# Your trip itinerary

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## Day 1: Fly London to Tokyo

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Fly overnight London to Tokyo.

**Overnight: In flight**

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

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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: Shiba Park Hotel or Park Hotel, Tokyo (Meals: D)**

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## Day 3: Day trip to Hakone Mount Fuji area. Cruise on Lake Ashi.

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Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2013, Mount Fuji is Japan's most iconic landmark, and at 3,776 metres is also Japan's tallest mountain. 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 be able to 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 of 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: Shiba Park Hotel or Park Hotel, Tokyo (Meals: B)**

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## Day 4: Sightseeing in Tokyo.

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After a hearty breakfast you will visit the Sumo district of Tokyo, Ryogoku. The sport of sumo wrestling has been around for over 1,500 years. However it was in 1909 that the first sumo stadium was built, with the 4th constructed in 1985. The stadium is able to seat over 10,000 spectators and hosts annual tournaments. It is also home to the Sumo museum, which aims to preserve the rich history of Japan's national sport. You will also have a chance to walk around the district passing by the Sumo stables also known as Heya, a place where the wrestlers live and train. If you are lucky there is also a chance that you may watch a sumo training session. Please note that this cannot be guaranteed and if possible will be confirmed whilst you are in country.

You next visit the Grand Meiji shrine. Surrounded by a forest of over 100,000 trees the shrine is a place to worship the spirits of the Emperor. During the New Year period, nearly 3,000,000 people visit. Continuing on you will head to Mitsubkoshi, the oldest department store in Tokyo, where you will have a chance to sample some of the amazing food on offer for lunch, with many choices available.

After lunch you will make your way to the wonderful Hama-Rikyu gardens. 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 rest of the day is at leisure for you to relax or continue exploring.

**Overnight: Shiba Park Hotel or Park Hotel, Tokyo (Meals: B)**

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**Day 5: Travel to Obuse. Visit the Hokusai-kan museum. Continue to the hot springs at Yudanka Onsen to see the 'Snow Monkeys'.**

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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 snow-capped mountains of northern Shinano which provide a scenic backdrop to the town. Obuse was home to 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.

After lunch you continue by local train to Yudunaka 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, Hida beef as well as mushrooms, pickled vegetables and a fresh desert.

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

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

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As the sun rises and warms the snow-capped 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 three 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)**

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

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This morning after breakfast you will have the chance to visit a 180 year old coffee shop where the coffee is brewed in a traditional way, 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 ryokan (traditional style inn), there will be time to relax in a hot-spring bath before dinner. Tonight's multi course meal will include Hida beef, a regional delicacy.

**Overnight: Hotel Ouan or Similar, Takayama (Meals: B D)**

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

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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.



The Takayama area is also home to several saké breweries including the 200 year old Funaska saké brewery. You will enjoy a tour of the brewery today with the chance to taste their traditional saké as well as some more unusual flavoured ones!

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.

**Overnight: Hotel Ouan or Similar, Takayama (Meals: B D)**

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

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You have a relaxed start this morning with time to explore Takayama further. 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.

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. The Gion district is famed for its many Ryotei - exclusive private restaurants, and you will also visit the Sanjo-ohashi Bridge, the western end of the Nakasendo Trail.

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). 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 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.

Please note that your main luggage will be couriered to Kyoto today.

**Overnight: The General Kyoto Takatsuji Tominokoji or Similar, Kyoto (Meals: B)**

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#### **Day 10: Morning tour of Kyoto. Afternoon visit to the Fushimi Inari Shrine.**

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A great breakfast is followed by a full day of sightseeing in and around Kyoto.

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.



Crossing Kyoto by train you make your way this afternoon to the Fushimi Inari Shrine, with its many vermilion torii gates and photogenic walkways. You will find the first, much photographed section of the path busy but as you snake your way up the hillside through the gates the crowds start to clear and towards the top you will enjoy fantastic views over Kyoto. The torii gates are donated by those offering thanks for making a wish come true or seeking prosperity.

Your luggage will be waiting for you when you return to your hotel.

**Overnight: The General Kyoto Takatsuji Tominokoji or Similar, Kyoto (Meals: B)**

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

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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: The General Kyoto Takatsuji Tominokoji or Similar, Kyoto (Meals: B)**

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#### **Day 12: Scenic train ride to Mount Koya. Walk through the Okuno-In Cemetery.**

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We will send your luggage ahead this morning to Himeji while you travel with just your overnight essentials on the scenic journey by train and cable car to Mount Koya, ascending through a valley filled with cedar trees high up in the mountains of the Kii peninsula. Sacred Mount Koya has been a place of religious devotion and ceremony since the 9th century and there is a real contrast between here and Kyoto.

There are now more than 100 monasteries in Mount Koya, a number of which have special accommodation for pilgrims. Tonight you will stay in one of these temple shukubo. After you drop your bags off here you head to the vast cemetery of Okuno-in for a guided walk through the thousands of graves and memorials dedicated to feudal lords and other past luminaries. Interestingly it is also a place to remember the more recently deceased and many companies such as Nissan and Panasonic have their own memorials. Towards the far end of the

cemetery is the Gokusho Offering Hall where visitors throw water over a row of statues, praying for family members who have passed. Finally you come to the most sacred mausoleum in the cemetery, Kobo Daishi's Tomb, which is sealed behind doors.

Outside the cemetery you visit the Shingon Buddhist shrine of Kongobuji which has the largest sand and rock garden in the whole of Japan; one hundred and forty granite stones have been carefully positioned arranged to represent two dragons in a sea of clouds.

Returning back to the Shukubo you will have some time to take a hot spring bath and relax 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)**

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

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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 shoji 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.

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)**

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

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For the final time your main luggage will be couriered, and will be waiting on your arrival at your hotel in Osaka tomorrow.

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 recently completed 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 Gogyo; 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: Sotetsu Grand Fresa or Washington Hotel, Hiroshima (Meals: B)**

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

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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 stroll 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. There is a cableway up to Mt Misen (optional), the highest peak on the island, which you may like to take for fantastic panoramic views from the top on a clear day. Or 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 or Sotetsu Grand Fresa, Osaka (Meals: B D)**

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**Day 16: Transfer to Osaka airport. Fly to London.**

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Time to bid goodbye to Japan as you transfer to the airport for your flight home. (Meals: B)

## Our grading system

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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.

## What the price includes

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**Mountain Kingdoms** aims to offer the best value for money. We do not charge extra for meal packages or apply local charges and try to ensure that all the key elements of your holiday are included.

### What's included:

- ✓ 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
- ✓ Good standard hotel accommodation in the main towns on a twin-share basis
- ✓ 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 five nights when you stay in traditional accommodation where robes and slippers (expected attire) are provided
- ✓ All breakfasts and 8 dinners
- ✓ All transport by private vehicles, buses, ferries and trains (bullet and local)
- ✓ Sightseeing and activities where specified
- ✓ Carbon offsetting with the Ecoan Tree Planting Project (for clients taking our flight inclusive option)
- ✓ A free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle

### 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

### Water-to-Go Reusable Bottle Campaign

We have joined the campaign to help cut down on the use of plastics and, in particular, single-use water bottles. To do this we have teamed up with the revolutionary company, Water-to-Go who have developed a multi-use drinking bottle with a reusable filter that eliminates over 99.9% of all microbiological contaminants. This makes water from virtually any source safe to drink and significantly reduces the need for travellers to buy bottles of water wherever they are in the world.

Our clients who are not given a free Mountain Kingdoms kit bag for their holiday (these are required for certain treks), will instead receive a free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle. These unique Water-to-Go bottles can also be purchased from us at a discounted rate.

For further information about our campaign visit <https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/water-to-go-reusable-bottle-campaign>.

## Your accommodation

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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.



### **Shiba Park Hotel or Park Hotel, Tokyo**

We use hotels such as the Shiba Park Hotel or the Park Hotel in Tokyo. They have comfortable, western-style rooms with en-suite facilities, air-conditioning, televisions and fridges and are conveniently situated for sightseeing and transport links.



### **Biyu No Yado Ryokan or Similar, Yudanka**

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 with 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.



### **Hotel Ouan or Similar, Takayama**

Ideally located for sightseeing in Takayama, the Hotel Ouan is within easy walking distance of the old town, the morning market and a subway station. The Ouan has many traditional features including Japanese-style decor, tatami mat flooring, and even an open-air natural hot spring bath on the roof. Rooms have western beds, kettles and free Wi-Fi. A generous buffet breakfast is served including a wide range of both Japanese and western dishes.



### **The General Kyoto Takatsuji Tominokoji or Similar, Kyoto**

This four star hotel is located just 2km from the centre of Kyoto. The comfortable, air-conditioned rooms come with a good range of modern amenities including kettles and fridges, and the hotel has a restaurant, bar and terrace courtyard. Free Wi-Fi is available throughout the property.



### **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.



### **Sotetsu Grand Fresa or Washington Hotel, Hiroshima**

Situated beside the Peace Park and close to the Peace Memorial, the Sotetsu Grand Fresa is ideally situated for seeing Hiroshima's key sights. A modern hotel with good facilities, the Sunroute has a bar and two restaurants, rooms are well-equipped and Wi-Fi is free throughout the hotel. Similarly well situated, the Washington Hotel offers modern, well-equipped rooms 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 or Sotetsu Grand Fresa Namba, Osaka**

Conveniently located in Namba, central Osaka, Hotel 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. The Sotetsu Grand Fresa Namba 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

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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

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### **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

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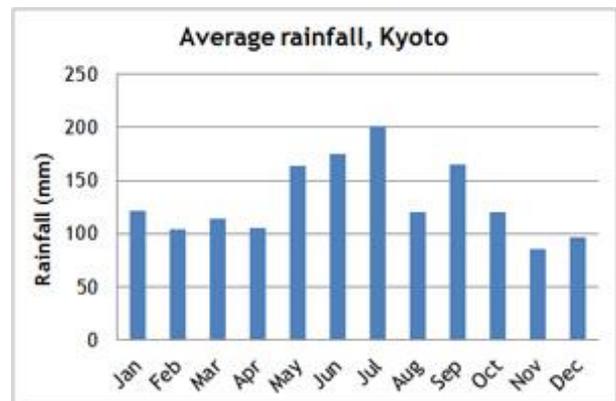
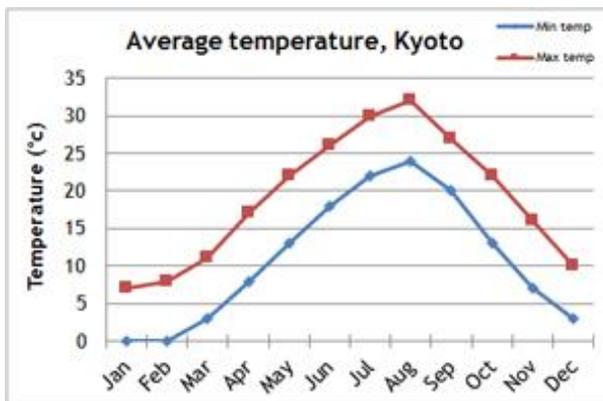
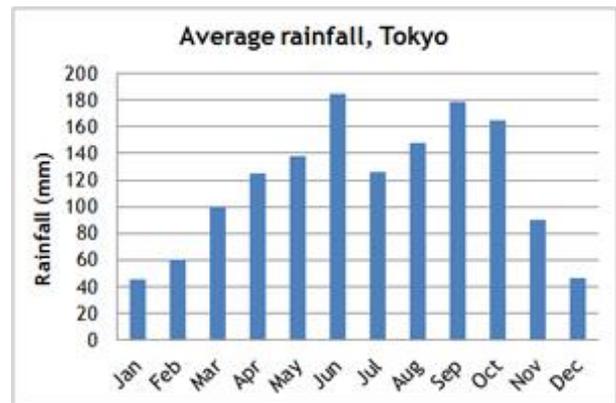
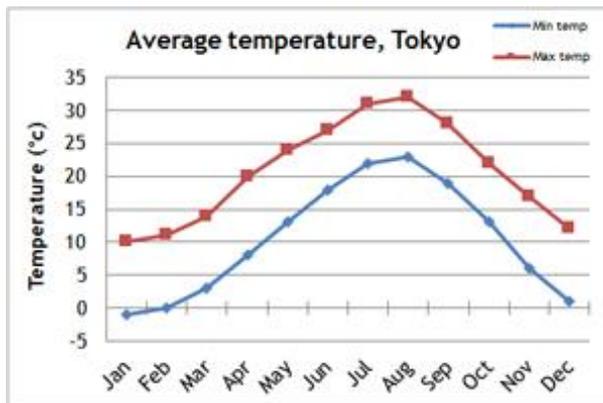
When we receive your booking, we send you a full Trip Dossier which contains details of any visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. If you do have queries at this initial stage do call us on 01453 844400 and we will be pleased to offer advice.

## The nature of adventure travel

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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

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## Extending your holiday

If you would like additional inspiration on how or where to extend your holiday please call us on 01453 844400. Alternatively, you can download a range of extension information sheets on our website, at [www.mountainkingdoms.com](http://www.mountainkingdoms.com).



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?

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- 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 commitment to 'Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency', 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](http://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

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*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*

*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

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## **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](http://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 CLIMATE EMERGENCY PLAN



For over 33 years, Mountain Kingdoms has been offering people the chance to visit amazing places on this extraordinary planet. We now offer trips to all corners of the world, but we are conscious that inevitably our holidays have a detrimental impact on the world around us, and we want to do all we can to reduce our carbon emissions. We are a signatory to Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency, along with a growing number of like-minded, reputable tour operators. For more information, please visit [www.tourismdeclares.com](http://www.tourismdeclares.com)

From 2020 onwards, we will be focusing on how we can reduce the carbon emissions that our holidays produce, and how to counterbalance 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**

#### **Already doing:**

- ✓ We have been offsetting carbon since 2007, but will be increasing our donations to the [Ecoan tree planting project](#) in Peru this year. This is with a trusted partner where the funds go directly to a project where the community plants trees on its own land.

#### **Will do:**

- ✓ We are working on making our carbon offsetting more accurate and targeted.
- ✓ In future, we will add to that a further estimate for carbon produced by hotels, local road travel, trains and internal flights to arrive at a carbon offset sum for each trip we operate.
- ✓ Carbon offsetting will be included in our holiday prices. For our Flight Inclusive holidays it will include the international flight and any emissions produced by inland travel and accommodation. Our Land Only prices will include the cost of offsetting emissions caused by inland travel and accommodation.

### **Reducing Carbon Emissions**

#### **Already doing:**

- ✓ We already offer the majority of our customers a free filtered water bottle which means they can instantly cut down on their single-use plastic consumption. This will be an ongoing project.
- ✓ We already predominantly use locally owned hotels, but will continue to ensure that, where possible, we use these rather than multinational chains.
- ✓ We have joined the Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency initiative to stand alongside like-minded travel companies, to work together to initiate best practices to make tourism as sustainable as possible.

#### **Will do:**

- ✓ We will re-evaluate our flights to make sure we are using the most fuel efficient airlines with the youngest fleets and, where possible, direct flights for each trip.
- ✓ We will stop offering unnecessary optional flights – for example our Everest sightseeing trip.
- ✓ We will eliminate unnecessary staff flights wherever possible.
- ✓ We will look at minimising internal flights.
- ✓ We will be asking all our worldwide agents and suppliers to look at their own carbon footprint and encourage them to reduce it.
- ✓ We will promote our more low impact trips to give customers an informed choice.

As part of our wider commitment to Responsible Tourism, we will continue to support a number of charities with whom we have had a long standing relationship over many years. These include: Shiva Charity in Nepal (Ginette Harrison School), Simien Mountains Mobile Medical Service and Porter Welfare, as well as setting aside a sum for emergency disaster relief should the need arise.

