



## ESSENTIAL JAPAN

Japan is a destination that is simply enthralling, offering an entrancing mix of ancient tradition and the ultra-modern.

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Tailor-Made Journeys, Suggested Itineraries



Asia, Japan



12 days from AU\$25,015 pp



Private

## Journey Overview

Few places in the world blend ancient rituals with trailblazing modernity quite like Japan. Tea ceremonies, tatami mats, monks, Samurai and time-honoured geisha traditions co-exist with an infectious pop culture, minimalistic smart homes, eclectic nightlife and glittering skyscrapers. From Shinto Shrines and Buddhist temples to space-age technology and cutting-edge art galleries, there is something to captivate every traveller. Add in the natural beauty of Mt Fuji, poignant Hiroshima and Osaka's vibrant culinary scene and you have a destination that is simply enthralling.

### Journey Highlights

- Go behind the ring of Japan's national sport in a leading Tokyo sumo stable
- Admire venerated Shinto shrines, Zen temples and perfectly manicured gardens
- Take part in a traditional taiko drumming class
- Appreciate Japan's rich culinary heritage with authentic kaiseki dining, street food staples, ocean-fresh sushi and traditional sweet treats
- Ride like a local on high-speed bullet trains and rickshaws
- Pay your respects at Hiroshima's Peace Memorial Park



## Itinerary

### **Day 1: Arrive Tokyo**

Arrive into Tokyo to a warm A&K welcome and enjoy private transfer to your hotel.

#### ***Palace Hotel***

### **Day 2: Tokyo**

Start your journey with a stroll in the beautiful Edo period garden, Hamarikyu, one of the most visited in the city thanks to its year-round botanical attractions. Pause to admire the surrounds over green tea at the Nakajima-no-Ochaya tea house. Next, visit Asakusa Kannon Temple, one of the city's most venerated temple sites dedicated to the Bodhisattva, Guan Yin, which has its origins in Hindu belief from India. The restaurants around Asakusa are some of the best for traditional Japanese cuisine, including the ever-popular tempura. You might ask your guide to recommend the best place for lunch, or perhaps learn to make sushi with an expert chef before feasting on your creations (additional cost).

This afternoon, wander through the Tokyo National Museum, which features one of the largest collections of art and archaeological artifacts in the country, made up of over 100,000 individual items and nearly a hundred national treasures. Finish your day with a visit to Meiji Shrine, a sanctuary for Shinto followers and a popular venue for traditional Japanese weddings. You may choose to take part in a solemn Shinto ceremony, full of ritual and offerings — for an immersive cultural experience (additional cost). The rest of the day is yours to discover this vibrant city at leisure.

#### ***Palace Hotel | Meals: B***

### **Day 3: Tokyo**

Enjoy an up-close 'behind the ring' encounter at one of Tokyo's best sumo stables for an appreciation of Japan's national sport. Housing anywhere between two and forty young men a time, these living and training quarters demand absolute loyalty and discipline from the wrestlers, with daily training commencing at dawn.

Your cultural tour continues with a fascinating taiko drum experience. Taiko is a recent tradition of Japanese drum playing, which has its roots in ancient Japanese religious ceremonies and folk music. Join the owner of a local music shop, and take part in a class to learn about its history and technique before putting your new skills to practise. (additional cost).

Enjoy this afternoon at leisure or explore the city at your own pace.

***Palace Hotel | Meals: B***

### **Day 4: Tokyo - Hakone**

Leave the bustle of Tokyo behind and head for Mount Fuji — Japan's highest and most prominent mountain. If you're feeling energetic hike up to admire the views (weather permitting). Alternatively, visit the Fujisan World Heritage Centre for an introduction to the area and its famous peak.

Next travel to Hakone, among Japan's most popular hot-spring destinations, and view the forested slopes of Hakone National Park, an area encompassing coastlines, mountains, lakes and more than 1,000 volcanic islands. Stroll the grassy hillsides of Hakone's Open Air Museum, and admire the impressive contemporary sculptures and artwork on display, including masterpieces by Henry Moore and Rodin. The museum also features one of the world's finest Picasso exhibits, presenting some 300 works by the cubist master.

***Hyatt Regency Hakone Resort and Spa | Meals: B***

**Day 5: Hakone**

Head into the great outdoors admiring stunning views of Mt Fuji and choose from a number of activities. Take a ropeway ride up to the summit of Mt Komagatake, for incredible views of Fuji, the Pacific Ocean and on a clear day, even Tokyo. Cruising on Lake Achi is a stunning option. Lake Achi was formed in the caldera of Mount Hakone after the volcano's last eruption 3000 years ago. Take a scenic cruise on the mirrored waters of the lake for serene views of the surrounding landscape. For those who are after classic Japanese rejuvenation, head to the Owakudani crater and volcanic hot water springs, where you can relax while you look out at the iconic mountain, and if you're looking for a hit of art it's a must-visit to the Okada Museum of Art.

***Hyatt Regency Hakone / Meals: B***

**Day 6: Hakone - Kyoto**

Step aboard the high-speed bullet train for Kyoto, Japan's famed cultural capital. With 2000 odd temples and shrines, Kyoto is an architectural marvel, where prayer chants can be heard down old street scapes, monks shuffle through quaint Zen gardens and the smell of incense is never far away. All this and more exists alongside a modern city with all the chic of Tokyo. Settle into your luxury hotel, before enjoying an afternoon at leisure. This evening, perhaps venture into one of Kyoto's many culinary hotspots for Michelin-starred delights.

***Ritz-Carlton Kyoto / Meals: B***

## **Day 7: Kyoto**

Set out for a full day exploring Japan's cultural capital. Begin at the ornamental Nijo Castle, one of the finest examples of feudal era Momoyama architecture. Beyond its massive stone walls and sprawling palace grounds, thick with cherry trees, stands the castle's centrepiece: the ornately embellished Ninomaru Palace. Next it's on to the Golden Pavilion, one of Kyoto's most famous temples with its gold leaf adornment. The temple was originally the retirement villa of the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, and upon his death in 1408 it became a Zen temple.

This afternoon, travel to Arashiyama and stroll through the impressive bamboo grove, one of Kyoto's top sights. Wandering along the path between the soaring stands of bamboo is an ethereal experience. The bamboo is still used in local workshops to produce baskets, cups, boxes, mats and pieces of art.

Later today, ride like a local on a rickshaw admiring the surrounding scenery from a different perspective (additional cost), before stopping at the Tenryuji Temple, one of Kyoto's many UNESCO World Heritage sites. The head temple of the Tenryu sect of Rinzai Zen Buddhism, this is the largest and most frequented temple in Arashiyama.

***Ritz-Carlton Kyoto / Meals: B***

## **Day 8: Kyoto**

Set out on a leisurely walk along the cherry-lined Philosopher's Path admiring the ever-changing vistas, the temples and shrines along the way and pausing for a refreshment at one of the cafés along the trail. Next you'll experience the ancient Japanese ritual of the tea ceremony in a nearby temple and get to understand the importance of this age-old custom.

Finish the morning at Gion, Kyoto's most famous geisha district, located around Shijo Avenue between Yasaka Shrine in the east and the Kamo River in the west. Discover an area brimming with shops, restaurants and ochaya (teahouses), where geiko (Kyoto dialect for geisha) and maiko entertain.

The afternoon is at leisure before taking your seat for an unforgettable meal in the company of a maiko, or geisha. Treat your tastebuds to a kaiseki ryori (multi-course) dinner and sip sake as you learn more about your hosts' world. Then, enjoy traditional maiko dance and musical entertainment (additional cost).

***Ritz-Carlton Kyoto / Meals: B***

**Day 9: Kyoto - Nara - Osaka**

Today you are driven to Osaka via Fushimi Inari and Nara. Fushimi Inari is the most important of several thousands of shrines dedicated to Inari, the Shinto god of rice. On your arrival at the main hall, you may wish to present a small offering to the resident deity, before making your way to the rear of the shrine to find the first of over 5,000 vermilion torii gates.

Fushimi is Kyoto's sake district. Stroll around the delightful tree-lined canals, past historic sites and among beautiful wooden brewery buildings. During a sake tasting learn about the process and how brewers balance the main ingredients of water, rice, malt and yeast, and how the taste of sake changes according to the ingredients.

Your next stop is the expansive estate, Nara Park, which is home to over 1,000 free-roaming deer, considered in Shintoism as messengers of the gods. After lunch (additional cost), head to Todaiji, a temple founded in 752 and home to Daibutsu, or Great Buddha, the world's largest bronze casting. Marvel at the size of the Buddha's open hand, which alone is the height of a person. This is believed to be the largest wooden structure on earth.

Return to Shintoism at Kasuga Taisha, a shrine built in 768 and reconstructed every 20 years thereafter. Envisage the 3,000 stone and bronze lanterns lit for festivals in February and August each year.

Finish the day in Osaka, arriving early evening, with dinner at your leisure.

***Conrad Osaka | Meals: B***

**Day 10: Hiroshima**

This morning, you are transferred to the train station to board the bullet train to Hiroshima. A visit to Hiroshima is a reminder of the catastrophic moment in 1945 when the city was hit by the world's first atomic bomb. A poignant visit to Peace Memorial Park is a chance to pay respects and discover more about this tragic event. Wander around the Atom Bomb Dome, the only structure left standing after the blast, and explore the old wing of the Peace Memorial Museum.

Afterwards travel to the southwest edge of the city and board a ferry to the island of Miyajima where you visit the Itsukushima Shrine. The red torii gate, one of the most photographed sites in Japan, is located 150 metres from the shore at the entrance to the cove in which the Itsukushima Shrine stands. An optional sea kayaking excursion gets you close up to the shrine and its famous torii gate (additional cost).

Return by ferry to the mainland and then continue to the railway station for the bullet train ride to Osaka.

***Conrad Osaka | Meals: B***

**Day 11: Osaka**

Enjoy a morning at leisure before joining your specialist foodie guide to discover the gastronomic highlights of the city. Wander through the colourful Shinsekai district to enjoy kushikatsu, deep fried morsels of meat and vegetables, and wash it down with a cold beer. Venture into the covered Kuromon Ichiba Market, also known as 'Osaka's Kitchen', where more than 150 shops sell fresh fish, meat and produce, traditional sweets, clothes and homewares. Sample some grilled sea food or yakitori, sea urchin or takoyaki — a street food staple.

Finish up in Dotonbori, the city's official entertainment district, where food is the main attraction and hundreds of eateries line the main thoroughfare and streets. Be sure to try local titbits like okonomiyaki (tasty savoury pancakes), kitsune udon (delicious noodle soup), ramen and teppanyaki treats.

***Conrad Osaka | Meals: BD***

**Day 12: Depart Osaka**

Transfer to Osaka Airport where your journey ends.

***Meals: B***



# Map



## Accommodation

### Palace Hotel Tokyo



A member of The Leading Hotels of the World the spectacular Palace Hotel in Tokyo with its excellent location is the perfect base to explore this vibrant city. Dating back to 1961 the hotel has been exquisitely refurbished and reopened in May 2012. Situated in front of the expansive grounds of the historic Edo Castle, next to the Imperial Palace and moats, the hotel is at the heart of the financial and business district of the city. Most of the spacious rooms and suites have balconies overlooking the Imperial Palace and Garden.

The restaurants offer a variety of cuisine from French to casual dining and all the Japanese specialities to try like Japanese Kaiseki, Sushi, Tempura, and Teppanyaki. There is also an outside terrace, an unusual and most welcome feature of a city hotel in Tokyo. For relaxation enjoy some time in the Evian Spa a luxurious spa with tailored treatments available, there is also a fitness suite and swimming pool. For the more energetic there is one of the most famous jogging courses in Japan - The Imperial Palace jogging course.

#### Why we like it

- Quiet respite from the neon-lit metropolis yet a central Maranouchi location
- Views over the Imperial Palace grounds

- The Evian Spa is the first in Japan
- The hotel boasts four distinctive restaurants, three bars and lounges
- Jacuzzi and indoor pool with expansive views of Tokyo

## Hyatt Regency Hakone Resort & Spa



In many ways the Hyatt Regency Hakone Resort and Spa offers the best of both worlds - a fusion of ryokan and hotel which refuses to compromise on comfort, service, or luxury. Some rooms combine a traditional hotel style bedroom with a tatami seating area, allowing guests to enjoy the luxury of a western bed within the Zen ryokan aesthetic of traditional Japan. Complimentary drinks are served in the late afternoon in the Living Room - a cosy area of comfortable chairs gathered around a huge open fire and surrounded by a massive sweep of glass. The Dining Room serves excellent Provincial cuisine, in warm brick semi-private rooms, and the adjacent sushi restaurant caters to those looking for something a little more Japanese. The Hyatt Regency takes advantage of Hakone's abundant hot springs, and the large, communal baths are ideal for relaxation. The hotel also offers spa treatments for those in need of relaxation. Like many ryokan, the Hyatt Regency provides yukata robes which can be worn throughout the hotel. The resort is easily accessible from major cities in Japan, at just one and a half hours' drive west of Tokyo and a two-and-a-half-hour bullet train journey east of Osaka.

### Why we like it

- A hot springs resort located in Gora in the central region of Honshu
- Large, western style guest rooms and suites with beautiful views of the surrounding hills each with its own private terrace or balcony
- Two restaurants offering French and Japanese cuisine
- The bar is elegant with its own entrance and sophisticated atmosphere
- Spa Izumi offers treatments reflective of the local tradition of the area

## Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto



Built on a site favoured by Japanese nobility since the 17th century, The Ritz-Carlton, Kyoto continues a legacy of quiet luxury, overlooking the Kamogawa River with views that extend to the Higashiyama Sanju-Roppo - the famous 36 mountain range. Drink in picturesque views of the Kamo River relax with a spa ritual inspired by Japan's wellness traditions or stroll to many of Kyoto's major attractions, including the iconic Geishas of the Gion district, Teramashi's random boutiques and Kyoto Imperial Palace.

The hotel interiors have a creative design dotted with the works of more than 80 of Japan's most prominent artists. Each of the 134 rooms cover a spacious 50sqm with light and airy decors displaying a natural Japanese style; light wood, bonsai plants, washi paper artwork and serene hints of cherry blossom. Room amenities include touch screen environmental controls, roof-top rain showers and LED TVs, while some of the suites also have a private Japanese garden, created by designer Kanji Nomura and modelled on traditional tsukimidai "moon-viewing decks".

Choose from two top quality restaurants; Misuki embodies the region serving four distinct types of Japanese cuisine - sushi, kaiseki banquets, tempura and tantalising teppanyaki dishes - while Italian cuisine dominates at La Locanda. For something a little more personal, the Ebisugawa-tei private rooms offer a modern twist on a traditional tatami mat dining space, with sliding paper screens and low wooden stools.

### Why we like it

- Luxury hotel located in the heart of Japan's former capital, Kyoto
- Largest rooms in Kyoto
- Interiors are inspired by the culture of Miyabi

- World-class ESPA Spa with indoor pool
- Close to the Teramachi Street and the Gion district



## Conrad Osaka



The luxurious Conrad Osaka is housed in one of the city's newest, shiniest skyscrapers – Festival Tower West – in the Nakanoshima area, an urban island in the heart of the city, home to art museums and concert halls, and steps away from lively neighbourhoods aplenty.

The 164 rooms fuse traditional Japanese aesthetics with an urban edge, luxuriously appointed bathrooms and easy-to-use bedside tablets control all in-room technology, from the master lights and curtains to room temperatures. All rooms have city-wide views through floor-to-ceiling windows. Ask for a west-facing room for a distant aerial glimpse of Osaka Castle.

True to Osaka's reputation as a gastronomic heaven, there is an array of high-quality restaurants to choose from on the picturesque 40th floor. Atmos Dining is home to a tasty breakfast buffet and all-day dining menu, and 40 Sky Bar & Lounge serves afternoon tea that can smoothly transition into cocktails after dark. Meanwhile lively C:Grill – a crustacean-centred restaurant – is a popular spot among locals. For Japanese cuisine, however, Kura steals the show – it's home to a series of intimate counters, where chefs prepare a selection of seasonal sushi or delicious teppanyaki grilled dishes against a backdrop of sparkling night views.

Rejuvenate body and spirit during your stay with a visit to the Conrad Spa. Boasting four private treatment rooms, a relaxation room, beauty salon and whirlpool area, choose to indulge in massages and treatments while looking out over the lively city. Those looking to stay active can swim laps in the heated indoor pool, or make use of the onsite gym, with personal trainers available to tailor a workout to your needs.





## Dates & Pricing

From \$25,015 per person twin share (low season) and from \$29,320 per person twin share (high season). Solo travellers on request.

As this Tailor Made Journey can be personalised to your specific requirements, it is not available for online booking. Depending on your preferred dates and arrangements, final pricing will vary.

Please call A&K on 1300 851 800, send us a **booking enquiry** to book this journey or contact your travel advisor.

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