TOUR CODE

JP1

ADVENTURESABROAD

JAPAN BY RAIL

Tokyo • Hakone • Takayama • Kyoto • Hiroshima

13 days

Updated 29/04/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in Tokyo*

Today we arrive in Tokyo and transfer to our hotel.

Tokyo is Japan's capital and the country's largest city. Prior to 1868, Tokyo was known as Edo. A small castle town in the 16th century, Edo became Japan's political center in 1603 when Tokugawa Ieyasu established his feudal government there. A few decades later, Edo had grown into one of the world's most populous cities.

Overnight in Tokyo. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Tokyo: City Tour*

First thing this morning we visit the exciting Tsukiji Fish Market.* Here we are able to witness the bustling activity of the central wholesale market, the largest fish market in the world. Although the market contains stalls selling meats and vegetables, the real product is the two million
kilograms of fish sold here every day. Over 1,500 fishmongers scurry about on motorised fish-mobiles in a cavernous warehouse where huge blocks of ice, all expertly hand-sawed, not only to cool the interior but also to miraculously keep all odour of fish at bey.

We then make our way to the Imperial Palace or Kokyo, built on the site of the Edo-jo Castle, an impregnable fortress that housed the Tokugawa Shogunate for 265 years. Surrounded by moats, the original outer walls extended for over 16 km (10 miles) and were thick enough for a squad of samurai to walk six abreast on top. Even in its original state, it deceptively looked more like an administrative villa than a fortress. Once inside, it was a maze of moats, bridges, dead-ends and cul-de-sacs, all perfect for defense, and now perfect for private and public strolling parks and gardens. Occupied by the shogunate for 265 years until Emperor Meiji moved the court here in 1860's, the buildings survived until they were all but obliterated by the fire bombings of WWII.

After peering into this amazing complex, we continue on to Ginza. We will take a brief walk through the food halls where you will see the amazing variety of beautifully presented foods being sold at unbelievable prices. Seeing where and how the Japanese shop, what they buy, for whom and for what occasion, offers instructive glimpses into a highly sophisticated social strata where conventions of human interaction and presentation are minutely-defined.

We continue from here on to Ueno, home to the National Museum and the finest collection of Japanese art in the country. After our guided tour of the museum we will return to our hotel.

* Due to rules that restrict visitor access, we cannot promise that we will be able to witness the tuna auction.

Overnight in Tokyo. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Tokyo - Kamakura - Tokyo*

This morning we venture to Kamakura, the capital established by the Shogun Minamoto Yoritomo in 1192. He was the first permanent shogun and ruler of Japan. His motivation was to get away from the corrupt imperial court of Kyoto. Within the next century many grand monuments were built, and has 65 Buddhist temples and 19 Shinto shrines located amongst its wooded hills. An easily defendable site, surrounded on three sides by hills and the fourth by the sea, is a dramatic setting for our wanderings through the area. One of the highlights here will be a visit to the Daibutsu, or Great Buddha; the second largest bronze image in Japan. We will also visit a beautiful Zen garden set within a bamboo forest.

We return to Tokyo in the mid-late afternoon.

Overnight in Tokyo. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Tokyo - Hakone*

This morning we enjoy our first Shinkansen, or "bullet train," ride as we head towards Hakone. Wedged between Mt Fuji and the Izu Peninsula, Hakone is a large region encircled by several forested mountains with a beauty accented by deep glens and ravines. In the feudal era, Hakone was a very important checkpoint that safeguarded the security of Edo (now Tokyo) as the seat of the Shogunate. This onsen (hotspring) area has been popular since the 1500s, when Hideyoshi Toyotomi came here to relax in an open-air bath after the hard fought Battle of Odawara.

From the castle town of Odawara we board a train that takes us into the National Park. We then board a funicular that takes us to Gora. One of the highlights today will be our visit to the Hakone Outdoor Museum, or Chokoku-no-mori, a beautiful park filled with sculptures by renowned Japanese and international artists such as Rodin, Bourdelle, Moore, Zadkine and Picasso.

Weather permitting, we can enjoy views of Mt Fuji from a cable car. We will be able to see down into the sulphuric springs of Sounzan from which the hotels take water for their hot-spring baths. The entire area of Sounzan smells of sulphurous fumes as these clouds of steam rise from crevasses, and hots-prings bubble out. Later this evening you will be able to enjoy bathing in these therapeutic waters at our hotel.

Tonight we will enjoy a Keiseki-type meal at our hotel. Originally this type of dining was to accompany tea ceremony and is a feast for both the eyes and the taste buds. You can feel free to wear your yukata, or bathrobe (provided by the hotel) to the dining room tonight as many of the Japanese do when they stay in these types of hotels. It is a perfectly wonderful place to relax after leaving busy Tokyo behind.

We use the rail system quite extensively on this tour, YOU MUST BE ABLE TO MANAGE YOUR OWN BAGS ONTO / OFF TRAINS AND IN TRAIN STATIONS. Japanese stations can be large and crowded and may not have escalators or elevators. Packing lightly is essential. If you are unsure about your suitability for this type of trip, please call and speak to one of our sales agents for more information.

Overnight in Hakone. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Hakone - Takayama*

Today we travel by local tram and Bullet Train to Takayama. The region known as Hida, which surrounds Takayama, was cut off from the rest of Japan by almost impregnable encircling mountains. Hida lacked good farmland, which made taxpaying from an agricultural livelihood an impossible burden upon the people. Necessity caused them to diversify, so the craftsmen of Takayama honed their tools to a sharpness matched by their skills and became known as the finest woodworkers in the land. The mountains yielded the most coveted lumber in the empire, which Takayama's artisans fashioned into magnificent works worthy to adorn Japan's finest temples, shrines and palaces. During the Nara

period, the central government, in lieu of taxes, required ten Takayama craftsmen to relocate to the capital, where their considerable talents were employed. During the Tokugawa era, the ancestral daimyo of Takayama was reassigned to the far north.

Our train journey today takes us through the scenic Hida River Valley. We arrive in the late afternoon and will have time to wander through the lovely town of Takayama and the merchant quarter of San-machi with its historic wooden structures.

Overnight in Takayama. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Takayama: City Tour*

This morning we will visit the colourful early morning market before heading to the Hida Folk Village, consisting of over 30 unique houses which had been scattered in the Hida region. The houses are attractively laid out around a small lake and display valuable articles showing the way of life and culture of the past. The style of architecture is called gassho-zukuri, or praying hand houses, because of the steep pitch of the roofs reminiscent of two clasped hands in prayer. This was to protect the occupants from the large amounts of snow that fall here over the winter months. Upon our return to the town centre we will visit the Yatai Kaikan, or Float Museum.

Your afternoon is at leisure. Takayama is a small, interesting and manageable place for those who enjoy easy going, on-foot exploration.

Overnight in Takayama. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Takayama - Kyoto*

Our journey continues by train to Kyoto, back through the Hida Valley to connect to a Bullet Train in Nagoya.

Kyoto vibrates with creative energy. For 1,000 years, skilled craftsmen, wise masters, and the nation's most promising fine artists have been lured here. The deep impress of culture and the refinement is indelible; it's in the soul of the city. A long line of Japanese emperors was enthroned here, and the city retains this regal bearing through myriad festivals and commemorative customs preserved from feudal times. In diminutive home workshops along cobblestone alleyways no wider than a footpath, lacquerware, cloisonne, damascene, kimono fabrics, pottery, porcelain, fans, dolls, embroideries, and bamboo ware are still expertly turned out by hand. Kyoto attracts a sophisticated crowd to its vibrant Noh and Kabuki theatres, while the last geisha finishing schools are found in the lantern-lit side streets of the Pontocho and Gion sections of the city.

Thankfully, Kyoto's treasures were spared from bombing during WW II, when American scholars persuaded the military to leave this masterpiece of a city alone. Though Kyoto is now a thoroughly modern city, much of its spirit is intact, with over 200 Shinto shrines; 1,600 temples, 30 of which administer to the major sects of Buddhism throughout Japan; three Imperial palaces; nine major museums; and countless classic gardens.

We arrive in this fascinating city mid-afternoon. Tonight we will venture to the Pontocho District, one of the traditional geisha quarters of Kyoto and next door to its rival Gion. Wandering down the narrow lanes with the Kama River flowing alongside gives a sense to what this city was like long ago.

Overnight in Kyoto. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Kyoto: City Tour*

We have a full day sightseeing in Kyoto.

We visit Sanjusangendo Temple, named for the 1001 life-size statues of the Buddhist teacher Kannon. Each statue has subtle differences and has 42 arms each of which are capable of saving 25 worlds. The central statue, which dominates the others, was carved by the master sculptor Tankei when he was 82 years old. First built in 1164, it was reconstructed in 1266.

We visit Heian Shrine, built in 1895 to commemorate the 1,100th anniversary of the founding of the capital. It is a replica to three-fifths of the size of the first imperial palace in the ancient capital Heiankyo. Behind it, there is a beautiful go-round style garden with a total area of 30,000 sq m which is well known for the beauty of its weeping cherry trees, Japanese iris, and waterlilies.

We continue to Ginkakuji, the Silver Pavillion, and proceed to Kinkakuji, the Golden Pavilion, one of Japan's most famous architectural and historical icons. We also visit Ryoan-ji, the famous raked gravel Zen Garden, for which the Zen Buddhists are renowned. The essential dichotomy and harmony of the universe, which lies at the heart of this belief system, is symbolized in these tranquil gardens.

NOTE: In order maintain a certain spontaneity during our time in Kyoto, the exact sites visited and their order in the itinerary may vary at the discretion of your Tour Leader.

Overnight in Kyoto. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Kyoto - Nara - Kyoto*

Today we travel by local train to Nara.

The crest of every mountain, the slope of every hill, the mute testimony of every rock, the waterfall, rivulet, and the valley of Nara are infused with the intangible spiritual energy that accompanied the birth of the Japanese civilization. Nara, meaning "level land, " occupies the great basin of what was Yamoto, or the Land of Great Peace. Here was the centre of the half-real, half mythical kingdom of Japan before it became a nation. Jimmu Tenno, the first emperor of Japan, was purportedly buried at Nara, the Imperial Japan, the oldest existing dynasty in the world, established its first permanent court within the city in 710. Arts, culture, and literature also bloomed in this fertile valley. The earliest histories of the nation were compiled in Nara by noble court ladies in colloquial Japanese, and from the ancient city Buddhism spread throughout the land.

In its glory days, Nara covered an expansive area linked by palaces, temples, shrines, public buildings, and nobles' villas. The temples were massive and extremely powerful, almost like independent city-states. Numerous fires, the ravages of time, war, and pestilence have reduced many of the ancient structures, but plenty remain in their original states, especially in the eastern sections of the city. Part of this legacy is the Great Buddha of Todai-ji Otera, the largest bronze statue in the world, tipping the scales at over 500 tonnes.

Nara Koen, at over 500 ha (1235 acres), is Japan's largest park and is home to the sacred deer of nearby Kasuga Taisha. This shrine, moss-covered and illuminated by over 3000 stone lanterns, was first erected in 768 and is second in importance only to the Grand shrines of Ise. As we walk through this park dotted with temples and deer wandering about, you will be struck at how the sublime cultural richness of the quiet past lingers on.

Overnight in Kyoto. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Kyoto: Nijo Castle, Higashi Honganji & Leisure time*

This morning we visit Nijo Castle, built in 1603 as the Kyoto residence of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first shogun of the Edo Period (1603-1867). His grandson Iemitsu completed the castle's palace buildings 23 years later and further expanded the castle by adding a five story castle keep. After the Tokugawa Shogunate fell in 1867, Nijo Castle was used as an imperial palace for a while before being donated to the city and opened up to the public as a historic site. Its palace buildings are arguably the best surviving examples of castle palace architecture of Japan's feudal era, and the castle was designated a UNESCO world heritage site in 1994.

We also visit Higashi Honganji (East Honganji), built as the head temple of the Otani faction of Jodo-shin Buddhism. Its main hall, the Goeido is Kyoto's largest wooden structure and dedicated to Shinran, the sect's founder.

The balance of the day is yours to explore Kyoto on your own. A good place to start may be the small Japanese garden named Shoseien, located another few street blocks east of Higashi Honganji. Your Tour Leader can help you plan your afternoon.

Overnight in Kyoto. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Kyoto - Hiroshima*

Today we take the Shinkansen train to Hiroshima. Passing through Osaka and Kobe, just minutes from Kyoto on this fast train, we will arrive at our destination in just a couple of hours.

Modern Hiroshima rose like a phoenix from its own ashes. Less than five decades since its obliteration, it is once again the most vital city of San-Yo with a population of one million and growing. Hiroshima is referred to as the "River City." In its confines, the Ota-gawa River fans out into six delta tributaries that flow into the immense and very busy bay. In the years just following the A-bomb blast, scientists doubted if Hiroshima could ever live again. Today the streets hum with activity, trees and flowers grow, and birds sing. Nature may not forget, but it does forgive!

On the morning of August 6, 1945, the people of war-torn Japan hurried to begin the day. Then suddenly buildings melted, people evaporated, and humankind lost the first battle of the atomic age. Seventy thousand buildings were flattened and 200,000 people perished, the lucky ones quickly; the unlucky lingered. Hiroshima, fringed by mountains forming a natural amphitheatre, seethed and fumed.

Our visit takes us to the Peace Memorial Park (Heiwa Kinen Koen). Here the Cenotaph, shaped like an ancient tomb, holds the names of the dead. The prayer, the hope, the Japanese reads "Repose ye in peace, for the error shall not be repeated." The skeleton of the Atomic Bomb Dome (Genbaku Domu) turns green with age against a blue sky. Until all nuclear arms are banned and destroyed, the Eternal Flame will flicker. We will visit the Peace Memorial Museum and walk to the A-Bomb Dome, passing the many monuments, memorials, and statues.

Overnight Hiroshima. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Hiroshima - Miyajima - Hiroshima*

Today we travel by train and ferry to Miyajima where we spend the day.

Since ancient times, Miyajima has been regarded as one of the "Three Most Beautiful Spots" of Japan and, as part of the Seto Inland Sea National Park, it has received several distinctions, such as a place of extraordinary scenic beauty,

exceptional history, and a natural monument. The virgin forests neighbouring Mt. Misen are representative of the lush greenery and abundance of nature which still covers the entire island even now. A surprisingly large number of southwestern Japan native botanical specimens can still be found on Miyajima. The island is like a miniature model of Japan, showing the harmonious ecology of all living things from the ocean depth to the top of mountains.

Our walking tour of the island will include a visit to the famous Itsukushima Shrine, which together with its large wooden tori, stands in the ocean during high tide. You will also have some free time to admire this World Heritage Site before returning to Hiroshima.

Overnight in Hiroshima. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Hiroshima - (OR Osaka) - Departure*

Departure for home.

LAND ONLY CLIENTS: You could book your return flight from Osaka instead of Hiroshima, though you would have to make it late enough in the day to allow for your arrival by train from Hiroshima on the same day. Trains are very regular and your Tour Leader will assist. Your flight from Osaka should be no earlier than 4pm. YOU MAY also fly directly from Hiroshima to Tokyo and connect to homeward flights if this is easier / more economical for you (though beware of possible change of airport). Land & Air passengers may be offered this option.

Departure from Hiroshima. Meal plan: Breakfast.