TOUR CODE

KR3

ADVENTURESABROAD

SOUTH KOREA & JAPAN

28 days

Updated 29/04/2013

Day 1 *Arrive in Seoul*

Arrive in Seoul / Incheon, South Korea and transfer to our hotel.

Seoul is a city of contrasts. In this rapidly evolving metropolis, the traditional exists with the modern in a state of harmony. For over 500 years the seat of Joseon Dynasty kings, Seoul is now the beating heart of modern Korea, the centre to which all else in the country is drawn.

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

Day 2 *Seoul: the DMZ & Seoul City Tour*

Today we travel along the Jayuro (Freedom Road) to Imjingak, the northernmost point bordering North Korea. On the way, we will be able to view barbed wire fences and military guards on duty all the way along the river, as well as serene rice paddies and the North Korean propaganda village over the confluence of the Han River and the Imjin River. At Imjingak, we visit the Mangbaedan memorial ritual altar which was established in 1985 for those who were separated from their families or displaced from home during the Korean War. It is a symbolic spot used to hold traditional memorial services for ancestors or to pray for separated family members living in the North and for reunification of the country.

We will see the Freedom Bridge, the very locale where 12,773 Korean War prisoners walked to freedom to South Korea in 1953. We then board a tour bus that will take us to the 3rd infiltration tunnel dug up by North Koreans. On the 20-minute ride to the tunnel, we pass through the check points, military camps and mine fields.

Before going down to the tunnel, we will view a short video presentation and visit exhibition hall for information on the divided Koreas. A seven-minute tram ride (if available) or a walk down a steep access through a narrow and steep interception tunnel, leads us to the lower platform, a point where we are only 170 meters from the Military Demarcation Line.

Our next stop is the Dora Observatory where we can see the whole expanse of the Demilitarized Zone, North Korean propaganda village, Gijeong-dong, where the world's largest flag hangs on a 160 meter-tall flagpole, South Korea's northernmost village of Daeseong-dong and Panmunjom where the armistice that ended Korean War was signed.

Finally, we visit the functioning northernmost railway station Dorasan, located 700 meters from the Southern Limit Line of DMZ. Here, the mile marker "Seoul 56km/Pyeongyang (the North Korean capital) 205km" still stands tall for all to see.

We retun to Seoul and commence our city tour of Seoul, including the Blue House (Presidential Residence, photo stop outside), the National Folk Museum, and Gyeongbokgung Palace.

Of all the tourist attractions in Seoul, the Joseon Dynasty Palaces and, particularly Gyeongbokgung Palace, are the most

tangible link between modern Korea and its not-too-distant monarchical past. Not merely inert relics, they are symbols of a deep history and rich culture. Although substantially reduced in number, the remaining palace buildings provide a glimpse of traditional architecture and the overall organization of a palace grounds.

General Yi Seong-gye (King T'aejo) ordered the construction of Gyeongbokgung-gung ("Palace of Shining Happiness") in 1934, two years after founding the Joseon Dynasty. In its original form, it is said to have had about 500 buildings. For the next 200 years, Gyeongbokgung-gung was the seat of government and the royal residence of Joseon Dynasty kings.

Overnight in Seoul. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Seoul - Mt Seorak*

We continue to Mt Seorak through the picturesque countryside to the vicinity of Seoraksan National Park, with its towering craggy peaks, waterfalls, forests, hiking trails, mysterious temples, and remote hermitages. Upon arrival in Mt Seorak you will have the afternoon to relax with outdoor and indoor hot spring pools and sauna.

Overnight Mt Seorak. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 4 *Mt Seorak Area*

We depart for Mt Seorak National Park where we take a cable car to one of the peaks for panoramic views of Mountain Seorak. Seoraksan's aerial tramway runs 1100 metres (3,608 feet) from the valley floor to the ridge above. The 5-minute ride offers a bird's-eye view of the Outer Seorak area.

We later proceed to Sinheungsa Temple. A short, easy stroll from the park plaza brings you to Sinheungsa ("Divine Undertaking Temple"), the principal temple of Seoraksan. At the junction of two major valleys below high peaks, this small compound has one of the most spectacular settings of any temple in Korea. It was established in 653 as Hyangseongsa Temple by the monk, Chajang. We have time for an optional afternoon hike to the Gyejoam Hermitage -- a religious site for Buddhist monks still practicing in the area.

Overnight in Mt Seorak. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 5 *Mt Seorak - Haeinsa*

Our tour continues to Haeinsa Temple, one of the most important Buddhist treasures in Korea. Haeinsa Temple features the famous Korean cultural treasure, Tripikata Koreana, built during the Goryeo Dynasty to protect the country from the invasion of Mongolian troops. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Tripitakana Koreana consists of over 80,000 pieces of inscribed wooden plates carved during the Goryeo Dynasty. It took more than 15 years to complete this incredible work.

Overnight in Haeinsa. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Haeinsa - Gyeongju*

Today we drive down to Gyeongju, Korea's ancient cultural city and the capital of the once great Silla Kingdom. It is to Korea what Kyoto is to Japan. During its 1979 meeting in Thailand, UNESCO selected Gyeongju as one of the world's

most important ancient cultural cities, both for its position in the historical and cultural development of East Asia and for its role in the formation of the Korean nation.

Around Gyeongju there are hundreds of royal tombs, temples, palace sites, fortress ruins, pagodas and rock sculptures. Finely crafted gold and silver ornaments, skillfully shaped clay figures and pottery, metal utensils and weapons and an astonishing number of other objects discovered here are now displayed in the Kyongju museum which we visit. We also observe scraps of Silla Literature and the legends that are preserved in ancient books and annals.

Overnight in Gyeongju. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Gyeongju: Area Tour*

We will spend a whole day sightseeing in Gyeongju with visits to Bulguksa Temple, Seokguram Grotto, Tumuli Park-Royal Tombs. While many important sites are scattered in the vicinity, Gyeongju, as the heart of the former Silla Kingdom, still has the largest concentration of remains. Mounded tombs, the most obvious remnant of the city's past, dominate your view as you approach this historic city. Many of the early tombs were constructed near the Banwolseong Palace site-- then undoubtedly the city centre but now at the edge of downtown. Later others were constructed outside the city, in the midst of flat farming fields and at the foot of the low hills that rim this valley.

Over the centuries these mounds have, by and large, been left un-plundered. Some informal excavation was done in the early 1900's, but the first government-sponsored excavations were authorized by the Japanese during the occupation.

Overnight in Gyeongju. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Gyeongju - Busan*

Our journey continues to Korea's second largest city, Busan (formerly Pusan). The city's name derives from two place names: Suwon, which means "water source" -- the land depression that the city occupies was for centuries known for its clear-water wells. High above the city rises P'aldal-san, a tall hill at its height of beauty in the spring, with its slopes awash with the colour of pink cherry blossoms. In the late 1600's the military established a garrison here as one of the five principal fortifications set up to protect the approaches to Seoul. Intending to move the official capital from Seoul to Suwon, King Chongjo the 22nd Joseon Dynasty King, had the fortress wall constructed in 1794. Battlements and palace buildings were erected, but the king died before he could initiate the move. Although there were great plans for this city, they never had the opportunity to mature, as the decision was made to keep the capital at Seoul.

Our tour continues with a visit to Kukje Market and Jagalchi Fish Market.

Overnight in Busan. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Busan, South Korea - Tokyo, Japan*

Today we fly from Busan to Tokyo.

Overnight in Tokyo. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *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 11 *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 12 *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 13 *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 14 *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 15 *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 16 *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 17 *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 18 *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 19 *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 20 *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 21 *Hiroshima - Kagoshima*

Today's Shinkansen train journey takes us along the eastern coast of Kyushu to Kagoshima.

Kagoshima City is the capital of Kagoshima prefecture. The city originally prospered as the castle town of Lord Shimadzu, and was the first city to introduce western civilisation to Japan. Today, it is the largest City in Southern Kyushu with about 540,000 people. Kagoshima City nestled on the west shore of beautiful Kinko Bay with majestic Mt. Sakurajima (the symbol of Kagoshima) is referred to as the Naples of the Orient.

One of Kagoshima's greatest contributions to modern Japan is it's role over the centuries as a gateway for trade and

exchange between Japan and the world. Japan has traditionally been a closed culture and only recently pursued international ties. Kagoshima is the catalyst city credited for "opening Japan to the World".

In 1543, a Portuguese vessel landed on Tanegashima one of the southern islands, bringing the first firearms to Japan. In 1549 The Spanish missionary Francisco Xavier landed in Kagoshima and introduced Christianity to Japan. During the 17th century, the shogunate had an "isolation policy" which prohibited contact with other nations; however, Satsuma (now Kagoshima) continued to trade with China, and sent students to England to study Western culture.

We visit Iso Ko-en Gardens, a wonderful garden with Mount Sakurajima as borrowed scenery in the background. Sakurajima is one of the world's most active volcanoes and lies just 4 km (2½ miles) from the city across the bay. The volcanic soil is extremely rich and the farmland at the base of this mountain is testament to its value.

Overnight in Kagoshima. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 22 *Kagoshima - Kumamoto*

Our day will start with our last train journey of the tour, bringing us to Kumamoto.

Shaped by nature's fires and the winds of history, Kumamoto is a highlight of our tour of Kyushu. We begin our tour with the Kumamoto Castle, considered one of the most beautiful and the third largest in the country. Built between 1601 and 1607 (known as the period of the Warring States) this castle was designed as impenetrable, and the curved stone walls are practically impossible for invaders to scale. A true fortress, within the castle walls are numerous wells and camphor trees; the wood from these trees can be used for firewood even when fresh. Authentic artifacts related to the castle as well as a siege in 1877 are on display in the castle's donjon.

From here we will go to the Hosokawa Mansion, a beautiful home that gives us an opportunity to see how the rich lived in Japan during the Tokugawa Period. We will end our day at the Suizenji-koen Park. Created in 1632 as a place of rest for the lords of the Hosokawa clan, the park is sublime in its aesthetic detail. Considered one of Japan's six most beautiful landscape gardens, the park was designed to represent the old road from Tokyo to Kyoto. Stop and enjoy a cup of green tea served with a delicate sweet while you relax in an authentic tea house (not included).

Overnight in Kumamoto. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 23 *Kumamoto - Mt Aso Kuju National Park - Kumamoto*

Today we travel by bus for our day trip to the Aso Kuju National Park. At 80 km (50 miles) in circumference, its caldera is one of the world's largest. This volcano has five cones, one still active. The five peaks of Mt Aso are Takadake, Nekodake, Kishimadake, Eboshidake and Nakadake. Nakadake Crater is 4 km (2.75 miles) in circumference and 125 m (410 feet) deep. Because of its situated and particular shape, it is the only active volcanic crater in the entire world that you can actually look down into. The lava flow created by eruptions over millennia forms a unique landscape that has a radius of 100 km (62 miles). Mt Aso is the reason Kumamoto has been known since early times as the "Land of Fire."

Halfway up Mt Takadake is the ravine known as Sensuikyo. In May, the entire ravine turns a glorious pink when 50,000 azalea burst into full bloom. From Daikanbo, 936 m (3088 ft) above sea level, one commands the best view of the five peaks of Mt Aso which are said to resemble the figure of a reclining Buddha. The noted writer Tokutomi Soho, deeply impressed by the view, gave it the name Daikanbo, "Great View Peak."

Senomoto Kogen (Senomoto Highland) is 1000 m (3,280 feet) above sea level. Looking beyond the highland, the five

peaks of Mt Aso and the Kujyu mountain ranges come into view. Many people come here in spring to enjoy picking a wide variety of wild, edible plants. In summer there is a welcome cool breeze, while in autumn the area is made lovely with the sight of pampas grass swaying gracefully in the wind. From May through the end of October the scenery is one of pastoral peace as contented cows graze freely.

Overnight in Kumamoto. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 24 *Kumamoto - Nagasaki*

This morning we leave by bus for Misumi Port just south of Kumamoto. From here we will board a ferry which will take us across the Ariake Sea to Shimabara. This old castle town sits in the shadow of Fugendake, which began erupting in 1990 after two centuries of inactivity and didn't stop until just a few years ago. The area worst affected is slowly being rebuilt but we will be able to see a number of homes still half buried and left as a reminder of the destructive forces. From here we make our way up the mountain and on to Unzen where we will see these bubbling jigoku, or "hells" as they are known in Japanese. We will be able to walk amongst these pools on walking trails. From here we make our way down the other side of this mountain and on to Nagasaki.

Overnight in Nagasaki. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 25 *Nagasaki: City Tour*

Blessed with a temperate climate, a superb setting, and a history unlike that of any other prefecture in Japan, Nagasaki easily ranks as one of Japan's most rewarding and exotic destinations. Much of the prefecture's considerable charm can be traced to the unique role which the region played in Japanese history. From 1639 to 1859, while the rest of the country was secluded from foreign contact by governmental decree, the port of Nagasaki alone was allowed to conduct trade with Europe and the Asian mainland. This free-port status and the prolonged exposure to foreign cultures which it brought resulted in the creation of a sophisticated and liberal climate which no other part of Japan could hope to emulate.

Nagasaki's attractions are as varied as they are plentiful: feudal castles, samurai houses, Meiji-era Western villas, smoking volcanoes, mineral-rich hot-spring baths, architecturally pleasing resorts, rugged islands, beautiful beaches, and a hospitable and friendly people are just a few of the rewards awaiting the traveller to this diverse and dynamic prefecture.

This morning we will start with a trip to Glover Garden, named after Thomas Glover. This is a collection of European style houses which have been collected in to this park which cascades down the side of a hill. In addition to the houses which you can go through is the Museum of Traditional Performing Arts which contains beautifully decorated floats from the Kunchi Festivals. We will then ride the streetcar to the Nagasaki Dejima Museum. Dejima was an artificial island built in 1636 in Nagasaki Bay for foreign traders, as foreigners were banned from the country. This was a vital portal through which culture, money, goods, and ideas flowed in and out of Japan.

This afternoon is free for you to enjoy this wonderful city. Nagasaki has an interesting Chinese Confucian Temple that you may like to visit on your own, as well as a vibrant Chinatown. And, of course, the compelling Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum commemorates the explosion of the atomic bomb that devastated Nagasaki at 11:02am on 9 August 1945.

Overnight in Nagasaki. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 26 *Nagasaki - Saga Prefecture - Fukuoka*

Today we travel by bus through Saga Prefecture, Japan's most important area for the production of traditional porcelain and pottery. Many of the kilns were established by potters who were taken to Japan from Korea after the war between Japan and Korea in the 1590s.

Arita ware originated in the beginning of the 17th century when layers of kaolin, the main component of porcelain, was discovered and the first porcelain kiln was built in present day Arita town. Arita is also called Imari ware because the products of the Arita Kiln were mainly shipped from the nearby port of Imari. Arita porcelains of the early days were typically made in the Chinese style of the period, with deep blue patterns on a white background, called "sometsuke." In the 1640s, a new style called "aka-e," characterised by bright colours and bold patterns principally in red, was invented. These two styles, sometsuke and aka-e, dominated Arita-Imari ware. These beautiful pieces of white earthenware from the Orient won tremendous acclaim in Europe and influenced the European porcelain industry.

Our first stop will be at the hidden village of Imari, then Arita. Karatsu will be our last stop before arriving in Fukuoka.

Overnight in Fukuoka. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 27 *Fukuoka: City Tour*

Fukuoka is a city blessed with a beautiful climate and a seaside location. Since ancient times the city has flourished as a crossroads of international exchange.

It is said that the earliest Japanese state mentioned in historical records, Nakoku, was located in the area where the city is now located. Foreign culture first entered Japan through Fukuoka. The Gold Seal discovered across the bay from Fukuoka City on Shikanoshima Island symbolises the long history of the area. This seal, inscribed "King of the State of Na of Wa, or Japan, and Vassal of the Han Dynasty", dates back to AD 57.

Today we embark on a half-day tour of Fukuoka, including the Kanzeonji Temple, Dazaifu Temmangu Square, and the Kyushu National Museum. The afternoon is at leisure to explore on your own.

Overnight in Fukuoka. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 28 *Departure*

Departure from Fukuoka.*

* LAND ONLY PASSENEGERS: It is in theory possible to travel by train from Fukuoka back to Tokyo, but this is a rather long journey (8 hours) and can involve multiple train changes. Accordingly, if you need to return to Tokyo to fly from there, we recommend that you fly from Fukuoka.

ITTE IRASSHAI!! Meal plan: Breakfast.