

ITINERARY 2026 JAPAN

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Japan: Folk Art and Nature

July 11–23, 2026

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This tour was custom designed to help you get to know Japan, a nation of contrasts, through its art and nature.

This itinerary is subject to change.

Travel demands flexibility. We will strive to balance adaptability with remaining on schedule. Please trust that, when it is not possible to follow the plan laid out below, your program leaders will work to find substitutions that retain the quality of this Study Travel program. Various details may be added or changed due to information obtained while making reservations, or perhaps on site, especially because of the weather. BLD indicate included group meals.

Saturday, July 11**Depart U.S.**

Individual flights depart from the U.S.

Sunday, July 12**Arrive Fukuoka (D)**

You'll be met on arrival and transferred to the hotel for check-in. We'll start our time together with a welcome and introductions, followed by a group welcome dinner at a local Hakata restaurant within walking distance from the hotel. Overnight at Mitsui Garden Fukuoka Gion.

Monday, July 13**Fukuoka (BLD)**

This morning, we'll visit Toho Village, a picturesque rural area located in the Asakura District of Fukuoka Prefecture. One of the most famous aspects of Toho Village is its rich pottery tradition, particularly Koishiwara-yaki. Koishiwara pottery dates back over 300 years and is known for its simple, rustic designs and distinctive "tobikanna" (chattering) patterns created with a special carving technique. We'll visit the ceramics museum and have a guided tour around the Koishiwara district, followed by group lunch at a local restaurant.

After lunch we'll drive to Hasami, a small, historic town located in Nagasaki Prefecture, known for its centuries-old pottery tradition, scenic countryside, and relaxed atmosphere. Situated in a valley between Nagasaki and Saga, Hasami has become a significant hub for ceramic production, with a reputation that rivals other famous pottery towns in Japan. We'll visit Hasami-yakimono park, a cultural and educational facility, serving as a tribute to Hasami's 400-year-old potter tradition.

Drive back to Fukuoka for group dinner. Overnight at Mitsui Garden Fukuoka Gion.

Tuesday, July 14**Fukuoka (BL)**

After breakfast, we'll continue our folk arts tour with visits to Arita and Sasebo. In Arita we'll visit the Kyushu Ceramics Museum and see the Tozan Shrine with its magnificent porcelain torii gate.

Tuesday, July 14 continued

After a group lunch, we'll head to Sasebo to visit the Mikawachi Ceramics Museum, dedicated to preserving and showcasing the heritage of Mikawachi-yaki (Mikawachi ware), a type of porcelain renowned for its delicate craftsmanship, fine details, and distinctive blue-and-white designs.

Return to the hotel for remainder of the day free with dinner on your own. Overnight at Mitsui Garden Fukuoka Gion.

Wednesday, July 15 Fukuoka to Kumamoto (BLD)

Today we'll head towards Kumamoto (approx 2 hrs), known for its rich history, stunning landscapes, and cultural attractions. First we'll visit Aso-Kuju National Park, renowned for its dramatic landscapes and diverse ecosystems. The park encompasses the active volcano Mount Aso and the Kuju Mountain Range, offering a stunning array of natural features. There will be a chance to visit the Kusasenri Observatory for a birds-eye view of the lush grasslands, hot springs, and rugged peaks. Then we'll make the short hike to Mt. Aso, one of Japan's most active volcanoes, featuring the largest volcanic caldera in the world: about 25 kilometers in diameter and including several towns and lush farmland within its borders.

We'll continue to Kumamoto for a group lunch and then check into the hotel for some free time. If you're feeling energetic, we recommend a quick visit to Kumamoto Castle, one of Japan's most famous and historically significant castles. Group dinner at a local restaurant. Overnight at Kumamoto Hotel Castle.

Thursday, July 16 Kumamoto to Kagoshima (BL)

This morning we'll head out to Kagoshima (Approx 2 hr 30 min), known for its volcanic landscapes, rich history, and warm climate. On arrival in Kagoshima, we'll embark on a guided tour including areas such as Tenmonkan Street, one of the city's most vibrant and bustling shopping and entertainment districts. Known for its lively atmosphere, it offers a blend of traditional and modern Japan. We'll also head to the Sengan-en Gardens, a historic Japanese garden and stately residence. Built in 1658 by the powerful Shimazu clan, one of Japan's most influential samurai families, it offers a stunning example of traditional Japanese landscape design. The garden is beautifully situated with a view of Sakurajima, an active volcano, and Kinko Bay. Group lunch today at an appropriate point. Check into the hotel for the remainder of the day free with dinner on your own. Overnight at Dormy Inn Kagoshima.

Friday, July 17 Kagoshima to Yakushima (BD)

Please prepare two days worth of belongings to take with you to Yakushima. We'll leave main luggage at the Kagoshima hotel, where it will be stored at their Bell Desk.

Today we'll journey to Yakushima, a lush, mountainous island that's listed as a Unesco World Heritage site for its ancient cedar forests, diverse ecosystems, and natural beauty. First we transfer by private bus to Kagoshima Port (approx 15 min), to take the Toppy Ferry to Yakushima's Miyanoura Port (approx 3 hrs). Cars are few and far between on Yakushima; we'll walk to the hotel. Lunch on your own and some free time followed by a group dinner. Overnight at The Hotel Yakushima Ocean and Forest.

Saturday, July 18 Yakushima (BD)

Today is free for you to explore the island on your own. Popular activities include scuba diving, hiking, or checking out the local shops and cafes. Hotel staff can assist you in booking various activities. Overnight at The Hotel Yakushima Ocean and Forest.

Sunday, July 19 Yakushima to Kagoshima (B)

We'll have part of the day free, depending on the return ferry to Kagoshima. Lunch and dinner are on your own today. Overnight at Dormy Inn Kagoshima.

Monday, July 20 Kagoshima to Hiroshima (BL)

Bring your main luggage to the front desk by 8 am, because it will be shipped to Hiroshima. Pack a day bag with any essentials such as medication, minimal toiletries, small change of clothing, just in case. This service is very typical in Japan, though, and top-notch. Your main luggage will be delivered to the hotel by 6 pm tonight.

Today we travel via Shinkansen (bullet train) to Hiroshima (approx 3 hr 10 min), a city that is a symbol of resilience and remembrance. Located on Honshu Island, today Hiroshima stands as a symbol of peace, resilience, and recovery. It has evolved from a site of immense destruction into a thriving, modern city dedicated to promoting global peace and nuclear disarmament while preserving its legacy through powerful memorials and educational initiatives.

Group lunch at a local restaurant. Then we'll visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, Museum, and Atomic Bomb Dome.

Check in at the hotel. Remainder of the day free with dinner on your own. Overnight at the ANA Crown Plaza Hiroshima.

Tuesday, July 21 Hiroshima to Kyoto (BD)

Again, bring your main luggage to the front desk by 8 am, because it will be shipped to Kyoto. Pack a day bag with your essentials.

Once more we'll travel via Shinkansen, this time to Kyoto (approx 1 hr 45 min), the former capital of Japan. Kyoto, one of Japan's most historic and culturally rich cities, is located in the Kansai region on Honshu Island. Once the imperial capital of Japan for over a thousand years (from 794 to 1868), Kyoto is often referred to as the heart of traditional Japan. Known for its well-preserved temples, shrines, beautiful gardens, and traditional tea houses, Kyoto is a major center for cultural heritage and is a popular destination for both domestic and international visitors.

We'll start our tour of Kyoto with a visit to Nishiki Market for lunch (pay on your own). Nishiki is a vibrant and bustling food market located in the heart of the city. Often referred to as "Kyoto's Kitchen," this market is a popular destination for both locals and tourists, showcasing a wide array of traditional Japanese foods, snacks, and culinary delights.

Then, we'll visit the famed Kiyomizudera, one of Kyoto's most celebrated and iconic Buddhist temples. Established in 778, it is part of the Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto UNESCO World Heritage Site and is renowned for its stunning architecture, rich history, and beautiful surroundings. In spring, the temple is surrounded by cherry blossoms, making it one of the most popular spots for hanami (flower viewing) in Kyoto.

After check-in at the hotel, we'll finish the day off with a group dinner in the Gion District. Overnight at ALA Hotel Kyoto or similar.

Wednesday, July 22 Kyoto (BD)

Our day starts with a morning tour of Kinkakuji, one of the most famous and iconic landmarks in Kyoto. Officially known as Rokuon-ji, this Zen Buddhist temple is renowned for its stunning architecture, rich history, and serene setting. The top two floors of the pavilion are covered entirely in gold leaf, making it a dazzling sight, especially when reflected in the surrounding pond.

Next we'll make the short drive to the Arashiyama Bamboo Grove, one of Kyoto's most iconic and serene natural attractions. Located in the scenic Arashiyama district, this bamboo grove is a mesmerizing place where towering bamboo stalks sway gently in the breeze, creating an otherworldly atmosphere. Walking through the Arashiyama Bamboo Forest feels like stepping into another world. The bamboo stalks, which can grow over 30 meters tall, create a canopy above, allowing soft light to filter through, giving the grove a mystical and calming ambiance.

Return to the hotel for lunch on your own and some free time. Tonight we'll have a Kyoto-style farewell group dinner. Overnight at ALA Hotel Kyoto or similar.

Thursday, July 23 Depart Kyoto (B)

One assisted airport transfer is included today. If the timing does not line up with your flights, the hotel staff can assist you in arranging a transfer.