



SAMURAI TOURS

Adventures in Discovering Traditional Japan

www.samuraitours.com

Winter Wonderland Self Guided



14 Days/13 Nights

Winter Wonderland Self Guided



Tour Overview

The weather outside may be frightful, but touring Japan in winter is delightful. After you see how beautiful Japan is blanketed in snow, you'll be saying "Let it snow, let it snow, let it snow."

Destinations

Tokyo, Sapporo, Abashiri, Kushiro, Nagano, Jigokudani Monkey Park, Takayama, Shirakawa-go, Kanazawa, Kyoto

Tour Details

When you add the unique opportunities that only Japan winters offer with the small crowds, the result is an unforgettable travel experience. In the best that Japanese winters have to offer, you'll have the opportunity to wander through the ice sculptures at the world-famous Sapporo Snow Festival; feast on all-you-can-eat grilled lamb and beer at the Sapporo Beer Garden; slash through the ice flows in a ice-breaker boat in the infamous prison town of Abashiri; contemplate the nearly-extinct Japanese Red-Crested cranes, revered by the Japanese; visit with the "snow monkeys" while they rest in thermally-heated mineral water to stay warm; explore quaint Takayama; visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Shirakawa-go with its many snow-covered, thatched-roof

gassho-zukuri (praying hand) homes; stroll through one of the best gardens in Japan made even better covered with snow; and much, much more!

Tour Highlights

- ✓ Sapporo Snow Festival
- ✓ Akan Crane Center
- ✓ Jigokudani Snow Monkey Park
- ✓ Abashiri Ice-Flow Cruise
- ✓ Three Kaiseki-style dinners including Crab Dinner in Abashiri
- ✓ Three Separate Rides on a Shinkansen (bullet train)

Tour Inclusions

- ✓ 14 Day JR Rail Pass
- ✓ Meeting service at the arrival airport
- ✓ Baggage transfer from city to city
- ✓ Electronic version of Tour Handbook and Japanese History
- ✓ Detailed, easy-to-follow directions on how to travel between cities
- ✓ Bi-lingual maps, addresses and phone numbers for all your lodging
- ✓ English-speaking emergency contact number in Japan
- ✓ Domestic Airfare from Tokyo to Sapporo and from Kushiro to Tokyo

Tour Exclusions

- ✗ International airfare is NOT included.
- ✗ A printed itinerary is not included
- ✗ Alcoholic beverages, soft drinks and desserts are NOT included

Map



Tour Destinations

- 📍 Tokyo
- 📍 Sapporo
- 📍 Abashiri
- 📍 Kushiro
- 📍 Akan Crane Center
- 📍 Nagano
- 📍 Jigokudani Snow Monkey Park
- 📍 Takayama
- 📍 Shirakawago
- 📍 Kanazawa
- 📍 Kyoto

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive in Tokyo; Travel to Sapporo

After clearing customs and immigration (which can take up to an hour and a half due to increased tourism to Japan), you will be met at Tokyo's Narita Airport by a Samurai Tours meeting staff. The staff will then help you exchange your JR Rail Pass, send your main luggage ahead to Abashiri, and escort you to the domestic terminal. Then you will fly to New Chitose Airport and take an express train to Sapporo. No meals included.

Travel: 3 Hours

Day 2 Sapporo - Sapporo Snow Festival

After breakfast you will meet with the licensed, English-speaking guide who will escort you around Sapporo. There is no pre-defined itinerary, as the guide will adjust the itinerary based on your preferences and interests. You can visit the JR Sapporo Tower where you will be able to get a bird's eye view of Sapporo, the largest city on Hokkaido and the host of the 1972 Winter Olympics. You may want to tour the Hokkaido Historical Museum where you can discover the rich history of Hokkaido, including Hokkaido's original inhabitants, the Ainu. Here you can discover how the taming of the wilds of Hokkaido was very similar to the settling of the American West. You can choose to explore the Hokkaido Historical Village Open Air Museum where many buildings from around Hokkaido, both modern and traditional, have been relocated. Perhaps tour the original Sapporo Beer Brewery and sample the many freshly-brewed beers, or visit the Sapporo Botanical Garden, established in 1886 by Hokkaido University, and a wonderful place for a picnic lunch. In the garden you will find a small preserved virgin forest which shows how Sapporo once looked, as well as a small alpine garden and greenhouse. In the evening, you can have dinner at the Sapporo Beer Garden, located next to the original Sapporo Beer brewery where you can try the local specialty of grilled lamb, cooked yourself at the table. Breakfast at the hotel and lunch with the guide is included.

Travel: N/A; Walking: Medium

Day 3 Travel to Abashiri

Today you will travel by express train to the city of Abashiri on the northeastern coast of Hokkaido. Abashiri is known as the site of the Abashiri Prison, a Meiji-era facility used for the incarceration of political prisoners. The old prison has been turned into a museum, and as a result Abashiri has become a popular tourist destination. Pick up your main luggage from the hotel when you check in. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: 5 Hours

Day 4 Abashiri - Ice Flow Cruise

In the morning you will transfer your main luggage to Nagano and travel to Kushiro and Nagano with an overnight bag only. Today is free to explore parts of Abashiri that you missed yesterday. We recommend visiting the Ice Flow Museum or the Okhotsk Drift Ice Museum. Every winter, ice flows from Russia collide with northeastern Hokkaido. These museums document the science behind the ice flows and also introduce some of the animal life living below the ice. We would also suggest experiencing an Abashiri Ice Flow Cruise where you can board an ice breaker boat to get a close-up view of the ice flow that clogs the Abashiri harbor every winter. Later in the afternoon you

will travel by train to Kushiro. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 3 1/2 Hours

Day 5 Akan Crane Center

Today is a free day to tour Kushiro on your own. We suggest starting the day by taking a bus to the nearby Akan International Crane Preserve in the Kushiro Marshland. Cranes are thought to live a thousand years, so they hold a special place in Japanese culture. The Japanese Red-Crested cranes at one time were on the brink of extinction, but with the help of a few dedicated groups, their numbers have been increasing. In the summer, when food is readily available and the cranes are nesting, they retreat deep into the surrounding marshland where they can't be seen. However, in the winter, they can be found near the viewing points on the edge of the marshland. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 2 Hours

Day 6 Travel to Nagano

Today is all travel. You will fly from Kushiro to Haneda Airport (Tokyo), then travel by local train and Shinkansen to Nagano. Pick up your main luggage when you check into the hotel. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 6 Hours

Day 7 Jigokudani Snow Monkey Park

Today you will delight in the famous snow monkeys of Japan. These monkeys are world-famous for using the hot spring baths located in and around Yukanaka Onsen. The red-faced snow monkeys are only found in Japan, and during the winter the monkeys enjoy using the baths to stay warm. Breakfast at the hotel included.

Travel: 2 Hours

Day 8 Travel to Takayama

Today you will send your main luggage ahead to Kanazawa. You will travel to Takayama and Kanazawa with an overnight bag only. Takayama is a quaint town located in the middle of the Japan Alps, and has managed to maintain traditional Japanese charm with its small inns, shops, and sake breweries. After checking in you can stroll around the Sanmachisuji District, an area of merchant homes dating back to the late 16th century. The evening is free to enjoy one of the many nearby Hida Beef (more commonly known as Kobe Beef) restaurants. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 3 Hours

Day 9 Tour Takayama

Today is free to explore the wonders of Takayama. We would suggest spending the morning at the farmer's market, strolling past the vegetable stands and stalls selling herbs, pickles, and souvenirs. You will be able to sample numerous options as you go. You can also tour the Takayama-jinya which was the governing office of Takayama and the surrounding area since the early 17th century. We recommend using the afternoon to explore the many temples and shrines, museums, rummaging through antique shops, or relaxing at one of sake breweries. Breakfast at

the hotel is included.

Travel: N/A

Day 10 Travel to Shirakawago; Tour Shirakawago; Travel to Kanazawa

You will start the day traveling by bus to Shirakawa-go, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A number of “gassho-zukuri” style homes have been relocated to Shirakawa-go from surrounding locations. “Gassho-zukuri” literally translates to “praying hands home”, and is a fitting description of these thatched-roof A-frame style homes which are well-suited for the large amounts of snow this area of Japan receives. We suggest visiting the Shirakawa-go Open Air Museum where you can get a glimpse into the hard lives of 18th century Japanese farmers. You may also want to visit the observation area where you will have a chance to view Shirakawa-go from above. Later in the afternoon you will travel by bus to the city of Kanazawa, and will retrieve your main luggage from the hotel. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 2 1/2 Hours

Day 11 Tour Kanazawa

Today is a free day to explore Kanazawa. Located near the northwestern coast of the Japan Sea, Kanazawa receives a tremendous amount of snow. In the morning we recommend touring the Kenrokuen Garden, considered by the Japanese to be one of the three best gardens in Japan. The garden takes on a completely different perspective when it is covered in snow. You can also visit the Nagamachi and Chaya Districts where you will feel like you are stepping back in time to the historic Samurai era with the preserved homes and restaurants. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: N/A

Day 12 Travel to Kyoto; Tour Kyoto

In the morning you will transfer your main luggage to Kansai Airport. You will travel to Kyoto and Kansai with an overnight bag only. Today you will travel by express train to Kyoto. Steeped in history and tradition, Kyoto has in many ways been the cradle of Japanese culture. A stroll through Kyoto is a walk through 11 centuries of Japanese history. For many, just the name of Kyoto conjures up the classic images of Japan: streets of traditional wooden houses, the click-clack of geta (wooden sandals) on the paved stones, geisha in a flourish of brightly colored silks, and a tea master warming water and making tea. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: N/A

Day 13 Tour Kyoto

Today you are free to tour Kyoto on your own. We recommend starting the day at the nearby Fushimi Inari Shrine. This Shinto shrine was established in the 8th century, and is dedicated to Inari, the Goddess of Cereal (Rice). Spread out over the expansive hillside location are more than 10,000 vermilion-colored torii gates, donated by thankful followers and the local sake breweries. These torii gates form kilometers-long tunnels of vermilion winding through the quiet woods and past many smaller shrines. Next, you can visit Kiyomizu-dera Temple. Kiyomizu-dera literally translates to “Pure Water Temple”. For centuries visitors and pilgrims have climbed the hill to Kiyomizu-dera standing on a steep hillside with fine views of the city. Supported in part by 139 pillars, the temple juts out over the valley. Finding the courage to set out on a daring, new adventure is likened to “taking a leap from the veranda of Kiyomizu.” Below the temple is the Sound of Feathers waterfall, believed to be the name source of the temple. Water from this spring is drunk from long-handled cups, and thought to prevent illness, make the drinker wiser, or add

years to life expectancy. But you have to choose one. It is considered greedy to drink all three. Next, you can explore the narrow, cobblestone-paved streets and alleys of the Higashiyama District and travel to the Gion Geisha district. Here you can see where the Geisha and Maiko live and work. You may even see one on the way to one of their appointments. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: N/A

Day 14 Return Home

It's time to say Sayonara (Goodbye). You will travel by express train to the Kansai International Airport, just outside Osaka. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 1 1/2 to 4 Hours

Dates & Pricing

Low Season-

\$3,395.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)

January 6 - February 28

June 16 - July 9

August 24 - August 31

November 16 - December 24

Regular Season-

\$3,678.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)

March 1 - March 14

May 7 - June 15

September 1 - October 14

Peak Season-

\$3,961.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)

March 15 - May 6 (Cherry Blossom & Golden Week)

July 10 - August 23 (Obon Holiday/Olympics)

October 15 - November 15 (Fall Foliage)

December 25 - January 5 (New Years)

Adjustments for 2021 Tours

There will be an additional 5% charge for 2021 tours

📌 Inclusions

- Accommodations in 3 Star hotels including all taxes, fees and breakfast every morning (contact us about accommodation upgrades)
 - Sapporo: Western-style hotel such as Keio Plaza Hotel Sapporo
 - Abashiri: Japanese-style ryokan such as Hotel Abashirikoso
 - Kushiro: Western-style hotel such as Lavista Kushirogawa Hotel
 - Nagano: Western-style hotel such as Chisun Grand Nagano
 - Takayama: Western-style hotel such as Takayama Ouan
 - Kanazawa: Western-style hotel such as Dormy Inn Kanazawa
 - Kyoto: Western-style hotel such as Kyoto Hatoya Hotel
- Detailed, easy-to-follow directions on how to travel between cities
- Bi-lingual maps, addresses and phone numbers for all your lodging
- 14 Day Ordinary Car JR Rail Pass
- English-speaking emergency contact number in Japan
- Meeting service at the airport
- Airport transfers
- 8 Hours of Guiding Service from a licensed, English-speaking guide
- Suggested train schedules including train schedules for 2 hours prior and 2 hours after the suggested time to allow you to choose your own times
- Nohi Bus Tickets to cover your travel to Shirakawa-go and Kanazawa
- Flight from Narita Airport to Sapporo Airport
- Flight from Kushiro Airport to Haneda Airport
- Breakfast every day
- Electronic version of itinerary
- A copy of our “Gaijin on Getas” tour handbook (this is the same popular handbook our escorted tour members receive) which contains 180 pages of Japan travel tips, Japanese language tips, Japanese customs and etiquette and Japanese history to prepare you properly for your trip and allow you to enjoy Japan even more after you arrive.
- Baggage transfer forms (we will provide the necessary forms in Japanese to transfer your main baggage ahead, allowing you the freedom of traveling light. The service provided will only work overnight, so you will need to travel with an overnight bag. The actual transfer fees are not included and will be paid by you at the time of transfer. These fees normally run between 1,250 Yen and 1,750 Yen)

What's Not Included

- Local transportation (subways, buses, taxis, etc.)
- All admission fees
- Lunches and dinners (except where noted)
- Desserts at any included meals (except where noted)
- Drinks other than water and tea at any included meals (except where noted)
- A printed itinerary is not included

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Contact Samurai Tours

WEBSITE/EMAIL

www.samuraitours.com
info@samuraitours.com

USA CONTACT INFO

Toll-free: 1-866-316-SAMURAI
or 1-866-316-7268
Fax number: 720-210-5423

Samurai Tours
7900 East Union Ave, Suite
1100
Denver CO 80237

JAPAN CONTACT INFO

Call us: 075-361-7303

Samurai Tours

307 Yodokizu
Fushimi
Kyoto 613-0911 Japan

Kyoto-fu Chijitoroku

Ryokogyo 3-576/

Japanese Travel Agency License:
Kyoto Prefecture #3-576

MEMBERSHIPS/ASSOCIATIONS

Better Business Bureau
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