

SAMURAI TOURS

Adventures in Discovering Traditional Japan

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Best of Japan Alps Self Guided



15 Day/14 Nights

Best of Japan Alps Self Guided

Tour Overview

Experience more of the Japan Alps on the Best of Japan Alps Self Guided tour. Soaring mountain peaks, open-air hot springs, lush forests, quaint mountain villages and a slow pace make this central alpine area a great escape. Hidden away in its rural and remote valleys are many of Japan’s best-preserved post towns, farm hamlets, and traces of the old urban culture. Combined with its beautiful natural scenery, these features make this area one of the most rewarding in Japan to visit.

📍 Destinations

Tokyo, Magome, Tsumago, Matsumoto, Kamikochi, Hirayu Onsen, Shin Hotaka, Takayama, Shirakawago, Kanazawa, Toyama, Tateyama, Nagano, Snow Monkey Park

Tour Details

The Japan Alps epitomizes the extremes and contradictions of Japan today. The densely populated coastal belt region, including the megalopolis cities of Tokyo and Osaka, is a stark contrast with the beautiful natural scenery of the mountainous central region. Though readily accessible, the Japan Alps are still remote enough to have retained traditional lifestyles and architecture.

The Japan Alps is a slow-paced region that has it all, without the crowds. The castle town of Matsumoto, with its striking “Crow Castle” is sure to please with its numerous 17th-century warehouses. You will feel like you have stepped back into 16th-century Japan in the small, mountain village of Tsumago. The stunningly beautiful mountain valley of Kamikochi has some of the best hiking in Japan. The quaint town of Takayama with its farmer’s markets invites exploration. The old farmhouses at Shirakawa-go will give you a glimpse of the way of life in 17th-century rural Japan. Visit with the famous Japanese Snow Monkeys as they bathe in the outdoor baths. And Hirayu Onsen has some of the best outdoor baths in Japan.

This tour is not available from mid November to May due to weather related transportation closures.

Tour Highlights

- ✔ Walk from Magome to Tsumago Along the Nakasendo Highway
- ✔ Matsumoto Castle
- ✔ Daio Wasabi Farm
- ✔ Overnight in Kamikochi Valley
- ✔ Tateyama Alpine Route with Overnight at the base of Mt Tateyama
- ✔ Jigoku-dani Snow Monkey Park
- ✔ Three Separate Rides on Shinkansen (Bullet Train)
- ✔ Four Kaiseki-style Dinners

Tour Inclusions

- ✔ Reserved Seat Train Tickets on all Inter-City Travel
- ✔ Meeting service at the arrival airport
- ✔ Sending service to the appropriate train station
- ✔ Baggage transfer from city to city
- ✔ Electronic version of Tour Handbook and Japanese History
- ✔ 8 Hours with a guide
- ✔ Tateyama Alpine Route Tickets
- ✔ 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

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

Magome

Tsumago

Matsumoto

Kamikochi

Takayama

Shirakawago

Kanazawa

Tateyama

Nagano

Jigoku-dani Snow Monkey Park

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive in Tokyo

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 assistant. The guide will then purchase a limousine bus ticket for you and help you board the bus to the hotel. No meals are included.

Travel: 1-1/2 Hour

Day 2 Tokyo - Tokyo Tower, Ginza, Asakusa

After breakfast, the licensed, English-speaking guide will meet you in the lobby of your accommodations. The guided tour will start with traveling to Tokyo Tower. The Tokyo Tower is a communications and observation tower in the center of Tokyo. At 332.9 metres (1,092 ft), it is the second-tallest structure in Japan. The structure is an Eiffel Tower-inspired lattice tower, with a main observatory at 150 meters that is reached via elevator or a 600-step staircase. Thanks to the tower's central location, the observatory offers an interesting view of the city despite being only at a relatively moderate height. Afterwards, we will travel to the famous Ginza district, the most expensive real estate in the world. Ginza is recognized by many as one of the most luxurious shopping districts in the world, attracting visitors and regulars alike from across the globe. Before continuing we will first stop for a lunch of Kushiage (fried meat and vegetables on bamboo skewers). Next we will travel to the nearby Asakusa area. Here we will tour the Nakamise-dori, Senso-ji Buddhist Temple and the Asakusa Shrine where you will learn about Buddhist and Shinto Japanese religious practices. We will return to the hotel, where we will go through the train tickets for the rest of the tour. Breakfast at the hotel and lunch at a local restaurant included.

Day 3 Travel to Magome; Overnight Magome

Before leaving Tokyo, you will need to prepare your luggage to transfer to Matsumoto. You will start the day by traveling by Shinkansen (bullet train), express train and bus to the city of Magome. Magome and Tsumago were once major stops on the Nakasendo, a major highway through the Japan Alps built in the late 16th century. After the Tokkaido Highway was built in the early 17th century near the coast, Magome, Tsumago and the other towns along this highway became ghost towns. Tremendous efforts have been made recently to rebuild the memory and feel of these old settlements. After arriving in Magome and checking in, you can tour the Toson Memorial Musuem which documents the life of the writer Shimazaki Toson who became well-known in Japan writing about the city of Magome. The rest of the afternoon is free to enjoy the town of Magome. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at the ryokan included.

Travel: 3 1/2 Hours

Day 4 Walk along the Nakasendo to Tsumago; Tour Tsumago

After breakfast at the ryokan, you can arrange to have your overnight bags delivered from Magome to Tsumago (you will walk with day bags only), and you can walk the 5 miles from Magome to Tsumago along the route of the old Nakasendo highway. The old highway winds through quaint neighborhoods, old forests, along mountain streams and waterfalls as it makes its way to the historic city of Tsumago. There are even sections of the original highway still remaining. (For those who are unable to walk this far, you can take the bus either from Magome to Tsumago, or there is a bus available from the half-way point of the walk to Tsumago.) All of the electrical and

utility lines have been removed and placed underground in Tsumago. You will feel like you truly stepped into 17th- century Japan and Tsumago is often used for filming period movies and television shows. You can tour the Wakihonjin Okuya where the retainers of the feudal lord's party would stay, and the Honjin, where the feudal lords would stay. The rest of the afternoon is free to explore the picturesque and charming village of Tsumago before checking into your ryokan. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokan is included.

Travel: N/A

Day 5 Travel to Matsumoto; Tour Matsumoto

After breakfast at the ryokan, you travel by express train to Matsumoto. From the moment you step off the train and hear the announcement "Matsumotooooo," you will recognize you are someplace special. Matsumoto is unique because of its many beautiful Edo-period (17th-to-19th-century) Kura (warehouses) with their striking black-and-white contrasting latticework. Today these warehouses house restaurants and shops. You can also tour the famous Matsumoto Castle. This beautiful castle is also known as Crow Castle because of its stark black walls. The castle was first built in 1504 and remodeled into its current form at the turn of the 17th century. Climbing to the top of the main tower, you will have a wonderful view of the city and the surrounding mountains. Breakfast at the ryokan included. You will retrieve your main luggage from the hotel in Matsumoto.

Travel: 3 1/2 Hours

Day 6 Daio Wasabi Farm; Travel to Kamikochi; Overnight Kamikochi

Before leaving the hotel, you will need to prepare your main luggage to be sent to Takayama. In the morning you can visit the nearby Daio Wasabi Farm. Here you can learn more about this Japanese condiment staple, while enjoying the many foods flavored with wasabi including ice cream. The farm is also famous for its river that flows though the farm with many watermills. The river appeared in the 1990 film, Dreams, by Akira Kurosawa in a segment called the "Village of the Watermills." In the afternoon, we travel to Kamikochi by train and bus along an incomparable scenic route. Kamikochi, in the middle of the beautiful Chubu-Sangaku National Park, is only open from late-April until October because of the almost 30-feet of snow that falls in this area of Japan during the winter. As you approach Kamikochi, the valley opens onto a row of towering mountains, with the icy Azusa River flowing through the middle of the valley. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at the ryokan are included.

Travel: 4 Hours

Day 7 Kamikochi Free Day

The day is free to relax and enjoy the beauty of Kamikochi. There are numerous gentle trails in the valley, and many trails leading to the surrounding mountains for the more adventurous. Breakfast and Kaiseki-style dinner at the ryokan are included.

Travel: N/A

Day 8 Travel to Shin Hotaka; Shin Hotaka - Shin Hotaka Ropeway; Travel to Takayama

After breakfast, you travel by bus to Shin Hotaka Onsen, where, weather permitting, you can enjoy the scenery from the Shin Hotaka Ropeway. From the top of the ropeway at 2,200 meters (about 7,000 feet), you can get a beautiful view of the surrounding Japan Alps. After the ropeway, you can continue by bus to Takayama. Takayama, in the middle of the Japan Alps, with its traditional inns,

shops, and sake breweries, has managed to retain its traditional charm. Breakfast at the ryokan is included. You will retrieve your main luggage from the hotel in Takayama.

Travel: 3 1/2 Hours

Day 9 Tour Takayama

In the morning you can stroll through the farmer's market, sampling the numerous options from vegetable stands and stalls selling herbs, pickles, and souvenirs. After that, you can tour the Takayama-jinya, which was the governing office of Takayama and the surrounding area since the early 17th century. You can also visit the San-machi-suji district, consisting of merchant homes dating back to the 16th century. For dinner, you can eat at one of the many nearby Hida Beef restaurants. (Hida Beef is the same thing as the more famous Kobe Beef.) The rest of the day is free to roam and explore Takayama. Visit the many temples, shrines and museums, rummage through antique shops, or relax at one of the sake breweries. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: N/A

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

Before leaving the hotel, you will need to prepare your main luggage to be sent to Toyama. Today you travel to the valley of Shirakawa-go by bus. Shirakawa-go is the home of many Gassho-zukuri (Praying Hand) style homes, which have been moved here from the surrounding area. These homes were first used as far back as the 18th century and are still being used today. You can tour the Shirakawa-go Open Air Museum where 25 buildings from the surrounding area have been relocated. After visiting the Shirakawa-go Observation Deck, where you will have an opportunity to view the village of Shirakawa-go from above and some free time to explore Shirakawago on your own, you will continue on by another bus to Kanazawa. You will travel with overnight bags to Shirakawago, Kanazawa and Toyama. Breakfast at the ryokan is included.

Travel: 2 Hours

Day 11 Tour Kanazawa; Travel to Toyama

You can begin the day touring the Kenrokuen Garden. This garden is considered to be one of the three best gardens in Japan and was initially constructed in the 17th century. After enjoying the garden, you can tour the Kanazawa Handicrafts Museum to learn how the local Kanazawa handicrafts are made. After lunch you can tour the Nagamachi District where the Samurai who worked at the nearby castle lived. At the Nagamachi District, you can tour the Nomura House. The Nomura Family was a high-ranking retainer for the Maeda Family, the feudal lord family who ruled Kanazawa and the surrounding area during the Edo Period. Later in the day you travel by express train to the city of Toyama, the gateway to Tateyama. Breakfast at the ryokan is included. You will retrieve your main luggage from the hotel in Toyama.

Travel: 3 1/2 Hours

Day 12 Tateyama Alpine Route; Overnight at Tateyama

Before leaving the hotel, you will need to prepare your main luggage to be sent to Nagano. You will be traveling by numerous modes of transportation into the Chubu Sangaku National Park. Here you will get a chance (weather permitting) for a view of the Tateyama mountain range. You will also have some time to go hiking around the alpine area above the treeline. Here you will not only enjoy the view of the surrounding mountains but the many alpine flowers as well, or you can just relax and enjoy the view. Breakfast and dinner at the hotel is included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours

Day 13 Tateyama Alpine Route; Travel to Nagano

Today you can finish the Tateyama Alpine Route. Along the way, you will have opportunities for short hikes. In the late afternoon, you will finish the trek across the Tateyama mountain range by taking the train to Nagano. Breakfast at the hotel is included. You will retrieve your main luggage from the hotel in Nagano.

Travel: 5 Hours

Day 14 Jigoku-dani Snow Monkey Park

After breakfast, you will travel by bus to the Snow Monkey Park. Here, at the Jigoku-dani (Hell Valley), you will delight in the world famous “snow monkeys” of Japan. The Red-Faced “snow monkeys” are only found in Japan, and during the entire year, the monkeys enjoy using the thermally-heated mineral water baths. You will return by bus to the city of Nagano where you can visit Zenkoji, one of the most important and popular temples in Japan. It is said that the first Buddha statue brought to Japan is stored at Zenkoji. The original statue cannot be seen, but a copy of the statue is put on display every six years. The next time it can be seen will be in 2021. The large main hall of the temple was constructed in the early 18th century. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 3 Hours

Day 15 Return Home

It’s time to say “sayonara” (goodbye) to Japan. You will take a Shinkansen and express train to Tokyo’s Narita Airport for your flight back home. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: TBD

Dates & Pricing

Low Season-
$3,994.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)
January 6 – February 28
June 16 – August 10
August 19 – August 31
November 16 – December 24

Regular Season-
$4,274.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)
March 1 – March 16
May 7 – June 15
September 1 – October 14

Peak Season-
$4,520.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)
March 17 – May 6 (Cherry Blossom & Golden Week)
August 11 – August 18 (Obon Holiday)
October 15 – November 15 (Fall Foliage)
December 25 – January 5 (New Years)

Add-On Tours

Our tours and tour itineraries are the best, but as the saying goes, “you can’t make everyone happy all of the time”. There may a specific destination or a specific experience you may want to include in your visit to Japan that may not be included your tour. Choose from our Add On tours to include your interests and make your Japan tour even better.

Click HERE **to view all of the Add-On Tours.**

Or, use the arrows to scroll though the recommended list of Add-On Tours for this tour.










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Inclusions

- Accommodations in 3 Star hotels including all taxes, fees and breakfast every morning (contact us about accommodation upgrades)
  - Tokyo: Western-style hotel such as Shinagawa Prince Hotel
  - Magome: Japanese-style ryokan such as Tajimaya
  - Tsumago: Japanese-style ryokan such as Hanaya
  - Matsumoto: Western-style hotel such as Hotel Kagetsu
  - Kamikochi: Japanese-style ryokan such as Hotel Shirakabaso
  - Takayama: Western-style hotel such as Takayama Ouan
  - Kanazawa: Western-style hotel such as Dormy Inn Kanazawa
  - Toyama: Western-style hotel such as Oarks Canal Park Hotel Toyama
  - Tateyama: Western-style hotel such as Hotel Tateyama
  - Nagano: Western-style hotel such as Chishun Grand Nagano
- Meeting Service at Tokyo's Narita Airport upon arrival
- Addresses, phone numbers and maps of all accommodations in both Japanese and English
- Train tickets for the following segments:
  - Shinagawa – Nagoya
  - Nagoya – Nakatsugawa
  - Nagiso – Matsumoto
  - Matsumoto – Hataka
  - Hataka – Matsumoto
  - Kanazawa – Toyama
  - Nagano – Tokyo
  - Tokyo – Narita
- Nohi Bus tickets for the following segments:
  - Takayama to Shirakawago
  - Shirakawago to Kanazawa
- JR Alpine Route Tickets
- SUCIA card pre-loaded with 2,500 Yen for the local trains and subways in Tokyo
- 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)
- 8 Hours with a licensed, English-speaking Japanese guide on the first full day in Japan (Day 2 of the Itinerary)
- Emergency contact number in Japan
- Airport transfers
- Detailed, easy-to-follow directions from city to city to take the worry out of travel in Japan
- Suggested train schedules
- 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 150 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.

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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