BEST OF KYOTO AND BEYOND

8 Days
7 Nights

Destinations
Kyoto, Fushimi, Arashiyama, Nara, Himeji
Tour Overview

Steeped in history and tradition, Kyoto has in many ways been the cradle of Japanese culture. A stroll through Kyoto today is a walk through 11 centuries of Japanese history.

Kyoto is endowed with an almost overwhelming legacy of ancient Buddhist temples, majestic palaces, and gardens of every size and description. 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 paving stones, geisha in a flourish of brightly colored silks, and a tea master deliberately warming water and making tea.

You will meet a “maiko” (geisha-in-training) face-to-face, climb to the top of a Samurai castle, participate in an authentic tea ceremony, copy a Buddhist Sutra in the middle of one of the most beautiful gardens in Japan, marvel at the world’s largest bronze Buddha statue built in the 8th century, and much, much more.

Combine this tour with the Best of Tokyo and Beyond tour for a more complete Japanese experience. Or, if you only want to spend a few days in Tokyo either before or after the tour, we can arrange this for you. Contact us for details.

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Tour Rating: ★★★★★

Tour Factors

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Tour Highlights

Kyoto
- Nijo Castle
- Kinkakuji (Golden Pavilion)
- Nishiki Koji
- Tea Ceremony
- Higashiyama District
- Yasaka Shrine
- Gion Geisha District Walking Tour
- Kenninji Temple
- Meet a Maiko Session

Fushimi
- Fushimi-inari Shrine

Arashiyama
- Arashiyama Bamboo Garden
- Tenryu-ji
- Shojin-ryori (Buddhist Vegetarian) Lunch
- Saiho-ji (Moss Temple) Garden

Nara
- Kasuga Shrine
- Nara Park
- Todai-ji (Great Buddha)

Himeji
- Himeji Castle
- Kokoen Garden
Tour Itinerary

**DAY 1  Arrive Osaka**

You lose a day flying to Japan due to crossing the International Dateline, but you will gain the day back when you fly home. After clearing customs and immigrations (which will normally take about one hour but can take up to a three due to increased tourism to Japan), proceed to the MK Shuttle kiosk to check in (kiosk maps in appendix). In a shared shuttle van, you will be taken to the hotel. Check-in to the hotel. No meals are included.

Travel: 1-1/2 Hours; Walking: Light

**DAY 2  Kyoto – Nijo Castle, Kinkakuji (Golden Pavilion), Nishiki Koji, Tea Ceremony**

After breakfast, we will start the day at the Nijo Castle. Built in 1603, it was the Kyoto home of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first Tokugawa Shogun. The ostentatious style of construction was intended as a demonstration of Ieyasu’s prestige, and to signal the demise of the emperor’s power. The finest artists of the day filled the castle with delicate transom woodcarvings and paintings by the Kano School on sliding doors. One of the castle’s most intriguing features is the so-called “nightingale” floors. To protect the Shogun from real or imagined enemies, these floorboards creak when stepped on. Next we will visit Kinkaku-ji. Kinkaku-ji, also known as the Golden Pavilion, is one of Kyoto’s, as well as Japan’s, most recognizable attractions. The gleaming building covered in gold leaf seems to float on the aptly named Mirror Pond, especially on a sunny day. After lunch you will have some free time at Nishiki Koji. Nishiki Koji is a narrow, five block long shopping street lined by more than one hundred shops and restaurants. Known as “Kyoto’s Kitchen”, this lively retail market specializes in all things food related, like fresh seafood, produce, knives and cookware, and is a great place to find seasonal foods and Kyoto specialties, such as Japanese sweets, pickles, dried seafood and sushi. Following this free time, we will participate in an authentic tea ceremony. The regimented discipline of the tea ceremony has been practiced for more than 400 years, and at one time was considered mandatory for Samurai as an aid to train the mind. After the tea ceremony, we will return to the ryokan. Breakfast at the ryokan and lunch at a local restaurant included.

Travel: 1 Hours; Walking: Heavy

**DAY 3  Fushimi – Fushimi Inari Shrine, Higashiyama District, Yasaka Shrine, Gion Geisha District, Kenninji Temple**

After breakfast, we are off by train to the nearby city of Fushimi, one of the largest sake producing regions of Japan. Here we will visit the Fushimi Inari shrine. This Shinto Shrine, established in the 8th century, is famous for the long tunnels of vermilion torii gates straddling a network of trails leading to the top of the heavily forested Mt. Inari. We will then travel to the Higashiyama District. This area of narrow, cobblestone alleys with its temples, shrines, numerous shops and restaurants is truly enjoyable and relaxing. We will stop for lunch in the Higashiyama District. We will then visit the Yasaka Shrine, also known as the Gion Shrine. This shrine, built over 1350 years ago, is one of the most famous shrines in Kyoto. The shrine’s main hall combines the honden (inner sanctuary) and haiden (offering hall) into a single building. Next, we will walk to the famous Gion Geisha District. Here, you will see where the Geiko (in Kyoto they call themselves Geiko, not Geisha) and Maiko live and work. You may even see one on their way to one of their
appointments. Finally, we will travel to the Kenninji Temple. Kenninji Temple is the oldest Zen Temple in Kyoto. The temple was founded in 1202 by the priest Yousai, who was ordained at just 14 years old. There are multiple gardens at this temple to enhance the Zen experience. We will return to the hotel from the Kenninji Temple. Breakfast at the ryokan and lunch at a local Japanese restaurant are included.

**Travel:** 1 Hours; **Walking:** Heavy

**DAY 4  Arashiyama – Arashiyama Bamboo Forest, Tenryu-ji, Saiho-ji (Moss Temple)**

We travel by train to the nearby town of Arashiyama. Once a favorite relaxation spot of the Emperors, Arashiyama is located on the hillsides bordering the banks of the Katsura River northwest of Kyoto. We will first visit the bamboo gardens which Arashiyama is famous for, located just outside the north gate of Tenryu-ji. This dense bamboo forest, with its rows upon rows of long, ringed, smooth stems, provide a feeling of composure and tranquility. The sound of the wind blowing through the bamboo, the stems knocking against each other and the rustling of the leaves is revered in Japan. Next, we visit Tenryuji Temple. Tenryu-ji is part of the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism, and was originally built in 1339 on the former site of Emperor Go-Daigo’s villa. A priest had dreamt of a dragon rising from the nearby river, hence the name which means “Heavenly Dragon”. The garden represents a transition between earlier pond gardens and the karesansui (dry landscape) gardens that later became popular in Zen temples. The focus of the garden is a pond that lies at the base of the hills rising to Mount Arashi, which is incorporated in to the design of the garden in the earliest known example of borrowed scenery (shakkei). At the far end of the pond are two rock groupings. These rock groupings are orientated on a vertical alignment, which was a departure from the horizontal alignments in earlier gardens. After finishing the tour of the temple and garden, we will enjoy a Shojin-ryori lunch (Buddhist vegetarian diet with no garlic or onions) at the temple. After lunch, we will visit Saihoji (commonly known as Kokedera, or “Moss Temple”). Saiho-ji is considered by many to be one of the best, if not the best garden in Japan. Created in 1339, the garden uses over 100 different types of moss creating waves of varying green colors. The moss is contrasted with trees, rocks and a small pond only. The garden is large (about 4 1/2 acres), and moss covers every ground surface and even some of the vegetation, creating a serene environment. The designer of the garden believed firmly in the value of gardens as a meditation aid, writing that the garden could be a means of reaching enlightenment. In addition to exploring the garden, the monks at the temple ask visitors to copy a sutra (a Buddhist scripture), giving you an opportunity to practice your calligraphy skills. Breakfast at the ryokan and Shojin-ryori lunch at Tenryuji is included.

**Travel:** 2 Hours; **Walking:** Heavy

**DAY 5  Himeji – Himeji Castle, Kokoen Garden**

We will take a Shinkansen (bullet train) to the nearby city of Himeji. Himeji Castle, also known as White Heron Castle due to its elegant, white appearance, is widely considered Japan’s most spectacular castle for its imposing size and beauty and its well preserved, complex castle grounds. The castle is both a national treasure and a world heritage site. Unlike many other Japanese castles, it was never destroyed by war, earthquake or fire and survives to this day as one of the country’s twelve original castles. The castle recently underwent extensive renovation over several years and was fully re-opened to the public in March 2015. Himeji Castle lies at a strategic point along the western approach to the former capital city of Kyoto. The first fortifications built on the site were completed in the 1400s, and were gradually enlarged over the centuries by the various clans who ruled over the region. The castle complex as it survives today is over 400 years old and was completed in 1609. It comprises over eighty buildings spread across multiple baileys, which are connected by a series of gates and winding paths. After touring the castle, we will visit the
nearby Kokoen Garden. Kokoen is a relatively recently constructed Japanese style garden, which was opened in 1992 on the former site of the feudal lord’s west residence (Nishi-Oyashiki). It consists of nine separate, walled gardens designed in various styles of the Edo Period. Among the gardens are the garden of the lord’s residence which features a pond with a waterfall, a tea garden where visitors can enjoy green tea in a tea ceremony house, a pine tree garden, a bamboo garden and a flower garden. Late in the afternoon we will return to Kyoto by Shinkansen (bullet train). Breakfast at the ryokan and lunch at a local restaurant is included.

Travel: 2 Hours; Walking: Medium

**DAY 6  Nara – Kasuga Shrine, Nara Deer Park, Todai-ji (Great Buddha), Meet a Maiko Session**

We take a train to the original capital of Japan, Nara. Nara was the capital of Japan in the 8th century before it was moved to Kyoto. We will first visit Kasuga Shrine. This shrine was first established in the 8th century, and was completely rebuilt every 20 years according to Shinto tradition until the 19th century. There are thousands of stone lanterns lining the entrance to the shrine. We then walk through Nara Park on our way to Todai-ji. Along the way, you will run into the famous Nara deer. These deer have been here since the 7th century, and roam at their free will protected by Buddhist traditions. Todai-ji is the largest wooden building in the world, and houses the world’s largest bronze statue of Buddha. In the late afternoon, we will travel back to Kyoto to the Gion Geisha district. Here, in a teahouse, we will attend a Meet a Maiko session. (A Maiko is a Geisha in training.) She will perform a short dance, answer any of your questions and pose for pictures with you. After this we will have a walking tour of the Gion Geisha district. Here you will see where the Geisha and Maiko live and work. We may even see one on their way to their appointments. After this we will enjoy our Sayonara Dinner. Breakfast at the ryokan and lunch and dinner at a local Japanese restaurant included.

Travel: 2 Hours; Walking: Medium

**DAY 7  Kyoto – Free Day**

Today is a free day. Breakfast at the ryokan is included.

Travel: TBD; Walking: TBD

**DAY 8  Home**

It’s time to say “sayonara” (goodbye). You will be escorted to the Kyoto train station, and then take the Express train on your own to the Kansai International Airport, just outside Osaka. Breakfast at the ryokan is included.

Travel: 1-1/2 Hours; Walking: Light
Inclusions

- Local, licensed, English-speaking, Japanese guides
- Travel Guard Gold Policy from Travel Guard, one of the world’s largest travel insurance providers, will be provided to everyone from the United States. All others will receive a $100 per person credit and will be responsible for obtaining their own travel insurance in their own home country. (The insurance provided by Samurai Tours will cover the land portion only. Insurance to cover airfare and other additional expenses is the tour member’s responsibility.) Click Here for more Coverage Information
  - The provided insurance coverage includes:
    - Trip Cancellation (up to trip cost)
    - Trip Interruption (up to 150% of trip cost)
    - Trip Delay (up to $750)
    - Missed Connection (up to $250)
    - Baggage and Personal Effects Loss (up to $1,000)
    - Baggage Delay (up to $300)
    - Medical Expense (up to $25,000)
    - Medical Evacuation and Repatriation of Remains (up to $500,000)
    - Accidental Death or Dismemberment (up to $10,000)
    - Coverage for financial default of tour operator
    - Cancel for Work Reasons
    - A waiver of any pre-existing medical conditions that could eventually cause you to interrupt your trip (entire trip, including airfare must be insured for pre-existing waiver to be valid. Contact travel guard for for information)

  - Travel Insurance Surcharge: Depending on your age at the time the travel insurance is purchased, you may be subject to the following surcharge for your travel insurance. Travel insurance surcharges will be due at the same time as your tour deposits. (the surcharge itself is not insured)
    - Up to 69 – $0
    - 70-74 – $57
    - 75-79 – $109
    - 80-84 – $218
    - 85+ – $349

  - Travel Insurance Opt-Out: If you would prefer to opt out of the travel insurance, please note this at the time of registration. You will receive a $100 credit per person, which will be reflected on your invoice. In the event that you would need to cancel your tour, cancellation penalties may apply. See the Terms and Conditions page for the Cancellation Fees Schedule.

- Transfers to and from Osaka’s Kansai Airport or Osaka’s Itami Airport by shared shuttle van.
- Optional meeting service at Tokyo’s Narita will be an extra $100 fee per group. If you are arriving or departing at Tokyo’s Narita or Haneda Airports, there will be an extra $150 fee per person for the train tickets to/from Kyoto for either of these airports (the meeting service is required if you want us to purchase the train tickets to Kyoto for arrival).
- Lodging for seven nights in Japanese-style ryokans
- **Meals**
  - Japanese-style or Western-style breakfast every morning. *(Please Note: Some ryokans offer Japanese breakfasts only.)*
  - Five Japanese-style lunches
  - One Japanese-style dinner

- All transportation costs when traveling with the group. *(Transportation costs during scheduled free times are the tour member’s responsibility.)*

- Admission fees to the destinations and activities listed in the Tour Highlights column on the right. *(Itinerary specifics subject to change.)*

- Sayonara dinner at the end of the tour

Each tour member receives a tour handbook. This handbook is full of tips and suggestions taken from our Japan travel experiences that allow you to better plan and prepare for your trip, and therefore enjoy your trip even more. The tips and suggestions included cover everything from how to save while exchanging money, what to pack, some basic Japanese-language tips, general etiquette do’s-and-don’ts, ryokan customs, etc.

**Exclusions**

*Airfare is NOT included*
Alcoholic beverages, soft drinks and desserts are NOT included

### 2017 Dates & Prices

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### 2018 Dates & Prices

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Tour Map

[Image of a map showing locations such as HIMEJI, KYOTO, and NARA]
Thank you for downloading this PDF version of our tour. Please visit our website at www.samuraitours.com/tours for the most current dates, prices and information.

Contact Samurai Tours

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MEMBERSHIPS/ASSOCIATIONS
Better Business Bureau
American Society of Travel Agents
National Tour Association
Japan National Tourist Organization
JNTO-approved Japan Travel Specialist

Best of Kyoto and Beyond