

JAPAN – KYOTO, TOKYO, NARA & THE NAKASENDO PATH

8-days / 7-nights inn-to-inn GUIDED walk from Kyoto to Tokyo - ancient trails, onsen & traditional inns



Japan is a land of contrasts, where an appreciation for the modern combines with a reverence for tradition, where skyscrapers sit side-by-side with peaceful ancient shrines. This walking holiday combines the ancient with the modern Japan to offer a truly unique insight into the Land of the Rising Sun. From Kyoto to Tokyo, travel back to the time of Shoguns and Samurai, when merchants and feudal lords travelled by foot or horseback through the mountains, a time when pilgrims walked from temple to temple seeking enlightenment. Get off the beaten track to less-touristed parts of Japan and experience the warm hospitality of the Japanese people staying in traditional travellers' inns and guesthouses.

The Nakasendo Trail linked Kyoto to Tokyo during Japan's feudal period. It was the '*road through the mountains*' travelled by feudal lords and their retinues, Samurai, merchants and travellers. Along the route were 69 'post towns', where weary travellers rested before continuing on the next leg. The journey starts in Kyoto, home to atmospheric gardens, temples, teahouses and Geisha district, with time to explore this iconic destination. Visit the shrines and temples of Nara, home to eight UNESCO World Heritage sites, then leave the modern world behind and walk the best-preserved and most interesting parts of the Nakasendo Trail.

By day, walk along the ancient route as it passes through well-preserved Edo period villages, and by evening stay in traditional country inns and dine on exquisite regional cuisine prepared from the freshest ingredients. There is the chance to rejuvenate with a relaxing soak in a natural hot spring at an Onsen Ryokan. End in the ultramodern, bustling streets of Tokyo, known as Edo during Japan's period of rule by the Shoguns.

Departures: 22 March, 4, 19 April, 7, 21 May, 5 June, 6, 20 September, 1, 15, 25 October, 1, 11 November, 2026

Cost from: \$5180 per person twin share. Single supplement* from \$930 on request.

Includes: 4 nights in 3 or 4-star hotel accommodation in ensuite rooms; 3 nights in traditional Ryokan or Minshuku, which usually have shared facilities; 7 breakfasts, 5 dinners; full program of guided walks led by an experienced English-speaking local guide; sightseeing and entrance fees mentioned in itinerary; travel between locations; luggage transfer (1 piece per person) on 2 occasions.

Not Included: Flights or airport transfers, any meals not mentioned in the itinerary, drinks, entrance fees not mentioned, luggage transfers not mentioned, travel insurance, personal expenses.

***Single Supplement:** Solo travellers pay a single supplement, which guarantees you a room to yourself on the 4 nights at the western-style hotels on the tour. For the 3 nights at the traditional Japanese inns, tatami-mat rooms are shared with another group member of the same gender.

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Grading: Easy to moderate, a combination of short walks of up to 5 hours on the Nakasendo Trail and city sightseeing walks. Walking on the Nakasendo Trail is unhurried, with plenty of time to enjoy the scenery; terrain is easy to moderate with daily walks of 4km up to 18km, with up to 725m of ascent and 644m descent. On the trail you carry a small to medium backpack with your essentials for the day.

Suggested itinerary:

Day 1: Arrive in Kyoto

Make your way to the city of Kyoto, Japan's historical capital that is still regarded as the country's cultural heart. Aim to arrive in the afternoon at the Western-style hotel where we stay for three nights. There is free time to explore before a welcome dinner.

Day 2: Guided sightseeing in Kyoto

Walking distance @ 6.5km (2-3 hours)

There is a guided half-day walking tour this morning. We first visit the Sanjo-ohashi Bridge, the western end of the Nakasendo Trail. We continue to Nanzenji, a tranquil Zen Buddhist temple with history dating back to the mid-13th century, and stroll along the Philosopher's Path, with craft shops, cafes, shrines and temples beside the clear waters of a small canal. The path ends near Ginkakuji, the Silver Pavilion.

This afternoon, we travel north to Kurama and enjoy a gentle walk through the Kitayama Mountains from Kurama to Kibune. Dinner is not included tonight, so you are free to choose from Kyoto's many restaurants. Perhaps take a walk in Gion, Kyoto's geisha district, in the hope of seeing *geiko* (fully-fledged geisha) or *maiko* (apprentice geisha) making their way through the narrow streets.

Day 3: Nara and Yamanobe no Michi Trail

Walking distance @ 14km (5 hours)

Travel by train to Nara, Japan's first permanent capital. Established in 710 and then known as Heijo, Nara abounds in cultural heritage, with many historic treasures and easy access to nature. Many of Japan's greatest cultural treasures are concentrated in and around the city, with eight UNESCO World Heritage sites – Todai-ji Temple, Kofuku-ji Temple, Kasuga Taisha Shrine, Kasugayama Primeval Forest, Nara Palace Site, Ganko-ji Temple, Yakushi-ji Temple and Toshoda-ji Temple. Many of these are in or near Nara Park, home to a thousand or more free-roaming deer. We walk the historic Yamanobe no Michi trail, part of Japan's oldest road, full of shrines, temples, torii gates, ancient sites and pretty villages, before returning to Kyoto for one final evening. No dinner is included tonight, and your guide will be happy to offer restaurant recommendations.

Day 4: Magome to O-Tsumago

Walking distance @ 7km (2.5 hours)

This morning travel from Kyoto to Nagoya on the world-famous *shinkansen* (bullet train), then another train to Nakatsugawa from where you board a local bus for the short journey to Magome (cost not included – paid locally). Magome's main street is a broad stone walkway lined with timber buildings and carefully tended greenery. While in Magome perhaps try *gohei-mochi*, skewered sticky rice covered in a sweet paste of miso, sesame and walnuts. Walk over Magome Pass to the charming hamlet of O-Tsumago. We spend the night at a Minshuku (family-run guesthouse) with a delicious home-cooked Japanese dinner included.

Day 5: O-Tsumago to Nojiri

Walking distance @ 18km (6-7 hours)

A longer day on the trail from O-Tsumago to Nenoue-toge Pass. Along the way, we pass through Tsumago, one of the best-preserved and most evocative of the Nakasendo post towns. From here, the trail heads through small valleys passing forests of bamboo and Japanese cedar, through some of the most untouched scenery on the tour. Option to shorten your walk to 4km (1 hour) should you want an easier day. Stay at either a lovely Onsen Ryokan or Onsen Hotel this evening, with hot-spring baths, perfect for a soak to rest your weary legs. Enjoy *kaiseki*-style cuisine for dinner.

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Day 6: Yabuhara to Narai**Walking distance @ 9km (4 hours)**

We begin the day with a short train journey to Yabuhara, the starting point for the hike over the Torii-toge pass, the highest point on the Nakasendo trail, to Narai. Narai is a well-preserved post-town, so explore this atmospheric village before travelling on by train to the castle town of Matsumoto and to your Onsen Ryokan or family-run Minshuku for the evening.

Day 7: Matsumoto, onward travel to Tokyo**Sightseeing day**

Spend the morning exploring the fascinating castle town of Matsumoto and visiting one of Japan's most intact and beautiful historic castles. Matsumoto Castle was built from 1592 to 1614 and is one of the best preserved 'Hirajiro' (castles built on the plains rather than atop a hill or mountain). It also has a moat, extensive grounds and scenic park, especially spectacular in cherry blossom season. After lunch, head onwards by train to Tokyo, where you stay in a Japanese-style hotel for your last night of the tour and enjoy a final farewell dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 8: Tour ends in Tokyo.

Tour ends after breakfast.



For those clients seeking a longer, in-depth look at Japan's Imperial past, and more of the Nakasendo Trail, we also offer this as a longer tour. Please ask for availability and a detailed day-by-day itinerary.

TOKYO, KYOTO, IMPERIAL NARA & THE NAKASENDO PATH

12-days / 11-nights inn-to-inn GUIDED walking and sightseeing from Tokyo to Kyoto.

Departs: 24 March, 2, 16 April, 9, 21 May, 1 June, 28 September, 6, 16, 19, 27 October, 13, 17 November, 2026

Cost from: **\$7375** per person twin share. Single supplement from \$1730 on request.

6 nights in Western-style hotels, 2 nights in Minshuku (family-run guesthouses), 2 nights in Ryokan (traditional Japanese inn) or Japanese-style hotels, 1 night in Shukubo (pilgrims' lodging in Buddhist monastery/temple)

Suggested itinerary:

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| Day 1: | Arrive in Tokyo. | |
| Day 2: | Sightseeing in Tokyo | |
| Day 3: | Nakasendo Trail from Kiso-Hirasawa to Narai | Walking distance @ 3km (1 hour) |
| Day 4: | Nakasendo Trail from Narai to Yabuhara | Walking distance @ 7km (3 hours) |
| Day 5: | Nakasendo Trail from Nojiri to Tsumago | Walking distance @ 14km (5 hours) |
| Day 6: | Nakasendo Trail from Tsumago to Magome | Walking distance @ 9km (3 hours) |
| Day 7: | Nara, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, Deer Park, Kasugayama Forest, Shrines and Temples | |
| Day 8: | Yoshino, UNESCO World Heritage Site, Yoshimizu Shrine, Cherry Blossoms in Spring | |
| Day 9: | Mount Koya, Buddhist Temple & Shukubo Temple Lodging | |
| Day 10: | Transfer to Kyoto, Evening walk in Gion | |
| Day 11: | Sightseeing in Kyoto, Sanjo-ohashi Bridge, Temples, Silver Pavilion & Philosophers Path | |
| Day 12: | Departure from Kyoto | |

The **Nakasendo Path** is also available as a 3, 4 or 5-day **inn-to-inn SELF GUIDED walk** starting/ending in Kyoto or Tokyo, with daily departures on request from April to November. Ask for more details.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR JAPAN

Accommodation: Tours stay in 3- or 4-star hotels or in traditional Japanese Ryokan and Minshuku.

Hotels are typically Western style with raised beds (rather than futons) and ensuite bathrooms, but rooms tend to be smaller than in many other countries.

Ryokan and Minshuku are traditional Japanese-style inns. They may be in modern concrete or older wooden buildings, but the rooms are always in the Japanese style with tatami (straw) matting and futons laid out in the evening. Dinners are served together, usually in the dining room, and are exquisitely prepared multi-course meals. Some Ryokan have ensuite bathrooms though older buildings generally offer shared facilities.

Minshuku are usually family-run. They have tatami-mat rooms, with futons laid out in the evening for sleeping. Most Minshuku do not have ensuite bathrooms as they are in older traditional wooden buildings. Compared with a Ryokan, they are usually (but not always) slightly less formal, but the service and food are just as good. Smaller inns offer domestic scale bathing tubs used privately in turn by guests; larger inns offer communal spa-style baths, segregated by gender. They are the classic Japanese experience.

Meals: Most meals will be Japanese cuisine. Vegetarian options are available but limited. Strict vegetarian diets, vegan diets, or gluten free diets will be difficult to accommodate due to the pervasiveness of the fish-based stock dashi and the use of soy sauce and miso in Japanese cuisine. Tips are not required in Japan.

*** A note about luggage transfers:** On some nights, while you are on the Nakasendo Trail, luggage transfers are not included. Larger items of luggage do not re-join you on the same day, and you will not have access to them on certain nights. So, you leave your main luggage when you depart Kyoto, then about halfway through the tour you will be re-united with it on one night and can change over gear then. Your luggage will then go on to await you at the hotel in Tokyo. In the interim, you adopt the Japanese way of travelling with just a daypack to carry your overnight items. This means you don't carry too much, and it makes the long-distance transfers by bus and train more relaxed (avoiding handling larger items of luggage through stations and on trains).

The inns used provide soap, shampoo, towels, slippers and Yukata robes, which are worn inside after check-in. Wear your Yukata for dinner, in your room and when walking about, even outdoors. You do not need extra evening clothes and can travel light. Luggage lockers are often available while walking or sightseeing.



Outdoor Travel offers guided or self-guided walking holidays in other iconic destinations in Japan, including the **Shikoku 88 Pilgrimage trail** and the **Kumano Kodo**.

Our other walking holidays cover many parts of the world including New Zealand, Australia, USA, UK, Ireland and in Europe. Please check out our website or call us for more details.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations:

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