

## **JAPAN – TOKYO, KYOTO, NARA & THE NAKASENDO PATH**

14-days / 13-nights guided sightseeing & walking tour



This magical journey through Japan takes us from the bustling streets of Tokyo through rural Japan and along the Nakasendo Path to the historic capital of Kyoto, with a stay in Nara. Experience the ultramodern Japan of today, combined with ancient Japanese traditions in this fascinating country.

As well as many of the 'must-see' highlights, we explore parts of Japan seldom visited by tourists – the hot springs and onsens of Nagano and the small post-towns and villages on the 'road through the middle mountains'. Our multi-day walk on part of the Nakasendo Path offers lovely mountain scenery in the Japanese Alps, and we stay in traditional inns (ryokan) and guesthouses (minshuku) for a taste of traditional Japan.

### **Highlights:**

- Walk on the historic Nakasendo Path through the Japan Alps
- Explore the gardens and shrines of ancient Kyoto
- UNESCO World Heritage temples and shrines of historic Nara
- See the modern side of Japan in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka
- Stay in ryokan, traditional Japanese inns, for an authentic experience
- Try delicious and interesting Japanese food

**Cost from:** **\$14,050** per person twin share.  
Single room supplement on request, only available in city hotels

**Departures:** 7 April, 15 May, 9 October 2024

**Includes:** 13 nights of comfortable 3 or 4-star accommodation in en-suite rooms (except in ryokan, which often have shared facilities), mostly half board from dinner on arrival to breakfast on departure (except 1 dinner in Kyoto), full program of guided walks led by an experienced local leader, sightseeing and entrance fees, travel by coach/minivan, train and public transport, tips/gratuities

**Not included:** International flights, other meals, drinks, visa or passport charges, personal expenses.

**Grading:** Easy to Moderate, a mixture of part-day walks, moderate trails, and city sightseeing. Walking ranging from level countryside paths to trails of up to 8km with 510m of ascent. Days on the Nakasendo Path are unhurried with plenty of time to enjoy the scenery.

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## Suggested itinerary:

**Day 1: Arrive in Tokyo.** Afternoon arrival and transfer to our accommodation in central Tokyo (2 nights). There will be some free time to explore before a welcome dinner.

### Day 2: Tokyo

**sightseeing & walking**

We have a full-day guided walking tour of Tokyo, which is a huge metropolis with many different districts, each with their own individual character. From the ultra-modern neon lights and skyscrapers and to historic temples, gardens and shrines, our guided walk gives us an insight into Japanese life.

### Day 3: Yudanaka Onsen and the 'snow monkeys'

**walking @ 6km**

Journey from Tokyo into rural Japan to the traditional hot spring village nestled in the mountains of Nagano. A short walk takes us to visit the 'snow monkeys', bathing in the hot springs. The monkeys started coming to warm themselves in the outdoor springs here around fifty years ago, and a local lodge owner built them their own bath after feeling sorry for them during the cold winters. Our accommodation in nearby Yudanaka, in a long-established ryokan, has its own natural hot springs (humans only!), where you can relax this evening.

### Day 4: The Nakasendo Path

**walking @ 7km**

Over the next two days we walk in the remote Kiso valley, exploring rural Japan, an area of the country that few overseas visitors reach. We walk from village to village and stay by night in a small, family-run country guesthouse (minshuku). We carry our overnight items in a small daypack, while our luggage is taken ahead to Kyoto. We start near Nagiso, one of the 11 'post-towns' along the Kiso valley section of the Nakasendo, at Nagiso. Post-towns were resting places, where travellers could find accommodation as they walked between Kyoto and Edo (now Tokyo). In days past this route was used by traders, feudal lords, and samurai as they made their way to and from the imperial capital. We walk to Tsumago, a charming post-town which has been restored over the last forty years by its residents. We stay in an authentic minshuku, a family-run guesthouse, in Tsumago or the nearby village O-Tsumago.

### Day 5: Nakasendo Path

**walking @ 8km**

A lovely walk today from Tsumago, past fields and houses, through forest and over the Magome Pass, to the sleepy village of Magome. We then continue on by coach and train to Kyoto, where we are reunited with our luggage. We stay four nights in Kyoto.

### Day 6: Kyoto

**sightseeing & walking**

Kyoto, the western end of the Nakasendo Way, was the capital of Japan from the 8<sup>th</sup> Century until 1868 when the capital was moved to Edo (now Tokyo). It was not bombed as heavily during WWII as other parts of Japan so it has retained more of its historic buildings and gardens. In the morning, stroll the 'Philosopher's Path', a delightful walk beside a canal lined with cherry trees, and in the afternoon walk through the narrow streets of Gion, Kyoto's geisha district, where there is the possibility of seeing a geisha or maiko (apprentice geisha).

### Day 7: Arashiyama

**sightseeing & walking**

We travel by coach to Arashiyama on the western edge of Kyoto. It is renowned for its scenic temples and for its soaring, majestic bamboo grove. We walk from the Adashino Nenbutsu-ji Temple at the top of the district, along the main road with its local craft shops, and through the famous bamboo grove. Our walk ends at the area's most significant temple, Tenryu-ji, with its fine gardens and views of the nearby mountains.

### Day 8: Kyoto

**free day**

Free day to explore Kyoto. Your guide can suggest places to visit, such as Nijo Castle, the former residence of the Shogun, or Kiyomizu Temple with its wonderful view of Kyoto.

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### Day 9: Nara

**sightseeing & walking**

We send our luggage ahead and travel by train to Nara, Japan's first permanent capital. Established in 710 as Heijō, Nara abounds in cultural heritage – it is home to a number of stunning UNESCO World Heritage temples and shrines – and easy access to wonderful nature. We explore the town and visit the UNESCO-listed Todai-ji Temple, with its enormous bronze Buddha and wooden temple building, the largest of its kind – even though its current structure is only a fraction of its original size. We also spend some time in Nara Park, where tame deer, regarded as messengers from the gods, wander freely. If time permits, we walk the approach to the ancient Shinto shrine Kasuga Taisha or we may visit the Naramachi district, Nara's old town, its narrow winding streets lined with traditional timber merchants' houses, where we can see craftspeople producing traditional items.

### Day 10: Nara

**walking @ 10km**

We explore the area around Nara with a walk along a section of one of Japan's oldest roads. Celebrated in the Nihon-shoki – the ancient histories of Japan, similar to the Domesday Book – the Yamanobe no-Michi Trail skirts the mountains and meanders through villages and past ancient temples and shrines. Walking on a mixture of paved and dirt trails and village roads, we take a step back into another element of Japan's fascinating heritage.

### Day 11: Asuka Ancient Monuments Trail

**walking @ 9km**

We travel by train to Asuka, known as the spiritual home of the Japanese people. Asuka, today a small agricultural village surrounded by rice fields, was an early capital of the Japanese empire, during a time of significant transformation of Japanese society. Buddhism was introduced and there were many changes to Japan's social structures, political and governmental systems, art and architecture, influenced greatly by Chinese and Korean culture. Our walk explores the village and surroundings, introducing us to its important landmarks, including ancient burial mounds and tombs. We then continue by train to our hotel in Osaka.

### Day 12: Osaka

**sightseeing & walking**

See all the sights in Osaka, known as the working heart of Japan. Visit the Shitenno-jo Temple, one of the oldest in Japan, followed by Osaka Castle. The original castle was destroyed in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century; the current castle is a 1930s-era reconstruction which withstood air raids during WWII. Nishinomaru Garden on the castle grounds is one of the most popular areas in Osaka for *hanami*, flower-watching, particularly during cherry-blossom season, when the gardens will be full of picnickers enjoying the beauty of the surrounding blooms. Once we've built up an appetite, it's time to head out on a street food tour around the famous Dotonbori area, known for its neon lights and vibrant nightlife – as well as tasty treats like Takoyaki, battered and lightly fried pieces of octopus.

### Day 13: Tokyo

We return to Tokyo, travelling on the famous Shinkansen (bullet train). The afternoon is yours at leisure – one more chance to explore this unique and fascinating city. We meet up in the evening for our farewell dinner.

### Day 14: Departure day

After breakfast, transfer by coach to Tokyo's Haneda Airport where the tour ends.



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