



Late Cherry Blossom Tour – 16th April to 29th April 2017

1. Introduction:

Welcome to our Late Cherry Blossom Tour 2017!

This year we have a schedule that includes some additional days in Tokyo that allows for side trips to Sendai (for Matsushima and Odawara) and also to Nikko (for its famous temples and shrines). Leaving Tokyo for the mountains we stay near Nagano for onsen and a visit to the snow monkeys before two days in the western city of Kanazawa. We then we head east back into the mountains to the township of Takayama to before taking the scenic train route to Kyoto for three nights, to take in the unique sights that this city has to offer. From Kyoto, we return to Tokyo.

The following schedule sets out the default activities planned for each day. However, there are additional sightseeing options depending on personal interests and preferences, so we have included some options you might like to consider. Please note that some activities require us to pre-book them or to have a minimum number of participants.

This tour will be hosted by Patrick Harnett.

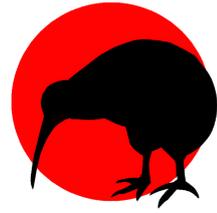
2. Airport arrivals:

We have guests arriving prior to the formal commencement of the tour. In all cases we are making arrangements to meet everyone at the airport (either Haneda or Narita) and transfer you to your hotel in central Tokyo.

Upon arrival, after clearing Immigration, luggage collection and Customs, we will meet you at the exit of the Arrivals Hall. You will recognise us as we will have a welcome sign displaying your name and our company logo. For Narita arrivals we then take the Narita Express (N'Ex) train into the city. For Haneda arrivals we take local trains (which require a single station transfer).

3. Tour itinerary:

Sunday 16th April Tokyo: Start the day with a visit to the Meiji Shrine. As the shrine is adjacent to Harajuku, we then head to Takeshita Street which is a trend-setting shopping area for Tokyo youth. Leaving Harajuku, we visit the nearby upmarket shopping district of Omotesando.



After lunch we will take you to Uneo Park: a famous Tokyo cherry blossom viewing spot and while the main season will be finished, Uneo Park boasts a large variety of trees including late blooming varieties.. The park also contains several museums (including Tokyo National Museum) and Tokyo Zoo.

Monday 17th April Tokyo: Visit Asukusa Kaminarimon (“Thunder gate”), Hozomon and pagoda. An array of stalls lines Nakamise Street (the entrance to this shrine) providing a wide range of souvenirs and snacks on the approach to Sensoji Temple.

In the afternoon, visit Shinjuku and enjoy the view from the Tokyo Metropolitan Building (200 metres above ground level). There is also time to see the expansive Shinjuku National Gardens with its large number of cherry trees, also with a range of late blooming varieties.

Tokyo options (certainly not an exhaustive list):

- *Visit the Robot Restaurant in Shinjuku (it is best described as a cabaret show and costs approx. Y7, 000)*
- *In Asakusa we can arrange a kimono photo shoot or an introductory samurai lesson for the adventurous (approx. Y7, 000 for the samurai training)*
- *In Akasaka a ninja-themed restaurant offers a unique dining option*
- *Tokyo also has a great array of art museums and the city often hosts exhibitions from around the world*



Torii gate at Miyajima (left); Kasuga Shrine, Nara (right)

Tuesday 18th April Tokyo: Day trip to Sendai: Head north by Shinkansen to Sendai. Then take the local train to visit Matsushima Bay, one of the three “views of Japan” and the cruise around the bay with its many beautiful pine-tree covered islands. After viewing the pine covered islands, walk

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to Zuigan-ji past the caves carved into the approach to the temple. *The caves were used for memorial services and as a cinerarium to house the ashes of the deceased.* The caves were constructed some 700 years ago and remained in use until a few hundred years ago.

After lunch we can visit Ogawara with 1,000 cherry trees along the banks of the Shiroishi River (*approximately 40 minutes (25km) by train from downtown Sendai.*)



Ogawara, Sendai (left); Matsushima Bay, Sendai (right)

Wednesday 19th April Tokyo: Day trip to either Nikko or to Hakone/Fuji

- **Nikko:** Taking the bullet train north and then the local train to visit the famous shrines at Nikko including the lavishly decorated Toshugu shrine and Iemitsu mausoleum.
- **Hakone day trip:** Romance Car train from Tokyo to Hakone-Yumoto, bus to Lake Ashi (walk along the cedar avenue to the Hakone checkpoint), boat cruise across the lake to Togendai, ropeway and the Tozan cable car, Tozan train back to Hakone-Yumoto for the return trip to Tokyo. Hakone provides many places to view Mt Fuji (on a clear day) including from the lake and the ropeway.

(The destination will be determined by group consensus/interest.)

Thursday 20th April Togura/Nagano: Tokyo to Togura/Nagano: Departing Tokyo we travel into the Japanese Alps to Nagano, transfer to a local train bound for Togura (30 minutes) and then check in at Ryokan Kamesei. Have a private soak in the ryokan's onsen (hot spring baths) or explore the neighbourhood before enjoying an especially prepared traditional ryokan dinner. Accommodation here includes breakfast and dinner. We usually arrange for Geisha entertainment during the evening meal (music and dancing performance).

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Friday 21st April Togura/Nagano: After breakfast, we head to Nagano station and take a bus to Jigokudani Monkey Park. Depending on the weather it could be cool. There is an approximately 2km walk to visit these famous “snow monkeys”. After a day of activity, a soak in the onsen is a relaxing option.

Togura options:

- *Visit the Togakushi Shrine in the forest to the north-west of Nagano, with its impressive tree-lined approach and Ninja Museum. We can arrange for some “ninja training” if desired.*
- *Visit Zenko-ji temple in Nagano, founded in the 7th century.*
- *There is a local cycling tour around Togura available for those that want to stay close to the ryokan.*

Saturday 22nd April Togura to Kanazawa: After a leisurely breakfast (or local cycling tour) travel via local train and then shinkansen to Kanazawa ("Little Kyoto").

Sunday 23rd April Kanazawa: Across the street from our chosen hotel is the Omi-cho market, a smaller, friendlier version of the Tokyo Tsujiki fish market (which was due to move in 2016) and a great location for a fresh sashimi breakfast. The day is set aside to visit the famous Kenrokuen Garden and Kanazawa castle. Additional options include the 21st Museum of Contemporary art or some of the local temples.

Monday 24th April Kanazawa to Takayama: Travel by Shinkansen and then local train to the onsen (hot spring) mountain town of Takayama. Explore the town's historic buildings and shops on foot. The local specialty is Hida beef, very good quality – we recommend enjoying it at one of the local bbq restaurants. Accommodation at a Japanese ryokan (inn), complete with onsen (hot springs bath).

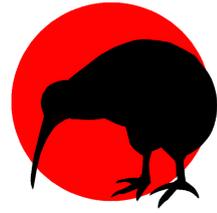
Tuesday 25th April Takayama: During the morning explore the town's historic buildings, morning market and shops on foot and/or visit the festival floats exhibition hall. The afternoon is reserved for a ½ day bus tour that visits the World Heritage Site of Shirakawa-go with its old traditional “A frame” farmhouses.

Wednesday 26th April Takayama to Kyoto: Leaving the mountains, complete the journey across the main island of Honshu to Nagoya and then catch the shinkansen train to Kyoto, arriving at the historic old capital of Japan around midday. During the afternoon we usually visit the very accessible Fushimi Inari Shinto shrine with its famous 10,000 torii gates. The walk to the top of Inari Yama (to see all 10,000!) takes a couple of hours and is definitely optional...

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Fushimi Inari Shrine (left), Kodaiji Temple Gardens (right)

Thursday 27th April Kyoto: Visit the "Golden Pavilion" Kinkaku-ji in the north-west of the city and then Nijo Castle (*the palace buildings are one the best surviving examples of castle palace architecture of Japan's feudal era*), before heading to Heian Shrine and gardens.

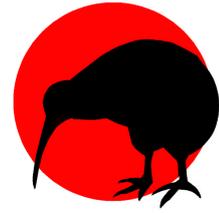
Shopping at the covered Nishiki Market, which includes a selection of local food stalls. The Isetan and Takashimaya department stores are also excellent for shopping and both have vast food halls.

Friday 28th April Kyoto: Day trip to the world heritage site at Nara. At Nara there is both Todai-ji temple (with the world's largest bronze Buddha), and Kagusa Shinto shrine. *There are sacred deer roaming the park and some excellent souvenir shopping options.*

Kyoto options:

- *Yamazakai Distillery Tour (advance reservations are required.)*
- *Exploring the 400 year old covered Nishiki food Market and adjacent Teramachi covered shopping street*
- *Ginkaku-ji (the "Silver Pavilion") followed by a walk along the cherry tree-lined Philosopher's' Path*
- *Visit the beautiful Arashiyama district for the view across the Oi River and the nearby Sagano bamboo grove or to visit some of the temples and gardens. The nearby Ryoanji Temple is the site of Japan's most famous rock garden.*

Saturday 29th April Kyoto to Tokyo: Transfer back to Tokyo by Shinkansen.



4. Transport arrangements:

For travel around Tokyo we use a combination of local trains and the subway. For trains and subways in Tokyo and Kyoto we use pre-paid electronic passes. In some places we use taxis to provide cost-effective point-to-point transportation.

The tourist Japan Rail Pass (JRP) covers the extensive Japan Rail network and is the most efficient and cost-effective method to transfer between the different places we are visiting. The pass covers either 7, 14 or 21 days. We will exchange JRP vouchers (previously obtained by us on your behalf) for the actual rail passes before we leave Tokyo to travel to Nagano. This exchange process (which we also do on your behalf) requires us to show your passports to prove eligibility (i.e. the temporary visitor visa stamp you receive on entering Japan) for the passes.

5. Hotels:

Tokyo: Cerulean Tower Tokyu: This large, modern hotel in Shibuya is very comfortable with a touch of luxury. Previous guests have enjoyed their stays here and the views across the city. The location has good access to the subway, local train lines and the airport. As it is in Shibuya, a busy Tokyo neighbourhood, there are many nearby dining options.

Togura: Kamesei Ryokan. The Kamesei is an old (100 years) traditional inn with onsen. Staying here is often a highlight of our guests' holiday. The inn is run by an ex-American husband and his Japanese wife. Included meals are a Japanese 'kaiseki' (course meal) dinner and an option for a shabu-shabu (hotpot/stew) meal on the second night. Breakfast is traditional Japanese-style for the first morning and we can arrange a "continental" breakfast for the second morning. For those requiring a "western" bed we will also be booking rooms at a nearby hotel.

Kanazawa: Holiday Inn Kanazawa Sky. A short taxi ride from the train station, this comfortable hotel is close to Kanazawa's main attractions. We have booked a mix of rooms breakfast included. For the adventurous, the Omi-cho market across the street provides fresh sushi as a breakfast option.

Takayama: Honjin Hiranoya Bekkin Annex: With views of the river and included meals the Honjin is a relaxing retreat in traditional ryokan style with excellent service. Rooms include private showers and there is an onsen on-site.

Kyoto: Kyoto Century Hotel: Twin rooms with breakfast included, located next to Kyoto Railway Station, and a good base while staying in Kyoto. The breakfast buffet is excellent and there is an optional Japanese restaurant for a traditional breakfast.

Lastly, we look forward to meeting you and providing you with a wonderful experience exploring Japan! If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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