



April 2018 Japan Tour – Tuesday 5th April to Saturday 19th April 2018

Our comments in italics.

1. Introduction:

Welcome to our Heritage Cherry Tour 2018! With a slightly different focus to the “Classic” blossom tour, this tour has a schedule that takes in some of the famous and iconic attractions of Japan. This tour will be led by Wendy and Koji.

For those wanting some alternative activities or exploring time to the main tour group we have suggested a few “options”.

2. Airport arrival and transfer:

Thursday 5th April Tokyo: Wendy and Koji will meet you at the airport.

Upon arrival, after clearing immigration, luggage collection and customs, you will recognise us as we will have a welcome sign displaying your name and our company logo.

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. From Narita we transfer you to your hotel in central Tokyo. The train trip into the city is 75 minutes by express train.

3. Tour itinerary:

Friday 6th April Tokyo: Start the day with a visit to 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, the oldest temple in Tokyo.

We then head to Ueno which provides some good options and variety for lunch adjacent to the expansive Ueno Park. The park also contains several museums (including Tokyo National Museum) and Tokyo Zoo (the main attraction of which is a giant panda) and the beautiful Tōshō-gū shrine that enshrines the first Shōgun of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Saturday 7th April Tokyo: Start with a visit to the Tokyo Metropolitan building for a bird’s eye view of the city from the 45th floor (200 meters up). From there, head to the west side of Shinjuku to the national gardens (58.3 hectares) including an impressive green house and some residual cherry blossom. From the gardens, head to the Golden Gai area of old style bars before seeing Godzilla towering above the night life area of Kabukicho or visiting the small (but interesting) Samurai museum.

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Nearby to Shinjuku is the Harajuku area which includes Meiji Shrine. After visiting the shrine explore Takeshita Street which is a trend-setting shopping area for Tokyo youth. For contrast, next to Harajuku is the upmarket shopping district of Omotesando.

Sunday 8th April Tokyo to Takayama: From Tokyo, take the Azusa express train to Matsumoto for viewing the castle. The timing between the train and onward bus connection is two hours which provides sufficient time to view the castle before continuing onward to Takayama.

At Takayama there is a short (5 minute/400 meters) walk to the Hida Plaza Hotel. *We aim to book Japanese/Western style room which previous guests have enjoyed.*

Monday 9th April Takayama: Explore the town and its easy walking courses; enjoy the local markets or visit one of the several small museums and temples scattered around the town. Takayama is famous for its woodworking and its biannual floats festival (matsuri). A visit to the Festival Floats Exhibition Hall is a recommended stop on our tours.

One of the attractions of the area is the unique steep thatched-roofed houses (gassho style). For the afternoon we can head to the nearby world heritage site of Shirakawa-go. *(We use the local half-day pre-booked bus tour for this excursion as it is more convenient than using local buses.)*

Tuesday 10th April Takayama to Kanazawa: Departing from Takayama we travel along the scenic Miyagawa River to Toyama before a short shinkansen ride to Kanazawa.

The local Omi-cho fresh food market is across the street from the hotel and provides a good option for a fresh sushi/sashimi lunch. After lunch visit the beautiful Kenrokuen Gardens (one of the top three gardens of Japan) and Kanazawa Castle. The city also boasts the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art which is also an option.

We typically book Japanese style suites at the Holiday Inn Kanazawa Sky.



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

Wednesday 11th April Kanazawa to Kyoto: Arriving into Kyoto around mid-day we begin our sightseeing at Inari Fushimi Shinto shrine (famous for its 10,000 vermilion torii gates). Given

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time/inclination we can visit one of the other nearby attractions in the eastern side of the city such as Sanjusangendo that has 1,000 hand carved statues. *(While I had seen Sanjusangendo described as an imitation of the Chinese Terracotta Warriors, each statue is slightly different, and the fact it was more than 100 years in the making helps to make it more impressive – Patrick.)*

Thursday 12th April Kyoto: Visit Nijo Castle *(the palace buildings are one the best surviving examples of castle palace architecture of Japan's feudal era)*, and then the “Golden Pavilion” Kinkaku-ji in the north-west of the city.

The afternoon has many options. We can head back towards the centre of the city visit Nishiki Markets and lunch before heading across to Gion. *(A short trip to Heian Shrine and gardens in the afternoon is an option.)* From here we can visit Kiyomizudera *(while the main hall is being renovated there are 16 main buildings that make up the complex).*

Friday 13th April Kyoto: To experience one of the most important cultural and historic places in Japan, we visit Nara, Japan’s first capital. At Nara is Todaiji Temple which houses the world’s largest bronze Buddha in the world’s largest wooden building. *We aim to get the 9:32 rapid train from Kyoto station.*

Saturday 14th April Kyoto to Hiroshima: Taking the shinkansen we cover the “short” 400km to Hiroshima. After depositing our luggage at the Sheraton (the hotel next to the train station) we head to Miyajima. The port and shopping area allows time for lunch and to sample a few of the island specialities. The island boasts the giant floating torii gate of Itsukushima Shrine, and one of the “three views of Japan”. Other activities include taking the ropeway up Mt Misen for the views across the Seto Inland Sea and Daishō-in Temple.



Miyajima (left), Kasuga Shrine, Nara (right)



Sunday 15th April Hiroshima to Osaka: A morning to visit the Peace Park and newly opened wing of the Peace Museum. The recently renovated building and exhibitions provide a useful contrast to the Nagasaki peace museum.

Suggested for the afternoon is to visit the Dotonbori area and/or free time to explore.

Monday 16th April Osaka: This day provides an opportunity to visit Himeji. Himeji Castle, the largest castle in Japan (*although not the largest donjon*), is a spectacular castle due to its size and beauty and castle grounds. It is both a national treasure and a World Heritage Site.

Depending on the time of arrival back into Osaka visit Tsūtenkaku tower, one of the landmarks of Osaka.

Tuesday 17th April Osaka to Tokyo: Returning to Tokyo by Shinkansen. We have deliberately left this day blank at the moment. During the course of the trip we will find out more about what you do/don't like - things that you might like to see or specific items that you want to hunt for.

Wednesday 18th April Tokyo: Optional suggestion - North of Tokyo cherry blossom viewing: because your dates are slightly after the peak cherry blossom for Tokyo and Kyoto, but possible for locations like Takayama and Kanazawa, we can offer a day trip to Sendai by shinkansen to catch some of the later blossoms. One of the locations that we frequent is Ogawara with 1,000 trees planted alongside the Shiroishi River. We can check other locations as the season unfolds as there are several good viewing locations in the area.



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

Thursday 19th April Tokyo: Final time in Tokyo for any last minute sightseeing or shopping before transfers back to Narita for flights.