



Late Cherry Blossom Tour – Sunday 15th April to Saturday 28th April 2017

1. Introduction:

Welcome to our Late Cherry Blossom Tour 2018!

For our 2018 late cherry blossom tour we will be doing some chasing of the “blossom front” by including a trip north of Tokyo to the top of the main island, Honshu. Depending on the progress of the cherry blossom season we will have several options at Sendai for viewing locations (for example Ogawara, Matsushima and Kakunodate), and also in Aomori prefecture with a trip to Hirosaki Castle Park, a famous hanami site with 2,600 cherry trees.

Returning to the centre of the country, we stay in the mountains at an onsen near Nagano and a visit to the snow monkeys before two days in the western city of Kanazawa and the mountain town of Takayama. From Takayama we take the scenic bus and train route via Matsumoto back 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 15th 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. *(As a famous cherry blossom viewing spot, Ueno Park boasts a large variety of trees including some late blooming varieties.)* The park also contains several museums (including

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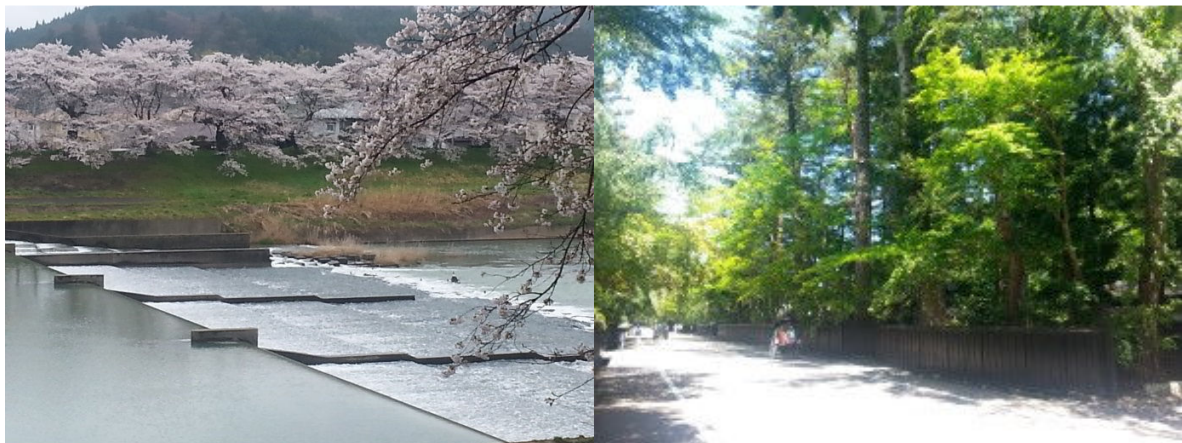
Tokyo National Museum) and Tokyo Zoo (the main attraction of which is a giant panda) and the beautiful Tōshō-gū shine that enshrines the first Shōgun of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Monday 16th 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.

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.

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*



Ogawara, Sendai (left); Tree lined streets in Kakunodate (right)

Tuesday 17th April Tokyo to Sendai: Departing Tokyo in the morning we take the Shinkansen from Tokyo station to Sendai. Despite the 350km journey, it only takes 92 minutes.

After depositing luggage at our hotel, 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.

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After viewing the pine covered islands, walk 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.

Wednesday 18th April Thursday 19th April Sendai: Cherry blossom viewing. With two full days we have plenty of time to explore and visit the famous areas in and around the city of Sendai. Depending on the progress of the cherry blossom season we have several options for our day in Sendai. These include:

- Ogawara with 1,000 cherry trees along the banks of the Shiroishi River (*approximately 40 minutes (25km) by train from downtown Sendai.*)
- Sakunami district which is also known for its cherry blossom (*approximately 40 minutes (25km) by train from downtown Sendai.*)
- Kakunodate is a modest shinkansen ride to from Sendai (*usually a 90 minute trip*). Arrival is planned for around midday, so we will visit one of the local restaurants before heading to the old Samurai district, houses and view the 400+ cherry trees.

Friday 20th April Sendai to Aomori: Taking the shinkansen we cover the trip to Aomori in around two hours. There will be time during the afternoon to see Wa Rasse, a museum celebrating the summer Nebuta festival, or the interesting floating car ferry museum in the port area.

Saturday 21st April. Day trip to Hirosaki Castle Park, one of the few surviving Edo era castles and its unusual triple moat is likely to be secondary to the 2,600 cherry trees planted in the extensive grounds.



Hirosaki (left), Ogawara (right)

Sunday 22nd April Aomori to Togura/Nagano: One of our longer travel days (around 4 ½ hours) we depart Aomori for the beautiful Japanese Alps of Nagano. Staying at a traditional Japanese inn in the onsen town of Togura (Kamiyamada) a short train ride from Nagano city.

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After check-in at Ryokan Kamesei there is time for a soak in the ryokan's onsen (hot spring baths) or explore the neighbourhood before enjoying an especially prepared traditional keiseki style dinner. (*Accommodation here includes breakfast and dinner.*) We usually arrange for Geisha entertainment during the evening meal (music and dancing performance) as part of providing some additional Japanese culture.

Monday 23rd April Togura/Nagano: After breakfast, we head to Nagano station and take a bus to Jigokudani Monkey Park. Depending on the unpredictable spring weather it could be cool to warm along the forest path. 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.*

Tuesday 24th April Togura to Kanazawa: After a leisurely breakfast (or local cycling tour) travel via local train and then shinkansen to Kanazawa ("Little Kyoto").

Wednesday 25th April Kanazawa: Across the street from our chosen hotel is the Omi-cho market, a smaller, friendlier version of the Tokyo Tsujiki fish market 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.



Monkeys enjoying their own onsen (left), Geisha entertainment at Kamesei Ryokan (right)

Thursday 26th April Kanazawa to Takayama: With a relaxed start to the day we take a short Shinkansen ride to Toyama and then local train into the mountains to the onsen (hot spring) mountain town of Takayama. Explore the town's historic buildings and shops on foot. The local

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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).

Friday 27th April Takayama: During the morning there is time to visit the morning market and shops before heading to the festival floats exhibition hall. Takayama float festivals (spring and autumn) are famous for the lavishness of the floats that take part in the parades around the town. The float museum periodically changes the displays with five or six of these priceless floats on exhibit at any one time.

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” (gassho) style farmhouses.

Saturday 28th April Takayama to Tokyo: From Takayama there are two scenic routes available. One is the train through the mountains to Nagoya before re-joining the Shinkansen network for the two hour bullet train back to Tokyo.

A second option is to journey by bus to the city of Matsumoto to visit the famous “black crow” castle. From Matsumoto we then take the Azusa express train back to Tokyo arriving in the evening. *(We are looking at the possibility of providing both options depending on guest preferences.)*

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. 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

These are an indication only. Actual hotels will be determined when booking availability becomes available (typically three to six months ahead of the tour).

Tokyo: Cerulean Tower Tokyo: 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.

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Sendai: The Westin Sendai affords great views across the city and also east to the ocean, or west to the mountains. The rooms are large, comfortable and feature the Westin's "Heavenly" bed for a great night's sleep.

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.

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.