



Traditions of Japan

Arts, crafts, history, society

19–31 October 2026 (MM 206)

13 days • £8,940

International flights not included

Lecturer: Professor Timon Screech

Modern architecture in Tokyo and historic buildings in Shirakawa and Takayama.

Extraordinary temples and gardens in Kyoto, and the legendary, ancient shrine at Izumo.

Traditional arts and crafts in Kanazawa.

Stay in an onsen hotel (with hot spring bathing option).

An exploration of Japanese custom, creativity and character in history and today.

One of the joys of exploring Japan is discovering its many different facets. It is a country of exquisite ancient beauty, but also at the cutting edge of modern design and creativity. Colourfully different characters constantly stride out both in history – such as Minamoto no Yoritomo, the founder of the shogunate – and today, in the pink-haired punks and Cosplay followers of Tokyo's Shibuya. Japan is known for adapting ideas from elsewhere, but it has also always produced art and ideas of wonderful originality.

This tour has been designed to take us to the heart of Japan, to explore the many aspects of the country and its people: its stunning natural beauty and heritage; the continuing work of its crafts-people; art and architecture both old and new; its history and relations with neighbours; and modern Japan and its position in the world.

In the sixth century, Buddhism arrived from China. Kyoto, founded as the new capital in 794, perfectly displays this history through its gardens and Buddhist temples, many of which are located on the hillsides around the city. Even when the seat of power moved to Kamakura and later to Tokyo in 1603, Kyoto remained at the heart of Japan. A visit to an Imperial villa offers a special insight, as does an exploration of the work of Kyoto's traditional craftspeople.

The long tradition of craft skills is also found in Kanazawa, which is well known for its Kutani pottery, lacquer and gold leaf. It is one of the few cities where tea houses and geisha are still in evidence. In the mountains not far away is Takayama, with its old merchants' houses, and Shirakawa's thatched gassho zukuri farmhouses.



Japanese woodblock.

At the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the emperor moved from Kyoto to Tokyo and Japan opened its doors to foreigners. Beginning in Tokyo, where there is an abundance of modern architecture, fashion and design, the tour offers a remarkable opportunity to engage with many aspects of this multi-layered country.

Itinerary

Day 1: Tokyo. The tour begins in Tokyo with lunch in the hotel (flights from London are not included. Your room is available from 3.00pm on 18th October – see Practicalities). There is an afternoon walk in the dynamic and design-conscious Tokyo Midtown. First of two nights in Tokyo.

Day 2: Tokyo. Nezu Kaichiro's collection of Japanese arts is well presented in the eponymous museum, which also has a delightful garden (subject to confirmation due to exhibition schedules). There is time to explore the Omotesando area, where architecture meets fashion. By contrast, the Asakusa Kannon Temple in shitamachi (literally 'downtown') is surrounded by busy street stalls.

Day 3: Kanazawa. Bullet train to Kanazawa (luggage by road, next day service), an attractive city which retains much of its old character. After lunch, visit the Kenrokuen,

one of Japan's finest strolling landscape gardens, and the traditional Seisonkaku villa. Nearby, the D.T. Suzuki Museum, designed by Taniguchi Yoshio, commemorates the ideas of a leading Zen Buddhist philosopher. The circular, glass and steel form of the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art is striking. First of three nights in Kanazawa.

Day 4: Kanazawa. In the Nagamachi area there remain many old samurai houses. Visit the Nomura House, a beautifully restored example. In the afternoon there is a lacquer maker's studio visit (by special arrangement). A visit to the Noh Museum in the afternoon.

Day 5: Kanazawa. Morning walk to include Terajima Kurando's house, the geisha quarter with its charming latticed wooden houses, a gold leaf museum and the Utatsu Shrine. The rest of the day is free for exploration of the market or the Prefectural Museum to see the Kutani pottery for which Kanazawa is famous.

Day 6: Shirakawa-go, Takayama. Drive through Japan's central Alps to visit Shirakawa-go, famous for its gassho-zukuri houses with their distinctive thatched roofs, and visit the folk museum. In Takayama, a small town with streets lined with heritage wooden merchant houses, visit Takayama Jinya, the seat of the Edo-period government in the region. Overnight in Takayama.

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continued

Day 7: Takayama, Matsue. An early morning walk along the Miyagawa river to visit the market and nearby temples before driving to Nagoya Airport. Fly to Izumo (Fuji Dream Airlines), arriving mid-afternoon. First of two nights at Matsue, beside Lake Shinji, in an onsen hotel. Onsen are natural hot springs and onsen bathing (optional) is a much-loved Japanese form of relaxation. First of two nights in Matsue.

Day 8: Izumo, Matsue. Ancient myths about the origin of Japan tell of Izumo and the Izumo Taisha, dating back before the Heian period, as well as the Kamosu and Yaegaki Shrines, which are all dedicated to early gods. Matsue Castle is one of the few remaining medieval castles. Here in the 1890s the writer Lafcadio Hearn, met his wife Koizumi Setsu and worked on his studies of so-called 'strange things' – Japanese ghost stories and superstitions. His home gives a flavour of his life.

Day 9: Yasugi, Bizen, Kyoto. The Adachi Museum, created by Adachi Zenko in 1980, has a spectacular landscape garden as well as his collection of paintings by Yokoyama Taikan, a leader of the Nihonga school in the 1930s. Drive south passing Mount Daisen to Bizen, famous for its brownish natural glaze earthenware pottery, where we visit a kiln. First of three nights in Kyoto.

Day 10: Kyoto. A day in the eastern foothills. Visit Ginkakuji, the temple of the silver pavilion built by Ashikaga Yoshimasa in the 15th century. In the Zen temple complex Nanzen-ji there is a famous tiger garden and fine 17th-century painted screens by Kano Tan'yu. Nearby is the intimate sub-temple Konchi-in.

Day 11: Kyoto. Ryōan-ji's dry garden is perhaps Kyoto's most famous stone garden. The large walled temple compound of Daitoku-ji, established in the 14th century, is an important foundation of Japanese Zen Buddhism. Its many sub-temples contain dry landscape gardens; one of the finest (and smallest) is in the Daisen-in.

Day 12: Kyoto to Tokyo. Morning excursion to Uji, the location of the last few chapters of *The Tale of Genji*. The Byōdo-in temple was a villa made into a temple in 1052 by Fujiwara no Yorimichi (of the Heian period power-holding family). Its Phoenix Hall appears to spread its wings in front of the lake. Bullet train to Tokyo and overnight.

Day 13: Tokyo to London. The tour ends after breakfast. (Flights to London are not included – there is an airport transfer in time for the recommended flight back to London – see Practicalities).

Lecturer

Professor Timon Screech. Professor of History of Art at the International Research Center for Japanese Studies (Nichibunken) in Kyoto. He has also taught at numerous other universities including SOAS, Chicago, Heidelberg, Meiji and Waseda. He is an expert on the art and culture of the Edo Period, including its international dimension, and has published some dozen books on the subject. His best-known work is probably *Sex & the Floating World*, a study of erotica, and he has also completed a field-defining overview of the Edo arts, *Obtaining Images*. His work has been translated into French, Japanese, Korean, Polish and Romanian.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £8,940.

Single occupancy: £10,680.

International flights are not included.

Included: domestic air travel with Fuji Dream Airlines: Nagoya to Izumo; high-speed rail travel (first class) from Tokyo to Kanazawa and from Kyoto to Tokyo; private coach for transfers and excursions; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 9 lunches and 9 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admission charges to museums; all tips for waiters, drivers and guides; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Flights: international flights from London to Tokyo and from Tokyo to London are not included in the price of the tour. We will send recommended flight options from London when they are available to book. The cost of a World Traveller (economy) seat with British Airways at the time of going to press is c. £1,900 though flights are not yet in range.

We provide airport transfers to meet the recommended return flights from London. For those not taking the recommended flights, airport transfers can be arranged for an additional cost.

Accommodation. Royal Park Iconic Shiodome, Tokyo (royalparkhotels.co.jp/ic/tokyoshiodome/): 4-star hotel in the redeveloped district of Shiodome with well-appointed but compact rooms. **Tokyu Hotel, Kanazawa** (tokyuhotels.co.jp): excellently located 4-star, in walking distance of the city's former samurai district. **Tokyu Stay Hida Takayama** (tokyustay.co.jp): centrally located hotel a short distance from the train station. **Ichibata, Matsue** (hotel.ichibata.co.jp): onsen (hot-spring spa) hotel with views over Lake Shinji; bland décor but it is the best option in town with western and traditional rooms. **Hyatt Regency, Kyoto** (hyatt.com): an elegant hotel within walking distance of the National Museum.

The night of 18th October 2026 is included in the price of the tour to allow for early check-in on Day 1.

How strenuous? A good level of fitness is essential. Unless you enjoy entirely unimpaired mobility, cope with everyday walking and stair-climbing without difficulty and are reliably sure-footed, this tour is not for you. You may be on your feet for lengthy stretches of time. Uneven ground and irregular paving are standard. Average distance by coach per day: 38 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.