Expansive Japan Private Tour

Please note that all of the itineraries listed in our web site are actual private tour itineraries we have prepared for clients over the past 12-18 months. By the very nature of what we do, each private tour itinerary is custom, exclusive and unique unto itself. Our over-riding goal is to create lifelong memories that you and your family will forever carry deep within your hearts.

Overview

Bev, Zen, and I freely admit Japan is our favorite destination in the entire world! Japan is singular among Asian cultures in its amazing ability to assimilate and then synthesize foreign cultures and influences. The contrast between Japan’s orderly, balanced Shinto/Buddhist-centered culture and its hyper-innovative technology-driven economy is compelling. A big part of our fascination with Japan is its unique wabi-sabi aesthetic. Wabi-sabi is a Japanese worldview/state-of-mind emphasizing simplicity and purity — the beauty and awe of all things humble, imperfect, and unpretentious (a beautiful sunrise, the still morning frost, or a graceful Japanese tea ceremony). The critical thing is savoring life’s simple daily pleasures. Please enjoy our meticulously-detailed, expansive Japan private tour itinerary based on our family’s many travels to this amazing land.

Best Travel Time: Spring Summer Fall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JAPAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Temperature Range</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highs: 80°F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lows: 40°F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Area</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>377,864 million sq. km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>145,894 million sq. miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126.4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capital</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Currency</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese Yen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Day 1
Fly to Tokyo
Through our sister company, premium air provider TRAVNET, we may assist with your international airfare, as well as with mileage points conversion.

Day 2
Arrive Tokyo
Upon arrival in Tokyo, you will be privately transferred to the Aman Tokyo or the Peninsula Tokyo. While in Tokyo, you may be able to catch a sumo wrestling match or a baseball game! Click on the link to read our blog posts on Sumo: Japan's National Sport and Japan's Unique Baseball Culture.

Aman Tokyo
Though we are big fans of Aman in China and Southeast Asia, we initially felt a bit ambivalent about the 84-room Aman in a noisy, urban environment like Tokyo. Located in the 40-story Otemachi Tower, within walking distance of Ginza shopping and dining and the Otemachi Forest (Marunouchi’s Naki-Dori tree-lined avenue), perhaps the most impressive sight of the Aman Tokyo is its magnificent 33rd-floor lobby entrance featuring huge floor to ceiling windows with a view of the Imperial Palace grounds and even Mt. Fuji on clear days! The Shoji-lanterned area is centered on a large garden and a washi-like ceiling that gives the area a Zen-like Japanese feel. Many clients feel the views from the lap-pool to be among the best in the world! Unlike Aman’s in most parts of the world that ban TV’s in the rooms, the Aman Tokyo includes a flat screen TV for those of us that need a daily BBC fix!
The Peninsula Tokyo
The 24-story Peninsula has the best luxury hotel location in Tokyo, directly across from the lovely Hibiya Park (think 5K run!), Imperial grounds, and adjacent to the amazing Ginza shopping district. Envisioned by architect Kuzukiyo Sato to look like a giant Japanese stone lantern, the freestanding Peninsula combines subtle Japanese hospitality with the Peninsula tradition of understated luxury. The rooms are among the largest in Tokyo, starting at 544 sq. feet. Cool amenities range from bedside consoles that control the drapes to Lavazza espresso machines. The rooms even offer a personal nail dryer! For our jogging friends, The Peninsula offers a nice 5K start to your day. Beginning across the street on the Imperial Palace’s grounds, a full 5K jog runs through the grounds and back through Hibiya Park. Zen rates the hot chocolate and the Peninsula’s amazing “vitality” pool as the best in all of Japan!

Accommodations: Aman Tokyo or The Peninsula Tokyo

Day 3
Tokyo Private Tour
Your touring today will begin with a visit to the Meiji Shrine, where, based on Shinto tradition, you may write your prayer on a wooden block just outside of the shrine. You will continue on to Higashi Gyoen, the east garden at the Imperial Palace, considered to be one of the most beautiful gardens in all of Tokyo. You will also visit the Akihabara and Harajuku shopping district and the Yasukuni Shrine, controversial due to its enshrinement of Japan’s wartime leader General Hideki Tojo and 13 other Class-A war criminals (found guilty of war crimes by the allied forces after World War II).

Meals: Breakfast
Accommodations: Aman Tokyo or The Peninsula Tokyo

Day 4
Private Transfer Tokyo/Mt. Fuji/Hakone
Today, you will travel to the Mt. Fuji visitor’s station and be guided to the fifth station on the mountain for the opportunity to hike the Ochudo Trail. The Ochudo Trail, also known as the “boundary between heaven and earth”, is a walking path that circles Mt. Fuji halfway up the mountainside. This trek includes the Oniwa Garden and ends at the Okuniwa bus stop; this hike is roughly 2.5 miles and will take approximately two hours. Following your energizing hike, you will be driven to the Gōra Kadan ryokan.

Gōra Kadan
Gōra Kadan is a superb ryokan (traditional inn) that has managed to compromise gracefully with the modern Western world. Proprietress Mikawako, the third generation of Fujimotos to run Gōra Kadan, has blended traditional Japanese ryokan hospitality with modern Western design in creating a luxurious ryokan spa experience. The Gōra Kadan’s original building dates back 300 years and was the summer home of the Kan’in-No-Miya imperial family. With its airy east-west fusion aesthetic, its wonderful (Kaiseki) food service, and total relaxation spa, Gōra Kadan is definitely on our A-list for high-touch ryokans in Japan!

Meals: Breakfast & Dinner
Accommodations: Gōra Kadan
Day 5
Hakone Private Tour
Following breakfast at the Gora Kadan, your private tour options will include a Lake Ashi boat excursion, Jinja Shrine, and the Owakudani Valley, an active volcanic valley famous for blacked boiled eggs! Another stopover will be the Hakone Open Air Museum amidst a mountain setting, which successfully balances art with nature. The indoor galleries are also very interesting – most compelling is the museum’s significant Picasso collection.

Meals: Breakfast & Dinner
Accommodations: Gōra Kadan

Day 6
Shinkansen (Bullet Train) Odawara/Tokyo/Kanazawa + Kenroku-en Garden Stopover
Following breakfast, you will be assisted by our representative in boarding the Shinkansen (bullet train) from Odawara Station to Kanazawa with a transfer in Tokyo.

Upon arrival at the architecturally striking Kanazawa Station, you will be met by our representative for a tour of the Kenroku-en Garden, before being transferred to Kayotei ryokan. Considered one of Japan’s three most famous gardens, Kanazawa’s verdant, lush Kenroku-en Garden makes a stopover in this coastal city certainly worthwhile. Compared to our beloved Saiho-ji in Kyoto, Kenroku-en is a relatively "new" garden, initially created as the outer garden of Kanazawa-jo in the 17th-century.

Kayotei
The Lynch family first discovered this heavenly place back in 2014. An approximately 1.5-hour drive south of Kanazawa, this 10-room ryokan retreat is arranged in traditional sukiya style, overlooking the pristine nearby Yamanaka River. Kayotei’s onsen/hot springs overlooking the deep-forested hills, provide a quiet, relaxing sanctuary for those wishing for a remote getaway. A walk along the river trails offers an invigorating experience before being served Kayotei’s locally-sourced kaiseki dinner. Being such a noteworthy local ryokan, Kayotei highlights the work of local artisans: woodworkers, papermakers, soy sauce brewers, among others!

Meals: Breakfast & Dinner
Accommodations: Kayotei

Day 7
Kanazawa Private Tour + Thunderbird Train Kanazawa/Kyoto
Today you will tour Kanazawa with your private guide, beginning with the Nagamachi neighborhood, once inhabited by samurai, and Kazue-machi, an old, less touristy geisha district located along the river between Asanogawa Ohashi and Naka-no Hashi bridges. Stop for lunch at Omicho Fish Market, Kanazawa’s largest fresh fish market conceived in the 17th-century Edo Period. In the afternoon you will be transferred to the Kanazawa Station for your Thunderbird train to Kyoto.

The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto
With the Hyatt Regency Kyoto having been the only western 5-star luxury hotel in Kyoto for quite some time, we were excited about the February 2014 opening of the 134-room The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto. Living in a Mies van der Rohe high-rise in Chicago, we feel a particular affinity to the Hyatt Regency’s simple, clean,
architectural design. Nevertheless, The Ritz-Carlton’s rectangular, low-slung property ideally situated in the Kamogawa River has definitely piqued our interest. Replicating the aesthetics of a traditional Meiji House, the design and amenities of The Ritz are quite impressive (including a French Haute Patisserie!). Though we are not big fans of the Ritz global brand (prefer AMAN/Peninsula/Mandarin/Four Seasons), we feel the Ritz to be currently the highest quality luxury “western” hotel in Kyoto.

**Aman Kyoto – Coming November 2019**

With Kyoto being our favorite city in Asia, we are most excited about the 24-room Aman Kyoto opening in November 2019. The 80-acre site will include 72 acres of native forest and eight acres of traditional Japanese gardens. We are particularly impressed with the property’s location in the Takagamine district, walking distance to Kinkaku-ji (Golden Temple)! The property will feature spacious and light-filled interiors, similar to traditional ryokans; natural hot springs; and spectacular dining celebrating the unique culinary traditions of Japan using the finest local produce. With large floor-to-ceiling windows, the outside is brought in, allowing for a complete escape in total luxury.

**Meals: Breakfast & Lunch**

**Accommodations: The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto or Aman Kyoto**

**Day 9**

**Saiho-ji Gardens Private Tour + Tea Ceremony**

There is nothing casual or fortuitous about a visit to Saiho-ji Temple and its garden. You may visit by prior appointment only via a written request to the administering monks. Unlike the mass tourism that envelops much of Kyoto, the Saiho-ji priests hope to retain a solemn, meditative atmosphere in the temple and gardens.

You will also participate in a traditional tea ceremony with over a dozen steps including the respectful exchange of greetings, eating the tea sweets, and mixing the green powder tea and water with the bamboo whisk.

**Meals: Breakfast**

**Accommodations: The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto or Aman Kyoto**

**Day 10**

**Arashiyama Private Tour**

Today, you will enjoy a full-day tour Saga Arashiyama including Monkey Park (touristy but fun!), the surreal Sagano Bamboo Forest, Togetsu-kyō Bridge, Tenryū-ji Temple, and Ginkaku-ji “Silver Pavilion”. In the late afternoon, you will be transferred to Hiiragiya ryokan.

**Hiiragiya**

Similar to Tawaraya Ryokan (just across the alley-way), Hiiragiya is considered among the most noteworthy and famous ryokans in all of Japan. A stay at Hiiragiya represents a complete immersion into traditional Japanese culture. Enclosed in a traditional sukiya-style wooden structure, Hiiragiya was conceived in 1818 when Hiiragiya, a seafood dealer, began providing accommodation to traveling merchants. Later, Hiiragiya welcomed many members of the imperial family including writers, governing officials, and international celebrities. Proprietress Akami Nishimura only modestly acknowledges the many celebrities and world leaders
who have stayed here (including Charlie Chaplin many decades ago). We give an A+ to both the Tawaraya and Hiiragiya, although we feel Hiiragiya is perhaps more accommodating and open to Western eccentricities.

**Meals: Breakfast & Dinner**

**Accommodations: Hiiragiya**

**Day 11**

**Shinkansen (Bullet Train) Kyoto/Hiroshima + Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park & Museum Private Tour**

Following breakfast, you will be assisted in boarding the Shinkansen train from Kyoto Station to Hiroshima.

Upon arrival in Hiroshima, your private guide will take you to Peace Memorial Park & Museum. A simultaneously moving and disturbing experience, this visit should be historical and eye-opening. The Peace Memorial Museum graphically illustrates the history of the Atom-bomb and its dramatic effects on the citizens of Hiroshima (August 6, 1945).

**Sheraton Grand Hiroshima Hotel**

Among the many 5-star luxury hotels we have used throughout the world, I cannot recall us staying at a Sheraton. However, we were most impressed with our recent visit to the relatively new 238-room Sheraton Grand Hiroshima, beyond a doubt the finest hotel in Hiroshima. Guests should enjoy the heartfelt, friendly staff and the updated room amenities.

**Meals: Breakfast**

**Accommodations: Sheraton Grand Hiroshima Hotel**

**Day 12**

**Miyajima Island Private Tour**

In the afternoon, you will board a ferry to Miyajima Island, considered one of Japan’s three most scenic views and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is famous for the Itsukushima Shrine, which, together with its large wooden torii (gate), stands in the ocean during high tide. Deer move around the island freely, as do monkeys on top of Misen, the island’s largest mountain. You will have the opportunity to enjoy the sunset on the island before a ferry returns you to Hiroshima.

**Meals: Breakfast**

**Accommodations: Sheraton Grand Hiroshima Hotel**

**Day 13**

**Shinkansen (Bullet Train) Hiroshima/Okayama + Ferry to Naoshima Island**

In the morning you will be assisted with boarding a Shinkansen to Okayama Station, where you will be met and driven to Uno Port for a ferry ride to Benesse House on Naoshima.

Naoshima is a somewhat remote island located in the Seto Inland Sea of Japan and is famous for its striking architecture, art museums, and many unusual sculptures. Benesse House exists in harmony with the nature around it, having been built mostly underground so as not to impose too much on the surrounding landscape. Despite its almost-completely underground location, the museum gets plenty of natural light exposure, providing varying experiences with the art contained within, depending on the time of day and season of the year.
Benesse House Hotel
The central lodging facility within “Benesse Art Site Naoshima” consists of four buildings: Museum (10 rooms) allows close contact with the artworks both in a public exhibition space and in each guestroom; Oval (six rooms - our favorite!), offers beautiful panoramic views of the Seto Inland Sea and is connected to the museum by a monorail; Park (41 rooms) looks out to the green lawn with open-air artworks to the ocean and the mountains of Shikoku on the far shore, and contains an exclusive lounge, a shop, and Spa; and Beach (eight suites), located on the shoreline with suites only, provides beautiful views of the Seto Inland Sea. The Benesse House spa, La Villa, offers a variety of rejuvenating spa treatments.

Meals: Breakfast
Accommodations: Benesse House Hotel

Day 14
Naoshima Private Tour
Following breakfast, you will enjoy a full-day private tour of Naoshima including the Chichu Art Museum, Lee Ufan Museum, and the Art House Project. All a part of the Benesse Art Site, this site aims to create significant spaces by bringing contemporary art and architecture in resonance with the pristine nature of the Seto Inland Sea.

Meals: Breakfast
Accommodations: Benesse House Hotel

Day 15
Ferry to Uno Port + Shinkansen (Bullet Train) Okayama/Osaka + Fly Osaka/Home
Following breakfast, you will be assisted in boarding your ferry to Uno Port, where you will be met and driven to Okayama Station for your Shinkansen (bullet train) to Osaka. You will be met at Osaka Station and privately transferred to the airport for your onward flight home.

Meals: Breakfast