



Classic Cherry Blossom Tour – Sunday 1st April to Saturday 14th April 2018

1. Introduction:

Welcome to our Classic Cherry Blossom Tour 2018! For the 2018 edition of our “Classic” tour we have running a single group (up to ten people) and will be led by Patrick Harnett.

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

2. Airport arrivals:

We expect most guests will be arriving into Japan in the few days before the official start of the tour. As part of our planning we make arrangements to meet everyone at the airport (either Haneda or Narita) and transfer you to your hotel in central Tokyo. We can also arrange the additional days accommodation to suit your arrival.

When you arrive, 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.

3. Tour itinerary:

Sunday 1st April Tokyo: We start the day with a visit to the Meiji Shrine. As an important period of change we explain some of the historical elements of the Meiji Restoration before visiting the shrine buildings located in a central Tokyo forest. 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 there is a distinct transition as we move to the nearby upmarket shopping district of Omotesando.

We then head to Ueno which provides some good options and variety for lunch adjacent to the expansive Ueno Park. Ueno Park is a famous Tokyo cherry blossom viewing spot where you can see local Tokyoites enjoying the cherry blossom season. 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.

Monday 2nd 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, we head to Shinjuku to see the expansive Shinjuku National Gardens with its large number of cherry trees. 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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Some 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 3rd April Tokyo to Hiroshima: To maximise the opportunities for cherry blossom viewing (and your time in Japan), we travel to Hiroshima. This is one of our longer travel days, covering 900km in five hours by shinkansen (high-speed 'bullet' train). There is a transfer at Shin-Osaka and an opportunity to buy an o-bento (Japanese lunch box) or other food for lunch on the train. With an early afternoon arrival time, there is then an opportunity to visit the Peace Park and Museum in Hiroshima city.

Wednesday 4th April Hiroshima: A full day in Hiroshima allows us time to visit and explore Miyajima Island: Itsukushima Shrine is the location of the famous "floating" torii gate. The island is accessed by a short local train and ferry ride.

Depending on fitness and inclination, we can use the ropeway (cable car) and head to the top of Mount Misen for views across the Seto inland sea. If feeling energetic, the walk back down the mountain provides some good viewing and vantage points (otherwise we can get the ropeway back down).

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Some Hiroshima options:

- *The rebuilt Hiroshima Castle (the castle includes a samurai museum)*
- *Hiroshima is the location of one of the Mazda vehicle factories and there is a tour and museum. (Advance reservations are required.)*
- *At Kure there is the Yamato Battleship museum and the also the JMSDF museum with interesting exhibits relating to mine sweeping and also a submarine*

Thursday April 5th Hiroshima to Kyoto: The journey north to Kyoto is a modest 400km (2 hours by shinkansen), which delivers us to 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.

From Fushimi Inari we have several options including Sanjusangendo temple with its 1,000 hand carved statues or the Kiyomizudera temple and its hillside with many different varieties of cherry trees.

Friday April 6th Kyoto: Visit Nijo Castle (*the palace buildings are one the best surviving examples of castle palace architecture of Japan's feudal era*). Due to the timing, there may be cherry blossom to enjoy as we stroll around the castle grounds. From Nijo we had to the “Golden Pavilion” Kinkaku-ji in the north-west of the city which typically takes us to mid-day.

The afternoon/evening can be used to visit the old Gion area, Yasaka shrine and Maruyama Park (a famous site for hanami (picnicking under the cherry blossom trees)).

Saturday April 7th 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. *Many of our guests love seeing the deer roaming around the park and being able to feed them “deer biscuits”.*

Some 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*

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Fushimi Inari Shrine, Kyoto (left); Kodai-ji Temple gardens, Kyoto (right)

Sunday 8th April Kyoto to Kanazawa: Continuing our journey across Japan's biggest island (Honshu), we take the "Thunderbird" Express train to Kanazawa. Visit the beautiful Kenrokuen Gardens (another site famous for its blossom trees) and the Kanazawa Castle. Enjoy local cuisine including fresh sushi and sashimi (optional) at the Omi-cho food market. The city also boasts the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art which is also an option.

Monday 9th Kanazawa to Togura: Departing from Kanazawa we head along the west coast of Japan by Shinkansen to Nagano. After lunch there is an opportunity to visit the Zenko-ji temple, founded in the 7th century. The temple houses the first Buddhist image in Japan (552CE) and the city grew around the temple. Among the interesting features is the passageway beneath the inner chamber and people search for the "key to paradise" and numerous important cultural properties.

The temple visit takes us to mid-afternoon and the local train bound for Togura (30 minutes) and then check in at Ryokan Kamesei. Before dinner there is time to have a soak in the ryokan's onsen (hot spring baths) or explore the neighbourhood (and castle behind the inn). Dinner is traditional keiseki style (course meal) dinner and arrange geisha entertainment (music and dance) as part of the evening meal.

Tuesday 10th April Togura: After breakfast, we head to Nagano station and take a bus to Jigokudani Monkey Park. Depending on the weather it could be cold (there might still be some snow on the ground). 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.

Some 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.*
- *There is a local cycling tour around Togura available for those that want to stay close to the ryokan*

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Wednesday 11th April Togura to Sendai: Departing Togura we head north by shinkansen to chase the blossoming cherry trees. The city of Sendai is also famous for its scenery. After lunch we will visit the Ogawara district which is famous for its riverbank-lined 1,000 cherry blossom trees. To get there is only 40 minutes (25km) by train from downtown Sendai.

Thursday 12th April Sendai: After breakfast, 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 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.

Friday 13th April Sendai to Tokyo: By shinkansen, Tokyo is just 90 minutes away as we transfer back to the capital city. The afternoon is available for sightseeing around the city, covering any remaining places that you would like to visit.

Saturday 14th April Tokyo: Last day in Tokyo and free time until transfers back to the airport for your flights home (or your next destination).



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

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 Japan Rail Pass (JRP) available to tourists visiting Japan covers the extensive Japan Rail network. The rail network is the most efficient and cost-effective method to transfer between the different places we are visiting. 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

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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 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.

Kyoto: Kyoto Century Hotel: Located next to the Kyoto Railway Station the “Century” provides an excellent base while staying in Kyoto. The breakfast buffet is excellent and we find the rooms suit the majority of our guests due to the layout and comfort.

Hiroshima either:

- Sheraton Hiroshima. One of our favourite hotels in Japan, we typically book their deluxe king rooms (including breakfast).
- Granvia Hiroshima. A comfortable hotel with a good variety of restaurants and excellent location.

Both hotels are adjacent to the Hiroshima Railway Station, making the city and nearby Miyajima Island easily accessible.

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.

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.

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.

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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