

CHERRY BLOSSOM TOURS JAPAN 2021

Version 1.02 , Updated 26 June 2020



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CHERRY BLOSSOM TOURS

JAPAN 2021 - TOUR SUMMARIES

YOKOSO—WELCOME

Each cherry blossom (sakura) season is slightly different, the weather is the main driver of the blossom dates as spring arrives. Over the past few years the cherry blossom season has variously hit its peak in Kyoto and Tokyo right on time at the end of March and beginning of April providing some great displays. In 2017, the season initially was forecast to be slightly early, but ended up a little late due to cold weather. The 2018 and 2020 cherry blossom seasons were more than a week early in many locations. In each case we made slight adjustments to our schedule to deliver stunning displays.

Due to positive feedback from our guests we are repeating our core cherry blossom tours that begin and end in Tokyo. For the 2021 season we are limiting our schedule to two main tours. The first of these tours 31st March through to 14th April, and the late blossom tour starting on 18th April.

We include some flexibility to add extra days at the start or end of the trip, for those wanting extra free time in Tokyo or time to explore nearby locations such as day-trips to the nearby Hakone for a possible view of Mt Fuji.

The attached schedules indicate the dates for cherry blossom viewing in each location. These dates are based on the flowering times from the last ten years and are a guide only. The actual dates are out of our control. However, there are a couple



of things that make chasing the blossom a little easier. First, the early part of the season is when plum trees flower, providing an alternative offering of spectacular colours. Second, the cherry blossom forecast refers to a specific “five petal” variety, and there are many different types of cherry that flower earlier and later, thus extending the season.



BRIEF TOUR SUMMARIES (TWO WEEK TOURS)

JAPAN SPRING BLOSSOM TOUR 31ST MARCH TO 14TH APRIL

Starting in the metropolis of Tokyo, we then head to the Japanese Alps staying at a luxury ryokan in Matsumoto. A scenic journey to the mountain town of Takayama includes the World Heritage site of Shirakawa-go.

Passing through Kanazawa for the famous Kenrokuen Gardens we go to Hiroshima for Miyajima and Iwakuni's Kintai-kyo Bridge area.

Moving across to Takamatsu on the island of Shikoku we have a day scheduled on the art island of Naoshima. Returning to the main island with a stay at Okayama, the Korakuen Gardens and a visit to the picturesque Kurashiki canal district and historical quarter.

Our journey next takes us next to Kyoto, the previous capital of Japan for more than 1,000 years. With hundreds of possible sites to explore across the city we cover a mix of famous/popular location and some of the less crowded sites. A day trip to Nara is included.

From Kyoto we take the shinkansen ride back to Tokyo completing the tour.

LATE BLOSSOM TOUR 15TH TO 28TH APRIL

Our late cherry blossom tour heads north of Tokyo to enjoy blossom viewing in Sendai, possibly Kakunodate (depending on the season), Aomori, and the famous Hirosaki Castle Park's blossom festival with 2600 cherry trees.

This tour also includes visits to the mountains including a visit to Jigokudani Monkey Park, time in the western city of Kanazawa and also the picturesque town of Takayama. A stay at a traditional ryokan with onsen can be included.

The end of the tour has an option to return either to Tokyo, or include an extension to the city of Kyoto and the myriad of sights that city has to offer.

LOCATIONS AND HIGHLIGHTS

TOKYO

Take advantage of this metropolis of 37 million people by exploring the areas that interest you. Visit the beautiful gardens, museums, and shopping areas.

For an introduction to Japan visit Asakusa and Sensoji Temple with its impressive Kaminarimon gate (thunder gate), Hozomon and pagoda. Hundreds of stalls line the entrance to this temple providing an array of souvenirs and goods for its many visitors.

Also head to one or more of the famous neighbourhoods of Tokyo: Shibuya and the “scramble” pedestrian crossing, Akihabara, Shinjuku, Harajuku, and Meiji Shrine.

For cherry blossom viewing we recommend Shinjuku National Gardens or Meguro River. The Imperial Palace East Gardens or Ueno are options or even Showa Memorial Park.



KYOTO

Visit the Inari Fushimi shrine, famous for its 10,000 torii gates. For the energetic, take the time to climb Mt Inari (a two hour walk).

Day trip to the World Heritage Site at Nara to view Todaiji Temple and the world's largest bronze Buddha. Enjoy the deer park and other monuments of the first capital of Japan.

Enjoy cherry blossom viewing several sites around the city - sites depend on the timing of the season.

Visit the famous "golden pavilion" (Kinkakuji) and Nijo Castle and the Honmaru Palace for its landscaped gardens, cherry trees and preserved artworks.

Shopping at the 400-year old covered Nishiki Market, which includes a selection of local foods and other stalls. The Isetan and Takashimaya department stores are also excellent shopping options. The adjacent 300 year old Teramachi Dori shopping street is also a good browsing option,



SENDAI

Sendai is certainly not crowded with western tourists. Around Sendai the city provides an open and relaxed city environment.

While in Sendai we head to Matsushima Bay, one of the top three views in Japan (a designated "special place of scenic beauty") to cruise around the pine tree covered islands and view the sacred and historic cinerarium caves.

For cherry blossom viewing we can take the local train to Ogawara where more than 1,000 cherry trees have been planted along the river banks. Depending on the season we might also visit Kakunodate or Kitakami (one of the top 100 cherry blossom spots in Japan).

There is also an opportunity to visit the impressive Zuihoden, the mausoleum for Date Masamune, the famous feudal lord that ruled the area around Sendai.



LOCATIONS AND HIGHLIGHTS

HIROSHIMA

Hiroshima is known as the location where an atomic bomb was first used. In 1945 The city now focuses on peace and has an interesting Peace Museum and the neighbouring Peace Park and Atomic Dome.

The city also provides a base to visit the beautiful island of Miyajima and the famous "floating" torii gate, one of the "three views of Japan." The island includes forest walks, views across the Seto Inland Sea and a ropeway ride to the top of Mt Misen. Also close to Hiroshima is the interesting Yamato Maritime Museum



NAGANO/TOGURA

Some of the tour schedules include a stay at a traditional Japanese inn in the small hot spring ("onsen") town of Kamiyamada/Togura, 30 minutes from Nagano. Enjoy a traditional keiseki style meals. During dinner enjoy the dancing and musical entertainment provided by the local geisha.

Have an a relaxing soak in the inn's own hot mineral baths, and sleep on futons in spacious tatami mat rooms (note, the rooms do not have private bath/shower. If required, please request this in your inquiry and we will arrange nearby accommodation.)

Enjoy a day trip to the famous Jigokudani Monkey Park to see the "snow" monkeys, including a walk through the cedar forest.



TAKAYAMA

The historic mountain town of Takayama provides variety in a small area. Stroll along the riverside morning market, enjoy the scenery and forest walking course, visit the Festival Float museum to see the intricate workmanship on priceless floats, several hundred years old and still in regular use today.

From Takayama take in the World Heritage Site of Shirakawa-go and visit the historic village museum of Hida Mura.

A visit would not be complete without sampling the local Hida beef—an evening meal at a BBQ restaurant is recommended.



KANAZAWA

Kanazawa is famous for the Kenrokuen Gardens, one of the top three gardens in Japan. With a range of plum and cherry trees, plus excellent design provides beautiful scenes all year around.

Also visit the Kanazawa Castle grounds and castle garden. Nearby is the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art as well as a number of other interesting, historic areas such as the Higashi Chaya (geisha teahouse) district.

LOCATIONS AND HIGHLIGHTS

HAKODATE

At the southern end of Hokkaido, the port town of Hakodate is the northern-most point for our cherry blossom tours.

Over one thousand cherry trees were planted along the moats of Fort Goryokaku making it one of Hokkaido's best cherry blossom spots.

The city is also known for the spectacular views from Mount Hakodate and its delicious, fresh seafood. With the extension of the shinkansen to Hokkaido the journey is now less than two hours from Aomori.



AOMORI

The northern-most prefectural capital on the main island of Honshu, Aomori provides easy access to Hirosaki and across to Hokkaido and Hakodate.

The city itself includes several worthwhile attractions including the Nebuta Matsuri Museum, the Hakkodamaru roll-on/roll-off ferry that acts as a floating museum, and an archaeological site from the Jomon period (13000-300 BC).



KAKUNODATE

A former castle town, Kakunodate is located on the shinkansen line to Akita. This small town is famous for its hundreds of weeping cherry trees (“shidarezakura”) and many people visit during the cherry blossom season.

The samurai district is home to some of the best examples of samurai architecture in Japan and Kakunodate also boasts some interesting galleries and museums.



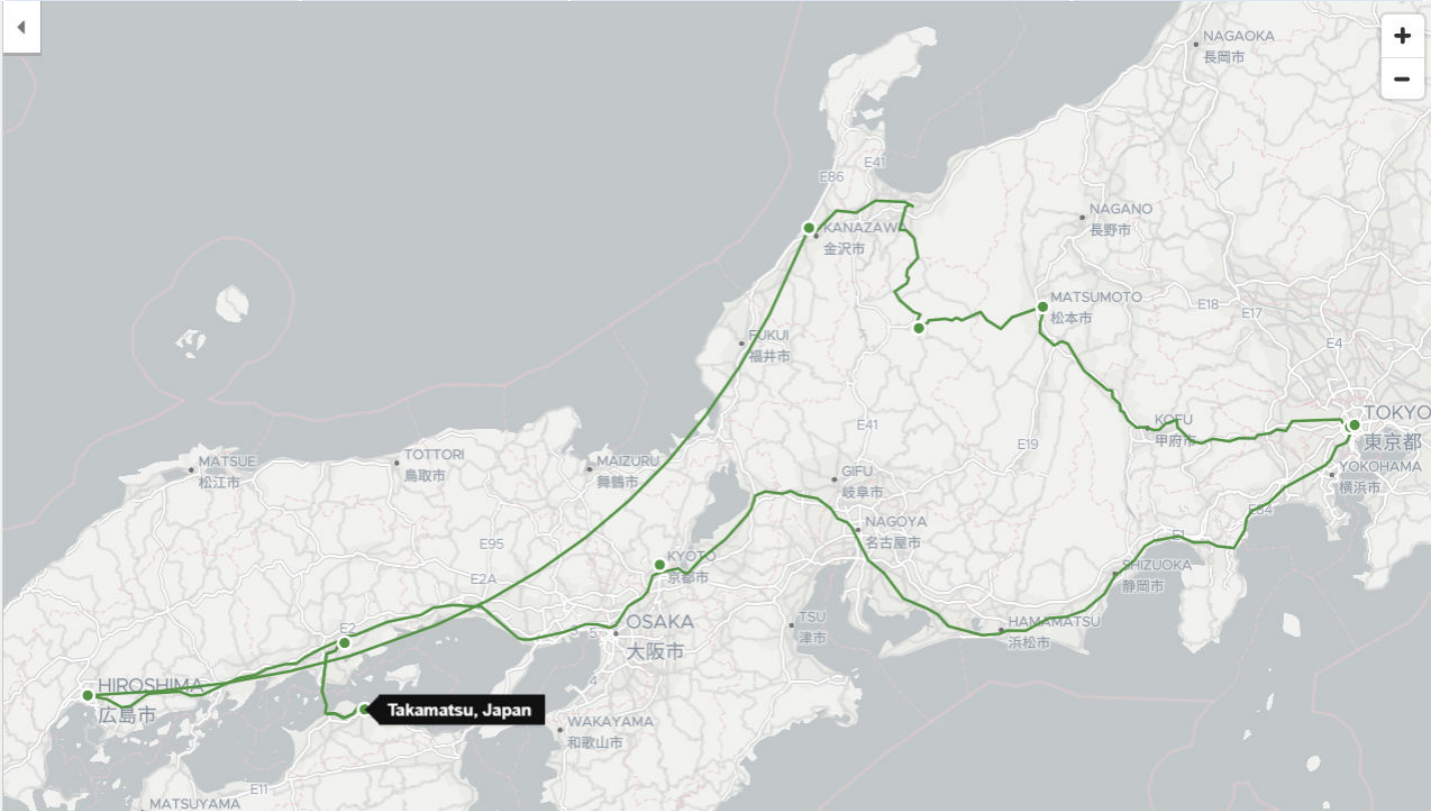
HIROSAKI

We visit Hirosaki Castle Park and the 2,600 cherry trees that contribute to the local cherry blossom festival. The current castle is counted among the few “original” castles in Japan as it has not been rebuilt in the modern era.

JAPAN SPRING TOUR 31ST MARCH TO 14TH APRIL

JPY745,000 per person , 17 days, 16 nights, double/twin occupancy, JPY890,000 single occupancy.

Accommodation Dates	Location	Highlights	Cherry Forecast First and full bloom
Wednesday 31st March to Thursday 1st April	Tokyo	Shibuya, Sensoji Temple, Meiji shrine and Shinjuku National Gardens.	23 March / 31 March
Thursday 1st April to Friday 2nd April	Matsumoto	Matsumoto Castle, ryokan/onsen and Japanese keiseki meals	180 late blossom trees at the castle.
Friday 2nd April to Sunday 4th April	Takayama	The World Heritage Site “gassho-style” houses of Shirakawa-go, Hida beef and historic mountain town.	10 April / 15 April
Sunday 4th April to Monday 5th April	Kanazawa	Famous Kenrokuen Gardens and the Kanazawa Castle	3 April / 9 April
Monday 5th April to Wednesday 7th April	Hiroshima	Miyajima Island, Mt Misen, Peace Museum, Peace Park and Atomic Dome.	25 March / 4 April
Wednesday 5th April to Friday 9th April	Takamatsu	Famous Kenrokuen Gardens and Kanazawa Castle	23 March / 2 April
Friday 9th April to Sunday 11th April	Okayama	Kurashiki canal district and historical quarter, Okayama Korakuen Garden	25 March / 4 April
Sunday 11th April to Wednesday14th April	Kyoto	Fushimi Inari Shrine, Nara day trip, Nijo Castle, Kinkakuji (golden pavilion), cherry blossom.	25 March / 4 April
Wednesday 14th April	Tokyo	Return to Tokyo for sites around the city.	23 March / 31 March



LATE CHERRY BLOSSOM TOUR 18TH APRIL TO 1ST MAY

JPY595,000 per person , 14 days, 13 nights, double/twin occupancy, JPY720,000 single occupancy.

Accommodation Dates	Location	Highlights	Cherry forecast First and full bloom
Sunday 18th April to Tuesday 20th April	Tokyo	Sensoji Temple in Asukusa, Shinjuku, Meiji Shrine and Ueno Park	23 March / 31 March
Tuesday 20th April to Friday 23rd April	Sendai	Matsushima Bay, cherry blossom at either Ogawara (with 1000 cherry trees) or Kakunodate for their cherry blossom and old samurai district.	10 April / 15 April
Friday 23rd April to Sunday 25th April	Aomori	Hirosaki Blossom Festival and Aomori Nebuta Matsuri Museum.	25 April / 29 April
Sunday 25th April to Tuesday 27th April	Nagano	Optional Japanese inn experience with dining and onsen. Visit to Jigokudani Monkey Park.	10 April / 15 April
Tuesday 27th April to Thursday 29th April	Takayama	The World Heritage Site “gassho-style” houses of Shirakawa-go, Hida beef and historic mountain town.	10 April / 15 April
Thursday 29th April to Saturday 1st May	Kanazawa	Famous Kenrokuen Gardens and Kanazawa Castle.	3 April / 9 April
Saturday 1st May	Tokyo/Kyoto	Either return to Tokyo or optional extension to Kyoto.	23 March / 31 March



TOUR INFORMATION

BOOKING, HOTELS, ARRIVALS

HOTELS

We select hotels in each city based on our personal experience and previous guest feedback. This includes considerations for location, space and availability. With these in mind we look for good quality 4* and 5* accommodation that meets the needs of our guests. This includes selecting superior and deluxe room options rather than the cheapest “standard” rooms.

We typically use these hotels:

- ◇ Tokyo: Century Southern Tower in Shinjuku.
- ◇ Kyoto: Kyoto Century Hotel
- ◇ Hiroshima: Sheraton Hiroshima or ANA Crowne Plaza
- ◇ Sendai: Sendai Westin
- ◇ Kanazawa: Holiday Inn Kanazawa Sky or ANA Crowne Kanazawa
- ◇ Nagano/Togura: Hotel Metropolitan, Kamesei Ryokan
- ◇ Aomori: Richmond Hotel
- ◇ Akita: Akita Castle Hotel
- ◇ Takayama: Hida Plaza Hotel or the Takayama Green Hotel.
- ◇ Hakodate: Four Points by Sheraton



BOOKINGS AND DEPOSIT

Bookings are accepted by contacting us directly at

Admin@japancustomtours.co.nz

At the time of booking we request a 25% non-refundable deposit to secure your place, with the balance due one month prior to your departure date.

We price our tours in Japanese yen, but can convert this to your preferred currency. Once your booking is confirmed, your tour price is also fixed so you do not need to worry about currency fluctuations.

RYOKAN AND ONSEN

Staying at a traditional Japanese inn or ryokan is part of the unique Japan experience that we like to offer our guests. However, there are some things to be aware of regarding this style of accommodation:

First, onsen is usually a large shared, single sex, bath without swimsuits (i.e naked). Second, bedding is on soft futons on tatami mat floors. Third, some properties do not include a private (in room) shower.

If you think these issues might prevent you from enjoying your stay at a ryokan, please tell us and we can book at a nearby hotel for you.



ARRIVING AND DEPARTING

Each of our tours starts and finishes in Tokyo. We are happy to arrange accommodation covering dates before the tour starts or after a tour finishes to match your flight arrangements

We expect most guests to arrive during the days before a tour begins and we anticipate being able to meet guests at the airport (either Narita or Haneda) to assist with navigating the initial transfer to our hotel.

This means that before the tour begins guests will have free time to explore the city and to see those things that most interest them. We can help with suggestions and directions.



TOUR INFORMATION

OTHER GUIDANCE

LUGGAGE

Guests need to be able to manage their own luggage. This helps ensure you do not over pack, and also relates to issues of fitness. JCT staff will have their own luggage to manage and we are here as guides, rather than baggage handlers. We do not employ people to manage bags, nor do we have a “bus” that carts luggage around the country.

We strongly recommend luggage is kept to one modest sized case and a day bag/pack. This makes our travel around Japan practical, as we travel with our luggage on the trains. Luggage storage on many Japanese trains is similar in size to aircraft overhead lockers (but is open shelves).

ACTIVITY LEVEL

We require our guests to have an average level of fitness as our tours involve a lot of walking and some steps/stairs (a typical day covers 5-10 km of walking.) In some locations there may not be elevators or escalators (for example, in small railway stations). At many tourist sightseeing spots there will be steps - some places more than others.



MEDICAL ISSUES AND FOOD

Guests need to disclose all relevant current and chronic illnesses, recent surgeries, disabilities and allergies (including food allergies). JCT needs to know about these before the tour is booked. Some examples of disclosures (examples of things we have been told about and others “discovered” after the start of a trip) include; a recent knee replacement, presence of a heart pacemaker, allergic reaction to bee stings, type 1 diabetes that requires insulin treatment etc. Well-managed medical conditions are not a problem but we need to know about these in case of emergency. Personal travel insurance (including medical insurance) is a necessity to avoid paying 100% of any healthcare costs incurred while in Japan.

Japan is not a vegetarian friendly country. Many dishes include meat ingredients or daishi (fish stock) and may not be listed as part of the menu. Due to the difficulty of recommending vegetarian dining options it is the responsibility of

the guest rather than JCT. We do not cater for vegan or halal cuisine as it is very difficult to find appropriate food options and adversely impacts on the experience of other guests. Dairy and gluten-free diets are easier to accommodate but are also the responsibility of the guest to manage .

SMALL GROUP TRAVEL ETIQUETTE

JCT deliberately keeps its tours small and we work closely with you before and during the tour. We will treat you with respect and politeness and we expect the same in return. We like to say that traveling with us is like traveling with friends. Respectful, polite behaviour also includes with people on the tour, and interaction with the people we meet such as staff in hotels, restaurants, and stores.

We aim to provide flexible timing for sightseeing on our tours so you have sufficient time to enjoy the different places we visit. However, there are times when punctuality is important.

For days where we are travelling between cities, we reserve seats ahead of time for particular trains. It is important for everyone to be able to get on the same train as sometimes the next train may be several hours later.

On sightseeing days in different locations we will agree a morning meeting time to commence the days’ activities. This will usually be the same time across the trip, and be confirmed the at the end of the previous day in case there are any modifications for particular events.

