

CHERRY BLOSSOM TOURS JAPAN 2024

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JAPAN CUSTOM TOURS LIMITED

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CHERRY BLOSSOM TOURS

JAPAN 2024 - 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. For example, 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, while 2023 was around two weeks early. 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 2023 season we are limiting our schedule to two main tours. The first of these tours 15th March through to 28th March, and the Classic blossom tour starting on 2nd April through to 16th 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. (We are running a trip to Hakone on Friday 29th March as a pre-tour excursion.)

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 SUMMARY

CLASSIC BLOSSOM TOUR 30TH MARCH TO 14TH APRIL 2024.

The peak period for cherry blossom viewing usually starts in Tokyo at the end of March and into the beginning of April. Therefore, we include some of the famous and popular viewing locations around the city including the Shinjuku National Gardens and Ueno Park. For the early 2023 season we also included the Hamarikyū gardens that included green blossom as a contrast to the usual white and pink.

From Tokyo, the shinkansen (bullet train) carries us south to the historic capital of Kyoto for some of the famous sites around the city, including a day trip to the first capital of Japan at Nara. From Kyoto, we travel to Hiroshima and time on the beautiful island of Miyajima with its floating torii gate.

Leaving Hiroshima we head to the west coast city of Kanazawa and its famous Kenrokuen Gardens and castle buildings. We then head to the Japanese alps and Takayama before visiting Nagano prefecture for a stay at a traditional Japanese inn and onsen.

Rounding out the tour and chasing the cherry blossom north we visit the festival in the area around Sendai city. During our time in the city we also include a visit to the scenic Matsushima and a cruise around Matsushima Bay (considered one of the “three views of Japan”). The end of the tour sees us return to Tokyo on the Sunday.

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 or 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.

CLASSIC CHERRY BLOSSOM TOUR 30TH MARCH TO 14TH APRIL

JPY795,000 per person, 16 days, 15 nights, double/twin occupancy, JPY895,000 single occupancy.

Accommodation Dates	Location	Highlights	Cherry forecast First bloom and full bloom
Saturday 30th March to Tuesday 2nd April	Tokyo	Blossom viewing, at Ueno Park, Shinjuku National Gardens and other famous sites	23 March / 31 March
Tuesday 2nd April to Friday 5th April	Kyoto	Fushimi Inari Shrine, Nara day trip, Nijo Castle Kinkakuji (golden pavilion), cherry blossom festival.	25 March / 4 April
Friday 5th April to Sunday 7th April	Hiroshima	Miyajima Island, Mt Misen, Hiroshima Peace Museum, and Peace Park.	25 March / 4 April
Sunday 7th April to Tuesday 8th April	Kanazawa	Famous Kenrokuen Gardens and Kanazawa Castle	3 April / 9 April
Tuesday 8th April to Wednesday 10th April	Takayama	The World Heritage Site “gassho-style” houses of Shirakawa-go, Hida beef and historic mountain town.	10 April / 15 April
Wednesday 10th April to Friday 12th April	Nagano/Togura	Traditional Japanese inn experience with dining, geisha and onsen. Visit to Jigokudani Monkey Park.	10 April / 15 April
Friday 12th April to Sunday 14th April	Sendai	Cherry blossom at Ogawara with its 1000 cherry trees. Matsushima Bay - one of the “three views of Japan.”	10 April / 15 April
Sunday 14th April	Tokyo	Return to Tokyo	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
- ◇ Takayama: Hida Plaza Hotel or the Takayama Green Hotel.



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.

