



Classic Cherry Blossom Tour - 2nd April to 15th April 2017

1. Introduction:

Welcome to our Classic Cherry Blossom Tour 2017! This year we are running two tours in parallel. One group will be led by Patrick Harnett and the other by Wendy Harnett and Koji Arihisa (a new bi-lingual team member, originally from Fukuoka).

Running two tours simultaneously means that we can provide additional sightseeing options for members of both tour groups to choose from, depending on personal interests and preferences. For each day we have listed the default or planned activity, and also some options you might like to consider. Please note that some activities require us to pre-book them or to have a minimum number of participants (and in logistical terms we cannot offer too many simultaneous activities).

2. Airport arrivals:

We have guests arriving on 31st March, 1st April, 2nd April and 3rd April for this tour. In all cases we are making arrangements to meet everyone at the airport (either Haneda or Narita) and transfer you to your hotel in central Tokyo.

Upon arrival, 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 (which require a single station transfer).

3. Tour itinerary:

Sunday 2nd April Tokyo: Start the day with a visit to the Meiji Shrine. 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, we visit the nearby upmarket shopping district of Omotesando.

After lunch we will take you to Uneo Park: a famous Tokyo cherry blossom viewing spot. The park also contains several museums (including Tokyo National Museum) and Tokyo Zoo (the main attraction of which is a giant panda).

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Monday 3rd 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, visit Shinjuku and enjoy the view from the Tokyo Metropolitan Building (200 metres above ground level). There is also time to see the expansive Shinjuku National Gardens with its large number of cherry trees.

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 4th April Tokyo to Hiroshima: To maximise the opportunities for cherry blossom viewing, 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 5th 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).

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 6th 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...

Friday April 7th Kyoto: Visit the "Golden Pavilion" Kinkaku-ji in the north-west of the city and then Nijo Castle (*the palace buildings are one the best surviving examples of castle palace architecture of Japan's feudal era*), before heading to Heian Shrine and gardens.

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 8th Kyoto: Day trip to the World Heritage Site at Nara. At Nara there are both Todai-ji temple (with the world's largest bronze Buddha), and Kagusa Shinto shrine. Sacred deer roam the park and temple/shrine areas.

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 9th 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 and Kanazawa Castle. Enjoy local cuisine including fresh sushi and sashimi (optional) at the Omi-cho food market.

Monday 10th Kanazawa to Togura: Departing from Kanazawa, we travel into the Japanese Alps to Nagano, transfer to a local train bound for Togura (30 minutes) and then check in at Ryokan Kamesei. Have a private soak in the ryokan's onsen (hot spring baths) or explore the neighbourhood before enjoying an especially prepared traditional ryokan dinner. Accommodation here includes breakfast and dinner.

Tuesday 11th 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.

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.*
- *Visit Zenko-ji temple in Nagano, founded in the 7th century.*
- *There is a local cycling tour around Togura available for those that want to stay close to the ryokan (recommended!)*

Wednesday 12th April Togura to Sendai: Head north by shinkansen to follow the blossoming cherry trees. The city of Sendai is also famous for its scenery. After lunch we will visit the Ogawara

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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 13th April Sendai: Visit Matsushima Bay by ferry: one of the ‘Top three views’ in Japan (designated "special places of scenic beauty").

Sendai options:

- *Zuihoden (瑞鳳殿, Zuihōden) is the mausoleum of Date Masamune, one of the most powerful feudal lords of the Edo Period. Designed in the ornate style of the Momoyama Period, it features intricate woodwork and a rich variety of vivid colours*
- *A visit Rinno-ji temple and its Japanese garden*

Friday 14th 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 15th 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.

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The tourist Japan Rail Pass (JRP) covers the extensive Japan Rail network and is the most efficient and cost-effective method to transfer between the different places we are visiting. The pass covers either 7, 14 or 21 days. We will exchange JRP vouchers (previously obtained by us on your behalf) for the actual rail passes before we leave Tokyo to travel to Hiroshima. This exchange process (which we also do 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:

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: Hotel Mystays Shijo: A good, comfortable hotel near central Kyoto and its shopping district. This being peak tourist season, we have managed to secure a mix of twin and double rooms for our guests.

Hiroshima: Granvia Hiroshima. A comfortable hotel with a good variety of restaurants and excellent location 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.