



Sacred Japan

12 Days



Day 1 | Tokyo

今日は (Hello), Tokyo!

Arrive at Tokyo Haneda Airport (HND) or Narita International Airport (NRT) and relax with a scheduled transfer to our hotel in Tokyo.

Tonight, we meet our expert guide and gather for our inaugural Wild Women dinner in the glittery capital of Japan. Tokyo is the world's most populous metropolis. The city is nearly vibrating with neon and yet there are countless green spaces and parks. It's an endless mix of contemporary architecture, trendy cafes, electronic giants, anime, harajuku, Buddhist temples, Edo Castle and the spike of the 2,080 foot (634 m) Tokyo Skytree.

We find sleep easily after our first big introduction to the sprawling city that was formerly known as Edo.

Included Meals

Dinner

Accommodations

Washington Shinjuku Hotel

Travel

Approximately 1 hour (airport transfer to hotel)



Day 2 | Tsumago

The Nakasendo Samurai Trail

After breakfast we board an early express train to Shiojiri Station to begin our grounding walk on the ancient trail. This historical route was one of just two trails that vitally connected Edo to Kyoto over a 336-mile (540 km) expanse with 69 *shukubas* (post towns) serving as station-like rest stops for travelers.

On our soulful journey, we visit the post towns of Shiojiri and Nagiso and walk in the ghostly footsteps of monks, merchants and samurais along time-worn mossy cobblestones through rural villages. The Kiso Valley is fragrant with Hinoki cypress, Japanese umbrella pines and cedars and dotted with several shrines.

Today's journey ends in Tsumago, where we stay in a traditional *Minshuku* (Japanese-style inn). This old town is bewitching with its neatly restored lattice wooden houses, tiny shops, museums and car-free main road. Local laws prohibit any demonstration of modern life—including parked cars, phones and power lines.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Tatami, Tsumago

Please note: These traditional Japanese rooms have tatami (Japanese rush reed flooring) with sliding doors (*fusuma*) versus hinged doors.

Travel

Train (3 hours)

The Hike

5 miles (8 km), approximately 2–3 hours, depending on the group's pace



Day 3 | Magome

The Village of Kiso Valley

Today we walk from Tsumago to Magome on a trail that winds through immense forests, small villages along jade rice paddies and over Magome Pass (2,600 feet/790 m). We see the water wheel by the granary and the *Odaki* and *Medaki* Waterfall (Male and Female Waterfall). Legend has it that the waterfall's natural power will reinvigorate the body, mind and soul and transport us into another world.

In Magome, we reach the end of our Nakesendo route. Traditional wooden houses line the street like Tsumago, sandwiched between rustic tea houses and soba (Japanese noodles made from buckwheat flour) restaurants.

From here, we take a bus to Nakatsugawa station, board the express train to Nagoya and then transfer to the Kintetsu Nagoya express train to Ise and a short bus to our onsen hotel. Don't worry, our fearless guide will be navigating all the stations and transfers with us!

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Ancient Rest Inn Ikyu, Ise

The Walk

5 miles (8 km), which takes about 2–3 hours

Travel

25 minutes (bus), 3 hours (express train), 10 minutes (local bus)



Day 4 | Osatsu-cho

Women of the Sea

We have an early start to see the sunrise on the “Soul of Japan.” The Ise Grand Shrine is dedicated to the sun goddess Amaterasu.

Traveling by bus to Osatsu-cho, we meet the lean and mean Ama divers known as the “*ama-san*.” This group of free divers are celebrated for their unique culture, customs and exceptional pearl harvesting skills. *Ama* means “woman of the sea” in Japanese and these fearless pros routinely dive down to an astounding depth of 82 feet (25 m) without the aid of modern scuba equipment.

We chat with an Ama diver over tea or lunch (depending on our time) in an Ama hut and may have the opportunity to see one of these amazing women in action.

After this deep dive into extreme legendary female empowerment, we’ll board an express train to Kyoto and check into our hotel to refresh and relax before dinner.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Hotel Vista Premio, Kyoto (Kawaramachi)

Travel

30 minutes (bus), 45 minutes (bus), 2.5 hours (express train)



Day 5 | Kyoto

A Big Taste of Kyoto

We begin our day at Enko-ji. A meditative stroll through the Zen temple's gardens will be rich in color—either from autumn foliage or brilliant cherry blossoms.

Afterwards, we take a short train ride to Shimogamo Shrine. We have time to explore the immaculate grounds and impressive architecture of this UNESCO World Heritage Site.

For lunch, we sample traditional Kyoto cuisine like *Kyo-kaiseki* or *obanzai*. Kaiseki revolves around seasonality, freshness, simplicity and visual appeal. To be considered *obanzai*, half the ingredients must be grown or processed in Kyoto and consider the five core spiritual elements.

Satiated, we visit the Shimogamo Shrine to participate in a traditional tea ceremony experience at a tea house and visit Tadasu no Mori Forest next to the shrine. It's known for its 600-year-old trees. After a walk along the Kamogawa River, we return to our hotel.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Hotel Vista Premio, Kyoto (Kawaramachi)

Travel

Not far! It's a short train ride and then we travel by foot around Kyoto today.



Day 6 | Shiga

The Women Tea Farmers

After breakfast, we'll take a short train ride to the Asamiya tea experience. Here, the surreal green tea plantations completely cover the hillsides in a mesmerizing way.

During this deeply steeped visit, we meet local women tea farmers or women who are in the tea business. In their skilled company, we learn how to pick and roast the green tea leaves and the fine art of brewing a perfect cup of tea during a tasting session. The tasting will also help us discern the subtle differences and aroma of tea blends and how they are influenced by the seasons and weather conditions.

We have lunch at a nearby restaurant before visiting two pottery studios where we meet a talented female potter. It's a slow and easy walking tour around the village.

After we return to our hotel, we gather later for dinner and possibly another cup of green tea!

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Hotel Vista Premio, Kyoto (Kawaramachi)

Travel

15 minutes (train), quick shuttle to lunch



Day 7 | Misasa Onsen

Sacred Mitokusan

We take an express train into the countryside to Misasa Onsen. This region has been a sanctuary for those seeking restoration in the healing waters for over 850 years.

After lunch, if Mother Nature is cooperative, we embark on a short pilgrimage. This 1000-year-old temple is built miraculously into a rock face of Mount Mitoku at 2,953 feet (900 m). Mitokusan is considered one of the three most sacred sites of the Shugendo religion (a form of mountain asceticism-shamanism). This pilgrimage is said to purify the “six roots of perception.”

You can also opt to simply enjoy the serene setting of the lower temple complex. For those who would prefer to stay at ground level, you can join the priests and make tracings.

In the evening, we soak in the hot springs at our hotel, a neighboring facility or possibly the open-air public hot baths.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

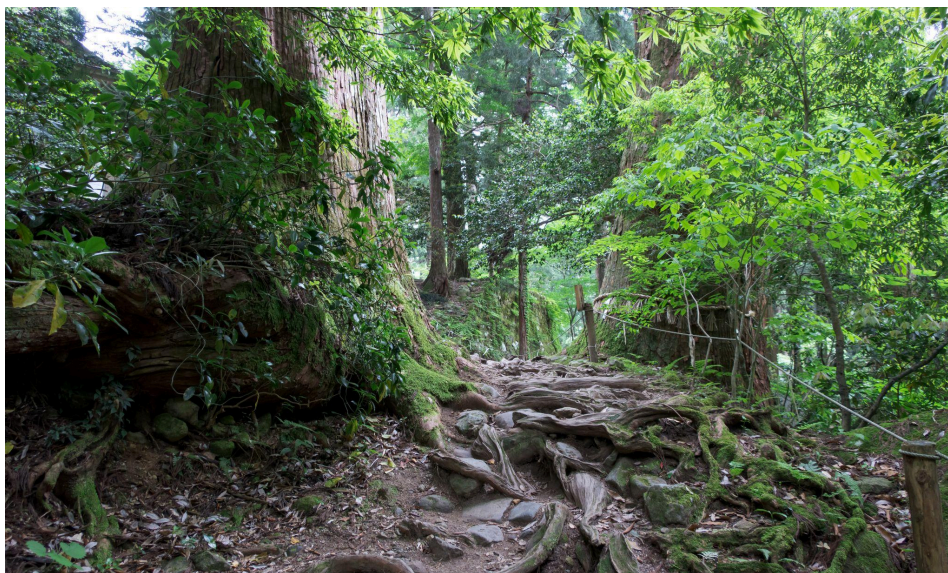
Misasakan

Travel

3.5 hours (express train)

The Hike

Due to the slippery, steep and highly technical nature of this hike, it is totally weather-dependent. Our guide will gauge the skill level of the group as tree roots and chains are used on this climb. If it's raining, the hike will not be possible.



Day 8 | Mount Daisen

Bikes and Bamboo

We travel by bus to an area near Daisen Waterfall where we hike around 5 miles (8 km) through the dramatic forest to Kawadoko. This area is coveted for its spectacular autumn colors when the forests completely transform.

Following an ancient nature trail used by mountain priests and warrior monks for several centuries we discover the truest description of *shinrin-yoku* or “forest bathing.” This practice emerged in Japan in the 1980s as an all-natural prescription for burn-out and to help inspire reconnection to wild spaces.

After lunch, we embark on a mostly downhill bike ride through swatches of forest, bamboo groves and farmland while taking in the captivating views of Mihonoseki Bay below. We can stop and visit a female potter who uses ancient Jomon era techniques in her work. Her studio is located in a unique complex of buildings made from natural materials such as grasses and bamboo.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Sanrakusou

The Activities

5 miles (8 km) or 4 hours (walking), 3 hours (biking)



Day 9 | Nishinoshima Island

Kuniga Coast Walking Trail

This morning, we have a private transfer to the port of Shichirui. Here, we board a ferry to the volcanic Nishinoshima Island. The Oki Islands and the Kuniga Coast cliffs are a designated UNESCO Global Geopark (sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with a holistic concept of protection, education and sustainable development).

After lunch in the port area, we travel by taxi to the top of the Kuniga Coast Walking Track, which follows along the edge of Matengai Cliff at 843 feet (257 m) above the Sea of Japan. The short trail cuts through cow and horse pastures to Tsūtenkyō Arch, Kuniga Bay and Kuniga Shrine.

In the port area we meet a special group of smiley senior women who play taiko drums and make traditional crafts together. We can try our hand at drumming. A short inter-island ferry takes us to Ama Island to our hotel.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Entō Hotel

Travel

1 hour (private shuttle), 2.5 hours (ferry), 1.5 hours (1.2 miles/2 km walking), 7 minutes (ferry)



Day 10 | Oki Islands

Cycling the Oki Islands

After breakfast we explore this wind and wave-sculpted archipelago in the Sea of Japan by bicycle (or e-bike) and meet women who are entrepreneurial and environmental stewards of this UNESCO designated Global Geopark. The cluster of islands are part of the Daisen-Oki National Park and only four of the Oki Islands are inhabited.

Activities here may include making traditional crafts or visiting an organic vegetable or sea cucumber farm. During the cycling tour, we have lunch midway with a group of local women working hard to maintain cultural traditions while also making positive, sustainable changes.

The Oki diet is a testament to this as the islanders' menu is based wholly on the season with a steadfast focus on life led in rhythm with nature. Fish, shellfish and seaweed are mainstays; wagyu beef dominates menus too. The pure water springs are a lifeline to rice and Japanese sake production on the island.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Entô Hotel

Travel

4 hours (biking)



Day 11 | Tokyo

Sushi Roll

In the morning, we take a two-hour ferry ride to the mainland and then transfer to the Yonago Airport to catch our flight to Tokyo.

With full memory cards and a highlight reel spooling in our heads and hearts, we'll transfer to our hotel to refresh and reset. Later, we gather for an unforgettable dinner at Tsurutokame, where all the chefs are female! It's a lively open kitchen serving the best seasonal ingredients for vegans and fresh fish lovers alike!

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Washington Shinjuku Hotel

Travel

2 hours (ferry), 30 minutes (car), 1.5 hours (flight to Tokyo)



Day 12 | Tokyo

決別 (Goodbye), Tokyo

After an early breakfast, we take a group transfer to Tokyo Haneda International Airport (HND) or Narita International Airport (NRT). As we squeeze each other goodbye and share a few laughs and tears, it's time to exchange contact info, photos and ideas for a reunion! Where next? Another pilgrimage perhaps?

Included Meals

Breakfast



Trip Details

Know Before You Go

For all of the logistical details you'll need to know prior to departure—including the packing list, arrival and departure details and suggested tipping information, click [HERE](#).

Itinerary version as of April 17, 2024.