

Land of Fire

Kyoto, Kyushu & Yakushima

15 days guided walking tour

Adventures in JAPAN



Aso caldera seen from Kuju Highlands

15 days guided walking tour visiting Kyoto, Hiroshima, and Japan's southern island of Kyushu. Accommodation in family-run minshuku, traditional ryokan, mountain lodges and hotels.

Highlights

Imperial Kyoto – Mount Aso, one of the world's largest active volcanoes – Samurai houses and castle at Obi – Traditional Yokagura dances at Takachiho – Hot sand baths on the beach – Yakushima Island UNESCO World Heritage site – Hiroshima – Accommodation in traditional ryokan – natural hot spring baths – gentle walks along country paths

Introduction We will start our journey in Kyoto, seeing the former imperial capital and repositories of much of Japan's cultural heritage. Visits to grand temples and shrines will be balanced with easy walking in the Nara plain south of Kyoto, before continuing to Japan's southern island of Kyushu. It is considered the cradle of Japanese civilization, and several locations connected with the Japanese creation myths feature on our journey. Kyushu is also known for its numerous active volcanoes, and we will explore the Kuju and Kirishima ranges, as well as the spectacular island of Yakushima to the south, a national park and UNESCO World Heritage site. A natural by-product of the volcanoes are 'onsen', or hot springs, and we will enjoy many relaxing dips in their soothing waters, as well as the unforgettable hot sand baths at Yamakawa where you will be buried in sand heated by the naturally-occurring hot spring water. In the Kuju Highlands we hike to our remote natural hot spring lodge. Mount Aso, the world's largest volcanic caldera, with some lovely walking, comes next. At Takachiho, the Yokagura dances performed at the shrine enact the Japanese creation myth. After some gentle cycling in the countryside, and a visit to the stunning gorge, we will travel to the samurai houses of Obi and try fresh lobster at a family-run inn. At Kagoshima we will visit the nearby town of Ibusuki to enjoy a hot sand bath on the beach – one of the highlights of this journey.

From Kagoshima we take a ferry to the island of Yakushima. A national park and UNESCO World Heritage site, this island is home to giant Yakusugi cedars, some of them thousands of years old. The island is home to the endemic yakushika deer, and yakuzaru macaque, and we may catch a glimpse or discover them as well as the breathtaking scenery of Yakushima through a lovely hike in the interior of the island. After eating our fill of locally caught fish and enjoying the local hospitality, we head back to the mainland and ride the bullet train to Hiroshima. Now a vibrant city, Hiroshima has almost no trace of its dark past, except the Peace Park and the 'A-Bomb dome', a building which survived the explosion. Finally, we head to Osaka, and with your guide we celebrate a wonderful trip with a farewell dinner.

DAY 1 MEET IN KYOTO

Arrive at Kansai International Airport, meet your tour leader, and transfer to Kyoto. There will be a welcome dinner at a restaurant in the centre of the city.

DAY 2 KYOTO

A full day to discover the ancient capital of Kyoto. We begin with a walk along the Philosopher's path to Nanzen-ji Temple and then continue to Nijo Castle, originally the Kyoto residence for the Tokugawa Shoguns in the 17th century. Built in the 'momoyama' style, the wooden floors creak when walked on, apparently a security measure against intruders. After lunch, we will visit Nishiki market, to

see the fish, crab, pickles, tea, sweets and other foodstuffs on display.

DAY 3 YAMANOBE-NO-MICHI PATH

(Walking 10 miles: 4.5 hours)
We take a short train ride from Kyoto to Miwa shrine near Nara, and then walk along the 'Yamanobe-no-michi', literally the 'path beside the mountain'. This leads between small villages and farming land along the edge of the Yamato Plain where it meets low hills. The path is mostly level with a few slopes. We will stop for a lunch of noodles at one of the small restaurants along the way. From Sakurai, after we finish the walk, we will take the train

Dates & Prices

2010 £2690

13 - 27 April
9 - 23 October

2011 £2690

2 - 16 April
3 - 17 October

Included

all transportation between destinations
accommodation
entrance fees
full-time services of tour leader
all breakfasts & 9 evening meals

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive Kyoto **2** Kyoto sightseeing
3 Walking on 'yamanobe-nomichi' **4** Beppu & hiking in Kuju **5** Travel to Mount Aso & Takachiho **6** Takachiho Gorge **7** Visit Obi
8 Kagoshima sightseeing **9** Ibusuki hot sand baths **10** Yakushima Island UNESCO World Heritage site **11** Hiking in Yakushima **12** Hot springs and sightseeing on Yakushima **13** Bullet train to Hiroshima **14** Hiroshima sightseeing, transfer to Osaka **15** Tour ends



to Osaka, and if there is time, visit a local 'sentou' public bath. A delightful insight into Japanese neighbourhood life. In the years before most houses had private baths families would visit the sentou every evening, and exchange gossip with the neighbours. Following a bath and an optional sauna, we will transfer to Osaka's ferry port, and board our ferry for the overnight journey to Kyushu, through the Seto Inland Sea. On board, we have single or twin-bedded first class cabins.



Yakushima Island



Paper umbrellas, Obi



Macaques, Yakushima

DAY 4 BEPPU & KUJU

(Hiking 4 miles: 3 hours)

Arriving in Beppu by sea is a dramatic and memorable experience. The city is surrounded by mountains, and steam from the abundant hot springs rises skyward to give it an otherworldly feel. After disembarking, we have breakfast at a local restaurant and there is the option of a refreshing dip in one of the hot springs.

We then board a bus for the 90 minute journey to the Kuju area, a beautiful range of volcanoes where we will stay at a remote hot spring lodge. From the trailhead we hike through the volcanic landscape to the remote Hokkein Onsen, where a lodge has tapped the nearby hot spring to offer hikers a relaxing soak after walking. Dinner and overnight at lodge.

DAY 5 ASO & TAKACHIHO

(Hiking & walking 7 miles: approximately 6 hours)

Leaving the mountain lodge, we will hike out by a different path, passing nearby Kujū-dake peak and Naka-dake peak and arriving back at the trailhead. We will then continue by bus to the Aso area. Aso is the largest active volcano in Japan, and one of the largest in the world. The caldera, which was formed around 300,000 years ago in a cataclysmic eruption, is around 25km in diameter. The peaks of Taka-dake and Naka-dake punctuate this massive highland area and dominate the skyline. We take a relaxed walk amongst rice fields on the southern part of the Aso caldera, and then take a short bus ride to Takachiho, where we will stay for two nights. Dinner and overnight at ryokan.



Hot sand baths, Yamakawa

DAY 6 TAKACHIHO & YOKAGURA DANCES

After breakfast at the ryokan, we will rent bicycles, and take a leisurely ride along small lanes in the nearby countryside, to the shrine of Amanoiwado shrine, literally the 'Shrine of the Sun God'. From there, we will visit Takachiho gorge, which the town of Takachiho sits astride. It features a number of strange rock formations created by volcanic activity, which have become part of local folklore and the Japanese national creation myth. You will take a short walk along the gorge, and have a lunch at a small teahouse of sansai (mountain vegetables), grilled rainbow trout and grilled chicken, accompanied by shochu, a spirit made from sweet potato heated inside bamboo. You will have dinner at the ryokan, and then visit Takachiho shrine to see the Yokagura, sacred dances which tell the mythical story of Japan's creation.

DAY 7 OBI

Today we will travel by bus to Nobeoka, and board the train to travel along the Miyazaki coast to the lovely town of Obi, south of Miyazaki city. Along the way you will see the spectacular Nichinan coast. Obi, once home to a formidable castle built by the Ito clan, is now a well-preserved town with several whitewashed samurai houses lining its main street,

and colourful carp swimming in culverts beside the small streets. You will visit the former residence of the Ito clan and wander the backstreets stopping in a small teashop to enjoy green tea and sweets. Dinner and overnight in ryokan.

DAY 8 KAGOSHIMA

Leaving Obi, we will travel to the city of Kagoshima, dramatically situated on Kagoshima Bay opposite Sakurajima, an active volcano. Kagoshima used to be the home of the Shimazu clan, southern Kyushu's most powerful feudal family, and we will visit Sangen-en, their lovely villa and gardens which has Sakurajima across the bay as an impressive backdrop.

The city has a culture and cuisine distinct from other parts of Japan, a result of the sub-tropical climate and long distance from Tokyo. Shochu, a spirit usually made from sweet potato is favoured over sake, and slow-baked 'kurobuta' (a breed of Berkshire pig) as well as grilled bonito (skipjack tuna) are two of the typical local dishes. Overnight in hotel.

DAY 9 IBUSUKI & HOT SAND BATHS

You will travel south this morning, by train along Kagoshima Bay, to the seaside town of Ibusuki, where thermally-heated mineral water bubbles up through the black volcanic sand on the beach. Locals mix the sand to ensure a steady temperature, and you will be able to wear a cotton yukata robe to sit in the warm sand and be covered. Very relaxing!

Kagoshima Bay is a beautiful natural harbour, crowned at one end by Kaimondake, the 'little-Fuji' of Satsuma. We will then return to Kagoshima for dinner.

DAY 10 TRAVEL TO YAKUSHIMA ISLAND

(Walking: 3 miles, approximately 1.5 hours)

From Kagoshima we travel by ferry to Yakushima Island, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The small population lives around the coast of this mountainous island, while the interior is almost totally undeveloped. Giant cedar – yakusugi – stand tall in the moss-laden forest, some of them thousands of years old. Two other endemic species are found here; the yakushika deer, and yakuzaru macaque. Around the coast are stunning beaches, and hot springs. We will stay at a local guesthouse to enjoy the local hospitality and evening meals prepared from the day's catch.

DAY 11 YAKUSHIMA ISLAND

(Walking 12 miles: 6-8 hours)

We have a full day on Yakushima. We will hike into the interior, walking amongst the giant yakusugi trees, and if we are lucky spot some of the macaques. The oldest tree on Yakushima has been dated as 3,000 years old, and many of the trees have huge trunks, wider than a car. The centre of the island is a temperate rain-forest, and the highest peak on Yakushima is the tallest mountain in the south of Japan. It's a unique ecosystem and has escaped any significant development. The stunning Shiratani Unsuikyo ravine is a beautiful world of moss-covered boulders and majestic yakusugi trees. We will return by bus to our guesthouse in the evening.

DAY 12 YAKUSHIMA ISLAND

Our second day on Yakushima will be spent visiting some of the lovely beaches and one of the most spectacular hot springs in Japan. The Hirauchi Kaichu hot spring is a natural hot spring bath built into the rocks lapped by the waves.

DAY 13 HIROSHIMA

Leaving Yakushima by ferry, we board the shinkansen in Kagoshima and travel to Hiroshima. Famous throughout the world as the site of the first use of atomic weapons, Hiroshima is today a vibrant, modern city. The city never forgets its passed, however, and there are important memorials to that day including the A-bomb dome and the Peace Memorial and museum. We check-in to our hotel and there will be free time before dinner.

DAY 14 OSAKA

We will take a leisurely sightseeing walk in the morning around central Hiroshima, and after lunch we board the bullet train for our short journey to Osaka. There will be free time to relax and perhaps shop for souvenirs, and in the evening there will be a farewell dinner.

DAY 15 TOUR ENDS

On our final day we say farewell. Your guide will help you transfer to Osaka's Kansai airport for your flight home, or you may like to stay a few day's longer.

General Information

Meet/Depart

Kyoto (Kansai International Airport)/Osaka

Group Size

5 to 12

Walking level

moderate - 6 days of walking from 2 to 8 hours per day on flat paths and mountain trails with some moderate ascents.

Mode of travel

Trains (shinkansen 'bullet train' and local), plane, bus, and on foot

Tour leader

Full time services of a bilingual tour leader.

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