

Nakasendo Trail

Tokyo to Kyoto & Nara

12 days guided walking tour

Adventures in
JAPAN



Tsumago village on the Nakasendo trail

12 days guided village-to-village walking tour from Tokyo to Kyoto.
Accommodation in family-run minshuku, traditional ryokan, shukubo (pilgrims lodges) and hotels.

Dates & Prices

2010 £2445

25 October - 5 November

2011 £2445

18 - 29 April

10 - 21 May

26 July - 6 August

25 October - 5 November

Included

all transportation between destinations
accommodation & entrance fees
full-time services of tour leader
all breakfasts + 7 evening meals

Itinerary

Day 1 Meet Tokyo **2** Sightseeing in Tokyo
3 Train to Shiojiri & walk along Nakasendo to Narai **4** Walk on Nakasendo, stay at hot spring ryokan **5** Walking to Tsumago post town
6 Walk to Magome, then by train to Nara
7 Visit Todai-ji temple and Nara Park **8** By road to Yoshino, walking **9** Train to Mount Koya, visit Okunoin cemetery **10** visit Kongo-buji temple, train to Kyoto **11** Golden Pavilion & Ryōan-ji rock garden **12** Tour ends

Highlights

Four days of village-to-village walking on the old Nakasendo trail – Imperial Nara and Kyoto – modern Tokyo - the mountaintop village of Yoshino - visit sacred Mount Koya and stay in a shukubo (temple lodging) – relax in the bath at a lovely hot spring ryokan – travel on the bullet train

Introduction

The Nakasendo trail linked Kyoto to Tokyo during Japan's feudal period. It was the 'road through the mountains' travelled by feudal lords and their retinues, samurai, merchants, and travelers. Along the route were 69 'post towns', where weary travelers could rest before continuing on the next leg. Our journey will start in Tokyo, known as Edo during Japan's period of rule by the Shoguns. We will then spend three days walking along the Nakasendo. By day we will walk along the ancient route as it passes through beautifully-preserved villages along an easy path, and by evening we will stay in traditional country inns enjoying exquisite regional cuisine prepared from the freshest ingredients, soak in natural hot springs, and enjoy the warm hospitality of our hosts. Enjoy bathing in hot spring water after a day on the trails! We'll then continue by bullet train to Nara, to explore the former imperial capital, wander the old town and see the famous Todaiji temple, Nara park. From Nara we will continue to Yoshino, a beautiful village famous for its cherry blossoms in springtime and also for its 'warrior' monks. We will walk in the hills and relax in the evening in a lovely ryokan. After Yoshino we visit Mount Koya, in the mountains of the Kii Peninsula, a temple complex founded in the 9th century by the monk Kobo Daishi, where we will stay in a 'shukubo' (temple lodging), enjoying the vegetarian shojin-ryōri cuisine. Finally, we travel by train to Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan, at the western end of the Nakasendo, with time to explore some of the most important temples and shrines, as well as the craft shops and food markets. Our tour ends here and we say farewell.



DAY 1 MEET IN TOKYO

Arrive at Narita International Airport, be met by your tour leader, and transfer to Tokyo. Alternatively meet at the hotel at 7pm. There will be a welcome dinner at a nearby restaurant.

DAY 2 SIGHTSEEING IN TOKYO

Our first full day in Japan will be spent on a walking tour of Tokyo, starting at Nihonbashi (the 'Japan Bridge') considered to be the 'centre of Japan' and the zero marker point for all Japan's main roads since the Edo period. Afterwards, we visit Ueno and the Tokyo National Museum, as well as the grand Meiji shrine and the fashionable Harajuku district. In the evening your tour leader will be on hand to help you with ordering dinner.

DAY 3 NAKASENDO TRAIL DAY 1

(5 miles walking: approximately 3 hours)

Our journey through rural Japan begins with a journey from Tokyo to the remote Kiso valley. Over the next three days we will walk by day from village to village, staying by night in small, family-run country inns (ryokan). Our luggage will be taken by road allowing us to carry just a light daypack. After a lunch of buckwheat noodles in the local town of Shiojiri, we will walk 5 miles to Narai from Niekawa, first of 11 'post-towns' along the Kiso valley section of the Nakasendo. Post-towns were resting places, where travelers could find accommodation and food as they walked between Kyoto and Edo (as Tokyo was then called). Niekawa is known for its locally-produced lacquer ware, and there may be a chance to see the craftsmen at work. Stay in Narai, a beautifully-preserved post-town. Our lodgings will be an atmospheric traditional ryokan.

DAY 4 NAKASENDO TRAIL DAY 2

(5 miles walking: approximately 3 hours)

On our second day there will be a 5-mile walk from Narai to Yabuhara over Torii Pass and then we will continue by train to Kiso-Fukushima. There we will stay in a lovely traditional ryokan with its own natural hot spring. Soak in the indoor baths made of cypress wood or try the outdoor baths.

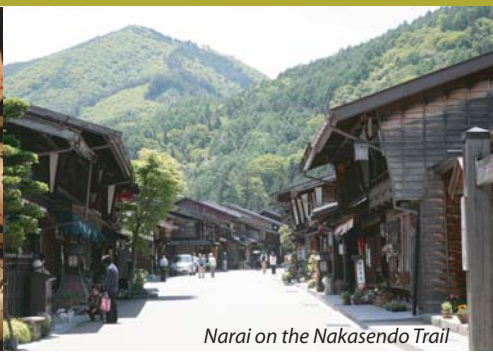
DAY 5 NAKASENDO TRAIL DAY 3

(12 miles walking: approximately 5 hours)

We will transfer from Kiso-Fukushima to Nojiri by train, and then walk 12 miles along the Nakasendo Way to Tsumago. Only twenty years ago it was falling into disrepair, but through a concerted effort of its residents, it has been saved and restored. We arrive in the small village of Tsumago in the afternoon, passing along the way through delightful small villages and rice fields.



Lanterns at Yasaka Shrine, Kyoto



Narai on the Nakasendo Trail



Golden Pavilion, Kyoto

DAY 6 MAGOME AND TRANSFER TO NARA
(4 miles walking: approximately 2.5 hours)

From Tsumago we will walk the 4 miles to Magome, our last stop in the Kiso Valley. You will have lunch in Magome and time to explore the many small shops. We will transfer by train to Nara. We'll check-in to our hotel and enjoy dinner in a nearby restaurant.



DAY 7 NARA

In the morning we will have a guided walk in Nara. Many of Japan's greatest cultural treasures are concentrated in and around the city, with eight UNESCO World Heritage sites. The Todaiji temple, Nigatsu-do and Sangatsu-do halls, Kasuga shrine, Shinyakushi-ji temple, Kofuku-ji temple, Shosoin treasure house, and Isuien garden are all in or near Nara Park. The park is also home to a thousand or more free-roaming deer. Todaiji's Daibutsu-den is the largest wooden building in the world, and houses a 16-metre tall bronze image of the cosmic Dainichi buddha, containing 437 tonnes of bronze and 130kg of gold. Prior to being rebuilt three hundred years ago, the awesome structure was even bigger than it is today. There will be time to relax or wander through the old town.



'Matcha' powdered green tea

DAY 8 TRANSFER TO YOSHINO

From Nara our journey takes us to the ridge top village of Yoshino, and a comfortable ryokan. We will visit Mikumari Shrine and Kinpusenji Temple (main temple of the Shugendo sect of mountain monks), and explore the area on foot.



Meeting on the trail

DAY 9 MOUNT KOYA

From Yoshino we will take the scenic train to Mount Koya, situated in a bowl-shaped valley filled with stands of cedar trees 800 metres up in the mountains of the Kii Peninsula. Since the 9th century, when the monk Kukai (also known as Kobo Daishi) founded the first temple and the shingon sect of Buddhism, Mount Koya has been a place of religious devotion and ceremony. Today there are more than 100 monasteries, many of which have



Evening meal at a ryokan

shukubo (temple lodgings). We will stay in one of the elegant temples, run by the monks, and dine on shojin-ryori (Buddhist vegetarian cuisine). There will be a guided walk through the vast Okuno-in cemetery, with thousands of graves and memorials to feudal lords and other past luminaries.



Bamboo forest

DAY 10 KYOTO

There will be the opportunity to get up early and join the Buddhist morning service if you wish. Afterwards, we will visit Kongobu-ji temple; the head temple of the Shingon sect. After lunch, we will travel by train to Kyoto. After checking-in at the hotel, we can enjoy an evening walk in Gion, Kyoto's geisha district and there is always the possibility of seeing a geisha or maiko (apprentice geisha) making their way through the narrow streets. There will be a half-day walking tour this morning.

DAY 11 KYOTO

First of all we will visit the Sanjo-ohashi Bridge, the western end of the Nakasendo Trail. From there, we will visit Ryoan-ji, with its famous rock garden of raked gravel and 15 moss-covered boulders. It is not possible to see all 15 boulders at once from any place in the garden. It is said that if you can see all 15 you have achieved enlightenment. Afterwards, we will visit the famous Kinkaku-ji, also known as the Golden Pavilion, originally built by the Ashikaga Shogun in the 15th century as a place of contemplation and rest. After lunch, there will be free time. There will be free time in the afternoon so you can explore the area further or shop for crafts.

DAY 12 KYOTO TOUR ENDS

On our final day, we will say farewell in Kyoto, or you may like to stay a few days longer.



'Oyako-don' rice bowl

General Information

Meet/Depart

Tokyo (Narita International Airport)/Kyoto

Group Size

5 to 12

Walking level

Easy/moderate - 4 days of village-to-village walking and from 2 to 5 hours per day

Mode of travel

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

Tour leader

Full time services of an English/Japanese-speaking tour leader.

Extending your trip

We are happy to book pre or post-tour accommodation throughout Japan.

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