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EXPERIENCE **JAPAN**

SAKURA CHERRY BLOSSOMS • MARCH 19 - APRIL 2, 2024
15 DAYS • 27 MEALS • ESCORTED BY MARK AITCHISON

Young maiko, an apprentice geisha in Kyoto

Japan, the world's third-largest economic powerhouse, remains a captivating enigma to many outsiders. Renowned for its dominance in electronics, automobiles, and heavy industry, we often overlook the fascinating depths of its history, culture, architecture, and arts. Japan is a multifaceted gem, with neon-lit modern cities, alpine villages nestled amidst mountain regions with pastoral sceneries that appear untouched by the modern world, and relics of an imperial and feudal past, preserved for all to see. Join us as we explore this nation during Sakura season, when the cherry trees burst forth in a glorious display of colour. In Japan, spring arrives early, and for approximately two weeks, millions of trees teem with new life (though, of course, this timing depends on nature). Experience the diverse landscapes of Japan on this journey, from bustling cities like Tokyo and Hiroshima to tranquil mountain retreats like Hakone, Takayama, and Nagano. Discover the historical and religious relics of Kyoto, Japan's Imperial capital for nearly 1,000 years, and marvel at the temples of Nara. Immerse yourself in the timeless traditions of a ryokan (traditional inn) and be enchanted by the picture-perfect sights of several Japanese gardens.



Inclusive Features

- Return economy group airfare from Canada to Narita (Tokyo)
- 13 nights in first-class hotels as indicated or similar, including 1 night in a traditional ryokan, a Japanese country inn
- 27 meals included as noted in the itinerary (B - 13 Breakfasts, L - 6 Lunches, D - 8 Dinners) featuring traditional Japanese dishes
- Transfers and intercity transportation by private coach and rail service, as indicated
- Services of your tour escort plus our professional Japanese tour guide and local guides
- All surcharges, taxes, and fees for included services
- Airport transfers in Canada or equivalent value with purchase of group airfare

Journey Leader

Reverend **Mark Aitchison** and his life partner, Pattie, have escorted groups to Israel, Peru, South Africa, China, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, Turkey, Egypt and Greece. Mark spent the last 46 years as a pastoral minister in the United Church of Canada, serving in rural and urban charges in Ontario and Saskatchewan. During his ministry he has also served in interim postings in Edinburgh, Scotland, and Newcastle, Australia. He was the Senior Minister at Islington United Church, Toronto, for 24 years before he retired in December 2016. Currently, he serves at the congregation of Metropolitan United Church in Toronto, where he is the Minister of Pastoral Care. Mark and Pattie are very excited about this journey in Japan and look forward to sharing this experience with you.



Tour Highlights

- Experience Japan during the lovely Sakura season when the cherry blossoms are in full bloom
- Komagatake Ropeway with scenic views of Hakone
- Step into the past at the mountain village of Shirakawago, a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- Enjoy a relaxing Japanese night in a traditional Ryokan (inn)
- Visit one of Japan's largest and most famous gardens, Kenroku-en, the "Garden of Six Qualities"
- Enjoy a tea ceremony at Matsuri-no-Mori Museum
- Tour Hiroshima and nearby Miyajima island
- Visit Himeji Castle, Kyoto's Nijo Castle, and Nara plus other UNESCO World Heritage sites
- Discover the mountainous interior of Japan where life seems unchanged from centuries past
- Enjoy Japan's extensive and very efficient rail system, including bullet train rides
- Visit the Golden Pavilion (Kinkaku-ji Temple) in Kyoto

Book With Confidence

For peace of mind, your deposit for this journey is fully refundable until:

December 12, 2023



Views of the iconic Mt. Fuji

MAR 19, Tuesday **Depart Canada**

Tour members from across Canada will gather in Vancouver for the overnight flight to Narita (Tokyo).

MAR 20, Wednesday **Tokyo, Japan**

Arriving in Tokyo this afternoon, we will transfer to our hotel, located in the centre of Tokyo. After settling in, we gather for an opportunity to meet our fellow travellers and enjoy a relaxed buffet dinner. **Tokyo Prince** (3 nights) BD

MAR 21, Thursday **Tokyo**

Our full day city exploration will begin with a visit to the Imperial Palace Eastern Gardens, home to 210,000 square meters of green space that is open to the public. Stroll through the Ginza district, the most expensive real estate in the world, with some free time to explore. Witness the world's busiest intersection, Shibuya Crossing, where hundreds of people cross from all directions every time the signal changes. After enjoying a lunch of Kushiage (fried meat and vegetables on bamboo skewers) we proceed to the Tokyo Skytree to visit the top level for an awe-inspiring view of the city. We may even see Mt. Fuji on a clear day. At Asakusa, explore the vibrant streets of Nakamise-dori, the Senso-ji Buddhist temple, and learn about Japan's unique religious practices, with a photo stop at the Asakusa Shinto shrine. BL

MAR 22, Friday **Kamakura**

Travel by local train to Kamakura, the 13th century capital and home to countless poets and artists. Discover iconic landmarks during a walking tour, such as the Kotoku-in temple, home to a 40-foot bronze Buddha, the Hasekannon temple, and the Tsurugaoka Hachimangu shrine. Stroll along the colourful Komachi-dori street with its many shops. BL

MAR 23, Saturday **Mt. Fuji / Hakone / Nagano**

Departing Tokyo, we drive south, skirting the Japanese alps before driving up the slopes of Mt. Fuji (weather permitting). Enjoy a delightful cruise on Lake Ashi and take the Komagatake Ropeway for scenic views of Hakone. Next is Nagano for the night, where we step into another world, relaxing in a cotton yukata (dressing gown) by the natural hot springs, enjoying meals in a tatami-matted room and sleeping on a traditional futon.

Senjukaku Ryokan (1 night) BD

MAR 24, Sunday **Matsumoto / Takayama**

Our journey continues via Matsumoto, noted for its majestic six-storey castle, to the mountain village of Takayama. Visit the Hida Folk Village, a living museum of rural homes and barns, where we will experience the traditional lifestyles of a bygone era. Later we will visit the Matsuri-no-Mori Museum to learn about the art of tea and to experience a traditional Japanese tea ceremony. The museum has a collection of massive yatai (parade floats) created for the annual harvest festival.

Hotel Associa Takayama Resort (2 nights) BD

MAR 25, Monday **Takayama**

This morning, join a comprehensive walking tour exploring this delightful small city. Visits include the Miyagawa Morning Market, the traditional wooden houses and shops of Kami Sannomachi street and Kusakabe Folk Museum. The latter was formerly the residence of the Kusakabe family and has been designated an important cultural property. We'll also visit Takayama Jinya, the former regional headquarters of the Tokugawa Shogunate. BD



Magnificent Himeji Castle

MAR 26, Tuesday **Shirakawago / Kanazawa**

Our first stop will be at the mountain village of Shirakawago, a UNESCO World Heritage Site noted for its traditional gassho-zukuri (thatched roof) farm houses, some of which are over 250 years old. Visit the residence of the Iwase family, with its magnificent thatched roof home. Later visit Gokayama to observe the intricate and involved process of creating traditional Japanese paper (Washi).

Daiwa Roynet Hotel (1 night) BD

MAR 27, Wednesday **Kanazawa / Hiroshima**

Walk through one of Japan's most famous gardens, Kenroku-en, the "Garden of Six Qualities". It features magnificent landscaping, flowering trees, and lakes. With some good fortune, we might be able to enjoy the enchanting colours of the cherry blossoms. Visit the Hakuichi Gold Leaf Museum with a demonstration explaining the art of gold leaf application before travelling by bullet train to Hiroshima, an important southern city. Box lunch will be provided for the train ride.

Grand Prince Hotel Hiroshima (2 nights) BL

MAR 28, Thursday **Miyajima**

Hiroshima is best remembered for the event of August 6, 1945 when the atomic bomb decimated the city and surrounding area. The Peace Memorial Museum and Peace Memorial Park are sobering testaments to the event and its aftermath. Time permitting, we shall visit Shukkeien garden to enjoy the cherry blossoms or for a quiet walk with time to reflect. After an Okonomiyaki lunch, cross the Inland Sea by ferry to Miyajima Island, considered to be one of the top three scenic experiences in Japan. On the island, we will ride the cable car to enjoy the magnificent views from the peak and visit the Itsukushima-jinja shrine dating from 1168AD. BL

MAR 29, Friday **Himeji / Kyoto**

Travel by bullet train to Himeji to see the exterior of Himeji Castle, a 400 year old UNESCO World Heritage Site and national treasure. Continue by coach to historic Kyoto, capital of Japan for almost 1,000 years, until 1868. This delightful city conjures up classic images: streets of little wooden houses, geta (wooden sandals) clicking on the cobblestones, geisha in brightly coloured silk, tea ceremonies, traditional gardens, and more.

Kyoto Yamashina Hotel Sanraku (3 nights) BLD

MAR 30, Saturday**Kyoto**

Our day begins with a walk through the unique Arashiyama Bamboo Grove, one of Kyoto's most popular attractions, followed by the Kinkaku-ji temple, or Golden Pavilion. The three-story pagoda, covered in gold foil, is set next to a tranquil reflecting pool and surrounded by gardens and pine forests. Nearby are the gardens and palace of Nijo Castle, a UNESCO Site noted for the great Ninomaru Wing and Audience Hall with its nightingale floors. In Fushimi we will explore the gardens of the Inari Shinto shrine with its series of vermilion Torii gates and delightful cherry trees leading up to the slopes of Mt. Inari. With good fortune and good weather, this will be a most enchanting day with lots of colours to enjoy. Tonight enjoy a special Kaiseki dinner at a local restaurant. BD

MAR 31, Sunday**Nara**

Nara is one of the most gracious and sacred centres in Japan. Following an ancient tradition, the Kasuga Taisha shrine, founded in the 8th century to protect the capital, is rebuilt every 20 years. In the temple grounds you will find around 3,000 stone lanterns which are lit twice a year, during special festivals. At Todaiji temple, we visit Daibutsuden Hall, once the largest wooden building in the world, enshrining a great bronze seated Buddha. Before returning to Kyoto, we shall enjoy a stroll through the Deer Park. This afternoon we will walk through the Higashiyama District, with its narrow cobblestone streets and tiny shops, and into the Gion, where geisha still live and work. BL

APR 1, Monday**Kyoto / Tokyo**

Most of today is at leisure with ample time to explore this wondrous former capital. Take the opportunity to shop in the huge complex by Central Station or at the Kyoto Handicraft Centre. Discover the wonders of the Nishiki food market, the National Museum or the Kyoto Imperial Palace. If you want more religious sites, there are a host of unique temples throughout Kyoto. Late this afternoon, we travel by bullet train to Tokyo. Gather tonight for our Farewell Shabu-Shabu dinner. **Hotel JAL City Toyosu** (1 night) BD

APR 2, Tuesday**Tokyo / Canada**

Following a leisurely start, we will transfer to Narita airport to catch our flights bound for Canada, arriving home the same day. B

CT Rating 3.5/5 - Challenging: This journey is designed to provide an in depth exploration of all that is Japanese. It will feature an overnight in a Japanese ryokan (traditional inn), sleeping and eating in tatami-matted rooms, as well as a variety of different meals featuring traditional Japanese cuisine. By its nature, this journey involves a lot of walking, with some long walks and numerous visits involving many steps. To fully enjoy this journey, members should be fully mobile with **no walking limitations** and be in good physical health.

Special Note: For two nights our luggage will be unavailable to us. Please bring a small overnight bag to carry clothes and other personal items for these occasions. Porters may not be available at all hotels and some visits may need to be adjusted or revised.

Tour Cost in Canadian Dollars per person

Land Only (Join / Leave Tokyo hotel).....	\$8,745
Vancouver.....	\$10,525
Victoria.....	\$10,625
Calgary / Edmonton.....	\$10,685
Winnipeg / Regina / Saskatoon.....	\$10,775
Toronto.....	\$10,945
Montreal / Ottawa.....	\$10,995
Halifax / St. John's.....	\$11,245
Single Supplement.....	\$1,885

Airfares from other gateways are available on request.

Tour price is based on sharing a twin room at hotels and on a minimum of 15 members, based on rates, taxes and fees effective June 2023 and are subject to change due to factors beyond our control. Group to be escorted from Canada with a minimum of 15 group members.

Insurance is NOT INCLUDED but is highly recommended. Premiums are calculated based on the individual's age, destination (country), trip length, and trip booking window – please contact our staff to receive a quote. Your coverage starts on the effective date of your confirmation of coverage. Please discuss your insurance coverage prior to booking. Check our website for the most current information. Refer to the enrollment form for terms and conditions.

Final payment will be due December 13, 2023

Deposit is \$800 per person

To reserve your place(s) on this tour, simply complete the enrollment form, indicating the tour you wish to join and your home city, and forward it with your deposit to:



Experiencing Our World

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Book and deposit by October 31, 2023
and save \$200 per person



Geisha walking past Cherry Blossom trees

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