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JAPAN

CHERRY BLOSSOMS & TAKAYAMA FESTIVAL
APRIL 10-25, 2026 • 16 DAYS • 29 MEALS
JOURNEY LEADER: JOAN PITMAN

Cherry blossoms paint the spring in pink dreams, with Mount Fuji in the distance

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 a tranquil mountain retreat, Takayama. We will step back in time in Takayama's Old Town, as the Edo-style streets come alive during the vibrant Takayama Festival. 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 Japan
- 14 nights in first-class hotels as indicated or similar, including 1 night in a traditional ryokan, a Japanese country inn
- 29 meals included as noted in the itinerary (B - 14 Breakfasts, L - 4 Lunches, D - 11 Dinners) featuring traditional Japanese dishes
- Transfers and intercity transportation by private coach and rail service, as indicated
- Services of your journey leader 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

Tour Highlights

- Experience Japan during the lovely Sakura season when the cherry blossoms are in full bloom
- Experience the Takayama Spring Festival
- Kachikachiyama Ropeway with scenic views of Hakone
- 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 Japanese tea ceremony experience
- Tour Hiroshima and nearby Miyajima island
- Visit the UNESCO-listed Kinkaku-ji, Kyoto's iconic Golden Pavilion, 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

Journey Leader

Joan Pitman was in the airline industry for 25 years and remains in the travel industry today. As a Journey Leader she has travelled extensively to Alaska, Asia, across Canada and the US, and Europe. Personal travel has also taken her to South America, Australia, Asia, New Zealand, Africa, Central America, and Bali. A Whistler weekender since the mid 70's, and a full time resident from 2000, Joan and her husband **George** also maintain a home in Vancouver. Joan and George have 6 children between them and 9 grandchildren. They are looking forward to sharing this exciting journey to Japan with all those who will join them.



APR 10, Friday

DEPART CANADA

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

APR 11, Saturday

TOKYO, JAPAN

Touching down in Tokyo this afternoon, we'll head to our hotel right in the heart of the city. After settling in, it's time to meet our fellow adventurers and kick things off with a welcome dinner to celebrate the journey ahead!

New Otani Garden Tower Tokyo (2 nights)

D

APR 12, Sunday

TOKYO

We begin our city tour in Asakusa, home to the vibrant Sensoji Buddhist Temple—Tokyo's oldest, founded in 628 AD. Stroll along Nakamise Street to soak in its historic charm, from wooden dolls to traditional sweets. Then, ascend Tokyo Skytree for sweeping views of the city. BD

APR 13, Monday

FIVE LAKES / GOTEMBA

We begin our day at the Imperial Palace Plaza, where the iconic twin bridges offer a glimpse into Japan's royal legacy. A peaceful stroll through the leafy East Gardens sets the tone before we dive into Tokyo's cultural heart. At

the Tokyo National Museum, we explore centuries of Japanese art, then head to the stylish Ginza district for a hands-on sushi-making experience with a local chef. Leaving the city behind, we journey to the scenic Five Lakes District—keeping watch for the majestic Mt. Fuji as it rises above the landscape.

Rembrandt Premium Fuji Gotemba or similar (1 night) BL

APR 14, Tuesday MT. FUJI / TAKAYAMA

We begin in the picturesque village of Oshino Hakkai, where spring-fed ponds reflect Mt. Fuji and the sky above. Ascend by road to Mt. Fuji's 5th station (2,300 meters) to admire its grandeur, then ride the Kachikachiyama Ropeway up Mt. Tenjo for sweeping views of Lake Kawaguchiko—and Mt. Fuji, if weather permits. Continue through the Japanese Alps to Takayama, where dinner and the glowing lantern-lit Evening Festival await.

Mercure Hida Takayama Hotel or similar (2 nights) BD

APR 15, Wednesday TAKAYAMA FESTIVAL

Immerse yourself in tradition as you walk through the Edo-style streets of Takayama's Old Town. The festival procession features hundreds of participants in Edo-period attire accompanying the portable shrine of Sannou-sama, the patron deity of Hie Shrine. Performers dressed in traditional robes share the road with *shishimai* (lion dancers) and *tokeiraku* (gong performers). Enjoy a lunch of Hida-gyu—premium beef from a black-haired Japanese cattle breed, renowned as one of the finest wagyu varieties in Japan. After lunch, soak up the town's festive atmosphere. Admire the intricately carved *yatai* (floats), some dating back to the 17th century, which feature *karakuri ningyo* (marionettes) that move and perform through the skill of *tsunakata* (puppeteers). Later, return to the hotel by coach. BLD

APR 16, Thursday GOKAYAMA / KANAZAWA

Journey back in time this morning with a visit to the peaceful, UNESCO-listed village of Gokayama, nestled among five scenic valleys. Admire the unique construction of the traditional gassho-zukuri wooden houses, built without the use of nails and featuring steeply pitched thatched roofs designed to prevent snow from accumulating. Meet with a local family in one of these historic houses, and observe artisans as they demonstrate the art of making washi paper and try your hand at making your own. **Ana Crowne Plaza Kanazawa** (2 nights) BD

APR 17, Friday KANAZAWA

This morning, join a local specialist to learn the delicate art of gold leaf painting—a craft perfected in Kanazawa since the 16th century. Continue to the tranquil gardens of Kenroku-en, which took shape over 200 years to emerge as one of Japan's most beautiful gardens. Connecting with your exquisite natural surrounds, you'll stroll through ornate landscapes and past ponds and temples. Take a short walk through the Omicho market next to see the local catch of the day and enjoy an insider's view of everyday life in a busy coastal town. Then, visit the Nagamachi District with its beautifully preserved samurai houses that line the traditional stone streets. Here you will gain first-hand insights into samurai life during a visit to the Nomura house, an elegant samurai mansion. BD

APR 18, Saturday KANAZAWA / KYOTO

Board an express train to Kyoto, where you'll enjoy lunch at a traditional restaurant and learn about local customs from your hosts. Later, visit the UNESCO-listed Kinkaku-ji, Kyoto's iconic Golden Pavilion. Originally built in the 14th century as a shogun's villa, it was later converted into a Zen temple and remains one of the city's most treasured landmarks. **Kyoto Tokyu Hotel** (2 nights) BL



UNESCO-listed Gokayama



Ornate wooden floats parade through Takayama's streets during the festival

APR 19, Sunday KYOTO

Visit one of Kyoto's highlights—the historic Arashiyama district, renowned for its springtime cherry blossoms and breathtaking landscapes that change dramatically with the seasons. Take a leisurely walk through the towering bamboo groves and see the iconic Togetsukyo Bridge. Connect with nature in the Zen gardens of Tenryu-ji Temple, then spend some free time at Nishiki Market, a traditional food market known to locals as “Kyoto's Pantry.” This afternoon we will be treated to a Japanese tea ceremony where we will learn from expert practitioners and even trying our hand at the ritual. Continue to Nara to visit Todai-ji Temple, home to Japan's largest bronze Buddha statue, and stroll through nearby Nara Park, where hundreds of friendly free-roaming deer await. End the day at Fushimi Inari Shrine, famous for its tunnel of thousands of vibrant vermilion torii gates that wind up the wooded slopes of Mount Inari. BD

APR 20, Monday AWAJI AND SHIKOKU ISLANDS

This morning, we leave Japan's main island of Honshu behind, crossing the world's longest suspension bridge over the Seto Inland Sea to Awaji Island. Take a walk around Yumebutai, noted for its ‘100 Stepped Garden’ built into the hillside. Next, visit the Water Temple (Mizumido) to admire the reflection of the mountains, rice paddies and bamboo groves as we descend the steps to the Buddhist temple. This evening, we are in the small hot springs village of Kotohira at a traditional style Japanese ryokan. There will time to make the climb to Kotohira-gu Shrine for the breathtaking views of the surrounding countryside. Later be sure to enjoy a relaxing soak in the onsen (hot spring) baths in our hotel. Gather in the hotel for Kaiseki, a traditional Japanese multi-course dinner, highly regarded

for its meticulous preparation, artistic presentation, and emphasis on seasonal ingredients. It and art form in itself, where every detail, from the food to the tableware, is thoughtfully arranged to create a memorable dining experience.

Kobaitei Ryokan (1 night)

BD

APR 21, Tuesday

KOTOHIRA / HIROSHIMA

Zentsuji Temple, birthplace of one of the most revered figures of Japanese Buddhism, the high priest Kobo Daishi, is the 75th temple on the 88 temple Shikoku Pilgrimage, which covers approximately 1,200 kilometers and was traditionally done on foot taking up to 60 days to complete. It is still done by many people today although modern pilgrims use cars, taxis, buses, bicycles or motorcycles. On Omishima Island we will have lunch at a local restaurant, before continuing across the Setouchi Shimanami Kaido Expressway, a 60-kilometre route that links Honshu and Shikoku via six main islands and seven bridges. We continue to Hiroshima.

Ana Crowne Plaza Hotel (2 nights)

BL

APR 22, Wednesday

MIYAJIMA ISLAND

We travel by ferry to the sacred Miyajima Island, where we'll see the famous UNESCO-listed Itsukushima Shrine and elaborate torii gate that stands majestically in the sea. After some free time for lunch and to explore the island's spiritual sanctuaries, we return to Hiroshima for a visit to the Peace Memorial Park and Museum. Imagine the devastation and horror that followed the world's first atomic explosion in 1945 as you see the UNESCO-listed Peace Memorial, the only structure left standing in the area and an expression of hope for world peace. This evening, we'll indulge in Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki, a savoury pancake made with egg, cabbage, soba noodles, and meat, seafood or cheese, grilled in layers on a hot plate.

BD

APR 23, Thursday

BULLET TRAIN TO OSAKA

This morning, enjoy another unique Japanese experience as we board the high-speed bullet (Shinkansen) train for the 90-minute journey to Osaka, a spirited and liberal city. This afternoon, we can join our guide for a walking tour through the colourful Namba District (very much like the Ginza in Tokyo) to the Kuromon Ichiba Fish Market, with vendors selling street food, fresh produce, varieties of seafood and shellfish plus souvenirs.

Hotel Monterey Grasmere Osaka (2 nights)

BD

APR 24, Friday

OSAKA

Gain a different perspective of Osaka's landmark city sights, starting your day with a cruise on the 'aqua-bus' along Okawa River. Sail past the Japan Mint, City Hall, and Nakanoshima. Visit the downtown district of Shinsekai to see the Tsutenkaku Tower, then continue to the Dotonbori Street area for some time at leisure. Delve into the star-crossed love story of Ohatsu and Tokubei during your visit to the Tsuyunoten Shrine in Umeda, which inspired the famous Edo-period play "The Love Suicides of Sonezaki." Written in 1703 by dramatist Chikamatsu Monzaemon, the play fictionalized a tragic lovers' pact said to have occurred near the shrine. Admire the panoramic views of Osaka from the Floating Garden Observatory – an open-air viewing platform that straddles the two towers of the Umeda Sky Building. Later join your fellow guests and national guide for our farewell dinner in a local restaurant.

BD

APR 25, Saturday SAYONARA JAPAN / HELLO CANADA

Your journey revealing Japan's past and present comes to an end. Following a morning at leisure, a final transfer will bring us to Kansai International Airport for our return flights to Canada.

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 (Apr 20) 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 one night our luggage will be unavailable to us. Please bring a small overnight bag to carry clothes and other personal items for this occasion. Porters may not be available at all hotels and some visits may need to be adjusted or revised.

**Book and deposit by August 29, 2025
and save \$400 per person**



Tour Cost in Canadian Dollars per person

Land Only (Join Tokyo hotel / Leave Osaka hotel)	\$11,595
Vancouver.....	\$14,095
Calgary / Edmonton.....	\$14,245
Winnipeg.....	\$14,295
Regina / Saskatoon	\$14,395
Toronto.....	\$14,295
Montreal / Ottawa	\$14,445
Halifax / St. John's	\$14,595
Single Supplement.....	\$2,145

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 May 2025 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 January 6, 2026

Deposit is \$1,000 per person

To reserve your spot on this tour, you can either book online through our website or submit an enrollment form along with your deposit to:



Experiencing Our World

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