

WALKJAPAN



西日本

WEST JAPAN: AN EXPLORATION OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY

Programme Proposal

8 NIGHTS
9 DAYS

Thank you for your interest in Walk Japan's programme WEST JAPAN: AN EXPLORATION OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY. Please find enclosed the programme proposal. If you have any questions or require further assistance please do not hesitate to contact us at supportservices@walkjapan.com

OVERVIEW

Starting in Kyoto, this 9-day programme takes us through two of Japan's four main islands, Kyushu and Honshu. We visit some well-known cities including Hiroshima and Kyoto, but also journey through the Inland Sea to spend time in the less well-known, off-the-beaten-track area of the Kunisaki Peninsula.

We gain many insights and experiences into Japan's society, history and culture through activities that include helping with the work of a farming community; learning of events that surround the bombing of Hiroshima, delving into the intimate world of Japan's cultural capital, Kyoto; and learning how devastating natural disasters can be and how the Japanese character is shaped by them.

The transport we use varies from the super-fast Shinkansen Bullet Train to local trains that wend their way gently, clattering street trams and rural buses. Occasionally, we also travel on foot. Accommodation includes Japanese inns, where we experience the very different, traditional way of life. Japan is renowned for its cuisine, which provides us with a feast to delight both our eyes and appetites.

Importantly, throughout our travels, the Walk Japan programme leader sets all we see and experience into an enjoyable and understandable context to be inspired and better informed about one of the world's more elusive countries and its delightful, welcoming people.

ITINERARY

DAY 1

Kansai Airport ~ Kyoto

Meals: Dinner
Accommodation: Western business hotel

Arrive in Japan mid-afternoon and transfer to our accommodation in Kyoto. A full briefing on the days ahead follows over dinner in a local restaurant.

DAY 2

Kyoto

Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner
Accommodation: Western business hotel

Kyoto is an elegant city that, until 1869, was Japan's capital, and remains the cradle of much of the nation's traditional culture. It also contains 17 UNESCO World Heritage Sites and our exploration of the city begins at one of these, Nijo-jo castle. Nijo-jo was the Kyoto residence of the Tokugawa Shoguns, the rulers of Japan in the Edo Period (1603 - 1868). We explore the magnificent audience halls, the only examples still in existence, and learn about the samurai and daily life at the Shogun's court.

From earthly power we transfer across town to heavenly power and more Unesco sites at Rokuon-ji and Ryoan-ji temples. Rokuon-ji is famed for its Golden Pavilion. Coated in gold leaf and reflected in a lake, the Pavilion is probably Japan's most recognisable icon after Mt. Fuji. We walk to nearby Ryoan-ji temple and its world-famous garden, considered the epitome of a Zen Buddhist garden.

This afternoon, we experience the Tea Ceremony in the informative and enthralling company of a Tea Master. We delve into the ceremony, a delightful and deeply meaningful practice far from the rigid image it often has, and also make tea for each other. Appreciation of art and ceramics is as much a part of our time here as the tea itself, and your curiosity will be appreciated by our host.

N.B. Space is limited at the tea room and our group will be split into two or more, reversing the daily AM:PM itinerary.

DAY 3

Kyoto

Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner
Accommodation: Western business hotel

Following breakfast, we transfer to the entertaining and interesting Kyoto Disaster Prevention Center to learn about how the threat of natural calamity has influenced the Japanese way of life. The centre has many hi-tech hands-on exhibits to experience typhoons, earthquakes, put out fires, escape burning buildings, fly an emergency helicopter, etc. Both adults and children have fun and learn some good practical skills.

We return to Kyoto for a visit to the bustling centre of town, including Nishiki market and Teramachi for a chance to window shop, buy an interesting souvenir or sample one of the delightful morsels Kyoto is famed for before our dinner in the centre of town.

DAY 4**Kyoto ~ Hiroshima**

Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodation: Western business hotel

An early morning start for a two-hour journey by Shinkansen Bullet Train from Kyoto to Hiroshima, a vibrant city that belies its traumatic past. Our first sight here is the Atomic Bomb Dome, once Hiroshima's Industry Promotion Hall. Immediately adjacent to the blast's epicenter, the structure's smashed walls and twisted metal frame vividly relate the destructiveness unleashed here. Across the Park is the Peace Museum, which contains a thought-provoking and

non-sentimental exhibition of the effects of the bomb.

The Park also contains the Flame of Peace, eternally alight, and the National Peace Memorial Hall, a serene, contemplative space. The whole area is a testament to the horror of war, but with an overwhelming feeling of the forward-looking, positive way the people of Hiroshima have and still use their experience.

From here we journey to Miyajima, an island in the Seto Inland Sea famed for its shrine built in the waters, as well as the multitudes of deer that populate the small town. We return to Hiroshima for dinner, which is the local specialty of okonomiyaki savoury pancakes, enjoyed in a lively restaurant. The animated atmosphere comes in part from us having to create our own delicious dishes before feasting on them.

DAY 5**Hiroshima ~ Akane Onsen**

Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodation: Japanese style inn

Morning transfer by rail from Hiroshima to Tokuyama for a two hour ferry journey through Japan's Inland Sea to the beautiful, countryside of the Kunisaki Peninsula. Upon arrival, a craft workshop nearby. Activities include *take-zaiku* bamboo working and *shitto* weaving.

At the conclusion of the workshop we are met by a bus and taken to our accommodation, which includes a Japanese favourite; *onsen* thermal hot spring baths. Upon our arrival, we take some time to learn the vital do's and don'ts of living in the traditional Japanese style: Where do we take off our shoes? Where are the beds? How do we use the baths? The lessons learnt here are important, and will be vital later on during the tour when we stay with Japanese families. Bathing is divided into male and female but private facilities are also available for those who would rather bathe on their own.

DAY 6**Akane Onsen ~ Futago-ji ~ Ota**

Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodation: Log cabin

An early morning start to visit Futago-ji, the most important temple in Kunisaki. Here we try zazen buddhist sitting meditation, under the friendly guidance of Gojun-san, the young priest of the temple. Gojun-san will also show us around the extensive grounds of his lovely temple and introduce us to the history of Kunisaki area.

We then transfer to Ota where we begin our community project work. Substantial parts of Japan's native woodland habitat have been destroyed by large-scale uprooting of old forests and the creation of cedar plantations designed to supply lumber for the construction industry. Under these conditions the forest floor, starved of sunlight, becomes a barren environment where few other plants and wildlife are able to survive.

Today we assist in the recreation of a more diverse woodland ecosystem consisting of fruit and nut trees, bushes, vegetables, vines, medicinal plants and flowers. Activities may include surveying, clearing undergrowth, planting trees and bushes, opening up old paths, creating wetlands and setting bird boxes. We will help rebuild a rich environment closer to the traditional countryside of Japan.

At the end of the day, we return to our accommodation, atop the hill, not far from where we have been working in the forests and fields. Here we try our hand at making soba buckwheat noodles. The soba along with dishes made from what we harvested earlier form part of our al fresco dinner around a camp fire. After enjoying the fruits of our labours we join in *wadaiko* Japanese drumming.

DAY 7**Ota ~ Bungotakada**

Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodation:
Home stay

After breakfast, we travel a short distance by bus to visit the towering Kumano Magaibutsu, which are 1,000 year-old, giant Buddhist relief carvings on the side of a cliff. It is a steep climb to reach them but well worth the effort to see one of the best reminders of Kunisaki's great religious history.

We then transfer to Bungotakada to enjoy lunch at a local restaurant.

Afterwards we have some time to stroll around this small town, which has a pleasant post-war period charm. Here we are divided into small groups to meet local families, who we will be staying with until tomorrow morning. This is always a great opportunity for getting to know the Japanese and their culture at first hand.

DAY 8**Bungo-Takada ~ Fukuoka**

Meals: Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodation:
Western business hotel

After breakfast we gather with our farmstay families in Bungo-Takada for a farewell ceremony. We set off for Fukuoka by bus, eating lunch en route before arriving at Dazaifu and its elegant Shinto shrine, which was first built in 905AD. Appropriately, it enshrines Tenjin, the Japanese god of learning. Adjacent is the Kyushu National Museum, where we learn about the history and culture of Kyushu and connections with Asia. Some time in Dazaifu to explore the shops

for souvenirs.

Finally we reach Fukuoka and after dinner in a local restaurant we partake in a Japanese favourite, *karaoke*, for a celebratory end to our tour.

DAY 9**Fukuoka Airport**

Meals: Breakfast

After breakfast we stroll through central Fukuoka to Yanagibashi Market. Started in the 1920s, the market is an atmospheric and important centre of fresh produce for the locals. From here we walk a short distance to Canal City,

an architecturally interesting, modern shopping mall for some relaxation and souvenir shopping before our flight home.

NOTES

- ➔ This itinerary is subject to change.
- ➔ The group will be met at Kansai International Airport by the Walk Japan Tour Leader.
- ➔ The Tour Leader is an experienced guide, is fluent in English and Japanese and knowledgeable about many aspects of Japan.
- ➔ All travel in Japan is included on the itinerary.
- ➔ Meals provided are noted in the itinerary above. Japanese cuisine is as varied as it is high in quality.
- ➔ Japanese inns are traditional Japanese-style accommodation and hotels are Western-style.
- ➔ Entrance fees for guided visits to museums and the like are included.
- ➔ There is no porter service in Japan. Please bring only one piece of main luggage and a day pack for walking per person.
- ➔ WiFi and other internet connections are only available in our accommodations in Kyoto, Hiroshima, and Fukuoka.

WALKJAPAN

Walk Japan is the pioneer of off-the-beaten-track walking tours in Japan. Authentic and enjoyable tours to discover Japan, its people, society and culture. Beginning in 1992 with our innovative and best-selling Nakasendo Way tour, we were the first to successfully introduce the real Japan, geographically and culturally, that often remains inaccessible for most visitors to the country. Since then, Walk Japan has created more original tours throughout Japan and been widely recognised for its work, including selection by National Geographic as one of the 200 Best Adventure Travel Companies on Earth.

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