



Japan

Temples, Gardens, Castles & Villages

November 3-12, 2011

Plan your arrival in Osaka/Kyoto for November 2

Plan your departure from Nagoya for November 13

Behind contemporary Japan's facade of modernity lies an alluring, centuries-old culture that's yours to discover! Begin in Kyoto for a selection of the most impressive temples and gardens. Take a day trip to Himeji, the best preserved samurai castle in Japan. Retreat to the mountains for a night in traditional Japanese lodgings at Koyasan, then stay in Nara (Japan's ancient capital). Catch the spectacular fall foliage in the Kii mountains or in the Japan Alps. Experience the calm of a village with a home-stay in a thatched-roof farmhouse in Shirakawago. From the bustle of modern Nagoya where you visit the impressive Tokugawa Museum, take a day trip back in time to walk two to five miles along the ancient samurai path from Edo (now Tokyo) to Kyoto.

Day 1: Begin your Japan adventure in Kyoto, Japan's capital and residence of the emperor from the end of the eighth century to the middle of the nineteenth. Because of this prominence, Kyoto contains a overwhelming treasury of cultural sites. Today we'll visit the visually stunning *Kinkakuji* ("Golden Pavilion") originally constructed in the fourteenth century as the residence of a shogun and later converted to a Zen temple. The temple of *Ryoan-ji*, another Zen temple, is famous for its rock garden. Later in the day, you'll have a chance to visit *Ginkaku-ji* (the "Silver Pavilion"). In the afternoon, pay a visit to the Kyoto Handicraft Center. Settle into your centrally-located Kyoto hotel where you'll spend the next three evenings. Enjoy a welcome dinner this evening.

Day 2: Continue your exploration of Kyoto's sights with a visit to the massive structure of *Kiyomizudera* ("Pure Water Temple"), one of the most celebrated temples in Japan. The temple is set on the flanks of a wooded hillside and its large wooden terrace offers wide-ranging views over the city of Kyoto. The springs for which the temple is named are said to possess healing properties. (*Kiyomizudera* along with several other shrines and temples in Kyoto are part of the "Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto" World Heritage Site.) Enjoy a stroll through *Gion*, a district that dates from the middle ages, is a possibility. Here are narrow streets (like *Shinmanzen-dori*) lined with fine examples of Kyoto's wooden vernacular architecture. You may perhaps spot a *maiko* ("geisha apprentice") walking past the long established restaurants and tea houses along the street of *Hanami-Koji*. Later in the day visit the Fushimi-Inari shrine, the best known of several shrines dedicated to the Shinto god of rice. Countless vermilion *torii* ("gates") cover the walkways that wind over the slopes of Inari-san, the wooded hill behind the shrine.

Day 3: Travel by "bullet train" (or *shinkansen*, which actually means "new trunk line") to the city of Himeji, forty-five minutes away. The centerpiece of the city is the Himeji castle (Himeji-jo), widely considered to be the finest remaining example of a feudal castle in Japan. Unlike many other Japanese castles, Himeji-jo has not been reconstructed and survives in its original form. Construction of the Himeji castle began in the fourteenth century and reached its finished form at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Himeji-jo has been designated a national treasure by the Japanese government and is also a World Heritage Site. Return by train to Kyoto and overnight.

Day 4: Travel from Kyoto to the Kii Mountains southeast of the city. A cable car provides access to the car-free temple complex at Koyasan, perhaps Japan's holiest place (and a UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site). Kobo Daishi, founder of the Shingon sect of Buddhism who has been called the "father of Japanese culture" is buried in a mausoleum here. Leave modern Japan behind and immerse yourself in this place that writer Pico Iyer describes as "consecrated to everything old and changeless and hushed." There are 117 temples in the Koyasan complex and you'll have the opportunity to spend two nights in simple, but comfortable temple lodgings, or *shukubo*, in Japanese. Upon your arrival at Koyasan, visit the atmospheric graveyard of *Oku-no-in* ("innermost sanctum") featuring distinctive five-tiered monuments and set in deep, solemn woods of cedar and cypress.

Day 5: Arise early to witness morning chants and the *goma* fire ceremonies where monks burn pieces of wood and sesame seeds to purge illusions and invite enlightenment. This morning, visit the 16th-century *Kongobuji* (mother temple of Shingon Buddhism noted for its painted doors), the stunning orange-colored *Konpondaito* pagoda, and the Reihokan Museum which houses a collection of the important cultural properties of Koyasan. Later in the day, travel by train to Nara which in the 8th century served as Japan's first permanent capital.

Day 6: This morning, visit *Nara-Koen* ("Nara Park") established in the late 19th century and the location of Nara's principal cultural sites including the *Todai-ji* ("Great Eastern Temple") built originally in the 8th century. The present structure is a reconstruction dating from the 17th century and is two-thirds the size of the original. Nevertheless, the temple is considered the largest wooden building in the world. *Todai-ji* also houses Japan's largest statue of the Buddha. Then visit the *Kasuga Taisha*, a Shinto shrine established in 768 A.D. The shrine is noteworthy for its bronze lanterns and for the many hundreds of stone lanterns that line the approach to the temple. In the afternoon, visit *Horyu-ji*, a 7th century temple complex with a five-storied pagoda. *Todai-ji*, *Kasuga Taisha*, and the *Horyu-ji* complex along with other structures are part of a UNESCO-designated World Heritage Site established in 1993. Spend a second evening in Nara.

Day 7: This morning depart Nara bound for the mountain town of Hida-Furukawa in the Hida region of Gifu prefecture. The town is well-known for its Spring Festival, but with luck, we'll be able to enjoy a flush of autumn color on the forested hillsides surrounding the town! Pay a visit to two local museums to view the elaborate floats used in the festival (with intricate puppets) and learn about the skilled craftsmen and the traditional wooden buildings and artifacts they make. Later, wander the streets of Furukawa enjoying its wooden merchant houses particularly on the street called *Ichinomachi*. You can identify the old *sake* breweries by a ball of cedar branches over the entrance. Furukawa is also known for its cuisine which features delicious locally raised Hida beef. Overnight in Furukawa.

Day 8: Enjoy the morning leisurely exploring the village of Furukawa. Then travel by private vehicle to Shirakawago, a remote, mountainous region in northern Gifu Prefecture. Shirakawago is famous for its old farmhouses built in a style called *gassho-zukuri* in reference to the shape of the steeply pitched roofs resembling two hands folded in prayer. An open fireplace, or *irori*, is a characteristic feature of these houses. Upon arrival at Shirakawago, visit the Wada House museum and stroll to a viewpoint that provides you with a sweeping view over picturesque Ogimachi village. You'll stay overnight in one of the farmhouses for a rustic, but unforgettable experience.

Day 9: Spend the early morning wandering through the picturesque rice fields of Shirakawago. Later, travel to Nagoya where you'll visit the Tokugawa Museum and its 17th century garden known as Tokugawa-en. The museum contains heirlooms from the family of the first Tokugawa shogun, Ieyasu, as well as a collection of Nō costumes and masks, lacquer furniture, calligraphy, and Chinese and Japanese ceramics and paintings. Overnight in Nagoya.

Day 10: This morning, travel east of Nagoya to the Kiso Valley, traversed by the well-known Nakasendo Way. The Nakasendo was one of the two main "highways" between Kyoto and *Edo* (Tokyo) during the Edo Period. "Post stations" along the route offered food and accommodation to travelers and a few of these stations survive to this day. Two of the best preserved are Tsumago and Magome. If you desire, you'll have the opportunity to walk a segment of the old Nakasendo Way between these villages. Return to Nagoya for the evening. Depart Japan from Nagoya's brand new Central Japan Airport the following day.

Other Details about this Trip

Dates: November 3-12, 2011

Price: \$4,895

Single room for entire trip: \$550. Please note that the single supplement price does not include a single room for one night at Koyasan and one night at Shirakawa-go since single accommodations may not be available for these evenings.

Lodging: Eleven nights in small hotels/inns. Please note that we plan to overnight at traditional Japanese inns on two evenings. At inns, bathing and toilet facilities will be shared. There are normally separate bathing rooms for men and women with showers and a hot water tub (*ofuro*) intended for use only after showering. On other evenings you can expect private hotel rooms (either Western or Japanese-style) with private bath facilities. **Note:** Your hotel in Kyoto for the evening of November 2 is included in the trip price.

Meals: Eleven breakfasts, nine lunches (packed lunch or restaurant depending on the day), and ten dinners are included and will normally be Japanese-style.

Trip Begins at hotel in Kyoto, Japan

Trip Ends at hotel in Nagoya, Japan