

## Japan Private Tour

Each private luxury tour is custom to the wishes of each client. This itinerary is a sample. Our Sister Company, TRAVNET, may provide assistance with mileage point conversion. Do not hesitate to call Randy to create your custom tour.

### Overview

Having visited Japan four of the last six years during the late March/early April (Sakura) Cherry Blossoms flowering season, Bev, Zen, and I are truly big fans of this extraordinary experience. The relationship between the Japanese people and the sakura is unique. The vast numbers of Japanese people who engage in the ritual of flower viewing (hanami) make cherry blossom season the largest mass participation floral event on the planet. Based on our many travels throughout Japan, we've crafted this itinerary that highlights some of the prime cherry blossom viewing sites in all of Japan.

**Best Travel Time:** [Spring](#) [Summer](#) [Fall](#)

#### **JAPAN**

##### **Temperature Range**

Highs: 80°F

Lows: 40°F

##### **Area**

377,864 million sq. km

145,894 million sq. miles

##### **Population**

126.4 million

##### **Language**

Japanese

##### **Capital**

Tokyo

##### **Currency**

Yen

#### **DAY 1**

##### **Fly to Tokyo**

Through our sister company, premium air provider TRAVNET, we may assist with your international airfare, as well as with mileage points conversion.

#### **DAY 2**

##### **Arrive Tokyo**

Upon arrival in Tokyo, you will be privately transferred to the Aman Tokyo or the Peninsula Tokyo. While in Tokyo, you may be able to catch a sumo wrestling match or a baseball game! Click on the link to read our blog posts on [Sumo: Japan's National Sport](#) and [Japan's Unique Baseball Culture](#).

If interested, this evening, we highly recommend a visit to the Golden Gai in the fun Shinjuku area of Tokyo. Set in a series of alleyways and comprised of over 270 bars and restaurants, this is a great place to get to know locals with something for everyone!

#### **Aman Tokyo**

Though we are big fans of Aman in China and Southeast Asia, we initially felt a bit ambivalent about the 84-room Aman in a noisy, urban environment like Tokyo. Located in the 40-story Otemachi Tower, within walking distance of Ginza shopping and dining and the Otemachi Forest (Marunouchi's Naki-Dori tree-lined avenue), perhaps the most impressive sight of the Aman Tokyo is its magnificent 33rd-floor lobby entrance featuring huge floor to ceiling windows with a view of the Imperial Palace grounds and even Mt. Fuji on clear days! The Shoji-lanterned area is centered on a large garden and a washi-like ceiling that gives the area a Zen-like Japanese feel. Unlike Aman's in most parts of the world that ban TV's in the rooms, the Aman Tokyo includes a flat screen TV for those of us that need a daily BBC fix!

## Peninsula Tokyo

The 24-story Peninsula has the best luxury hotel location in Tokyo, directly across from the lovely Hibiya Park (think 5K run!), Imperial grounds, and adjacent to the amazing Ginza shopping district. Envisioned by architect Kuzukiyo Sato to look like a giant Japanese stone lantern, the freestanding Peninsula combines subtle Japanese hospitality with the Peninsula tradition of understated luxury. The rooms are among the largest in Tokyo, starting at 544 sq. feet. Cool amenities range from bedside consoles that control the drapes to Lavazza espresso machines. The rooms even offer the ladies a personal nail dryer! For our jogging friends, the Peninsula offers a nice 5K start to your day. Beginning across the street on the Imperial Palace's grounds, a full 5K jog runs through the grounds and back through Hibiya Park. Zen rates the hot chocolate and the Peninsula's amazing "vitality" pool as the best in all of Japan!

## Accommodations: Aman Tokyo or Peninsula Tokyo

### DAY 3

#### Tokyo Private Touring

Your touring today will begin with a visit to the Meiji Shrine, where, based on Shinto tradition, you can write your prayer on a wooden block just outside of the shrine. You will continue on to Higashi Gyoen, the east garden at the Imperial Palace, considered to be one of the most beautiful gardens in all of Tokyo. You will also visit the Akihabara and Harajuku shopping district and the Yasukuni Shrine, controversial due to its enshrinement of Japan's wartime leader General Hideki Tojo and 13 other Class-A war criminals (found guilty of war crimes by the allied forces after World War II).

#### Meals: Breakfast

#### Accommodations: Aman Tokyo or Peninsula Tokyo

### DAY 4

#### Tokyo Private Touring

A 35-minute drive from the city center, you will visit the Ghibli Museum Mikata. Being big fans of Hayao Miyazaki's award-winning animated films (*Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle*, *Ponyo* – among others), we feel this is a must-see when visiting Tokyo. Welcomed by a large Totoro at the entrance, you will see a colorful array of handcrafted stain windows and lamps, using Ghibli's characters, beautiful plants, flowers, and forest animals. The 80-seat Saturn Theater is a fun treat to watch a short Miyazaki animated feature.

#### Meals: Breakfast

#### Accommodations: Aman Tokyo or Peninsula Tokyo

### DAY 5

#### Private Transfer Tokyo/Mt. Fuji/Hakone

You will travel to the Mt. Fuji visitor's station and taken to the fifth station on the mountain for the opportunity to hike the Ochudo trail. The Ochudo Trail, also known as the "boundary between heaven and earth", is a walking path that circles Mt. Fuji halfway up the mountainside. This trek includes the Oniwa Garden and ends at the Okuniwa bus stop; this hike is roughly 2.5 miles and will take approximately two hours. Following your energizing hike, you will be driven to the Gora Kadan ryokan.

## **Gora Kadan**

Gora Kadan is a superb ryokan (traditional inn) that has managed to compromise gracefully with the modern Western world. Proprietress Mikawako, the third generation of Fujimotos to run Gora Kadan, has blended traditional Japanese ryokan hospitality with modern Western design in creating a luxurious ryokan spa experience. The Gora Kadan's original building dates back 300 years and was the summer home of the Kan'in-No-Miya imperial family. With its airy east-west fusion aesthetic, its wonderful (Kaiseki) food service, and total relaxation spa, Gora Kadan is definitely on our A-list for high-touch ryokans in Japan!

**Meals: Breakfast & Dinner**

**Accommodations: Gora Kadan**

## **DAY 6**

### **Hakone Private Touring**

Following breakfast at the Gora Kadan, your private tour options will include a Lake Ashi boat excursion, Jinga Shrine, and the Owakudani Valley, an active volcanic valley famous for blacked boiled eggs! Another stopover will be the Hakone Open Air Museum amidst a mountain setting, which successfully balances art with nature. The indoor galleries are also very interesting – most compelling is the museum's significant Picasso collection.

**Meals: Breakfast & Dinner**

**Accommodations: Gora Kadan**

## **DAY 7**

### **Shinkansen (Bullet Train) Hakone/Kyoto**

Following breakfast, you will be assisted to the Odawara Station for your Shinkansen (bullet train) to Kyoto. Upon arrival in Kyoto, you will be met by your private guide and driver and transferred to The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto of the Aman Kyoto. With 26 shrines and temples listed as UNESCO World Heritage Sites (the most in the world!), Kyoto is truly one of the most culturally alluring cities on the globe.

### **The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto**

With the Hyatt Regency Kyoto having been the only western 5-star luxury hotel in Kyoto, we were excited about the February 2014 opening of the 134-room Ritz Carlton Kyoto. Living in a Mies van der Rohe high-rise in Chicago, we feel a particular affinity to the Hyatt Regency's simple, clean, architectural design. Nevertheless, the new Ritz Carlton's rectangular, low-slung property ideally situated in the Kamogawa River has definitely piqued our interest. Replicating the aesthetics of a traditional Meiji House, the design and amenities of the Ritz are quite impressive (including a French Haute Patisserie!). Though we are not big fans of the Ritz global brand (prefer AMAN/Peninsula/Mandarin/Four Seasons), we feel the new Ritz to be currently the highest quality luxury "western" hotel in Kyoto.

### **Aman Kyoto**

With Kyoto being our favorite city in Asia, we are most excited about the 24-room Aman Kyoto opening in November 2019. The 80-acre site will include 72 acres of native forest and eight acres of traditional Japanese gardens. We are particularly impressed with the property's location in the Takagamine district, walking distance to Kinkaku-ji (Golden Temple)! We look forward to on-site feedback from our favorite Koyo private guide, Izumi-san!

**Meals: Breakfast**

**Accommodations: The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto or Aman Kyoto**

## **DAY 8**

### **Kyoto Private Touring**

You will begin your day in with the Philosopher's Walk, a two-kilometer-long path that covers five temples and two shrines, paralleling a beautiful canal/stream. After the walk, you will continue to the Shirakawa Minami-Dori Street in Gion, which has wonderfully preserved wooden structures, with various restaurants and ryokans. In the afternoon, you will visit the Fushimi Shrine, perhaps our favorite shrine in all of Japan. Dating back to the eighth century, the shrine includes a wandering pathway around three miles up the mountain lined with hundreds of beautiful red torii, now faded to look orange.

**Meals: Breakfast**

**Accommodations: The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto or Aman Kyoto**

## **DAY 9**

### **Saihoji Gardens Private Touring + Tea Ceremony**

There is nothing casual or fortuitous about a visit to Saihoji Temple and its garden. You may visit by prior appointment only via a written request to the administering monks. Unlike the mass tourism that envelops much of Kyoto, the Saihoji priests hope to retain a solemn, meditative atmosphere in the temple and garden. You will also participate in a traditional tea ceremony with over a dozen steps including the respectful exchange of greetings, eating the tea sweets, and mixing the green powder tea and water with the bamboo whisk.

**Meals: Breakfast**

**Accommodations: The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto or Aman Kyoto**

## **DAY 10**

### **Nara Private Tour**

Behind the free-roaming deer in Nara, we suggest a twilight walk through the nearby cottages of Edosan Inn down to the Ukimido hexagonal wooden pavilion over the pond. Following a path beside an orange gated shrine, you arrive at the 109-year-old Nara Hotel. A hidden flight of stairs along the hotel's driveway takes you down into Naramachi, a feeling of "old Japan" within a maze of narrow lantern-lit lanes with Meiji-era houses with many fun local handicrafts and cones of yuzu ice cream.

**Meals: Breakfast**

**Accommodations: The Ritz-Carlton Kyoto or Aman Kyoto**

## **DAY 11**

### **Arashiyama Private Tour**

You will enjoy a full day tour of Saga Arashiyama including Monkey Park (touristy but fun!), surreal Sagano Bamboo Forest, Togetsukyo Bridge, Tenryuji Temple, and the "Silver Pavilion". In the late afternoon, you will be transferred to Hiiragiya Ryokan for your overnight stay.

### **Hiiragiya Ryokan**

Similar to Tawaraya Ryokan (just across the alley-way), Hiiragiya is considered among the most noteworthy and famous ryokans in all of Japan. A stay at Hiiragiya represents a complete immersion into traditional Japanese culture. Enclosed in a traditional sukiya-style wooden structure, Hiiragiya was conceived in 1818 when Hiiragiya, a seafood dealer, began providing accommodation to traveling merchants. Later, Hiiragiya welcomed many members of the imperial family including writers, governing officials, and international celebrities. Proprietress Akami Nishimura only modestly acknowledges the many celebrities and world leaders who have stayed here (including Charlie Chaplain many decades ago). We give an A+ to both the Tawaraya and Hiiragiya, although we feel Hiiragiya is perhaps more accommodating and open to Western eccentricities.

**Meals: Breakfast & Dinner**

**Accommodations: Hiirigiya Ryokan**

### **DAY 12**

#### **Private Transfer Kyoto/Osaka + Fly Osaka/Home**

Following breakfast, you will be privately transferred to the Osaka airport for your onward flight home.

**Meals: Breakfast**