

DAY 13 • KYOTO: KINKAKUJI AND RYOANJI

We visit the famous Kinkaku-ji, the Golden Pavilion, originally built by the Ashikaga Shogun in the 14th century as a place of contemplation and rest. From there, we will visit Ryoan-ji, with its famous rock garden of raked gravel and fifteen moss-covered boulders.

In the afternoon you have a choice of free time to make your own discoveries in the afternoon, or, you may accompany your guide to explore the downtown core. Within a short walking distance of your hotel is Teramachi street – the section between Sanjo and Shijo streets in Kyoto used to be known as a temple town. If you look carefully off of this street and behind the parallel Shinkyogoku shopping arcades, you'll find ancient temples tucked in behind the shops. Walking a bit further West near the Shijo end of Teramachi street will also bring you to Nishiki market, for those who wish to explore the culinary offerings of Kyoto. The shopping arcades also provide a wonderful opportunity to purchase souvenirs that reflect the traditional crafts of Japan – washi paper cards, elegant folding fans, brightly decorated tenu-gui and handkerchiefs can all be found within this area, in addition to traditional Japanese sweets.

Overnight in Kyoto.

DAY 14 • TRAVEL TO HIMEJI, VISIT HIMEJI CASTLE

This morning, following breakfast at our hotel, we will depart by bullet train for Himeji. Himeji Castle is nicknamed "White Heron" Castle because of its white walls covered with white plaster. Himeji Castle is famous for both its huge main tower and its maze-like design. As one of the finest surviving examples of early 17th-century Japanese castle architecture, it is a masterpiece of construction. The castle has recently completed extensive restoration works.

Overnight in Himeji.

DAY 15 • SIGHTSEEING OF MIYAJIMA AND ONWARD TO HIROSHIMA

We leave Himeji and continue by bullet train to Hiroshima. From here it's a short journey on a local train to board our ferry to Miyajima Island. We begin with a stroll along the waterfront offering us outstanding views of the Great Torii and Itsukushima Shrine. The island is so sacred that the Torii stands on 6 pillars so as not to be buried deep within the sea bed. The shrine itself has multiple buildings which are linked by boardwalks.

We will ascend on ropeway to a viewpoint that offers spectacular views over the inland sea. As we leave and return back to the town, we'll spend time exploring its streets and traditional shops before retiring to our accommodations.

Overnight in Hiroshima.

DAY 16 • PEACE PARK AND MUSEUM AND ONWARD TO NARA

This morning we travel to Hiroshima. Known throughout the world as the first city to bear the impact of the use of atomic weapons, Hiroshima today is a vibrant, modern city. Throughout the Peace Park are a number of touching memorials, including the Children's Peace Monument, festooned with brightly colored strings of origami cranes, left by children from all over the world to express a desire for peace. The Peace Memorial and Museum provides context to the impact of the bombing on the city, the country, and the world.

Next, we journey onto the first permanent ancient capital of Japan, Nara which served as the nation's capital from 710 to 784. We visit Nara National Museum before taking a stroll down Naramachi, Nara's old town and the old merchant district with its narrow streets, shops, cafes and restaurants.

Overnight in Nara.