

# JAPAN & THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS

## OVERVIEW

Tour Date: 28 March 2018 – 12 April 2018

Duration: 16 days

Tour Cost (\$AUD): \$12,950

Single Supplement (\$AUD): \$2,315

*'Japan & the Cherry Blossoms' is a remarkable 16-day journey to the iconic cities, heritage sites, mountains and lakes of Japan's largest island, Honshu, when the landscape is bathed in the pink hue of the springtime cherry blossoms.*

Though undoubtedly a visual feast, this tour is much more than just a ramble through the candy floss canvas of central Honshu. The tour begins in Tokyo with a three-night stay in the dazzling capital before moving on to Takayama, nestled at the foot of the Hida mountain range. Here we explore the small atmospheric towns and villages that were isolated from the rest of Japan for hundreds of years, and tell the story of the country's ancient past. In this beautiful mountainous region the landscape is dotted with shrines and temples, and cherry blossom trees adorn the river banks. We then move south for a three-night stay in the ancient capital of Kyoto which boasts more than a dozen UNESCO World Heritage sites and is home to Japan's largest population of geisha. Continuing south-west via the great 'White Heron' castle of Himeji, we arrive in the sobering city of Hiroshima, where the cataclysmic events of 6 August 1945 etched the city's name permanently in the history books. Yet through the sadness, our exploration of Hiroshima focuses on the amazing resurgence and resilience of the city and its inhabitants. Finally we take a bullet train to Mt Fuji for a two-night stay beside the sparkling lakes lying in the shadow of the iconic mountain. This tour is a fascinating exploration of the history and culture of Japan set against the beautiful backdrop of pink and white cherry blossoms.

**Tour Fitness Level: Moderate**

# JAPAN AND THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS 2018

## TOUR ITINERARY

### 28/03/2018 Australia – Singapore

Check-in at your chosen Australian airport for the flight to Singapore.

### 29/03/2018 Singapore – Tokyo (D)

Depart Singapore SQ 632, 08.05

Arrive Tokyo (Haneda) 16.05

After completing customs and immigration formalities at Tokyo transfer to your hotel.

Hotel Metropolitan Edmont (or similar)

Tokyo

### 30/03/2018 Tokyo (BLD)

Visiting Japan's capital for the first time is a fascinating experience. Very different from Western cities and with an expanding population of more than 12 million within 1300 sq kms, Tokyo is Japan's largest and most densely populated city. Always safe, Tokyo is perhaps the only city in the world that could make New York look like a sleepy town! Today we spend the whole day exploring this exciting metropolis including the Tsukiji Market which is one of the world's largest fish markets, handling more than 2,000 tons of marine products per day. We enjoy a sushi lunch at one of the local restaurants inside the market itself.

### 31/03/2018 Tokyo (BLD)

Today we start with a visit to Asakusa where 'old Tokyo' still exists and the atmosphere conjures up images of days long gone. We walk through a network of charming streets before taking a cruise on the Sumida River which provide a wonderful viewing platform of cherry blossoms from water.

### 01/04/2018 Tokyo – Takayama (BD)

Leaving Tokyo we travel by train via Nagoya into the heart of Honshu and the beautiful Hida Mountains. The wonderfully atmospheric town of Takayama dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Shrines and temples dot the hillsides and a river running through its centre complete an idyllic setting. We arrive mid-afternoon and commence a walking tour of the town, exploring its wealth of narrow winding streets, galleries and museums.

Ryu Resort & Spa (or similar)

Takayama

### 02/04/2018 Takayama – Hida – Takayama (BLD)

Hida was isolated from the rest of Japan for hundreds of years, and as a result it has fostered a distinctly different culture from the rest of Japan. Visiting Japan's 'hidden gem' is like stepping back in time, as we witness a simple lifestyle were locals fish in the rivers and grow vegetables and rice. Surrounded by forest and rice terraces, the architecture is a result of generations of 'master builders' or highly skilled carpenters and the town now provides a fascinating mirror into rural life of previous centuries.

### 03/04/2018 Takayama – Kanazawa (BLD)

This morning we take a short drive to Kanazawa. Located between the alps and the Sea of Japan, this great castle town escaped any war devastation and has never suffered any significant natural disasters. Thus, Kanazawa is wonderfully preserved and is considered the cherry blossom capital of Japan. At its heart is the amazing Garden of Kenrokuen, sitting opposite the castle. Formerly a feudal lord's garden,

and covering more than 11 hectares, Kenrokuen is one of the best place to see cherry blossoms. When in full bloom delicate soft flowers line the streets creating an incredible pink hue all over the city.

**Ana Crowne Plaza Hotel (or similar)**

Kanazawa

**04/04/2018 Kanazawa – Kyoto (BLD)**

After breakfast we transfer to the railway station for our journey to Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan for 1,000 years until 1867 when Tokyo took the crown. Surrounded by mountains, Kyoto is the city that touches the heart of the Japanese in a way that no other place can. Ancient customs and heritage have continued here as Geisha and Maiko scurry between appointments in tiny alleys lit by traditional lanterns. On arrival we visit Nijo Castle and Kiyomi Zu Temple.

**Grand Prince Hotel (or similar)**

Kyoto

**05/04/2018 Kyoto (BLD)**

One of the best places to see cherry blossoms in Kyoto is along the Philosopher's Walk – a pleasant stone path running beside a canal lined with hundreds of cherry trees. From here we continue our exploration of Kyoto with a visit to the Silver Pavilion, set amongst a beautiful moss garden and a unique dry sand garden, known as the 'Sea of Silver Sand'. After lunch we visit the western historical area of Arashiyama, an hour from Kyoto centre, where we meander through the famous Bamboo Forest and the wonderful Nonomiya Shrine.

**06/04/2018 Kyoto – Nara – Kyoto (BLD)**

Nara Park is situated south of Kyoto, about an hour's drive from the city. Japan's capital from AD710–784, the park is a serene place of natural beauty and infinite treasures, and home to around 1,200 freely roaming deer. Among the historic buildings within the park are Todaiji Temple, the world's largest wooden structure, which houses the 'Giant Buddha' that soars 16 metres in height. After fully exploring Nara, we return to Kyoto.

**07/04/2018 Kyoto – Himeji – Hiroshima (BLD)**

Today we take a short bus ride to Himeji Castle, also known as The White Heron because of its elegant, white appearance. This is Japan's most imposing castle and its beautiful gardens, especially in cherry blossom season, create a wonderful backdrop to the white edifice. The castle, which like Kanazawa, was never destroyed by war, earthquake or fire, survives to this day as one of the country's twelve original castles. After our visit here we board our bullet train for the two-hour journey to Hiroshima.

**Grand Prince Hotel (or similar)**

Hiroshima

**08/04/2018 Hiroshima (BLD)**

On 6 August 1945, the world's first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. The tremendous impact of the bomb obliterated everything within a 2km radius, and immediately killed more than 80,000 people, with tens of thousands more dying from radiation exposure. After the war, despite some predictions that the city would be uninhabitable, Hiroshima was reconstructed quickly and a large park was built in the centre of the city. This morning we visit Peace Park and Peace Park Museum which provide a powerful reminder of the worst day in Hiroshima's history. We also see the A-Bomb Dome, now a UNESCO World Heritage site, which remains the last visible link and iconic image of this cataclysmic day.

**09/04/2018 Hiroshima – Miyajima Island – Hiroshima (BLD)**

The so-called 'Island of the Gods', Miyajima Island, is on the beautiful Seto Inland Sea. One of the most picturesque spots in Japan, this romantic and historical island is laced with virgin forest as well as numerous Shinto shrines, temples and monuments. After breakfast we board a ferry for the short trip to the island, which is famous for its beautiful display of cherry blossoms during the season. We take a cable car to the top of Mt Misen for breathtaking views of Hiroshima and the surrounding islands before reboarding our ferry back to Hiroshima.

**10/04/2018 Hiroshima – Mt Fuji (BLD)**

This morning we take the Shinkansen bullet train to Mt Fuji. Here we transfer by bus to the magnificent Yamanaka Lake, one of the five lakes at the base of this sacred mountain. Shaped like a whale this area is where some Japanese families have second homes, due to its outstanding natural beauty and scenery. At this time of year the sky is usually clear which provides a stunning vista as the sun sets behind Mt Fuji.

**Hotel Tominoko (or similar)**

**Mt Fuji**

**11/04/2018 Mt Fuji – Tokyo Haneda Airport (BL)**

This morning, weather conditions permitting, we have the opportunity to see the sun rise over magnificent Mt Fuji. After breakfast we board our bus for the 140km journey to Tokyo's Haneda airport, to catch our homeward flight.

**Depart Haneda Tokyo, Singapore Airlines SQ 633, 17.05**

**Arrive Singapore 23.05**

**12/04/2018 Singapore – Australia**

On arrival in Singapore we connect with the flight to our chosen Australian airport.