

TAKAYAMA REVERSE FESTIVAL TOUR

Details

Duration: 12 Nights

Max Group size: 10

Starts in: Tokyo

Ends in: Tokyo

Prices

Start Date	Finish Dates	Price	Spaces available	Reference	Hotel Level
10 Apr 2020	22 Apr 2020	£2,800.00	Fully booked	0420TR	Mid

Overview

The Reverse Festival Tour is based upon our Takayama Festival Tour (<http://www.dragonflytours-japan.com/tours/Takayama-Festival-Tour>) but it heads in the opposite direction with some extra tweaks along the path. You experience the highlights of Japan such as Tokyo and Kyoto, but at the heart of this tour is the experience of the Takayama festival, unheard of by many travellers here, and experienced by fewer.

The festival is over 500 years old, and although now adopting many 20th century features, is essentially unchanged in that time. There are two festivals, one in the spring and one in the autumn and each has a different spiritual centre: renewal in the first, and harvest in the second. Both show off the ages-old tradition of parading with shrines carried on shoulders or drawn on wheels by traditionally clad revellers.

The streets are full of festival decorations, music, dancing and the very earthly revelry of eating and drinking. The city of Takayama is picturesque, preserving many historical and venerable buildings and is surrounded by impressive mountains.

You also visit Shirakawa-go, a village of wooden, thatched houses built hundreds of years ago and preserved – but still home to families and a real community. Journeying to Takayama from Tokyo, you visit Hakone, home of Fuji, historical sites, high culture and touristy distractions.

After Takayama you travel to the cultural and historical heart of Japan, Kyoto, where you will meet many of the UNESCO World Heritage sites, witness performing arts, take part in a tea ceremony, see apprentice geisha dance, soak in hot springs, and of course sample more the country's famed culinary heritage. With their personalised service and flexible, customisable itineraries, Dragonfly puts the adventure into tours of Japan.

The Takayama Reverse Tour is fully guided; All accommodation, All entrance fees, and All transportation is included while with the guide following the itinerary as well as a whole lot more. For the full list of inclusions, please check the "Other Info" tab above.

Itinerary

Summary

Day 01	Group meal; Walking tour of Shinjuku and Kabukicho	Tokyo
Day 02	Tsukiji Outer Fish Market; Bullet train to Kanazawa; Kenroku-en Garden; Nomura Samurai Garden	Kanazawa
Day 03	21st Century museum, Higashi Chaya Geisha district; visit the Shima Teahouse.	Kanazawa
Day 04	Travel to Shirakawa-go World Heritage village; explore village and stay in traditional thatched farmhouse and feast on a home-cooked dinner	Shirakawa-go
Day 05	Travel to Takayama; enjoy the sights and foods of the Takayama Festival	Takayama
Day 06	Free day to explore Takayama, the festival or neighbouring towns	Takayama
Day 07	Travel to Kyoto; tea ceremony; Fushimi Inari mountain shrine	Kyoto
Day 08	Ryoanji (Zen Garden); Kinkakiji (Golden Pavilion); Nijo-jo Castle. (All three sites have UNESCO status)	Kyoto
Day 09	Kiyomizudera (UNESCO); Walk through Higashiyama district to Gion; Miyako Odori (Geisha Cherry Blossom Dance - Spring Tour Only)	Kyoto
Day 10	Travel to Hakone; Samurai museum	Hakone
Day 11	Hakone circuit - Cable car and funicular to Owakudani (Hell's Valley); views of Mt.Fuji; Pirate ship across Lake Ashi; Hakone Checkpoint; Cedar avenue	Hakone
Day 12	Travel to Tokyo; afternoon free.	Tokyo
Day 13	End of Tour, no itinerary set but why not stay a couple of extra nights, there is plenty more to see and do nearby!	

* Gassho-Zukuri - Traditional thatched farmhouse unique to the Shirakawa-go area, it's a fantastic cultural experience. Here you sleep on futon, there are no en-suite bathroom options available.

** Ryokan- Traditional Japanese inn, sleeping on futons in rooms floored with tatami mats.

Notes

We recommend arriving in Japan a day or two before the tour starts to help with acclimatization and overcome any jet lag. We can organize any additional nights at the tour hotel and will be pleased to meet you at the airport (at either Narita or Haneda) and transfer with you to the hotel (up to one week before the start of the tour), making your transition as smooth as possible. We'll also run through the maps with you, answering all your questions and setting you off on your first adventures, here in one of the world's greatest metropolises.

You say you want even more?? A good after-tour excursion for the Takayama Reverse Tour is to finish up with a couple of days relaxing and exploring in the scenic area of Kawaguchiko, on the northern side of Mt. Fuji. If this is of interest, or any other excursion, such as to Nikko (a couple of hours north of Tokyo), please just drop us a line and we'll be happy to organize your after-tour adventure!

Itinerary

Details

Day 1 - Tokyo

The tour starts this evening; Dragonfly Tours hosts a meal at a local restaurant, where your tour of Japan kicks off with a tour of the Japanese palate. This is also a great way for everyone in the group to get to know each other. After the meal, we walk around the neon lit streets of the infamous Kabuki-cho night time entertainment district as it all comes alive.

Day 2 - Kanazawa

This morning you go to the famous Tsukiji Outer Fish Market buzzing with atmosphere, stalls and shops. You can enjoy some prime cuts in one of the many quality sushi restaurants dotted around the market.

Take the bullet train to Kanazawa. Kanazawa, like Kyoto, a historic city and also like Kyoto, spared the bombing of the Second World War. The hotel is close to the station and most of the town's main attractions, including the geisha districts, samurai houses, and the world-famous Kenrokuen garden.

Kenrokuen is considered one of the three best gardens in Japan – and many consider it *the* best. Once the private gardens of the ruling samurai family, the garden was developed and improved over 200 years to become what you see today. It is the essential Japanese garden: manicured trees, waterfalls, rock gardens, a teahouse by a tranquil pond; the ideal blend of art and nature.

Next, you visit the Nomura Samurai Residence. The Nomura family flourished with their class during the Edo period but during the Meiji Restoration the samurai lost their reason for existing, their status and eventually their wealth. The Nomura house was sold to a member of the newly ascendant merchant class but is now restored as it would have been under the Nomura family. The house provides a privileged look into history, evoking the lifestyle of a class that holds enduring fascination.

Day 3 - Kanazawa

After breakfast visit the Shima Teahouse in the atmospheric Higashi Chaya geisha district, one of the three geisha districts of Kanazawa. Stroll around the preserved streets maintaining the characteristic architecture of the Edo era, refreshingly void of the overhead power cables and phone lines you see in much of Japan. The tea house, once an exclusive geisha house is now open to the public revealing a fascinating peep into the secretive lives and work of the geisha. See their musical instruments, accessories and the rooms where guests were entertained.

After lunch visit the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, an interesting contrast to the morning's itinerary. Here we wrap up today's guided tour to allow you to enjoy wandering around the exhibits at your own pace.

Other places of interest you might want to consider seeing close by include the Omi-cho market, the gastronomic heart of Kanazawa or perhaps the DT Suzuki museum celebrating the work of the Suzuki Daisetz Teitaro, the philosopher instrumental in introducing Zen to the west through his writings.

Day 4 - Shirakawa-go

This morning you take the bus to the picturesque village of Shirakawa-go. Nestled deep in the mountains, it's an idyllic place with age-old traditions and architecture now lost to most of the country. You spend the night in a *gassho zukuri* (a traditional thatched farm house) that is over 250 years old. The rooms are homely and you sleep on comfortable futons on *tatami* flooring. These are not recreations of Japanese historical Japanese homes, they are the real thing.

This is also a living community – most of these beautiful old buildings are family homes. Imagine living like this all year round. You have plenty of time to stroll around the village and get a taste of the community spirit at the heart of this place. The local people here still work together in building and maintaining these magnificent houses, re-thatching them every 25-35 years. In the evening you are served a home cooked meal made with ingredients from the local mountains. After dinner you may wish to visit the nearby fantastic *onsen* (hot spring). If you've never been to an onsen before then this is a good one to start with. If you don't think onsen are your thing, (communal bathing doesn't appeal to all) the farmhouse has its own private washing facilities.

Day 5 - Takayama

This morning take the bus to the mountain city of Takayama where the festival that is the centrepiece of your trip is heating up.

Eagle-eyed readers will have noticed there are two Takayama Tours at different seasons, this is because there are two Takayama festivals. As with so many Japanese rites, nature and the seasons are immensely important. The festival to welcome spring takes place amongst the delicate pinks and whites of the blooming cherry blossoms. In contrast, the autumn festival celebrates the harvest.

The highlights of both festivals, which date from the 15th century, come in the evenings, when colourful *dashi* (floats), are lead through the streets amid cheers and drums. There are a number of small rivers running through the old town and the parades will pass over the bridges that span them.

Day 6 - Takayama

Japanese festivals are the heart of the life of the community and just one day is rarely enough for a proper celebration. The festival continues today but there is no tour itinerary. You are free to explore on your own and soak up the atmosphere and the sights as floats and parades weave their way through the old town.

Other places you might want to visit nearby include:

Gero onsen, one of the most famous onsen towns in the country. For more hot springs consider **Okuhida** known for its outside onsen with mountain views. **Gujo-Hachiman** is a traditional rural town, good for a day trip and also the nearby town of **Furukawa** which is only around 15 minutes away from Takayama, is well known for its carpentry and old quarter.

Day 7 - Kyoto

Moving ever onward, the next destination is Kyoto, the heart and soul of Japan.

The tea ceremony is the definition of serenity, and this morning you have the chance to find out what it's all about and experience it for yourself. You participate in a ceremony in a teahouse that has been performing the art and supplying the tea to the Nishi Honganji temple for seven generations.

From here the tour proceeds to Fushimi-Inari shrine located just south of Kyoto. This is another of Kyoto's most photographed spots. Thousands of vermilion torii shrine gates lead up a winding path into the hill. The patron of Fushimi-Inari is the fox, a messenger of the gods, but the shrine is dedicated to rice, Japan's staple. Fushimi-Inari has thousands of sub-shrines all over Japan, and has been adopted by merchants and business people, who pray here for success in their enterprises.

Day 8 - Kyoto

Today is steeped in beauty, history, art, and intrigue. You visit the three principal World Heritage sites in Kyoto, each are very different and each help to tell the story of how we understand Japan today.

You start with Ryoanji and the Zen garden that defines Zen gardens. Fifteen rocks set in a swirling gravel bed. However, you only see 14 of the rocks because only the truly enlightened see all 15. As you strive for enlightenment you might contemplate the enigmatic phrase "Ware tada taru shiru" (I only plenty know), which is carved into the water receptacle at the back of the temple.

Next you see one of the most beautiful buildings in the world, Kinkakuji – the famous Golden Pavilion. The pavilion is covered in gold leaf and stands next to a pond that captures the reflection in its shimmering surface. The pond and the pavilion stand in a classic Japanese garden. The Golden Pavilion is another UNESCO World Heritage site and was the centrepiece of Yukio Mishima's novel The Temple of the Golden Pavilion.

The exploration of Kyoto's history continues as you go on to Nijo-jo – Nijo Castle – built by the Tokugawa shogunate as a symbol of power. It's a building full of national treasures and walking down the corridors on the "nightingale flooring" which sings as you tread – alerting the shogun to unwelcome visitors – carries you back in time to feudal days.

Day 9 - Kyoto

Here you visit Kiyomizudera, UNESCO World Heritage site, a temple perched on stilts on the mountainside and appearing to float on the forest. Visitors flock here from far and wide to pray and wish for their most heartfelt desires, from meeting their ideal lover to promotion at work; from exam success to miraculous cures for health troubles.

From Kiyomizudera you walk down the atmospheric cobbled streets of the Higashiyama area to Gion, the main geisha district of Kyoto, where, in the evening, we have tickets for the Miyako Odori reserved for this evening for the spring tour.

Day 10 - Hakone

Today's destination is Hakone, the National Park beside Mt Fuji. Staying with the theme of the tour, we go to the samurai museum, however the Hakone area is blessed with a surprising number of museums of fine art, and you are free to split away from the group and visit one of these others as an alternative. There is the Open Air Museum featuring art by Henry Moore and Pablo Picasso and the collection of the Pola Museum includes pieces by Van Gogh, Monet and Renoir. The Pola Museum building is itself an amazing piece of architecture of concrete and glass. (Be aware that the museums are dotted around the national park, and even for the most dedicated culture vulture, it isn't possible to see everything in one day.)

If museums aren't your thing, you may wish to simply relax and soak the day away in the revitalizing hot springs.

Day 11 - Hakone

Today we start soon after breakfast to avoid the day trippers coming in from Tokyo. You take the cable car up the mountain to Owakudani, "Hell's Valley". From this craggy volcano, you should be able to see Mount Fuji in its full majesty. Eggs that have been cooked in the volcanic waters are sold here. The process turns them black and, it is said, for every egg you eat extends your life by seven years. How many can you eat?

From the summit of Hell's Valley, you descend to Lake Ashi – you may choose to do this on foot, getting up close with Hakone's hiking trails, or you may prefer the ropeway and the views it affords.

The lakeside is a beautiful place for a stroll (especially if you didn't walk down the mountain). Here the group gets back together for something to eat. Replete, you catch the pirate ship across the lake to the reproduction of the Hakone checkpoint. This may be a remake but the original checkpoint was very significant in its day.

During the Edo era (1603-1868) the Tokugawa shogunate imposed strict regulations monitoring and controlling travellers and merchandise. The regulations were enforced by 52 such checkpoints, and this one is thought to have been the largest and most important – not to mention a cause of considerable anxiety for travellers of the day. Following years of research, the checkpoint was re-built using traditional methods and tools, and was opened to the public in the spring of 2007.

From here, you walk along a stretch of the ancient highway lined with huge cedar trees, planted on the orders of the shogun to shade the travellers from the winter snows and the intense summer sun. After this stretch you can take a bus back to the hotel or you can continue walking along the ancient highway, which still has sections of the original paving. There is something very special about walking on these cobbles, under the very same trees that some of the greatest people in Japanese history have walked (or been carried along in palanquins). Shogun, armies of samurai, noblemen, writers, peasants, courtesans, and ninja in disguise all took this route.

Day 12 - Tokyo

The only thing planned for today is trip back to Tokyo taking around two hours giving you some free time to see more of the city at your own pace. As always your guide will give you any help on advice on how to get to wherever you decide to sightsee or shop.

Day 13 -

This is the last day of the tour and there is no itinerary planned. Some guests head to the airport today for their homebound flight, but many stay on a few more days. Dragonfly Tours Japan is happy to help you with the arrangements for an extended stay.

Accommodation



Tokyo - Yaesu Terminal Hotel

A comfortable, clean, and efficient business hotel with helpful staff situated in a great location near Tokyo Station and the Imperial Palace. As you would expect for such a prime piece of real estate, the rooms are not so big but it has everything you need and much more!

LAN and Wifi

Breakfast included



Hakone - Shinanoki Ichinoyu

Rooms are a modern hybrid of a traditional inn and a hotel. With each room having an outside bath on the balcony you'll probably find yourself more out than in.

Wifi available

Traditional Japanese breakfasts and delicious dinners included



Takayama - Takayama Ouan

Located close to the station, it has modern but traditional style rooms and hot springs on the roof with views over the city.

All rooms have LAN

Breakfast included



Shirakawa-go - Kidoya

Traditional 250 year old farm house with thatched roof. Friendly owners and delicious handmade seasonal foods.

Wi-Fi available

Breakfast and excellent dinner included.



Kanazawa - Daiwa Roynet Hotel

Hotel close to Kanazawa station, the idea; spot from which to explore the city.

All rooms have wi-fi

Breakfast included



Kyoto - Dormy Inn Premium

Comfortable, clean & efficient hotel close to Kyoto station, the hub of the city. The hotel has coin-laundry facilities; computers are available for use in the lobby and it also has an onsen (hot spring bath) and free ramen noodles in the evening.

All rooms have LAN & Wifi.

Breakfast included.

Please note that the accommodation above is standard for the Takayama Reverse Festival Tour but is at times subject to change to a similar or better hotel.

All hotels have been selected with location and comfort in mind.

Other Information

What's Included?

- ALL accommodation. (12 nights)
- The support of your Tour Leader for the entirety of the tour.
- ALL Entrance fees to Museums, Temples, Shrines and Gardens when with the guide following the itinerary. Visiting alternative or additional sites at personal expense.
- ALL city to city transportation including the shinkansen bullet train.
- ALL local transport (subways / city trains / city buses / taxi) is covered while following the itinerary. Additional sites or locations at personal expense

- Suica card - An electronic travel card for your convenience (saves fiddling around with tickets)
- Meet & greet at the airport in Tokyo (either Narita or Haneda) on arrival and transfer (guided) to the tour hotel in Tokyo up to one week before the starting date of the tour.
- Tickets for transfer at the end of the tour from the tour hotel (transfer is non-guided)
- Miyako Odori (Geisha Cherry Blossom Dance) Show Tickets - spring tour only
- Authentic Tea Ceremony at a tea house in Kyoto
- Baggage forwarding for one case / bag per person
- Breakfast every morning.
- Group meal on Day 1 in Tokyo (Alcoholic drinks included!)
- Dinners (Traditional Teishoku) on Days 10 and 11 at Hakone
- Dinners (Traditional Kaiseki Ryori) on Day 4 at Shirakawa-go
- Tour Info-Pack
- 100% payment protection through the TTA (our membership number is U6165)

What's not included?

- Meals, except for the ones noted above
- Any coin lockers that you may use
- Travel Insurance. You must take out travel insurance before travelling to Japan, we suggest this is done soon after a booking has been made.
- Flights to and from Japan!

Payments

After a booking request has been made through the "Make a Booking" section of this website, your booking will be processed. We'll email you back to confirm it along with your invoice and payment details, we accept payments by card or bank transfer. The deposit of GBP 300 / USD 400 per person is requested within 7 days to confirm your booking. The balance is due by 12 weeks prior to the tour departure date. All payment made to us are protected by the TTA (Travel Trust Association). Our membership number is U6165.

Flexibility

The itineraries in our tours are flexible, and do vary occasionally, sometimes due to weather or on-going events such as festivals which guests may want to see. In addition if there is something else you'd like to do or see on your trip please mention this to your tour leader and we'll try our best to ensure you can do it!

Age / Requirements / Fitness

The Takayama Tour is suitable for ages of around 12 and upwards, and is ideal for families, couples, and singles alike. All ages are welcome and the eldest guest we've had on one of our Small Group Tours, to date, is 87 – she was one of the fittest members in the group!

Our only requirements are English speaking ability (all tours are conducted in English) and a zest for life! While Olympic levels of fitness are not necessary, on average we walk around 3 to 5 kilometres per day, steps are involved at some of the tourist sites we visit as are slopes. Most stations do have escalators but not all and an extended time is spent on the feet each day. If you have any questions about this, please just let us know.

Having said all that, walking is done at an easy pace, with plenty of stops for ice cream and to absorb the sights. In the unlikely event that an excursion is going to be too taxing or if you have another preference, you are welcome to break away from the group at any time. No part of the itinerary is compulsory; we like to keep things as fun and flexible as possible!

Transportation

As with all our Small Group Tours in Japan we use the extremely efficient, clean, safe and reliable public transportation network. - It's the most efficient way to get around, and by far it's the best way to experience the country and its people. This is not a tour bus holiday with fixed tourist trap set lunches and carpet sales in the afternoon! At times, particularly in Kyoto when using the city bus it might not always be possible to sit. For longer journeys we use the bullet train and seats are reserved in advance.

Baggage Forwarding

We do at times forward your main cases ahead from one hotel to another (one case per person) allowing you to travel light and easy keeping things as fun as possible. If you bring too much luggage with you, or buy too many souvenirs during the tour and require additional use of the service, this can easily be arranged.

Minimum Numbers

The minimum number of passengers on the Takayama Tour is two as we believe it's unfair to cancel tours when larger numbers are not met.

Single Supplement

Because we keep the group size to a maximum of 10, unfortunately we have to charge a single supplement of £ 400 if travelling alone. For this you'll be ensured to have a room to yourself for the entirety of the tour, except for on rare occasions when staying at traditional accommodation, here we may ask you to share a room with another member of the group of the same sex. If you have any questions about this, please drop us a line.