



THE HEARTLAND TOUR

Details

Duration: 12 Nights

Max Group size: 10

Starts in: Tokyo

Ends in: Osaka / Tokyo

Prices

Start Date	Finish Dates	Price	Spaces available	Reference	Hotel Level
11 Nov 2023	23 Nov 2023	£3,150.00	Only 2 places left!	1123HL	Mid
11 May 2024	23 May 2024	£3,150.00	Only 3 places left!	0524HL	Mid
09 Nov 2024	21 Nov 2024	£3,150.00	6	1124HL	Mid
10 May 2025	22 May 2025	£3,200.00	10	0525HL	Mid
08 Nov 2025	20 Nov 2025	£3,200.00	10	1125HL	Mid

Overview

Taking in the futuristic high-rises of Tokyo, the ancient temples of Kyoto and the traditions, food and culture of an intriguing nation, this **small group tour in the heart of Japan** available in 2023 is ideal for the first-time visitor or for anyone who wants to capture the essence of the country.

Starting with a bite of the freshest sashimi from Tokyo's world famous Tsukiji fish market, the **Japan heartland tour** follows a rapid trail west on the bullet train to the old capital Kyoto, with its abundance of UNESCO World Heritage sites. As you wind your way along the coast to **Hiroshima** and the beautiful island of **Miyajima**, you have the chance to visit the best castle in the country, try the traditional costume of a geisha or samurai, participate in the tea ceremony, enjoy classic gardens and soak in hot springs when you feel the need to relax.

Before closing this small group tour of Japan in the **vibrant city of Osaka**, you visit the spiritual home of Buddhism, Mount Koya, and stay in temple lodgings. Heartland gives you the best of Japanese culture, old and new.

Our Japan tours (<http://www.dragonflytours-japan.com>) take you right to the beating heart of this fascinating culture. If you would like to discuss this tour please get in touch (<http://www.dragonflytours-japan.com/contact-us>).

We have been delivering the Japan Heartland tour and other enjoyable trips for many years and have many happy customers, find out what visitors have said about this and other tours - read Dragonfly Tours Japan reviews (<http://www.dragonflytours-japan.com/testimonials>).

The Heartland Tour is fully guided; all accommodation, entrance fees and city to city transportation is included as well as a 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	Asakusa; Sumida River Cruise; Harajuku; Meiji Shrine; Yoyogi Park; Shibuya's Scramble Crossing	Tokyo
Day 03	Tsukiji Fish Market; Bullet Train to Kyoto; Kiyomizudera; Gion Geisha District; Cultural Show	Kyoto
Day 04	Ryoanji Zen Garden; Kinkaku-ji (Golden Zen Pavillion); Nijo Castle; Nishiki Market	Kyoto
Day 05	Tea Ceremony; Arashiyama; Bamboo Forest; Tenryuji Zen Temple & Garden	Kyoto
Day 06	Free Day to Shop, Relax and Explore - or join a Workshop? How about a daytrip to Nara or Kobe?	Kyoto
Day 07	Bullet Train to Hiroshima; Hiroshima Peace Park, A-Bomb Dome and Museum	Hiroshima
Day 08	Itsukushima Shrine and Floating Gate; Primeval Forest; Mt.Misen; Eternal Flame; Optional Hike	Hiroshima
Day 09	Korakuen Castle Gardens; Kurashiki Old Edo Quarter	Okayama
Day 10	Day Trip to Himeji, Himeji Castle	Okayama
Day 11	Scenic Rail Ride up to Mount Koya, the Buddhist Heartland	Mount Koya

Day 12	Buddhist Monk Chanting; Okunoin Graveyard; Shinsaibashi, Osaka	Osaka
Day 13	Journey's end. If you would like to stay a few extra days in Tokyo or Osaka, we will be happy to help with any arrangements.	The Journey's End

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

* Shukubo- Temple lodgings, 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..

The Heartland Tour finishes in Osaka, but if you would prefer to fly out from Tokyo at the end, just let us know and we'll be happy to help with the arrangements.

You want more? A popular after-tour excursion for the Heartland Tour is to finish up with a couple of days relaxing in hot springs in the scenic area of Hakone, the home of Mt.Fuji. If this is of interest, or any other excursions, please just drop us a line and we'll be happy to organize your after-tour adventure!

Itinerary

Details

Day 1 - Tokyo

This evening, to start the Japan Tour, you are invited to a **group meal** (courtesy of Dragonfly Tours) at a local restaurant. It is a great introduction to Japanese food with a variety of flavours for all tastes. Afterwards, you take a walking tour around **Shinjuku** and the entertainment district of **Kabukicho**. It's Saturday night and the area is buzzing with energy and neon and the streets are packed with people in search of big-city thrills.

Day 2 - Tokyo

This morning you head to **Asakusa** to get a taste of what Edo (the old name for Tokyo) used to be like. It's a great place to explore, browse around the stalls and sample the local foods. But the main attraction is the great **Senso-ji temple** with its enormous, much-photographed, red lanterns at the gates. From there you take the **Sumida River Cruise** going under thirteen colourful bridges to Hinode, enjoying Tokyo from a less familiar angle.

In the afternoon witness the powerhouse of the Japanese youth culture in **Harajuku**. This is the source of Japan's signature fashions and, today, Sunday, is the best day to see it. The renowned **Takeshita Street** will be jumping, and in the neighbouring **Yoyogi Park** you see bands, dance troupes, and exhibitions of skill from jugglers, kung-fu, karate and capoeira experts. Right next door to this, the Meiji shrine housing the deities of the Emperor Meiji and consort stands sublimely in a defiant and very serene manner in contradiction to the loud exhibitions of pop culture.

Before finishing up for the day, we take you to the famous pedestrian crossing in **Shibuya** so often used in documentaries and films about Japan. From the Megabucks Cafe on the corner, you have a bird's eye view of the crowds flooding across as the lights turn green.

Day 3 - Kyoto

In the morning, you explore the world famous **Tsukiji Fish Market** at Tokyo Bay. Fish and vegetables are hawked and haggled over as welcomes and invitations are called out from shopkeepers. You'll also have chance to sample some of the best sashimi and sushi you might have ever tasted.

After spending a couple of days in the heart of modern Japan, it is now time to board the bullet train bound for **Kyoto**. As you shoot westwards at 270km/hr you see, on the right, weather permitting, one of the national symbols, **Mt Fuji**, in its full glory.

It's been said many times before but it's worth saying again – if there is one place you have to visit in Japan then Kyoto is that place. You stay here for four nights and there is a wealth of things to see and do. Kyoto has secured its place in the modern psyche through the treaty on carbon emissions but the ancient capital is still the capital of culture and history – and full of less rarefied delights such as the chance to bathe in the nearby hot springs.

On today's itinerary is a visit to the must-see sites of Eastern Kyoto including the mighty **Kiyomizudera**, which was nominated in 2007 as one of the New 7 Wonders of the World.

You finish up in the evening with a walk around the atmospheric streets of the **Gion** geisha district where you have the opportunity to attend a show of traditional **performing arts** including a bunraku puppet play, gagaku court music, comedy skits and watch a real maiko (apprentice geisha) perform a traditional dance.

Day 4 - Kyoto

The day starts with a visit to the UNESCO site of **Ryoanji**, The Temple of the Dragon at Peace, the most famous of all the **Zen gardens**. The design is classic Zen minimalism: larger rocks sit in a flowing sea (or cosmos) of fine, raked gravel, consisting of carefully chosen, river-worn stones, and constructed to aid meditation. Famously, only 14 of the 15 rocks in this meditation garden are visible from any one vantage; to see the 15th is to achieve enlightenment.

Just up the road from Ryoanji, you visit the photogenic UNESCO site of **Kinkakuji**, the Golden Zen Pavilion said to house sacred relics of the Buddha. The gold-leaf-covered pavilion stands beside a reflecting pond and in the middle of a classically landscaped garden.

After lunch, you visit **Nijo castle**, also with UNESCO status – more of a palace than a castle, it was built by the legendary Ieyasu Tokugawa, the third of the three unifiers, as a show of might and domination. All the feudal lords in western Japan were required to contribute to the building of Nijo – these donations included the main tower and main gate of another castle.

Day 5 - Kyoto

For a moment of calm and tranquillity, you start the day with a **traditional tea ceremony** at an authentic teahouse, which has been a home of the art and supplying the highest quality Uji macha (green tea) to the Nishi Honganji temple for generations.

Later, visit the charming district of **Arashiyama** in western Kyoto, a short train ride away. Walk through the atmospheric **bamboo grove** to one of Kyoto's most famous and important Zen temples, Tenryuji. With UNESCO World Heritage status, **Tenryuji** and its classic Zen garden was founded in 1339 and dedicated to the emperor Go-Daigo by Ashikaga Takauji, the first of the Ashikaga Shogun.

Day 6 - Kyoto

This is a **free day** set aside for shopping, relaxing, exploring and cultural experiences. Perhaps you would like to attend a workshop for one of the following:

- Taiko (traditional drumming)

- Ikebana (flower arranging)
- Wearing a kimono
- Cooking class at a local home
- Sake tasting
- Shodo (Calligraphy)
- Paper craft with Washi paper

If interested, please let us know in advance and we'll get it arranged for you!

There is so much more to do in Kyoto and the surrounding area. Your tour leader will offer plenty of suggestions and let you in on a few local secrets to help you make the most of your day.

This day is also an opportunity to take a trip to one of the neighbouring cities: Nara or Kobe. Nara is another UNESCO treasure and a former capital of Japan that predates even Kyoto. Kobe is a fashionable and affluent city with a cosmopolitan tone, derived from its history as one of the first places to admit foreign residents when Japan opened its Chrysanthemum Curtain in the 19th century. Another option in the summer is the beach – which is only an hour away.

Day 7 - Hiroshima

You go to Hiroshima today. There is no need to state what happened here on the 6th of August 1945. However, these days the city is an attractive and welcoming place. The only remains of that dreadful event are those that have been preserved as memorials. The analogy of Japan being like a phoenix isn't hard to grasp. The Peace Park stirs emotions, and the Atomic Bomb Museum, well ...

Tonight you stay on the beautiful island of Itsukushima, popularly known as Miyajima. This is a mystical place – sparsely populated, mostly forested, and home to a trove of treasures belonging to Japan's spiritual history. You stay in a great ryokan with fantastic views and a very relaxed atmosphere. If you are lucky you might even spot a tanuki – a Japanese raccoon said to enjoy the odd bottle of sake and possessing magical powers.

Day 8 - Hiroshima

This morning you visit Itsukushima Shrine first built in 593 and famous for its 'floating torii' (shrine gate). It's considered one of the top three most beautiful spots in the country, and has to be one of the most photographed too.

From there you meander through the trees and tame deer to the Mt. Misen cable car where you take the quick and easy route up this sacred mountain above the primeval forest to the summit with its fantastic 360-degree views. You also have the chance to see the eternal flame lit by the monk Kobo Daishi (Kukai) some 1200 years ago amongst an unusual collection of rock formations. From the top it's an hour or so hike down the mountain, or simply take the cable car back. After a bite to eat in a restaurant in the woods, enjoy browsing through the souvenir shops at your leisure.

During the summer tours a trip to the beach is also a perfect way to wind down before enjoying the beautiful kaiseki meal in the evening served at the ryokan (Japanese inn).

Day 9 - Okayama

In the morning you make the journey to the less visited city of Okayama. After dropping off your bags at the hotel close to the station – and staying with 'top threes' – you can stroll around one of the top three landscaped gardens in the country, Koraku-en, situated beside Okayama castle.

Alternatively, you could visit the Bizen area (non-guided) in the outskirts of Okayama city famed for its historical role in sword making and pottery, and where there is a sword museum with an impressive display of swords going back to the Kamakura period. If you are lucky you may even see a master swordsmith working on katana and preserving age-old techniques.

In the afternoon you visit Kurashiki just west of Okayama with its picturesque and atmospheric old Edo quarter with quaint, willow-lined canals and museums full of treasures. The name of Kurashiki is not well known outside Japan, but it was a port, centre of commerce and culture and a scene of some of the many power struggles in Japan's history. Unlike many modern cities, much of the old town remains. The buildings are distinctively white with black tiling, and willow-lined canals run through the town. Kurashiki is also the home of Japan's first museum dedicated to Western art, the Ohara museum, a surprising and exciting find in this very Japanese town.

Day 10 - Okayama

Today you go to the neighbouring city of Himeji, home to Japan's finest castle, Himeji Castle, a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1992. It has survived clan wars, world wars, earthquakes, typhoons and the fiercest enemy, fire, for centuries. Himeji castle, white and majestic stands over the city and its elegance and white colour has earned it the nickname, "the Egret Castle". The castle was constructed in the busy nation-building period that saw Kyoto's Nijo Castle go up, and was improved and developed by various warlords over the centuries.

In recent years the structure has undergone extensive repairs and cleaning and the white has been burnished to ever-greater impressiveness.

Day 11 - Mount Koya

Today you hop up the misty, mystical mountains of Koya, the Buddhist Heartland and a proud National Heritage treasure. You are treated to a glimpse of the spiritual life. However briefly, you become part of the spiritual life of Koya, staying the night in beautiful temple lodgings and rising with the monks for the early morning chanting. You don't need to be Buddhist or religious to enjoy this experience. In the evening you dine as the monks do in the local vegetarian culinary style, shojin ryori.

Another of the highlights here is Okunoin, the graveyard. At over 1000 years old, with ancient paths winding around huge cedar trees, it's perfect for an atmospheric evening stroll through the mist.

Day 12 - Osaka

Your morning is free to explore more of Koya and then, if you can tear yourself away, you board the train and wind your way down the mountains to Osaka. After dropping off your bags at the hotel, which is conveniently close to the station, you go for a walk through the energy-filled streets of the Dotonbori and Shinsaibashi downtown areas. Browse through the fantastic shopping malls packed with boutiques and electronics stores selling everything from kimono to tools. How about buying a traditional Japanese lantern to hang outside your house? You name it, Osaka has it for sale!

Alternatively, visit the Osaka aquarium housing the biggest fish tank in the world and where you can get nose to fishy nose with thousands of creatures from the Ring of Fire, the Pacific rim.

Day 13 - The Journey's End

Unfortunately today is the last day of the tour and there is no itinerary planned. If you wish to extend your stay, we can easily help arrange your accommodation for the extra nights - there is so much more to see and do in the area. Just drop us a line, we'll be glad to help.

Likewise if you would prefer to return to Tokyo at the end of the tour for your departing flight, it's an easy trip to do by bullet train which will be covered by your JR Rail Pass at no extra expense (depending on the date). For more information on this, please contact us at info@dragonflytours-japan.com

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 available.

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 at night!

All rooms have LAN & Wifi.

Breakfast included.



Okayama - Daiwa Roynet

Refurbished hotel in an ideal location near the station and just a walk away from Okayama castle and the gardens.

All rooms have LAN and Wi-Fi.

Breakfast included.



Hiroshima - Miyajima Seaside Hotel, Miyajima

Relaxed ryokan (traditional inn) by the beach with a beautiful sunrise. A computer is available for free in the lobby. Wifi in rooms.

Breakfast and excellent traditional Japanese dinners included.



Hiroshima - Aki Grand Hotel

At times, due to school trips, to avoid the chaos we use the Aki Grand Hotel adjacent to the island with spectacular views of the island particularly at sunset and amazing traditional kaiseki meals!

Wifi available in some parts of the building



Koya-san - Jofukuin

A beautiful shukubo (temple lodgings) with Japanese garden. Comfortable and atmospheric rooms with tatami mat flooring and sliding doors. A computer is available in the lobby for free use.

Breakfast and delicious dinner included.



Osaka - Midosuji Hotel, Namba, Osaka

Renovated hotel in the centre of action in downtown Namba, the pumping heart of Osaka, shops, clubs, restaurants all just outside the door. Easy access to the airport.

Breakfast included.

Please note that the accommodation above is standard for the Heartland 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 city to city transportation including the shinkansen bullet train
- ALL local transportation covered while following the set guided itinerary. (Any non-guided side-excursions at personal expense)
- Suica card - An electronic travel card for your convenience (saves fumbling around with tickets especially while in Tokyo!)
- Entrance fees to Museums, Temples, Shrines and Gardens while with the guide following the itinerary are included. Visiting alternative / additional sites at personal expense
- Meet & greet at the airport in Tokyo (either Narita or Haneda) on arrival and transfer (Guided) to the tour hotel in the city up to one week before the starting date of the tour
- Tickets for airport transfer at the end of the tour from the tour hotel (non-guided)
- Authentic Tea Ceremony at a tea house in Kyoto
- Sumida River Cruise in Tokyo
- Baggage forwarding for one bag / case, two times (from Kyoto to Okayama and from Okayama to Osaka). If you would like to use the service more than this it can easily be organised
- Breakfast every morning
- Group meal on Day 1 in Tokyo (Alcoholic drinks included!)
- Dinner on Days 7 and 8 (Kaiseki Ryori at Miyajima)
- Dinner on Day 11 (Shojin Ryori at Mount Koya)
- Tour Info-Pack
- 100% payment protection through the TTA (our membership number is U6165)

What's not included?

- Meals, except for the ones mentioned 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 Japan Heartland 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. The service is cheap and reliable.

Minimum Numbers

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

Single Supplement

Because we keep the group size to a maximum of 10, unfortunately we have to charge a single supplement of £ 380 if travelling alone. For this you'll be ensured to have a room to yourself for the entirety of the tour, except for when staying at the 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.