

The Nakasendo Trail

Japan Ancient And Modern

Tuatara Tours will show you Japan from a local perspective, whether it be shopping on the Ginza, snacking on street food, sleeping on a futon or soaking in a hot springs bath.

tour highlights

Tokyo River Cruise
A visit to Tokyo's oldest temple.
Riding the Shinkansen Bullet train.
Experiencing local hospitality in Japanese Inns, sleeping on tatami mats and dining on traditional cuisine.
Natural hot springs bathing.
UNESCO World Heritage sites and the historic beauty of Kyoto.

tour date

7 May to 14 May 2020

tour cost

NZ\$6145

Single supplement: NZ\$2475

activities

Walking

trip duration

8 Days 7 Nights

grade

Moderate

accommodation

Western Style Hotels, Japanese minshuku (B&B) and Ryokan (Inns)

your guide

Join Tuatara Tours on a fully guided walking tour of Japan and let Nicky, our Tour Manager (and fluent speaker of Japanese) take care of the details for you. Nicky spent 3 years living in Japan and looks forward to sharing her love of this fascinating country with you.



the tour

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See Japan from a local perspective, not from a tour bus window. Our small group tours provide a more up close and personal experience of Japan, its culture and its people.

Your journey covers Japans capital cities, ancient and modern, and the most picturesque section of the Nakasendo, the ancient travellers highway that was a vital link between these capitals in the feudal era.

You will start by exploring Tokyo on foot and experience the feel of modern Japan first hand, and from here, step back in time and follow in the footsteps of merchants and samurai, walking on the most historic stretch of the Nakasendo. You will pass through traditional villages and stay in local family run inns; enjoy picturesque scenery and great food and hospitality.

The Trail finishes with a stay in the beautiful and historic city of Kyoto, with its many UNESCO World Heritage sites.

at a glance

DAY 1: TOKYO

DAY 2: TOKYO HIGHLIGHTS

DAY 3: TOKYO - NAGOYA - O-TSUMAGO

DAY 4: O - TSUMAGO - KISO - FUKUSHIMA

DAY 5: KISO-FUKUSHIMA - KAIDA PLATEAU

DAY 6: KAIDA PLATEAU - NARAI - NAGOYA-KYOTO

DAY 7: KYOTO

DAY 8: TOUR FINISH

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what's included

General

All transport within Japan - all accommodation in hotels or Japanese style Inns on a double / twin share basis- daily breakfast, 3 dinners and 1 lunch- admission to all temples and sightseeing spots in your itinerary- portage of luggage on the Nakasendo- services of Nicky as guide and interpreter throughout.

Accommodation

- **Tokyo:** We stay at a modern western style hotel in central Tokyo, handy to the Ginza district and its elegant department stores. Rooms are double/ twin with ensuite facilities. Hotels in Japan are quite small compared to Western equivalents, an average double room is only 20-30sqm. The room typically contains a small private ensuite bathroom, known as a "unit bath", with shower over Japanese bathtub, toilet and hand basin. The room will usually have a television, an electric pot for boiling water for a hot drink, phone and internet access, hairdryer, air conditioning and a fridge.
- **The Nakasendo:** We stay in Japanese minshuku (B&B) and Ryokan (Inns). These are traditional rooms with tatami mat floors, futon bedding and yukata robes for wearing in the evenings and to dinner. On our tours some of the inns are more rustic and atmospheric, while others more modern and luxurious. Most are family run and have been in the same family for several generations. As is traditional, in some inns bathing and toilet facilities are shared but others have en-suite facilities.
- **Kyoto:** We stay in a Western Style Hotel close to Kyoto Station, and shops and restaurants. Rooms are double/ twin with ensuite facilities and the hotel also has both European and Japanese restaurants, in house bar and room service.



Food

Japan is a food lovers paradise, as well as all the traditional local favourites, Japan offers an amazing choice of international restaurants, coffee shops, bars and food outlets. On your tour we provide a hearty breakfast each day to set you up for the day and you also have the opportunity to experience traditional home cooked dishes during your stay at the inns. The tour includes a daily breakfast, 3 dinners and 1 lunch.

Clothes & Luggage

We provide a comprehensive list of gear for you in the tour trip notes (sent to you on completion of the booking process.) Because the tours are planned for the warmer months of spring and early summer in Japan you will not need a large amount of heavy clothing however we do suggest a good rainproof jacket and a fleece, merino top or similar for the cooler evenings. During your stay at the ryokans you will be provided with a yukata, or cotton kimono, which is your evening wear and can be worn around the inn and for dining. We travel between the major cities using public transport and you need to carry your belongings with you on these trips (bullet trains and local trains) so luggage needs to be kept to one suitcase and one day pack for ease of handling. A medium size suitcase should be sufficient for all your clothing requirements, and ideally on wheels so that it can be pulled along.

Travel Insurance

Medical services in Japan are good but the cost of treatment is high and you can expect to pay the full cost of any treatment you receive. For this reason we require all tour participants to have a comprehensive medical insurance in place.

When should I arrive and how do I get to the hotel?

If you are travelling to Tokyo on the day of the tour, Nicky can advise the best flights and times to book so that you can travel with other group members from New Zealand.

If you are arriving for an extended stay prior to the tour, Nicky will advise how to get into Tokyo and where to meet us for the start of the tour as well as tips on what to see and do to maximise your time in Japan.

Tipping

There is no tradition of tipping in Japan and it is not a requirement at restaurants or hotels that you tip for services provided. However if you feel you have been provided with excellent service and you would like to reward that, please feel free to offer a tip.



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Day 1: Tokyo

For those travelling from New Zealand today, Nicky will be at Narita Airport to welcome you. Once you have cleared customs and immigration, Nicky will be in the arrivals area to meet you and assist you through to Tokyo. The journey is approx. 1 hour and on arrival in Tokyo we head directly to our hotel in the Ginza District.

For those joining the group in Tokyo, Nicky will provide full instructions on how to get to the hotel and can also assist with any pre or post tour travel plans if you need ideas on how to maximise your stay in Japan.

This evening, if you wish to relax and have an early night, you may prefer to dine at the hotel, or for those that wish to venture out, there are several local eateries within a short walking distance of our hotel.

Day 2: Tokyo Highlights

After breakfast at our hotel we'll set out to explore Tokyo, on foot, by boat and by local train. Our journey takes us through central and northern Tokyo this morning but there is time in the afternoon for you to branch out further if you wish to.

Our first port of call is Hinode Pier, where we will take a boat cruise of the Sumida River for a great view of the Tokyo skyline. The Sumida River runs through Tokyo for 27km, travels under 26 bridges and flows into Tokyo Bay. Boats travel back and forth around 8 destinations on the river and our destination today is one of Tokyo's most historical districts, Asakusa, where an atmosphere of the Tokyo of past decades survives.

Asakusa was for many years the main commercial and working class neighbourhood of Tokyo and is home to Sensoji, Tokyo's oldest and most famous Buddhist temple founded in the 7th century. Many of the small shops on Nakamise Street leading up to the temple have been providing temple visitors with traditional local snacks and souvenirs for centuries and we have the opportunity to browse some of these shops, and grab something to eat for our lunch here today.

After lunch, the choice is yours for the afternoon. You may wish to return to Ginza to stroll and window shop at some of the most elegant upmarket departments stores in Japan, or you may prefer to jump on the Yamanote loop line and head to Ueno, Shinjuku or one of Tokyo's other districts to explore further. Nicky will be able to provide directions and suggestions for things to see and do.

This evening, we will regroup at the hotel and head out for an optional dinner at a local Izakaya, (a Japanese-style pub), to sample some traditional fare, and a few local beverages.

MEALS INCLUDED: B

Day 3: Tokyo - Nagoya - O-Tsumago

We have an early start today, to catch the bullet train to Nagoya for the start of our 4 day hike. From Nagoya Station we catch a train to Nakatsugawa, an old post town and now a pleasant regional town, and then head out on our walk. Our first rest stop is at the quaint Magome post-town, with its traditional small shops perched on the side of the hill. We continue on to Tsumago, for a classic hike through old forests and bubbling streams along the Nakasendo, until we reach our inn in the hamlet of O- Tsumago. We visit nearby thermal hot spring baths to relax before we end our day over dinner.

MEALS INCLUDED: B, D

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Day 4: O - Tsumago - Kiso - Fukushima

After waving goodbye to the innkeeper, we wend our way on through Tsumago before following the old highway on to Nagiso through picturesque hamlets and fields.

We now start one of the alternative routes of the old highway through this area. Our choice avoids the easy riverside way which is now overlaid by a busy modern highway. Instead, we take the original route of the Nakasendo here. Over 3~4 hours, it takes us gradually higher and higher through quiet farming hamlets until we ascend through a forest to Ne-no-ue Pass. From the pass it is a steep descent for an hour to Nojiri train station, where a 40-minute rail journey takes us on to Kiso- Fukushima and our ryokan in the centre of town. The inn has a welcome attraction, its own thermal hot spring baths to relax in before dinner.

MEALS INCLUDED: B, D

Day 5: Kiso-Fukushima - Kaida Plateau

This morning we transfer part-way to the Kaida Plateau by bus and then head off on our walk. Our morning walk takes us over the Jizo Pass , through forests filled with majestic cypress and then down onto the Kaida Plateau itself. The plateau is dominated by Mt. Ontake, an active volcano that is considered sacred by a Buddhist sect.

After lunch, our afternoon's excursion takes us over another pass that, on a clear day, provides views high over the plateau to Mt. Ontake. We descend from here to our accommodation, a delightful, family run modern Japanese inn with hot springs.

MEALS INCLUDED: B, L, D

Day 6: Kaida Plateau - Narai - Nagoya-Kyoto

Returning from Kaida Plateau, we begin our climb of the Torii Toge (Torii Pass). The pass is named after the Shinto torii, or gate, that marks one of four protective sites surrounding the sacred Mt. Ontake. At 1,197 meters, Torii Pass is also the second highest point on the Nakasendo. The descent into Narai post- town takes us along narrow mountain paths until we emerge at the outskirts of this famous post-town. This is an area well known for its lacquer ware and we will have some free time here to explore, relax in cafes and shop before travelling back to Nagoya. From Nagoya Station we will travel onwards to Kyoto, our destination for the next 2 nights.

MEALS INCLUDED: B

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Day 7: Kyoto

We head out today to explore Kyoto on foot and pack in as many of the beautiful and historic sites of Kyoto as the day will allow us. Kyoto was the Imperial Capital of Japan for more than 1000 years and is steeped in history and tradition. It has 1600 Buddhist temples and 400 Shrines and among those we will visit is Kiyomizu-dera, one of the most famous temples in Japan and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We will also pay a visit to Sanjusangendo, the temple of 1001 statues now designated as a National Treasure.

Walking through the city along the narrow back streets of Gion, we may catch a glimpse of Kyoto's famous Maiko-san, the elegant and mysterious geisha, and for those that are interested there is an opportunity to watch the geisha dance and other Japanese traditional arts performed in an evening show (bookings essential).

The evening will be spent in one of Kyoto's popular bars and restaurants where we can try some local fare and perhaps a few sake's to celebrate our journey. (Additional Cost)

MEALS INCLUDED: B

Day 8

The morning is free in Kyoto for some last minute sightseeing, shopping or a stroll around the central city before making the journey back to Tokyo on the bullet train and then the Narita Express to Narita Airport. If you wish to explore Japan further, Nicky will be happy to help with suggestions on how to extend your time in Japan.

MEALS INCLUDED: B

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Some useful information on Japan

Overview: Japan is situated in northeastern Asia between the North Pacific and the Sea of Japan. The area of Japan is 377,873 square kilometers, nearly equivalent to Germany and Switzerland combined or slightly smaller than California. In comparison New Zealand is 268,021 square kilometres. Japan consists of four major islands, surrounded by more than 4,000 smaller islands. Japan's population is over 126 million. Most Japanese reside in densely populated urban areas. Japan's capital city is Tokyo. The population of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area including the city, some of its suburbs and the surrounding area is approximately 12 million.

Currency: The unit of Japanese currency is yen. Coins are available in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 50, 100 and 500 yen and bank notes in denominations of 1,000, 2,000, 5,000 and 10,000 yen. Currently Japanese consumption tax (equivalent of GST) is 8%, and is already included in the cost of most goods and services. Tipping is not customary in Japan.

Electricity: The voltage used throughout Japan is uniformly 100 volts, A.C. There are two kinds of frequencies in use; 50 Hertz in eastern Japan and 60 Hertz in western Japan (including Nagoya, Kyoto and Osaka). A convertible type of electrical appliance such as a travel hair dryer, travel iron and shaver will therefore be handy; otherwise a step-down transformer is required to convert the voltage. There are no columnar-shaped plugs or 3-pin plugs used in Japan but 2-flat-pin plugs are used instead. It is therefore advisable to purchase a plug adapter beforehand.

Drinking water: Tap water is safe to drink anywhere in Japan. Mineral water including major imported brands can be easily obtained from super markets, convenience stores and other similar places.

Vaccinations There are no vaccinations required for entering Japan from anywhere around the world.

Visas Visas are not required for visitors from New Zealand, for other countries please check with your local Japanese embassy or Consulate. Visitors on a current New Zealand passport valid for 6 months or more can enter Japan as tourists for a period of up to 90 days.

Dining out: One of the highlights of any visit to Japan is the opportunity to sample an amazing array of delicious food, from a simple noodle snack served at a street stall or a full Japanese banquet, a feast for the eye as well as the palate.

Japanese cuisine is traditionally based on rice and fish, vegetables and soup with an emphasis on seasonal produce. It is considered a healthy, low calorie diet and is often touted as the secret behind Japan's longevity statistics. Each region in Japan has its own food culture and promotes its own regional specialities whether they be pickles, noodles or sweets. Japan has also adopted a number of dishes from the western world and other parts of Asia such as curries and these are popular alternatives to the more traditional way of eating.

Japan also produces excellent local beers and its indigenous rice wine, sake.

A brief historical overview: Japan was first mentioned in historical documents around the 5th century when the Emperor Jimmu became the first in a long imperial line which still continues today. Japan's first permanent imperial court was established at Nara in 710.

In 794 the capital city moved from Nara to Heiankyo (the present day Kyoto) and a period of peace and prosperity continued until around 1185 with the ascendancy of the warrior class known as samurai. The Military clans pushed Japan into a series of civil wars, with the regional warlords becoming more and more powerful and toppling the aristocracy from power. Of these the most powerful was Tokugawa Ieyasu who established his shogunate government in Edo (present day Tokyo) and to secure his supremacy forced Japan into a period of isolation from the outside world until the mid-19th Century.

In 1853 Commodore Perry of the US Navy sailed his "black ships" into Japan, and with the arrival of the West and its more advanced technology, the Shogunate was forced to give in to the rising tide of modernisation. Emperor Meiji was restored to power and embracing western culture, dress, food and architecture he set Japan on the path to the modern industrialised nation we see today.

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