



ANCIENT HIGHWAY TOUR

Details

Duration: 11 Nights

Max Group size: 10

Starts in: Tokyo

Ends in: Tokyo

Prices

| Start Date | Finish Dates | Price | Spaces available | Reference | Hotel Level |
|-------------|--------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|-------------|
| 03 Sep 2018 | 14 Sep 2018 | £2,780.00 | Only 3 places left! | 0918AH | Mid |
| 15 Oct 2018 | 26 Oct 2018 | £2,500.00 | 8 | 1018AH | Mid |
| 05 Nov 2018 | 16 Nov 2018 | £2,500.00 | Fully booked | 1118AH | Mid |
| 11 Mar 2019 | 22 Mar 2019 | £2,500.00 | 10 | 0319AH | Mid |
| 13 May 2019 | 24 May 2019 | £2,650.00 | 10 | 0519AH | Mid |
| 02 Sep 2019 | 13 Sep 2019 | £2,620.00 | 10 | 0919AH | Mid |
| 14 Oct 2019 | 25 Oct 2019 | £2,620.00 | 10 | 1019AH | Mid |
| 04 Nov 2019 | 15 Nov 2019 | £2,620.00 | 10 | 1119AH | Mid |

Overview

Our Japan **Ancient Highway Tour** is a relaxing trip taking in four of the most popular places for travellers to Japan. The tour starts in the neon and **glitz of Tokyo** which makes a neat contrast with the next stop, the somewhat more traditional old capital Kamakura. From there we move west to Hakone, home to the iconic Mount Fuji.

Over a couple of days in the area you can **walk along the ancient Tokaido trail**, the old main passageway for shogun and merchants alike. The route takes in the once feared highway checkpoint that monitored the passage of people and goods in and out of Edo (the old name for Tokyo).

These days you'll get a more friendly welcome and the numerous hot springs in the area make it the perfect place to heal and relax. From there we follow the trail the modern way - by bullet train - to Kyoto, Japan's cultural capital with a national treasure around every corner. You'll have the chance to participate in sado (the Japanese tea ceremony), watch maiko (apprentice geisha) dance, and see some of the best sights in the land.

The last leg of the tour is spent in **Hiroshima** where the poignant peace park and museum stand out in this vibrant, open city before heading to back in Tokyo with lifelong memories of this intriguing country. If you would like to discuss this tour in depth please **contact us** for more information or read our **tour reviews** to find out how other like minded travellers have enjoyed our tours. We have places available on 2018 Japan Ancient Highway tour dates with more places available for 2019.

The **Ancient Highway 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 in Shinjuku and Kabukicho; Tokyo Metropolitan Building. | Tokyo |
| Day 02 | Tsukiji Fish Market; Kamakura Day Trip; Daibutsu (Great Buddha); Forest Walk; Hokokuji Bamboo Zen Garden. | Tokyo (Kamakura Day Trip) |
| Day 03 | Hakone; Samurai Museum; Hot Springs. | Hakone (Mount Fuji) |
| Day 04 | Views of Mount Fuji; Hell's Valley; Pirate Ship across Lake Ashi; Old Edo Checkpoint; Cedar Avenue; Walk along the Ancient Highway. | Hakone (Mount Fuji) |
| Day 05 | Bullet Train to Kyoto; Kiyomizudera (UNESCO); Gion Geisha District; (Optional) Culture Performance. | Kyoto |
| Day 06 | Tea Ceremony; Path of Philosophy; Ginkaku-ji (Silver Pavilion and Zen Garden). | Kyoto |
| Day 07 | Ryoanji Zen Garden; Kinkakuji (Golden Zen Pavilion); Nijo Castle (All three have UNESCO status) | Kyoto |
| Day 08 | Free Day to Shop, Relax and Explore - or join a cultural workshop! Perhaps do a daytrip to Nara, Osaka or Kobe | Kyoto |
| Day 09 | Bullet train to Hiroshima; A-Bomb Dome; Peace Park and Museum; Miyajima Island (UNESCO). | Hiroshima (Miyajima) |

| | | |
|--------|--|----------------------|
| Day 10 | Itsukushima Shrine and Floating Shrine Gate; Mount Misen; Primeval Forest; Optional Hike. | Hiroshima (Miyajima) |
| Day 11 | Himeji Castle (UNESCO); Bullet Train to Tokyo. | Tokyo |
| Day 12 | Journey's end. If you would like to stay a few extra days, we will be happy to help with any arrangements. On the May tour, why not go to the sumo tournament today? | The journey's end |

* 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.

What's that - you want more you say? A popular after tour excursion for the Ancient Highway Tour is to visit the famous Art Island of Naoshima for a couple of days to soak in the atmosphere and relax instead of returning to Tokyo on Day 11 after you've visited Himeji Castle. If you are fortunate to have a lot of time on your hands, you could consider a trip to Takayama, Shirakawa-go and Kanazawa too! If this, or an alternative excursion is of interest, please just let us know and we'll be happy to organize your adventure for you!

Itinerary

Details

Day 1 - Tokyo

The tour proper will start this evening, after introductions and a tour briefing you are treated to a meal (on us) at a local restaurant. This is a great opportunity to experience some local cuisine and meet the other members of the group.

Later, you go to the Tokyo Metropolitan Building, a skyscraper within the business district, where you head for the 45th floor for panoramic night views over the city. You wrap up the evening with a walking tour of the neon-lit streets of the famously hedonistic **Kabuki-cho** night-time entertainment district.

Day 2 - Tokyo (Kamakura Day Trip)

This morning you visit the fascinating **Tsukiji Fish Market**. In a country famed for its regimented order, you witness a taste of the local chaos as fish are sold to traders from all over the city. There is an astounding variety of sea creatures here and you can sample some of the freshest and best sashimi you're ever likely to taste – straight off the boats – at one of the many restaurants around the market.

Then the tour of Japan moves on, boarding the train for **Kamakura**, an hour away southwest of the capital for a daytrip. Kamakura was Japan's capital from 1185 to 1333 and many of its sites date back to that time including the serene **bamboo Zen Garden** of Hokokuji, where you may want to sit down with a bowl of macha (green tea) and contemplate life, the universe and everything.

After lunch visit the famous **Great Buddha**, an enormous statue of The Amida Buddha, cast in 1252. Originally it was housed within a huge wooden structure but that was washed away in a tsunami in the 15th century, leaving the Buddha open to the elements, as it remains today.

Assuming the weather is on our side you take a forest walk, which ends at 800-hundred-year-old Zeniarai Benten shrine, hidden away in a cave. Bring money – money washed in the spring water of this shrine is said to multiply, which may be why this site is the second most visited in Kamakura after the giant statue of Buddha. This walk is optional. You head back to Tokyo late in the afternoon.

Day 3 - Hakone (Mount Fuji)

You make our way to the region of **Hakone**, 100km west of Tokyo this morning. Hakone-Yumoto is renowned for its hot springs and you stay here for two nights in a hotel near the main town with fantastic views and traditional onsen (hot spring) facilities dating back to the early Edo era.

There are a number of world-class museums in the region, but in keeping with the theme of the tour, your guide will take you to the **Samurai Museum** where you can try on real Edo armour. If you prefer you can split off from the group and visit any of the other museums in the area, or simply relax and soak in any of the many **hot springs**.

Day 4 - Hakone (Mount Fuji)

Today is a fun day and best started 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 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 your life will be extended by seven years. Unsurprisingly, the eggs sell very well – how many can you eat? Due to volcanic conditions, visiting Owakudani may not be possible and this part of the circuit will be missed out.

You descend on the other side of the mountain. The hike down to **Lake Ashi** takes about an hour but, but there's the option of taking the cable car. At the bottom, the lakeside makes a beautiful place for a stroll, (especially if you didn't walk down the mountain) before regrouping and getting a bite to eat. After that, you catch the cheesy-but-fun pirate ship across the lake to the reproduction of the **Hakone checkpoint**, a place of great historical significance. After much research, and built using traditional methods and tools, this re-creation was opened to the public in the spring of 2007. During the Edo era (1603-1868) the Tokugawa shogunate imposed strict regulations monitoring and controlling travellers and merchandise in order to maintain the newly won, but fragile, peace. During the Edo era there had been 52 such checkpoints, but this one is thought to have been the largest and most important.

From here, you walk along a stretch of the **ancient highway** with huge cedar trees on either side, planted in 1618 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, some sections of which still have the original paving. Many of the greatest people in Japanese history have walked (or been carried in palanquins) along this road – shogun, armies of samurai, noblemen, writers, artists, peasants, courtesans and disguised ninja all took this route – and it's a very special thrill to walk in their footsteps.

Day 5 - Kyoto

After breakfast, and perhaps one final soak in the onsen, you board the **bullet train bound for Kyoto**. Sit back and enjoy your bento (lunch box) as you head westward to the cultural heart of the country at almost 300km/h. This ancient and enchanting city was lucky enough to have been saved from the Second World War bombing, and is more recently known for the treaty on carbon emissions.

Today, you visit the must-see site of **Kiyomizudera**, the famous stilted temple with UNESCO status on **Higashiyama**, the Eastern Mountains. It's the most visited temple in Kyoto and was a runner up in a recent wonders of the world competition. Kiyomizudera and the neighbouring Jishu Shrine have altars where the devout can pray for almost anything, from finding Mr. or Mrs. Right, to soothing the corns on their feet.

From there you stroll through the ancient winding cobbled streets to the **Gion geisha district** where we conclude today's guided tour. Later, in the evening you have the

opportunity to watch a performance of traditional performing arts, including among other things, a koto (Japanese harp) performance and maiko (apprentice geisha) dance.

Perhaps you have dreamt of dressing up as a geisha – well, today you have the opportunity to do so, have some pictures taken, and, if you're feeling confident, even go for a walk around the old streets in full costume. If this is something you are interested in doing please let your tour leader know in advance and get an appointment made for you.

Day 6 - Kyoto

The **tea ceremony** has fascinated visitors to Japan for centuries. Its ritual, its precise choreography, its Zen calm, its mystery, have made it one of the nation's most famous cultural features. But what is it all about? Now you can find out because on day 6, the tour invites you to participate in the tea ceremony at a venerable teahouse that has been part of Kyoto's tradition for seven generations.

After the meditative serenity of the tea ceremony, it is appropriate that you next walk **Tetsugaku-no-michi** (the Path of Philosophy), a path that runs between **Nanzenji and Ginkaku-ji**, alongside a stream lined with cherry and maple trees through evocatively old neighbourhoods. Influential 20th century philosopher professor Nishida Kitaro is said to have regularly walked this path while mulling the big questions – hence the name of this street.

Your philosophical walk terminates at the UNESCO site of Ginkaku-ji, (the Temple of the Silver Pavilion). This Zen temple feels like the overlooked treasure of Kyoto, often mentioned only after Ryoan-ji, Kinkaku-ji, and Kiyomizudera. Founder Ashikaga Yoshimasa planned to cover the temple in silver leaf but work had not yet begun at his death in 1490, and was never completed. Ginkaku-ji remains as Yoshimasa probably last saw it; simple and unfinished, but today an exemplar of the Japanese aesthetic of wabi-sabi. Walking into the precincts of the temple takes you into another world. The designs of the garden are intended to evoke land and sea; elegant stone gardens lie next to groves of birch and moss gilds the natural surfaces.

From here you have choices. You may wish to take a short bus ride into the centre of Kyoto or if you'd prefer, join your tour leader for a walk through the local residential area to the Kyoto Handicraft Centre, a popular destination for souvenir hunters.

Day 7 - Kyoto

Today you see three of the best UNESCO World Heritage sites in Kyoto, starting with **Ryoan-ji** and its renowned Zen rock garden. The garden's 15 stones are cunningly laid out so that only 14 are visible from any one place in the garden. The full 15 are only visible to the enlightened.

Afterwards you go to the nearby Temple of the Golden Pavilion – **Kinkaku-ji**. This is perhaps the most famous of Kyoto's sights, and certainly the most photogenic. The three-storey pavilion, covered in gold leaf, as its name suggests stands in classic Muromachi period gardens and next to a pond, which catches the gold reflection in its shimmering surface.

From Kinkaku-ji, the tour goes on to **Nijo castle**. The castle was built by the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu, one of the towering figures in the formation of Japan – and builder of the Hakone checkpoint you visit on day 4. Tokugawa lived in dangerous, turbulent times at the centre of a power struggle that lasted his entire life – and his enemies continually sought his demise. Aware of the constant danger of assassins, the shogun came up with a novel alarm system, which he installed in Nijo castle: "nightingale" floorboards. Not even the stealthiest ninja could sneak around this castle without the floor singing his presence to everyone.

Day 8 - Kyoto

Today is a **free day** set aside for shopping, relaxing and exploring. There is so much 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.

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!

This day is also an opportunity to take a trip to one of the neighbouring cities: **Osaka, Nara or Kobe**. Nara is another UNESCO treasure and a former capital of Japan that predates even Kyoto. Osaka is Kansai's commercial powerhouse, and centre of more worldly delights in its profusion of restaurants and night spots. 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 9 - Hiroshima (Miyajima)

The Japan tour moves on to **Hiroshima**. The events of 1945 need no explanation and a visit to the Dome, **Peace Park and museum** are truly moving experiences. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have had a huge formative influence on the psyche of the modern nation and time spent at these memorials will help the visitor understand modern Japan. It is a powerful experience to stand at ground zero and reflect that you are standing at the centre of one of the most profoundly affective and destructive events in the history of humanity.

However, modern Hiroshima is more than the bomb. The phoenix city offers as much as any other city in Japan in terms of attractions and distractions.

At day's end you take a short ferry ride to beautiful Miyajima, a forested and historical island in the bay, and the region's principal attraction after the city itself. **Miyajima** also has UNESCO status. You spend the night in a traditional ryokan and feast on a classic kaiseki meal that comprises various dishes of seasonal foods prepared in a quintessentially Japanese way.

Day 10 - Hiroshima (Miyajima)

You start the day by visiting the main attraction on the island, the magnificent **Itsukushima Shrine**, perched on stilts over the ocean. The waves lapping gently beneath create a very special atmosphere. In the same bay, welcoming the tide, is the much-photographed "floating torii", a massive Shinto gate standing in the water, framing the view across the straits and the hills of Hiroshima beyond.

Miyajima is a small island but is home to infinite mysteries. **Mt Misen**, Miyajima's dominant peak, is associated with the Buddhist ascetic Kobo Daishi and is dotted with shrines and sites of miracles attributed to him. Among these is the eternal flame, lit by Kobo Daishi himself as part of his rites and which is said to have burned continuously for 1,200 years. The eternal flame ignited the lamp which now burns in the Hiroshima peace park as memorial to the atomic bombing.

A ropeway takes the traveller to a point near the summit of Mt.Misen and provides opportunities for hiking to the summit for more spectacular views of the Seto Inland Sea and the mainland. The full walk would take about two hours, but you tailor your adventure to your own needs. Later treat yourself to fresh oysters from the bay.

As with Nara, deer, messengers of the gods, roam freely with no fear of people. Less godly and full of mischief, the island is home to a large colony of monkeys, who may oblige the lucky traveller with their antics.

Day 11 - Tokyo

The tour now returns to Tokyo, but on the way you stop off in Himeji to visit Japan's most beautiful and renowned castle.

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. Unsurprisingly, Himeji castle has UNESCO World Heritage status. In recent years the structure has undergone extensive repairs and cleaning and the white has been burnished to ever-greater impressiveness.

Once satiated on the glory of Himeji, you continue back to Tokyo.

Day 12 - The journey's end

Sadly, this is the last day of the tour and there is no itinerary. However, the adventure doesn’t have to end. If you would like to stay longer in Japan, let Dragonfly Tours know, and we will be happy to help you out – arrange hotel bookings and discuss travel ideas with you.

If you are travelling in May, Tokyo’s main sumo tournament will be in progress – a great opportunity to catch the unique spectacle of the big men doing battle.

Accommodation



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



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



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 Ancient Highway 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.



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.



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

Other Information

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 Ancient Highway 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 Ancient Highway 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 £ 350 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 ryokan (usually 2 nights), 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.

What is Included?

- ALL accommodation (11 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 / additional sites at personal expense
- ALL city to city transportation including the shinkansen bullet train
- Meet & greet at the airport in Tokyo (either Narita or Haneda) on arrival and transfer (guided) to the tour hotel up to one week before the starting date of the tour
- Airport transfer at the end of the tour from the tour hotel (this is non-guided)
- 2018 Tours - Most local transport (subways / city buses etc) is covered by the various travel passes we issue, but not all coming to an overall total of around an additional GBP£ 20 per person
- 2019 Tours - All local transportation is covered while with the guide following the itinerary. Visiting alternative / additional locations at personal expense
- Suica card - An electronic travel card with JPY1,500 credit on it for your convenience (saves fiddling around with tickets especially while in Tokyo!)
- Authentic Tea Ceremony at a tea house in Kyoto
- Baggage forwarding for one bag per person, two times (from Tokyo to Kyoto and from Kyoto back to Tokyo)
- Breakfast every morning
- Group meal on Day 1 in Tokyo (Alcoholic drinks included!)
- Dinners (Traditional Teishoku) on Days 3 and 4 at Hakone
- Dinners (Traditional Kaiseki Ryori) on Days 9 and 10 at Miyajima
- 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
- 2018 Tour - Local transportation which is not covered by the various travel passes we issue for the tour. This comes to around GBP£ 20 in total. 2019 tours onwards will have all local transportation covered.
- 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!

If the ancient highway tour isn't for you, have a look at our other [tours to Japan](#), we have a fantastic selection of tours for all tastes and budgets.