



# CHERRY BLOSSOM TOUR

## Details

Duration: 11 Nights

Max Group size: 12

Starts in: Tokyo

Ends in: Tokyo

## Prices

Start Date	Finish Dates	Price	Spaces available	Reference	Hotel Level
29 Mar 2019	09 Apr 2019	£3,300.00	Only 4 places left!	0319CB	High
31 Mar 2019	11 Apr 2019	£3,300.00	6	0419CB	High

## Overview

The cherry blossom that paints Japan in pink every April is the most powerful symbol in the nation's culture. The intimate relationship between natural images and Japan's philosophy and art is well known and records suggest that the people of Japan have held these pink blooms in high regard right back to the foundation of the country.

If you are looking for a **spring tour of Japan**, our 2019 Cherry Blossom Tour is the perfect choice. We have dates available for the Japan Cherry Blossom Tour in 2019 so please book early to ensure your place on this fantastic experience. The temples and parks are particularly beautiful during the spring and our Cherry Blossom Tour is timed to ensure you visit when they are at their most resplendent.

The delicate but brightly coloured and short-lived flower has long symbolised the frailty, transience and intensity of life. The flower has inspired countless songs and works of art and its image has adorned everything from fabrics to flags to warplanes to coins to stationery. The association between the cherry blossom and mortality made it an especially potent image in the second world war, when Japan's rulers suggested that each bloom was the reincarnated soul of a soldier or civilian who had died in the conflict.

It is easy to imagine the emotional impact of the blizzards of pink petals swept from the trees in spring breezes. In today's Japan, cherry blossom season is an occasion for picnics and parties with friends under the ubiquitous bloom-laden trees, or sightseeing trips with the family, or romantic strolls with a loved one.

The Cherry Blossom Tour captures Japan at its most attractive. It starts in the great capital Tokyo with its many cherry tree-filled parks, takes you to the ancient capital Kyoto and explores Mt. Fuji and Hiroshima too. Dragonfly's flexible approach to itineraries lets you enjoy both group and independent sightseeing, in order for you to get the most out of your trip in your own way.

Read on for more about the itinerary, available tour dates this year and in 2019, hotels used and other useful information about our Japan Cherry Blossom tour in 2018. Please **get in touch** to discuss this tour in more detail or maybe you would like to **read our reviews** and see how other visitors have found our tours.

**The Cherry Blossom Tour is fully guided; ALL local accommodation, transportation and entrance fees are included. 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 Entertainment District	Tokyo
Day 02	Asakusa; Sumida River Cruise; Hama-Rikyu Gardens; Scramble Crossing	Tokyo
Day 07	UNESCO World Heritage Day – Ryoanji Zen Garden; Kinkaku-ji (Golden pavilion); Nijo castle	Kyoto
Day 03	Tsukiji Fish Market; Sake Brewery	Tokyo
Day 04	Hakone; Open Air Museum; Natural Hot Springs; Gourmet dinner	Hakone
Day 05	Views of Mt. Fuji; Lake Ashi; Pirate Ship; Old Tokaido Highway Check Point; Cedar Avenue	Hakone
Day 06	Bullet Train to Kyoto; Gion Geisha District; Miyako Odori (Geisha Cherry Blossom Dance)	Kyoto
Day 08	Free Day to Shop, Relax and Explore - or join a Workshop! How about a daytrip to Nara or Kobe?	Kyoto
Day 09	Traditional Tea Ceremony; Higashiyama (Eastern Mountains of Kyoto); Kiyomizudera; Gion Geisha District; Cultural Show	Kyoto
Day 10	Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park; the Atomic Bomb Dome and Museum	Hiroshima
Day 11	Miyajima Island; Itsukushima Shrine with Famous Floating Gate; Bullet Train to Tokyo; End of Tour Party	Tokyo
Day 12	End of Tour.	End of Tour

\* Ryokan- Traditional Japanese inn with tatami mat flooring.

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..

# Itinerary

## Details

### Day 1 - Tokyo

Day 1 of the Cherry Blossom tour starts in the evening when the group meets up and goes to a **local restaurant** in Shinjuku. This is an ideal opportunity for everyone to get to know each other and begin their excursion into the world of Japanese food.

Afterwards you take a walk around Shinjuku and the neighbouring area of **Kabukicho**, the renowned entertainment districts dazzling with neon. These areas are both celebrated and notorious for providing the best of contemporary Japanese urban culture along with big servings of hedonism. These are great areas for people watching, exploring, and observing the city at play.

### Day 2 - Tokyo

Today we make our way to **Asakusa**, a part of the city steeped in the atmosphere of Edo Japan and, once upon a time, the location of the first temple in what is now called Tokyo. Asakusa is also known as the old gateway to the Yoshiwara, "the Floating World", formerly an area of entertainment and carnal indulgences. Take some time here to browse the market stalls and explore the side streets where the real treasures are to be found.

After a bite for lunch, you catch a boat along the **Sumida River** towards Tokyo Bay, from which the water-level perspective provides a new angle on the city. At this time of the year you have the spectacle of the river banks lined with hanami (cherry blossom viewing) parties – people will be sitting out with friends and elaborate picnics, possibly singing with portable karaoke machines, or simply strolling and absorbing the atmosphere.

You disembark at the **Hama-Rikyu** landscape gardens. In days of yore, shogun would come here to relax, hunt and entertain guests from Japan's elite.

On the way back to Shinjuku you have the opportunity to go to **Shibuya** to finish the day. This is a bustling shopping area whose centrepiece is the much-filmed Hachiko Square **scramble junction**, which is engulfed whenever the lights change by seeming thousands of people, all apparently intent on a pileup. You can avoid the crush by watching the spectacle from a coffee shop overlooking the junction.

### Day 7 - Kyoto

Today you visit three of the best sightseeing spots in Kyoto, each of which enjoys UNESCO World Heritage status. You start with the classical **Zen Garden of Ryoanji**, perhaps the most famous of these creations that define the Japanese aesthetic of simple, natural elegance.

Not far from Ryoanji is the equally famous **Golden Pavilion of Kinkakuji**, casting its reflection on the shimmering lake it sits beside. This is without doubt one of the most beautiful scenes in the country.

After lunch you go to **Nijo Castle**, which was built as a show of power and prestige by the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1603. This beautiful structure is renowned for its elaborate decorations and "nightingale" flooring which "sings" when you walk on it, making the presence of all, including potential assassins, known.

### Day 3 - Tokyo

This morning you go to the famous **Tsukiji Fish Market**. Hundreds of varieties of fish from around the world are traded here and bellowing fishmongers trade tuna at prices in the hundreds of thousands of dollars for each fish. You can enjoy some prime cuts at less dramatic prices in one of the many quality sushi restaurants dotted around the market.

Later, you visit a local **sake distillery** dating back to the 1800's where you'll be given a tour of the buildings and facilities learning about the craft. Afterwards you'll have the opportunity to sample some of the produce! Wind your day down later with a stroll along the neighbouring river under the fluttering blossoms.

### Day 4 - Hakone

This morning you take the "Romance Car" train from Shinjuku to **Hakone** and the national park neighbouring Mt. Fuji. The region of Hakone is home to many first-rate museums featuring works by the world's most renowned artists. Your tour leader will take you to the **Open Air Museum** riding the switch-back train up through the mountains, a beautiful backdrop for art featuring pieces by Henry Moore, Pablo Picasso and many Japanese artists. Alternatively we can give you directions and help you get to one of the many other fantastic museums in the area, explore the town, or soak the day away relaxing in **hot springs**.

In Hakone we will stay at a traditional ryokan, (Japanese inn) with spacious suites that comprise a bedroom, a tatami (straw mat flooring) room, and a private **bath on the balcony**. There are also communal onsen (natural hot spring bath), both indoors and outdoors, where you can relax in natural hot spring water. (Male and female baths are separate). The **gourmet, dinner** which is included, is a traditional Japanese meal designed to highlight the foods of the season. Afterwards take in the entrancing views from the roof terrace.

### Day 5 - Hakone

This day is a lot of fun and begins with a scenic trip on the **switchback train** up the mountain to Gora. A further ascent on a cable car allows superb views of Mt. Fuji, with its snow-capped peak and a sea of pink blossom at its base. At the top here you can eat the famous black eggs cooked in the volcanic waters, each of which is said to lengthen your life by seven years. They are a popular buy.

You take another cable car down the other side of the pass offering more scenic views of **Mt. Fuji** to the volcanic **lake of Ashiko**. After lunch by the lake you board a **pirate ship** taking you across the water to the site of the sekisho, the reconstruction of the old **Tokaido checkpoint**. There were many such highway checkpoints during the feudal times, but this one was the most feared. You learn about its history and its significance before walking along a stretch of the original Tokaido highway called the **Cedar Avenue** lined by 400-year-old cedar trees. The trees, planted by order of the shogun, protected travellers from the icy winds and the snows of the winter, and the intense sun during the summer months.

Later, tired feet can be rejuvenated in one of the region's excellent onsen.

### Day 6 - Kyoto

You take the Shinkansen (**bullet train**) to the heart of Japan's cultural legacy, **Kyoto**.

We have tickets for the **Miyako Odori** reserved for this evening. The event dates back to 1872 featuring geiko and maiko of Gion in a colourful and mesmerizing series of dances.

After arriving in Kyoto and checking in, you have some time to freshen up before going to explore the **Gion** district prior to the show.

## Day 8 - Kyoto

This 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: 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.

## Day 9 - Kyoto

The **tea ceremony** is one of Japan's signature customs. We've all seen this mysterious and beautiful practice in films and photos and read about it in books. Today is your chance to join in and experience it for yourself. You go to a teahouse that has been performing the art and supplying the tea to the Nishi Honganji temple for generations. Afterwards the tour goes to **Higashiyama, the Eastern Mountains**, home to Japan's most popular temple, **Kiyomizudera**. This temple is one of the many UNESCO monuments in Kyoto and you find it perched on a mountainside rich in cherry blossom. The temple has stood on stilts for 1200 years and the feat of its construction is made the more remarkable for not using a single nail in its huge frame. People come here from around the world to wish for anything from finding a partner to passing an exam.

From Kiyomizudera you walk through the old, winding cobbled streets to **Gion**, one of the few remaining geisha districts in Japan, where today's guided tour is concluded. In the evening there is a show of traditional **performing arts** including koto playing, gagaku and bunraku. This show is different to the Miyako Odori (Day 6). Although held at the same venue, it's on a different stage and through its diversity is a great introduction to Japanese performing arts.

## Day 10 - Hiroshima

Today you head by bullet train to **Hiroshima**. Visits to the **Peace Park, dome**, memorials and museum are moving and take us closer to an understanding of a terrible moment in history. The modern city however is attractive and thriving, offering an intriguing variety of restaurants and cafes.

## Day 11 - Tokyo

After spending the night in Hiroshima you take a short trip to another of Japan's signature sites: **Miyajima**, Itsukushima shrine and its famous "floating" torii (shrine gate). Both the shrine and the torii are built in a small bay so when the tide is in, both appear to be floating on the water. The views of the shrine and the gate on the water are enchanting, as are the performances of noh on the adjacent stage. Itsukushima is considered to be one of the three most beautiful sights in Japan and enjoys **World Heritage** status.

You return to Tokyo by bullet train to conclude the tour. On the way you pass **Himeji Castle**, which re-opened to the public in spring 2015 after five years of extensive renovations. Rather than heading straight back to Tokyo, feel free to break away from the group to visit the castle and its extensive grounds.

Later, why not get together for an end of tour sayonara party in the evening.

## Day 12 - End of Tour

This is the last day of the tour and there is no itinerary set. Some guests head to the airport for their departing flight, but if you wish to stay a few extra days Dragonfly Tours is happy to help you with the arrangements!

## Accommodation



A luxury skyscraper hotel in Shinjuku, the dynamic heart of Tokyo and situated beside Shinjuku station. Parks full of blossom, shops, department stores, and restaurants of every kind are all close at hand. The rooms have amazing views over the city.

All rooms have LAN & Wi-Fi

Breakfasts included



An excellent ryokan serving gourmet food. We have spacious Japanese suites for the Cherry Blossom Tour with private baths on the balcony. Soak in the luxury!

All rooms have Wi-Fi

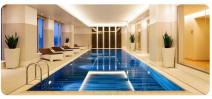
Traditional breakfasts and dinners included



Luxury hotel situated at Kyoto Station; the ideal hub from which to explore the city.

All rooms have Wi-Fi

Breakfasts included



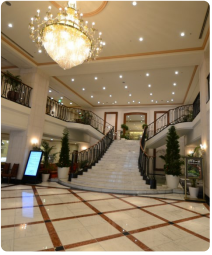
Centrally located luxury hotel near Hiroshima Station and close to shops and restaurants, also with pool and spa facilities.

All rooms have LAN & Wi-Fi

Breakfasts included

Please note that the accommodation above is standard for the Cherry Blossom 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.



Located in Shijo in central Kyoto near the subway station, an ideal location for exploring, and from which to explore from. Shops and restaurants all around!

All rooms have Wi-Fi

Breakfasts included

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## 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 Cherry Blossom Tour is suitable for all ages but in general most guests on this tour are aged between 40 and 75, it's ideal for couples and friends alike.

Our only hard and fast 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 cover between 3 to 5 kilometres per day, and there are at times steps involved at stations and sites we visit.

Having said all that, walking is done at an easy pace, with plenty of stops for ice cream and coffee 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, or hop in a taxi to skip some sections. 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 of 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!

### Baggage Forwarding

We forward your main baggage ahead from hotel to hotel where necessary during the tour (one case / bag per person). You can enjoy all the pleasures of travel without having to drag your case around with you.

If you bring too much luggage with you, or buy too many souvenirs during the tour; and require additional baggage transfers we can easily arrange this for you.

### Minimum Numbers

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

### Single Supplement

Unfortunately we are unable to accept single travellers on this tour due to the accommodation. If you are a single traveller and would like to join the tour, please let us know and we will try to arrange for you to share a room with another traveller of the same sex.

### What's included?

- All accommodation (11 nights)
- The support of your guide for the entirety of the tour, our guides are government licenced English speaking Japanese.
- All entrance fees while with the guide to temples, shrines and museums as stated in the itinerary. (Additional optional entrance fees at personal expense)
- All city to city transportation including the Shinkansen bullet train
- All local transportation (subways / city buses / boats / taxis) is covered while following the itinerary (any transportation not covered by your rail pass while on the free day or during private time such as in the evenings is at own expense)
- Suica card - An electronic travel card for your convenience (saves fumbling around with tickets especially while in Tokyo!)
- 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 in advance
- Tickets for airport transfer (non-guided) at the end of the tour from the tour hotel to the airport (either Haneda or Narita)
- Sumida River Cruise in Tokyo
- First Class Tickets on Pirate Ship in Hakone
- Miyako Odori (Geisha Dance) Show Tickets (with tea)
- Authentic Tea Ceremony at a tea house in Kyoto
- Baggage forwarding for one bag / case per person, from Tokyo to Kyoto, and Kyoto to Tokyo
- Breakfast every morning
- Group meal on Day 1 in Tokyo (Alcoholic drinks included!)
- Dinners (Traditional Teishoku) on Days 4 and 5 at Hakone
- 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
- 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!

