



KYUSHU GATEWAY TOUR

Details

Duration: 13 Nights

Max Group size: 10

Starts in: Osaka / Tokyo

Ends in: Osaka / Tokyo

Prices

Start Date	Finish Dates	Price	Spaces available	Reference	Hotel Level
21 Oct 2020	03 Nov 2020	£3,150.00	6	1020KG	Mid

Overview

This is a Japanese tour off the beaten track and ideal for adventurers on a return visit to Japan or first-time visitors who, like our ancestors, want to approach Japan through its historical gateway.

Smoking volcanoes, sulphurous vents, bubbling hot springs, wild mountains, dramatic shorelines – no this isn't a description of Mordor, it's Kyushu, the western-most of Japan's mainland islands. Rugged as it is, it is far from inhospitable.

Due to its western location, Kyushu was for centuries the first point of contact for foreign explorers and adventurers, a history that earned the region the sobriquet Gateway to Japan. It was here that Japan had its first contact with Korea and China, and the influences of both those cultures are still strong. The first Europeans landed here, and when Japan closed itself to outside contact, foreigners were quarantined to the artificial island of Dejima in Nagasaki bay.

Not all outside contact was benign, and when the Mongols decided to add Japan to their empire, they tried their luck at Fukuoka. Beaten back in two invasion attempts, the wild men of the Asian continent thereafter kept a respectful distance.

While being the gateway to the world, Kyushu is one of the centres of Japan's own culture. Archaeology has revealed Kyushu hosts some of the oldest settlements in the country. Rich in resources, and precocious in development, the region probably lost out as a national hub due to its relative remoteness in comparison to Kyoto and Tokyo. Nevertheless, traditions run strong in this area and it was from here that the Saga and Satsuma rebellions attempted to halt Japan's modernisation after the raising of the Chrysanthemum Curtain in the late 19th century.

Naturally, a place with such a deep and distinctive identity has its own rich heritage of food and drink. Each city has its own signature dishes, recipes honed over the ages on the appetites of Kyushu's tough and industrious folk. Most notable is shochu, the local firewater, distilled from sweet potatoes and local grains.

The Kyushu Gateway tour 2020 & 2021 kicks off in the modern, buzzing, western hub of Osaka, famed for its nightlife and love of self-indulgence. From there you travel to 'Hell,' the steaming springs of Beppu. From there you visit Aso, Japan's largest active volcano, experience the history of Kumamoto, the mountains in Kagoshima, and then to the poignantly historical city of Nagasaki.

The Kyushu Gateway Tour is fully guided; all accommodation, entrance fees and 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	Introductions; Group Meal; Walking Night Tour of Shinsaibashi.	Namba (Osaka)
Day 02	Umeda Sky Garden Building; Ramen Museum; Make your own Cup Noodle!	Namba (Osaka)
Day 03	Bullet Train to Kyushu; Beppu Jigoku Hells; Hot springs	Beppu
Day 04	Day trip to Yufuin; Lake Kinrinko	Beppu
Day 05	Travel to Kumamoto stopping off at Mt.Aso	Kumamoto
Day 06	Kumamoto Castle; Hosokawa Samurai Residence	Kumamoto
Day 07	Suizenji Landscape Garden; Jokamachi area	Kumamoto
Day 08	Kagoshima; Sakurajima Volcano; Nagisa Lava Trail.	Kagoshima
Day 09	Day trip to Satsuma; Chiran Kamikaze memorial and museum; Preserved Samurai District.	Kagoshima
Day 10	Dejima; Magane bridge; China Town	Nagasaki
Day 11	Nagasaki Peace Park & A-Bomb museum; Glover Gardens.	Nagasaki

Day 12	Bullet train to Kyoto; Fushimi Inari	Kyoto
Day 13	Tea Ceremony; Nanzenji; Tetsugaku no michi (the path of philosophy); Ginkaku-ji (Zen Temple and Garden)	Kyoto
Day 14	End of Tour. If you would like to stay a few extra days in Kyoto, Osaka or in Tokyo, we will be happy to help with any arrangements. There is plenty more to see!	

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

Notes

If you would prefer to fly into and out of Tokyo instead of Osaka, please drop us a line and we can help with arrangements.

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 (in either Tokyo or Osaka) 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 want to see, do and experience even more? How about staying in the area a bit longer and spending a couple of days up in Koya-san? Or how about Nara? For more on these after-tour excursions or anything else, please just drop us a line!

Itinerary

Details

Day 1 - Namba (Osaka)

The tour starts in the evening with everyone getting together at a restaurant in Shinsaibashi, the lively, downtown area of south Osaka. This is an ideal chance for everyone to get to know each other and begin their excursion into the world of Japanese cuisine.

Later, you take a walk around the neon-drenched area, which is packed with bars, restaurants and clubs of all kinds – this is a great opportunity for people watching, and absorbing the special atmosphere of the nightlife of a buzzing, modern Asian city.

Day 2 - Namba (Osaka)

This morning you visit the mighty Umeda Sky Garden Building, offering spectacular views over the city from the open-aired circular observation deck that connects its two towers above the 40th floor.

In the afternoon you have the opportunity to make you very own, unique, instant ramen (Cup Noodle) at the Momofuku Ando Instant Ramen Museum – Osaka is the birthplace of this gastronomic masterpiece invented in 1958. Your creation will be vacuum packed to take home but will you be able to resist the temptation to eat it on the spot?

Making pot noodles isn't the only thing to do in Osaka. As an alternative, you might want to consider visiting Kaiyukan, the Osaka Aquarium and the world's biggest fish tank. It features many representatives of the aquatic life of the Ring of Fire – the seismically active Pacific Rim – and is home to an enormous whale shark. For thrill-seekers, Universal Studios Japan is just a short train ride away and has all the attractions and rides of an international, movie-themed park – from Spider-Man to Jaws to Neverland to the newest feature, The Wizarding World of Harry Potter.

Day 3 - Beppu

Today we take the Shinkansen bullet train westwards, leaving Honshu, Japan's largest island, to the more rural setting of the third largest island, Kyushu.

Beppu, one of the nation's favourite hot spring towns is known not only for its many onsen (hot springs for bathing) but also for its boiling jigoku 'hells'. Each of the 'hells' has its own colour, character and properties that come from the different minerals and temperatures of each spring. The 'sea hell' has beautiful cobalt blue waters, 'the blood hell' is dramatically red, 'tornado hell' is a geyser, and 'crocodile hell' is home to dozens of crocodiles (not naturally occurring crocodiles; these were bred in captivity). Some of these eight hells are quirky, others are intriguing but none are for bathing in.

After your trip to hell, you may want to bathe in the safer onsen at either the hotel or one of the many other baths in town.

Day 4 - Beppu

Yufuin is your destination today. This is an atmospheric, relaxing town featuring many old, preserved buildings. The skyline is dramatically dominated by the twin peaks of mount Yufu, while the streets are full of intriguing shops, boutiques, cafes, and the ubiquitous onsen. Here we'll have free time to stroll, and explore.

Later you may want to join your guide for an optional walk around Lake Kinrinko, which is ringed with walking routes and yet more shops, cafes and onsen!

Day 5 - Kumamoto

Today you take the train to Kumamoto stopping off at Mount Aso, one of the world's largest active volcanoes. Geology tells us that Aso has been responsible for some huge eruptions in its history, big enough to demolish itself at least once. As a result of this titanic temper, Aso is now comprised of one of the world's largest calderas – 25km across at its widest point – five peaks and a circumference of about 120km.

These days, Aso is much better behaved but is still very much dramatically active and responsible for near-constant emissions of smoke and ash. The volcano also provides some excellent hiking – how about telling the folks back home you slogged up a smoking volcano? – but there is a cable car for those who want to devote all their attention to the view.

Note: the trip up to Mount Aso depends on the volcanic conditions on the day, wind direction and weather. It cannot always be visited.

Day 6 - Kumamoto

No visit to this area could be complete without a visit to Kumamoto castle considered one of the top three castles in the country. The castle and its defences played important roles in Kyushu's martial history, and the site of a siege during the Satsuma uprising when Kyushu's samurai tried to halt the new fangled modernisation coming out of Tokyo. This is an appropriate place to begin the cultural exploration of Kyushu.

Close to the castle there is the Hosokawa residence, a beautifully restored samurai residence once belonging to a powerful branch of the ruling Hosokawa clan. This house dates from the Edo era, but the Hosokawa clan trace their history deep into Japan's past and is seemingly attached to every significant moment in the past of the nation. The clan itself is descended from an emperor, grew to immense power, started one war and more recently gave Japan a prime minister. The residence is well preserved and a fascinating example of the residence of a high-ranking samurai.

Day 7 - Kumamoto

The tour is again touched by the Hosokawa family, this time through a visit to the Suizenji gardens, which were created by the clan. The path around the expansive garden represents the Tokaido Highway, one of the main routes from Edo (old name for Tokyo) to Kyoto (the former capital), which famously passes Mt. Fuji along the way, symbolized by an unusually shaped grassy mound in the garden.

Later, you explore Jokamachi, an old area of the city by the river. Jokamachi translates as 'town below a castle' for the sprawls of houses and businesses that appeared wherever a castle went up. In Kumamoto, many of the old houses in this district have been preserved and today host a variety of shops, restaurants and cafes. Jokamachi evokes Japan's past before modernisation while providing the fruits of the country's development.

Day 8 - Kagoshima

We take the bullet train this morning to the furthest shore of Kyushu. Kagoshima is in the shadow of Japan's most famous active volcano, Sakurajima, which belches ash and smoke over the city. These hellish, dark clouds are impressive for the visitor to watch, but very tiresome for the locals, who are constantly cleaning up after them as their streets, cars and laundry get coated with black sand. On the other hand, the vegetables in the area grow well with this constant nutritional replenishment. Sakurajima is a different order of active to Aso so there is no hiking to the top, or anywhere near it. However, there is a gentle ferry ride across the bay to the lower reaches of the fuming mountain, and a chance to let your feet experience more hot spring water.

Sakurajima was once an island – until the lava flows from the huge 1914 eruption connected it to the mainland. This is known as the Nagisa Lava Trail, and is your bridge for the walk back.

Day 9 - Kagoshima

One of the enduring images of Japan's history is the Kamikaze of the second world war. Who were these people? What were they like? Why did they consent to make such a sacrifice? They were, of course, ordinary people, and you find out more about them and their lives at Chiran Tokko Museum, which is located on the airbase from which they flew their one-way missions. Here you see the artefacts of their lives and training, their personal effects, and, most movingly, the letters they wrote home before their final flights.

Kagoshima has its own well-preserved district of samurai residences, Chiran, with buildings dating back 250 years. Chiran has gone further than other areas in removing signs of the 21st century: no cars, no overhead cables, so you are able to step back a little further into history. You cannot enter the houses, but many of the gardens are open to the public.

Day 10 - Nagasaki

Nagasaki is another name that is resonant in Japan's history, and that's where you go today. For much of Japan's self-imposed isolation the only foreign contact permitted was in this city. In the 1600s, a small spit of land in Nagasaki bay was severed from the mainland to create an artificial island. This was called Dejima and it was here that foreign visitors and traders were isolated. Even then Dejima was hardly a cosmopolitan centre. Only certain nationalities were allowed to set foot here and only under strict conditions. After the Portuguese were ejected (or crucified) by Tokugawa, the place became most closely associated with the consistent Dutch presence until the nation re-opened itself to the outside world in the 19th century. Over time, much of the bay was filled in and claimed from the sea and Dejima became another district of the city. Now it is being restored to how it would have been in the 1800s.

Day 11 - Nagasaki

Once Japan had opened up to the world and the Dejima lost its reason for being, but Nagasaki retained its status as an important portal to the outside world. Traders and representatives of foreign interests moved into the city and now we can peek into the lives of these pioneers by visiting their residences overlooking Nagasaki bay.

One of the houses belonged to Thomas Blake Glover from Aberdeen, Scotland, who helped establish a number of companies including Mitsubishi and Kirin (the drinks company). His story is a fascinating one, played out in a time when Japan was undergoing great changes militarily, industrially and politically, firmly marking its place on the map and becoming a world power in the following decades.

Day 12 - Kyoto

Today you return to Kansai by bullet train, but now to the ancient capital of Kyoto. Home to an abundance of UNESCO World Heritage sites, beautiful gardens, parks, great food, great nightlife and geisha, it remains Japan's cultural soul.

After checking in at the hotel, you visit nearby Fushimi Inari shrine, just south of the city, where you walk along the photogenic hillside on paths winding up through a tunnel of thousands of vermilion shrine gates. The shrine of Fushimi Inari is dedicated to the fox deity, the god of business, and is therefore close to the heart of the nation. This is the main shrine for the fox, and there are 32,000 sub-shrines around the country.

If you have the legs you may want to continue all the way to the summit for the incredible sunset over the city.

Day 13 - Kyoto

Start the day with the tea ceremony, clear your mind, refresh your spirit and find your place in the universe. The tea ceremony is one of Japan's signature cultural rites and you too can join in. The teahouse that hosts your experience has been active in supplying tea to Kyoto for generations. Later, you visit Nanzenji this is one of the most important and expansive temples in Japan. Its history goes back to the 13th century, from which time it has grown and prospered. Nanzenji is now one of Japan's important cultural treasures. Dozens of pavilions and shrine are set in landscaped parkland, which is particularly beautiful in spring and autumn.

From Nanzenji, you continue north along the picturesque Tetsugaku no Michi (the path of philosophy) to the World Heritage site of Ginkaku-ji, the Silver pavilion built in the 1400s by the ruling shogun as a retirement home as Japan fell deeper into civil war. Originally, the building was to have been covered in silver leaf to contrast with the Golden Pavilion, but this plan was never completed. The result is a simple but elegant temple, stone gardens, and grounds of birch and moss that beautifully exemplify the Zen aesthetic.

Day 14 -

Sadly 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 time – 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 and we'll be able to organize your bullet train tickets.

Accommodation



Osaka - Shin-Osaka Station Hotel

Comfortable city hotel close to the central shopping, dining and entertainment districts. Easy access to the airport and to the bullet train if coming in from Tokyo.

Internet available.

Breakfast included



Beppu - Seaside Hotel Mimatsu Ooetei

Ryokan with sea views and natural hot spring baths indoors and out. Free Wi-Fi in the lobby.

Breakfast & Dinner included



Kumamoto - Hotel New Otani Kumamoto

Centrally located hotel near to the bullet train station. All rooms have Wi-Fi for free use.

Breakfast included.



Kagoshima - Solaria Nishitetsu hotel Kagoshima

Great hotel in convenient location close to the station with views of Sakurajima volcano and surrounding area. All rooms have Wi-Fi for free use.

Breakfast included.



Nagasaki - Hotel Forza Nagasaki

Great hotel with views over the city and port. All rooms have Wi-Fi for free use.

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). All rooms have LAN & Wifi.

Breakfast included.

Please note that the accommodation above is standard for the Kyushu Gateway 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 is Included?

- All accommodation (13 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)
- Meet & greet at the airport in Osaka or Tokyo on arrival and guided transfer to the tour hotel in the city up to one week in advance. If flying in and out of Tokyo there will be additional costs to get to Osaka by bullet train. If planning on doing this get in touch and we'll work out what is best
- Tickets for airport transfer (non-guided) at the end of the tour from the tour hotel to the airport
- Authentic Tea Ceremony at a tea house in Kyoto
- Baggage forwarding for one bag / case per person
- Breakfast every morning
- Group meal on Day 1 in Osaka

- Dinners on Days 3 & 5 in Beppu
- 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 of our Japan Tours are flexible, and do vary occasionally, 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 include it.

Age / Requirements / Fitness

The Kyushu Gateway Tour is suitable for the ages 12 and upwards, and the tour is ideal for families, couples, and singles alike. Our only requirements are English speaking ability (all tours are conducted in English), and a zest for life!

None of the hikes in the Kyushu Gateway Tour are compulsory and can easily be missed out. On average we walk between 3 to 5 km per day following the itinerary. Steps are involved at some stations and attractions and an extended time is spent on your feet each day. This is not a tour bus holiday!

If at any point you would like to take time off from the itinerary to rest or to stop to catch up with your memoirs with a cup of sake, it is absolutely no problem – it's your tour and we like to keep things as flexible and relaxed as you need them to be.

Transportation

As with all our Small Group Tours 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 do forward cases / baggage ahead on the tour to save travelling with them, one case per person. If you need to send additional luggage this can easily be arranged, your guide will organize this for you and you can pay directly at the time.

Minimum Numbers

The minimum number of passengers on the Kyushu Gateway 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 £ 350 if travelling alone. For this you'll be ensured to have a room to yourself for the entirety of the tour