



LATE NOVEMBER AUTUMN LEAVES (PEAK SEASON)

18th November to 3rd December

Saturday 18th November Tokyo: We meet you at the airport (Narita or Haneda) and transfer to your hotel in Tokyo. Options for the day depend on your time of arrival but for the first day we keep the tour fairly low-key including things like dinner at a local restaurant, seeing some of the city (afternoon and/or evening) or just sleep if you are jetlagged.

Sunday 19th November Tokyo: Visit Asukusa Kaminarimon (thunder gate), Hozomon and pagoda. An array of stalls lines the entrance to this shrine (Nakamise Street) providing a wide range of souvenirs and snacks on the approach to Sensoji Temple. We can arrange a kimono photo shoot or an introductory samurai lesson for the adventurous. In the afternoon visit one or more of the famous neighbourhood areas of Shibuya, Shinjuku, Ginza. An option for Shinjuku includes a visit to the Robot Restaurant, (more a cabaret show) before selecting something delicious for dinner.

Monday 20th November Tokyo to Takayama: Travel by Shinkansen and then local train to the onsen (hot spring) mountain town of Takayama. Use the afternoon for a relaxing onsen bath or explore some of this old-style mountain town.

Tuesday 21st November Takayama: During the morning explore the town's historic buildings, morning market and shops on foot and/or visit the festival floats exhibition hall. The afternoon is reserved for a ½ day bus tour that visits the World Heritage Site of Shirakawa-go with its old traditional “A frame” farmhouses. Dinner time is an ideal opportunity to sample the famous Hida Beef.



Fushimi Inari Shrine (left), Kodaiji Temple Gardens (right)

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Wednesday 22nd November Takayama to Kyoto: Taking the WideView Hida train down the scenic Kiso valley to Nagano and then a short shinkansen ride to the historic previous capital of Japan. In the afternoon enjoy sightseeing at Inari Fushimi Shinto shrine (10,000 torii gates).

Thursday 23rd November Kyoto: Visit the beautiful Arashiyama district for viewing the autumn leaves and enjoy the view across the Oi River and the nearby Sagano bamboo grove. After spending time in Arashiyama, head to to the "Golden Pavilion" Kinkaku-ji in the north-west of the city. Returning to the centre of Kyoto exploring the 400 year old covered Nishiki Market.

Friday 24th November Kyoto: Start the day at Nijo Castle before heading to the Heian Shrine and gardens. During the evening visit Kodai-ji temple for the autumn leaf illumination. The temple complex includes a Zen garden, bamboo forest and interesting artisan shops.

Saturday 25th November Kyoto to Hiroshima: Heading south from Kyoto, take the shinkansen to Hiroshima. The afternoon is available to visit the Peace Park and Museum in Hiroshima city and the rebuilt Hiroshima Castle (the castle includes a samurai museum).



Miyajima (left), Kasuga Shrine, Nara (right)

Sunday 26th November Hiroshima: A full day in Hiroshima allows time to visit and explore Miyajima Island and Itsukushima Shrine are the location of the famous "floating" torii gate, accessed by a short local train and ferry ride. Depending on fitness and inclination we can use the ropeway and head to the top of Mount Misen. The walk back down the mountain provides some good viewing and vantage points.

Monday 27th November Hiroshima to Osaka: Head to Osaka the second largest city of Japan. From the hotel it is a short walk across the moat bridge to visit the castle and grounds. During the evening head to the Dotonbori district.

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Tuesday 28th November Osaka: Day trip to the world heritage site at Nara. At Nara there are both Todai-ji temple (with the world's largest bronze Buddha), and Kagusa Shinto shrine. Sacred deer roam the park and temple/shrine areas.

Wednesday 29th November Osaka to Kanazawa: Completing the trip across the main island take the "Thunderbird" express train to Kanazawa. Visit the famous Kenrokuen Garden and Kanazawa castle. Enjoy local cuisine including fresh sushi and sashimi at the Omicho food market.

Thursday 30th November December Kanazawa to Togura: Departing from Kanazawa head back into the Japanese Alps to Nagano transfer to a local train bound for Togura (30 minutes) and check in at Ryokan Kamesei. Have a private soak in the ryokan's hot spring baths or explore the neighbourhood before enjoying an especially prepared traditional ryokan dinner. During dinner we can arrange geisha entertainment of traditional music and dance. The ryokan accommodations include breakfast and dinner.

Friday 1st December Togura: After breakfast (provided), head to Nagano station and take the bus to Jigokudani Monkey Park. Depending on the weather it could be cold (maybe snow). There is a walk of approximately 2km to the "snow monkeys" . For those not wanting to see the monkeys, we can visit the Togakushi Shrine in the forest to the north-west of Nagano with its impressive tree lined approach. There is a local cycling tour around Togura and Chikuma for those that want to stay close to the ryokan. After a day of activity, a soak in the onsen provides a relaxing option.

Saturday 2nd December Togura to Tokyo: Transfer back to Tokyo by shinkansen. A visit to Harajuku and the Meiji Shrine, an important focal point of the city commemorating the Emperor and a significant change in the structure of Japan. The nearby Takeshita Dori provides an experience in the local youth culture of the city and the adjacent Omotesando shopping area provides some higher-end brands. Also in this area is Yoyogi Park, a popular place on Sundays for people to spend time and provide entertainment.

Sunday 3rd December Tokyo: Last day in Tokyo and transfers back to Narita or Haneda.

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Transport arrangements:

For Tokyo we will make use of a combination of local trains and the subway. For Tokyo trains and subways in Tokyo and Kyoto we use pre-paid passes. The Japan Rail pass (JRP) covers the extensive Japan Rail network and is the most efficient method to transfer between the different places we are visiting. We will exchange the JRP vouchers for the actual tickets around the 3rd to maximise their use, through to the 17th.

In places we will make use of taxis as they provide cost effective point-to-point transportation.

Hotels:

Tokyo: Cerulean Tower Tokyu. A large, modern hotel in Shibuya. It is very comfortable with a touch of luxury. Some people argue if it is 5* or only 4½* but our guests like it and the views across the city. The location is good with access to the metro, JR lines and the airport. As a busy Tokyo neighbourhood there are lots of dining options very close by.

Takayama: Ryokan Asunaro. Five to ten minutes from the main train station the Asunaro is a mix of traditional and modern ryokan. Rooms have their own toilet and there is a private shower available if you do not want to use the onsen baths. Breakfast included.

Kyoto: Kyoto Century Hotel. The description from the hotel is “Comfort Room Superior Room Non Smoking, with breakfast”. What that long description means is the rooms are a decent size 23m², the breakfast buffet is one of the best I know of, and there is a Japanese restaurant option for breakfast too. Located next to the Kyoto railway station, it is a good base for our time in the city.

Hiroshima: Sheraton Hiroshima. One of our favourite hotels in Japan, we have booked deluxe king rooms (including breakfast). The location is adjacent to the Hiroshima railway station making the city and nearby Miyajima easily accessible.

Osaka: New Otani Inn. We have used the New Otani chain previously in Sapporo and visited Osaka last month and found the rooms large and comfortable. We have booked “Superior double castle view” rooms so you do get to see the castle (illuminated during the evenings).

Kanazawa: Holiday Inn Kanazawa Sky. A short taxi ride from the train station makes the main sights of Kanazawa easier to get to. We have booked a mix of rooms and breakfast is available. For a high protein option, the Omi-cho market across the street provides fresh sushi.

Togura: Kamesei Ryokan. A traditional inn (some 100 years old) with onsen. Meals include kaiseki (course meal) and an option for a shabu-shabu style the second night. Breakfast is a traditional Japanese style for the first morning and we can arrange a “continental” style the second morning.

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