TRIP NOTES

**Sapporo Snow Festival**  
15 Days | Starts/Ends: Tokyo

**Escorted Group Tour:** While Japan is famous for its pink hue of springtime, winter offers something slightly different, but just as special. Take in the highlights of Japan, explore the snowy wilds of Hokkaido, Japan’s northern island, and join in the revelry of the Sapporo Snow Festival.

**HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS**

**Trip Highlights**
- Tokyo - See the famous Sensoji Temple in Asakusa, cruise the Sumida River, stroll through the Hamarikyu gardens, go shopping in the Harajuku area, and pay a visit to the Meiji shrine
- Tsurui - Witness the famous winter dance of the red-crowned cranes and go on a guided bird watching tour with a local expert
- Rausu - Stay in a traditional Japanese inn with an onsen (hot spring bath), and enjoy a morning cruise onboard an Icebreaker boat through the ice drifts of the Shiretoko Peninsula
- Abashiri - Here there is the chance to visit a few of this fishing city’s many interesting museums, including the Northern People’s Museum, the Prison Museum and Ice Float Museum
- Sapporo - Enjoy a tour of a Sapporo brewery, museum & beer garden. Opt to visit the Botanical Gardens, Nijo Fish Market and browse the Ainu Museum
- Sapporo Snow Festival - Join the revelry of the Sapporo Snow Festival held in Odori Park, a winter wonderland of larger-than-life snow sculptures and ice statues, and try your hand at some winter sports on the outskirts of town
- Kyoto - Explore the ancient and cultural capital of Japan, with a guided tour of Gion and the Geisha district, and plenty of free time to discover the city on your own
- Nagano - Zenkoji Temple
- Yudanaka - See the famous Snow Monkeys as they enjoy hot spring baths.

**What’s Included**
- 12 breakfasts and 5 dinners
- 12 nights 3 star accommodation (including 1 night in a traditional Japanese Ryokan)
- Airport arrival and departure transfers. Meet and greet service and shared shuttle bus transfer
- Economy class flights: Tokyo - Kushiro and Sapporo - Osaka
- All relevant transfers and transportation between cities in public and private transportation including bullet trains and internal flights
- Tokyo Transport PASMO Card allowing you to move freely around the city on the subways and train systems.
- Ice breaker cruise in Rausu
- Sapporo brewery tour
- Sumida River boat cruise in Tokyo
- Guided walking tour of the Gion Geisha district in Kyoto
- Escorted by an English speaking Japanese tour guide
- Specialist local guides at some sites incl. Naturalist in Tsurui
- Maximum group size: 18 persons

**What’s Not Included**
- Entrance Fees: USD $50 - $60
- International flights and visas
- Laundry, drinks, items of a personal nature

**DETAILED ITINERARY**

**Day 1 : Tokyo**
Upon arrival in Tokyo you will be met at Narita International Airport by your tour guide. Here you will be given a Tokyo Transport PASMO Card allowing you to move freely around the city on the subways and train systems. Transfer to hotel in the old-town Asakusa area, and later enjoy a welcome dinner at a local restaurant. A flight arriving to Tokyo before 16:00 would be ideal as we expect to head off for dinner at 18:30.

*Overnight - Tokyo. Hotel: Asakusa Via Inn (D)*
Day 2: Tokyo Sightseeing Tour

We start the day with a morning tour of the city, taking in some of its many highlights. First we will visit the famous Buddhist Sensoji temple in Asakusa, before continuing to the Hamarikyu gardens – one of the most tranquil and stunning gardens in the city, via water bus. Later we will explore the Harajuku area – a shopping and entertainment haven, and pay a visit to the Meiji shrine. In the afternoon you can enjoy free time exploring the city at your own pace. Overnight - Tokyo. Hotel: Asakusa Via Inn (B)

Day 3: Fly to Hokkaido

Tokyo – Tsurui. We make our way to Tokyo Haneda Airport first thing this morning for our flight to Hokkaido, Japan’s northern island. Here we will take a private minibus to Tsurui, where we will be spending the night. Well off the beaten track, this small village is home to one of Japan’s most beautiful national parks. Overnight - Tsurui. Hotel: Woody Hotel (B, D)

Day 4: Bird Watching, Hot Springs & home cooked meals

Tsurui – Rausu. The morning starts with a guided bird watching tour with a local expert, where we will learn about some of the other feathered creatures that live in the area, followed by a tasty afternoon lunch. Later we will transfer to Rausu, a large town on the eastern coast of the remote Shiretoko Peninsula, home to one of Japan’s most beautiful national parks. Our accommodation for the night will be at a traditional Japanese inn, with a fantastic onsen (hot spring baths) and delicious home cooked meals! Overnight - Rausu. Hotel: Rausu Daiichi (B, D)

Day 5: Ice Breaker Cruise

Rausu – Abashiri. Today begins with a cruise onboard an icebreaker boat through the icy cold waters of the Shiretoko Peninsula, taking in spectacular views and spotting birdlife en route. Later we will drive by minibus to Abashiri, a fishing city located on the eastern coast of Hokkaido, which is famous in winter for its drifting sea ice.

Here may be the chance to visit the Northern People’s Museum – with exhibits depicting the culture and traditions of the inhabitants of the northern reaches of the globe, the Prison Museum – a retired prison that has been turned into an open air museum, or the Ice Float Museum – which explains the science behind the formation of the sea ice and the marine life that lives beneath it. Overnight - Abashiri. Hotel: Route Inn (B)

Day 6: Sapporo Brewery tour

Abashiri – Sapporo. Next stop is the capital city of this northern island, Sapporo, which we will reach via a train journey through snow-covered wilderness on day 6. Upon arrival we will be greeted by the excitement of the Sapporo Snow Festival held within the Odori Koen Park in the heart of the city. Later an evening tour of a Sapporo brewery will be followed by a tasty in-house meal.

Day 7: Sapporo Snow Festival

Today we join in the revelry of the Snow Festival, one of Japan’s largest winter events attracting two million people every year from at home and abroad. During the seven day festival Odori Koen Park is transformed into a winter wonderland, with larger-than-life snow sculptures and ice statues dotting in the park grounds. We will spend the morning exploring all that the festival has to offer, and in the afternoon may head out of town to try our hand at some winter sports, from tobogganing and sled rides, to finding out way out of an ice maze. Overnight - Sapporo. Hotel: Mercure Hotel (B)

Days 8-9: Kyoto Temples & Geisha District

Sapporo – Kyoto. On the morning of day 8 we will fly back to Japan’s southern island and transfer directly to Kyoto, the country’s ancient and cultural capital. As one of the most culturally rich cities in Asia, Kyoto is home to 17 UNESCO World Heritage sites, over 1,600 Buddhist temples and 400 Shinto shrines. Enjoy a full day of exploration in Kyoto on day 9 and do be sure let your tour guide know if there are any particularly sites of interest
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that you’d like to see. Brimming with arts and handmade crafts, Kyoto is a great place to do some shopping for friends and family back home. In the afternoon we will enjoy a tour of the Geisha district, led by a local expert, providing intriguing insight into this mysterious world. Overnight - Kyoto. Hotel: Karasuma Kyoto (B2, D1)

Day 10 : Kyoto - your way

You are free to spend today doing whatever takes your fancy. There are plenty of walking tours available in the city, taking in various sites of interest along the way – just ask your tour guide for details. Or alternatively why not make a day trip to Hiroshima, Nara or perhaps Osaka – Japan’s second city. Overnight - Kyoto. Hotel: Karasuma Kyoto (B)

Days 11-12 : Yudanaka snow monkeys

Kyoto – Nagano - Yudanaka - Tokyo. Today we will take a scenic bullet train ride up into the mountains to the Nagano prefecture. In the morning we’ll visit Zenkoji Temple and Yudanaka Onsen, a pretty hot spring town, where we will have the chance to see the famous Snow Monkeys as they enjoy the hot spring baths.

Yudanaka - Tokyo. Heading back to Tokyo by bullet train, rather than staying in the old-world Akakusa as we did previously, this time we will be staying in Shinjuku, one of the most modern districts in the city. Today is a great opportunity to do any last minute shopping or sightseeing before our tour comes to an end tomorrow. Overnight - Nagano. Hotel: Toyoko Inn Nagano-eki Zenkoji-guchi. Tokyo: Hotel Sunroute Plaza Shinjuku (B2)

Day 13 : Goodbye Japan!

Thu 18 Feb 2016. Today our tour concludes! Transfer to Narita International Airport by shared shuttle bus for onward travel. Overnight - Tokyo (B)

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Health

While Japan is considered safe make sure you are up to date on routine vaccinations; it is also recommended to be vaccinated for Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B and Japanese B Encephalitis.

Japan does have mosquitoes in the summer months, but Malaria is not a problem in Japan. If you are allergic to bites from mosquitoes please take appropriate precautions; anti-mosquito sprays and creams are widely available in Japan or you could bring your own from home.

Water is safe to drink in all areas of Japan.

Climate

Weather conditions vary in Japan depending on location and time of year. Typically summers are hot and humid, whilst winters are significantly colder - especially in the mountains, with a dry climate and light snowfall. Spring and Autumn offer warm days and cool nights, making this a wonderful time to explore the highlights of Japan. June is considered the rainy season with hot and muggy weather. Temperatures do vary depending on the region, so be sure to check in advance when travelling to the far north or far south of Japan.

Currency

The official currency in Japan is Japanese Yen (JPY).

USD $1 - JPY 117 GBP £1 - JPY 185
AUD $1 - JPY 101 Euro €1 - JPY 147

Most major currencies can be exchanged at the airport, post office, banks or major hotels; and traveller’s cheques can be exchanged in major banks, larger hotels and some duty free shops. While credit cards are becoming increasingly popular in Japan, they are not commonly used for making purchases as in western countries so you are best to pay in cash where possible.

Avoid cash machines at banks as these do not normally accept foreign-issued cards. Instead use the Post Office cash machines from which you will be able to take out money using Visa cards, MasterCard, Cirrus or Maestro. Note that Post Offices may only be open during office hours Mon to Fri. Convenience store chain 7-Eleven will have ATMs in almost all of its stores which will accept most foreign-issued credit and debit cards.

Time & Voltage

Time: Japan is 9 hours ahead of GMT and does not observe daylight savings.

Voltage: In Japan the standard voltage is different from other regions of the world at 100V, and power outlets accept a flat 2-pin plug (similar to North American outlets). To cover all bases, it is best to pack an international travel adaptor!

Food

One of the best things about visiting any country is sampling its cuisine and during your stay in Japan you’ll probably be wishing to do just that. Many Japanese restaurants specialise in one particular type of food. Sushi is of course the most famous dish, but Japanese food does not stop with raw fish; other specialities include teriyaki (marinated beef/chicken/fish seared on a hot plate), sukiyaki (thin slices of beef, bean curd and vegetables cooked in soy sauce and...
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then dipped in egg, and tempura (deep fried sea-food and vegetables).

If everything so far sounds a bit meat and fish orientated don’t be alarmed - there are vegetarian options in Japan. Try the wonderful zaru soba (buck-wheat noodles served cold), a bowl of Udon (thicker noodles) in a mountain vegetable soup, tofu steak or a vegetable okonomiyaki (savory pancake). If you are feeling adventurous you could try natto, this is a sticky and slightly smelly concoction made of fermented soya beans.

If you want a more general selection, then the best place to go is an Izakaya (Japanese pub) where you will find an extensive and pretty cheap choice of food and drink. Izakaya often offer tabehodai or nomihodai - for a set price you get an hour or two to eat or drink as much as you like. Choosing exactly what to eat is made easier by well illustrated menus or plastic food displays at the doorway – just point and see what you get. In major cities you will also find plenty of Western-style restaurants.

Each region of Japan also has its own speciality foods, unique to or particularly famous in that one area of the country. These are nearly always made from locally produced ingredients.

Transportation - Private Tours

When travelling with us to Japan on a Private Tour you will be met upon arrival at the airport and escorted by shuttle bus to your start hotel. While our tours do include a day of guided sightseeing in Tokyo and Kyoto, the remainder of your tour is independently led, meaning you will be responsible for getting from place to place.

Thankfully transportation in Japan is modern, punctual and easy to use. And to help you get started you will be provided with various travel vouchers which will cover most of the journeys you will make during your stay in Japan. These will then need to be exchanged for actual tickets upon your arrival.

Exchanging your vouchers

You will need to exchange the vouchers for actual tickets after your arrival in Japan. We recommend making the exchange at a mainline station in Tokyo. Instructions on how and where to do this will be in the Japan Rail Pass pamphlet you will be provided with. Note that you will need to show your passport when you make the exchange, and when you make the exchange you will be asked to state the date you wish to start using the passes.

Please note that many ticket offices do not open until 9 or 10am, so be sure to make the exchange in advance if you plan on making an early start. Plus remember to check your Japan Rail Pass pamphlet you will receive with the vouchers for specific ticket office opening hours.

Reserving a seat for your journey

You can make seat reservations for no extra charge using your Japan Rail ticket – simply apply at any JR ticket office or at the time you make the exchange. You can reserve seats whenever you like; days in advance, the day before each journey; even just turn up at the station a few minutes before the train departs and (subject to availability) you can reserve seats. If you like to be very organised you can even make all your seat reservations right at the start of your trip. You will not be penalised if you end up not using a reservation, though it is polite to turn the reservation in at a ticket office so that other people can use those seats.

Alternatively you can just turn up and travel in the unreserved seats carriage of any JR train.

Transportation - Escorted Group Tours

If travelling with us to Japan on an Escorted Group Tour you will be met at the airport by tour guide and transferred to your hotel by shuttle bus. In the first few days of your tour our guide will escort the tour group to a railway station for you to exchange your rail vouchers (given upon arrival) for actual railway tickets that will be needed on the tour. The process is quick and easy and your guide will be there to assist.

Rooming Arrangements

Most hotels and Ryokans in Japan offer single rooms fitted with one bed and twin share/ double rooms fitted with two single beds. It is relatively uncommon to find twin share/ double rooms with one large bed. If you have requested a twin share/ double room with one large bed we will always request this particular rooming configuration with the hotel, though it is not guaranteed and you may often be accommodated in a twin share/ double room with two single beds. Further triple share rooms and family suites are very hard to come by.

Visas

UK, AUS, NZ, USA and CAN passport holders do not require a visa at present to enter Japan for touristic purposes for a stay of up to 90 days.

South African passport holders can obtain a visa prior to arrival for touristic purposes, for a stay of up to 90 days.

A full passport with two full blank pages and at least 6 months validity beyond date of exit from Japan upon entrance is essential. Please check your personal visa requirements with your embassy if you are from another country.

Please double-check all visa requirements with the Japan embassy at least one month before travel as the above is intended as a guide.

Please Note: Visa information is subject to change. Contact your nearest Japanese Embassy for the most up to date information. Visa procurement remains the responsibility of the passenger and not that of On The Go.