

CHERRY BLOSSOMS – JAPAN BY RAIL –

- experience the beauty of Japanese nature and culture -

Wednesday 19 March – Thursday 10 April 2025



Join us for one of our most popular tours to Japan – a twenty-two day tour to view cherry blossoms on the Japanese islands of Kyushu, Honshu and Hokkaido. Enjoy eight nights in **excellent hot spring (Onsen) resorts in beautiful ryokans** in Kyushu, Mie, Aomori (Honshu) and Hokkaido. Even if you've been to Japan before, you'll visit different locations and have a **deeper cultural experience**. Planted in places of great beauty and often marking special events, the cherry blossom trees become the most important trees in Japan during March and April. With the north/south geography of Japan, the nation's climatic range sparks a massive cherry blossom flowering that sweeps from the southern tip of Kyushu, through to the north of Honshu. The blooming of the blossoms becomes a national event, with websites and news reports monitoring the state of flowering in each location. During sakura – the period of cherry blossoms – the Japanese people celebrate a tradition known as hanami – cherry blossom viewing picnics. Whether we're in central Tokyo, or remote Kyushu, we'll join with the local Japanese people to celebrate sakura.

Travel first class on the high speed 'Shinkansen' trains – making your journey very comfortable. Enjoy **special scenic rail journeys** – the steam hauled **SL Hitoyoshi** along the Kuma River. Experience **coastal ferry journeys, themed resort trains** and more. The itinerary will respond where possible to the best cherry blossom locations as the weather dictates, and we will do so enjoying the comfort and convenience of the Japan Rail system – arguably the finest rail network in the world.

A range of accommodations from modern city hotels, convenient simpler business hotels and **luxury Japanese traditional ryokans with ocean view**. We've included meals when it is prudent, and for special locations, but also provided freedom to dine when, with whom and where you wish. Taste **local cuisine at 'Izakaya' restaurants** and **fine traditional (Kaiseki) dinners** featuring local produce.

The tour is led by Japanese speaking expert **Takako Ishige** and **Owen Johnstone-Donnet**, who have designed and organised the tour. We are proud and passionate about our tours - we make it possible to experience the real Japan, visiting **not only iconic cities and sights, but also 'off the beaten track' small villages**, meeting local people. The tour is limited to 20 guests – we look forward to you joining us on this special journey around the land of the rising sun.

Wednesday 19 March 2025 - to Japan

Begin your experience of Japanese culture aboard a daylight flight from Sydney to Tokyo's Narita Airport with Japan Airlines, or from Melbourne or Brisbane with Qantas to Tokyo, then transfer to our Tokyo hotel for overnight. Alternatively fly overnight from Australia to Tokyo with Qantas or All Nippon Airlines. Overnight Tokyo or aboard the flight to Japan.

Thursday 20 March 2025 (B/LL/D) – Tokyo cherry blossom sights – Chidorigafuchi, Shinjuku Gyoen and more

We'll visit the best places to view cherry blossoms during our day of sightseeing – our day may include visits to **Shinjuku Gyoen**, **Yasukuni Shrine** and **Chidorigafuchi** - the latter featuring more than one thousand cherry trees planted along the edge of the moat of the palace - we will enjoy the walk along this historic site, constructed in the early Edo Period. When in bloom, the pedestrian path is covered with the blossoms, and a gorgeous tunnel of flowers creates an especially magical atmosphere. We will stroll around **Omotesando area** and enjoy the stylish environment imbued with fashion, arts and culture. We have organised a simple picnic luncheon – freshly made '**Onigiri**' - a rice ball (like a sandwich for us) - portable and easy to eat. It is normally made with white rice but today we have one with 12 organic grains which is healthier and tastier. Before sunset we visit Tokyo's most beautiful Japanese landscape garden - '**Rikugien Garden**'. A huge weeping cherry tree is famous and many locals visit for this annual spring celebration. Enjoy our first **group dinner** at a small restaurant which uses fresh ingredients from Akita Prefecture – vegetables, fish and meat with local drinks. Overnight Tokyo.

Friday 21 March 2025 (B) – High speed train (the Shinkansen) to Kagoshima, Kyushu

Today we commence our rail experiences with the 1,450km journey from Tokyo to Kagoshima aboard the **excellent Japanese 'Shinkansen' service**. Running at speeds of up to 320 km/h, the Shinkansen is known for punctuality (most trains depart on time to the second), comfort, safety and efficiency. We break our journey at Shin Kobe station. You can stretch your legs, purchase a **bento box** for lunch, as well as experience a short walk near Shin-Kobe. We continue our journey south to **Kagoshima** - Kyushu's southernmost major city and the capital of Kagoshima Prefecture. The city is often compared with its Italian sister city Naples, due to a similarly mild climate, palm tree lined streets, and nearby geological activity. As we arrive at Kagoshima Chuo, we transfer to our hotel for next three nights next to the station. Enjoy dinner at one of the excellent local restaurants. Overnight Kagoshima.

Saturday 22 March 2025 (B/L/LR) – Sakurajima, Meiji Restoration museum, Kiriko factory, Senganen garden

Today we explore the city of **Kagoshima**, which played an important role in Japan's modern history. In the local museum we'll learn of the **Meiji Restoration**, and at the **Satsuma Kiriko factory** – see cut glass produced by the Satsuma clan from the final years of the Edo period to the beginning of the Meiji period (1868–1912). From 1985 a glass factory, an artisan, and a researcher together succeeded in reproducing Satsuma Kiriko. Explore the beautiful **Senganen Garden** with views over Sakurajima Bay. Around sunset we board a ferry to Sakurajima Island, looking back over the city of Kagoshima. Known as the 'Naples of the Orient' the city boasts palm trees, wide boulevards and wonderful seaside ambience. Explore and dine at one of myriad restaurants in this vibrant and colourful city - many small, local restaurants specialise in local Kyushu foods. Overnight Kagoshima.



Sunday 23 March 2025 (B) – Kirishima Mountain National Park by tourist and steam trains

A day exploring the countryside around Kagoshima and Kumamoto. JR Kyushu has created rail experiences that are designed to make the trains as interesting as the countryside through which they travel. The **Hayato no Kaze Limited Express** travels along the edge of Kagoshima Bay before climbing into the mountains to Hayato and Yoshimatsu. The **Shinpei Limited Express** offers spectacular views of the Kirishima mountain range and a magnificent ascent through the steep pass, around a spiral loop and over switchbacks. **Aso Boy** climbs into the volcanic caldera of the Aso ranges, and the **Hisatsu Orange Railway** offers a coastal journey along the Ariake Sea. A key attraction of these journeys is not only the spectacular scenery, but also the interesting stops en route where you can alight briefly from the train to meet locals on the stations with local produce to taste and for sale. The restored steam train '**SL Hitoyoshi**' offers a journey along the scenic Hisatsu Line towards Kumamoto. The line was opened on November 21st 1909 to connect Kumamoto and Kagoshima prefectures in Japan's southern island of Kyushu. For security reasons, the Japanese government decided to build the railway in and around the mountains, rather than along the coastline, to avoid gunfire from foreign battleships.

The project faced a series of difficult challenges, including the construction of sixty tunnels and ninety bridges, as well as the nation's first railway spiral and switchback to climb up and down the steep slopes. It was also suspended several times due to the First Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War before the railway was finally completed. The black steam engine 8620 allows tourists and railway fans to enjoy the beautiful scenery along the Kuma River in Hitoyoshi, Kumamoto Prefecture, as it runs through old brick tunnels and across iron bridges dating back to the Meiji Era. (Note: which of these experiences we are able to enjoy depends upon the operation at the time – as some lines were damaged in 2020/21 storms and are still being repaired.) Dinner at leisure or with some members of the group. Overnight Kagoshima.

Monday 24 March 2025 (B/L/D) – scenic rail journey to Ibusuki, Museum of ceramics, Ryokan and sand bath

After breakfast we join the **Limited Express Ibusuki no Tamatebako** - the train's name comes from the legend of an undersea kingdom called Ryugu which has been handed down to Ibusuki, affectionately known as "Ibutama". We enjoy a one-hour coastal journey with **grand views of Sakurajima Island and Kinko Bay**. Ibusuki is famous as an onsen town that is known for its hot sand baths, where bathers are buried in naturally heated sand. We visit **Satsuma Denshokan Museum** - a spectacularly designed museum that introduces the history of Satsuma (modern day Kagoshima) around the beginning of the Meiji Period (1868-1912) with a focus on local ceramics. A simple but **excellent Italian luncheon** is enjoyed in the Museum's restaurant. Our accommodation is at **an excellent local ryokan, with traditional rooms and fine food**. Ibusuki is surrounded by sunshine, sea and land, and is a treasure trove of rich sea and mountain food. Our meal tonight is a seasonal taste of the surrounding local foods – after a refreshing **sand bath (O)** in our hotel's private beach area. Overnight Ibusuki.

Tuesday 25 March 2025 (B) – to Hiroshima and Peace Park Museum

This morning we check out of our hotel and leave the island of Kyushu and head to **Hiroshima**. We join the rapid service **Nanohana** and travel to Kagoshima Chuo. We've time to collect lunch, before joining our Shinkansen for the journey to Hiroshima. After leaving luggage at our hotel, we head to the **Peace Park** and **atomic bomb site** - there are about 300 cherry trees planted around the park especially along the river – and along with the monuments and paper cranes, they stand as a testament to world peace. The **Peace Museum**, A-dome and extensive memorials in the park at the confluence of two rivers are a sombre reminder of the effect on the citizens of Hiroshima. Dinner at leisure and overnight Hiroshima.

Wednesday 26 March 2025 (B/D) – Iwakuni , Kintaikyo Bridge, Kikko Koen, Miyajima and Itsukushima Shrine

After breakfast we head to Iwakuni. We alight at Shin-Iwakuni and visit **Kintaikyo Bridge**, which has been Iwakuni's most distinguished landmark and a subject of admiration for hundreds of years. Completely made of wood and without the use of any nails, the bridge makes five bold arches onto massive stone pillars as it crosses over the Nishiki River. Whilst beautiful throughout the year, the bridge is particularly attractive during the cherry blossom season in early April. We'll walk over the bridge, and have time to explore **Kikko Koen (Park)**, where during the Edo Period, the residences of the ruling Kikkawa family were located. For castle afficianado's you can join a ropeway to inspect Iwakuni Castle - built in 1608, at the beginning of the Edo Period, the site of the castle was chosen for its natural defensive advantages on top of Mount Shiroyama and half surrounded by a natural moat, the Nishiki River. The castle keep is four stories high, and looks out onto the city 200 metres below. Probably a source of considerable frustration for those who built it, the original castle lasted only slightly longer than the time it took to construct it. Being built over the course of five years, the castle was torn down by decree of the shogun a mere seven years after its completion. As a contrast, we then head to **Miyajima Island** to see this stand out attraction – with its famed red Tori Gate floating on the inland sea. Boasting the fine Itsukushima Shrine, along with myriad other temples and pagodas, its popularity is testament to its beauty. We return to Hiroshima for an included dinner and our overnight accommodation.

Thursday 27 March 2025 (B) – Okayama Castle, Korakuen Garden, Bizen-yaki ware or Grand Seto-Ohashi Bridge

We join a shinkansen for the short journey to Okayama - visit the beautiful **Korakuen Garden – considered one of the 'three best gardens in Japan'** - located adjacent to Okayama Castle, which can be seen from the garden as "borrowed scenery," **Okayama Castle**, known as "crow castle," gets its name from its black exterior. Dinner at leisure and overnight Okayama. In the afternoon you have two options - **visit the home of Bizen-yaki** - the old-fashioned art of hand-kneaded ceramic making - which uses neither glazing nor painting. Bizen-yaki is the oldest of the six types of ancient Japanese pottery styles, dating back more than 1,000 years. As Bizen-yaki uses fire (not electricity) the flames in the kiln change the patterns on this simple pottery, and no two pieces are alike. It has been known that Bizen-yaki is so strong that it will not break even though you drop it. It also functions to purify water so flowers in Bizen-yaki last longer, and water tastes more pure. Alternatively, we offer the option to cross the grand Seto-Ohashi Bridge – one of the great wonders of the world – to the island of Shikoku and the city of Takamatsu. The Grand Seto-ohashi Bridge is a collective term for six bridges that connect Kojima in Okayama Prefecture on Honshu and Sakaide of Kagawa Prefecture on Shikoku.

Spanning five islands in the Seto Inland Sea, the bridges took forty years and a tremendous amount of money to build. The bridge is more than thirteen kilometres long and has become a major sightseeing spot. The upper level is the Seto-Chuo Expressway, and the lower for the JR Seto-ohashi rail line. The six bridges consist of three suspension bridges, two oblique suspension bridges, and one truss bridge. They are the essence of all available bridge-building technologies and are most impressive. We return to Okayama, and change to our shinkansen for the short journey back to Hiroshima - dinner at leisure and overnight Hiroshima.

Friday 28 March 2025 (B/D) - to the fisherman's village of Kihoku and Kii Nagashima

After bustling cities, we head off the beaten track - first by Shinkansen to Nagoya, and then by limited express train south, to visit the **small fisherman's village of Kii Nagashima** in Mie prefecture. Here you will see and experience Japan most deeply. The local community will show us their daily life and extend hospitality. On arrival at Kii Nagashima we visit an **old residential house** for refreshments, and they welcome us with their fresh smoothie made from produce from their gardens. Explore a traditional merchant's home, and see how Japanese lived 100 years ago. Then we head for our lovely ryokan on the water's edge. Enjoy the relaxing afternoon, a wonderful onsen looking over the sea, and a fine Japanese Kaiseki meal. We stay three nights. Overnight in Kii Nagashima.

Saturday 29 March 2025 (B/L/D) – Kumono Kodo Centre, Kumono Kodo trail and 'Kii Nagashima'

After breakfast (an experience in itself - you can **pick and cook fresh mountain mushrooms**), explore the **fisherman's district guided by local people**. We see the fishermen's houses, their local shrine which is respected as a guardian god by fishermen, and their community centres. Enjoy Japanese tea listening to their story being passed from generation to generation with its **handmade shadowgraph display**. Then experience soba noodle making – you'll get to join in the process of making famous soba noodles, then enjoy them, along with other delicacies, for our lunch – a real treat. As a sweet refreshment we will experience **strawberry picking** - a popular activity for Japanese in spring time – we believe they will be the sweetest strawberries you've ever eaten. Dinner tonight is a fresh **seafood BBQ with locals** – experience genuine and generous hospitality with the local people and build new friendships with them. Overnight Kii Nagashima.

Sunday 30 March 2025 (B/L/D) – Kumono Kodo trail, Wappa craft and traditional musical performance

Today we explore the Miyama area of this region. We visit one of the sacred pilgrimage routes through Kumono Kodo forest - the pilgrimage road '**Kumano Kodo**' has been use for over 1000 years by all levels of society, including retired emperors and aristocrats. Whilst short, it is challenging, with the forest providing both shade and rewarding experiences for those who partake in the morning exercise We then visit the shop/factory of **Owase Wappa**, the **Japanese traditional bento box made from high quality Japanese cypress** growing in this area. The shaved and boiled cypress are carefully bent and tied with bark from cherry blossoms and then finished with lacquer. There are 45 steps in the total process and the high quality craft has been gifted at important occasions for generations. We rejoin our coach to visit the impressive **Kumono Kodo Centre**. Established in 2007, the centre commemorates the sacred places and pilgrimages in the Kii Mountain Range. Made from more than 6,500 Owase Hinoki (Japanese cypress) the building houses a permanent exhibition on the nature, history and culture of the area. Enjoy a **simple Japanese bento luncheon with local foods prepared by our new friends**, then experience a **thrilling drum and musical performance by the local community** with young and old alike performing for us. We return to our ryokan where you can enjoy a **traditional Japanese bath overlooking the sea** and a **fine meal using the freshest local ingredients**. We have the opportunity to again dress in Japanese style with yukata for our evening meal together. Overnight at our ryokan in Kii Nagashima.



Monday 31 March 2025 (B) - to Kyoto, Kyoto sightseeing

After a relaxing morning, we farewell our new friends and head to **Kyoto**, the world famous ancient capital city of Japan since the 8th century. We visit the world famous national treasure of **Kiyomizudera Temple** - literally "Pure Water Temple". Founded in 780 it is one of the most celebrated temples of Japan because of its wooden stage supported by 139 giant pillars without the use of nails, and positioned 13 metres above the hillside below.

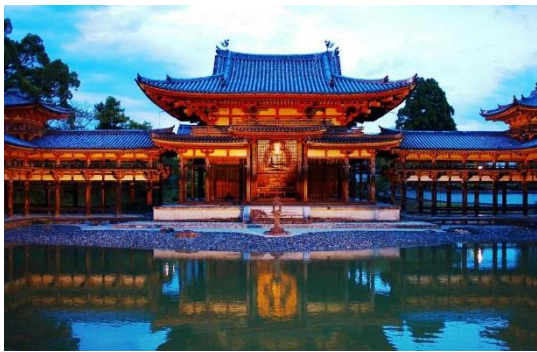
Enjoy the spectacular view of the numerous cherry trees below that erupt in a sea of colour in spring, as well as of the city of Kyoto in the distance. The Higashiyama District along the lower slopes of Kyoto's eastern mountains is one of the city's best preserved historic districts. **Maruyama Park** is Kyoto's most popular spot for 'Hanami' (cherry blossom viewing parties). There are many local people enjoying the once in a year picnic under the trees with their friends, family or work colleagues. After sunset, cherry blossoms are illuminated and the park will show its different face. Enjoy the atmospheric stroll before dinner. In the evening we head for the **Gion district** and **Ponto-cho** which is the most famous geisha district. It is filled with shops and restaurants where geiko (Kyoto dialect for geisha) and maiko (geiko apprentices) entertain. If you are lucky you may spot them on the way to work. Enjoy the early **evening stroll along the Kamo River** before we return to our hotel near Kyoto Station for an included dinner at leisure and overnight Kyoto.

Tuesday 1 April 2025 (B) – Kyoto sightseeing : Golden Pavilion, Rock Garden or Fushimi

Today we'll head to the best cherry blossom sights with historic temples or gardens. An early start to visit **Kinkakuji Temple (Golden Pavilion)**, which is a symbol of Kyoto and one of the historic buildings most representative of Japan. Recognised by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage, the reflection of the golden pavilion on the water is striking. Depending upon blossoms we may also visit nearby Ninnaji Temple or Ryoanji Temple. **Ninnaji Temple** - also known as Omuro Imperial Palace as a member of the Imperial Family used to serve as Ninnaji's head priest - has 200 cherry blossom trees in the precincts of the temple. **Ryoanji Temple** is known as Japan's most famous 'rock garden' consisting of a rectangular plot of pebbles surrounded by low earthen walls, with 15 rocks laid out in small groups on patches of moss. The contrast between the grey stones and the pink blossoms is striking. In the afternoon we stroll along the famed Philosopher's Path and conclude near Nanzenji Temple with its remaining industrial period aqueduct bringing water from Lake Biwa through the mountains to Kyoto. Return to our hotel for dinner at leisure - there are many restaurants nearby that offer quality food at reasonable prices -overnight Kyoto.

Wednesday 2 April 2025 (B) – Phoenix Hall in Uji, prized green tea, Kimono, textiles and craft

On our last day in Kyoto we travel south to **Uji**, situated between Kyoto and Nara – the two ancient capitals in Japan. In Uji we visit **Byodoin Temple Phoenix Hall** – the design on the Japanese 10 yen coin. The reflection of the spectacular symmetry construction on the water is striking and attracts many visitors. Together with its garden, the temple represents the Pure Land Paradise and was influential on later temple construction design. For morning tea we enjoy **green tea produced in Uji**, as it is also famous for its fine quality green tea since the 1100s. We return to Kyoto and visit **Nishijin Kimono Textile Centre**, where you can see a beautiful Kimono show or learn about the Nishijin-ori belt, which are high-quality brocades, manufactured in Kyoto, the ancient capital also famous for its textile tradition. For a souvenir from Japan, join us to visit the Kyoto **craft centre** where you can purchase both books about Japan, as well as traditional art work at reasonable prices and of a high quality. Dinner at leisure tonight and overnight in Kyoto.



Thursday 3 April 2025 (B/D) – Arashiyama, bamboo forest, to Tokyo and Sendai and overnight to Hokkaido

An optional early morning start to visit the nearby **Arashiyama district** on the western outskirts of Kyoto. Enjoy the relaxing walk in the bamboo forest, visit the fine **Tenryuji Temple** and its 14th century Japanese Garden that remains in its original form. View the picturesque Togetsukyo Bridge that crosses the Hozugawa River, and admire the cherry blossoms that should be in bloom along the river's edge. Return to Kyoto Station where we purchase luncheon to enjoy aboard the shinkansen for the journey north to Tokyo. A brief inspection of the wonderful Tokyo station where we change from the shinkansen of the Central Japan Railway to that of the East Japan Railways - witness the **7 minute miracle** – the super-efficient cleaning of a sixteen shinkansen car train in 7 minutes - then **to Sendai**. Here we join one of the vessels of the **Taiheiyo Ferry Company for the overnight sea journey from Sendai to Tomakomai in Hokkaido**. Enjoy dinner aboard, watch the evening light over the ocean, and overnight in a private cabin with ensuite. Don't miss the opportunity to enjoy the Grand Bath - soothe yourself at the end of the day with a soak in the Grand Bath where you can enjoy watching the ocean while taking a bath. If you are an early riser, you may also watch the sunrise from the bath. Overnight aboard the ferry.

Friday 4 April 2025 (B/L/D) – Ainu Culture, Upopoy National Aini Museum and to Noboribetsu

After breakfast enjoy a relaxing morning enjoying coastal views of Hokkaido before our 11am arrival at Tomakomai, on the southern coast of Hokkaido. Join our coach and head to **Shiraoui to Upopoy - the National Ainu Museum**. Recently completed, it is one of the country's most comprehensive museums about the Ainu, the indigenous people of northern Japan. The combination of enclosed and open-air museum includes a replica village of thatched houses along the shore of Lake Poroto. Each of the houses demonstrate different aspects of Ainu culture and lifestyle. We'll experience traditional Ainu folk dances, songs and mouth harp demonstrations. Then to our destination for the next two nights - **Noboribetsu Onsen - Hokkaido's famous hot spring resort**. A contrast to our past weeks of cherry blossoms, Noboribetsu Onsen offers a ryokan hotel style accommodation and insight into a different landscape. Late this afternoon you can enjoy one of the many different types of natural hot baths - mineral-rich waters of the area bubble up from the ground and are renowned for their healing properties. Milky-white sulphur-infused waters soften and refresh the skin. Other salt-rich and metal-rich pools have different health benefits, which are proudly listed in the bathing areas of the hotel. Enjoy dinner and overnight at our resort hotel, Noboribetsu.

Saturday 5 April 2025 (B/D) – Noboribetsu's Hell Valley, Oyunuma Brook and foot bath

A quiet and restful day - after breakfast and a very relaxed start to the day we'll walk to Jigokudani or "Hell Valley" - a large amount of Noboribetsu's many types of hot spring water surface in the spectacular Jigokudani or "Hell Valley" just above the resort town, and part of the Shikotsu-Toya National Park. It is a pleasant and easy walk from our hotel and a fascinating geological presence which displays hot steam vents, sulphurous streams and other volcanic activity. From the valley, we'll take one of the attractive walking trails through the wooded hills for a 70 to 90 minute walk to **Oyunuma**, a sulphurous pond with a surface temperature of 50 degrees celsius and a smaller, even hotter, mud pond nearby. Flowing out of Oyunuma is the Oyunumagawa river - still hot, the river flows through the forest, making for an out-of-this-world sight. We'll follow the river for several hundred metres and there's the opportunity to enjoy a natural **foot bath (ashiyu)** along the way. We'll return in the early afternoon for a simple gyoza luncheon (optional) and you can then enjoy our hotel's facilities with a massage or hot mineral bath. Dinner is included and overnight Noboribetsu.

Sunday 6 April 2025 (B/D) – towards Hakodate, through the Seikan tunnel and to the Tohoku region

Enjoy breakfast and then a mid-morning departure south to Shin-Hakodate-Hokuto, where we change trains and join the shinkansen for the **undersea crossing to Honshu, through the Seikan Tunnel**. Whilst once the whole train would travel by ship across the Tsugaru Straits from Hakodate on Hokkaido to Aomori on Honshu – we traverse this treacherous sea effortlessly, via the 53.85km Seikan tunnel – one of the world's longest undersea tunnels. On Honshu we change trains at Shin-Aomori, and travel to our **lovely resort** for the next two nights – **a fine Japanese ryokan**, boasting soothing hot springs and Japanese-style interiors. Enter an authentic world of ryokan and experience the spirit of this country's omotenashi or traditional hospitality. Our ryokan is surrounded by bountiful nature. Enjoy a **fine onsen experience, excellent food**, and great accommodation. Overnight Tohoku.

Monday 7 April 2025 (B/D) – Hirosaki and surrounds, and Tsugaru Jyamisen performance

After breakfast we travel the short distance to visit the nearby town of **Hirosaki**. During the Edo Period, Hirosaki was the political and cultural capital of the Tsugaru Region, the western section of present day Aomori Prefecture. The city remains one of the culturally richest cities in the northern Tohoku Region. The Neputa Mura or "**Neputa Village**" is a museum about Hirosaki's famous festival, the Neputa Matsuri, and also introduces the city's other cultural specialties. The Neputa Matsuri takes place annually and features floats with large painted screens that depict beautiful women, mythological warriors and other themes, and are illuminated from within when paraded through the streets. Several such floats and screens are on display in the Neputa Mura. You can also experience the drumming that accompanies the procession, and see traditional handicrafts being made. Experience a **Tsugaru Jyamisen Guitar performance** - the shamisen is a lute-like musical instrument unique to Japan. The Tsugaru Jyamisen is different compared to shamisens found in other parts of the country, with sounds are produced by hitting the strings. We walk through the **historic quarter of Hirosaki, through the castle park** and grounds, and then return to our ryokan. Enjoy a **relaxing onsen experience**, another excellent dinner which is included, and overnight Tohoku.

Tuesday 8 April 2025 (B/D) – to Tokyo and the Airport or overnight Tokyo for an optional extension

After breakfast we join a limited express train to Shin-Aomori, then join the Shinkansen through Sendai to **Tokyo**. Enjoy your last day in Japan relaxing as the scenery of northern Honshu passes by your window. In Tokyo we'll have a short opportunity for last minute shopping, and then head to the airport for overnight flights to Australia. Alternatively stay on one more day in Tokyo for some local culinary experiences. Those staying overnight enjoy drinks overlooking the Shinjuku skyline at night, then participate in a lovely dinner as the local Tokyo diners do. Dinner and overnight, Tokyo.

Wednesday 9 April 2025 (B/L/D) – arrive Australia or Tokyo culinary experience

Those returning to Australia arrive home. For those enjoying the final day in Tokyo, we enjoy a culinary day in the capital and experience a cooking lesson with local people. Begin with a walk around the **Tsukiji Market** - Japan's "Food Town," where one can encounter all kinds of Japanese traditional foods. A mixture of wholesale and retail shops along with numerous restaurants that line the streets, new culinary trends are born here. Then a local cooking experience with a focus on food whose ingredients can be purchased in Australia, to allow you to put the experience into practice back home. Learn how Dashi is made – the tasty stock / base of many Japanese dishes. We'll enjoy learning about Japanese food and cooking, as well as enjoying eating what we've prepared for lunch. In the late afternoon we've a little time for some shopping in the vibrant Shinjuku area of Tokyo – smart department stores, the latest fashions, state-of-the-art electrical goods, textiles, stationery and more. Then head to the airport for overnight flights to Australia.

Thursday 10 April 2025 (B) – arrive Australia

A morning arrival back in Australia and the conclusion of our wonderful cherry blossom tour of Japan by rail.



**- SJR Travel map -
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GENERAL COMMENTS AND BOOKING CONDITIONS

ACCOMMODATION, MEALS AND RAIL TRAVEL

Accommodation is generally in 4 star standard hotels. In some locations the best available may not be 4 star, and in some locations we have selected superior hotels or ryokans as part of the experience of the location. Some nights we have included traditional ryokan accommodation with tatami mat floors and comfortable futon beds prepared on the tatami matting. Shoes need to be removed whilst in the ryokan, in rooms and at meals. Ryokan meals are generally included, and whilst we will aim to accommodate dietary requests, some meal experiences are a traditional Japanese set meal. Meals are included as shown - breakfast is included most mornings, however as a general rule we have not included lunch or dinner when there is a range of options, and you can choose the style and time of dining that you prefer. Meals included are indicated as (B) Breakfast, (L) Luncheon and (D) Dinner. Travel is generally in first class (Green Car) seats, though some services only offer standard accommodation and on some trains Green Car accommodation can be limited – we'll arrange the best seating possible. There is a wide range of options for eating in Japan - from very simple meals to elegant dining experiences, and from traditional Japanese food, through to the very best of international western cuisine. The choice is yours. For lunch we'll identify a number of eating options. Every town in which we stay where dinner is not included has a range of restaurants where it is relatively easy and inexpensive to eat well and enjoyably. Major department stores have food halls with freshly prepared food. Most shops and at all railway stations you can purchase a 'bento' - local take away meal boxes with a fresh range of meats, seafood, vegetables and rice. Bakeries offering tempting fresh items abound, especially at railway stations. Eating and enjoying the foods of Japan is part of the tour experience. You can eat as simply or as lavishly as you wish. Japan is exceptionally clean, fresh food a priority, and preparation and hygiene surpass Australia.

PERSONAL SERVICE AND MEETING INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

SJR prides itself on its personal service and attention to detail. The tour is escorted by the two organisers of the itinerary who have both travelled to Japan many times, or lived in Japan for many years. You are assured of the utmost service and our commitment to your satisfaction. We recognise each guest has different interests, and we will provide the opportunity to allow you to rest from the group, explore by yourself, return to particular places, or visit friends or special sites you've read about – if you wish. If your interests are gardens or castles or scenery, you can tailor your activities to focus on these specific interests. Detailed advice and assistance will be given to help you, and most travel requirements can be made for you.

CAPACITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE TOUR

Fitness and mobility are necessary for participation in the tour. Tour passengers must be able to manage their own luggage, and to carry/wheel it on and off trains, from stations to hotels, and if necessary, up or down a flight of stairs. Whilst most stations have escalators / elevators, some older and regional stations do not. Visiting temples and shrines involves walking up and down flights of steps, and in some cases removing shoes. The tour involves travel on the public transport networks of the many Japanese cities. By payment of your deposit and tour fare you confirm that you are of a suitable level of mobility and fitness to participate in the tour, and are aware of the nature of the tour. Whilst it is often possible to use taxis to reduce the distances walked, this option is at your own expense.

FARES AND BOOKING PROCEDURES

The tour is limited in size to 22 guests, and bookings will be confirmed in order of receipt of a deposit of \$3,000 per person. **The tour fare is \$16,980 per person (twin share) plus airfares from Australia, with a \$3,495 single supplement for hotels and the overnight cruise ship. The additional night/day cultural option is \$795 plus \$295 single supplement.** The tour fare includes first class rail travel in Japan (some rail services may not have first class accommodation available, or in some instances, not sufficient for the whole group, and in these cases, standard rail accommodation is provided); all bus, tram, metro and light rail transfers when part of the group; all accommodation on a twin share basis (single accommodation is available on payment of the single supplement); sightseeing and entrance fees as indicated, and meals as shown in the itinerary for each day. The fare does not include meals not identified, drinks, excess baggage charges, gratuities, telephone calls, laundry, any items of a personal nature, travel outside the organised group, or taxi usage when not part of the planned transport means. Due to the variety of interests of individuals, and the large range of temples, gardens, shrines, museums etc. available for inspection on some days, we have included key features in the tour cost. Inspection and entry fees when not part of the planned group activity are not included in the tour cost. Additional or optional activities such as some cable car journeys, boat cruises or entrance fees are not included in the cost. Bookings should be made on the attached form.

The deposit of \$3,000 per person should be forwarded by cheque, payable to St James Rail, along with the booking form, to SJR, PO Box N400, GROSVENOR PLACE, 1220.

You can also pay by Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT):

Account Name:	Scenic Journeys by Rail
BSB:	033 364
Account Number:	612826
Reference:	Your name and 'Japan'

If paying by EFT, please include the Reference above, and email to sjr@digitor.com.au to advise that you have done so – or if you have used a different reference. Please forward the booking form to the postal address above, or scan and email it to us. Credit card payment is possible, with merchant fees of 1% for Visa/MasterCard. Please call us to make payment by credit card.

AIR TRAVEL TO/FROM JAPAN

A range of flight options exist, including daylight and overnight services in both directions with Qantas and All Nippon Airlines, direct daylight travel to Japan and night travel back from Japan with Japan Air Lines, or via the Gold Coast or Cairns with Jetstar. On receipt of booking we'll contact you to discuss your flight preferences and with our travel agent, Sarah Manche, MTA. Travel, we will identify the best airfare to meet your travel needs. Business Class seating is also available. The tour organisers will meet those travelling from Sydney on a Tuesday 18 March 2025 overnight flights with Qantas or ANA, and those travelling on Wednesday 19 March 2025 on daylight flights with Japan Air Lines. Other flight arrivals may require you to travel from the airport to Tokyo city by train by yourself – full details will be provided.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Call us on 0418 585 838 or email at sjr@digitor.com.au for further details or information.

BOOKING, CANCELLATION AND TRAVEL CONDITIONS

Bookings will be accepted on the attached form. **Changes to the itinerary** - as the tour operates to some remote parts of Japan, where accommodation and travel options are limited, the tour organiser reserves the right to change and amend the itinerary at his sole discretion based on necessary changes to travel plans due to air, sea and land schedule changes and hotel availability. **Currency fluctuations** – the tour organiser reserves the right to adjust the tour price based on significant foreign exchange movement between the Australian Dollar and the Japanese Yen. **Cancellation** fees apply as follows: the initial deposit is non-refundable. After payment of further amounts towards the final tour cost, costs for tickets, accommodation, sightseeing etc made on your behalf will incur cancellation charges equal to the cancellation charges incurred to us, imposed by suppliers/operators, plus a fee to cover administrative costs – more than four months prior to departure, \$2000 per person; within four months, \$3000 per person. No refund will be made for cancellations after 1 February 2025. All cancellation or administration charges imposed by the suppliers/operators of components of this tour must be borne by you, the passenger. **Responsibility** - St James' Rail acts only as the organiser of the tour. On acceptance of tickets and travel documents for this tour, which may be evidenced in writing by a ticket, voucher, letter, or other document, you accept that neither St James' Rail nor representatives from any other firm supplying services in conjunction with this tour programme, shall be liable in contract or in tort (actionable wrong) for any injury, loss, damage, accident, sickness, delay or additional expense to you or your possessions arising directly or indirectly by force majeure or other events which are beyond our control, or which are not preventable by reasonable diligence on our part, including, but not limited to, civil disturbance, fire, floods, acts of God, acts of Governments or other authorities, changes in itinerary, weather, strikes, war, transportation disruption, failure of machinery or equipment, industrial action, pandemic, quarantine or any other cause. Where travel is by scheduled carrier, or charter service, that carrier's responsibility is limited in accordance with their conditions of carriage. Similarly all luggage is your responsibility, and we cannot be held liable for any loss or delay however caused. The care of your travel documents are your own responsibility. All expenses incurred by loss must be borne by you. Airline regulations and conditions are written on the airline tickets and are issued to passengers subject to their acceptance of these conditions. Changes in exchange rates, taxes and any land arrangements costs may alter the price of the tour, and St James' Rail reserves the right to change, amend or cancel this tour and/or itinerary if necessary. We reserve the right to amend the itinerary en route to account for unforeseen changes or conditions, or to improve the tour experience for the majority, as determined by the tour leader. **Passports, visas, vaccinations, health requirements** – a valid passport with six months validity from the end of the tour is required. Obtaining all visas, vaccinations or other health requirements to meet the expectation of airlines or foreign governments is your responsibility. St James' Rail cannot accept responsibility for any losses or expenses incurred as a result of a passenger not holding valid and necessary passport, visa, vaccination or health documents. If the tour is unable to proceed due to Government restrictions, SJR may at our election: postpone your travel arrangements to a future date, in which case we will issue you with a credit note equal to amounts paid at the time of postponement; or cancel your travel arrangements, in which case our contract with you will terminate. If we cancel your travel arrangements and our contract terminates, neither of us will have any claim for damages against the other. We will refund payments made by you less unrecoverable third-party costs and less fair compensation for work undertaken by us up until the time of termination and in connection with the processing of any refund. SJR will refund payments it is able to recover or not

incur from the various suppliers of services to this tour. Refunds will be made when the funds have been received by SJR from third party suppliers. **Full details of terms and conditions:** if you would like a copy of the full terms and conditions applicable to all SJR tours please contact us and we will forward a copy to you.

INSURANCE

A condition of travel on this tour is that you have a comprehensive travel insurance policy to protect yourself against cancellation fees, health and other travel risks. An insurance policy can be sent to you from our travel agent, Travel Associates, Paddington, for your consideration. Obtaining insurance cover for the tour is your responsibility.

CHERRY BLOSSOMS - JAPAN BY RAIL -

Wednesday 19 March – Thursday 10 April 2025

Booking Form

YOUR CONTACT DETAILS

Name:
Address: Suburb: Postcode:
Home tel: Work tel: Mobile:
Email:

BOOKING DETAILS (Full passenger names EXACTLY as shown in your passport:)

Passenger 1 Name:
Date of Birth: Passport No: Expiry Date:
One World Frequent Flyer No: Airline No:
Star Alliance Frequent Flyer No: Airline No:
Passenger 2 Name:
Date of Birth: Passport No: Expiry Date:
One World Frequent Flyer No: Airline No:
Star Alliance Frequent Flyer No: Airline No:

(Please send a scan/copy of the data page of your passport with, or in the following weeks, of making a booking.)

PAYMENT

..... I have enclosed \$ as deposit (\$3,000 per person) for the above booking. Please make cheques payable to St James Rail.

..... I have paid by Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) as described previously. Please email SJR to advise and send this form.

Account Name: Scenic Journeys by Rail
BSB: 033 364
Account Number: 612826
Reference: Your name and 'Japan'

A letter will be sent acknowledging receipt of your deposit and providing further details.

AIR TRAVEL TO/FROM JAPAN

..... Please book me/us to travel to and from Japan and advise me of the best airfare.

..... Wed 19 March 2025 daylight with Japan Airlines Wed 19 March overnight with Qantas

..... Tue 18 March overnight with Qantas / ANA
(note – you will be met at the airport, however 19 March 2025 is a free day)

..... Economy class air travel Business class air travel

..... Please call me to discuss air travel options.

HOTEL ACCOMMODATION

Single rooms: Double rooms: Twin (two bedded) rooms:

A single supplement is payable for sole use of rooms in hotels/ryokans and aboard the overnight cruise ship.

OPTIONAL CULINARY DAY

..... I/we would like to join the culinary day

RYOKAN – TRADITIONAL JAPANESE ACCOMMODATION

The tour includes six night’s accommodation in quality Japanese ryokans. These may involve sleeping on tatami mat floors, with futons (thin mattresses) and require you to remove shoes in the ryokan, the rooms, and sometimes at dinner and breakfast.

Please advise below if you are not able (or do not wish) to sleep on tatami mats with futons in Japanese ryokan hotels, or do not wish to remove your shoes. We will then book you a western style hotel room or at a western style hotel.

..... I prefer western style beds, but am happy to remove shoes in the ryokan

..... I prefer western style beds, and do not wish to remove shoes for meals (we will accommodate you in a nearby hotel.)

DIETARY REQUESTS (we will do our best to accommodate and advise accordingly)

Please indicate any dietary request :
.....
.....

INSURANCE

..... Please send an insurance policy from Sarah manche, MTA Travel, for our consideration.

YOUR SIGNATURE

I have read the reservation conditions outlined above and accept them on behalf of myself and my party by whom I am authorised to make this agreement.

Signature of person making reservation: Date:

Cancellation charges will apply as advised in this itinerary. An insurance policy can be forwarded from our travel agent, Sarah Manche, at MTA Travel.

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Web www.stjamesrail.org

January 2024