

EXPLORE!



BEST SELLER

Shogun Trail
12 days

Japan - Trip code JS

Shogun Trail

This action-packed journey by high-speed rail covers many of Japan's iconic sights. Explore Tokyo's neon-lit streets, discover Kyoto's tranquil temples and visit the site of the world's first atomic attack in Hiroshima. Travelling away from the tourist trail, we uncover the country's rural charm with a stay in a traditional ryokan on the beautiful island of Hirado, a meeting with a geisha and a visit to rolling tea plantations.

Trip highlights

- ★ **Tokyo** - Explore the city's lively neon-lit streets and visit the nearby Hakone National Park for a spectacular view of Mount Fuji
- ★ **Bullet Train** - Experience comfortable rail travel at an average speed of 174 mph
- ★ **Kyoto** - See the traditional side of Japan, with its stunning temples, immaculate Zen gardens and enigmatic geishas
- ★ **Tea with a geisha** - Enjoy Japanese tea with a geisha and learn about her art and her life
- ★ **Hiroshima and Nagasaki** - Reflect at the sites of the world's first atomic bomb attacks
- ★ **Hirado** - Discover this island's rural charm and spectacular scenery

ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

TRIP PACE:**Moderate**

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

GROUP SIZE:**10 - 16**

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

DAY 1 - Join tour in Tokyo

Our tour starts in Tokyo, the modern-day capital of Japan. After checking in to our conveniently-located hotel which will be our base for the next two nights, we will enjoy an included dinner with the rest of the group and our Tour Leader.



Accommodation: Asakusa Via Inn (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Dinner

DAY 2 - Walking tour through Tokyo's shrines and gardens

Over one-quarter of the Japanese population live within a 50 km radius of the centre of Tokyo, making it the most populous metropolitan area in the world. The result is a bustling and exciting city - the economic powerhouse of Asia. However, scratching its neon-clad surface reveals a city bursting with history and tradition.

A morning stroll to Tokyo's oldest temple, Senso-ji, in Asakusa, will introduce us to Tokyo's unique culture. We then board a boat for a short journey along the Sumida River. Gaining a totally different perspective of the city, we drift past high rise apartments, secluded gardens and busy warehouses. After arriving in the heart of the city near Hamarikyu Gardens, you may later wish to visit the Meiji shrine and Shinjuku area, where the latest electronic gadgets dazzle from glowing shop-fronts.



Accommodation: Asakusa Via Inn (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 3 - Boat ride on Lake Ashi; transfer to Hakone

Today, we spend the day exploring the Hakone National Park - home to the towering Mount Fuji. Although distances are short, we use a variety of forms of transport including bus, funicular rail and cable car as we make our way initially to the hot, bubbling sulphur springs at Owakudani. From here, on a clear day, there are magnificent views of the snow-capped mountain that is so synonymous with Japan. Whilst at the springs, you may wish to join the locals in eating an egg boiled in the sulphur pools - just one is reputed to increase life expectancy by seven years!

Our next stop is Lake Ashi, a magnificent lake created from the eruption of the Hakone Volcano over 3000 years ago. A short boat ride takes us to Moto Hakone. Here, you may choose to relax in one of the lakeside restaurants, or enjoy a one-hour trek along a section of the old Tokaido Highway, following in the footsteps of the shogun warriors. Passing through a stately avenue of ancient Japanese cedar trees lining the old route, we walk on some of the original paving stones. This ancient trail was mainly for the use of the nobility and shoguns as they travelled with huge retinues between the feudal court in Edo (Tokyo) and their own regional castles.

In Hakone, we are accommodated in a traditional inn, known as a ryokan, where we sleep on comfortable, folding futon mattresses. During our stay, we learn about local etiquette, such as when to take off our shoes and the pleasures of taking a Japanese bath, all of which helps enhance our stay in this traditional establishment.



Accommodation: Fuji Hakone Guest House (or similar)



Simple Ryokan



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 4 - Bullet train to Kyoto; explore the Geisha district

Leaving the mountains behind us, we take the world-famous 'Bullet Train', or Shinkansen, to Kyoto - the cradle of all things uniquely Japanese. This imperial capital was at the heart of events that shaped Japan's destiny for more than 1000 years. As the only major Japanese city to remain unscathed by World War II bombings, signs of the past are in its grand temples and palaces, and also in the many quaint shops selling traditional wares. This afternoon, we head to the famous geisha district of Gion. Here, we hope to catch a glimpse of these enigmatic entertainers as they scuttle to work in the teahouses or high-class restaurants, and we'll meet with one for tea.



Accommodation: Hotel Sunroute Kyoto (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 5 - Explore Kyoto's temples and zen gardens

Kyoto is regarded as Japan's loveliest city, with more than 2000 temples and shrines, many set in manicured landscaped gardens. We start with the Ryoan-ji Temple with its beautiful Zen gardens and famous rock garden. The exact history of the gardens is uncertain but the temple was converted from an aristocrat's villa in 1450. Whilst in the gardens try testing out the theory that at least one of the rocks is hidden from every vantage point. We then explore the famous Golden Pavilion. The temple is a three storey building with the top two tiers covered in gold leaf. Set in a lake the building appears to float on the water and the reflections, coupled with the background of forest make it worthy of its place on many Japanese postcards. There is also time to stroll along Kyoto's charming streets and tree-lined canals, simply soaking up its unique atmosphere and your local guide will take you to some of their own favourite sites while exploring Japan's former capital.



Accommodation: Hotel Sunroute Kyoto (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 6 - Continue to explore traditional Kyoto

Today we continue our exploration of Kyoto. We will start with a visit to Nijo Castle. Built in 1603 as a Shogun palace, it is a great example of the sumptuous setting in which the Shogun would have held audiences with his samurai warriors. The grounds and gates are impressive but the real highlights are the nightingale floors and the extensive gardens. It is also possible to take an optional trip to nearby Nara, a journey of 45 minutes each way by train. Nara is one of Japan's greenest cities and is home to the Todai-ji Temple, until very recently the world's largest wooden building, it is also home to a giant bronze Buddha statue. All of Nara's highlights can be explored by foot so it makes for an easy day's exploration.



Accommodation: Hotel Sunroute Kyoto (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 7 - Reflect at Hiroshima Peace Park; train to Nagasaki

An early morning train takes us to Hiroshima, where we will spend the morning exploring this thought-provoking city in our own time. Completely destroyed on 6th August 1945, when it was the target of the first atomic bomb to be used in wartime, Hiroshima has literally risen from the ashes, and is now a thriving, friendly city.

You may choose to visit The Peace Memorial Park and the well-presented museum on the site of the 1945 A-bomb hypocentre. Whilst serving as poignant reminders of the nuclear holocaust, their over-whelming message is of hope that such horrors will never reoccur. Travel around the city is easy, thanks to the provision of colourful street trams, brought in from all over Japan after the war.

This afternoon, we regroup to take the train to Nagasaki, where we will spend the next two nights. This is a city with an eventful history and was, of course, the target of the second atomic bomb attack on Japan. In a cruel twist of fate, the city bore the unimaginable brunt of a last-minute change of plan, when the preferred target of Kokura was obscured by cloud.



Accommodation: Toyoko Inn Nagasaki Eki-mae (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 8 - Take a walk through Dejima, Nagasaki's Dutch quarter

This morning we are given a tour of Nagasaki, which, for long periods in its history, has served as Japan's main contact with the outside world. In the 16th century, the city became established as the main trade point with the Portuguese. As well as providing wealth from trade, the Portuguese introduced Christianity. After almost a century of turmoil, the religion was banned, foreign traders were expelled, and Japan closed its doors to the West.

The one exception was the artificial island in Nagasaki harbour, Dejima. This small, closely guarded enclave was the site of the Dutch Trading Mission, which remained Japan's only contact with the outside world for almost 200 years. During our visit here, we can see that some of the original features remain, as well as some excellent reconstructions of the 18th century buildings. Continuing our tour in the Glover Gardens, we will see fine foreign residences of the Meiji period and enjoy impressive views over Nagasaki Harbour, perhaps the most scenic harbour view in Japan.

The afternoon has been left free to explore this historic city in your own time.



Accommodation: Toyoko Inn Nagasaki Eki-mae (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 9 - Drive through scenic tea plantations and ferry ride to Hirado Island

This morning we travel light, sending our main luggage on to our final destination of Fukuoka and packing our rucksacks for our stay on the island of Hirado. Our route takes us along a scenic road through tea plantations. We'll stop at a picturesque terraced area and walk through the fields to the tea farmer's house. There'll be an opportunity to sample some of the brew including green 'Sencha' and roasted 'Hojicha' teas before enjoying a traditional style lunch with the local tea farmers. After lunch we continue our journey to the seaside city of Sasebo. Here we board our ferry to the charming harbour quayside in Hirado. Our accommodation for the next two nights is a classic ryokan, furnished in the traditional Japanese style with futon mattresses on the tatami mat floors.



Accommodation: Umeyashiki Kairakuen (or similar)

■ - Simple Ryokan

DAY 10 - Full day to explore Hirado and Ikitsuki Islands

Today, we will explore the pristine and unspoiled islands of Hirado and Ikitsuki, connected by an impressive 400 metre-long bridge which happens to be the longest truss bridge in the world. Accompanied by a local expert on a day-long minibus tour, we will discover rural Japan and take in the remote countryside of the 'Hidden Christians'. Along the islands' shores, fishing remains one of the main occupations, but we also have the opportunity to learn about traditional industries along the way. We plan to visit a museum dedicated to the whaling industry, which played a vital role in the history of this region. On our journey, we will gain views of the islands' spectacular coastlines and towering cliffs.



Accommodation: Umeyashiki Kairakuen (or similar)

DAY 11 - Sail among the '99 Islands' then travel to Fukuoka

This morning will be spent soaking up the charms of Hirado. The city has prospered as a castle town for almost 500 years. Its excellent port enabled it to become the central stage for trade with China, Holland and Portugal from the 17th century. Our walking tour will offer fascinating insights into the way things were here in the early 1600s. As well as visiting the castle, we will take in the church commemorating Saint Francis Xavier who preached here in the 16th century; the sites of the old trading houses and the foreigners' cemetery. Later we will enjoy spectacular views on a relaxing cruise through the fabled 'Ninety Nine Islands'. In actual fact, 170 islands, mostly uninhabited, lie alongside the indented saw-toothed coastline.

This afternoon, we travel to our accommodation near the airport in Fukuoka, for our final afternoon.



Accommodation: Route Inn Hakata Eki-mae (or similar)



Single room available

DAY 12 - Tour ends in Fukuoka

Our tour ends after breakfast this morning, although some flights may depart before this.



What's included?



Included meals

Breakfast: 11
Lunch: 2
Dinner: 3



Transport

Bus
Boat
Train



Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader



Accommodation

8 nights standard hotel
3 nights simple ryokan

Trip information

Country information

Japan

Climate

Japan's climate is mostly temperate, with five distinct seasons. Summer is from June to September with temperatures reaching 30°C, although it can vary from warm to very hot after mid-July. July and August can be humid. Spring and Autumn are mild throughout Japan. Winter, October to April, is cold with snowfall. The main rainy season is June. Japan can be prone to short, tropical cyclones in August to October. October November although cooler is a great time to see the Autumn colours.

Time difference to GMT

+9

Plugs

2 Pin Flat

Religion

Buddhism, Christian and Shinto

Language

Japanese

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for

guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Tokyo - trip to Kamakura £20.00.

Kyoto - Boat trip on Hozu River £30.00. Train to Nara - £10.

Nagasaki - Sunset on Mt. Inasa £15

Clothing

Rain gear is essential all year. You will need warm clothing from October through until April when temperatures drop, especially at night. December until February are particularly cold so bring extra layers if you are travelling at this time.

Footwear

Comfortable shoes, and sandals for relaxing.

Luggage

20kg

Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and a daypack. Please note: that for logistical reasons your main luggage will be forwarded from Tokyo to Kyoto, from Kyoto to Nagasaki and from Nagasaki to the final nightstop at Fukuoka. Your daysac should therefore have sufficient space for overnights in Hakone and Nagasaki and a 2 night stay on Hirado. We recommend a compact suitcase with wheels or good quality rucksack.

Equipment

Bring a water bottle to save on purchase of plastic bottles and a small torch. Hairdryers are provided at all the hotels.

Tipping

Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Country Information

Japan

Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

Lunch price

£8

Dinner price

£15-20

Beer price

£4

Water price

£1.00 - 2.00

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Yen.

Recommended Currency For Exchange

It is preferable to take money in Yen or traveller's cheques.

Where To Exchange

Most major towns - your Tour Leader will advise you on arrival.

ATM Availability

All post offices have international ATMs. Some other ATMs do not accept Western bank/credit cards. Your tour leader will advise you locally.

Credit Card Acceptance

In major restaurants and stores.

Travellers Cheques

It should be noted that outside of the major cities it is difficult to change traveller's cheques. Where available it takes 30-45 minutes, the best places to exchange them is at the airport on arrival.

Transport, Accommodation & Meals

Transport Information

Bus, Boat, Train

Essential Information

FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice [click here](#).

For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Price Guarantee

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

Visa and Passport Information

Japan: Visas are not required by UK, Australian, New Zealand, US and Canadian citizens.

Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

Booking conditions

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our [Essential Information](#) and [Booking Conditions](#).

Transfers

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Polar, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer click [here](#)

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

Flight information

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. [Read more about them here.](#)

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Japan

Vaccinations

Nothing compulsory. We recommend protection against typhoid, tetanus, infectious hepatitis and polio. The use or possession of Vicks inhalers and some other common prescription and over-the-counter medicines (e.g. for allergies and sinus problems or even certain mild painkillers, such as those containing certain levels of codeine) are banned under Japan's strictly enforced anti-stimulant drugs law. Customs officials may not be sympathetic if you claim ignorance about these medicines. If in any doubt about customs procedures for such items, you should check with the nearest Japanese Embassy before visiting Japan. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at [Explore Travel Health](#) and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.