Japan Golden Route

Tokyo - Hakone - Kyoto - Osaka - 8 days / 7 nights

Sample itinerary - Subject to availability

Travel style: scheduled

Overview

The first-timer's Japan, on the world's best railway.

The journey

Eight days on the route that made Japan the world's great city journey - Tokyo's temples and neon, Fuji over the Hakone hills, Kyoto's shrines and craft streets, ending in Osaka's kitchen. Shinkansen between all of them, run on fixed departures with our Japan delivery partners.

Highlights

- Sensoji and Nakamise at opening
- Mt Fuji over Lake Ashi from Hakone
- A ryokan night with onsen bathing and kaiseki dinner
- Fushimi Inari's torii tunnels before the crowds
- Kinkaku-ji and Arashiyama's bamboo grove
- Nara's Great Buddha and deer park
- Dotonbori street food, Osaka

Day by day



Day 1 - Arrive Tokyo

Met at Narita or Haneda for the shared transfer into town; most arrivals settle by late afternoon. The first evening is the group's own pace - Shinjuku's Omoide lanes and their lantern parlours, or an early night after the flight; both are correct. The guide runs the metro briefing and tomorrow's opening-time logistics over dinner for whoever is up for it.

Meals: - - Hotel: Tokyo, Asakusa

Day 2 - Old Tokyo, new Tokyo

Sensoji at opening, before the Nakamise shutters finish rolling up and the incense burner starts drawing its crowd. The Meiji Shrine's forest walkway for the counterpoint - Tokyo's quietest forty minutes - then Omotesando and the Shibuya crossing as the city's two registers. The evening is free; the guide's list runs from standing sushi to department-store basements.

Meals: B - Hotel: Tokyo

Day 3 - Markets and museums

Tsukiji's outer market for breakfast - knife shops, tamago stalls, and the queues that mark the right ones - then the Tokyo National Museum's galleries for the long view of everything eaten and visited so far. The afternoon bends to Ginza's food-hall basements or free time as the group prefers; tonight bags are staged for the ryokan's one-night move.

Meals: B - Hotel: Tokyo

Day 4 - Hakone and the ryokan night

The Romancecar out of Shinjuku and into the hills. The Hakone loop runs as weather allows - the ropeway over the sulphur vents of Owakudani, the black eggs, and the Lake Ashi cruise past the torii standing in the water with Fuji behind it when the skies hold. Then the ryokan: tatami, the kaiseki dinner's seasonal sequence, and the onsen before bed. The trip's best night, booked early for a reason.

Meals: B, D - Hotel: Hakone, onsen ryokan



Day 5 - On to Kyoto

The shinkansen to Kyoto (about two hours from Odawara) with Fuji behind and the Alps ahead. The afternoon is Kinkaku-ji, the Golden Pavilion holding its reflection, and the temple district around it; the evening is Gion at lantern-lighting time, the lanes and the teahouse fronts - and the honest note that geisha sightings are never guaranteed, only hoped for.

Meals: B - Hotel: Kyoto, Gion side

Day 6 - Torii and bamboo

Fushimi Inari early, while the torii tunnels still belong to the morning walkers: the full climb optional, the lower galleries usually enough. Midday through Nishiki Market's food stalls and knife shops - Kyoto's kitchen for four centuries - and the afternoon out to Arashiyama for the bamboo grove and the river bend. The last Kyoto evening is kept free; it tends to fill itself.

Meals: B - Hotel: Kyoto



Day 7 - Nara, then Osaka's kitchen

The rail day-trip to Nara: Todai-ji's Great Buddha under the hall's enormous roof, the deer of the park bowing for crackers, the lanterns of Kasuga Taisha. Late afternoon the shinkansen slides down to Osaka for the finale - Dotonbori at night, takoyaki where it was invented, and the group eating standing up like it means it.

Meals: B - Hotel: Osaka, Namba

Day 8 - Depart

Shared transfer to Kansai International timed from check-in backwards - the airport's own distances deserve the margin. The Japan delivery partners and the UK coordination team stay reachable until boarding, and the route extends naturally: Hiroshima and Miyajima westwards, or the Nakasendo and the Alps northwards, for whichever brief comes next.

Meals: B - Hotel: -

What makes this journey different

- Asakusa at opening, when the Nakamise shutters are still rolling up.
- A ryokan night in Hakone - tatami, kaiseki dinner and onsen bathing - with Fuji across Lake Ashi when the weather allows.
- Fushimi Inari's torii tunnels early, and Gion's lanes at lantern-lighting time.
- Fixed departures with shared transfers and English guiding - the accessible way into Japan.

Where you stay

Four-star city hotels in Tokyo (Asakusa or Shinjuku), Kyoto and Osaka, plus one ryokan night in Hakone with tatami rooms and onsen bathing - the single upgrade we recommend before being asked.

Food & local life

Tsukiji's outer-market breakfast, department-store basement food halls, a kaiseki dinner in Hakone, Kyoto tofu cuisine and Nishiki Market tastings, and Dotonbori - takoyaki where it was invented.

Included

+ Accommodation as stated - city hotels plus one ryokan night, with breakfast
+ English-speaking guide on touring days; shared transfers on fixed departures
+ All internal transport as stated - Odakyu Romancecar or shinkansen to Hakone, shinkansen Kyoto-Osaka, Nara day-trip rail and airport transfers
+ Entrance fees for the sites named in the itinerary
+ Meals as stated (B = breakfast, L = lunch, D = dinner)
+ A 24-hour emergency contact while the group is in Japan

Not included

- International flights to and from Japan
- Japan visa costs where applicable
- Travel insurance, including medical and cancellation cover
- Meals not marked in the itinerary, drinks and personal spending
- Anything listed under subject to confirmation until it is confirmed

To be confirmed with suppliers

- fixed-departure dates and minimum numbers
- ryokan tatami-room stock per departure
- Fuji visibility - Hakone viewpoints are weather-dependent, no guarantee
- Gion evening walk - private lanes; geisha sightings are never guaranteed

Customisation

Every framework can be re-built around your client's dates, party size, hotel grade, pace and interests - or combined with scheduled small group departures where budget matters. Send us the brief and we will quote in writing.