

Model 16-Day Itinerary for Japan

Tokyo, Hiroshima, Miyajima, Kurashiki, Okayama,
Himeji, Kyoto, Nara, Takayama, Osaka

This "model" 16-day itinerary is based on over thirty years experience traveling in Japan. As a company and as individuals, our focus is on introducing our clients to the unique history, culture and food of each country in as efficient and appropriate a manner as possible. This itinerary reflects that focus. Our intent here is not to include all the worthy attractions in Japan, but rather to provide you, the potential visitor, with our considered opinion on what attractions we feel are worth seeing given your limited time and budget. Although our clients usually request first-class or deluxe accommodations when they travel with our arrangements, our model itineraries can be used by travelers on almost any budget as the routing and sites are still what most visitors should see. We also offer some alternative suggestions for those with slightly different interests, or with time and/or other travel constraints.

In reality only a few fortunate travelers will be able to spend more than our recommended 16-days in Japan, and many will not be able to spend that much time, but this itinerary will provide the majority of potential travelers a good idea of some of the most memorable and beautiful things there are in Japan and how long it takes to see and do them (the individual city modules are perfectly capable of being used as just that if you are not able to see everything we are recommending.) This is in recognition of the fact that most first-time travelers to a country (and with Asia travel that is the vast majority of North American travelers) underestimate time and distance in their planning.

Our 16-day recommendation is based on a two week trip, departing on a Saturday, and returning on a Sunday two weeks later. This would mean missing only two weeks of work (painful as that absence may be for some) but maximizing the total number of days you can be gone by including the three weekends. Please keep in mind that to get to Asia from North America you have to cross the International Date Line in the Western Pacific. This means that you lose a day going to Asia, but will gain it back when you return. Thus, you can leave on a Saturday morning and arrive in most Asian destinations by Sunday evening (after a flight of 10-20 hours against the jet stream), and can depart an Asian destination for North America on Sunday morning and arrive the same day (after a shorter flight of 8-18 hours with the jet stream). The total trans-Pacific travel time is therefore at least three full days. From these numbers you can see that a shorter trip to Asia would involve a significant amount of the time just traveling and would not be as efficient a use of your time and money.

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PRIOR TO DEPARTURE

- Arrange your airline tickets to arrive in Tokyo and depart from Osaka, if at all possible. This will save you a full day of backtracking to Tokyo so it is worth even an extra \$100-200 in airfare, if that is necessary.
- Check to be sure you don't need a visa (American and Canadian passport holders currently don't need a visa for Japan for normal tourist length stays).
- Purchase an appropriate Japan Rail Pass before you leave.
- If you plan to drive in Japan, obtain an International Driver's License from the AAA.
- Plan to travel with two medium size suitcases rather than one or more large suitcases.

Day 1 - Home to Japan - Air

(We recommend you begin this itinerary on a Saturday for the maximum stay.) Depart in the morning from the closest airport to your home via air for Tokyo. *Cross the International Date Line.*

Day 2 – Air to Tokyo (Night 1 of 3)

While on the plane fill out the Japanese Arrival/Departure card the flight attendant should give you.

Arrive in Tokyo at Narita International Airport (Terminal 1 or 2.) Pass through **Quarantine** (only of concern if you are coming from certain “infected countries”) and **Immigration**. Once through Immigration you will collect your luggage. Narita airport provides complimentary luggage carts. Proceed through **Customs**, normally via one of the Green (“Nothing to Declare”) Lanes, and out into the Arrival Hall.

We recommend you do five things before leaving the airport:

1. Change several hundred dollars at the nearest **money exchange** (rates are pretty similar throughout Japan);
2. Look for the **baggage shipping services**, normally at one end of the terminal as you exit Customs, and ship one of your two bags to your hotel in Hiroshima for approximately ¥1,200-2,000 (about US\$10-20)

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- depending on the weight, size and distance. It will normally arrive the next afternoon unless you arrived in Tokyo fairly late;
3. Take the escalators downstairs to the **Japan Rail (JR) office** to have your [JR Pass](#) validated and to get reserved seat tickets for your various train trips. If you want aisle or window seats you should tell the ticket agent now. Remember to ask for a window seat on the north side on your Tokyo to Hiroshima leg so you can see Mt. Fuji if visible;
 4. Purchase your **Airport Limousine Bus** ticket for approximately ¥3,000 (about US\$30) to your specific hotel or the closest hotel to yours; and,
 5. If you don't already have maps, brochures and a JR timetable from a [Japan National Tourist Organization office](#) in North America pick some up at their information counter.

Go outside to the queue number for your bus for the drive into Tokyo (a minimum of 1 hour but can take 2 hours in rush hour to some hotels.)

Day 3 - Tokyo (Night 2 of 3)

Sightseeing in Tokyo should include the unique **Tsukiji Wholesale Fish Market**, the nearby **Tsukiji Honganji Temple**, the **Sensoji Temple** (in the Asakusa Kannon Temple), a **Sumida river boat cruise** to the **Hamarikyu Garden**, and the **Ginza** area. End with a performance of Kabuki at the **Kabukiza Theater** in the Ginza (if available.)

Day 4 - Tokyo (Night 3 of 3)

Sightseeing in Tokyo should include the **Edo Tokyo Museum**, the **Kokugikan Sumo Stadium and Museum** (unless a Sumo tournament is on, in which case definitely buy a ticket), and either the **Meiji Shrine**, **Harajuku** and **Omotesando**, or the **Tokyo National Museum** in Ueno. In the evening visit the **Mori Tower** in Roppongi for the best view of Tokyo.

Day 5 - Tokyo to Hiroshima (Night 1 of 2)

(Ship bag to Kurashiki.) Depart Tokyo Station for Hiroshima via JR Shinkansen train. Lunch on train.

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Arrive in **Hiroshima**. Transfer to your hotel. Sightseeing in Hiroshima to include the **Peace Memorial Museum**, the **A-Bomb Site**, the **Peace Park**, and if time permits, **Hiroshima Castle**. (Japan Rail Pass Day 1 of 14)

Day 6 - Hiroshima to Miyajima to Hiroshima (Night 2 of 2)

Day trip to **Miyajima** via local Japan Rail (JR) train from Hiroshima station to Miyajima pier. Take JR Ferry to Miyajima Island. Sightseeing in Miyajima to include the Shinto **Itsukushima Shrine**. Return via JR Ferry and train. (Japan Rail Pass Day 2 of 14)

Day 7 - Hiroshima to Kurashiki (Night 1 of 2)

(Ship bag to Kyoto.) Depart Hiroshima for Shin-Kurashiki via JR Shinkansen train.

Arrive in Shin-Kurashiki. Transfer to local JR train from Shin-Kurashiki to **Kurashiki**. Walk or take a taxi to your hotel. Sightseeing in Kurashiki to include the local historic and art museums, galleries, and picturesque old streets. (Japan Rail Pass Day 3 of 14)

Day 8 - Kurashiki to Okayama to Kurashiki (Night 2 of 2)

Day trip to Okayama via local JR train from Kurashiki to Okayama.

Arrive in **Okayama**. Sightseeing in Okayama to include the **Korakuen Garden**, the **Okayama Castle** and the **Prefectural Museum**. Return to Kurashiki via JR train in late afternoon. Balance of evening for strolling around Kurashiki. (Japan Rail Pass Day 4 of 14)

Day 9 - Kurashiki to Himeji to Kyoto (Night 1 of 4)

(Ship bag to Takayama.) Depart Kurashiki for Shin-Kurashiki via local JR train. Transfer at Shin-Kurashiki for Himeji via JR Shinkansen train.

Arrive in **Himeji**. Sightseeing in Himeji to include the **Himeji Castle**. Return to train station. Continue on in afternoon to Kyoto via JR Shinkansen train.

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Arrive in **Kyoto**. Transfer to your hotel. Balance of day for walking around Kyoto. (Japan Rail Pass Day 5 of 14)

Day 10 - Kyoto (Night 2 of 4)

Sightseeing in Kyoto to include the **Nijo Castle**, the **Golden Pavilion**, the Zen **Ryoanji garden**, the **Silver Pavilion**, the **Philosopher's Walk**, and the **Sanjusangendo Temple**. (Japan Rail Pass Day 7 of 14)

Day 11 - Kyoto to Nara to Kyoto (Night 3 of 4)

Day trip to **Nara** via local JR train. Sightseeing in Nara to include the **Todaiji Temple**, the **Kasuga Taisha Shrine**, the **Kofukuji Temple**, the **National Museum**, and the **Nara Deer Park**. Late afternoon return to Kyoto via local JR train. (Japan Rail Pass Day 8 of 14)

Day 12 - Kyoto (Night 4 of 4)

Sightseeing in Kyoto to sites of interest including the **Tenryuji Temple** in Arashiyama. (Japan Rail Pass Day 9 of 14)

Day 13 - Kyoto to Takayama (Night 1 of 2)

(Ship bag to Osaka.) Depart Kyoto for Takayama via JR express train. Lunch on train.

Arrive in **Takayama**. Transfer to your hotel. Sightseeing on foot in Takayama through the historic streets. (Japan Rail Pass Day 10 of 14)

Day 14 - Takayama (Night 2 of 2)

Suggested sightseeing in Takayama to include the **Festival Floats Exhibit Hall** and the **Hida Folk Village**. (Japan Rail Pass Day 11 of 14)

Day 15 - Takayama to Osaka (Night 1 of 1)

(Ship bag to Osaka.) Depart Takayama for Nagoya via JR express train.

Arrive in Nagoya. Transfer to JR Shinkansen train departing Nagoya for Osaka. Lunch on train.

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Arrive in **Osaka** (Shin-Osaka Station). Transfer via local JR train or subway to Osaka Station. Transfer to your hotel. Suggested sightseeing in Osaka to include the **Osaka Castle**, and the **Dotombori entertainment district**. (Japan Rail Pass Day 12 of 14)

Day 16 - Osaka to Home (Air)

Morning free. Transfer to airport via coach. Depart Osaka (Kansai) via air for hometown. *Cross the International Date Line.*

Arrive in your hometown. (Japan Rail Pass Day 13 of 14)

