Eagle-Eye Tours

Japan's National Parks, Art & Culture Cruise Itinerary

Link: Japan's National Parks, Art & Culture Cruise

Tour Overview

Join us on an unforgettable circumnavigation of Japan’s main island Honshu and exploration of its wilderness, arts, culture and rich history. A Circumnavigation of Honshu, Osaka – Kobe to Kobe, including South Korea.
This voyage has been specially designed to explore and experience Japan’s seamless blend of ancient customs with ultramodern living, incredible wilderness, wildlife and renowned arts as we cruise from iconic cities to remote coastlines and islands.

Highlights include Kanazawa’s thriving centre of the arts, long known for its lacquerware, outstanding collectable pottery of the Kutani style, goldleaf workmanship, delicate hand painting of silk for kimonos and classical Noh theatre dramas performed since the 14th Century, and Naoshima Island – Japan’s Art Island. Visit two of Japan’s best contemporary art museums – the recently-opened Hachinhoe Art Museum and the Towada Art Center, celebrate Japan’s internationally-renowned magna culture at Ishinomaki, explore the living museum Ise- Shima National Park and Japan’s most sacred shrine complex Ise Jingū.

Our voyage will see us visiting the iconic Japanese island-dotted seascapes of Matsushima and Argo Bays and discovering the unique plants, wildlife and wilderness hiking trails on UNESCO registered Global Geopark Dogojima Island and Izu Oshima Island, Bandai-Asahi National Park and the impressive lakes, hot springs and volcanic wonderland of Shikotsu-Toya National Park.

Also on the itinerary is the iconic the five-storey Pagoda of Miyajima, sobering Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park with its eternal Flame of Peace, a day in South Korea’s Ulsan visiting the fascinating UNESCO World Heritage Site Gyeongju – the ‘museum without walls’ and Karatsu’s medieval heritage.

Join us for this rare opportunity to sail around Japan exploring its unspoiled nature, world renowned arts scene, culture and history.

Itinerary

Day 1: Osaka



Arrive at Honshu's largest port city Osaka where modern architecture and a vibrant dining scene are nestled alongside the 16th Century shogunate Osaka Castle, and make your way to your hotel where our group will spend the first night of the expedition. This evening meet your fellow voyagers and expedition guides over dinner at the hotel.

Day 2: Osaka



Enjoy breakfast at the hotel before exploring Osaka, opportunities here include visiting Minoh Park and Osaka Castle. With an area of just 9.6 square kilometres (963 hectares) Minoh Park is one of Japan's smallest National Parks and home to iconic 33-metre high Minoh Waterfall and diverse wildlife including Japanese Salamander and protected Mino Monkeys. Explore Osaka Castle, one of Japan's most famous landmarks, take in the views from Osaka Castle Main Tower and relive dramatic stories of warlords and Osaka's fascinating history. Board Heritage Adventurer for lunch as your Captain and Expedition Team welcome you aboard.

Day 3: Ise-Shima National Park



Expect a day like no other as we explore Ise-Shima National Park. Often likened to a living museum the peninsula of Ise-Shima, or just 'Shima' as it is known to the locals, there is much to discover here including endless forests and abundant nature, rich maritime history, incredible coastal scenery and Japan's most sacred shrine complex Ise Jingū. Comprising some 125 different shrines hidden among a labyrinth of mossy walls and dating back to the third century Ise Jingū is considered the spiritual home of Shinto cosmology. Explore grand shrine, Kotai Jingū, made entirely of Japanese cypress where no metal nails or screws have been used in its construction and, in accordance with Shinto practice, is rebuilt every 20 years in order to preserve its purity. Currently in its 62nd iteration, it was last rebuilt in 2013. Shima has been an official source of seafood for Japan's imperial family since the 5th Century and the iconic amulet-wearing ama divers, female seabed foragers have been responsibly harvesting these waters since Japan's Jomon era. At Ago Bay gaze out over the fascinating seascape created by more than 60 islands dotting the water and observe Shima's sacred Meoto Iwa - Wedded Rocks, connected by a shimenawa rope near the Futami-Okitama Shrine. At Ise Contemporary Art Museum discover a diverse collection of works by both Japanese and international artists including the famed sculpture garden featuring work by Atsuo Okamoto.

Day 4: Izu Oshima Island



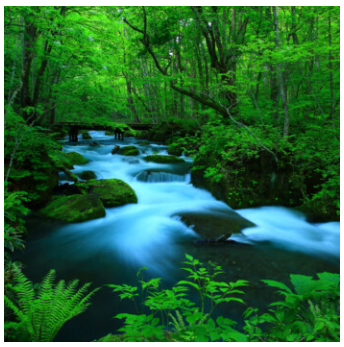
Izu Oshima is the largest of 'Tokyo's Treasure Islands', Izu Islands, a chain of islands lying to the south of the Japanese mainland, which preserves its own unique natural and human history. There will be an opportunity to hike up Mount Mihara, or Oshima Fuji as it's known by the less than 7,000 locals, at the island's centre, to the east a dramatic cliff drops into the ocean, while gently sloping plains extend towards the west. Almost entirely covered by forests, Izu Oshima Island was certified as a Japan Geopark in September 2010 in recognition of its unique status. We also plan to visit one of these unique geological features at the Great Road Cut Geological site featuring 700-metre-long cliffs and their undulating layers of volcanic stratum which has earned it the nickname 'Baumkuchen' due to its resemblance to the famous layered cake.

Day 5: Ishinomaki



After a morning at sea with presentations from our on board experts, we arrive in the port city of Ishinomaki. Options today include exploring the Shiogama Seafood Wholesale Market and its colourful urban core showcasing its 'manga' culture – the art of Japanese comic books and illustrated novels – thanks to famed pioneer Shotaro Ishinomori and creator of the popular Kamen Rider series. We will visit the iconic Ishinomori Manga Museum established in his honour and, throughout the city, you can observe artworks and statues celebrating the importance of the artist and his art on Japanese culture, there may also be time to visit the 2011 Iwate Tsunami Memorial Museum and try your hand at painting some of the region's iconic Kokeshi Dolls. Alternatively explore Sanriku Fukkō National Park, known for its dramatic scenery it was increased to 38,537 hectares (95,227 acres) and renamed in 2013 from Rikuchu Kaigan National Park to encourage the region's recovery efforts following the devastating 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Explore jagged cliffs, white-sand beaches, quaint fishing ports, hiking trails and unique flora and fauna. Black-tailed Gull, Streaked Shearwater, Peregrine Falcon and Osprey all breed here, while botanists can look for Thunberg Lily and Beach Morning Glory among the many flowers.

Day 6: Hachinohe



With a Pacific shoreline of outstanding natural beauty and a clutch of fantastic cultural sights, there is lots to see and experience during a visit to Hachinohe and the Aomori Region. Today we will explore the region's fascinating connection with contemporary art through visits to two of Japan's best contemporary art museums – the recently opened Hachinohe Art Museum and the Towada Art Center. Reflecting a new approach to contemporary art, Hachinohe Art Museum, also known as an 'art farm', offers a dynamic new interpretation of how and where art is created, housed in an innovative design intended to bring the community together to utilise the space. At Towada Art Center, one of Japan's foremost contemporary art institutions, the striking Ryue Nishizawa-designed building features contemporary artists such as Leandro Erlich, Yayoi Kusama and Ron Mueck. Alternatively, visit the stunning Lake Towada, a 2,000-year-old flooded double caldera 400 metres above sea level, and its surrounding forest in Towada Hachimantai National Park. Lake Towada is the largest caldera lake on Honshu and is characterised by two large peninsulas which extend nearly a third of the way across the lake. On a clear day, Mt Towada is reflected in the still waters of the lake creating a picture-perfect scene. Take in these expansive views from the Hakka Pass Observatory or continue onwards to walk at Tsuta Numa Lake. A short walk brings you to Oirase Stream with its beautiful cluster of 30 waterfalls.

Day 7: Muroran



lakes. Another picturesque natural hot spot, the park's spectacular scenery includes impressive lakes, hot springs and a volcanic wonderland, which are all easily accessible and offer multiple hiking and walking options. Activities here include riding the cable car to the top of Mount Usu to take in the grand scale views over Lake Toya and visiting the geothermal spectacle of steaming vents, bubbling mud and sulphurous streams at Jigokudani aka 'Hell Valley'. Observe and experience the Ainu culture including cuisine, music and crafts at the Upopoy National Ainu Museum which stands on the shores of Lake Poroto. This afternoon explore Muroran, options may include experiencing a traditional onsen at the Noboribetsu Onsen or a visit to the scenic cape and lighthouse.

Day 8: Akita



A key city in the Tohoku region since medieval times, Akita was once a castle town of the Satake clan. Today it is a vibrant, prosperous city that seamlessly honours its past while embracing its young, energetic spirit. Noted for its burgeoning art community, there are several museums to explore, including the Akita Museum of Art which houses a collection of work by Western and Japanese artists, the Akita City Folklore Museum and the Namahage Museum. The latter, in Ogi, shares the area's ogre tradition which visit on New Year's Eve to search for lazy children or wives to punish. Alternatively, discover Akita's little-known Kaiyu-style Japanese Suishin-en Garden. Explore its many pathways, bridges, ponds filled with Koi, waterfalls, skunk cabbage garden and more under the shade of towering trees planted by the then Crown Prince and Princess.

Day 9: Sado Island



Today we will explore remote Sado Island off the coast of Niigata. The entire island is designated as one of Japan's Geoparks and comprises the mountain ranges of Osado and Kosado flanking the Kokunaka Plain. Once a destination of political exile, it now boasts its own rich cultural and religious life incorporating puppet theatre, Okesa folk songs, Ondeko drumming and demon dances. Home to the Japanese Crested Ibis, extinct on the mainland, and the iconic Taraibune Tub Boats, which we will have the opportunity to experience, this island off the beaten path combines stunning natural scenery including Senkakuwan Bay and Ogi Peninsula, and wilderness and wildlife with a rich history including gold and silver mining, Samurai warrior culture and unique agri- and aquaculture practices. Sado Island is widely considered a perfect miniature version of Japan. Here, we will visit the Shukunegi Village National Important Preservation Area and learn more about traditional taiko drumming at the Sado Island Taiko Centre.

Day 10: Kanazawa



Options today include exploring the historic mountain settlement and UNESCO World Heritage Site of Shirakawa-go, high in the remote mountains of the Shogawa River Valley in Hakusan National Park. Experience the unique cultural traditions including the region's iconic Gassho-zukuri farmhouses, some of which are more than 250 years old, designed to withstand the heavy snow in winter and provide a large attic space for cultivating silkworms. Alternatively explore the rich art centre of Kanazawa discovering some of the unique styles of Japanese art. Kanazawa is rightly famous for its Kutani-style pottery, exquisite lacquerware, gold-leaf workmanship, hand painted silk, and classical Noh dance-drama performed since the 14th Century. Wander the winding cobblestone streets of Kanazawa's Geisha district Higashi Chaya, explore elegant restaurants and craft galleries and visit the impressive Edo-period Kenroku-en Garden, one of the Three Great Gardens of Japan.

Day 11: Sakaiminato / Matsue



This morning we arrive at the port of Sakaiminato, entry point to Matsue, known as ‘the town of water’ due to being situated between Lake Shinji and Lake Nakaumi. We plan to visit Matsue Castle, a national treasure and one of Japan’s few largely intact 17th Century castles. Other options today may include exploring Daisen-Oki National Park and Mount Daisen with its rich Buddhist culture, once home to 3,000 soldier monks, enjoy panoramic views from the Ogamiyama Shrine before visiting the breathtaking Daisenji Temple. The Adachi Museum of Art is renowned for its superb Japanese gardens and collection of contemporary Japanese paintings, comprising some 1,500 of the country’s most highly regarded paintings produced after the Meiji period.

Day 12: Ulsan, South Korea



Today we cross the Sea of Japan to Ulsan in South Korea where we plan to visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Gyeongju. The capital of the Silla Dynasty and dating back to the first millennium, Gyeongju is known as ‘the museum without walls’ and is full of ancient Korean history and Buddhist culture. Stroll among excavated monuments, temples, tombs and pagodas at Tumuli Park and the Bulguksa Buddhist Temple. We may also visit the iconic Woljeonggyo Bridge, savour Korean delicacies and explore Hwanglidangil Road, South Korea’s trendy yet traditional Korean-style food, pub, and shopping street and walk in the beautiful Taehwagang Bamboo Forest. Today is a perfect taste of South Korea.

Day 13: Fukuoka, Japan



The largest city on the island of Kyushu, Fukuoka is the union of the castle town of Fukuoka on the west bank of the Naka River and the merchant town of Hakata on the east bank. This buzzing metropolis combines an effortless blend of trendy Yatai food stalls (which made Lonely Planet and The New York Times 2023 travel lists) with vibrant art installations, historic ruins and colourful coastal parks. During our time here there may be opportunities to explore the northern city of Kitakyushu and the famed Kokura Castle, TOTO Museum and Kawachi Wisteria Garden or Nanzoin Temple with its reclining bronze Buddha (thought to be the world’s largest bronze statue). At the Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine, which is built on the gravesite of poet and scholar Sugawara no Michizane, it is surrounded by beautiful gardens, ponds and more than 6,000 plum trees.

Day 14: Hiroshima & Miyajima



Despite its history, including being the site of the world's first atomic bomb attack on 6 August 1945, Hiroshima is a vibrant and thriving cosmopolitan community. We plan to visit the beautiful Peace Park and Museum, with its sombre cenotaph containing names of atomic bomb victims, and the permanently lit 'Flame of Peace'. We plan to time our visit to Miyajima Island during high tide, where possible, to experience the floating Torii Gate. Considered one of Japan's most scenic spots it is also the location of the famed Daisho-in Buddhist temple. Choose to indulge in fresh local oysters and ice cream, while native Sika deer wander the streets, and enjoy the views of the Shinto Shrine and Torri Gate.

Day 15: Takamatsu



Shikoku Island's Takamatsu has a long history as a port town, earning itself the nickname 'Gateway to Shikoku', although more recently locals call it 'Udon Kingdom'. If you are interested in plants, a visit to Ritsurin Park, considered one of Japan's finest gardens, is sure to be a highlight. Next, you will enjoy a visit to Kinashi Garden, one of Japan's main bonsai production centres, where you will learn about traditional methods of growing bonsai. Visit Mount Yashima, a historic mountain that played a significant role in the Genpei War during the late 12th Century, before visiting the open-air museum of Shikoku Shikoku-mura. For those interested in art you may wish to travel to Naoshima Island – Japan's art island – for a full-day excursion. Shikoku Island is known for its art and this excursion to Naoshima will have you admiring its architecture and art museums which include Chichu Art Museum and Benesse House, featuring work by Japanese and international artists including Yayoi Kusama's iconic pumpkins.

Day 16: Osaka



This morning sail back into Osaka, after breakfast there will be a complimentary coach to a central hotel or either Kansai or Osaka International Airports. To allow time for disembarkation procedures and travel from Osaka, we do not recommend booking flights departing before 1300 hours.

What to Expect

The focus and emphasis of every expedition is getting you ashore as often as possible for as long as possible with maximum safety and comfort. Our Expeditions are accompanied by some of the most experienced naturalists and guides, who have devoted a lifetime to field research in the areas that we visit.

Every day we offer a combination of interesting shore excursions and fun shipboard activities. The number of participants per group may vary as there are a variety of daily activities to choose from, but you can generally expect a group size of maximum 30. Our excursions onshore will involve a relatively low level of exertion, but you will need a reasonable level of mobility to get up and down the gangway and climb into and out of Zodiacs (with assistance).

For this tour we have a combined focus and most days offer a choice between wilderness adventures or arts and culture experiences, plus opportunities to enjoy local cuisine.

When the ship is underway, it is a wonderful time to join a naturalist on deck, take photos of the stunning scenery, or get caught up on some reading in the library. In addition, our resource staff will give informative talks at various times throughout the voyage.

Meals in the ship's dining room are a great opportunity to meet new friends and recount the day's adventures. Special diets can be accommodated with advance notice. Safety is also a top priority with Eagle-Eye Tours – our team has extensive experience in the field, and all of our Voyages are run in conjunction with operators with the highest safety standards. The Heritage Adventurer is equipped with a well-stocked hospital and medical doctor on voyages.

We know that everyone travels for different reasons. Over the years, however, we have found one common element among the guest who choose to travel with us – a thirst of knowledge and authentic experience. Knowing this drives us to ensure the highest quality learning experience on our trips, by taking time to carefully design each trip we offer.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

• Landing fees
• Pre and post cruise transfers
• One-night hotel accommodation equivalent to your on board accommodation (incl. dinner/breakfast)
• All on board ship accommodation with meals
• House beer, wine and soft drinks with lunch and dinner
• All shore excursions and activities.
• Programme of lectures by noted naturalists

Tour Price Does Not Include

• All items of a personal nature (e.g., Laundry)
• Drinks
• Gratuities
• International/domestic flights
• Visas and travel insurance
