



A Caravan through...

The Land of the Rising Sun

DETAILED DOSSIER

14 day itinerary *Kyoto – Nara – Hiroshima – Miyajima Island
Beppu – Mt Aso – Miyaji – Nagasaki – Tokyo*

Travel dates **Fri 26 Mar 10 – Thu 08 Apr 10**
Fri 09 Apr 10 – Thu 22 Apr 10
Fri 25 Mar 11 – Thu 07 Mar 11
Fri 21 Oct 11 – Thu 03 Nov 11

INTRODUCTION

– a 14 day journey by bullet train, boat and car across Japan's largest island of Honshu and on to slower-paced Kyushu, exploring modern cities and off-the-beaten track locations that will intrigue and inspire veteran travellers as well as first-time visitors to Japan. Designed to be relaxing as well as informative, the itinerary – while in itself quite full – is sufficiently flexible, so as to allow time for individual exploration.

Gardens and walks As well as the smaller gardens in Kyoto, we also visit the classic gardens of Koraku-en in Okayama, Suizen-ji in Kumamoto and Hama Rikyu in Tokyo. Also highly recommended, as and where there are free mornings and afternoons during the tour, are optional visits to Glover Garden in Nagasaki and Koishikawa Korakuen in Tokyo. In addition to the published itinerary, there are also opportunities, for those who wish, to further explore the surrounding countryside on foot.

About us... *The Oriental Caravan* is a truly independent travel organisation, founded by tour leader, linguist and lifelong Orientalist Phil Colley, on the basis of his twenty years experience of North, East and Central Asia. *The Caravan's* passionate approach to small group exploration ensures that 'Caravaneers' don't just visit a country but really experience it – in style and a fair amount of comfort. For more information – or if you would like to discuss this itinerary and your travel plans in more detail – please call us on +44 (0)20 7582 0716, or send an email to info@theorientalcaravan.com.



The Oriental Caravan



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ITINERARY

Day 1 Kyoto Depending on your arrival time you will be met at Osaka's futuristic Kansai airport and escorted to our hotel in Kyoto. For those group members who have arrived early there are opportunities to explore the various temples nearby to our hotel or perhaps walk in the wooded hills of Inari Mountain, famous for its 'fox temple' and tunnels of red *torii* gates – the perfect way to ward off jetlag. Tonight is also the first chance to experience some of Kyoto's legendary cuisine.

Overnight – hotel

Day 2 Kyoto Flanked on all sides by lush, forested hills, and with the shallow waters of the cherry tree-lined Kamagawa river flowing gently down its length, Kyoto lies in a delightful setting. Originally modelled on Xian in China, the city's long and rich history reaches back to a time well before its choice as imperial capital in the 8th century. Since then generations of artisans and benefactors have helped build a legacy of almost 2,000 Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines and Zen gardens. The ensuing centuries have seen the city become a paradise not just for the pilgrim but also for the pleasure-seeker, and in the cobbled streets of the Gion quarter it is still possible to steal a glimpse into the enigmatic and often misunderstood world of the *geisha*. With such a limitless wealth of treasures and traditions the city of today stands proudly at the country's cultural heart, still managing to effortlessly encapsulate all that is magical and refined about Japan. Kyoto remains, for many a visitor, the finest city in Asia.

This morning an orientation tour takes us to some of Kyoto's more important sites, including: the imposing and opulent Nijo Castle – formerly home of the Tokugawa shoguns and, nestling at the foot of Kyoto's north-western hills, the extravagantly decorated Kinkakuji temple, which was immortalised in Yukio Mishima's novel "The Golden Pavilion". From here it is also possible to walk or drive the short distance to Ryoan-ji, perhaps Japan's most famous Zen garden. The rest of the afternoon is free, or offers the possibility of walking in the eastern hills at Daimonji Yama for fine views over Kyoto and beyond. Then, in the early evening, there will be an introductory briefing followed by dinner at one of the city's many delightful restaurants, situated near the new and architecturally astounding railway station. Later, for the more 'energetic' members of the group, there will be a night tour – carefully researched – of Kyoto's entertainment district with its street musicians, canalside bars and youthful neon verve!

Overnight – hotel

Day 3 Kyoto Kyoto is a city that lends itself to walking, and there are many differing routes that can be taken during this day at leisure in the city. Recommended is a gentle stroll through the eastern hills along the 'Path of Philosophy' that links Ginkaku-ji, the Temple of the Silver Pavilion, with Nanzen-ji Temple. This walk can be extended south via Heian shrine and on through well-preserved old town areas to Kiyamizu-dera – the Temple of Clear Water. From here there is a justifiably famous view across a wooded gorge toward Kyoto. Also recommended, for those visiting in Spring, is a visit to the Kaburenjo theatre for a presentation of *Miyako Odori* (the Cherry Blossom Dance) performed by elaborately dressed *maiko* (apprentice *geisha*). Closer to our hotel the architecturally impressive Higashi Honganji temple and the almost surreal Sanjusangendo, home to 1001 statues of Kannon, (the bodhisattva of compassion whose name, incidentally, was later taken up by the camera company Canon) – both make for an interesting visit. In the late afternoon, for those who wish, there will be a short walking tour of Gion – the *geisha* district – with its many old teahouses, some of them mentioned in the widely acclaimed novel "Memoirs of a Geisha". Later a traditional dinner will be served in one of the many restaurants of the Pontocho area.

Overnight – hotel

Day 4 Kyoto & Nara This morning we make a short journey by train to Nara, formerly Heijo, Japan's first true capital. The composition of today depends very much on the weather and the interests of the group, but will certainly include a visit to the awe-inspiring Todai-ji temple – the largest wooden structure in the world and home to Japan's largest bronze statue of the Buddha. As we wander through the woods of Nara's famous Deer Park we also visit the important Kasuga-jinja Shinto shrine with its vermilion-pillared corridors, and the towering Kofuku-ji pagoda. The afternoon is free to continue exploring Nara, and perhaps visit the intriguing and culturally important Horyu-ji temple. Alternatively we can return early in the afternoon to spend more time in Kyoto.

Overnight – hotel

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ITINERARY *continued*

Day 5 Okayama, Hiroshima & Miyajima Island Today we travel by bullet train to Hiroshima. En route we pause in Okayama to visit the celebrated Korakuen Garden, one of Japan's 'Big 3' classical gardens. Constructed at the end of the 18th century, *Korakuen* (meaning 'garden for taking pleasure later') is situated on a sandbank of the Asahi River, and is overlooked by the commanding heights of Okayama Castle. Like Ginkaku-ji in Kyoto, it is classified as a 'stroll garden' or *shuyu*, with a winding path that allows the garden to slowly unfurl and reveal itself in all its many aspects. On arrival in Hiroshima we will visit the A-Bomb Museum and Peace Memorial Park. Both stand testimony to the fateful day in August 1945 when the city was chosen as target for the first ever wartime use of the atomic bomb. We then head for the enchanting island of Miyajima, which we reach after a short ferry ride across the inland sea. The island is home to the venerable Shinto shrine of Itsukushima, famous for its huge vermilion gate or *torii* which rises majestically out of the sea. At high tide it is considered to be one of the most beautiful sights in Japan. The size and physical landscape of Miyajima makes it an ideal place for walking, and as we will be spending the night here there is plenty of time to explore. In the evening, after most visitors have returned to the mainland, Miyajima takes on a magic of its own.

Overnight – guesthouse

Day 6 Miyajima Island & Beppu The morning is free to further explore Miyajima Island. There is the lovely Momaji Park (known as Maple Valley) from where it is possible to walk or take a cable car up to the top of Mt. Misen. The summit is home to a colony of wild monkeys, and provides fine, sweeping views over western Honshu and the island-studded Inland Sea. Also of note is Daisho-in Temple. In the afternoon we leave Honshu and cross over to the island of Kyushu, making our first stop in the spa town of Beppu. Gloriously situated, with the coast on one side and mountains behind, Beppu is indeed an extraordinary place. Throughout the town, pillars of steam rise up like smoke signals, as a reminder that this is one of the world's most geo-thermally active regions. Beppu is one of Japan's most unusual destinations, and its attractions – ranging from the refined to the fascinatingly tacky – are many. It is likely that we will stay at the Suginoi Hotel, famous throughout Japan, and a travel experience in its own right.

Overnight – hotel

Day 7 Beppu There is something for everyone in Beppu though many of the town's most popular attractions revolve around its health-giving waters. Clustered around the Kannawa area are Beppu's famous *jigoku* or 'hells' – a collection of hot multi-coloured lakes, geysers and bubbling pools of mud – surrounded by unusual and beautiful botanical gardens. Nearby, but not necessarily recommended, are the mixed, nude *myoban* mud baths that claim to cure ills as diverse as arthritis and insanity! Also, close to the Ashiya Hotel in the Kannawa area, is the bizarre, and highly amusing, Hinokan Sex Museum. For a far more relaxed and less touristy experience, group members may wish to visit the Takegawara Onsen – a delightful old *Meiji*-era wooden building, where the aches and pains of the day can be eased away by the application of hot black sand, piled on by muscle-bound, laughing old ladies. An open-air equivalent of the hot sand bath is available down on the beach, where is it also possible to go swimming. For the energetic there are also some good hiking trails that will take you up into the hills around Beppu – recommended in particular are the climbs to the top of nearby Mount Tsurumi or, slightly further afield, the summit of Yufu Dake volcano. The second of these walks, which takes up most of the day, finishes in the lovely village of Yufuin with a chance to soak tired limbs in an open-air hot bath looking out onto a small lake.

Overnight – hotel

Day 8 Mt Aso & Miyaji Leaving behind the natural as well as the very man-made wonders of Beppu, we climb by local train into the mountains of Kyushu's rural hinterland, where we find a slower, more traditional way of life. The main attraction of this area is the Aso Caldera – a huge volcanic crater surrounded by fertile agricultural land, home to numerous farming villages. Within the main crater there are five smaller cones, known collectively as Mt. Aso. The scenery here can be dramatic. Travelling by bus up to the base of Nakedake, the lush meadows, grazed by horses and cattle, slowly give way to a starker more volcanic landscape. It is then possible, either by foot or cable car, to ascend the short distance to the very top of Nakedake peak, and peer down through sulphurous clouds to the eerie and seething grey, green lake that lies at its heart. From here it is possible to return by bus. Alternatively we can hike around the crater rim and descend from the opposite side of the mountain through beautiful scenery back to our delightful *minshuku* (traditional Japanese bed & breakfast) in Miyaji, where the facilities are basic but comfortable, and where we are assured a friendly welcome and some excellent home-cooking.

Overnight – minshuku

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ITINERARY *continued*

Day 9 Nagasaki The train down from Aso to Kumamoto ranks as one of Japan's great railway journeys, as the small train passes through and regularly stops at rural hamlets to pick up farmers and their produce, before descending from the volcanic heights by a series of switchbacks. We break our journey in Kumamoto, where we have the option of visiting one of Japan's most highly regarded 'stroll' gardens, Suizenji. Carrying on through Kyushu's attractive countryside we eventually reach the charming and picturesque harbour of Nagasaki.

Overnight – hotel

Day 10 Nagasaki Japan's first contacts with the West took place in Nagasaki with the arrival of missionaries and traders from Portugal and the Netherlands. Foreigners were at first confined to the small enclave of Dejima, but soon as their influence spread and trade grew so did their concessions. Situated in one of the most interesting parts of Nagasaki, quite close to our hotel, is the hillside Glover Garden, named after the influential Scottish entrepreneur Thomas Glover. Here, set amidst the gardens, many fine turn-of-the-century European residences look out over the harbour. An ill-timed break in the clouds resulted in Nagasaki becoming the world's second target for an atomic bomb that had originally been intended for cloud-bound Fukuoka. This part of the city's history is commemorated in the Peace Museum and Peace Park situated in the north of the city. Also recommended is an evening cable car trip to the top of Inasa-yama for a spectacular night-time panorama of the city. With its easy-to-use tram system, many of whose streetcars are museum pieces in themselves, Nagasaki is a pleasure to explore. Blessed with a cosmopolitan and relaxed atmosphere, the city is considered by many visitors to be one of the most enjoyable in all Japan.

Overnight – hotel

Day 11 Tokyo Today we travel north to Tokyo, breaking our journey briefly in Kyushu's provincial capital of Fukuoka. As we speed our way by bullet train we may, in fine weather, be afforded beautiful views of Japan's most sacred symbol, the snow-capped Mount Fuji. Arriving at Tokyo station in the late afternoon we transfer the short distance to our hotel.

Overnight – hotel

Day 12 Tokyo Tokyo is well-known for its bustling energy and futuristic architecture. However, it also has a gentler side, and its citizens often reveal themselves – particularly outside of working hours – to be some of the friendliest of any capital city in the world. There are also many vestiges of the past, with historic temples and shrines still to be found in some of the most unexpected places, as well as an abundance of parks and gardens which are particularly exquisite in spring when the cherry trees and azaleas are in bloom. Today we have a varied, full-day tour of the city beginning in the lively Senso-ji temple district of Asakusa, with its many interesting craft and souvenir stalls. After lunch we are afforded an alternative view of Tokyo as we relax on a short cruise down the Sumida River. Our boat drops us off at the delightful Hama Rikyu gardens where we have time to stroll along paths that were once the sole preserve of the *shogun*. Later we make our way to the shopping district of Ginza where, depending on the theatre schedule, we have the chance to see a short performance of Kabuki, one of Japan's more spectacular performing arts.

Overnight – hotel

Day 13 Tokyo Today the whole day has been left free for further independent exploration or shopping. There are endless opportunities for sightseeing in and around Tokyo; in the east of the city, the districts of Shibuya and Harajuku – a magnet for the city's breathtakingly trendy youth – are particularly interesting, as is the important Meiji Jingu Shrine. In Shinjuku the city's highest skyscrapers offer panoramic views that on clear days stretch as far as Mount Fuji. The area is also home to Kabuki-cho, the Soho (but more so!) of Tokyo. It is also possible to take day-trips outside of Tokyo, either to the Hakone area of Mt Fuji or – as a highly recommended and less weather-dependant option – a visit to the magnificent Tokugawa shrines of Nikko – home of, amongst many other things, the famed three monkeys for whom evil is neither seen, nor spoken, nor heard! In the evening, the group come together over dinner to bid Japan farewell. For the more energetic, tonight may also include a few hours in Tokyo's unforgettable nightlife district of Roppongi.

Overnight – hotel

Day 14 Journey's end... The Oriental Caravan heads home

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Tour price (excluding international flights) – £1,895 per person on a twin share basis

Group size & Leader The group will comprise between 6 and 14 members, and be escorted throughout by an experienced Japanese-speaking tour leader from the UK, assisted by a local guide in Kyoto.

Transport We make good use of Japan's well-developed and highly efficient train system, whether it be the quaint, sometimes bizarre, local trains of Kyushu or the futuristic bullet trains in Honshu. It is felt that use of the public transport system allows for a more in-depth and personal experience of Japanese life – and is also invariably a lot of fun. Other forms of transport used include ferry, private taxis and cable car (optional), and on occasion we may also travel on public buses. Some of the sightseeing is done by foot, and it should be noted that use of the train system necessarily entails a certain amount of walking.

Accommodation Throughout our visit, we stay at good quality 'tourist hotels' except at Miyaji, where we stay in a *minshuku* – a friendly Japanese-style 'bed and breakfast' – and on Miyajima island, where we stay in a comfortable Japanese-style guesthouse. All rooms have en suite facilities, except the *minshuku* where facilities are shared. It should also be noted that in the *minshuku* we will be sleeping on the floor on Japanese-style *futons*, which most people find to be very comfortable. The tour is sold on a twin share basis but if required single rooms can be reserved on payment of a single supplement of £425 – details available on application. Single rooms, though usually available, cannot however be guaranteed at the *minshuku* or guest house.

Food Apart from the farewell dinner in Tokyo and one breakfast and one dinner at the *minshuku* in Miyaji, meals are not included in the price. Depending upon your appetite and choice you can expect to spend, on average, between £15-25 a day on food and drink. It is possible to eat more cheaply than this, or to spend considerably more. It is worth mentioning that Japanese cuisine is generally of a very high quality and extremely varied. For many visitors it is a distinct highlight of any visit. For those with more conservative tastes Western food is generally available at most the places that we visit. There is some great vegetarian food – both Asian and Western – but at certain places en route the choice of meat/fish-free meals may be limited.

Weather Japan has a temperate climate with four distinct seasons. Our departures are during Spring and Autumn, the most comfortable seasons for travelling, when we can expect mild to warm weather. June and July are seen as the 'rainy season' though rainfall is possible throughout the year. September is the month most prone to typhoons.

Price includes... the services of The Oriental Caravan's Japanese-speaking group leader assisted in Kyoto by a local guide; all accommodation, transportation (excluding optional trips on cable cars), sightseeing tours and entrance fees as indicated in the itinerary; dinner and breakfast at the *minshuku* in Miyaji, and the farewell dinner in Tokyo; and the airport transfer from Kansai Airport (Osaka) to Kyoto.

Price does not include... international flights, airport transfer to Narita Airport (Tokyo), meals (except for the one breakfast and dinner in Miyaji, and the farewell dinner in Tokyo), drinks/tips/laundry and other items of a personal nature, or optional entrance fees and fares (bus/taxi/cable car) not included in the itinerary – depending on how each individual wishes to spend their free time a budget of between £35-£50 should be adequate.

Insurance It is a condition of travelling with The Oriental Caravan that each group member be insured against medical and personal accident risks (including the cost of emergency repatriation) and have adequate baggage cover. In addition, it is strongly recommended that all participants take out cancellation insurance at the time of booking to cover their costs should they, for any reason, need to cancel prior to departure. (The Oriental Caravan is able to provide details of a suitable single/multi-trip insurance policy – please ask for details).

Passport, Visa & Health Formalities All nationalities require a passport valid for at least 6 months beyond the date of departure from Japan. For most nationalities – including British – a single-entry ('temporary visitor') Tourist Visa is issued on arrival in Japan. This tour is not available to those of other visa status (e.g. business or student) There are no statutory (vaccination) requirements for Japan.

Luggage Requirements Detailed information on what to pack, and other practicalities, is included in the 'Pre-departure Information' (PDI) that will be sent to group members closer to the date of departure.

This dossier, and the itinerary it describes, have been carefully compiled and are provided in good faith. As with any such journey to a remote destination unusual and unexpected conditions can occur at any time, and this kind of holiday can be subject to unforeseen changes; to fully enjoy this kind of travel it is, on occasion, necessary for participants to be prepared to adopt a certain amount of flexibility.

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