

SIGNATURE TOUR

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2024 AUTUMN TOUR OF NORTHERN JAPAN

Staged in Japan's northern region of Tohoku, much less visited by international tourists, this tour offers the rural traditions and warm hospitality, intense autumn colours and stunning natural landscapes.

"This is my third tour with Journey to the East. In 2023 I will take my fourth tour as they have all been excellent."
 — Bill Mackay



DURATION
 11 days



THEME
 Autumn Tours



GROUP SIZE
 Min 4 - Max 8



TOP TOUR HIGHLIGHTS



Take a breathtaking boat cruise on Matsushima Bay

Experience one of the three most beautiful landscapes of Japan, and experience the gorgeous Autumn colours.



Experience Lake Towada's natural beauty up close

Through a walk and boat cruise, this lake is surrounded by lush autumn colours and majestic mountains, one of the best views of autumn foliage on earth.



Visit Nikko UNESCO World Heritage site

Nikko is ever so photogenic at every corner especially at the height of autumn



Learn about samurai history and culture in Kakunodate

This town is called a little Kyoto, and filled with gorgeous samurai houses and traditional craft shops.



Walk along the crystal clear Oirase River

The spectacular autumn colours dancing on the gurgling stream will be with you for e

National Treasure, Chusonji Temple

Be stunned by the beauty of this northern gem.

[SEE FULL TOUR ITINERARY](#)

TOUR OVERVIEW

The 11-Day 2024 Autumn Tour of Northern Japan takes you to the best autumn colours destinations in Tohoku region, the northern part of the Honshu Island. This Tohoku autumn itinerary is crafted specifically for this time of the year. The tour starts in Tokyo and travels to Nikko, Oirase, Lake Towada, Kakunodate, Lake Tazawa, Hiraizumi, Naruko Gorge and Matsushima.

Past guests have raved about the breathtaking beauty of Tohoku. Centuries of relative isolation has ensured tracts of unspoiled natural wilderness, unique traditions and remarkably well-preserved villages from the samurai era.

This northern Japan itinerary in fall is set out to introduce you to warm hospitality of Tohoku people, great local food and sake, and especially selected rustic stays in mineral hot-spring (onsen) towns, all against the backdrop of Japan's most spectacular autumn colours. This is a perfect tour for people who like the great outdoors and travelling at a reasonable pace. Great for first-time visitors looking for a compact yet culturally immersive Japan experience or for repeat visitors keen to discover Japan that lies beyond the big cities.

ITINERARY

[DOWNLOAD FULL ITINERARY](#)

▼ Day 1: Arrival in Tokyo

Welcome to Japan! On arrival at Narita or Haneda Airport, you will be met by a Journey to the East guide and escorted to your hotel by an airport shuttle.

Today is an arrival day and no group program is scheduled. Your hotel is located near glitzy Ginza and famous Tsukiji Market. Why not take a stroll and relax, ready to start the first full day of your 2024 Autumn Tour of Northern Japan.

*Many of our guests arrive a day or so early to settle in before the tour starts. We can arrange your additional nights accommodation in the same room as the tour.



Tokyo (Park Hotel Tokyo or similar)



No meals

▼ Day 2: Nikko



Leaving Tokyo by Japan's iconic shinkansen (bullet-train) your next stop is the UNESCO World Heritage listed site of Nikko. It had its origins as the mountain hermitage for a Buddhist priest in the 8th century and rose to fame in the 17th century when it was chosen as the site for the mausoleum of powerful shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, who unified Japan in 1603. A walk along an impressive avenue of giant cedar trees takes you to the highly decorated Toshogu Shrine which honors the Tokugawa shogun. There will be time to explore the extensive complex of shrine buildings enclosed within dense forest.

On the way to your accommodation, you will take a gondola at Akechidaira that glides high above the mass of autumn colours below you.

Tonight you will experience your first onsen, a hot mineral springs spa bath. Our guide will talk you through the ritual and etiquette of the Japanese bath and explain why a visit to an onsen remains one of the nation's most popular pastime.



Nikko (Oku-Nikko Hotel Shikisai)



Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

▼ Day 3: Nikko





An **authentic Japanese-style breakfast** awaits this morning – a nutritious, protein-charged mix of grilled fish, miso soup, tofu, rice, and pickles!

Nikko is arguably **the most popular autumn destination** in Japan. Today you will travel further into the Nikko National Park to admire the stunning autumn coloured foliage. You will;

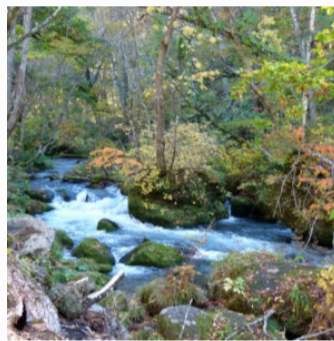
- Drive through Oku-Nikko (deeper Nikko) and stop to admire the natural beauty of Nikko National Park in autumn,
- Enjoy the truly beautiful autumn colours against the **Chuzenji Lake**, and
- View the dramatic 100-metre **Kegon Waterfalls** created when lava flows rerouted the Daiya River.

You will stay at Nikko one more night tonight.

 **Nikko (Oku-Nikko Hotel Shikisai)**

 **Breakfast (Japanese style), Dinner**

▼ Day 4: Transfer to Oirase



The bullet train whisks you away further north today, to **Aomori**, the **northern most prefecture on the main island of Honshu**. The next few days you explore this rugged region. Geographically remote, over centuries Aomori has developed its own **distinctive folk traditions, regional foods and architecture** to withstand its cold climate and snowy conditions.

On this tour you will stay in the scenic **Oirase** and **Lake Towada** area. The area is **stunning in autumn and a great spot for walkers and photographers**. You'll also have another chance to soak in an onsen bath.

 **Oirase (Towada Hotel or similar)**

 **Breakfast (Japanese style), Dinner**

▼ Day 5: Oirase and Lake Towada



Today you will immerse yourself in beautiful **Oirase** and **Lake Towada**. Highlights include;

- A **leisurely 7 km walk** (or shorter if preferred) on the flat walkway along **the stunningly picturesque Oirase River** with cascading waterfalls and rapids,
- **Cruise Lake Towada** covered in brilliant shades of red, orange and yellow, **possibly one of the best views of autumn foliage on earth!**

You'll stay one more night in Oirase and dinner will be at the hotel.

 **Oirase (Towada Hotel or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ Day 6: Lake Tazawa and Kakunodate



This morning you head south in a private minibus and stop at a couple of scenic spots before arriving at today's destination **Kakunodate**. One of the stops is **Lake Tazawa, the deepest lake in Japan**. Your guide will recount some of the local folklore about the lake and the mythical spirits and demons which are said to inhabit the area.

Kata Branch School Museum is an interesting little museum in **the old school building built in 1882** and closed in 1974 due to the decline of population in this area.

In the late afternoon, you will arrive at Kakunodate often called "**Tohoku's little Kyoto**". Kakunodate has the refined cultural traditions introduced from Kyoto when the town was made a vital northern **stronghold in the feudal era**. The samurai classes brought with them **fine ceramics, cherry-bark ware and other craft traditions**, which you can still see being made in Kakunodate today. While its feudal-period castle was destroyed long ago, the old **samurai and merchant districts** remain remarkably **unchanged since the 1600s**.

For the next couple of nights, you will stay at a local boutique hotel with typical Tohoku hospitality. Tonight you will experience a soul-warming hot-pot dish "**Kiritampo nabe**", a specialty of the region for dinner.



Kakunodate (Tamachi Bukeyashiki Hotel or similar)



Breakfast, Dinner

▼ Day 7: Kakunodate



This morning, you will explore historical Kakunodate with your guide including;

- One or more former **samurai houses impeccably preserved** to show you the life of mid to lower class samurai in Edo era,
- Kakunodate **craft museum** where high standard local **crafts are displayed**, and
- Little shops selling local crafts and food items such as miso and soy sauce.

In the afternoon, enjoy a fabulous few hours of free time wandering the atmospheric streets among the old wooden buildings of the samurai district checking out the local craft shops and restaurants. Kakunodate is framed beautifully this time of year by its trademark cherry trees covered in autumn colours.



Kakunodate (Tamachi Bukeyashiki Hotel or similar)



Breakfast, Dinner

▼ Day 8: Hiraizumi and Naruko



Once again onboard a minibus, you head to the centre of the Tohoku region. The stop today is **Chusonji Temple** in Hiraizumi, a historical temple founded in 850, and now designated as National Treasures and Important Cultural Properties. It is well known for its **Golden Hall Konjikido which is, apart from the roof, covered with gold leaf both inside and out**.

You will then explore the lovely mineral hot springs town of **Naruko** in the afternoon. **Naruko Gorge, a spectacular ravine 100 meters deep**, is a place to enjoy the **dramatic mix of autumn colours**.

Tonight's accommodation is another **onsen** hotel where you stay in a **Japanese-style room on futon bedding** and enjoy a soak in an authentic hot springs bath, incredibly relaxing after a day on the road. An additional attraction of Naruko is its local craft of **Kokeshi doll**. You will have a chance to paint your own kokeshi doll today.



Naruko (Naruko Hotel)



Breakfast, Dinner

▼ Day 9: Matsushima



Today, you will visit a small coastal city of **Shiogama**. Shiogama is much quieter and visited by less tourists than nearby famous Matsushima, and a great detour, before finally arriving at Matsushima today. In Shiogama, you will;

- Visit **Shiogama Shrine**, an impressive complex designated Important Cultural Properties,
- Try Japan's famous drink, **sake at a local boutique brewery**, and
- Enjoy **sushi lunch** which Shiogama is famous for.

After lunch, you will take a scenic boat to cruise down the **Matsushima Bay**, best known for over **250 pine tree-covered islands**. Over time, sea-winds have helped to shape the pine trees and their twisted trunks silhouetted against rocky island outcrops. Matsushima is counted as **one of the three most beautiful landscapes of Japan** along Amanohashidate in Kyoto and Miyajima in Hiroshima.

After arriving in Matsushima by boat, stop for a break of **frothy matcha green tea** and traditional sweets at a centuries-old teahouse, **Kanrantei** overlooking the bay.

Your accommodation tonight has onsen bath with spectacular views of the bay. Before dinner you may like to visit the mid 17th century Zen temple **Entsu-in**, ablaze in **autumn colour beautifully lit-up at night**.

 **Matsushima (Matsushima Taikanso)**

 **Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

▼ Day 10: Matsushima



This morning you will have a guided tour of Matsushima. During the tour, you will visit **Zuiganji Temple**, one of Tohoku's finest Zen temples originally built in 828. Next you cross the evocative red-coloured bridge linking the mainland to the island of **Godaido**, designated a site of Important Cultural Heritage.

Your guide will provide some background on the history of the Matsushima region and the **popular daimyo lord, Date Masamune**, who controlled the area in the early 1600s. Another interesting part of Japanese history is the famous 17th century haiku poet **Matsuo Basho**, who also journeyed through these parts.

You will have some free time this afternoon. Why not explore some of the islands off Matsushima which are connected by bridges. They are full of monuments and caves, the remains of the pilgrimage era.

This evening you will head to **Sendai**, the largest city of Tohoku to stay before your departure tomorrow. Tonight you will gather one last time for a farewell dinner to say goodbye to your fellow travelers and talk about your memories of the northern Japan - a trip you will never forget.

 **Sendai (Metropolitan Hotel Sendai East)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ Day 11: Bon Voyage

After breakfast, your 2024 Autumn Tour of Northern Japan completes in Sendai.

But it doesn't have to be the end of your dream adventure! You can take shinkansen to go back to Tokyo, then onto your departing airport, or continue travelling in Japan a little longer. We will be delighted to plan your personal post-tour extension to show you a different part of Japan. Please see our Model Extension Itineraries for inspiration.

Note: The cost of an escorted transfer to your departure airport is not included in our Small Group Tours as we found many guests choose to stay in Japan a bit longer, but we will be happy to arrange your transfer to next destination or to exit airport. Please see our FAQ for more details.



 **Breakfast**



DATES & PRICES

2024 Autumn Tour of Northern Japan

| TOUR CODE | STARTS | DEPARTS FROM | AVAILABLE PLACES <small>?</small> | CURRENCY | PP TWIN SHARE | SINGLE SUPPLEMENT <small>?</small> | | |
|-----------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------------------|----------|---------------|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| GAN-24 | Oct 22, 2024 | Tokyo | One Solo | AUD\$ | 8,250 | 1,500 | ASK A QUESTION | BOOK NOW |
| GAN-24a | Oct 29, 2024 | Tokyo | Available | AUD\$ | 8,250 | 1,500 | ASK A QUESTION | BOOK NOW |



INCLUSIONS

Each guest is personally looked after with one-on-one interactions with our hand-picked, expert tour guides. As part of your investment, this tour includes:

- ✓ First-class wisdom and higher standard of individual care and attention
- ✓ 11 nights' accommodation (including traditional Japanese inns)
- ✓ All breakfasts
- ✓ 2 lunches (7 free choice lunches)
- ✓ 9 dinners
- ✓ Exclusive activity access
- ✓ Airport meet & greet
- ✓ Hotel transfer by public transport on arrival
- ✓ All local transport (train, bus and private minivans)
- ✓ Pre-loaded Suica card
- ✓ Expert English speaking tour guides (Locally licensed)
- ✓ Cultural activities and entry fees included in itinerary
- ✓ Luggage transfers (1 piece per person)

DISCLAIMER: Unless otherwise stated, this tour does not include the costs of international and domestic airfares, transfers on the last day, travel insurance, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, transport during free time, personal expenses (laundry, internet, telephone, coin lockers etc.) and Visa (if required).



WHO THIS JAPAN TOUR IS FOR...

This is a perfect tour for people who:

- ▶ Want to see spectacular **autumn sceneries in natural and rural** settings
- ▶ Are keen to travel Japan **beyond the big cities** and skip the queues
- ▶ Are interested in Japan's **samurai era history and culture**
- ▶ Prefer to travel by **public transport (bullet trains)** with some use of **private minivan**
- ▶ Love staying at variety of style accommodation including **ryokan**

REVIEWS



The whole journey was a well-curated experience that combined some of the most outstanding examples of Japan's artistic and cultural heritage, exposing us to the traditional Japanese lifestyle, as well as superb culinary delights. The trip was absolutely amazing and we will always remember our rejuvenating and relaxing time at the many ryokan. A truly unique feature of the journey.



Trip date: October 2023

Lucas Nunag - The Philippines

Have a question about this tour? Get in touch with our staff directly.

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