

SIGNATURE TOUR

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2025 ARCHITECTURE TOUR OF SHIKOKU JAPAN

A once-in-a-lifetime journey to experience the best of Japan's traditional and contemporary architecture. Travel through spectacular landscapes of valleys and mountains, and stay in designer-styled accommodation in charming historic towns.

"Journey to the East puts their heart and soul into creating wonderful times for visitors to Japan. They know it well and share the best of it with you...."
— Frances Miller



DURATION

15 days



THEME

Garden & Art Tours



GROUP SIZE

Min 4 - Max 6



TOP TOUR HIGHLIGHTS



Heritage preservation

Visit regional towns taking the lead in heritage preservation and sustainability



Naoshima Art Island

Soak up the island vibe as you stay two nights on this fascinating art hub



Shimanami Kaido

Marvel spectacular views of the bridges linking the islands of the Seto Inland Sea



Unique accommodation

Stay at some truly unique accommodation including a thatched roof cottage in the beauti

Ritsurin Garden

Study the exemplary design of a traditional, grand scale, Japanese garden



Original castles and temples

Learn about the distinctively Buddhist and Shinto visits to some of Shikoku's most and shrines

[SEE FULL TOUR ITINERARY](#)

TOUR OVERVIEW

The 2025 Architecture Tour of Shikoku Japan has been specifically designed to showcase Japanese architecture – both traditional and contemporary – on the enchanting island of Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's four main islands.

Shikoku's relative isolation has meant that old traditions and ways of life are still visible today, making it the perfect place to discover a more traditional Japan. You will learn how culture and climate have influenced the built environment as well as seeing the works of Japan's modern-day architects such as Kengo Kuma, Tadao Ando and Kenzo Tange. You will tour through areas of great natural beauty – misty mountains and river valleys, charming historical towns, and the islands of the spectacular Seto Inland Sea.

This special 15-day tour of Shikoku is offered to only 6 people due to the limited availability of the unique experiences and accommodation selected, as well as the accessibility of the remote locations.

*Please note we are unable to accept solo travelers on this tour due to rooming constraints.

Testimonial on Architectur...



ITINERARY

[DOWNLOAD FULL ITINERARY](#)

▼ Day 1: Arrival in Tokyo

Welcome to Japan! On arrival at Tokyo's **Haneda International Airport**, you will be met by a Journey to the East guide and escorted to your airport hotel. Those landing at **Tokyo's Narita Airport** will also be met on arrival and escorted to your hotel at Haneda by airport bus.

Today is an arrival day and no group program is scheduled. Your hotel is located at Haneda International Airport given the early start of the tour on Day 2. However if you have time, you might like to consider a short trip into central Tokyo before the start of your **2025 Architecture Tour Shikoku Japan**.

*Many of our guests arrive a day or so early to settle in before the tour starts. Please contact us if you'd like us to arrange additional night's accommodation in the same room as the tour or in central Tokyo.



Haneda (Hotel Villa Fontaine Grand Haneda or similar)





▼ Day 2: Iya Valley



You meet your guide at the hotel lobby and leave Haneda this morning to **fly to Shikoku island**, the smallest of Japan's four main islands and the fascinating base for your island adventure. On arrival at a regional centre **Takamatsu**, you'll travel by private vehicle to the old shrine town of **Kotohira**. Here you stop for a traditional lunch of Sanuki udon noodles, the region's most famous dish.

You will see other pilgrims, and walk with them on the well-worn path up **785 stone steps to Konpirasan**, Shikoku's beloved shrine dedicated to the god of seafarers. Here you will:

- Learn about **traditional Shinto shrine architecture** and the etiquette of visiting a shrine,
- See the magnificent painted door screens by famous artist **Maruyama Okyo** in the shrine's Reception Hall, a nationally **designated Important Cultural Property**, and
- Admire impressive views all the way to **the Seto Inland Sea!**

Back in your private vehicle, you head to the magical **Iya Valley**, deep in the heart of the Shikoku mountains. Here you enjoy a truly unique experience for **two nights in a beautifully renovated traditional thatched roof cottage** in the remote village of Ochiai. Step into your cottage and the stresses of the last few days of international travel will evaporate. You'll be instantly calmed by the stunning views and hovering mist, the warmth of the traditional interiors and welcoming irori hearth, as well as the quality of the modern amenities. Enjoy a catered dinner cooked by locals using freshly harvested ingredients from the village before a long and comfortable sleep.



▼ Day 3: Iya Valley

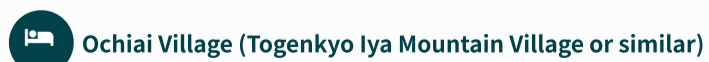


Breakfasts at these cottages are self-service by you making your own toast and coffee or tea from the ingredients delivered to your cottage.

Today is a day of full immersion into local rural life. It begins with a **tour of Ochiai with a local guide** who will give an insight into village life and how the **Chiiori Trust** project, initiated by writer Alex Kerr many years ago, **has saved and breathed new life into the village's thatched roof houses**. Visitors from across Japan and the world now visit for the **rare opportunity to stay in one of these houses**, which have almost disappeared from Japan's rural landscape.

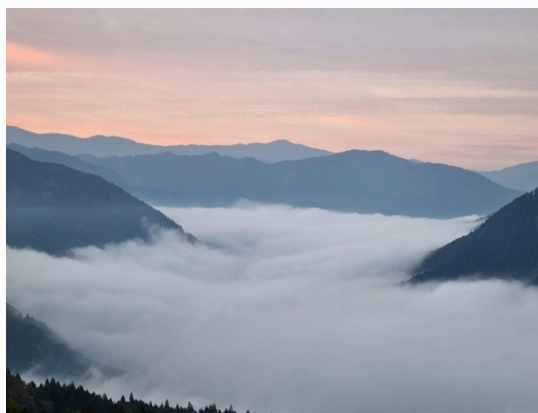
For lunch you are introduced to soba (buckwheat) and participate in a **soba noodle making experience** where you learn how to make (and properly slurp!) these delicious noodles. After lunch you head deeper into the valley by private vehicle to visit spectacular **Niju-Kazura Bridge**, a unique pair of twisted vine bridges constructed hundreds of years ago across a deep river gorge. Then it's on to the "**scarecrow village**" of **Nagoro** where an enterprising local has playfully recreated her fellow residents in surreal lifelike form.

Breakfast and dinner are served in your cottage.



▼ Day 4: Iya Valley and Kochi





If you like to rise before dawn you will be rewarded by **unkai**, a natural phenomenon found in mountainous regions and known as “**sea of clouds**” (if we are lucky!).

Today you spend the day exploring central Shikoku as you travel along scenic mountain roads from Iya into neighbouring **Kochi**. Along the way you will;

- Drive through **Hinoji Iya Valley Observation Point**,
- Visit **Oboke Gorge** and see unique '**Peeing Boy**' statue, and
- Experience by candle-light the richly decorated folding screens depicting local folklore at **Ekin Museum**.

For the next two nights you stay in **Kochi City** – the prefecture’s vibrant capital on the Pacific Ocean coast. You will stay at a popular onsen ryokan and enjoy a kaiseki dinner tonight.



Kochi (Joseikan or similar)



Breakfast (self-service), Lunch, Dinner

▼ Day 5: Kochi



Kochi is home to **one of Japan’s last surviving original castles** and this morning you visit this authentic example of feudal architecture. **Kochi Castle** functioned as both a military fortress and residence for the daimyo lords who once ruled the region. Its design is therefore quite unique, as most lords lived in palace buildings separated from their castle.

After a morning steeped in Japan’s military past, you:

- Tour Kochi’s iconic Thursday Market, popular amongst office workers in the central city to purchase everything from their lunch and snacks, fresh food and produce, to craft and kitchen knives (Kochi’s specialty craft),
- Visit revered Chikurin-ji, **one of the 88 temples on the Shikoku Pilgrimage**, to learn about Buddhist temple architecture and engage in a **Zen meditation** session in a beautiful autumn coloured garden,
- Stroll through **one of Japan’s best Botanical Gardens**, Makino and find out more about sustainable architecture.

Tonight, you have a free evening to relax or perhaps seek out a tasty izakaya in Kochi’s central town area. Why not head to the city’s ever-popular **Hirome Ichiba**, a marketplace full of food stalls and restaurants open all hours, a great place to sample the freshest of seafoods and other local specialties!



Kochi (Joseikan or similar)



Breakfast

▼ Day 6: Nakatsu Gorge and Shikoku Karst




You leave the coast this morning to explore Kochi's scenic interior region. One of the rivers in this part of Kochi is ranked as one of Japan's most beautiful, famous for its vivid cobalt-blue colour. You walk along **Nakatsu Gorge** to experience the river's crystalline waters. On the way, you tour some **unique "chinkabashi" submersible bridges** which have been ingeniously designed to cope with heavy seasonal rains.

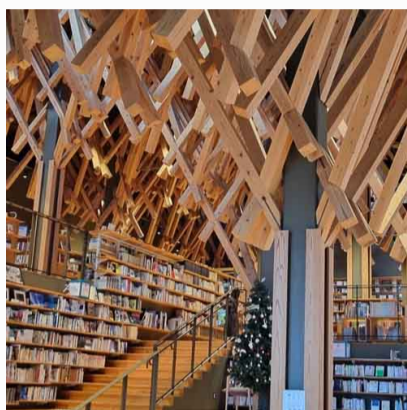
The abundance of pristine water in this region has also fostered a strong **washi paper-making** culture and you enjoy an authentic **hands-on experience** in a lovely rural setting.

After an active day, you will arrive at a hotel with great views of Shikoku Karst, a geological formation caused by the erosion of limestone hillsides. On a clear night, you will see the gorgeous display of stars from your room.

 **Kumakogen (Hoshifuru Village Tengu or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

▼ Day 7: Yusuhara and Uwajima



Next stop is Yusuhara – a small mountain town which has become famous for its **innovative public buildings**, constructed as part of a regional revitalization project. **Designed by architect Kengo Kuma** (who designed Tokyo's 2020 Olympics Stadium), the buildings feature wooden exteriors using repurposed cedar and have a strong eco-friendly focus. You are given a guided tour of the town's most notable buildings.

Then, you leave the mountains behind and head for the charming historical towns of Ehime Prefecture. Your main destination today is the castle town of **Uwajima**. On the way, you'll also make a brief stop at **Kihoku Town Hall**. Originally built in 1958, this building has received acclaim in recent years **for the integrity of its 1950s-style architecture**.

Depending on time and interest, on arrival in Uwajima you will:

- Explore Uwajima Castle, a delightful compact fortress perched on a hill looking out to sea,
- Experience Uwajima's **pearl-farming culture**, one of Japan's oldest, and
- Savour Uwajima's famous signature dish – tai meshi (sea bream sashimi on rice)

Tonight's accommodation ranks as another key highlight of your tour. **Kiya Ryokan** is a century-old ryokan inn which has been painstakingly restored to combine stylish modern amenities within a traditional aesthetic. It has been selected as a nationally registered **Tangible Cultural Property** and you will meet with the manager for a personal tour of the property and insights into the renovation process.

 **Uwajima (Kiya Ryokan or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

▼ Day 8: Uchiko and Ozu



This morning you travel by private vehicle to delightful **Uchiko**, a former merchant town which flourished during the Edo period (17th-19th centuries). Wealth from the Japanese wax trade led to a building boom and its elegant streetscape is now a preservation district – Uchiko was one of Japan's first towns to receive this designation. You will:

- Visit the **Kamihaga Residence** and attached wax museum to get the sense of a typical merchant house, and
- Tour the charming **Uchiko Kabuki Theatre** (one of the last remaining in Japan) with its ingenious revolving stage and hidden trapdoors.

The picturesque castle town of **Ozu** is our next destination. Ozu Castle dates back to the 1300s and was authentically restored by its townsfolk in recent times. The town pride which mobilised its citizens led them to subsequently save their delapidated samurai residences and merchant houses. These have now



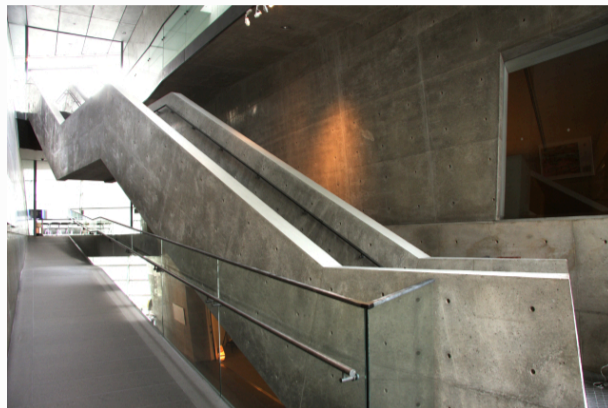
been transformed into premium accommodation, craft shops, cafes and restaurants in an impressive community-wide project. You have the rare opportunity tonight to stay in one of these houses at Nipponia, the boutique hotel group collaborating with the community to renovate around 25 of the town's heritage properties.

This afternoon, led by a local specialist guide, you **tour Garyu Sanso**, a beautiful riverside villa with a garden at its autumn peak and teahouses built 120 years ago using the best carpentry and craft skills at the time.

 **Ozu (Nipponia Ozu or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

▼ Day 9: Matsuyama and Dogo Onsen



Enjoy a delicious Japanese-style breakfast at Nipponia, and perhaps step out to enjoy the town's relaxed vibe and a quick espresso before departing mid-morning by a private minivan.

Your next stop is **Matsuyama**, Ehime's attractive provincial capital and a former castle town steeped in feudal culture. Not well known outside Japan, Matsuyama boasts some notable modern architecture such as Ehime Prefectural Government building, **Bansuiso Villa**, both designed by architect Shichiro Kigo, and Ando Tadao's **Saka no Ue no Kumo Museum** nestled into the hillside beneath Matsuyama Castle.

The city's superlative hilltop **Matsuyama Castle** dates back to 1602 and is one of the 12 remaining original castles left in Japan. Immaculately preserved, the expansive castle compound has an impressive tower, steeply angled stone walls and informative displays.

Matsuyama is also home to venerable **Dogo Onsen**, believed to be the site of Japan's oldest onsen (natural mineral hot springs) with a history spanning some 3,000 years! Later in the afternoon, you will stroll the charmingly retro arcades at Dogo Onsen with your guide, stop for a refreshing Dogo beer or freshly squeezed mikan (mandarin orange, specialty of Ehime) juice.

Your accommodation tonight is an exquisite traditional ryokan inn, located near Dogo Onsen's historic main building. You can soak in the onsen baths within your hotel or don your yukata robe and head to the public onsen. Bliss!

 **Dogo Onsen (Funaya or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

▼ Day 10: Shimanami Kaido



Leaving Shikoku's mainland behind, you island-hop across **the Seto Inland Sea** to explore the relaxed pace of island life in this special part of Japan. Your first stop is **Kirosan Observatory** for sweeping views of the sparkling Inland Sea with its stunning bridges and islands as far as the eye can see. The observatory was designed by Kengo Kuma and a notable sight in itself.

Passing by traditional fishing villages and citrus groves, you arrive at tonight's destination, a contemporary boutique-style accommodation located right on the waterfront of Omishima Island.

You then hop on a bike for a **guided cycling tour** to beautiful **Oyamazumi Shrine**, one of the oldest shrines in western Japan. You'll find a 2,600 year-old camphor tree in its sacred grounds and one of Japan's best collections of samurai armory, harking back to the time when powerful warlords and pirates controlled sea passage and trade.

In the afternoon, you head to **Ito Toyo Museum for Architecture** on the island just in time for a beautiful sunset.

Enjoy a **BBQ dinner** on the terrace of your accommodation, with a splendid background of views over the bridges and Inland Sea.



 Omishima (Wakka or similar)

 Breakfast, Dinner

▼ Day 11: Takamatsu



Enjoy a relaxed morning on the island before heading back to the Shikoku mainland where you make a brief stop at **Imabari**, the first town after crossing impressive **Kurushima Kaikyo suspension bridge, one of the world's longest**. Here you briefly tour some noteworthy civic buildings designed by world-famous architect **Kenzo Tange**, winner of the 1987 Pritzker Architecture Prize.

Then it's on to **Takamatsu** by train, catching glimpses of the Seto Inland Sea on the way. At the top of the list for anybody who visit Takamatsu is superb **Ritsurin Garden, one of Japan's absolute best, especially in autumn**. A classic landscape garden from Edo times, enjoy the varied scenery provided by ponds, bridges and teahouses, superbly set against the backdrop of Mt Shiun. You take a leisurely guided tour as well as lunch in the park's beautiful autumnal setting.

For inspiration of a different kind, you head to **George Nakashima Memorial Gallery** to see how the world-renown furniture designer reshaped natural timbers into stunning pieces, such as his classic cantilever chair. Don't miss the display of his famous "chigiri" butterfly joinery.

End the day with Takamatsu's most popular soul food – succulent roasted chicken thighs!

 Takamatsu (JR Clement Hotel or similar)

 Breakfast, Dinner

▼ Day 12: Takamatsu



Start the day with a visit to Takamatsu's main civic structure – the **Kagawa Prefectural Government Office**, which was also designed by Kenzo Tange. Symbolic of Japan's modernism and democracy in the post-war period, this was the only Japanese building listed as one of the top 25 modern buildings of significance by the *New York Times* in 2021.

You then tour **Isamu Noguchi Garden Museum** which houses the works and studio of Isamu Noguchi, the **influential mid-20th century sculptor, artist and landscape designer**. Among other notable works, Noguchi designed the garden at UNESCO's headquarters in Paris.

The rest of the day is yours to relax or explore. You may like to stroll through pleasant Tamamo Park where the seawater moat walls of Takamatsu's former castle can still be seen, or wander the city's retro shopping arcades or do a wasanbon confectionery class.

 Takamatsu (JR Clement Hotel or similar)

 Breakfast

▼ Day 13: Teshima and Naoshima





The **art islands** of the **Seto Inland Sea** have led to a revitalisation of the region's islands over the last decade. Now populated with galleries, outdoor installations, hotels and restaurants, the islands attract a steady stream of art lovers throughout the year.

This morning you hop on a ferry to tour the picturesque island of **Teshima** to see the **Teshima Art Museum**. Designed as a monumental concrete shell, it is shaped as a large tear-drop hugging the side of one of the island's forested hills. You also visit **Les Archives du Coeur** for a fascinating experience of a different kind – this unique museum has changed the heartbeat of thousands across the globe.

Then you will further transfer to your final destination **Naoshima** this afternoon to see some of Japan's best contemporary art displayed across the island's natural setting. Before settling into your accommodation you will visit some of the works of **Art House Project** as well as **Tadao Ando Museum**.

After an inspiring day spent outdoors on the islands, check into your Naoshima accommodation, a beautifully designed **Japanese contemporary-style ryokan**. The ryokan features contemporary works of emerging artists, and each suite has its own **private open-air bath**.



Naoshima (Roka or similar)



Breakfast, Dinner

▼ Day 14: Naoshima



This morning you are off to Benesse Art Site including **Valley Gallery**, **Chichu Art Museum**, **Benesse House Museum** and the **Lee Ufan Museum**. Don't forget to walk around the area between excellent outdoor installations including **Yayoi Kusama's trademark pumpkin sculpture**, all superbly blending into the island environment.

This afternoon, it is time for eagerly awaited free time to explore the island's narrow paths at your own pace.

Tonight you will gather together one last time and enjoy a sumptuous **inhouse kaiseki course meal** to mark your final night in style!



Naoshima (Roka or similar)



Breakfast, Dinner

▼ Day 15: Goodbye in Naoshima

This morning, you check out of your hotel after breakfast and your **2025 Architecture Tour of Shikoku Japan** concludes.

You can take a domestic flight from Takamatsu or return by train to the international airports in Tokyo or Osaka. (You need to book an evening flight if you are departing on this day.) If you'd like to linger in Japan a little longer, we would be delighted to plan your personal post-tour extension to show you a different part of Japan. Please see our **Model Extension Itineraries on Private Tour** page for inspiration.

Note: The cost of a 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. However, we would be happy to arrange your transfer to your next destination or your departing airport. Please see our **FAQ** for more details.



Breakfast





DATES & PRICES

2025 Architecture Tour of Shikoku Japan

TOUR CODE	STARTS	DEPARTS FROM	AVAILABLE PLACES (?)	CURRENCY	PP TWIN SHARE	SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (?)		
GRS-25	Nov 16, 2025	Tokyo	Available, No Solo	AUD\$	11,810	0	ASK A QUESTION	BOOK NOW

Choose a different currency at the very top right of the page.



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
- ✓ 14 nights' accommodation (including traditional Japanese inns)
- ✓ All breakfasts
- ✓ 7 lunches (6 free choice lunches)
- ✓ 11 dinners (2 free choice dinners)
- ✓ Airport meet & greet on arrival
- ✓ All local transport (domestic flight from Haneda to Takamatsu, train and private minivans)
- ✓ 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).



Kazurabashi (vine bridge)

WHO THIS JAPAN TOUR IS FOR...

This is a perfect tour for people who:

- ▶ Want to see and stay in **Japan's unique architecture** including renovated farm houses and historical buildings
- ▶ Wish to travel in **remote areas of Japan** away from typical tourist destinations
- ▶ Enjoy Japan's traditional culture like **food, onsen and crafts** in more authentic settings
- ▶ Are interested in learning about Japan's feudal **history, religions, and rural lifestyle**
- ▶ Love the **nature** such as valleys, mountains, sea and islands against gorgeous **autumn colours**
- ▶ Prefer a **casual style small group tour** with variety of accommodation, transport and meals



REVIEWS

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

CONTACT US




INFORMATION


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BLOG

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