

## SIGNATURE TOUR

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## 2025 CHERRY BLOSSOM TOUR OF NORTHERN JAPAN

Experience the late-blooming cherry blossoms on this spectacular journey through the rural heartland of Northern Japan in spring – discover the proud samurai heritage and unique traditions of Tohoku plus the stunning natural landscapes and old trading ports of Hokkaido

*“A top-quality, well planned & organised small group tour”*

– Ross & Rosalind Hayward



**DURATION**  
13 days



**THEME**  
Cherry Blossom Tours, Remote Japan Tours



**GROUP SIZE**  
Min 2 – Max 8



## TOP TOUR HIGHLIGHTS



### Visit samurai town of Kakunodate

Kakunodate is one of Japan's most photogenic historic sites with weeping cherries framing the old samurai houses



### Appreciate the grandeur of Nikko

The ornate grandeur of Toshogu Shrine in UNESCO-listed Nikko, the resting place of Japan's most famous shogun



### Be surrounded by cherry blossoms in Hirosaki

Boasting 5,000 cherry blossom trees, Hirosaki Castle Park is one of the most popular places in Tohoku in spring



### Cruise down the Matsushima Bay

The pine-covered islands of Matsushima Bay, regarded as one of Japan's top three scenic sights





## Tour the former foreign trading outpost of Hakodate

Hakodate is a melting pot of cultures Ainu, Russian and other European co

## Feel the spring air in Sapporo

Japan's northern most city of Sapporo bursts into

[SEE FULL TOUR ITINERARY](#)

## TOUR OVERVIEW

**The 2025 Cherry Blossoms Tour of Northern Japan introduces you to a less-hurried side of Japan during the country's peak cherry-blossom season. Leaving Tokyo behind, you journey to Japan's Tohoku region and the northern island of Hokkaido to experience some of the most spectacular cherry blossoms in the country, which bloom later here than other parts of Japan, and with relatively less crowds!**

Over 13 inspiring days, you enjoy the warm hospitality of the people, outstanding regional food, and natural mineral hot-springs – and all against the backdrop of landscapes blanketed in pink. Centuries of isolation have ensured tracts of unspoiled natural beauty, unique traditions, well-preserved samurai towns and historic trading outposts.

This is the perfect tour for those looking for a culturally immersive experience and a Japan that lies beyond the big cities. Our small 8-member groups led by expert local guides mean you benefit from their local knowledge, as well as access local restaurants, lodgings and hidden sites where you can truly experience the unique flavour of Northern Japan, one of Japan's best-kept secrets!

\*From 2025 all our Small Group Tours will have guaranteed departure from 2 guests.

## ITINERARY

[DOWNLOAD FULL ITINERARY](#)

### ▼ Day 1: Arrival in Tokyo

Welcome to Japan and your **2025 Cherry Blossom Tour of Northern Japan!** On arrival at one of Tokyo's international airports, you'll be met by a Journey to the East guide and escorted to your Tokyo hotel by airport bus or train.

Today is an arrival day and no group program is scheduled. Stretch your legs if you like and explore the local neighbourhood around your hotel, such as **Ginza**. Let us know if you need any local tips. You'll be staying here for two nights, which will help you ease into the trip and recover from any jet-leg.

\*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.

 **Tokyo (Park Hotel Tokyo or similar)**

 **No meals**

### ▼ Day 2: Tokyo



After orientation with your guide, you begin your exploration of **Tokyo**. A dazzling metropolis characterised by soaring towers and neon, Japan's capital is also an intriguing collection of small neighbourhoods each with their own distinct flavour. As you explore the city, you'll also get beyond its surface to discover some of the local places where ordinary Tokyoites live and socialise.

Today you make good use of Tokyo's efficient train system and head to the lovely neighbourhood of **Fukagawa**. Despite being close to the business districts of central Tokyo, Fukagawa has a laid-back and serene atmosphere, characteristic of Tokyo's traditional "shitamachi," the old heart of the city. This byside district was historically a merchant neighborhood, and it still retains an unpretentious, down-to-earth feel. At this time of the year, the area bursts into pink air of cherry blossoms along the rivers.

While you are in the area, you will visit **Kiyosumi Garden**. Originally built by a local lord in Edo period, the garden was later owned by the Iwasaki family, the founder of Mitsubishi conglomerate as a place to entertain guests and employees. It is an exemplary stroll style garden with a large pond in the middle punctuated by magnificent stones transported from all over Japan.

After a full day's exploration we head back to our hotel and a **welcome dinner** at a **local Japanese izakaya pub**.

 **Tokyo (Park Hotel Tokyo or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

### ▼ Day 3: Nikko





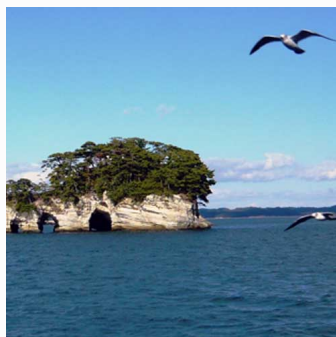
Today you leave Tokyo by express train for **Nikko, a UNESCO heritage site**. Once a remote mountain hermitage, Nikko rose to fame in 1617 when it became the mausoleum for Tokugawa Ieyasu, Japan's most famous shogun. We walk through an impressive avenue of **giant cedar trees** before arriving at the brilliantly decorated **Toshogu Shrine**. There will be time to explore the extensive complex of shrine and temple buildings as well as beautiful **Chuzenji Lake** and **Kegon Falls**, part of Nikko National Park.

Tonight you'll experience your first **hot spring onsen bath** of the tour at a **traditional ryokan inn**. Our guide will talk you through basic bathing etiquette and explain why a visit to an onsen remains one of the nation's most popular pastimes. Unwind in the mineral waters, enjoy a multi-course **kaiseki banquet**, and sleep on futon in the simple elegance of a **tatami mat room** – a quintessential Japan experience!

 **Nikko (Tsurukame Daikichi or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

#### ▼ Day 4: Matsushima



Back onboard the shinkansen, you head north for Sendai and transfer to a local train for the seaside town of **Shiogama**, where you will see a spectacular sight of the **cherry blossoms** at **Shiogama Shrine**. After having sushi lunch, which Shiogama is famous for, you take a bay cruise to reach **Matsushima**, regarded as one of Japan's **top three scenic sights**. Matsushima is most famous for its impossibly **picturesque bay**, dotted with over 250 pine-covered islands. Onboard the cruise boat, you can see up close how sea-winds have shaped the pine trees trunks silhouetted against rocky outcrops.

The Matsushima area is also well-known for its seafood and the buffet-style dinner at your hotel tonight features fresh seafood as well as other local specialties.

 **Matsushima (Matsushima Taikanso or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

#### ▼ Day 5: Matsushima



Matsushima Bay is populated with tracts of **cherry blossom trees** along its coast and you spend the morning walking among the trees and enjoying their beauty in the fresh sea air. You also explore ages-old **Zuiganji, Entsu-in** and **Godaido** temples, which rank among the oldest temples in northern Japan. While here, you will sample a bowl of frothy matcha tea and traditional sweets at a centuries-old teahouse.

The afternoon is free to do your own exploring. You may like to visit compact Ojima Island which offers a number of notable sites including some intriguing pilgrim caves, or perhaps try some of the local oysters, Matsushima's most famous food for lunch.

 **Matsushima (Matsushima Taikanso or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

#### ▼ Day 6: Kakunodate



Journeying further north, you take the shinkansen to the former castle town of **Kakunodate** in Akita Prefecture. Kakunodate is often referred to as Tohoku's "little Kyoto" due to the rich crafts and traditions introduced from the old capital when this northern fortress was first established. While its castle was destroyed long ago, the old samurai and merchant districts remain remarkably unchanged since the 1600s, making Kakunodate one of Japan's **most photogenic towns**. You visit some former **samurai residences** and the **Cherry Bark Work Museum** with its displays of beautiful items covered in fine strips of cherry bark, the area's main traditional craft.

For dinner, you'll enjoy a soul-warming hotpot of **Kiritampo nabe**, Akita's famous signature dish.

 **Kakunodate (Tamachi Bukeyashiki Hotel or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner**

#### ▼ Day 7: Lake Tazawa & Kakunodate



Your tour continues this morning with a circuit of **Tazawa-ko**, Japan's deepest lake famous for its clear blue waters and absolutely stunning mountain setting. Your guide will recount the tale of the **female dragon spirit**, who is believed to inhabit the lake, before we explore the shrine and statue associated with the legendary spirit. You stop by a **charming historic schoolhouse**, fortunately rescued from demolition by a group of passionate locals.

Then it's back to central Kakunodate and the afternoon is yours to wander freely. Stroll through the atmospheric streets of the samurai district beautifully framed by weeping cherry trees or hike through a tunnel of pink formed by 400 cherry trees overhanging the bank of the Hinokinai River. Truly one of the best cherry blossom sights in the country! Enjoy exploring some of the traditional shops selling crafts and food items such as miso paste, dashi stock and Japanese pickles.

 **Kakunodate (Tamachi Bukeyashiki Hotel or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

#### ▼ Day 8: Hirosaki



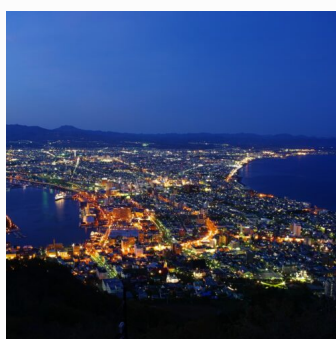
This morning a private minivan will drive you through the countryside of central Tohoku to **Hirosaki** in Aomori Prefecture, another former castle town. Today, it's a welcoming city with a hilltop castle and expansive parks at the foot of scenic Mt Iwaki. In spring, the castle's park literally erupts in a sea of pink as **thousands of cherry trees** respond to the warming weather, as do the locals who flock to the park to soak up the sun after a long, cold winter. You visit the ancient remains of **Hirosaki Castle** to enjoy the sight of cherry trees on mass framing the castle's network of **solid stone walls and moats**.

Over dinner you enjoy a **live performance of the Tsuguru shamisen**, the local version of Japan's traditional three-stringed instrument played with great energy to express the distinctive sound of the region's folk songs.

 **Hirosaki (Art Hotel Hirosaki City or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

#### ▼ Day 9: Hakodate



The shinkansen takes you to Japan's northern island of **Hokkaido** via an underwater sea tunnel, an impressive feat of engineering. You disembark at **Hakodate**, a historic port city with a distinctly European feel. The city was one of Japan's foreign trade ports allowed to engage with Russian and other foreign traders during Japan's self-imposed period of seclusion and that legacy is still apparent today.

You tour unique **Goryo-kaku Park**, a fascinating western-style fortress built in the shape of a star to defend Hokkaido against western powers in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. Come evening, you head up **Mount Hakodate** to enjoy the **stunning panoramic view** of the harbour lit-up at night, one of Japan's best! Hakodate is also known for its excellent cuisine and we enjoy a delicious **kaiseki meal** at one of its local eateries.





 **Hakodate (Century Marine Hakodate or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

#### ▼ Day 10: Hakodate



The day starts with an early-morning visit to Hakodate's **seafood market**, known particularly for premium crab and squid caught daily from local waters. You hop on one of the city's **vintage street cars** to the old hillside district of **Motomachi** where you take a walking guided tour, stopping by the former **British Embassy** and the heritage **Red Brick Warehouse district** on the waterfront to get a sense of the city's early cosmopolitan history.

Hakodate was not only one of the early gateway ports for Japan's trade with the west, but also between the local Ainu people and the Japanese settlers who moved to Hokkaido around 500 years ago. You visit the small but insightful **Ainu Museum** today to learn about the intriguing culture of Hokkaido's indigenous people.

Step out tonight to sample some of Hakodate's local cuisine – fresh seafood served up in a casual izakaya or perhaps a bowl of tasty ramen noodles. Chat with your guide if you'd like some recommendations.

 **Hakodate (Century Marine Hakodate or similar)**

 **Breakfast**

#### ▼ Day 11: Lake Toya



Finally you travel to your last destination on this trip, Sapporo by a private minibus. But before reaching Sapporo, you will stop by another landmark of Hokkaido, Lake Toya. It is a popular leisure destination for Hokkaido residents. It also has an active volcano, Mt. Usu, and a beautiful forest at the foot of photogenic Mt. Yotei. You take the ropeway to see the lake from the top of Mt. Usu and look out over the Showa-shinzan, a lava dome created by volcanic activity in 1943.

You continue your journey to **Sapporo**, Hokkaido's prefectural capital. With its wide boulevards and large public parks, Sapporo is a welcoming, cosmopolitan city with a lively food scene and stylish shops. In February the city hosts the Sapporo Snow Festival, one of Japan's most popular events. However over April-May the atmosphere is distinctly spring-like, with masses of flowers on display in Odori Koen, the long stretch of public park in the city's centre.

 **Sapporo (Sapporo Grand Hotel or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

#### ▼ Day 12: Sapporo and Otaru



Our guide takes you on a walking tour of Sapporo this morning. You stop at **Sapporo TV Tower** for a great view of the city from above, and check out the historic **Clock Tower** and charming weatherboard barns of the former **Agricultural College**, which introduced livestock farming to Hokkaido 150 years ago, now one of its key industries. You may like some classic **Hokkaido-style ramen**, which Sapporo is most famous for.

After lunch you head to the quaint town of **Otaru**. Once a vibrant trading centre, Otaru has converted its stone and brick warehouses from its boom times into attractive museums, glass workshops, craft breweries and sake distilleries. You explore Otaru's **central canal** with its Victorian-era buildings and street lamps and visit intriguing **Aoyama Villa**, once the home of a wealthy herring merchant built during the hey days of Otaru's prosperous herring trade.

Return to Sapporo for a **farewell dinner** over a delicious modern cuisine with a great night view of the city and share your best memories of the trip!

 **Sapporo (Sapporo Grand Hotel or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**



### ▼ Day 13: Goodbye in Sapporo

This morning, you check out of your hotel after breakfast and your **2025 Cherry Blossom Tour of Northern Japan** concludes.

You can take a domestic flight from Sapporo to the international airports in Tokyo, or 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 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. However, we would be happy to arrange your transfer to your next destination or your departing airport. Please see our FAQ for more details.



## DATES & PRICES

### 2025 Cherry Blossom Tour of Northern Japan

TOUR CODE	STARTS	DEPARTS FROM	AVAILABLE PLACES <small>?</small>	CURRENCY	PP TWIN SHARE	SINGLE SUPPLEMENT <small>?</small>		
GSN-25	Apr 11, 2025	Tokyo	Available	AUD\$	9,100	1,900	<a href="#">ASK A QUESTION</a>	<a href="#">BOOK NOW</a>
GSN-25a	Apr 18, 2025	Tokyo	Available	AUD\$	9,100	1,900	<a href="#">ASK A QUESTION</a>	<a href="#">BOOK NOW</a>

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
- ✓ 12 nights' accommodation (including traditional Japanese inns)
- ✓ All breakfasts
- ✓ 4 lunches (7 free choice lunches)





- ✓ 10 dinners (1 free choice dinners)
- ✓ Airport meet & greet on arrival
- ✓ Hotel transfer by public transport on arrival
- ✓ All local transport (train, bus 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).

Sapporo Ramen

## WHO THIS JAPAN TOUR IS FOR...

This is a perfect tour for people who:

- ▶ Want to appreciate **cherry blossoms** in historic sites with less crowds
- ▶ Wish to experience **authentic cultures** of Japan
- ▶ Enjoy the guidance of **professional tour guides** as well as some **free time**
- ▶ Like extra small group tours **designed with healthy 55+** travelers in mind
- ▶ Be up-close and **interact with locals** through public transport
- ▶ Experience a **variety in style**, and typically 4 star **boutique accommodation** with private bathroom

## REVIEWS



**bb**

*For anyone interested in seeing and experiencing the best of Japan, this is the go-to tour company, with the most wonderful guides, great planning and the best all-round, guaranteed fabulous experiences!*

★★★★★ | Trip date: April 2023

**John Bates** - Australia



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

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