

BASIC TOUR OUTLINE

2025 SPIRITUAL WALKS OF NORTHERN JAPAN (DISCOVERY)

Start: Sunday, 12 October 2025 from Tokyo (Haneda)

Finish: Friday, 24 October 2025 at Tokyo

Duration: 13 days

Group size: 8 people

Cost estimate: AUD \$8,390 per person

Single supplement: AUD \$1,970 per person

Ref: GHN-25

CLIENT BRIEF

The 2025 Spiritual Walks of Northern Japan takes you on walks in the hauntingly beautiful northern part of Honshu (main) Island of Japan known as "Tohoku" for 13 days. The area is truly off the beaten path, hard to access by public transport therefore an ideal destination to visit on a small group tour.

Tohoku is full of hidden gems. After arriving in Tokyo, your tour will travel to the three mountains of spiritual Dewa Sanzan (the northern answer to the southern Kumano Kodo); walk the Zao caldera amid the mass of autumn colours; visit the temple atop Yamadera with its panoramic views; immerse yourself in the colours in Goshikinuma (five coloured lakes) of Urabandai. Our northern Japan specialist guides will help you to have truly immersive experiences in the rural part of Tohoku; the local culture, the history and the best walking tracks. This is a perfect tour for people who love walking in spiritually rich areas surrounded by natural beauty. Each walk is packed with interesting experiences such as Shugendo (esoteric ascetic practice originated in Japan) and Iaido (Japanese martial art of swordsmanship). You will also have plenty of opportunities to explore the area at your leisure.

Click each day in the itinerary below for your day-to-day experiences.

Activity level of this tour is **Moderate**. Participants need to be in good health and fit. They must be able to walk up to 10 km a day with some ascents and descents, sometimes on uneven terrains. Main luggage will be transferred to the next accommodation, however, a day pack with personal items must be carried by the participants during the walks.

| DAY | DATE | PLAN | DETAILS | MEALS | ACCOMODATION |
|-----|-------------------|-----------------------------------|--|----------|--|
| 1 | Sun 12/10/2025 | Airport meet and greet on arrival | Welcome to Japan! On arrival at any of Tokyo's international airports, you will be met by a Journey to the East guide and escorted to your hotel at Haneda International Airport. After a good night's sleep, you will be ready to start the first full day of your 2025 Spiritual Walks of Northern Japan. No group activity is planned today. *Many of our guests arrive a day or so early to settle in before the tour starts. We can try arranging your additional night's accommodation in the same room as the tour. | No meals | Villa Fontaine Grand Haneda Airport [Superior King/Twin] |

| DAY | DATE | PLAN | DETAILS | MEALS | ACCOMODATION |
|-----|-------------------|------------------------------------|--|----------------------|---|
| 2 | Mon 13/10/2025 | Transfer to Dewa Sanzan with guide | <p>Leaving Tokyo behind, you will transfer to Yamagata in Tohoku (the northern region of Honshu Island) by domestic flight. For the next couple of days, you will walk through the fascinating area of Dewa Sanzan (meaning the three mountains of Dewa). Dewa Sanzan is a religious hotspot where Animism, Shintoism, Buddhism and Shugendo have coexisted throughout its history. It is such an inspirational place, culturally rich with so much to take in that you cannot avoid feeling a connection with nature and spirituality of the location.</p> <p>After arriving in the Hagurosan area, your guide will lead you to a museum that will help you grasp and enjoy the area and its history.</p> <p>Tonight you stay at a shukubo (working temple lodging) to prepare for the pilgrims' walk the next day. Dinner tonight is shojinryori, Buddhist vegetarian cuisine served with the region's fresh rice, mountain vegetables and mushrooms (you never knew a vegetarian dinner could taste so good!).</p> <p>No group walking today.</p> | Breakfast, Dinner | Daishinbo (Shukubo) [Japanese style room with futon bedding with communal toilet & bath facilities] |

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|-----|-------------------|----------------------------|---|--------------------------------|--|
| 3 | Tue 14/10/2025 | Guided tour of Dewa Sanzan | <p>Dewa Sanzan (three mountains of Dewa) has continued to be a place of worship for the last 1,400 years. The three mountains represent the past, present and future, and one should visit the three in succession.</p> <p>Before embarking on the ancient pilgrimage route of the Dewa Sanzan, you will dress up as yamabushi (mountain ascetic monk) and have shugendo training in a museum at the foot of Hagurosan.</p> <p>The first mountain is Hagurosan (past) where you will walk along a series of stone steps among spectacular towering cedar trees. Along the way, you will see many interesting sights not least of which is the 600-year-old Five Story Pagoda. At the top of Hagurosan stands one of the largest thatched buildings in Japan, the Sanjin Gosaiden shrine. The walk is only 1.7 km (1 mile) (mainly stone steps) but takes around 1.5 hours.</p> <p>After lunch at a local restaurant, you will transfer to tonight's destination, a small onsen (hot spring spa) hamlet. You will visit some interesting temples and gardens on the way.</p> <p>Tonight, accommodation is at a small local ryokan, where you will experience your first onsen, (hot mineral springs spa bath) on this tour. Our guide will talk you through the ritual and etiquette of the Japanese bath and explain why visiting an onsen remains one of the nation's most popular pastimes.</p> <p>Today's walking distance: 5-6 km (3.1-3.7 miles) Elevation: 400 m (1,312 feet) ascent, 150 m (492 feet) descent Terrain: 2,446 stone steps</p> | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | Ochimizu no Yu Tsutaya [Japanese style room with futon bedding with private toilet but with communal shower & bath] |

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| 4 | Wed 15/10/2025 | Guided tour of Dewa Sanzan | <p>The second mountain, Gassan (present) can only be accessed during good weather as its walking track is along the open ridge of the mountain. At the 8th station of Gassan, you take the flat 2 km circuit boardwalk through the beautiful wetland (about 1.5 hours).</p> <p>You will then tackle the last mountain, Yudonosan (future or rebirth). This is such a mysterious mountain and there are so many secret rituals in this part of the pilgrimage. One of the reasons why it remains mysterious is because visitors are not allowed to take photographs while in the sacred area of this mountain. This means that the experience is truly reserved for the people who visit there. It is also a naturally beautiful area displaying autumn colours this time of the year.</p> <p>Tonight you will head to Yamagata City to have a good rest before your next adventure.</p> <p>Yamagata is at the heart of Tohoku, with numerous local specialty foods, sake and festivals. You will enjoy the Tohoku hospitality at a local izakaya restaurant tonight.</p> <p>Today's walking distance: 7 km (4.35 miles) Elevation: 150 m (492 feet) ascent, 150 m (492 feet) descent Terrain: boardwalk at Gassan, required to take shoes off at the top of Yudonosan</p> | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | Hotel Metropolitan Yamagata [Main Tower Twin] |

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| 5 | Thu 16/10/2025 | Guided tour of Yamadera | <p>Our target today is Hojusan Risshakuji, commonly known as Yamadera (literally translates to "mountain temple"). Yamadera was established in 860 by the Buddhist monk Jikaku-Daishi and is one of the leading sacred places in the Tohoku region. Once you begin the ascent of the 1,100 stone steps, you will be fascinated along the way by the dozens of stone monuments, small temples, and groups of massive rocks each with its own story. On reaching Godaido (small temple hall) at the top, the view is something you don't want to miss and will never forget. The ascent takes around 0.5 to 1 hour. You can also enjoy local crafts and restaurants on the way out.</p> <p>In the afternoon, yet another special experience awaits. You will be a samurai and try laido, a traditional Japanese martial art that focuses on training the mind and body with a traditional sword. laido is termed as "the art of the sword without fighting" and is more for spiritual training rather than focusing on techniques of using a sword.</p> <p>Back at the hotel, you enjoy the last night in the hospitable town of Yamagata.</p> <p>Today's walking distance: 6 km (3.73 miles) Elevation: 156 m (512 feet) ascent Terrain: 1,015 steps</p> | Breakfast | Hotel Metropolitan Yamagata [Main Tower Twin] |
| 6 | Fri 17/10/2025 | Guided tour of Zao | <p>Our private minivan takes you off to Zao, well-known as a winter ski resort, but in autumn it is simply splendid. In Zao you will;</p> <p>Ascend by a cable car and a chair lift to the mountain plateau, Take an incredible guided hike on one of the many walking courses amongst blazing autumn-coloured mountains, and Walk along the picturesque caldera lakes and waterfalls. At this time of the year, the pristine landscape will stun you.</p> <p>In the afternoon, you will visit a local pottery kiln for some artistic activity. Japanese pottery is very popular amongst international visitors for its earthy colours and minimalistic design. Why not find your special piece, or better still, make your own!</p> <p>Tonight you will stay at a traditional ryokan at another onsen town. Enjoy kaiseki dinner, onsen bath and futon bedding.</p> <p>Today's walking distance: 5 km (3.1 miles) Elevation: 467 m (1,532 feet) ascent, 465 m (1,526 feet) descent Terrain: open path exposed to wind</p> | Breakfast, Dinner | Nihon no yado Koyo [Japanese style room with private bathroom] |

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|-----|----------------|--|--|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 7 | Sat 18/10/2025 | Transfer to and guided tour of Urabandai | <p>Today you will head to the very special Urabandai. Along the way, you will see some spectacular autumn scenery in the southern part of the Tohoku region.</p> <p>Urabandai is a part of Bandai Asahi National Park. It is naturally spectacular and relaxing, an ideal spot to enjoy nature at its best. There are many beautiful walking and cycling tracks, and you will walk arguably the most spectacular walk of all, the Goshikinuma (five coloured lakes) track. Along the way, you can see very exotic lakes, each is a distinctly different colour because of the natural mineral content of the water.</p> <p>Tonight you have another chance of soaking in an onsen bath with gorgeous autumn scenery.</p> <p>Today's walking distance: 8-10 km (5-6.2 miles) Elevation: flat Terrain: well-maintained nature trails</p> | Breakfast, Dinner | Hoteli Aalto [Superior Twin/Double] |
| 8 | Sun 19/10/2025 | Free day in Urabandai | <p>Today is a free day and it is up to you to make it as busy or as relaxed as you please. You can walk some of the many walking tracks in Urabandai, rent a bike from the hotel and ride through beautiful autumn avenues, take a cruise on a lake or visit an exquisite art gallery.</p> <p>At the end of the day, we will gather together and have dinner at the hotel.</p> | Breakfast, Dinner | Hoteli Aalto [Superior Double/Twin] |

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| 9 | Mon 20/10/2025 | Transfer to and guided tour of Aizu-Wakamatsu | <p>Changing the focus from nature to history, today you are in one of the most historically significant cities of Tohoku, Aizuwakamatsu. You start your experience at Tsurugajo Castle. During the Boshin War (Fr. 1868) that eventually reinstated imperial rule after centuries of samurai rule, this castle withstood a fierce attack by the newly formed imperial army in a bitter siege that lasted one month.</p> <p>Inside the tower, is now a museum dedicated to the history of Aizuwakamatsu, and the observation gallery at the top offers panoramic views of the city. You will also visit the former samurai residence and a Japanese garden in the complex.</p> <p>You then stroll the charming streets of Nanokamachi that is full of traditional crafts and food items. In particular, you will visit a sake brewery to see the sake production method and participate in tasting.</p> <p>Dinner tonight is a regional cuisine of Aizuwakamatsu at a local restaurant.</p> <p>Today's walking distance: 10 km (6.2 miles) Elevation: flat Terrain: town walking on sealed road</p> | Breakfast, Dinner | Hotel New Palace [Western style double/twin] |
| 10 | Tue 21/10/2025 | Transfer to and guided tour of Nikko | <p>Travelling further south, you reach one of the most historically significant sites of Japan, Nikko. Nikko's Toshogu Shrine is designated a UNESCO World Heritage site steeped in history, but this is not the only reason you are here. In mid to late October Nikko is ablaze with autumn foliage and it is simply exceptional. During your stay in Nikko, you enjoy many walks around lakes and waterfalls beneath the reds, browns and golds of Japanese autumn.</p> <p>Today's walking distance: 6 km (3.7 miles) Elevation: less than 100 m (328 feet) Terrain: 63 steps and optional 275 steps</p> | Breakfast, Dinner | Oku Nikko Hotel Shikisai [Japanese style room with open-air bath] |
| 11 | Wed 22/10/2025 | Guided tour of Nikko | <p>Continuing to explore Nikko, you will head to Oku-Nikko, which is deeper into Nikko National Park with spectacular natural beauty. Today you have opportunities to walk along Lake Chuzenji, Ryuzu Waterfall, Yunoko Waterfall and Ramsar-registered Senjogahara Marsh. All in the peak of autumn colours.</p> <p>Today's walking distance: 10 km (6.2 miles) Elevation: almost flat Terrain: boardwalks and footpath along lakes</p> | Breakfast, Dinner | Oku Nikko Hotel Shikisai [Japanese style room with open-air bath] |

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| 12 | Thu 23/10/2025 | Transfer to and guided tour of Tokyo | <p>An express train takes you away from Nikko back to Tokyo. A dazzling metropolis characterised by soaring towers and neon, Japan's capital is also an intriguing collection of small neighbourhoods each with their 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.</p> <p>Today you will visit one of those neighbourhoods, 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 bayside district was historically a merchant neighbourhood, and it still retains an unpretentious, down-to-earth feel.</p> <p>While you are in the area, you will visit Kiyosumi Garden. Originally built by a local lord in the Edo period, the garden was later owned by the Iwasaki family, the founder of the 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.</p> <p>After a full day of exploration, you head to your hotel to get ready for your final dinner with the group. The farewell dinner tonight will be at a Japanese restaurant high above Tokyo with views of the city and Tokyo Bay.</p> <p>Today's walking distance: 10 km (6.2 miles) Elevation: flat Terrain: city walking on sealed road</p> | Breakfast, Dinner | Park Hotel Tokyo [Queen/Twin] |
| 13 | Fri 24/10/2025 | Departure | <p>This morning, you check out of your hotel after breakfast and your 2025 Spiritual Walks of Northern Japan concludes.</p> <p>You can transfer to Tokyo's Narita or Haneda International Airports for departure, or perhaps linger 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 Extension Model Itineraries for inspiration!</p> <p>Note: The transfer cost 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 departure airport or your next destination. Please see our FAQ for more details.</p> | Breakfast | |

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|-----|------|---------------------------|--|-------|--------------|
| | | Inclusions for Group Tour | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 12 nights accommodation listed above ■ Airport meet & greet on arrival in Tokyo ■ Private guide as specified ■ All local transport (train, bus and taxi) stated in the itinerary ■ Domestic flight from Haneda to Shonai ■ All cultural activities and entry fees stated in the itinerary ■ Luggage transfers (1 piece per person) ■ Meals as specified | | |
| | | Exclusions for Group Tour | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ International and domestic airfare (unless otherwise stated) ■ Travel insurance ■ Transfer on the last day ■ Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages ■ Tips and gratuities (not routinely expected in Japan) ■ Transport during free time ■ Personal expenses (laundry, coin-lockers, internet, telephone etc.) ■ Visa (if required) | | |