

DISCOVERY TOUR

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2025 SPIRITUAL WALKS OF NORTHERN JAPAN

2025 Spiritual Walks of Northern Japan takes you through spiritual mountains, national parks ablaze in autumn colours and authentic onsen villages. An ideal opportunity to be stunned by the beautiful Japanese rural landscapes and the warm traditional hospitality of northern Japan.

"A top quality, well planned & organised small group tour..."
 – Ross & Rosalind Hayward

DURATION
13 days

THEME
Autumn Tours, Remote Japan Tours, Walking Tours

GROUP SIZE
Min 2 – Max 8

☰

TOP TOUR HIGHLIGHTS



Hagurosan
 Experience the training of shugendo in spiritual mountains of Dewa Sanzan.



Yamadera
 Climb a fascinating trail with a reward of the outstanding views from an historic temple at the top.



Zao
 Enjoy the walks through this unusual landscape and witness the amazing colours of the calderas.



Iaido
 Try iaido, a Japanese martial art using a Japanese sword as a prop.



Onsen
 Experience Japanese favorite pastime, onsen, mineral hot spring bath - an exceptional way to relax after a good walk.



Nikko
 Immerse yourself in the autumn colours at the Nikko National Park.



TOUR OVERVIEW

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.

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.

Tohoku is full of hidden gems. 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. Seeing regional cities and small towns on foot with your guide will also give you some exceptional insights into life in this part of Japan.

This is a perfect tour for people who love walking in spiritually rich areas surrounded by natural beauty. This Spiritual Walks of Northern Japan tour covers locations that are less visited by international tourists. Each walk is typically 5 to 10 km, 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.

ITINERARY

[DOWNLOAD FULL ITINERARY](#)

▼ Day 1: Arrival in Tokyo



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.

 **Haneda (Villa Fontaine Haneda Grande or similar)**

 **No meals**

▼ Day 2: Transfer to Dewa Sanzan



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.

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.

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!).

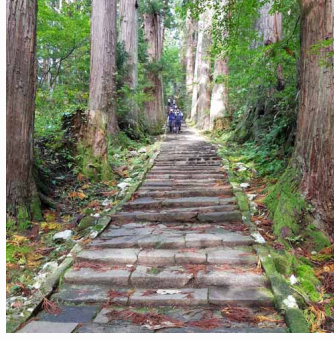


(No group walking today)

 Tsuruoka (Daishinbo - private room with a shared bathroom)

 Breakfast, Dinner

▼ Day 3: Hagurosan



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.

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.

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 (mainly stone steps) but takes around 1.5 hours.

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.

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.

(Total walking distance today - about 5-6 km)

 Tsuruoka (Ochimizu no yu Tsutaya)

 Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

▼ Day 4: Gassan and Yudonosan



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 2 km circuit boardwalk through the beautiful wetland (about 1.5 hours).


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.

Tonight you will head to **Yamagata City** to have a good rest before your next adventure.

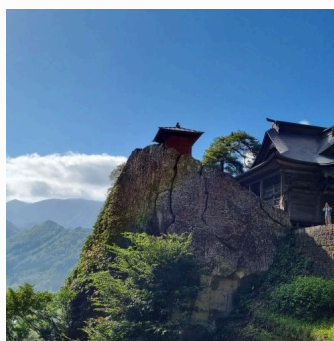
Yamagata is at the heart of Tohoku, with numerous local specialty foods, sake and festivals. You will enjoy the Tohoku hospitality at a local izakaya restaurant tonight.

(Total walking distance today - about 7 km)

 Yamagata (Hotel Metropolitan Yamagata)

 Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

▼ Day 5: Yamadera



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.

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. Iaido 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.

Back at the hotel, you enjoy the last night in the hospitable town of Yamagata.

(Total walking distance today - about 6 km)

 **Yamagata (Hotel Metropolitan Yamagata)**

 **Breakfast**

▼ Day 6: Zao



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;

- 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.

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!

Tonight you will stay at a traditional ryokan at another onsen town. Enjoy kaiseki dinner, onsen bath and futon bedding.

(Total walking distance today - about 10 km)

 **Kaminoyama Onsen (Koyo or similar)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ Day 7: Urabandai



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.

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.

Tonight you have another chance of soaking in an onsen bath with gorgeous autumn scenery.

(Total walking distance today - about 8-10 km)

 **Urabandai (Urabandai Lake Resort)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ Day 8: Urabandai

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.

At the end of the day, we will gather together and have dinner at the hotel.

 **Urabandai (Urabandai Lake Resort)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ Day 9: Aizuwakamatsu





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.

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.

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.

Dinner tonight is a regional cuisine of Aizuwakamatsu at a local restaurant.

(Total walking distance today - about 10 km)

 **Aizuwakamatsu (New Palace Hotel)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ Day 10: Nikko



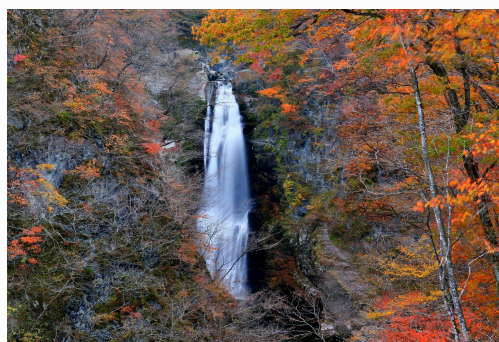
Travelling further south, you reach one of the most historically significant sites of Japan, Nikko. **Nikko's Toshogu Shrine** is designated a **UNESCO World Heritage site** steeped in history, but this is not the only reason you are here. In mid to late October Nikko is ablaze with autumn foliage and 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.

(Total walking distance today - about 6 km)

 **Nikko (Oku Nikko Hotel Shikisai)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ Day 11: Nikko



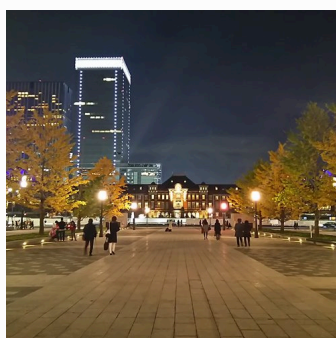
Continuing to explore Nikko, you will head to Oku-Nikko, which is deeper into Nikko National Park with spectacular natural beauty. Today you have opportunities **to walk along Lake Chuzenji, Ryuzu Waterfall, Yunoko Waterfall** and Ramsar-registered **Senjogahara Marsh**. All in the peak of autumn colours.

(Total walking distance today - about 10 km)

 **Nikko (Oku Nikko Hotel Shikisai)**

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ Day 12: Tokyo



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.

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.

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.

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.

(Total walking distance today - about 10 km)

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

 **Breakfast, Dinner**

▼ Day 13: Bon Voyage

This morning, you check out of your hotel after breakfast and your **2025 Spiritual Walks of Northern Japan** concludes.

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!

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.

 **Breakfast**



DATES & PRICES

2025 Spiritual Walks of Northern Japan

Show Prices in:

TOUR CODE	START DATE	START CITY	AVAILABLE PLACES	CURRENCY	PP TWIN SHARE	SINGLE SUPPLEMENT		
GHN-25	12 Oct'25	Tokyo (Haneda)	Available	AUD\$	\$8,390	\$1,970	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
- ✓ 12 nights' accommodation (including traditional Japanese inns)
- ✓ All breakfasts
- ✓ 2 lunches and 10 dinners
- ✓ Airport meet & greet on arrival in Tokyo
- ✓ Hotel transfer by public transport on arrival
- ✓ Domestic flight from Tokyo to Shonai Airport
- ✓ All local transport (train, bus and private minivans)
- ✓ Expert English speaking tour guides (Locally licensed)
- ✓ Cultural activities and entry fees included in itinerary

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 enjoy short (6-10 km a day) walks in **spiritual and remote part of Japan**
- ▶ Enjoy leisurely walks **without carrying a heavy backpack**
- ▶ Like to have authentic cultural experiences such as a **pilgrimage trail , martial arts and onsen**
- ▶ Wish to learn about Japanese **religions and spirituality**
- ▶ Enjoy a **variety and authenticity in accommodation style** from city hotels to traditional ryokan





I would highly recommend this company and this tour in particular. professional , knowledgable and great company. The itinerary was w scenery truly magnificent. The organisation was faultless and comm.



Trip date: October 2023

Jennifer Sweeney - Victoria, Australia

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

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