

## BASIC TOUR OUTLINE

### 2026 ARTISAN TOUR OF KYUSHU JAPAN (SIGNATURE)

**Start:** Wednesday, 15 April 2026 from Fukuoka  
**Finish:** Monday, 27 April 2026 at Fukuoka  
**Duration:** 13 days  
**Group size:** 6 people  
**Cost estimate:** AUD \$11,500 per person  
**Single supplement:** AUD \$2,000 per person  
**Ref:** GCK-26

#### TOUR OVERVIEW

This specially designed 2026 Artisanal Tour of Kyushu takes you on a 13-day journey across Japan's southern island to explore its deep craft traditions. As a key entry point for ideas and goods from China and Korea, Kyushu has developed unique Japanese craftsmanship over time. Spring's warm, temperate weather makes it an ideal time to visit.

The tour connects you with Japan's master craftspeople, offering hands-on sessions where artisans demonstrate their skills in private workshops. You will visit ancient silk weavers, trace the origins of Japanese porcelain, stroll through old pottery towns, witness master swordsmiths at work, see 1,000-year-old timbers transformed into exquisite pieces without nails, and prized bamboo woven into delicate basketry. The tour also includes experiencing Kyushu's hot springs, celebrated seafood and wagyu beef, premium-grade teas, and heritage accommodation.

Curated for an intimate group of 6 guests, this boutique tour provides private access to craftspeople, making it perfect for those eager to learn about Japan's arts and crafts while enjoying the scenic beauty of Kyushu. With its rich traditions, history, warm hospitality, and leisurely pace of life, Kyushu offers an unforgettable cultural experience.

\*Accommodation will be as planned below or similar.

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
1	Wed 15/4/2026	Airport meet and greet on arrival	<p>On arrival in Fukuoka for your 2026 Artisan Tour of Kyushu Japan, you'll be met by a Journey to the East staff member at Fukuoka's airport or main railway station and escorted to your hotel.</p> <p>Fukuoka is readily accessible both by rail and air from other places in Japan, but please let us know if you need assistance arranging a connection between your arrival port in Japan and Fukuoka, or if you'd like to book an additional night's accommodation at our Fukuoka hotel before the tour starts.</p>	No meals	The Gate Hotel Fukuoka [Essential Double/Twin]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
2	Thu 16/4/2026	Guided tour of Fukuoka	<p>On the first day of the 2026 Artisan Tour of Kyushu Japan, you will visit a traditional woodcraft maker. "Hakata Magemono" is made by shaving cedar and cypress planks, bending them with heat, and sewing them together with cherry bark. Because no metal is used, it is very light and lasts for decades. You will visit a workshop of Hataka Magemono, which has been running for more than 400 years, maintaining the tradition and responding to the needs of new generations.</p> <p>The next visit is about the fascinating world of Japanese textiles, in particular "Hataka-ori" silk kimono fabric. Silk textiles from China were first introduced to Kyushu 800 years ago and evolved into a distinct style known as "Hakata-ori". Highly regarded, Hakata-ori was used as a tribute gift for Tokyo's ruling elite during feudal times and remains popular today for its historical legacy, ribbed texture and lustrous finish. Today you will visit one of Japan's oldest weaving companies, and have the chance to observe master craftsmen at work behind hand-operated and mechanised looms, also learn about design motifs and colours that trace back to the Song Dynasty of China (960 - 1279).</p> <p>After ramen lunch, which Hakata is famous for, you are taken on a guided tour of the historic streets of Hakata's old town, learning more about its intriguing past and textile traditions. You stroll past machiya townhouses once busy weaving hubs, and wander the grounds of ancient temples and shrines.</p> <p>Over a welcome dinner tonight you have your first chance to try Kyushu's celebrated seafood, freshly caught from local waters!</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	The Gate Hotel Fukuoka [Essential Double/Twin]
3	Fri 17/4/2026	Guided tour of Dazaifu	<p>Today, you journey by local train to historical Dazaifu on Fukuoka's city edge. Dazaifu is most famous for the magnificent Tenmangu Shrine (dating back to 905), which commemorates the life of one of Japan's most celebrated scholars. You will have a guided tour of this historically significant shrine complex.</p> <p>Next to the shrine is the Kyushu National Museum, one of Japan's four national museums. This contemporary museum provides an excellent overview of Japan from prehistoric to modern times, with a particular focus on its cultural ties with Asia. Dazaifu itself was once the administrative centre for the entire Kyushu region, and through the port at Fukuoka, flourished as Japan's key trade gateway for goods from Asia and later Europe.</p> <p>Back in central Fukuoka, tonight you will have free time to soak up the atmosphere of this vibrant city.</p>	Breakfast	The Gate Hotel Fukuoka [Essential Double/Twin]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
4	Sat 18/4/2026	Guided tour of Karatsu	<p>Our focus for the next two days is ceramic traditions. While the foundation of Japan's ceramics originated in China and Korea, Kyushu artisans adapted and refined ceramic-making techniques over hundreds of years to develop a distinctly Japanese aesthetic. This not only influenced the subsequent development of ceramics in other parts of Japan but also in Europe, where early traders found a ready market among the European nobility. Today, Kyushu ceramics still rank among the world's best.</p> <p>This morning, you start your exploration with a visit to a traditional pottery studio, which has remained in the same family for 400 years and currently headed up by the 14th generation owner. You tour the studio's beautiful memorial museum to see its exquisite collection of old Karatsu-ware, celebrated for its simple elegance and natural tones.</p> <p>Guided by expert artisans, you'll also participate in a dedicated workshop to create a piece of Karatsu-ware in the afternoon. Tonight's accommodation is an exquisite ryokan in a delightful garden setting. The ryokan displays the works of Karatsu potters, including an onsite gallery. Enjoy a delicious multi-course kaiseki banquet, served of course on superb Karatsu-ware!</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Yoyokaku [Japanese style room]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
5	Sun 19/4/2026	Guided tour of Imari and Arita	<p>This morning, you head to the pottery towns of Arita and Imari, each with their own unique styling.</p> <p>Your first stop is the fascinating village of Okawachiyama, nestled between steep mountains and known as the “Village of Secret Kilns”. The village was purposely set up in the 17th century by the local Nabeshima clan to exclusively produce porcelain for Japan’s imperial court and ruling elite. Its remote location allowed artisans to refine production techniques, which they zealously guarded and protected. Today, Imari Nabeshima-ware is thankfully available to all, while its high-end status and exquisite quality remain unchanged.</p> <p>You then move to the town of Arita, the birthplace of Japanese porcelain. Kaolin, the essential material used in porcelain clay, was discovered in Arita’s hills in the early 17th century. You tour the original quarry before visiting the superb Kyushu Ceramic Museum. With over 30,000 exhibits, the museum provides a comprehensive introduction to its ceramic arts. Afterwards, you visit some of Arita’s leading studios and galleries (some featuring the celebrated works of “Living National Treasures”) and soak up the historic atmosphere.</p> <p>After a full, inspiring day, you spend the night at the nearby spa town of Ureshino. The mineral hot springs at this onsen are known for their clear waters and smooth, silky feel on the skin.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Hamilton Ureshino [Room with western bed]
6	Mon 20/4/2026	Guided tour of Saga	<p>The hilly terrain and clear waters of Saga provide ideal conditions for Japanese paper-making, and you visit a rural village where this traditional industry once flourished. You stop by one of the remaining makers that applies 300-year-old techniques to create beautiful handmade washi paper, known for its unique thinness and strength. Its durability is largely due to the use of long fibres from the native mulberry tree. After being taken on a walk to learn about village life, your hosts guide you through your own washi-making experience.</p> <p>For another perspective on how Japanese designers have superbly incorporated the natural environment into their built structures, stop by Mifuneyama Rakuen Gardens at the foot of Mt Mifune. A rural retreat for the local Nabeshima clan, the garden was ingeniously designed to encapsulate the mountain as part of its “borrowed scenery”. In spring, azaleas break out in spectacular waves of colour.</p> <p>You stay in the city of Saga and try the highly prized Saga brand wagyu beef for dinner tonight.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Garden Terrace Saga [Deluxe Twin Room]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
7	Tue 21/4/2026	Guided Tour of Okawa	<p>Today, you continue your exploration of Kyushu's rich 'maker' culture with a focus on its woodcrafting traditions at the city of Okawa. For over 450 years, Okawa has been a woodworking hub and Japan's largest producer of furniture, celebrated nationwide for its sophisticated craftsmanship and quality. It's still home to master carpenters and boutique makers who attract worldwide attention for blending age-old techniques with leading-edge design.</p> <p>You visit a unique company that specialises in crafting pieces from the rare and beautiful Yakusugi cedar, found on Kyushu's World Heritage island of Yakushima. While the felling of these precious 1,000-year-old trees ended years ago, this Okawa company was one of the few woodworkers permitted to purchase felled or buried stumps and limbs.</p> <p>"Kumiko" is a style of decorated wooden paneling which originated in Kyushu, and here in Okawa you visit a company specializing in this beautiful joinery technique. Finely shaved pieces of wood are assembled in elaborate geometric patterns without the use of nails. The panels typically adorn traditional interiors and serve the dual purpose of allowing air flow and light distribution, while elegantly creating a sense of privacy and separation.</p> <p>You will stay one more night in Saga and have a free evening tonight.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch	Garden Terrace Saga [Deluxe Twin Room]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
8	Wed 22/4/2026	Guided tour of Yame	<p>Admirers of Japanese indigo will relish the opportunity to spend the morning with a 5th-generation indigo artisan.</p> <p>“Japan blue” is the quintessential colour of Japan. Its deep intensity comes from an elaborate production process evolved since ancient times. After repeated stages of fermenting and drying the leaves of the Japanese indigo plant, hand-woven yarn is dyed multiple times in large vats of indigo liquid before being woven. Today, you'll learn about the traditional labour-intensive approach still used by this studio, as well as more modern-day methods. You'll also be introduced to “Kurume kasuri” weaving traditions unique to this part of Kyushu.</p> <p>In the afternoon, you stop at a master maker of traditional buckets and ladles constructed from wood and bamboo without any nails. The skills required to bend and shape the wood to best accent the grain while simultaneously creating a beautiful, water-tight product are exemplary.</p> <p>In between, you drive through the rolling green hills of Yame's tea plantations and speak to a tea farmer.</p> <p>For a unique accommodation experience over the next two nights, you will stay in a renovated former sake brewery in the preservation district. A boutique hotel group has been working with local communities to sensitively renovate old daimyo residences and merchant houses. Delight in its stylish 100-year-old timber interiors and soak in a bath infused with Yame tea leaves!</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	NIPPONIA HOTEL Yame Fukushima [Renovated Heritage Room with Western beds]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
9	Thu 23/4/2026	Guided tour of Yame	<p>This morning, you have another unique opportunity, to learn about Kyushu incense. The way of the fragrance ("kodo") is one of Japan's three classical arts alongside the tea ceremony ("sado") and ikebana ("kado"). For centuries the Japanese have used scented woods to purify and to focus and calm the mind, well before mindfulness and aromatherapy arrived in our modern lives!</p> <p>You visit an incense workshop where the custom of creating pure cedar wood powder for incense sticks continues. Using sustainable cedar wood sourced from local forests, cedar leaves are dried and ground into fine powder in an old watermill, a process entirely powered by water. Yame once supported some 40 mills, which supplied high-quality cedar powders to incense makers across Japan.</p> <p>Back at the Yame town centre, you continue your exploration of Yame's traditional crafts through a guided walking tour of the old town. Designated an Important Preservation District, the area features rows of white-walled townhouses with wooden latticed shopfronts. Your first stop on the walking tour is the Yame Traditional Crafts Museum. You will also stop at Kyushu's oldest tea merchant and relax over a cup of Yame "gyokuro" tea (the highest grade of Japanese tea) in a nostalgic teashop. Yame arrows are another craft produced in the area using authentic materials. With a combination of traditional techniques and cutting-edge modern technology, they create arrows used in Kyudo (Japanese archery) and also decorative arrows such as for celebrating children's growth.</p> <p>In the evening, enjoy some free time in the relaxed ambience of your heritage accommodation or stroll the old town and stop by a local izakaya.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch	NIPPONIA HOTEL Yame Fukushima [Renovated Heritage Room with Western beds]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
10	Fri 24/4/2026	Guided tour of Mt Aso and Taketa	<p>You leave Yame this morning and drive through one of Kyushu's most picturesque landscapes - the volcanic caldera of the Aso-Kuju National Park in central Kyushu. While in the Aso highlands, you'll stop to admire the unique scenery of the National Park from some vantage points.</p> <p>In many ways, the Japanese sword sits at the pinnacle of Japanese craftsmanship, and today, you find out why. In rural Oita Prefecture, you attend a private session with a master swordsmith to see how a lump of steel ingot is forged into a form which, after months of hammering, polishing and sharpening, eventually transforms into a gleaming, finely curved blade. Not only highly trained technicians, but these craftsmen also hold deep cultural knowledge about the symbolism and evolution of the Japanese sword over some 1,000 years. In this experience, you'll engage firsthand with this amiable swordsmith and come away with a renewed reverence for the art form.</p> <p>This evening, you will reach your last destination of this tour, Beppu, one of the most well-known onsen towns of Japan. Your accommodation tonight is a local hotel overlooking Beppu Bay. Take time for yourself to relax and rejuvenate in the hotel's onsen baths with great ocean views.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Rex Hotel Beppu [Japanese & Western style room]



DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
11	Sat 25/4/2026	Guided tour of Beppu	<p>Bamboo crafts have been a traditional craft in Beppu since ancient times. Mythology suggests that a visiting Japanese emperor was first impressed by the quality of the local “madake” bamboo some 2,000 years ago and since then the industry developed, flourishing during the boom times of the late 19th century. Today the Beppu bamboo basketry industry is officially designated a traditional heritage craft.</p> <p>Today, you visit the Traditional Bamboo Craft Centre to trace this history and admire the detail and elegance of a range of fine bamboo-ware and basketry. You then participate in a bamboo-weaving workshop to create a small piece yourselves. Moving on to an intriguing bamboo factory, to watch up close as workers process bamboo for use by craftspeople in the bamboo and basketry trades. The factory sources locally grown bamboo species (some up to 10 to 15 metres high), processing around 200 canes a day using old sustainable techniques. You'll see different bamboo species boiled in a soda formula, or fired and dried in the sun, before the natural surface oil is wiped off and the bamboo polished for slicing into different lengths and forms.</p> <p>For lunch, you have “jigoku mushi” (literally, hell-steaming), Beppu’s most famous local specialty dish. This is a culinary style, passed down over centuries, which uses the natural power of the hot springs. Freshly harvested vegetables, seafood and meat are gathered in traditional bamboo baskets and steam-cooked above geothermal outlets. Not only delicious, it's also incredibly healthy as the ingredients absorb the natural minerals contained in the steam and without the use of any cooking oil. With no gas or electricity, it's 100% ecologically sustainable as well! After lunch, you will go on to experience the full geothermal force of Beppu with a walking tour of the famous “Hells of Beppu”. These are naturally formed bubbling hot pools with temperatures exceeding 100 degrees Celsius, each with a different natural mineral make-up and smell.</p> <p>The remainder of the day is free time to further explore Beppu’s unique onsen culture. Consider some onsen therapy by covering yourself in hot sand on the beach (another traditional practice) or an herb-infused bath.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch	Rex Hotel Beppu [Japanese & Western style room]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
12	Sun 26/4/2026	Beppu to Hakata	<p>Relax at your onsen hotel for the final moments before heading back to Hakata by a modern express train.</p> <p>Back at Hakata, you will have free time until dinner. Your hotel is conveniently located for the final shopping and city walking. Let us know if you are interested in seeing or doing anything special on your final afternoon.</p> <p>This evening, you will gather for the last time to enjoy the Farewell Japan dinner.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	The Gate Hotel Fukuoka [Essential Double/Twin]
13	Mon 27/4/2026	Departure	<p>You check out of your hotel after breakfast, and your 2026 Artisan Tour of Kyushu, Japan, concludes.</p> <p>For travelers departing Japan from Tokyo, you can take a domestic flight from Fukuoka Airport to Haneda or Narita airports, or take shinkansen from Hakata Station. Or if you'd like to linger in Kyushu or Japan a little longer, we would be delighted to help plan your personal post-tour extension. Please see our Model Extension Itineraries for inspiration.</p>	Breakfast	
Inclusions for Group Tour			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 12 nights' accommodation (including traditional Japanese inns)</li> <li>■ Meals as per the itinerary</li> <li>■ Airport meet &amp; greet on arrival</li> <li>■ All local transport (train and private minivans)</li> <li>■ Transfer from the hotel to Fukuoka Airport or Hakata Station at the end of the tour</li> <li>■ Expert English-speaking tour guides (locally licensed)</li> <li>■ Cultural activities and entry fees are included in the itinerary</li> </ul>		
Exclusions for Group Tour			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ International and domestic airfare (unless otherwise stated)</li> <li>■ Travel insurance</li> <li>■ Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages (except the 1st drink at each meal)</li> <li>■ Tips and gratuities</li> <li>■ Transport during free time</li> <li>■ Personal expenses (laundry, coin-locker, internet, telephone etc.)</li> <li>■ Visa (if required)</li> </ul>		