

## BASIC TOUR OUTLINE

### 2026 CHERRY BLOSSOM TOUR OF NORTHERN JAPAN (SIGNATURE)

**Start:** Friday, 10 April 2026 from Tokyo

**Finish:** Wednesday, 22 April 2026 at Sapporo

**Duration:** 13 days

**Group size:** 8 people

**Cost estimate:** AUD \$9,300 per person

**Single supplement:** AUD \$1,900 per person

**Ref:** GSN-26

### TOUR OVERVIEW

The 2026 Cherry Blossom Tour of Northern Japan introduces you to a more relaxed side of Japan during the country's cherry blossom season. The tour starts in Tokyo and travels to Japan's Tohoku region and the northern island of Hokkaido to experience some of the most spectacular cherry blossoms in the country. They bloom later, in mid to late April, and with relatively fewer crowds!

Over 13 days, you enjoy the warm hospitality of the Tohoku people, outstanding regional food, and traditional culture like onsen (mineral hot springs) and well-preserved samurai towns. This is the perfect tour for those looking for a rural experience of Northern Japan, one of Japan's best-kept secrets!

\*Accommodation will be as planned below or similar.

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
1	Fri 10/4/2026	Airport meet and greet on arrival	<p>Welcome to Japan and your 2026 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.</p> <p>Today is an arrival day and no group program is scheduled. Stretch your legs and explore the local neighbourhood around your hotel. You'll be staying here for two nights, which will help you ease into the trip and recover from possible jet lag.</p> <p>Many of our guests arrive a day or so early before the tour starts. Please contact us if you'd like us to arrange additional nights at the tour hotel.</p>	No meals	KKR Hotel Tokyo [Deluxe Twin]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
2	Sat 11/4/2026	Guided tour of Tokyo suburbs	<p>After orientation with your guide, you begin your exploration of Tokyo. Japan's capital is an intriguing collection of small neighbourhoods each with their distinct flavour. As you explore the city, you'll get beyond its surface to discover some of the local places where ordinary Tokyoites live and socialise.</p> <p>Today you take Tokyo's famous subway to the lovely neighbourhood of Fukagawa. Despite being close to the business districts of central Tokyo, Fukagawa has a laid-back atmosphere, characteristic of Tokyo's traditional "shitamachi," the old heart of the city 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's exploration, you head back to your hotel and have a welcome dinner at a local Japanese izakaya restaurant.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	KKR Hotel Tokyo [Deluxe Twin]
3	Sun 12/4/2026	Guided tour of Nikko	<p>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. You 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 as well as its surrounds including the Nikko's iconic Shinkyo Bridge.</p> <p>Tonight you'll experience your first hot spring onsen bath of the tour at a traditional ryokan inn. Your 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 a futon in the simple elegance of a tatami mat room – a quintessential Japanese experience!</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Tsurukame Daikichi [Japanese style room with futon beddings]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
4	Mon 13/4/2026	Transfer to and guided tour of Matsushima	<p>On board Japan's famous shinkansen (bullet train), you head north for Sendai and transfer to a local train for the seaside town of Shiogama, where you will see the spectacular sight of the cherry blossoms at Shiogama Shrine. After having a 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. On the bay cruise boat, you can see up close how sea winds have shaped the pine trees' trunks silhouetted against rocky outcrops.</p> <p>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.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Matsushima Taikanso [Japanese style room with Western beds]
5	Tue 14/4/2026	Guided tour of Matsushima	<p>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 Godaigo 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.</p> <p>The afternoon is free for you to explore at leisure. You may like to visit compact Ojima Island which offers several notable sites including some intriguing pilgrim caves, or perhaps try some of the local oysters, Matsushima's most famous food for lunch.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Matsushima Taikanso [Japanese style room with Western beds]
6	Wed 15/4/2026	Transfer to and guided tour of Kakunodate	<p>You take the shinkansen again 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 have remained 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.</p> <p>For dinner, you'll enjoy a soul-warming hotpot of Kiritampo nabe, Akita's signature dish.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Tamachi Bukeyashiki Hotel [Western style twin room]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
7	Thu 16/4/2026	Morning guided tour of Lake Tazawa	<p>Your tour continues this morning with a circuit of Tazawa-ko, Japan's deepest lake famous for its clear blue waters and stunning mountain setting. Your guide will recount the tale of the female dragon spirit, who is believed to inhabit the lake. We explore the shrine and statue associated with the legendary spirit. On the way back to Kakunodate, you will have a chance to experience exclusive zazen (zen meditation) practice at a local zen temple before enjoying lunch at a farm restaurant.</p> <p>Then it's back to the 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.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Tamachi Bukeyashiki Hotel [Western style twin room]
8	Fri 17/4/2026	Transfer to and guided tour of Hirosaki	<p>This morning a private minivan will drive you through the countryside of central Tohoku to Hirosaki, another former castle town in Aomori Prefecture. It's a welcoming city at the foot of scenic Mt Iwaki. In spring, the castle's park 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.</p> <p>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.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Art Hotel Hirosaki City [Western style room]
9	Sat 18/4/2026	Transfer to and guided tour of Hakodate	<p>This time, the shinkansen takes you to Japan's northern island of Hokkaido via the underwater sea tunnel, 53.9 km long and 100 m deep under the sea bed - 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.</p> <p>You tour the unique Goryokaku Park, a fascinating Western-style fortress, built in the mid-19th century in the shape of a star, to defend Hokkaido against Western powers. 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 views! Hakodate is also known for its excellent cuisine and you enjoy a delicious meal at one of its local eateries.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Century Marina Hakodate [Deluxe Twin room]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
10	Sun 19/4/2026	Guided tour of Hakodate	<p>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 then 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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	Breakfast	Century Marina Hakodate [Deluxe Twin room]
11	Mon 20/4/2026	Guided tour of Lake Toya and transfer to Sapporo	<p>Finally, you travel to your final 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.</p> <p>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.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Sapporo Grand Hotel [Standard Large Twin/Double]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
12	Tue 21/4/2026	Guided tour of Sapporo and Otaru	<p>Your guide takes you on a walking tour of Sapporo this morning. You stop at Sapporo TV Tower for a great view of the city 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. For lunch, you may like some classic Hokkaido-style ramen, for which Sapporo is most famous.</p> <p>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 the intriguing Aoyama Villa, once the home of a wealthy herring merchant built during the heydays of Otaru's prosperous herring trade.</p> <p>Return to Sapporo for a farewell dinner over delicious modern cuisine, with a great night view of the city.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Sapporo Grand Hotel [Standard Large Twin/Double]
13	Wed 22/4/2026	Departure	<p>This morning, you check out of your hotel after breakfast and your 2026 Cherry Blossom Tour of Northern Japan concludes.</p> <p>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 the Private Tour page for inspiration.</p>	Breakfast	
Inclusions			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 12 nights' accommodation (including traditional Japanese inns)</li> <li>■ All breakfasts, 4 lunches and 10 dinners</li> <li>■ Airport meet &amp; greet on arrival</li> <li>■ Hotel transfer by public transport on arrival</li> <li>■ All local transport (train, bus and private minivans)</li> <li>■ Airport transfer from hotel by public transport on departure</li> <li>■ Expert English speaking tour guides (locally licensed)</li> <li>■ Cultural activities and entry fees included in itinerary</li> <li>■ Luggage transfers (1 piece per person)</li> </ul>		

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
		Exclusions	<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 (not routinely expected in Japan)</li><li>■ Transport during free time</li><li>■ Personal expenses (laundry, coin-locker, internet, telephone etc.)</li><li>■ Visa (if required)</li></ul>		