

BASIC TOUR OUTLINE

2026 CRAFTS AND CHERRY BLOSSOM TOUR OF SEA OF JAPAN COAST

Start: Saturday, 28 March 2026 from Tokyo

Finish: Friday, 10 April 2026 at Tokyo

Duration: 14 days

Group size: 8 people

Cost estimate: AUD \$10,890 per person

Single supplement: AUD \$1,950 per person

Ref: GSJ-26

TOUR OVERVIEW

The 2026 Crafts and Cherry Blossom Tour of the Sea of Japan Coast takes you on an exhilarating journey away from Japan's busy metropolitan centres to the fascinating Hokuriku region. Separated from Tokyo and the eastern seaboard by the rugged Japanese Alps, Hokuriku offers a less hurried pace and the chance to experience natural landscapes and old rural and seafaring traditions less impacted by mass tourism. On this 14-day rural Japan tour you experience the region's deep Buddhist roots, its mountain culture and distinctive thatched roof houses, its strong artisanal traditions, samurai history, its coastal towns and fresh seafood markets as well as the gorgeous cherry blossoms. For those who like discovering the roads-less-travelled, this is a fabulous introduction to the raw beauty and rich traditions of the Sea of Japan Coast at magical cherry blossom time.

*Accommodation will be as planned below or similar.

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
1	Sat 28/3/2026	Airport meet and greet on arrival	<p>Welcome to Japan and your 2026 Crafts and Cherry Blossom Tour of the Sea of Japan Coast! 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.</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 an additional night's accommodation.</p>	No meals	Mitsui Garden Hotel Kyobashi [Moderate Queen/Twin]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
2	Sun 29/3/2026	Guided tour of Tokyo	<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. While you are here, you will visit Fukagawa Fudo-do and witness a spectacular Buddhist ritual with fire and drums as well as enjoy a river cruise along the cherry tree-lined Oyoko River.</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	Mitsui Garden Hotel Kyobashi [Moderate Queen/Twin]
3	Mon 30/3/2026	Transfer to and guided tour of Kyoto	<p>You leave the big metropolis behind this morning and take a shinkansen (bullet train) to the ever-popular old capital, Kyoto.</p> <p>Established as the capital in 794, Kyoto remains the cultural heart of Japan and home to 17 UNESCO World Heritage sites and a wealth of traditional craft boutiques, museums, galleries and restaurants.</p> <p>You have an afternoon guided tour of Kyoto focusing on hidden treasures away from the crowded tourist spots. Here you will hope to see gorgeous cherry blossoms against elegant temples and gardens, typical of Kyoto. In the evening, you gather for a relaxed dinner in the city's heart. The streets are beautifully illuminated at night highlighting cherry trees during the spring season.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Cross Hotel Kyoto [Superior King/Twin]
4	Tue 31/3/2026	Guided tour of Kyoto	<p>Today is spent exploring Arashiyama and Sagano in Kyoto's western mountains. UNESCO-listed Tenryu-ji is the key attraction with its superb stroll garden which artfully utilises the mountains behind as part of its design. It's also a popular stop for its cherry blossom trees. You visit the historic Togetsu Bridge and its scenic river and stop for a traditional tofu lunch, a specialty of Arashiyama. Arashimaya's bamboo forest is another popular site for its thick bamboo dappled in ethereal light. Escaping the other day-trippers, you'll walk on through quiet backstreets to Daikakuji Temple with its beautiful lake fringed by cherry blossom trees.</p> <p>After arriving back at your hotel, the remainder of the day is free. Please ask our friendly team for suggestions and recommendations.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch	Cross Hotel Kyoto [Superior King/Twin]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
5	Wed 1/4/2026	Transfer to and guided tour of Echizen	<p>Leaving Kyoto by express train, you will arrive in Fukui Prefecture on the Sea of Japan coast. The first stop is the region of Echizen, where the tradition of forging swords, knives and farming tools has continued for some 700 years. In the 1970s, artisans from the area gathered to decide how to revitalise a declining industry impacted by agricultural mechanization and stainless steel knives. Echizen knives are now sold around the world and recognised on Japan's traditional crafts register. You tour one of the progressive knife manufacturers in the area as artisans expertly forge metal into bladed implements using traditional methods. While in the area, you will also visit a washi paper-making workshop as well as a lacquerware studio.</p> <p>After a full day of high-quality Japanese crafts, you will stay at a hotel in Fukui City, and enjoy dinner at a local restaurant.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Courtyard by Marriott Fukui [Superior King / Twin]
6	Thu 2/4/2026	Guided Tour of Eiheiji & Tojinbo	<p>This morning, you visit one of the most significant Buddhist temples, Eiheiji (Temple of Eternal Peace). This large Zen temple and monastery was founded in 1244 by the prominent priest Dogen Zenji and belongs to the Soto School, Japan's largest Zen Buddhist sect. While touring around the complex with your guide, you wander along its forested paths and covered walkways and experience the spiritual side of this region and Fukui's long and deep Buddhist roots.</p> <p>Travelling by private transport, our next stop is Tojinbo where you take a cruise to view the unusual rock formations from the ocean. A spectacular natural landmark in Echizen-Kaga Kaigan Quasi-National Park, the rock formations have been sculpted by wind and waves over millions of years to form rugged honeycomb-shaped columns.</p> <p>In the late afternoon, you arrive at Kanazawa. With its lineage as a wealthy castle town steeped in samurai culture, Kanazawa offers an impressive list of architectural and cultural sites. After resting at your hotel, your guide will give you some orientation around the hotel before dinner. You stay here for three nights, giving you the chance, mid-trip, to enjoy a slower pace and do some of your own exploring.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	INTERGATE Kanazawa [Hollywood Twin]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
7	Fri 3/4/2026	Guided tour of Kanazawa	<p>Kanazawa is home to Kenrokuen Garden, a castle garden dating back to the 17th century, regarded as one of three great gardens of Japan. After touring this sublime garden and admiring some of its ancient cherry trees we head to nearby Kanazawa Castle Park to view the remains of castle embattlements from feudal times.</p> <p>In the afternoon, you will visit the studio of a Kaga Yuzen Kimono maker. The artist produces kimonos with designs integrating the beauty of the natural scenery and geometrical patterns, creating original dyeing expressions using the traditional Kaga Yuzen techniques. While you are in Kanazawa, you will also visit a Kutani-style pottery kiln founded in 1870. You will have a guided tour of the factory and see magnificent works of this most awarded kiln.</p> <p>Tonight's dinner is teppanyaki – tender wagyu beef and vegetables grilled to perfection on a hot plate.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	INTERGATE Kanazawa [Hollywood Twin]
8	Sat 4/4/2026	Morning guided tour of Kanazawa	<p>This morning you will discover the feudal past of Kanazawa through a guided walking tour of Nagamachi district, the old part of Kanazawa where daimyo lords once resided. Its winding old streets are full of beautiful villas and gardens nestled behind traditional plaster-covered walls.</p> <p>The next stop is Omicho Market, a lively working market full of fishmongers and eateries. It is called "the Kitchen of Kanazawa residents" and a great place to learn the life of local people.</p> <p>You have the afternoon and evening free to explore the city. Wander Kanazawa's backstreets, discovering galleries and shops offering all sorts of exquisite ceramics, gilded lacquerware, local sake and traditional foods. Your guide is happy to give you information based on your interests.</p>	Breakfast	INTERGATE Kanazawa [Hollywood Twin]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
9	Sun 5/4/2026	Guided Tour of Gokayama and Inami	<p>Leaving Kanazawa, it's on to your last destination along the captivating Sea of Japan coast – Toyama Prefecture. The first stop here is the UNESCO World Heritage site of Gokoyama. Some of the thatched-roof farmhouses, with their steeply slanted roofs built to withstand heavy snowfalls, are open to the public and you take a look inside to learn about their history, construction and ongoing preservation efforts.</p> <p>The next stop is the traditional woodworking town of Inami in Toyama's countryside. While there are other Japanese towns known for their woodcraft traditions, Inami is justifiably known as Japan's best. Its high level of craftsmanship is officially recognised as "Japan Heritage" designated by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. This afternoon you do a hands-on craft workshop, fashioning a small dish or spoon out of wood, guided by an Inami master artisan. This session provides an opportunity to chat with local folk in a relaxed studio setting and gain some insights into their work and lives as well.</p> <p>Reflecting our focus today, you stay at 'Bed and Craft', which has progressively renovated the town's old buildings as lovely boutique villas.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Bed & Craft [Renovated traditional house]
10	Mon 6/4/2026	Guided Tour of Inami & Toyama Bay	<p>You will have a relaxed morning today enjoying your wonderful accommodation, and the atmospheric town of Inami. The town's Zuisenji Temple represents the pinnacle of Inami craftsmanship and you visit this grand temple to appreciate the beautiful woodwork on its main hall and Sanmon gate.</p> <p>Your next destination is Toyama Bay. The bay is a member of the UNESCO-endorsed "Most Beautiful Bays in the World Club" and one of the country's best places to enjoy fresh seafood and you have the unique opportunity today to witness a fresh seafood auction at Shinminato Kitokito Market. Afterwards, you sit down for a sushi lunch, with seafood caught from the bay in front of you!</p> <p>For the next two nights, you stay in Toyama City, the centre of Toyama Prefecture. It is a lovely regional city with much green space and relaxed amenities. Your hotel is very centrally located, perfect for a stroll. In the evening you will have dinner at a relaxed local restaurant.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Hotel JAL City Toyama [Superior Twin]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
11	Tue 7/4/2026	Guided tour of Toyama	<p>This morning you take a cruise through a stunning tunnel of cherry blossoms on the Matsukawa River, then continue with your sightseeing and studio visits in Toyama.</p> <p>This afternoon and evening are free for you to explore this pleasant regional city at your own pace. There are numerous art and craft museums, local parks and gardens, and great modern shopping, too. A visit to an old port town of nearby Iwase is highly recommended, and so are the beautiful Glass Art Museum and the unique Hotaruika (firefly squid) Museum.</p>	Breakfast	Hotel JAL City Toyama [Superior Twin]
12	Wed 8/4/2026	Guided Tour of Unazaki Onsen	<p>Toyama is where Japanese traditional and modern pharmaceutical industries have thrived. For a slice of local history, you stop by an old medicine shop specialising in traditional medicines this morning. Remarkably, some of the traditional medicinal herbs first sold centuries ago in Japan, are still available.</p> <p>This afternoon you stop to enjoy a unique local landmark, only possible at this time of year. Known locally as the "Spring Quartet", contrasting rows of rapeseed and tulips sit alongside cherry blossoms lining the Funakawa River, with the dramatic snow-capped Northern Alps in the background.</p> <p>Tonight's accommodation is an authentic onsen ryokan in the hot spring town of Unazuki, nestled in the foothills of the magnificent Kurobe Gorge. Unwind in the natural hot spring bath, enjoy the simple elegance of a tatami-mat room and feast on a delicious kaiseki multi-course meal. Bliss!</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Unazuki Onsen Enraku [Japanese style room with futon beddings and view of Kurobe Gorge]
13	Thu 9/4/2026	Transfer to Tokyo	<p>After a splendid Japanese-style breakfast at your ryokan, you will finally leave the Sea of Japan Coast by Shinkansen and head back to Tokyo. After arriving, you have free time until the final group dinner. You may like to do last-minute shopping or visit a few of the endless list of interesting sites in Tokyo. Please ask our friendly team for suggestions and directions.</p> <p>Tonight you will gather one last time for a "farewell Japan" dinner with your fellow travellers and relive the best memories of your Japan adventure.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Mitsui Garden Hotel Kyobashi [Moderate Twin/Queen]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
14	Fri 10/4/2026	Departure	<p>You check out of your hotel after breakfast and your 2026 Crafts and Cherry Blossom Tour of the Sea of Japan Coast concludes.</p> <p>You can take an airport express train or limousine bus to Narita or Haneda International Airport for your departure. 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"> ■ 13 nights' accommodation (including traditional Japanese inns) ■ All breakfasts, 5 lunches & 9 dinners ■ Airport meet & greet on arrival ■ Hotel transfer by public transport on arrival ■ All local transport (train, bus and private minivans) ■ Airport transfer by public transport on departure ■ Pre-loaded transport IC card ■ Expert English-speaking tour guides (locally licensed) ■ Cultural activities and entry fees included in the itinerary ■ Luggage transfers (1 piece per person) 		
Exclusions			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ International and domestic airfare (unless otherwise stated) ■ Travel insurance ■ Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages (except the 1st drink at each meal) ■ Tips and gratuities (not routinely expected in Japan) ■ Transport during free time ■ Personal expenses (laundry, coin-locker, internet, telephone etc.) ■ Visa (if required) 		