

## BASIC TOUR OUTLINE

### 2026 NIIGATA & SADO ISLAND CRAFT AND CULTURAL TOUR OF JAPAN

**Start:** Thursday, 17 September 2026 from Tokyo

**Finish:** Saturday, 26 September 2026 at Tokyo

**Duration:** 10 days

**Group size:** 8 people

**Cost estimate:** AUD \$8,740 per person

**Single supplement:** AUD \$1,240 per person

**Ref:** GCN-26

#### TOUR OVERVIEW

The 2026 Niigata & Sado Island Craft and Cultural Tour of Japan offers an immersive journey into regional Japanese culture, traditional craftsmanship, and rural life. Located less than two hours from Tokyo by shinkansen, Niigata is remarkably accessible yet feels a world away from Japan's crowded tourist centres, making it ideal for travellers seeking a deeper and more authentic experience.

Blessed with fertile land and a strong agricultural heritage, Niigata has long supported prosperous primary industries, from rice and sake to metalworking and traditional crafts. These industries have shaped a culture of exceptional craftsmanship, which continues to thrive today. On nearby Sado Island, centuries of history—from gold mining to performing arts—add further richness to the region's cultural landscape.

This brand-new small group tour of Japan is designed in Journey to the East's signature style, with a maximum of eight travellers, ensuring a slow-paced, personal, and comfortable travel experience. Enjoy carefully selected accommodation, comfortable transport, excellent regional cuisine, and expert local guides who bring each destination to life.

Perfect for senior travellers interested in culture, history, and meaningful travel, this journey reveals a less-visited side of Japan—where traditions are lived, landscapes remain unspoiled, and genuine encounters await in Niigata and Sado Island.

\*Accommodation will be as planned below or similar.

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
1	Thu 17/9/2026	Airport meet and greet on arrival	Welcome to Japan and your 2026 Niigata and Sado Island Craft and Cultural Tour of Japan! Upon arrival at one of Tokyo's international airports, you'll be warmly greeted by your Journey to the East guide and escorted to your hotel via airport bus or train for a relaxed and stress-	No meals	KKR Hotel Tokyo [Deluxe Twin]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
			<p>free start to your holiday.</p> <p>Today is an arrival day with no scheduled group activities, allowing you to settle in at your own pace. Take a gentle stroll around your hotel's neighbourhood to get a first taste of Tokyo's everyday life. As this tour focuses on the hidden gems in regional areas of Japan, it does not include a guided tour of Tokyo. If this is your first visit to Japan, we highly recommend spending extra time exploring the capital's rich traditions, iconic gardens, and vibrant local districts before the tour begins.</p> <p>Many guests choose to arrive a day or two early to ease into the journey. If you'd like to extend your stay, we will be delighted to arrange additional nights at the tour hotel. Feel free to contact us to tailor your pre-tour experience.</p>		
2	Fri 18/9/2026	Transfer to Niigata and guided tour of Tokamachi	<p>After meeting your guide in the hotel lobby, travel aboard Japan's famous shinkansen (bullet train) as you journey across Honshu to Niigata on the Sea of Japan coast. Smooth, spacious and efficient, the Shinkansen offers a relaxed way to experience Japan's modern engineering while enjoying views of the countryside.</p> <p>Niigata Prefecture is renowned for its deep agricultural heritage and is Japan's leading rice-producing region. Over centuries, this abundance has shaped local culture and craftsmanship, giving rise to exceptional sake brewing, high-quality cutting tools and fine textile production.</p> <p>This morning, visit a family-run textile workshop that has been producing local fabrics for nearly a century. The cultural immersion continues with an introduction to one of Niigata's most important industries—sake making.</p> <p>This evening, settle into a traditional onsen ryokan, known for its warm country hospitality. Enjoy a beautifully prepared dinner featuring Niigata's celebrated rice, followed by a soothing soak in the onsen hot spring baths. You will sleep on comfortable futon bedding laid over tatami mats in a Japanese-style room—an authentic and memorable cultural experience, perfectly suited to a slower, more reflective style of travel.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Hinanoyado Chitose [Japanese style room with private bathroom]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
3	Sat 19/9/2026	A day of cultural exploration of Niigata	<p>This morning, enjoy a guided walk through beautiful terraced rice paddies, offering a rare glimpse into Japan's traditional rural landscape. These scenic farming areas are gradually disappearing across the country, and participation in this walk directly supports the preservation of local villages and agricultural heritage. The route follows mostly sealed paths and is gentle and easy-paced, making it suitable for senior travellers.</p> <p>Next, take part in a hands-on country cooking experience with local women. You will learn to prepare a simple, home-style meal using fresh local vegetables, with a special focus on traditional food-preservation techniques developed to sustain families through Niigata's long, snowy winters. This is a wonderful opportunity for cultural exchange and insight into everyday rural life.</p> <p>In the afternoon, visit several local art and cultural sites, including Nishikigoi no Sato, a peaceful garden dedicated to nishikigoi (ornamental koi carp), one of Niigata's most celebrated regional products.</p> <p>In the early evening, travel to the city of Nagaoka, where you will check in to a comfortable Western-style hotel for an overnight stay.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Hotel New Otani Nagaoka [Standard Twin Room]
4	Sun 20/9/2026	Guided tour of Tsubame Sanjo	<p>This morning, begin with a visit to Yahiko Shrine, one of Niigata's most important Shinto sites. Nestled at the foot of Mount Yahiko, this grand and atmospheric shrine is set within tranquil forest surroundings. A visit to the shrine's upper garden area rewards you with sweeping views over the Niigata Plain and the Sea of Japan, offering a wonderful introduction to the region's spiritual and natural heritage.</p> <p>The remainder of the day is dedicated to exploring Niigata's renowned metalworking tradition. Visit a selection of knife-making and metalwork factories, where you can observe the scale, precision, and craftsmanship of this highly developed local industry. These visits provide insight into the techniques and skills that have made Niigata one of Japan's leading centres for metal production.</p> <p>In the early evening, arrive in Niigata City, the capital and cultural hub of Niigata Prefecture. Take in views of the city's symbol, the historic Bandai Bridge, which is especially striking at sunset. You will stay here for the next two nights, allowing time for relaxed evening strolls and opportunities to enjoy the city's local atmosphere at an unhurried pace.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Hotel Italiaken [Twin/Double Room - Executive Type]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
5	Mon 21/9/2026	Guided tour of Niigata City	<p>Start your day at the Northern Culture Museum in Niigata City, an exceptional destination for learning about the region's agricultural history. The museum was once the estate of the Ito family, one of Niigata's largest landowning families. Beyond the exhibits, the stately building and beautifully landscaped gardens offer a glimpse into the lifestyle and legacy of eight generations of wealthy farmers, reflecting the region's social and cultural heritage.</p> <p>Next, visit Ponshukan, a fun sake tasting venue where walls are lined with sake boxes from across Niigata. Sample a variety of premium local sake, discover your favourites, and explore the shop for other traditional Niigata foods and drinks.</p> <p>The evening is free to explore Niigata City at your own pace. Known as a gourmet destination, the city offers an abundance of restaurants and bars, giving you the opportunity to enjoy local specialties and immerse yourself in Niigata's culinary culture.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch	Hotel Italiaken [Twin/Double Room - Executive Type]
6	Tue 22/9/2026	Guided tour of Sado Island	<p>Once a place of political exile, Sado Island flourished in the 17th century with the discovery of gold and silver, shaping both its industry and culture. In July 2024, the island's gold and silver mine sites were designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the island now features informative museums and historical sites that bring its fascinating past to life.</p> <p>After arriving by Jetfoil, begin at the modern Sado Gold Mine Information Centre, where you will gain an overview of the island's history and its significant sites. Then, explore the actual mine sites and related facilities, including the Kitazawa Flotation Plant, a visually striking site that evokes the atmosphere of the island's mining heyday.</p> <p>In the late afternoon, check into a clifftop hotel overlooking the Sea of Japan, offering stunning panoramic views. Your evening culminates in a truly unique cultural experience: "Takigi Noh", a Noh theatre performance performed outdoors by torchlight. Originating over 1,000 years ago in Nara as a religious ritual, Takigi Noh blends spirituality, artistry, and magical ambience, creating a once-in-a-lifetime experience that resonates deeply with the island's heritage.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Hotel Azuma [Oceanview Garden Twin]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
7	Wed 23/9/2026	Guided tour of Sado Island	<p>This morning, enjoy a hands-on cultural experience on Sado Island with a ride on a hangiri, a traditional washtub boat. These boats, handmade from cedar and bamboo grown on Sado, were once essential for the local fishing communities of the Ogi Peninsula. While hangiri are no longer used commercially, this gentle ride provides a unique glimpse into Sado's historic coastal lifestyle and traditional fishing techniques.</p> <p>Continue your exploration of the island's history with a guided tour of Shukunegi, a charming village tucked into the back of a cove. Historically home to sengokubune merchant ships and shipbuilders, Shukunegi prospered in the 17th century thanks to the Sado Kinzan Gold Mine and later became a stop for the kitamaebune trading vessels. The village is famous for its densely packed wooden houses built with ship planks, and it has been designated a National Important Preservation Area for Traditional Buildings and Architecture, offering a fascinating window into Japan's maritime heritage.</p> <p>In the afternoon, enjoy a fun and informal introduction to taiko drumming, Japan's iconic percussion tradition. Sado Island is home to Kodo, one of Japan's most famous taiko ensembles, and this workshop lets you experience the rhythms in a relaxed, hands-on way, perfect for a memorable and playful cultural moment.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Hotel Azuma [Oceanview Garden Twin]
8	Thu 24/9/2026	Guided tour of Sado Island and return to Niigata	<p>This morning, enjoy a guided walk through the historic Aikawa area, where miners, merchants, and government officials lived during Sado Island's mining era. The tour includes the remains of the Sado Magistrate's Office and offers insight into the social and official life of the island's residents during this fascinating period of history.</p> <p>After a relaxing lunch, bid farewell to Sado Island and return to Niigata City on the mainland. Your evening features a highlight of Niigata's traditional culture: a private geisha experience. Your group will be entertained by dances and music performed by local geisha while enjoying an exquisite Japanese-style dinner, offering a rare glimpse into a tradition that has endured for centuries.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Hotel Italiaken [Twin/Double Room - Executive Type]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
9	Fri 25/9/2026	Guided tour of Murakami	<p>On the last day of the 2026 Niigata &amp; Sado Island Craft and Cultural Tour of Japan, travel north to Murakami City, famous for two of its signature local products: salmon and green tea.</p> <p>Murakami salmon is celebrated for its intense umami flavour, achieved through a traditional salting and air-drying process using the region's winter winds. This centuries-old method has shaped the city's culinary heritage and includes pioneering conservation practices. Wander the historic main street and see salmon hanging from shop ceilings to dry, a living tradition that reflects Murakami's deep connection to its natural environment and local cuisine.</p> <p>Murakami is also one of the northernmost areas of Japanese green tea production, with a rich 400-year history. Known for its mellow flavour and low astringency, this tea thrives despite harsh winters and heavy snowfall. You will have the opportunity to taste this prized tea paired with a traditional Japanese sweet at a local tea shop, an authentic cultural experience.</p> <p>The day concludes with a final relaxing onsen experience at a sublime traditional Japanese ryokan, where you can soak and unwind, reflecting on the memorable flavours, landscapes, and cultural experiences of your journey through Niigata and Sado Island. The sights, tastes, and traditions you've enjoyed will stay with you long after your tour ends.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Shiratama no yu Kaho [Japanese style room with beds]
10	Sat 26/9/2026	Transfer to Tokyo	<p>On your final morning, enjoy a traditional Japanese breakfast before being transferred to Niigata Station for your shinkansen journey back to Tokyo. The tour concludes at Tokyo Station, and we will be happy to assist with your onward travel, whether to the airport or another destination in Japan.</p> <p>For those wishing to extend their stay, our team of Japan travel experts can help design a personalised post-tour itinerary, allowing you to continue exploring another region of Japan at a relaxed pace, tailored to your interests and schedule.</p>	Breakfast	

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
		Inclusions for Group Tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 9 nights' accommodation (including traditional Japanese inns)</li> <li>■ All breakfasts, 6 lunches and 7 dinners</li> <li>■ Airport meet &amp; greet on arrival</li> <li>■ Hotel transfer by public transport on arrival</li> <li>■ All local transport (train and private minivans)</li> <li>■ Airport transfer from Tokyo Station by public transport on departure</li> <li>■ Expert English-speaking tour guides (locally licensed)</li> <li>■ Cultural activities and entry fees included in the itinerary</li> <li>■ Luggage transfers (1 piece per person)</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>		