

## BASIC TOUR OUTLINE

### 2026 SPIRITUAL WALKS OF NORTHERN JAPAN (DISCOVERY)

**Start:** Monday, 12 October 2026 from Tokyo

**Finish:** Friday, 23 October 2026 at Tokyo

**Duration:** 12 days

**Group size:** 8 people

**Cost estimate:** AUD \$9,690 per person

**Single supplement:** AUD \$2,180 per person

**Ref:** GHN-26

#### TOUR OVERVIEW

This immersive 12-day journey through Northern Japan blends centuries-old history, deep spiritual traditions, and spectacular seasonal beauty. From the sacred pilgrimage trails of Dewa Sanzan to the mountaintop serenity of Yamadera Temple, you'll walk in the footsteps of monks, samurai, and poets. Along the way, explore vibrant cities and quiet mountain towns, discover exquisite temples and castles, and enjoy hands-on cultural experiences such as pottery making and laido sword practice.

Timed to coincide with Japan's peak autumn foliage, the tour also reveals the country's natural splendour at its finest. Wander the caldera lakes of Zao, the jewel-toned waters of Urabandai's Five-Coloured Lakes, and the lakes, waterfalls, and marshes of Oku-Nikko. Comfortable accommodations, from traditional ryokan inns with soothing onsen baths to charming hotels in nature-rich settings, ensure each day ends as memorably as it begins. Fully escorted and rich in both culture and scenery, this journey offers an unforgettable exploration of Northern Japan's spirit and beauty.

\*Accommodation will be as planned below or similar.

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
1	Mon 12/10/2026	Airport meet and greet on arrival	Welcome to Japan! Upon arrival at Tokyo's Haneda International Airport, you will be warmly greeted by your Journey to the East guide and escorted to your airport hotel. (If you are arriving at Tokyo's Narita Airport, you will also be met on arrival and transferred by airport bus to your Haneda hotel.)  Today is a relaxed arrival day with no scheduled group activities. Your hotel is conveniently located at Haneda Airport to ensure a smooth start for tomorrow's early flight. If time permits, you may wish to enjoy a short excursion into central Tokyo before the official start of your 2026 Spiritual Walks of Northern Japan tour.	No meals	Villa Fontaine Grand Haneda Airport [Superior King/Twin]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
			Many travellers choose to arrive a day or two earlier to settle in and adjust to the time difference. If you'd like to book additional nights - either in the same room as your tour accommodation or at a central Tokyo hotel - please let us know, and we'll be happy to make the arrangements.		
2	Tue 13/10/2026	Transfer to Dewa Sanzan with guide	<p>Leaving the bustling streets of Tokyo behind, you will take a domestic flight to Yamagata, in the scenic Tohoku region of northern Honshu. Over the next couple of days, you will explore the mystical Dewa Sanzan - literally "the three mountains of Dewa" - a sacred area where Animism, Shinto, Buddhism, and Shugendo have coexisted for centuries. This is a place of deep spiritual resonance, where every step offers a connection with nature and a glimpse into Japan's rich spiritual heritage.</p> <p>Upon arrival in the Hagurosan area, your guide will take you to a local museum, offering insights into the mountains' history, cultural significance, and spiritual practices - a perfect introduction to the region before your explorations begin.</p> <p>Tonight, you will experience the unique atmosphere of a shukubo, a working temple lodging, where pilgrims have stayed for generations. Dinner is a special treat: shojin ryori, traditional Buddhist vegetarian cuisine crafted from the region's fresh rice, mountain vegetables, and mushrooms. You might be surprised at how flavorful and satisfying a vegetarian meal can be!</p> <p>There is no group walking scheduled today, giving you time to relax.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Daishinbo (Shukubo) [Japanese style room with futon bedding with communal toilet & bath facilities]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
3	Wed 14/10/2026	Guided tour of Dewa Sanzan	<p>Dewa Sanzan - the three mountains of Dewa - has been a place of worship for over 1,400 years. Each mountain represents a different aspect of time: past, present, and future. To honour tradition, pilgrims visit the mountains in succession, following a spiritual journey that has been practised for centuries.</p> <p>The first mountain, Hagurosan (past), features a series of stone steps winding through towering cedar trees. Along the way, you'll encounter numerous points of interest, including the 600-year-old Five-Story Pagoda, a symbol of endurance and spirituality. At the summit, the impressive Sanjin Gosaiden shrine, one of Japan's largest thatched buildings, stands as a testament to centuries of devotion. Though the main walk is only 1.7 km (1 mile), the ascent along stone steps takes approximately 1.5 hours, offering plenty of time to absorb the serenity and majesty of the surroundings.</p> <p>After a well-earned lunch at a local restaurant, you will transfer to tonight's destination, a quaint onsen hamlet. Tonight, you'll stay at a small local ryokan, where you will experience your first onsen - a hot mineral spring bath - on the tour. Our guide will introduce the customs and etiquette of the Japanese bath, explaining why this ritual remains one of Japan's most cherished pastimes.</p> <p>Walking today: 5-6 km (3.1-3.7 miles)  Elevation gain/loss: 400 m (1,312 ft) ascent, 150 m (492 ft) descent  Terrain: 2,446 stone steps</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Ochimizu no Yu Tsutaya [Japanese style room with futon bedding with private toilet but with communal shower & bath]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
4	Thu 15/10/2026	Guided tour of Dewa Sanzan	<p>The second mountain, Gassan (present), offers a unique experience that depends on clear weather, as its trail follows the open ridges of the mountain, providing panoramic views of the surrounding landscapes. At the 8th station, you'll walk a flat 2 km boardwalk through a tranquil wetland, taking around 1.5 hours to soak in the serene beauty and observe the delicate flora that thrives in this high-altitude environment.</p> <p>Next, you will approach the final mountain, Yudonosan (future or rebirth). This is the most mysterious and sacred of the three, home to secret rituals that have been preserved for centuries. Photography is strictly prohibited in the sacred areas, ensuring that your experience remains personal and profound. Yudonosan is also naturally stunning, particularly in autumn when the landscape bursts with vibrant colours. Visitors leave with a deep sense of connection, having witnessed the culmination of the spiritual pilgrimage.</p> <p>After completing the Dewa Sanzan journey, you will transfer to Yamagata City for a well-earned rest. Located at the heart of Tohoku, Yamagata is renowned for its local specialties, sake, and lively festivals. Tonight, you will enjoy the warm hospitality of the region at a local izakaya, sampling authentic dishes and savouring the flavours of Tohoku.</p> <p>Walking today: 7 km (4.35 miles)  Elevation gain/loss: 150 m (492 ft) ascent, 150 m (492 ft) descent  Terrain: boardwalk at Gassan; shoes must be removed at the summit of Yudonosan</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Hotel Metropolitan Yamagata [Main Tower Twin]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
5	Fri 16/10/2026	Guided tour of Yamadera and the Way of the Sword	<p>Today, your journey takes you to Hojusan Risshakuji, more commonly known as Yamadera - literally "mountain temple." Founded in 860 by the Buddhist monk Jikaku-Daishi, Yamadera remains one of the most revered sacred sites in the Tohoku region.</p> <p>Your adventure begins with the ascent of 1,100 stone steps, where every turn reveals dozens of stone monuments, small temple halls, and massive rocks, each carrying its own story. The climb is steep but rewarding, and upon reaching Godaido, a small temple hall at the summit, you will be treated to a breathtaking panoramic view that is truly unforgettable. The ascent takes approximately 30–60 minutes, and on your way back down, you can explore local crafts and restaurants, sampling regional delicacies or picking up unique souvenirs.</p> <p>In the afternoon, you will step into the role of a samurai with a hands-on laido experience. laido is a traditional Japanese martial art focused on drawing the sword, precise movements, and mindfulness. Often described as "the art of the sword without fighting," it emphasises spiritual and mental discipline as much as physical skill, giving you a truly immersive cultural experience.</p> <p>After a day of both physical and spiritual enrichment, return to your hotel in Yamagata and enjoy your final night in this welcoming city, reflecting on the memories of the sacred mountains and the art of the samurai.</p> <p>Walking today: 6 km (3.73 miles)  Elevation gain: 156 m (512 ft)  Terrain: 1,015 stone steps</p>	Breakfast	Hotel Metropolitan Yamagata [Main Tower Twin]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
6	Sat 17/10/2026	Guided tour of Zao	<p>Today, your private minivan will take you to Zao, a region famed for its winter ski slopes, but in autumn it transforms into a stunning natural playground.</p> <p>Your adventure begins with a cable car and chair lift ascent to the mountain plateau, where you'll embark on a guided hike through blazing autumn-colored forests. Follow one of the scenic walking courses past crystal-clear caldera lakes and cascading waterfalls, and take in the pristine landscapes that make Zao a photographer's dream.</p> <p>In the afternoon, your journey turns creative with a visit to a local pottery kiln. Japanese pottery is celebrated worldwide for its earthy tones and minimalist beauty. You can browse for a unique piece to take home - or roll up your sleeves and create your own in a hands-on pottery workshop, making this a truly personal souvenir of your travels.</p> <p>Tonight, you will stay at an upscale traditional ryokan in a charming onsen town. Relax in your authentic Japanese-style room, soak in the hot mineral springs, and savour a luxury kaiseki dinner, an exquisite multi-course feast that highlights seasonal flavours and artistic presentation.</p> <p>Walking today: 5 km (3.1 miles) Elevation gain/loss: 467 m (1,532 ft) ascent, 465 m (1,526 ft) descent Terrain: open paths exposed to wind</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Nihon no yado Koyo [Japanese style room with private bathroom]
7	Sun 18/10/2026	Transfer to and guided tour of Urabandai	<p>Today, you will journey to the enchanting Urabandai, taking in spectacular autumn scenery along the way through southern Tohoku.</p> <p>Urabandai, part of Bandai-Asahi National Park, is a haven for nature lovers. Its serene landscapes and crisp mountain air make it the perfect place to slow down and appreciate Japan's natural beauty. You will explore the Goshikinuma (Five-Coloured Lakes) walking trail, arguably the most stunning route in the area. Along the way, marvel at the vividly coloured lakes, each displaying a unique hue caused by the mineral-rich waters - a truly otherworldly sight.</p> <p>Tonight, you will stay at a charming hotel nestled in nature, surrounded by the gorgeous autumn foliage, allowing you to feel fully immersed in this peaceful and scenic region.</p> <p>Walking today: 8-10 km (5-6.2 miles) Elevation: flat Terrain: well-maintained nature trails</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	HOTELLI aalto [Superior Double/Twin]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
8	Mon 19/10/2026	Free day in Urabandai	<p>Today is a free day, allowing you to tailor your experience to your own pace - whether you prefer relaxation or adventure. Stroll along Urabandai's scenic walking trails, rent a bicycle to explore autumn-painted avenues, take a peaceful cruise on one of the lakes, or visit a local art gallery to admire exquisite works inspired by the region's natural beauty.</p> <p>In the evening, we will gather for dinner at the hotel, sharing stories of the day's discoveries and enjoying the warm hospitality of Urabandai.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	HOTELLI aalto [Superior Double/Twin]
9	Tue 20/10/2026	Transfer to and guided tour of Aizuwakamatsu	<p>Shifting from nature to history, today you explore Aizuwakamatsu, one of the most historically significant cities in Tohoku. Your day begins at Tsurugajo Castle, a fortress that played a pivotal role during the Boshin War of 1868, when it withstood a month-long siege by the imperial army that sought to restore imperial rule after centuries of samurai governance. Inside the castle tower, a museum chronicles the rich history of Aizuwakamatsu, and the observation gallery at the top provides panoramic views of the city. You will also visit a former samurai residence and a serene Japanese garden within the castle complex, offering a glimpse into the lifestyle of Japan's warrior class.</p> <p>Next, take a stroll through the charming streets of Nanokamachi, lined with traditional crafts and local food shops. Here, you will visit a sake brewery to see the traditional production methods and enjoy a tasting, and a lacquerware studio to admire the skill and artistry of local craftsmen.</p> <p>Tonight, savour Aizuwakamatsu's regional cuisine at a local restaurant, experiencing the flavours that have been perfected over generations.</p> <p>Walking today: 10 km (6.2 miles) Elevation: flat Terrain: town walking on paved streets</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Hotel New Palace [Western style room]

DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
10	Wed 21/10/2026	Transfer to and guided tour of Nikko	<p>Continuing south, you arrive at Nikko, one of Japan's most historically significant destinations. The highlight of your visit is Toshogu Shrine, a UNESCO World Heritage site and the lavishly decorated mausoleum of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Tokugawa shogunate. Built in the early 17th century, Toshogu is famous for its intricate carvings, gold leaf embellishments, and vibrant lacquered structures. Iconic features include the Three Wise Monkeys carving, representing the principle of "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil," and the Sleeping Cat, symbolising peace in the shogun's reign.</p> <p>Arriving in mid to late October, you will also experience Nikko's breathtaking autumn foliage. Fiery reds, deep oranges, and golden yellows paint the landscape, creating a stunning backdrop for your exploration. Stroll along serene forest paths, lakes, and waterfalls, and soak in the seasonal beauty that has inspired visitors for centuries.</p> <p>Walking today: 6 km (3.7 miles) Elevation: less than 100 m (328 ft) Terrain: 63 steps, with an optional 275 steps for those wishing to extend the walk</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Chuzenji Kanaya Hotel [Standard Twin]
11	Thu 22/10/2026	Guided tour of Nikko	<p>Today, you venture deeper into Nikko National Park to Oku-Nikko, a region celebrated for its spectacular natural beauty. Surrounded by the peak autumn colours, you will enjoy a series of scenic walks that immerse you in Japan's seasonal splendour.</p> <p>Stroll along Lake Chuzenji, whose tranquil waters reflect the fiery reds and golds of the surrounding forests. Visit Ryuzu Waterfall, known as the "Dragon's Head" for its distinctive twin streams, and the serene Yunoko Waterfall. You will also explore the Senjogahara Marsh, a Ramsar-registered wetland, traversed by boardwalks that allow you to experience this pristine ecosystem up close. Every step reveals the rich variety of flora and fauna that make Oku-Nikko a natural treasure.</p> <p>Walking today: 10 km (6.2 miles) Elevation: mostly flat Terrain: boardwalks and lakeside footpaths</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Chuzenji Kanaya Hotel [Standard Twin]



DAY	DATE	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
12	Fri 23/10/2026	Departure	<p>After breakfast, check out of your hotel and begin your journey back to Tokyo, travelling comfortably by train alongside your guide. On arrival at Tokyo Station, your guide will assist you with the smooth transition to your airport transfer, whether you're departing from Narita or Haneda International Airport.</p> <p>This marks the conclusion of your unforgettable 2026 Spiritual Walks of Northern Japan tour - a journey filled with spiritual discovery, scenic beauty, and meaningful connections.</p> <p>If you wish to extend your time in Japan, we would be delighted to help you plan a personalised post-tour extension. Whether you're drawn to the serene countryside, vibrant cities, or lesser-known regions, we can tailor an experience to introduce you to yet another captivating facet of Japan.</p> <p><b><i>If you plan to depart today, please ensure your flight is departing after 15:00 to allow sufficient travel time from Nikko.</i></b></p>	Breakfast	
Inclusions for Group Tour			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ 11 nights' accommodation (including traditional Japanese inns)</li> <li>■ All breakfasts</li> <li>■ 1 lunch and 9 dinners</li> <li>■ Airport meet &amp; greet on arrival in Tokyo</li> <li>■ Hotel transfer by public transport on arrival</li> <li>■ Domestic flight from Tokyo to Shonai Airport</li> <li>■ Airport transfer by public transport on departure</li> <li>■ All local transport (train, bus and private minivans)</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-lockers, internet, telephone etc.)</li> <li>■ Visa (if required)</li> </ul>		