

BASIC TOUR OUTLINE

2027 NIIGATA & SADO ISLAND CRAFT AND CULTURAL TOUR OF JAPAN (SIGNATURE)

START: (Refer to website for date) from Tokyo

FINISH: at Tokyo

DURATION: 10 days

PRICE: AUD \$9,360 per person

GROUP size: 8 people

SINGLE SUPP: AUD \$1,420 per person

REF: GCN-27

TOUR OVERVIEW

Sado Island is one of those places most travellers never hear about. Sitting off the Niigata coast in the Sea of Japan, just over two hours from Tokyo by shinkansen and a short ferry ride from Niigata Port, Sado is where the Japanese shogunate sent politicians, poets and scholars it wanted out of the way. Exiled intellectuals brought their arts with them. Later, in the 17th century, the discovery of gold turned Sado into one of the most important places in feudal Japan, funding the Tokugawa government for over 200 years.

That unusual history still shapes the island today. You'll find UNESCO-listed gold mine sites, outdoor Noh theatre performed by torchlight, ancient shrines, and taiko drumming traditions practised by some of the best ensembles in the world. The landscape is quiet and green, with rice terraces climbing the hills, fishing villages tucked into coves, and the sea never far away.

Pair Sado with the Niigata mainland, and you've got one of the richest cultural regions in Japan. Niigata Prefecture is the country's leading rice-producing area, which is why it's also home to some of Japan's finest sake and the famously sharp knives of Tsubame-Sanjo. The food is exceptional, the craftsmanship is world-class, and the pace of life is noticeably slower than in the big cities.

This 10-day small group tour of Japan is designed for the traveller who's already seen the headline acts and wants something deeper. We've kept it to a maximum of eight guests, which means we can visit workshops and villages that larger tours simply can't access. Our Director, Yuki, is travelling on this tour personally, bringing the local relationships and warmth that regular guests come back for.

It's ideal for senior travellers interested in culture, history, food and meaningful travel. You'll stay in a mix of traditional ryokan and comfortable Western-style hotels, travel by shinkansen, jetfoil ferry and private minivan, and be looked after from the moment you land in Tokyo to the moment you board your flight home.

*Accommodation will be as planned below or similar.

| DAY | PLAN | DETAILS | MEALS | ACCOMODATION |
|-----|-----------------------------------|--|----------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | Airport meet and greet on arrival | Welcome to Japan. Your Journey to the East guide will meet you at the airport and get you to your Tokyo hotel by airport bus or train, so you can arrive and settle in without the stress. | No meals | Hamacho Hotel [Family Room - Twin] |

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|-----|--|--|--------------------------|---|
| | | There are no group activities today. This tour focuses on the regional gems of Niigata and Sado Island rather than the capital, so if it's your first visit to Japan, we'd strongly recommend arriving a day or two early to explore Tokyo. We're happy to arrange extra nights at the tour hotel if you'd like. Just ask. | | |
| 2 | Transfer to Niigata and guided tour of Tokamachi | <p>After meeting your guide in the hotel lobby, you'll board the shinkansen and cross Honshu to Niigata on the Sea of Japan coast. It's a smooth, spacious ride with countryside views, one of the most enjoyable ways to travel in Japan.</p> <p>Niigata Prefecture is Japan's rice bowl, and that abundance of rice has shaped everything else here: the sake, the textile traditions, and the knife and metalwork industries you'll see later in the week. This morning, you'll visit a family-run textile workshop that's been producing local fabrics for nearly a century, followed by an introduction to Niigata sake making.</p> <p>By evening, you're at a traditional onsen ryokan in the Tokamachi countryside. Dinner showcases Niigata's prized rice, then it's into the hot spring baths and onto a futon on tatami mats. Proper Japanese country hospitality.</p> | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | Hinano-yado Chitose [Japanese style room with private bathroom] |
| 3 | Rural Walking and Country Cooking | <p>A guided walk through Niigata's terraced rice paddies this morning. These landscapes are disappearing across Japan as young people move to the cities, and the walking fees directly support the villages working to preserve them. The paths are sealed, gentle and easy to manage.</p> <p>Next, a hands-on cooking session with local women in the village. You'll make a simple home-style meal using seasonal vegetables, with a focus on the food-preservation techniques that kept families fed through Niigata's brutal winters. It's a warm, relaxed couple of hours and probably one of the best cultural exchanges on the tour.</p> <p>In the afternoon, you'll visit Nishikigoi no Sato, a peaceful garden dedicated to the ornamental koi for which Niigata is famous. Then on to Nagaoka for the night.</p> | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | Hotel New Otani Nagaoka [Standard Twin/Double] |

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|-----|---|--|--------------------------|---|
| 4 | Guided tour of Yahiko Shrine and Tsubame-Sanjo | <p>Start at Yahiko Shrine, one of Niigata's most important Shinto sites, set in a quiet forest at the foot of Mount Yahiko. The upper garden gives you sweeping views over the Niigata Plain and the Sea of Japan.</p> <p>The rest of the day belongs to Tsubame-Sanjo, the town that puts Japanese knives in the kitchens of most serious chefs around the world. You'll visit a handful of working factories and watch the craftsmanship up close. It's loud, hot, precise work, and genuinely impressive.</p> <p>Late afternoon, you'll arrive in Niigata City for a two-night stay. The historic Bandai Bridge at sunset is worth an evening stroll.</p> <p>Niigata has a lively nightlife developed by the wealthy farmers and craft people over the centuries. Tonight you will enjoy bar hopping in the old entertainment area.</p> | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | The Hotel Italiaken [Executive Twin/Double] |
| 5 | Guided tour of Niigata City and the Geisha Dinner | <p>Morning at the Northern Culture Museum, once the estate of the Ito family, eight generations of one of Niigata's largest landowning dynasties. The gardens and the old house tell you more about regional Japanese social history than most textbooks.</p> <p>Then to Ponshukan, Niigata's famous sake tasting hall. The walls are lined with sake boxes from every brewery in the prefecture, and you get to work your way through the ones that catch your eye.</p> <p>Tonight is one of the tour's most memorable evenings: a private geisha dinner. Local geisha perform traditional music and dance while you enjoy a refined Japanese meal. Intimate, rare, and exactly the kind of experience you can't book off a website.</p> | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | The Hotel Italiaken [Executive Twin/Double] |
| 6 | Transfer to and guided tour of Sado Island | <p>This is the day the tour properly changes gear. A jetfoil ferry gets you from Niigata to Sado in about an hour, and suddenly you're somewhere that feels like a different country.</p> <p>Your first stop is the Sado Gold Mine Information Centre, which sets up the story of the island's mining era nicely. Then out to the mine sites themselves, including the Kitazawa Flotation Plant, an extraordinary ruin of industrial Japan that looks half like a temple complex and half like a lost city.</p> <p>Check in late afternoon to a cliff-top hotel with panoramic Sea of Japan views. After dinner, the real highlight: Takigi Noh, Noh theatre performed outdoors by torchlight. It's been part of Japanese spiritual life for over a thousand years, and watching it on Sado, where the Noh tradition was strengthened by exiled artists, is a genuinely moving experience.</p> | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | Hotel Azuma [Oceanview Garden Twin] |

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| 7 | Guided tour of Sado Island - Tub Boats, Shukunegi and Taiko | <p>This morning, you'll ride a tarai bune, a washtub boat handmade from Sado cedar and bamboo that used to be the working vessel of Ogi Peninsula fisherwomen. It's a gentle ride, more curious than thrilling, and gives you a genuine feel for how coastal life worked here.</p> <p>Next, a guided walk through Shukunegi, a village of wooden houses built from old ship planks, tucked into a cove at the back of the Ogi coast. It prospered in the 17th century thanks to Sado's gold shipments, and it's now protected as a National Important Preservation Area. You could easily spend an afternoon here taking photos.</p> <p>In the afternoon, a taiko drumming workshop. Sado is home to Kodo, one of the most famous taiko ensembles in the world, and the session is a hands-on, informal introduction. Not a performance. You play.</p> <p>Dinner at a local restaurant tonight.</p> | Breakfast, Dinner | Hotel Azuma [Oceanview Garden Twin] |
| 8 | Guided tour of Aikawa and return to Niigata | <p>A guided morning walk through the Aikawa historic district, where Sado's miners, merchants and government officials lived during the island's gold rush. The remains of the Sado Magistrate's Office give you the official side of the story.</p> <p>After a relaxed lunch, farewell to Sado Island and back to Niigata City by jetfoil.</p> <p>The evening is yours. Niigata City is a serious food town, so you'll have plenty of options for dinner at your own leisure.</p> | Breakfast | The Hotel Italiaken [Executive Twin/Double] |
| 9 | Guided tour of Murakami | <p>Travel north to Murakami City for the final full day. Murakami is famous for two things: air-dried salmon and green tea.</p> <p>The salmon tradition goes back centuries. Walk the old main street, and you'll see fish hanging from shop ceilings, slowly curing in the winter wind. The flavour is remarkable. Deeply umami, concentrated, nothing like the fresh salmon most of us are used to.</p> <p>Murakami is also one of the northernmost green tea producing areas in Japan, with a 400 year history. The tea is mellow and low in astringency, which makes sense when you taste it. You'll try it paired with a traditional Japanese sweet at a local tea shop.</p> <p>The last night of the tour will be spent at an old onsen town of Tsukioka Onsen. Enjoy the guided stroll checking out local crafts and delicacies. The day finishes at a sublime onsen ryokan. Soak, eat well, and let the tour's flavours, landscapes and moments settle in.</p> | Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner | Tsukioka Onsen Mashu [Twin Room] |

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|-----|---------------------------|--|-----------|--------------|
| 10 | Transfer to Tokyo | <p>Traditional Japanese breakfast, then transfer to Niigata Station for the Shinkansen to Tokyo. The tour finishes at Tokyo Station, and we'll help you with onward connections, whether that's straight to the airport or on to another part of Japan.</p> <p>If you'd like to extend your stay, our team can put together a private post-tour itinerary tailored to what you want to see next.</p> | Breakfast | |
| | Inclusions for Group Tour | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 9 nights' accommodation (including traditional Japanese inns) ■ All breakfasts, 6 lunches and 7 dinners ■ Airport meet & greet on arrival ■ Hotel transfer by public transport on arrival ■ All local transport (train and private minivans) ■ Airport transfer from Tokyo Station by public transport on departure ■ Expert English-speaking tour guides (locally licensed) ■ Cultural activities and entry fees included in the itinerary ■ Luggage transfers (1 piece per person) | | |
| | Exclusions for Group Tour | <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 ■ Transport during free time ■ Personal expenses (laundry, coin-locker, internet, telephone etc.) ■ Visa (if required) | | |