

BASIC TOUR OUTLINE

2026 AUTUMN TOUR OF NORTHERN JAPAN (SIGNATURE)

START: (Refer to website for date) from Tokyo

FINISH: at Tokyo

DURATION: 11 days

PRICE: AUD \$9,610 per person

GROUP size: 8 people

SINGLE SUPP: AUD \$1,250 per person

REF: GAN-26

TOUR OVERVIEW

11-Day 2026 Autumn Tour of Northern Japan: A Journey Through Tohoku's Timeless Beauty

Experience the heart of rural Japan on this 12-day small-group journey through Tohoku, the unspoiled northern region of Honshu, at the height of autumn's fiery splendour. Specially timed for peak foliage, this itinerary begins in Tokyo and weaves through the region's most stunning and culturally rich destinations, including Nikko, Oirase Gorge, Lake Towada, Kakunodate, Lake Tazawa, Hiraizumi, Naruko Gorge, and Matsushima.

Tohoku's centuries of relative isolation have preserved its samurai-era towns, folk traditions, and vast natural landscapes. Along the way, you'll stay in handpicked onsen towns, savour local cuisine and sake, and enjoy warm encounters with the famously hospitable people of the region.

Perfect for nature lovers, culture seekers, and those wishing to step off the tourist trail, this tour offers an authentic, slower-paced Japan - ideal for both first-time visitors wanting depth and variety, and seasoned travellers eager to explore the road less travelled.

*Accommodation will be as planned below or similar.

DAY	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
1	Airport meet and greet on arrival	<p>Upon arrival at Narita or Haneda Airport, you will be warmly greeted by your Journey to the East guide, who will assist you with the smooth transfer to your hotel in Tokyo. There are no scheduled group activities today, allowing you to settle in and unwind after your flight.</p> <p>Your accommodation is set in the culturally rich neighbourhood of Asakusa, home to Tokyo's oldest temple, Sensoji. Whether you prefer to rest or take a gentle stroll through this atmospheric district, the day is yours to ease into the rhythm of Japan at your own pace.</p> <p>Many of our guests opt to arrive a day or two early, allowing time to adjust to the new time zone and enjoy a more leisurely start to their journey. For first-time visitors, an extended stay in Tokyo offers a wonderful introduction to Japan's vibrant capital, with its harmonious blend of tradition and modernity. We would be delighted to assist with additional nights in the same hotel room, subject to availability.</p>	No meals	The Gate Hotel Kaminarimon [Essential Hollywood Twin/Double]

DAY	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
		Tomorrow, your off-the-beaten-path cultural exploration of Northern Japan begins in earnest.		
2	Transfer to and guided tour of Nikko	<p>Leaving the bustle of Tokyo behind, you journey by express train to the forested mountains of Nikko, a UNESCO World Heritage-listed cultural and spiritual sanctuary. Once a remote Buddhist hermitage, Nikko flourished in the 17th century when chosen as the resting place of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the powerful shogun who unified Japan.</p> <p>Walk beneath towering centuries-old cedar trees to reach the ornate Toshogu Shrine, a masterpiece of craftsmanship surrounded by deep autumn hues and sacred stillness. You'll have time to absorb the atmosphere and explore the intricate shrine buildings set within the forest.</p> <p>Later, enjoy a breathtaking gondola ride at Akechidaira, gliding above a valley ablaze with seasonal colour.</p> <p>Tonight, relax at a lakeside onsen hotel on the tranquil shore of Lake Chuzenji, surrounded by brilliant autumn foliage. As you soak in the mineral-rich hot springs, your guide will introduce the ritual and etiquette of Japanese bathing - an essential, soul-soothing part of rural life in Japan.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Chuzenji Kanaya Hotel [Standard Twin]
3	Guided tour of Nikko	<p>Today, venture deeper into the heart of Nikko National Park - one of Japan's most celebrated autumn destinations. Travelling through Oku-Nikko (Inner Nikko), you'll witness nature at its most vibrant as fiery maple and golden beech trees paint the landscapes in rich seasonal hues.</p> <p>Stops include the wide-open beauty of Senjogahara Marsh, serene Lake Chuzenji reflecting the surrounding colours, and the spectacular 100-metre-high Kegon Falls - an iconic cascade formed by ancient volcanic activity. Each site offers a unique view of Nikko's stunning autumn transformation.</p> <p>Return to your lakeside accommodation for a second night, with more time to enjoy the peaceful rhythm of the forest and lake in peak autumn splendour.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Chuzenji Kanaya Hotel [Standard Twin]
4	Transfer to and guided tour of Oirase	<p>Today, a bullet train ride takes you deep into the far north of Honshu to Aomori Prefecture - a rugged, remote region shaped by harsh winters and centuries of isolation. This geographic solitude has preserved its distinct folk traditions, regional cuisine, and unique architecture.</p> <p>You'll stay in the scenic Oirase and Lake Towada area, one of Japan's most breathtaking autumn landscapes. Cascading mountain streams, fiery foliage, and peaceful lake views make this a paradise for nature lovers, walkers, and photographers alike.</p> <p>Your accommodation offers another opportunity to unwind in an onsen bath and savour a beautifully presented kaiseki dinner showcasing the flavours of northern Japan.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Towada Hotel [Standard Twin]

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5	Guided tour of Oirase and Lake Towada	<p>Today is dedicated to the natural splendour of the Oirase River and Lake Towada, two of Japan's most celebrated autumn landscapes.</p> <p>Enjoy a leisurely walk along the crystal-clear Oirase River, where a gentle 7 km (or shorter, if you prefer) riverside trail winds past mossy rocks, cascading waterfalls, and vibrant autumn foliage - perfect for photographers and nature lovers.</p> <p>Later, take a scenic cruise across Lake Towada, its calm waters mirroring the fiery reds, oranges, and golds of surrounding forested slopes - an unforgettable panorama of seasonal colour.</p> <p>You'll stay one more night in the peaceful Oirase area. Dinner is served at your hotel, offering a relaxing end to a richly rewarding day.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Towada Hotel [Standard Twin]
6	Transfer to and guided tour of Kakunodate	<p>This morning, travel south by private minibus through the heart of rural Tohoku, stopping at two scenic highlights en route to your next destination, Kakunodate. First, visit Lake Tazawa, Japan's deepest lake, known not only for its striking sapphire-blue waters but also for the haunting legends of spirits and mythical beings that surround it - stories your guide will bring to life. Continue to Dakigaeri Gorge, where you'll enjoy a gentle walk through a kaleidoscope of autumn leaves and turquoise river views in one of the region's most celebrated fall foliage spots.</p> <p>In the late afternoon, arrive in Kakunodate, often referred to as "Tohoku's Little Kyoto." Once a key northern stronghold during the feudal era, the town still preserves its elegant samurai traditions, from finely crafted cherry bark ware to pottery and other heritage crafts. The historic samurai and merchant districts remain beautifully intact, offering a glimpse into 17th-century Japan.</p> <p>Settle into your boutique accommodation, where Tohoku's signature warmth and hospitality await. For dinner, savour Kiritanpo nabe, a comforting local hot-pot dish that perfectly captures the flavours of the region.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Tamachi Bukeyashiki Hotel [Western style twin room]

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7	Guided tour of Kakunodate	<p>This morning, delve into the historical charm of Kakunodate with your guide. Your exploration includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A visit to one or more beautifully preserved samurai residences, offering a glimpse into the daily life of mid to lower-class samurai during the Edo period, - The Kakunodate Craft Museum, showcasing the region's refined traditional crafts, and - Local specialty shops feature handmade goods and regional delicacies like miso and soy sauce. <p>In the afternoon, enjoy a few hours of free time to wander the atmospheric streets of the old samurai district at your own pace. Lined with elegant wooden buildings and artisan boutiques, Kakunodate is especially striking in autumn, when its iconic cherry trees blaze with colour.</p> <p>For those seeking a deeper cultural experience, there's an optional opportunity to join a quiet Zen meditation session at a local Buddhist temple.</p> <p>Stay a second night in Kakunodate, with a warming shabu-shabu hotpot dinner served at your hotel.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Tamachi Bukeyashiki Hotel [Western style twin room]
8	Guided tour of Hiraizumi and Naruko	<p>This morning, travel by private minibus into the heart of the Tohoku region, where timeless culture and natural splendour await.</p> <p>Your first stop is the UNESCO World Heritage-listed Chusonji Temple in Hiraizumi, founded in 850. The highlight is the magnificent Konjikidō (Golden Hall), lavishly covered in gold leaf - a breathtaking symbol of the region's former wealth and deep Buddhist heritage.</p> <p>In the afternoon, continue to the tranquil onsen town of Naruko. Set among forested mountains, it's famous for Naruko Gorge - a dramatic 100-metre-deep ravine ablaze with autumn colours at this time of year. You'll take in this unforgettable scenery on a relaxed walk.</p> <p>Tonight, unwind at a traditional onsen hotel. Sleep in a Japanese-style room with futon bedding and soak in the rejuvenating mineral springs. Before dinner, enjoy a hands-on cultural experience: paint your own Naruko-style kokeshi doll, a cherished folk craft of the region.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Naruko Hotel [Japanese style room with futon beddings]

DAY	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
9	Transfer to and guided tour of Shiogama and Matsushima	<p>Today's journey takes you along the scenic coast to the charming city of Shiogama, a hidden gem often overlooked in favour of its more famous neighbour, Matsushima. With far fewer tourists, Shiogama offers an authentic and peaceful glimpse into coastal life in Japan.</p> <p>Begin with a visit to Shiogama Shrine, an impressive Shinto complex revered for centuries and recognised as an Important Cultural Property. Next, enjoy a sake tasting at a local boutique brewery, where you'll sample refined brews crafted using traditional methods. For lunch, indulge in some of Japan's finest sushi - Shiogama is one of the country's busiest fresh tuna ports and is renowned for its exceptional seafood.</p> <p>In the afternoon, board a scenic cruise through Matsushima Bay, dotted with over 250 pine-clad islets shaped by wind and sea over time. It's considered one of Japan's three most celebrated scenic views.</p> <p>After arriving by boat, enjoy a peaceful break with frothy matcha green tea and seasonal sweets at Kanrantei, a historic teahouse overlooking the bay.</p> <p>Tonight's accommodation features an open-air onsen bath with sweeping views of Matsushima Bay. Before dinner, take the opportunity to visit Entsu-in, a serene 17th-century Zen temple whose gardens glow in vibrant autumn colours, beautifully illuminated at night.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Matsushima Taikanso [Japanese style room with Western beds]
10	Guided tour of Matsushima	<p>This morning, on the last day of the tour, enjoy a guided cultural walk through Matsushima, one of Japan's most scenic coastal towns. Visit the atmospheric Zuiganji Temple, one of Tohoku's most revered Zen temples, originally founded in 828 and later rebuilt by the powerful feudal lord Date Masamune. Then, cross the striking vermilion bridge to Godaido, a small island shrine and Important Cultural Property, offering sweeping views across the bay.</p> <p>Your guide will share stories of Matsushima's rich history, from the legacy of Date Masamune to the travels of the famed haiku poet Matsuo Basho, who found deep inspiration in these landscapes during his 17th-century journey.</p> <p>This afternoon is yours to explore at your own pace. Wander the smaller islets linked by footbridges - quiet, wooded places once used for pilgrimage, dotted with stone monuments and meditation caves.</p> <p>Tonight you will gather for the one last time for a final farewell dinner with your fellow travellers - a chance to reflect on your unforgettable autumn journey through northern Japan.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Matsushima Taikanso [Japanese style room with Western beds]

DAY	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
11	Transfer to Tokyo and 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 Autumn Tour of Northern Japan - a journey filled with cultural 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><i>If you plan to depart today, please ensure your flight is departing after 15:00 to allow sufficient travel time from Matsushima.</i></p>	Breakfast	Mitsui Garden Hotel Kyobashi [Standard Queen]
	Inclusions for Group Tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 10 nights' accommodation (including traditional Japanese inns) ■ All breakfasts ■ 2 lunches and 9 dinners ■ Airport meet & greet ■ Hotel transfer by public transport on arrival ■ Airport transfer by public transport on departure ■ All local transport (train, bus and private minivans) ■ Expert English speaking tour guides (locally licensed) ■ Cultural activities and entry fees included in itinerary ■ Luggage transfers (1 piece per person) 		Mitsui Garden Hotel Kyobashi [Standard Queen]
	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) 		Mitsui Garden Hotel Kyobashi [Standard Queen]