

BASIC TOUR OUTLINE

2027 ARTISAN TOUR OF KYUSHU JAPAN (SIGNATURE)

START: (Refer to website for date) from Fukuoka

FINISH: at Fukuoka

DURATION: 13 days

PRICE: AUD \$11,500 per person

GROUP size: 6 people

SINGLE SUPP: AUD \$1,480 per person

REF: GCK-27

TOUR OVERVIEW

This specially designed 2027 Artisan Tour of Kyushu takes you on a 13-day journey across Japan's southern island to explore its deep craft traditions. As a key entry point for ideas and goods from China and Korea, Kyushu has developed unique Japanese craftsmanship over time. Spring's warm, temperate weather makes it an ideal time to visit.

The tour connects you with Japan's master craftspeople, offering hands-on sessions where artisans demonstrate their skills in private workshops. You will visit ancient silk weavers, trace the origins of Japanese porcelain, stroll through old pottery towns, witness master swordsmiths at work, see 1,000-year-old timbers transformed into exquisite pieces without nails, and prized bamboo woven into delicate basketry. The tour also includes experiencing Kyushu's hot springs, celebrated seafood and wagyu beef, premium-grade teas, and heritage accommodation.

Curated for an intimate group of 6 guests, this boutique tour provides private access to craftspeople, making it perfect for those eager to learn about Japan's arts and crafts while enjoying the scenic beauty of Kyushu. With its rich traditions, history, warm hospitality, and leisurely pace of life, Kyushu offers an unforgettable cultural experience.

*Accommodation will be as planned below or similar.

DAY	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
1	Airport meet and greet on arrival	<p>On arrival in Fukuoka for your 2027 Artisan Tour of Kyushu, Japan, you'll be met by a Journey to the East staff member at Fukuoka's airport or main railway station and escorted to your hotel.</p> <p>Fukuoka is readily accessible both by rail and air from other places in Japan, but please let us know if you need assistance arranging a connection between your arrival port in Japan and Fukuoka, or if you'd like to book an additional night's accommodation at our Fukuoka hotel before the tour starts.</p>	No meals	The Gate Hotel Fukuoka [Essential Twin]

DAY	PLAN	DETAILS	MEALS	ACCOMODATION
2	Guided tour of Fukuoka	<p>On the first day of the 2027 Artisan Tour of Kyushu, Japan, you will visit a traditional woodcraft maker. "Hakata Magemono" is made by shaving cedar and cypress planks, bending them with heat, and sewing them together with cherry bark. Because no metal is used, it is very light and lasts for decades. You will visit a workshop of Hataka Magemono, which has been running for more than 400 years, maintaining the tradition and responding to the needs of new generations.</p> <p>The next visit is about the fascinating world of Japanese textiles, in particular "Hataka-ori" silk kimono fabric. Silk textiles from China were first introduced to Kyushu 800 years ago and evolved into a distinct style known as "Hakata-ori". Highly regarded, Hakata-ori was used as a tribute gift for Tokyo's ruling elite during feudal times and remains popular today for its historical legacy, ribbed texture and lustrous finish. Today you will visit one of Japan's oldest weaving companies, and have the chance to observe master craftsmen at work behind hand-operated and mechanised looms, also learn about design motifs and colours that trace back to the Song Dynasty of China (960 - 1279).</p> <p>After ramen lunch, which Hakata is famous for, you are taken on a guided tour of the historic streets of Hakata's old town, learning more about its intriguing past and textile traditions. You stroll past machiya townhouses, once busy weaving hubs, and wander the grounds of ancient temples and shrines.</p> <p>Over a welcome dinner tonight, you have your first chance to try Kyushu's celebrated seafood, freshly caught from local waters!</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	The Gate Hotel Fukuoka [Essential Twin]

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3	Guided tour of Dazaifu	<p>The former Akizuki Domain, located on the outskirts of the greater Fukuoka area, was once an important centre of traditional Japanese papermaking. This morning, you will meet a fourth-generation papermaker who will share the history and techniques of Akizuki Washi (handmade Japanese paper). You will then take part in a hands-on workshop, creating your own unique sheet of washi using traditional methods.</p> <p>In the afternoon, you travel to the historic town of Dazaifu, located on the edge of Fukuoka city. Dazaifu is best known for the magnificent Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine, founded in 905 and dedicated to one of Japan's most revered scholars. A guided visit will introduce you to the shrine's history, architecture, and spiritual significance.</p> <p>Adjacent to the shrine is the Kyushu National Museum, one of Japan's four national museums. This striking contemporary museum provides an excellent overview of Japanese history from prehistoric times to the modern era, with a strong focus on Japan's long-standing cultural connections with Asia. Dazaifu itself once served as the administrative centre for the entire Kyushu region and prospered as Japan's principal gateway for international trade through the nearby port of Fukuoka.</p> <p>Returning to central Fukuoka by local train, you will have the evening free to enjoy the lively atmosphere, dining options, and street life of this vibrant city.</p>	Breakfast	The Gate Hotel Fukuoka [Essential Twin]
4	Guided tour of Karatsu	<p>Our focus for the next two days is on ceramic traditions. While the foundation of Japan's ceramics originated in China and Korea, Kyushu artisans adapted and refined ceramic-making techniques over hundreds of years to develop a distinctly Japanese aesthetic. This not only influenced the subsequent development of ceramics in other parts of Japan but also in Europe, where early traders found a ready market among the European nobility. Today, Kyushu ceramics still rank among the world's best.</p> <p>This morning, you start your exploration with a visit to a traditional pottery studio, which has remained in the same family for 400 years and is currently headed up by the 14th-generation owner. You tour the studio's beautiful memorial museum to see its exquisite collection of old Karatsu-ware, celebrated for its simple elegance and natural tones.</p> <p>Guided by expert artisans, you'll also participate in a dedicated workshop to create a piece of Karatsu-ware in the afternoon. Tonight's accommodation is an exquisite ryokan in a delightful garden setting. The ryokan displays the works of Karatsu potters, including an onsite gallery. Enjoy a delicious multi-course kaiseki banquet, served of course on superb Karatsu-ware!</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Yoyokaku [Japanese style room]

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5	Guided tour of Imari and Arita	<p>This morning, you head to the pottery towns of Imari and Arita, each with its own unique styling.</p> <p>Your first stop is the fascinating village of Okawachiyama, nestled between steep mountains and known as the “Village of Secret Kilns”. The village was purposely set up in the 17th century by the local Nabeshima clan to exclusively produce porcelain for Japan’s imperial court and ruling elite. Its remote location allowed artisans to refine production techniques, which they zealously guarded and protected. Today, Imari Nabeshima-ware is thankfully available to all, while its high-end status and exquisite quality remain unchanged.</p> <p>You then move to the town of Arita, the birthplace of Japanese porcelain. Kaolin, the essential material used in porcelain clay, was discovered in Arita’s hills in the early 17th century. You tour the original quarry before visiting the superb Kyushu Ceramic Museum. With over 30,000 exhibits, the museum provides a comprehensive introduction to its ceramic arts. Afterwards, you visit some of Arita’s leading studios and galleries (some featuring the celebrated works of “Living National Treasures”) and soak up the historic atmosphere.</p> <p>After a full, inspiring day, you spend the night at the nearby spa town of Ureshino. The mineral hot springs at this onsen are known for their clear waters and smooth, silky feel on the skin.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Hamilton Ureshino [Room with western bed]
6	Guided tour of Saga	<p>Taking a short break from traditional crafts, today you will visit Yutoku Inari Shrine, renowned for its striking vermilion-lacquered foundation. Founded in 1687, this magnificent shrine is visually impressive and popular with both locals and travellers.</p> <p>Kashima, in Saga Prefecture, is well known for its high-quality sake production, with several award-winning breweries. This morning, you will stroll along <i>Shuzo (sake brewery) Street</i> and learn about the sake-making process.</p> <p>In the afternoon, relax in the sublime garden of Keishu-en, which blends traditional Japanese aesthetics with the surrounding natural landscape. Covering approximately 9,917 square metres, the garden was created in 1979 by renowned landscape gardener Kinsaku Nakane. It is ingeniously designed to incorporate the surrounding environment as “borrowed scenery.” In spring, azaleas burst into spectacular waves of colour.</p> <p>You will stay in Saga tonight and enjoy a dinner featuring highly prized Saga-brand wagyu beef.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	Garden Terrace Saga [Deluxe Twin Room]

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7	Guided Tour of Okawa	<p>Today, you continue your exploration of Kyushu's rich 'maker' culture with a focus on its woodcrafting traditions at the city of Okawa. For over 450 years, Okawa has been a woodworking hub and Japan's largest producer of furniture, celebrated nationwide for its sophisticated craftsmanship and quality. It's still home to master carpenters and boutique makers who attract worldwide attention for blending age-old techniques with leading-edge design.</p> <p>You visit a unique company that specialises in crafting pieces from the rare and beautiful Yakusugi cedar, found on Kyushu's World Heritage island of Yakushima. While the felling of these precious 1,000-year-old trees ended years ago, this Okawa company was one of the few woodworkers permitted to purchase felled or buried stumps and limbs.</p> <p>"Kumiko" is a style of decorated wooden panelling which originated in Kyushu, and here in Okawa, you visit a company specialising in this beautiful joinery technique. Finely shaved pieces of wood are assembled in elaborate geometric patterns without the use of nails. The panels typically adorn traditional interiors and serve the dual purpose of allowing air flow and light distribution, while elegantly creating a sense of privacy and separation.</p> <p>You will stay one more night in Saga and have a free evening tonight.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch	Garden Terrace Saga [Deluxe Twin Room]

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8	Guided tour of Yame	<p>Admirers of Japanese indigo will relish the opportunity to spend the morning with a 5th-generation indigo artisan.</p> <p>“Japan blue” is the quintessential colour of Japan. Its deep intensity comes from an elaborate production process evolved since ancient times. After repeated stages of fermenting and drying the leaves of the Japanese indigo plant, hand-woven yarn is dyed multiple times in large vats of indigo liquid before being woven. Today, you’ll learn about the traditional labour-intensive approach still used by this studio, as well as more modern-day methods. You’ll also be introduced to “Kurume kasuri” weaving traditions unique to this part of Kyushu.</p> <p>In the afternoon, you stop at a master maker of traditional buckets and ladles constructed from wood and bamboo without any nails. The skills required to bend and shape the wood to best accent the grain while simultaneously creating a beautiful, water-tight product are exemplary.</p> <p>In between, you drive through the rolling green hills of Yame’s tea plantations and speak to a tea farmer.</p> <p>For a unique accommodation experience over the next two nights, you will stay in a renovated former sake brewery in the preservation district. A boutique hotel group has been working with local communities to sensitively renovate old daimyo residences and merchant houses. Delight in its stylish 100-year-old timber interiors and soak in a bath infused with Yame tea leaves!</p>	Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner	NIPPONIA HOTEL Yame Fukushima [Renovated Heritage Room with Western beds]

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9	Guided tour of Yame	<p>This morning, you have another unique opportunity to learn about Kyushu incense. The way of the fragrance (“kodo”) is one of Japan’s three classical arts alongside the tea ceremony (“sado”) and ikebana (“kado”). For centuries, the Japanese have used scented woods to purify and to focus and calm the mind, well before mindfulness and aromatherapy arrived in our modern lives!</p> <p>You visit an incense workshop where the custom of creating pure cedar wood powder for incense sticks continues. Using sustainable cedar wood sourced from local forests, cedar leaves are dried and ground into fine powder in an old watermill, a process entirely powered by water. Yame once supported some 40 mills, which supplied high-quality cedar powders to incense makers across Japan.</p> <p>Back at the Yame town centre, you continue your exploration of Yame’s traditional crafts through a guided walking tour of the old town. Designated an Important Preservation District, the area features rows of white-walled townhouses with wooden latticed shopfronts. Your first stop on the walking tour is the Yame Traditional Crafts Museum. You will also stop at Kyushu’s oldest tea merchant and relax over a cup of Yame “gyokuro” tea (the highest grade of Japanese tea) in a nostalgic teahouse. Yame arrows are another craft produced in the area using authentic materials. With a combination of traditional techniques and cutting-edge modern technology, they create arrows used in Kyudo (Japanese archery) and also decorative arrows, such as for celebrating children’s growth.</p> <p>In the evening, enjoy some free time in the relaxed ambience of your heritage accommodation or stroll the old town and stop by a local izakaya.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch	NIPPONIA HOTEL Yame Fukushima [Renovated Heritage Room with Western beds]

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10	Guided tour of Mt Aso and Taketa	<p>You leave Yame this morning and drive through one of Kyushu's most picturesque landscapes - the volcanic caldera of the Aso-Kuju National Park in central Kyushu. While in the Aso highlands, you'll stop to admire the unique scenery of the National Park from some vantage points.</p> <p>In many ways, the Japanese sword sits at the pinnacle of Japanese craftsmanship, and today, you find out why. In rural Oita Prefecture, you attend a private session with a master swordsmith to see how a lump of steel ingot is forged into a form which, after months of hammering, polishing and sharpening, eventually transforms into a gleaming, finely curved blade. Not only highly trained technicians, but these craftsmen also hold deep cultural knowledge about the symbolism and evolution of the Japanese sword over some 1,000 years. In this experience, you'll engage firsthand with this amiable swordsmith and come away with a renewed reverence for the art form.</p> <p>This evening, you will reach your last destination of this tour, Beppu, one of the most well-known onsen towns of Japan. Your accommodation tonight is a local hotel overlooking Beppu Bay. Take time for yourself to relax and rejuvenate in the hotel's onsen baths with great ocean views.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	Rex Hotel Beppu [Japanese & Western style room]

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11	Guided tour of Beppu	<p>Bamboo crafts have been a traditional craft in Beppu since ancient times. Mythology suggests that a visiting Japanese emperor was first impressed by the quality of the local “madake” bamboo some 2,000 years ago, and since then, the industry developed, flourishing during the boom times of the late 19th century. Today, the Beppu bamboo basketry industry is officially designated a traditional heritage craft.</p> <p>Today, you visit the Traditional Bamboo Craft Centre to trace this history and admire the detail and elegance of a range of fine bamboo-ware and basketry. You then participate in a bamboo-weaving workshop to create a small piece yourselves. Moving on to an intriguing bamboo factory, to watch up close as workers process bamboo for use by craftspeople in the bamboo and basketry trades. The factory sources locally grown bamboo species (some up to 10 to 15 metres high), processing around 200 canes a day using old sustainable techniques. You’ll see different bamboo species boiled in a soda formula, or fired and dried in the sun, before the natural surface oil is wiped off and the bamboo polished for slicing into different lengths and forms.</p> <p>For lunch, you have “jigoku mushi” (literally, hell-steaming), Beppu’s most famous local specialty dish. This is a culinary style, passed down over centuries, which uses the natural power of the hot springs. Freshly harvested vegetables, seafood and meat are gathered in traditional bamboo baskets and steam-cooked above geothermal outlets. Not only delicious, but it's also incredibly healthy as the ingredients absorb the natural minerals contained in the steam, without the use of any cooking oil. With no gas or electricity, it's 100% ecologically sustainable as well! After lunch, you will go on to experience the full geothermal force of Beppu with a walking tour of the famous “Hells of Beppu”. These are naturally formed bubbling hot pools with temperatures exceeding 100 degrees Celsius, each with a different natural mineral make-up and smell.</p> <p>The remainder of the day is free time to further explore Beppu’s unique onsen culture. Consider some onsen therapy by covering yourself in hot sand on the beach (another traditional practice) or an herb-infused bath.</p>	Breakfast, Lunch	Rex Hotel Beppu [Japanese & Western style room]
12	Transfer to Fukuoka	<p>Relax at your onsen hotel for the final moments before heading back to Hakata by a modern express train.</p> <p>Back at Hakata, you will have free time until dinner. Your hotel is conveniently located for the final shopping and city walking. Let us know if you are interested in seeing or doing anything special on your final afternoon.</p> <p>This evening, you will gather for the last time to enjoy the Farewell Japan dinner.</p>	Breakfast, Dinner	The Gate Hotel Fukuoka [Essential Double/Hollywood Twin]

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13	Departure	<p>You check out of your hotel after breakfast, and your 2027 Artisan Tour of Kyushu, Japan, concludes.</p> <p>For travellers departing Japan from Tokyo, you can take a domestic flight from Fukuoka Airport to Haneda or Narita airports, or take the shinkansen from Hakata Station. Or if you'd like to linger in Kyushu or Japan a little longer, we would be delighted to help plan your personal post-tour extension. Please see our Model Extension Itineraries for inspiration.</p>	Breakfast	
	Inclusions for Group Tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 12 nights' accommodation (including traditional Japanese inns) ■ Meals as per the itinerary ■ Airport meet & greet on arrival ■ All local transport (train and private minivans) ■ Transfer from the hotel to Fukuoka Airport or Hakata Station at the end of the tour ■ Expert English-speaking tour guides (locally licensed) ■ Cultural activities and entry fees are included in the itinerary 		
	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) 		