

JAPAN AUTUMN TOUR 2009

OCTOBER 30 – NOVEMBER 13



SMALL-SCALE PERSONALIZED TOUR: MAX 10 PARTICIPANTS

TRADITIONAL JAPAN: HIMEJI CASTLE and KARATSU KUNCHI FESTIVAL

Imposing 'White Heron' castle and joyous celebrations at a small castle town

HISTORICAL JAPAN: HIROSHIMA and MIYAJIMA

The stark reality of war and the gentle ancient beauty of the 'floating shrine'

SPIRITUAL JAPAN: KIRISHIMA JINJA FIRE FESTIVAL

White-robed priests light fires to guide the gods back to earth

NATURAL JAPAN: TAKACHIHO GORGE

Extraordinary rock formations amid a blaze of autumn colours

Booking deadline: Friday May 25, 2009

Previous participants say:

"A huge THANK YOU for our wonderful trip.
Excellent in every way, especially for your competence and enjoyable company. We feel very privileged to have been included."

"Tour was superb: excellent background knowledge, organisation, and above helpful guidance from a friendly companion. Japan was beautiful, surprising, contradictory, different and its people always delightful."

\$3660 *

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*This price is land only and calculated on the basis of 9 participants. Rail pass and airfare not included. (Current prices Rail pass \$752, Jetstar ex-Melbourne \$976 return)

ITINERARY

FRIDAY OCTOBER 30

We depart on a morning flight arriving at New Kansai Airport Osaka in the evening
Accommodation: Nikko Kansai Airport Hotel

SATURDAY OCTOBER 31 AND SUNDAY NOVEMBER 1

In the morning we travel by shinkansen bullet train to Hiroshima where we will have the opportunity to visit the Peace Park, the Atomic Dome and the A-bomb casualty data centre.

The following day we take a short train ride and a quick ferry ride to Miyajima. Since ancient times, Miyajima, the island itself, has been worshipped as a god. This belief, passed down from generation to generation, has protected Itsukushima Shrine, many other shrines and temples as well as the island's unique culture, and its sacred nature. Renowned for being a world cultural heritage site today, Miyajima is an island where people and gods dwell together.

Accommodation: Japanese style room with breakfast



MONDAY NOVEMBER 2, TUESDAY NOVEMBER 3, WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 4

We travel by shinkansen bullet train to Kyushu: The most southern of Japan's 4 main islands and the crucible of Japanese culture, arts and spirituality.

We will stay 3 nights in the seaside town of Karatsu where the townsfolk will be celebrating the Autumn Festival Karatsu



Kunchi and the town echoes with the sound of drums, flutes, and shouts as huge Hikiyama Floats are pulled through the streets. Kyushu is famous for pottery.



On November 4 we visit the many potteries in Karatsu or take a day trip to the pottery town of Imari and the small village of Okawachiyama.

Accommodation: Seaside People's Lodge – Western style accommodation with breakfast

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 5 AND FRIDAY NOVEMBER 6

The next two nights we stay in Usuki. Usuki was prosperous under the rule of the Feudal Lord Sorin Otomo in the 16th century who built the Usuki Castle there. Many remains of those days are present in this city. Nioza, located to the southwest of the Usuki Castle, is a chic street lined with white walls, stone walls and a stone pavement called "Nioza Historical Street". Approximately 400 years ago, the Dutch ship Liefde drifted ashore at Sashiu in the northern part of Usuki, opening up a new age in Japanese diplomatic history. A group of Buddha figures carved out of the natural rock wall of a cliff, known as "Usuki



Sekibutsu", is located 4 km away from the downtown area. With more than 60 figures, it is of the largest collection of rock-carved Buddhas in Japan and is believed to have been carved during the 12th century and the 14th century, that is, in the latter half of the Heian Period(797-1192) or the Kamakura Period(1192-1333).



Accommodation: Japanese ryokan with breakfast and dinner

SATURDAY NOVEMBER 7, SUNDAY NOVEMBER 8, MONDAY NOVEMBER 9

Takachiho, a small mountain town situated in the center of Kyushu, is one of the most sacred places in Japan, where the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, descended from the High Plain of Heaven. Takachiho is full of fascination for tourists, such as the sea of clouds floating over mountain villages, Takachiho Gorge with its mystic atmosphere, simple and old-fashioned farm houses with chigi (ornamental crossbeams on the gable, mostly seen in a Shinto shrine) on the roofs and glorious mountains covered with crimson foliage.



At Takachiho-jinja Shrine in the evening, we can enjoy the Yokagura Dance, which has been handed down from generation to generation in this district. Kagura is traditional sacred music and dancing dedicated to the gods. The towering Chichibu cedars, estimated to be 800 years old, are splendid.

Accommodation: Japanese ryokan with breakfast and dinner

TUESDAY NOVEMBER 10 AND WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 11



We will spend two nights near the Shinto shrine Kirishima-jingu. In 1989, this shrine was deemed a cultural asset to the nation. Not only is it a large, beautiful shrine, but it also has a rich history. According to ancient texts, the first shrine was built in 1460, between Mt. Takachiho and Mt. Ohara, but was destroyed by a volcanic eruption. When it was rebuilt many years later, it was wiped out in the first year by a second eruption. For 250 years it existed peacefully in

another location, but in 1484 Lord Shimazutadamasa ordered it rebuilt in its current location. It was once again a target of volcanic eruption, but was rebuilt once again in 1715 and has remained there ever since.

On November 11th we will witness a fire festival to commemorate the descent of the god, Niniginomikoto, at the former ground of Kirishima-Jingu, Furumiyaato. During this festival, Shinto priests in white robes begin to pray when night falls. With taiko drums playing in the background, they set fire to holy firewood in order to help the gods find their way back to earth.



Accommodation: Japanese minshuku with breakfast and dinner

THURSDAY NOVEMBER 12

Today we leave Kyushu arriving in the castle town of Himeji at about 3 or 4pm. Himeji Castle, also called Shirasagijo (White Heron Castle) due to its white outer walls, is the best preserved castle in all of Japan. The castle is designated both as a national treasure and a UNESCO world heritage site. It is flanked by gardens in several different styles.

Accommodation: Japanese style room in Western style hotel with breakfast



FRIDAY NOVEMBER 13

We spend today visiting the castle and surrounding gardens. Those returning to Australia in the evening will catch the train to the airport at 4:54pm to board the 8:55pm flight. Those remaining in Japan may use the last day of their Japan Rail Pass to continue to their next destination.