

Japan Notes

for planned 10-12 day Trip August 2026

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1.1 Reference Material

<https://www.japan-guide.com/>



1.2 Holidays

1.2.1 Mountain Day: August 11

<https://travel.rakuten.com/contents/usa/en-us/guide/mountain-day/>

Mountain Day was formally established as a public holiday in 2014 after decades of growing cultural and civic enthusiasm for the country's many majestic peaks.

Known as Yama no Hi in Japanese, Mountain Day is celebrated annually on August 11 (except when the date falls on a Sunday, in which case it's shifted to August 12). As a relatively new holiday, there are not many formalized practices associated with it yet. However, Mountain Day is an opportune time for anyone to appreciate or pay respects to this magnificent topography in their own special way.

1.2.2 Oban – mid July Tokyo – mid August Elsewhere

The timing of Obon varies depending on the region. Most of Japan observes it in mid-August, typically from August 13 to 16. However, some areas – particularly around Tokyo – celebrate Obon a month earlier in mid-July.

1.3 Getting Around in Japan

1.3.1 Booking Major Hops Ahead

The best way to book Japanese train tickets depends on your route. Use the official [Smart EX](#) app or website for the **Tokaido, Sanyo, and Kyushu Shinkansen** (Tokyo to Kyoto/Osaka/Hakata). For all other lines, book in person at any major JR station using ticket machines or ticket offices (*Midori-no-madoguchi*) to avoid third-party fees. [\[1, 2\]](#)

The most efficient methods and their ideal use cases include:

1. Smart EX (Official - Highly Recommended)

Best for: Major high-speed routes (Tokyo → Kyoto → Osaka). [\[1, 2, 3\]](#)

- **Perks:** Free registration, zero service fees, and advance booking up to 90 days ahead.
- **Flexibility:** You can change your reservation for free up to 4 minutes before departure.
- **Convenience:** You can link your ticket directly to an IC card (like Suica, Pasma, or Icard) or simply scan the provided mobile QR code at the ticket gates. [\[1, 2, 3\]](#)

2. JR-WEST ONLINE TRAIN RESERVATION

Best for: The Hokuriku, Sanyo, and Sanin Shinkansen regions, as well as limited express trains. [\[1, 2\]](#)

- **Perks:** Allows you to reserve seats online and pick up physical tickets at JR West stations.
- **Convenience:** Great if you are traveling to more rural or specific northern destinations. [\[1, 2\]](#)
- **3. In-Person at a JR Station (The Default)**
- Best for: Smaller, regional lines, local commuter trains, and last-minute travel. [\[1, 2\]](#)
- **Process:** Use the English mode on multilingual ticket machines or visit a staffed ticket office (*Midori-no-madoguchi*).
- **Perks:** It is entirely fee-free.
- **Important:** During peak holiday periods or on high-demand lines, book a day or two in advance. [\[1, 2, 3, 4, 5\]](#)

4. Third-Party Vendors (e.g., Klook)

- Best for: Travelers needing packaged deals or those who want to pay using specific international payment methods. [\[1, 2\]](#)
- **Consideration:** They offer an English interface but generally add extra service fees for tickets you could purchase directly for free. [\[1\]](#)
- **Essential Tips**
- **Luggage:** If your bag exceeds 160cm (sum of length, width, and height), you **must** reserve an "oversized baggage seat" in advance.
- **Nozomi Trains:** During peak travel periods, Nozomi trains operate entirely with reserved seats—you cannot board without a pre-booked seat. [\[1, 2, 3, 4, 5\]](#)
- Could you let me know **where you are traveling from and to?** I can give you a **specific breakdown of the exact Shinkansen or express lines** you will need and the best platform to book them.

1.3.2 Traveling with Luggage

<https://global.jr-central.co.jp/en/info/oversized-baggage>

You can secure your baggage storage space before your trip with a reservation. You will be charged a baggage fee (1,000 yen, including tax) if you carry on oversized baggage without a reservation. Additionally, you will be required to store your baggage in an area designated by a crewmember.

1.3.3 Shipping Your Luggage

<https://www.luggage-express-service.com/?lang=en>

LUGGAGE EXPRESS is a same-day luggage delivery service that utilizes the Shinkansen (bullet train). Simply drop off your luggage at your hotel or station - and receive it at your Delivery Hotel. Travel smart with LUGGAGE EXPRESS.

LUGGAGE EXPRESS currently offers luggage Drop off (From Location) at stations and hotels in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka.

You can choose from two available time slots for receiving your luggage at your Delivery Hotel (To).

* When using hotels as Drop off Hotel (From) or Delivery Hotel (To), this service is exclusively available to guests who have an existing reservation at the hotel in question. You can select the eligible hotels on the booking screen.

New Sanno Hotel is not on the list of hotels. Sheraton

1.3.4 For Our Route (Hiroshima → Osaka → Kyoto → Tokyo).

Because your entire itinerary is along the main high-speed spine of Japan (the Sanyo and Tokaido Shinkansen lines), you can manage the entire trip through **one single app** without needing multiple local regional passes.

The Ultimate Method: Use the Smart EX App

For your exact routing, the official [Smart EX](#) app or website is undeniably the best choice. It handles **every single leg** of your journey seamlessly.

- **Leg 1: Hiroshima to Osaka** (Sanyo Shinkansen) – Covered by Smart EX.
- **Leg 2: Osaka to Kyoto** – You can use a local rapid train (30 mins, book-free, just tap your digital/physical IC card at the gate) or a Shinkansen (15 mins, covered by Smart EX).
- **Leg 3: Kyoto to Tokyo** (Tokaido Shinkansen) – Covered by Smart EX.
- **Booking Roadmap for Your Legs**

[Hiroshima] --(Smart EX)--> [Osaka] --(IC Card/Local)--> [Kyoto] --(Smart EX)--> [Tokyo]

1. Setup Before You Travel

1. Download the official **Smart EX** App on your phone.
2. Register your credit card. *Tip: Some foreign Visa cards fail security checks on Japanese transport sites; Mastercard or American Express usually go through immediately.*
3. Link the app to your transit IC card if you have one.

2. Booking Window & Strategies

- **Standard Window:** You can book seats up to **30 days in advance** for regular tickets.
- **Early Bird Discounts:** Look out for *Hayatoku* discounts on the app if you book **21 days or 3 days** in advance for the Kyoto-to-Tokyo leg.
- **Oversized Baggage:** Since you are traveling between major tourist hubs with luggage, make sure to select the "**Seat with an Oversized Baggage Area**" or "**Seat with an Oversized Baggage Compartment**" option in the app if your bags exceed 160 cm (total dimensions). There is no extra charge, but seats are limited.

3. Boarding Your Trains

- **If Linked to an IC Card:** Walk straight up to the Shinkansen ticket gates and tap your physical or phone-based IC card. A small paper slip detailing your car and seat number will print out automatically at the gate.

- **If Using a QR Code:** Open the app, pull up the ticket QR code, and scan it at the Shinkansen gate reader.
- **In-Person Ticket Machines:** If the app rejects your credit card, don't sweat it. Every Shinkansen station on your list (Hiroshima, Shin-Osaka, Kyoto) has large, English-language touch-screen ticket machines where you can buy tickets for any future leg using your passport and a credit card or cash.
Are you planning to take any side trips, or do you have **specific travel dates and luggage sizes** in mind? I can let you know if you'll run into any major **Japanese holiday crowds** that require booking the absolute minute reservations open.

1.3.5 *Subway / Bus / Train card*

Called an IC card. 3 physical cards (all work the same and can be used all over Japan)

Like the Singapore card, it is pre-loaded with money from Credit Card or Cash. You tap at entrance to subways and buses. Re-load in train stations.

From AI: Since you are flying directly into **Hiroshima Airport (HIJ)**, your plan changes slightly because the airport does not have a direct train station inside the terminal. [\[1\]](#)

Instead, you will take the **Airport Limousine Bus** straight from the airport terminal to central **Hiroshima Station**. The trip takes about 50 minutes and costs 1,500 yen. [\[1, 2, 3\]](#)

Step 1: Getting from the Airport to Hiroshima Station

Because you do not have a physical IC card yet, you have a few easy options to pay for this initial airport bus:

- **Touch Payment:** You can pay directly at the bus gate using any foreign credit or debit card that has a contactless "tap" symbol.
- **Ticket Machine:** You can buy a paper ticket using cash or a credit card at the automated machines inside the airport arrival lobby. [\[1, 2\]](#)

Step 2: Get your ICOCA card at Hiroshima Station

Once the limousine bus drops you off at **Hiroshima Station**, head inside the station to buy your physical transit card. [\[1\]](#)

- **The Card to Buy:** You will buy an **ICOCA** card, which is the standard regional card for Western Japan.
- **Where to find it:** Go to any blue JR West ticket vending machine or visit the JR Ticket Office (Midori-no-Madoguchi).
- **Cost:** It costs **2,000 yen** in cash. This includes a 500-yen refundable deposit and 1,500 yen of immediate spending credit. [\[1, 2, 3, 4, 5\]](#)
- **How this card covers your entire trip**
- Once you have that physical **ICOCA** card in your hands at Hiroshima Station, you are fully set for the rest of your vacation. You do not need to buy any other transit cards. It is fully cross-compatible and works flawlessly for: [\[1\]](#)
- **Hiroshima:** Local city buses and the famous Hiroden streetcars/trams.
- **Osaka:** The entire Osaka Metro subway grid and local JR lines.
- **Kyoto:** City buses and local trains.
- **Tokyo:** The entire Tokyo Metro, Toei Subway, and JR Yamanote line. [\[1\]](#)
- When the balance runs low, just walk up to any station ticket machine in Osaka, Kyoto, or Tokyo, insert the card, and reload it using cash. [\[1, 2\]](#)

1.3.6 *Ride Hailing / Taxi*

Uber: We didn't use it a lot, but when we needed it Uber worked out great.

Uber in Japan was fast, clean and comfortable so I didn't even find the need to download a new app.

Go Taxi: Using Go Taxi or S.Ride is cheaper than Uber. In most instances, taxis are plenty to hail along the street or at the taxi ranks.

I try to mainly use go taxi but they tack on a booking fee at the end which made most shorter uber rides about the same in price. It was also harder to get a van with go taxi if we have a lot of luggage.

Don't use Uber. Just use the local taxi app Go taxi instead the rates are less. I always do that from and to the airport and it's less.

Didi: Use Didi in Japan. It's by far the cheapest with most cars.

I compared GO, Didi & Uber in Niseko, and Didi works out the best. In Tokyo, you get brand new Alphard at 2/3 of taxi price, also cheaper than GO.

From Haneda airport to Shinjuku, didi is 6750Yen for premium van, Uber is 10400Yen for premium van.

General: If you use Uber here it still calls you a taxi driver with a commercial license. With that in mind, I find GO Taxi to be better, but you can usually find a cab the old-fashioned way if you're in a real city.

You should be ok using Japan-based apps like GO or Uber, but if using non-Japanese apps like Klook be very careful. Ride-sharing is illegal, and you're screwed if you get in an accident. If the vehicle doesn't have a green license plate with white lettering, don't get in.

All 3 Apps have been installed on Sherry's phone.

-Uber is set up

-Go doesn't like our Google Voice number. Wait for Japanese sim, and sign up then?

-Didi didn't send code to Google Voice, used Malaysia Number, it came right away.

1.4 Cash

1.4.1 Getting Cash on Arrival

The main ATMs at Hiroshima Airport are located on the **1st Floor (Arrivals Lobby)**. Because Hiroshima Airport has a single, compact terminal building, you will find them clustered in the central area right after you exit the domestic or international customs gates. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)]

However, you need to be very careful about which ATM you use if you are trying to withdraw money with a foreign credit or debit card: [[1](#)]

- **The Local Bank ATM Cluster (1st Floor):** There is a shared ATM kiosk on the 1st floor near the information desk that hosts local Japanese banks (Hiroshima Bank, Momiji Bank, JA Bank). **These machines usually do not accept international cards** and only work with domestic Japanese bank accounts. [[1](#), [2](#)]
- **International Card Options:** To withdraw cash using a foreign card (like Visa or Mastercard), look for an **Automated Currency Exchange Machine** (such as Travelex or Hiroshima Bank's automated exchange kiosk) located near the international arrivals area on the 1st floor, or head to the **convenience store** on the 2nd floor (Departures) to find an international-friendly ATM. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)]

Pro-Tip for Your Arrival Bus: If you are trying to get cash specifically to pay for the Airport Limousine Bus to Hiroshima Station, you actually **do not need cash immediately**. The ticket machines and boarding gates at Hiroshima Airport accept **contactless credit card payments (Visa/Mastercard tap-to-pay)**. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

You can easily tap your card to board the bus, head into central Hiroshima Station, and use the **7-Eleven (Seven Bank) or FamilyMart (E-Net Bank) ATMs** inside the station. Those station ATMs are guaranteed to accept international cards 24/7 and have much better English interfaces. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

1.4.2 ATM Notes

The normal cash withdrawal limit from international-friendly ATMs in Japan depends on the specific ATM provider you use.

Most major networks have the following **per-transaction** limits for foreign cards:

- **Seven Bank (7-Eleven stores & stations): 100,000 Yen** per transaction (roughly \$600–\$700 USD, depending on exchange rates). If your card has a chip and pin, this is the standard. If you are using a card with only a magnetic stripe, the limit drops to 30,000 Yen.
- **Japan Post Bank (Post Offices): 50,000 Yen** per transaction.
- **E-Net / Lawson Bank (FamilyMart & Lawson stores): 50,000 Yen** per transaction. [[1](#), [2](#)]

Critical Factor: Your Home Bank Limit

While a 7-Eleven ATM allows you to pull out 100,000 Yen at once, the transaction will fail if that amount exceeds your **home bank's daily cash withdrawal limit**. [[1](#), [2](#)]

Before you fly, check your online banking app or call your bank to verify:

1. What your daily **ATM cash withdrawal limit** is in your home currency.
2. That a **travel notice** is placed on your card so your bank doesn't freeze it for "suspicious international activity" on your first day.

ATM Fees to Expect

- **Local ATM Operator Fee:** Seven Bank and Lawson usually charge a small fee of 110 Yen (for withdrawals under 10,000 Yen) or 220 Yen (for withdrawals over 10,000 Yen).
- **Home Bank Fee:** Your home bank may charge a flat foreign ATM fee (e.g., \$5) plus a foreign transaction percentage fee (usually 1% to 3%) unless you use a travel-optimized debit card. [[1](#), [2](#)]

1.5 Cell Phone / Sim Card Notes

1.6 Our Plans

A 7-day rail pass costs \$325 Ordinary class and \$458 Green Class plus \$19 delivery to Malaysia.

I checked on the jr railpass site and we wouldn't save money by using the rail pass.

1.6.1 Aug 7 - Grab to Penang Airport 6pm Friday August 7

Drive to Super Clean, drop car and pick up Grab to Penang

Grab already booked (can cancel with 1 hour notice).

1.6.2 Aug 8 - HK Express Flight DCEI6K Penang – HK – Hiroshima

Departure Penang 01:00 UO769 Seats 15C, 18D

Layover Hong Kong Airport 4 hrs

Arrival Hiroshima Airport 13:40 UO822

Baggage: 1 x Small Personal Item and 1 x Cabin Baggage + 32 Kg Checked, each

Personal Item must not exceed the dimensions of 40 (L) x 25 (W) x 20 (H) cm and must fit under the seat in front of you. The Cabin Baggage (including wheels, handles and side pockets) must not exceed the dimensions of 56 (L) x 36 (W) x 23 (H) cm

1.6.3 Aug 8-9, Day 2-3 Hiroshima

1.6.3.1 Arrival Hiroshima – Saturday, Aug 8

Fly into Hiroshima after overnight flight, arriving 1:40 pm. Go to hotel and rest.

1.6.3.2 Getting from Airport to Hotel Near Hiroshima Station

Pro-Tip for Your Arrival Bus: If you are trying to get cash specifically to pay for the Airport Limousine Bus to Hiroshima Station, you actually **do not need cash immediately**. The ticket machines and boarding gates at Hiroshima Airport accept **contactless credit card payments (Visa/Mastercard tap-to-pay)**. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

You can easily tap your card to board the bus, head into central Hiroshima Station, and use the **7-Eleven (Seven Bank) or FamilyMart (E-Net Bank) ATMs** inside the station. Those station ATMs are guaranteed to accept international cards 24/7 and have much better English interfaces. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

Take the **Airport Limousine Bus** straight from the airport terminal to central **Hiroshima Station**. The trip takes about 50 minutes and costs 1,500 yen. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

Step 1: Getting from the Airport to Hiroshima Station

Because you do not have a physical IC card yet, you have a few easy options to pay for this initial airport bus: [What is an IC card](#)

- **Touch Payment:** You can pay directly at the bus gate using any foreign credit or debit card that has a contactless "tap" symbol.
- **Ticket Machine:** You can buy a paper ticket using cash or a credit card at the automated machines inside the airport arrival lobby. [[1](#), [2](#)]

1.6.3.3 Navigating inside Hiroshima Station

Navigating **Hiroshima Station** to handle your cash and transit cards is very easy because the station is compact, highly modern, and entirely connected on the **2nd Floor Main Concourse**. [[1](#), [2](#)]

When your Airport Limousine Bus drops you off, you will find yourself outside either the South Exit or the Shinkansen (North) Exit. Head inside and follow the escalators up to the **2nd Floor Main Concourse walkway**. [[1](#), [2](#)]

Follow this sequential map to get your cash and your ICOCA cards:

Step 1: Withdraw Cash (International ATMs)

Before buying your transit card, you need cash (Yen). Locate the **ekie shopping mall corridor**, which stretches along the central concourse on the 2nd floor. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#)]

- Look for the **Seven-Eleven (Seven Bank)** store or the adjacent ATM vestibule located right inside the concourse area.
- Alternatively, look for the **FamilyMart (eNet ATM)** or the **Lawson** right near the main central walkways.
- **Action:** Insert your foreign debit/credit card. Select your language (English is standard), and withdraw your Yen. Both Seven Bank and eNet ATMs accept international Visa and Mastercards perfectly. [[1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)]

Step 2: Get Your ICOCA Transit Cards

With cash in hand, walk down the main 2nd-floor concourse toward the **JR Central Ticket Gates (Central Gate)**.

- Right next to the glass Central Ticket Gates, you will see a large bank of **blue automated JR West ticket vending machines**. []
- Look for the machines prominently marked with the **blue ICOCA cartoon mascot/logo**. [[1](#)]
- **Action at the machine:**
 1. Press the **"English"** button in the top right corner of the touchscreen.

2. Tap the "IC Card" or "Purchase ICOCA" button on the main menu.
3. Select "New Card".
4. Choose the **2,000 Yen** option.
5. Insert your newly withdrawn cash bills into the slot.
6. Grab your physical ICOCA card and your receipt! [1]

Now you are officially ready to navigate any local subway, tram, or bus across Hiroshima, Osaka, Kyoto, and Tokyo. [1]

1.6.3.4 Aug 9 - Sightseeing Hiroshima (1 full day) – Sunday, Aug 9

<https://www.aqua-net-h.co.jp/en/sightseeing/> About the Miyajima World Heritage Ferry Route

45 minute ferry each way (can book round trip for about \$27 pp).

<https://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2160.html>

Easy to do on your own!

-From Hiroshima station transfer to Sanyo line towards Iwakuni platform 1 to Miyajimaguchi station. -At Miyajimaguchi station exit and walk to the ferry station. There will be lots of people walking there with you and lots of signs!

-Ferries to Miyajima are every 5 to 10 minutes so take whichever one you feel comfortable with. I didn't buy a ticket I just scanned my IC card.

-Once you get there you can get a little paper map at the station of all the places to go on the island! Everything is close together. Nothing was sold out as far as I could tell.

-Ferries back are also frequent. They go until after sunset so you have plenty of time.

<https://www.reddit.com/r/JapanTravelTips>

If you're planning on going to peace park, there's a ferry that runs from there to miyajima, right near the A-bomb dome. It's a much easier and more scenic ride than taking the train/bus to Miyajimaguchi and taking the ferry from there, plus there's a restaurant right next to the ferry terminal that has the best oysters I've ever had in my life if you're into that. Kanawa Seto is the name.

Morning: Hiroshima City Highlights

- **09:15 AM – 11:30 AM:** Visit the **Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum** and the surrounding **Peace Memorial Park**. It is a moving experience that covers the history of the atomic bombing and the city's message of world peace. [1, 2, 3, 4]
- **11:30 AM – 12:00 PM:** Walk over to the **Atomic Bomb Dome**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and the only structure left standing near the hypocenter. [1]

Midday: Local Lunch

- **12:15 PM – 01:30 PM:** Head to **Nagarekawa** or the **Okonomimura** building to eat authentic **Hiroshima-style Okonomiyaki**—a savory layered pancake with noodles, pork, and cabbage. [1]

Afternoon: Miyajima Island

- **01:30 PM – 01:45 PM:** Walk to Motoyasubashi Pier 150m South of Atomic Bomb Dome
- **Ferry ticket booked for 2:05 45 minutes**
- **02:50 PM – 04:30 PM:** See the iconic "floating" **O-Torii Gate** and **Itsukushima Shrine**, which look as if they are resting on the water during high tide. Take some time to wander the historic streets, visit the stunning **Daisho-in Temple**, and interact with the free-roaming wild deer. [1, 2, 3]
- **05:30 PM – 06:15 PM Ferry ticket booked for 5:30 pm**

1.6.4 Aug 10 – Shinkansen Train Hiroshima to Osaka – Monday, Aug 10

Train leaves every 30 minutes, takes 1hr 30 minutes with one transfer and costs \$28-40

Shinkansen Bullet Train costs \$63 Booked direct on Japan Rail site.

Stash luggage at hotel, eat a quick lunch, go see Osaka Castle

1.6.5 Aug 10-12, Day 4-6 Osaka

1.6.5.1 Aug 10 - Afternoon, Half Day Osaka – Osaka Castle – Monday, Aug 10

Booked: Osaka walking/subway tour for \$56 pp

<https://www.getyourguide.com/booking/PUHM8ONBCYBIB7MATXB4WCBEPH8LDCN1>

1:30 pm. In front of 7-Eleven. There is a 7-Eleven convenience store right in front of Exit 1B of the Tanimachi Line at Tanimachi 4-chome Station. The guide can be recognized by a bright fluorescent green band attached to their bag. Please speak to the guide. If you are running late, please contact us via WhatsApp, phone, or text.

Castle Entry Times: 9:00 AM - 5:30 PM (last entry at 5:30 PM, closing time at 6:00 PM).

This ticket provides entry to Osaka Castle. In addition to historical exhibits from the Toyotomi and Tokugawa periods, you can explore the Toyotomi Stone Walls at the Toyotomi Ishigaki Museum.

?? Osaka, Japan's third-largest city and a major economic hub, is renowned for its rich history, diverse cuisine, distinctive culture, and robust economic strength. The city's unique sense of humor and open personality make it an exceptionally interesting place, more colorful than most cities. Acres of concrete are covered with dazzling neon lights and brightly colored storefronts. Osaka is a city that loves to eat, known as the "nation's kitchen", boasting a wide variety of culinary delights.

In this afternoon, visit **Osaka Castle Park**, one of Japan's most famous landmarks and a symbol of Osaka's historical grandeur. Originally built in 1583 by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, a powerful daimyo who aimed to unify Japan, it was the largest castle of its time. After multiple renovations and reconstructions, today's Osaka Castle has been transformed into an open park, covering a total area of 105.6 hectares, making it a must-visit attraction.

Walking into the scenic area of Osaka Castle, you'll be amazed by the massive scale and precision of the moats, gates, and stone walls. The largest stone slab is 11 meters wide, and many stones are inscribed with the crests of the 64 daimyō (feudal lords) tasked with the castle's construction back in 1620. **Overlook the Main Tower (Tenshukaku)** of Osaka Castle, which stands tall against the sky at the center of the extensive castle grounds. Take some time to stroll through the **Nishinomaru Garden**, which offers a picturesque setting with over **600 cherry trees** and beautiful views of the castle tower from below. This is especially enchanting during the **cherry blossom season**, which usually occurs in late March and/or early April.

Last, enjoy shopping at **Shinsaibashi-suji Shopping Street**, Osaka's busiest shopping arcade. Then, head to the lively district of **Dotonbori**, where waterways are lined with luminous advertisements and signs. It's especially glitzy during the holiday season, with decorations strung across the bridges. Full of fantastic restaurants, clubs, and karaoke bars, it's the city's go-to area for entertainment. Take a photo at the iconic **Glico Man** sign. Try takoyaki, ball-shaped octopus bites, kushikatsu (Japanese deep-fried skewered meat and vegetables), and okonomiyaki, a savory Japanese pancake topped with whatever you like.

Tour Info: Transportation cost (not included) is ¥430 (two train rides: ¥190 + ¥240). IC cards such as Suica and ICOCA are accepted. Osaka One-Day Metro Pass can also be used. JR Pass is not available as we will be using Osaka Metro.

The journey covers almost 10 km on foot, offering plenty of opportunities to experience Osaka's streets and culture at a comfortable pace.

This was a great tour, but a bit brutal on the feet!

1.6.5.2 Aug 11 - Full Day Osaka – Tuesday August 11, Mountain Day

Mountain Day is a public Holiday. More about Mountain Day, [here](#).

Here are the three best half-day mountain options that will get you back to the city by lunchtime or early afternoon:

1. Mount Minoo (Minoo Park) — Easiest & Most Popular

<https://www.twowanderingsoles.com/blog/minoo-park-japan>

- **The Vibe:** A gentle, paved walk through a lush forested valley alongside a river, ending at a massive waterfall.
- **Travel Time:** 30 minutes from Umeda Station via the Hankyu-Takarazuka Line (transfer at Ishibashi Handai-mae to the Hankyu-Minoo Line).
- **Trail Time:** 45 minutes each way (flat, paved walk).
- **Highlights:** The stunning **Minoo Waterfall** and the historic **Ryuan-ji Temple**.
- **Bonus:** You can try *Momiji Tempura* (deep-fried maple leaves), a famous local snack sold along the path.

2. Mount Ikoma — Best Views & Easiest Climb

- **The Vibe:** A mix of spiritual temple steps and sweeping panoramic views overlooking the Osaka plains.
- **Travel Time:** 20–30 minutes from Namba or Tsuruhashi Station via the Kintetsu Nara Line to Ikoma Station.
- **The Shortcut:** From Ikoma Station, you can ride Japan's oldest **cable car** directly to the top, completely skipping the strenuous uphill hike if you want to save time.
- **Highlights:** **Hozan-ji Temple**, a striking mountainside sanctuary built into the cliff face halfway up the mountain.

We did the one (above). Used Google Maps in "Public Transport" mode to find our way from our hotel next to Tenmabashi station, out to Ikoma Station, and then up on the cable car. No strenuous hike. We skipped the temple, but went all the way up to the amusement park at the top. Free to walk around and check out the views. If our feet weren't so sore from previous day's walking, we would have hiked (level dirt path, I think) about 10 minutes out to another viewpoint east of the amusement park. If you have little ones (like under 12), the park would be a fun day.

3. Mount Satsukiyama — Great Nature & Free Zoo

- **The Vibe:** A lightly wooded mountain park with multiple short hiking courses right on the edge of the city.
- **Travel Time:** 20 minutes from Umeda Station via the Hankyu-Takarazuka Line to Ikeda Station.
- **Trail Time:** 30 to 60 minutes depending on the chosen ridge trail.
- **Highlights:** The **Satsukiyama Zoo** sits right at the base of the mountain trails and is completely **free to enter**. It is famous for its resident wombats. *In 2026, the zoo is closed. Supposed to reopen later in the year.*

1.6.5.3 Aug 12 - Sightseeing Osaka – Wednesday, Aug 12

Free Time Ideas: visit **Shinsekai** (New World), an old neighborhood known for its nostalgic atmosphere reminiscent of the Showa era. Tsutenkaku Tower is the iconic landmark of this district. It was inspired by cities like Paris and New York. From a modern perspective, this 100-meter-tall steel tower may not seem particularly high, yet it holds a significant place in local history as a symbol of progress and innovation. Visiting Shinsekai is like stepping back in time, offering both the charm of yesteryears and the excitement of modern urban culture.

We had already done the "free time ideas" above in our afternoon walking tour the day before and had no desire to go back to the Shinsekai area (mobbed with tourists).

Dave is keen on History Museums, so we went first to the Osaka Peace Museum (aka "Military Museum") (free entry), had lunch at the nearby mall, and then went to the Osaka History Museum (500Y entry pp). Both were good, but I was sorely disappointed that several of the exhibits at the History Museum HAD NO ENGLISH EXPLANATIONS. It's really tedious translating everything with Google Translate. Spent 2-3 hours at each museum, then back to hotel for a rest and laundry before an early booked dinner at Hiroko, a very upscale (and expensive) Italian restaurant near our hotel. The food was a 5-course Italian meal, but cost about 15,000Y at the end. MUST book ahead. Nobody speaks English (or Italian, as far as I could tell).

1.6.6 Aug 13 - Osaka to Kyoto by Train – Thursday, Aug 13

About 250 trains a day. 30 minutes to 15 minutes. Between \$10 and \$23.

<https://www.rome2rio.com/map/Osaka/Kyoto?route=Train&segment=0&departureDate=2026-08-12>

*On the night of August 16, Kyoto concludes Obon with a breathtaking ritual known as Gozan no Okuribi. Massive bonfires in the shape of kanji characters are lit across the mountains. These flames symbolically send ancestral spirits back to the afterlife. The view of these fiery characters glowing over the darkened city marks a memorable and impressive end to the Obon season. **We opted not to stay for this.***

1.6.7 Aug 13-16, Day 6-8 Kyoto

For alternate suggestions for Kyoto, see the Asia Odyssey tour plan below.

1.6.7.1 Afternoon free – Aug 13

Lunch at nearby mall (many choices with real restaurants).

Check in to hotel and rest.

1.6.7.2 Friday, Aug 14 – Kyoto Full Day Tour

We booked our tour with Get Your Guide. It's an all day bus tour. (an air conditioned bus is a good idea in the heat of summer). "Kyoto: Fushimi Inari, Kinkakuji, Bamboo Grove 1 Day Bus Tour" \$95 USD per person.

The tour takes you to

1. Kiyomizudera Temple (1hr), a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Perched on the hillside of Eastern Kyoto, this temple is renowned for its wooden stage that juts out over the hill, providing stunning views of the city and the surrounding nature. The temple's main hall, constructed entirely without the use of nails, is an architectural marvel. Kiyomizu-dera is also celebrated for its sacred waters, which are believed to have wish-granting powers that draw countless visitors who come to drink from its stream. Don't miss the Hondo (Main Hall), Jishu Shrine, the Otowa Waterfall, and the spiritual experience of the Tainai-Meguri room.

The scenery at Kiyomizu-dera Temple is distinctively beautiful in each season, offering a unique charm year-round. In spring, the mountains are adorned with charming cherry blossoms; in summer, they are lush with vibrant greenery; in autumn, they are decorated with brilliantly colored leaves; and in winter, they are filled with enchanting trees.

2. Sanjusangen-do Temple (40mn): See the impressive hall famous for its 1,001 statues of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy. Learn about the temple's unique architecture and history from your guide.

3. Arashiyama area and Bamboo Grove: Travel to western Kyoto and enjoy the scenic Arashiyama area, one of Kyoto's most popular sightseeing districts.

Lunch (50mn): Enjoy a Japanese buffet made with seasonal ingredients while viewing the beautiful Togetsukyo Bridge.

Sagano Bamboo Forest (20mn): Walk through the famous bamboo grove and enjoy one of Kyoto's most iconic photo spots.

4. Tenryu-ji Temple (30mn): Visit a UNESCO World Heritage Zen temple and enjoy its beautiful Japanese garden, which changes with each season.

5. Kinkakuji Temple (40mn) (Golden Pavilion) - a UNESCO World Heritage site. This Zen Buddhist temple is famous for its stunning golden exterior. The temple's stunning visual appeal comes from its top two floors, which are completely covered in gold leaf. The reflection of the golden structure shimmering in the pond in front of it, makes it perfect for photos and quiet reflection. It was originally built in 1397 as a retirement villa for Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. After Yoshimitsu's death, the villa was converted into a Zen temple by his son.

Nijo Castle (drive by)

6. Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine (1hr) is famous for its thousands of vermilion torii gates, known as Senbon Torii ("thousands of torii gates"). Layers upon layers of vermilion torii gates line the lush, wooded hillside, forming a seemingly endless corridor. The vibrant orange and black gates contrast beautifully with the surrounding greenery, creating a visually stunning and almost otherworldly path that is highly photogenic.

Fushimi Inari Taisha was founded in the early 8th century (711 AD) and is primarily dedicated to Inari, the Shinto god of rice, fertility, sake, agriculture, and industry. As you explore the shrine, you will encounter hundreds of fox statues. Said to be the messengers of the god Inari, who is associated with cereal grains, these fox statues often symbolize the deity. Many of these fox statues are depicted holding a key in their mouths, which is said to open the granary.

20 minute drive back to starting point.

1.6.7.3 Aug 15 - Kyoto Free Day

Aircraft Museum! 30 minutes north on the Shinkansen.

1.6.7.4 Aug 16 – Kyoto End of Obon (didn't do)

*On the night of August 16, Kyoto concludes Obon with a breathtaking ritual known as Gozan no Okuribi. Massive bonfires in the shape of kanji characters are lit across the mountains. These flames symbolically send ancestral spirits back to the afterlife. The view of these fiery characters glowing over the darkened city marks a memorable and impressive end to the Obon season. **We did NOT stay in Kyoto for this.***

1.6.8 Kyoto to Tokyo by Train – Sunday, Aug 16

We booked on a mid-morning Shinkajen train, 2.5 hours, \$100

1.6.9 Aug 16-20, Day 8-13 Tokyo

1.6.9.1 Hotels

The New Sanno is not on the list of hotels we can ship luggage to. We figured out how to book “big luggage” spots on the Shinkajen. New Sanno is a US military (and retirees) hotel. Not located in a particularly tourist-centered place, there are probable better options for non-military people.

4-12-20, Minami Azabu, Minato-ku, Tokyo, Japan, 106-0047

Phone: +81-3-6868-2311

<https://www.thenewsanno.com>

Have a booking for Aug 16-20 (4 nights with breakfast) \$100 per night plus \$26 add-on for breakfasts (this is not per day, as best I could figure out).

1.6.9.2 Tokyo Day 1 – Aug 16 – Arrive Tokyo 12:45

Afternoon free.

1.6.9.3 Tokyo Day 2 – Aug 17 - Mount Fuji Day Trip

Options to get there and back are by train, bus, and day tour.

- Multiple trains (see google maps Kawaguchiko Station, 3641 Funatsu, Fujikawagu) approx. 2.5 hours and a little walking. Train trip from New Sanno to Lake Kawaguchi takes 2-2.5 hours and 2000+ yen

Reddit says bus is faster than trains.

- Second option appears to be by “Highway Bus” highwaybus.com

<https://www.highwaybus.com/gp/reservation/rsvPlanList?linelId=110&onStationCd=001&offStationCd=064&boardingDate=20260817>

Book tickets online for 2,000 yen. (about \$12-13) each way.

Third Option is GetYourGuide trip

<https://www.getyourguide.com/tokyo-l193/tokyo-mt-fujichureito-pagodalake-kawaguchioshino-hakkai-t792363/>

Details

Full-day round trip to admire the breathtaking views of Mount Fuji from Lake Kawaguchi

Begin your journey at the renowned Arakurayama Sengen Park, where you can admire the magnificent view of a five-story pagoda set against a backdrop of majestic mountains. Hike about 15-20 minutes up to Arakurayama Sengen Shrine, dedicated to the mountain god. The shrine is surrounded by beautiful gardens and offers a peaceful atmosphere. Enjoy the gorgeous scenery and capture iconic photos at the famous Red Fuji Observation Deck.

Next, head to Lake Kawaguchi, another excellent location to leisurely view Mount Fuji. The lake boasts crystal-clear waters, providing breathtaking views of the iconic mountain and a serene atmosphere. Enjoy a cruise on the tranquil waters to marvel at the stunning reflection of Mt. Fuji in Lake Kawaguchi. Additionally, take a leisurely stroll around the lake and explore the nearby parks, galleries, and museums based on your interests.

After that, head back to Tokyo.

- It is a long day trip
- If the weather is clear, you can enjoy a good view of Mt. Fuji. However, if the weather is not favorable, Mt. Fuji may not be visible.
- The best time to view Mount Fuji is generally from December to February when skies are clearer and the peak is snow-capped. And also, April to May (for blooming cherry blossoms) and October to November (for the autumn foliage) are good times.
- Early mornings often provide the best visibility before clouds obscure the view. Different locations around Mount Fuji offer varying perspectives, with some spots known for their clear views.

We booked a Mt Fuji day trip through Get Your Guide. 2 hrs getting there, 2 hrs getting back, and probably won't see Mt. Fuji! Half hour taxi ride to get to the starting point.

Other options besides taxi to get from New Sanno to starting point:

Bus (210Y 40mn): The most direct route from Tengenjibashi to Shinjuku Sta. Nishiguchi (West Exit) is the Toei Bus Route 品97 (Shina 97), which requires no transfers. Since you are traveling at 7:00 AM on a weekday, you will be catching the early edge of Tokyo's morning commuter rush hour. While traffic and passenger volumes will be heavy, leaving exactly at 7:00 AM allows you to avoid the absolute peak bottleneck that hits between 7:30 AM and 9:00 AM.

Train (380Y 30mn): If you want to avoid unpredictable morning road traffic entirely, walk 5 minutes north to Hiro-o Station. Take the Tokyo Metro Hibiya Line to Ebisu Station, and transfer to the JR Yamanote Line directly to Shinjuku Station. This method takes roughly 25 minutes but requires navigating highly crowded commuter train transfers

1.6.9.4 Tokyo Day 3 – Aug 18 – Museum?

1.6.9.5 Tokyo Day 4 – Aug 19 – Yokosuka (USS McCampbell)

Yokosuka Naval base to see the USS McCampbell?

1.6.9.6 Aug 20, Tokyo Day 5 – Aug 20 – Limo to Airport

Breakfast, rest, pack, catch Airport Limo to Airport

Airport limo bus from New Sanno to Airport takes about 2 hrs and \$25. <https://www.limousinebus.co.jp/en/ShinagawaArea>

Airport Shuttle Van from New Sanno, reservation must be requested on the New Sanno website. Costs \$250 pp!

First shuttle bus leaves at 12:00, we need to be on it! It arrives at 13:30

2nd bus leaves at 14:00 and arrives at 15:30.

Confirm times and make booking [HERE](#)

1.6.10 Fly out of Narita 6pm – Aug 20 – Arrive SEA Aug 20

Our flight leaves at 6:20pm. We need to be there by 3pm.

Alaska Airlines flies out of Terminal 2.

<https://www.narita-airport.jp/en/flight/dep-search/?keywordAirlineCodeL=ALASKA%20AIRLINES&keywordAirlineCodeV=AS>

1.7 Asia Odyssey 7 day Tour (Tokyo – Kyoto)

1.7.1 Tokyo – Day Tour

First to visit **Meiji Jingu Shrine** (Meiji Shrine), a Shinto Shrine dedicated to Emperor Meiji (1852-1912) and Empress Shoken (1849-1914), who played a crucial role in modernizing Japan while excelled in writing Waka (traditional Japanese poems of 31 syllables in the pattern 5-7-5-7-7). Meiji Shrine is also a popular venue for traditional weddings, where you will have the opportunity to witness a Japanese wedding procession and experience the charm of Japanese traditional culture.

The Meiji Shrine is nestled within a tranquil forest that covers an area of 70 hectares, providing a peaceful escape from the bustling city. This forest is home to over 100,000 trees that were donated from regions across Japan during the shrine's construction, in honor of their beloved Emperor Meiji (who established Shinto as the state religion) and Empress Shoken.

Take a stroll along the paths and enjoy the fresh air and natural beauty. You will walk through **Japan's largest wooden Torii gate**, standing in its natural wooden hue and weighing up to 13 tons. The Torii gate serves as the Symbol of Shinto Shrines, marking the transition from the worldly to the sacred. Then, you will notice the impressive **Sake Barrel Wall** along the South Approach, which features offerings from sake breweries and believers across Japan, including barrels of sake and Western liquor, reflecting Emperor Meiji's fondness for Western culture.

At the **main hall of Meiji Shrine**, you can witness locals washing their hands and rinsing their mouths at Purification Font before worship as a sign of respect. You can offer a 5-yen coin (symbolizing a connection) like locals and pray for blessings. In the eyes of the Japanese, Meiji Shrine is considered to have such boundless capabilities, from naming ceremonies for newborns, to coming-of-age ceremonies, graduation ceremonies, seeking marriage partners, praying for world peace, family well-being, safe travels, good health, warding off calamity, etc.

In addition to immersing yourself in Japanese Shinto traditions and architecture, revel in the enchanting surroundings filled with lush trees, serene ponds, graceful bridges, and stone pathways that epitomize the essence of traditional Japanese garden art. You should visit here to enjoy the vibrant bloom of cherry blossoms in spring, the verdant beauty of summer, the fiery hues of autumn leaves, and the serene snowy landscapes of winter.

Tips for Visiting Meiji Jingu Shrine:

- Wear modest clothing: Respect the sacred nature of the shrine by dressing appropriately.
- Be mindful of noise levels: Maintain a quiet and respectful atmosphere.
- Inner Garden (Optional; self-pay; once Imperial Property), and Meiji Jingu Museum (Optional; self-pay; items used by the imperial couple).

Then, move to visit **Shibuya Crossing**, one of the busiest intersections in the world, accommodating approximately 3,000 people per minute. As one of Tokyo's iconic locations, Shibuya attracts tourists and photographers from around the globe who come to observe and capture its essence. Numerous movies, TV shows, commercials, and music videos are filmed at this location, such as "The Fast and the Furious: Tokyo Drift."

Additionally, if you're interested in the story of Hachiko, the loyal dog, you can also visit his bronze statue. This **Hachiko statue** is located outside Shibuya Station and was erected to commemorate Hachiko's loyalty. Not

only is it a popular meeting spot, but it's also a must-visit attraction for tourists. The statue symbolizes the power of loyalty and love, serving as a touching tribute.

In the afternoon, head to **Senso-ji Temple** (Asakusa Kannon Temple), a must-visit for anyone traveling to Tokyo. Senso-ji Temple (Asakusa Kannon Temple), is one of the oldest and most famous Buddhist temples in Tokyo, located in the Asakusa district of Taito, Tokyo. The temple is dedicated to Kannon Bosatsu (Avalokiteshvara), the Bodhisattva of compassion. According to legend, in 628 AD, two fishermen retrieved a statue of Kannon from the Sumida River and decided to construct a temple to enshrine it. Completed in 645 AD, Senso-ji has since become a spiritual symbol of Tokyo.

The temple's entrance is marked by the iconic **Kaminarimon (Thunder Gate)**, featuring a massive red lantern and protective deity statues that symbolize the temple's guardians against evil spirits. This gate is a popular photo spot and marks the beginning of **Nakamise Street**, a lively shopping street lined with stalls offering traditional Japanese snacks, crafts, and souvenirs, which leads up to the temple's second gate, the Hozomon.

Beyond the Hozomon lies the **main hall**, dedicated to Kannon and adorned with exquisite decorations, where devotees pray and worship. Adjacent to the main hall is the temple's **five-story pagoda**, another striking feature, representing the traditional Japanese architectural style and symbolizing the five elements of Buddhist cosmology - earth, water, fire, wind, and void.

From Senso-ji looking south, you **capture a photograph of Skytree Tower** (Japan's Tallest Tower; 634 meters). On this street, you can see both old buildings and modern skyscrapers together, providing a visual contrast between traditional and modern.

After that, you can explore **Tsukiji Fish Market** (Now Toyosu Market). Tsukiji Fish Market was once the world's largest fish market, famous for its tuna auctions. However, in 2018, it relocated to a new, larger facility called Toyosu Market. You can still enjoy fresh seafood (sashimi, sushi, or seafood rice bowls), purchase kitchenware, and learn about a variety of seafood, including the characteristics, cooking methods, and nutritional value of different types of seafood.

After the tour, your group will be escorted back to your hotel in Tokyo.

1.7.2 Mt Fuji (day trip, not to mt)

Full-day round trip to admire the breathtaking views of Mount Fuji from Lake Kawaguchi

Begin your journey at the renowned Arakurayama Sengen Park, where you can admire the magnificent view of a five-story pagoda set against a backdrop of majestic mountains. Hike about 15-20 minutes up to Arakurayama Sengen Shrine, dedicated to the mountain god. The shrine is surrounded by beautiful gardens and offers a peaceful atmosphere. Enjoy the gorgeous scenery and capture iconic photos at the famous Red Fuji Observation Deck.

Next, head to Lake Kawaguchi, another excellent location to leisurely view Mount Fuji. The lake boasts crystal-clear waters, providing breathtaking views of the iconic mountain and a serene atmosphere. Enjoy a cruise on the tranquil waters to marvel at the stunning reflection of Mt. Fuji in Lake Kawaguchi. Additionally, take a leisurely stroll around the lake and explore the nearby parks, galleries, and museums based on your interests.

After that, head back to Tokyo.

- It is a long day trip
- If the weather is clear, you can enjoy a good view of Mt. Fuji. However, if the weather is not favorable, Mt. Fuji may not be visible.
- The best time to view Mount Fuji is generally from December to February when skies are clearer and the peak is snow-capped. And also, April to May (for blooming cherry blossoms) and October to November (for the autumn foliage) are good times.

- Early mornings often provide the best visibility before clouds obscure the view. Different locations around Mount Fuji offer varying perspectives, with some spots known for their clear views.

1.7.3 Tokyo to Kyoto by Bullet Train

At Tokyo Station, board the Shinkansen bound for Kyoto Station (about 2.5 hours). This fast and comfortable journey offers an opportunity to enjoy the changing landscapes of urban and rural Japan.

Kyoto, located in the Kansai region of the country, was once the capital of Japan. It epitomizes ancient Japan and is famous for tranquil temples, exquisite gardens, colorful shrines, grand imperial palaces, and ornate castles. Boasting **17 UNESCO World Heritage sites**, over 1,000 Buddhist temples, and more than 400 Shinto shrines, Kyoto is among the world's most culturally rich cities. It's also known for traditional Japanese arts and practices, such as tea ceremonies, kaiseki dining (a traditional multi-course meal), and ikebana (flower arranging). It remains one of the best places to see geishas, who are traditional Japanese female entertainers known for their refined skills in arts, music, dance, and conversation.

Upon arrival in Kyoto, **the local guide and driver** will be waiting in the designated area to greet you and escort you for today's sightseeing in Kyoto.

1.7.4 Kyoto Half Day Tour

In this afternoon, your group will visit one of Kyoto's most iconic sights, **Kinkakuji Temple** (Golden Pavilion) - a UNESCO World Heritage site. This Zen Buddhist temple is famous for its stunning golden exterior. The temple's stunning visual appeal comes from its top two floors, which are completely covered in gold leaf. The reflection of the golden structure shimmering in the pond in front of it, makes it perfect for photos and quiet reflection. It was originally built in 1397 as a retirement villa for Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. After Yoshimitsu's death, as per his will, the villa was converted into a Zen temple by his son.

Next, head to **Nijo Castle**, another UNESCO World Heritage site, to delve deeper into Japan's feudal history. Constructed in 1603 as the Kyoto residence of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first shogun of the Edo period, its expansive grounds and ornate architecture highlight the power and wealth of the dominant samurai clans during the Edo period (1603-1867).

The castle features two concentric rings of fortifications, each consisting of a wall and a wide moat. After passing through the grand Kara-mon (gate), you will enter Ninomaru Palace, which is divided into five buildings with numerous chambers. The interiors are adorned with masterful paintings by the Kano school, reflecting the cultural and artistic heritage of the era. The castle is renowned for its "nightingale floors," (that sing and squeak at every move, making it difficult for intruders to move about quietly), designed as a security measure against intruders. Don't miss the excellent Ninomaru Palace Garden, which was designed by the tea master and landscape architect, Kobori Enshu.

1.7.5 Kyoto Full Day Tour

Kyoto, once the capital of Japan, epitomizes ancient Japan. Boasting 17 UNESCO World Heritage sites, over 1,000 Buddhist temples, and more than 400 Shinto shrines, Kyoto is among the world's most culturally rich cities. Known for traditional arts like tea ceremonies, kaiseki dining, and ikebana (flower arranging), Kyoto is also one of the best places to observe geishas.

After breakfast, your group will explore Kyoto for a full day. Start the morning in Kyoto bright and early at one of its most iconic sites - the Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine, to beat the crowds.

Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine is famous for its thousands of vermilion torii gates, known as Senbon Torii ("thousands of torii gates"). Layers upon layers of vermilion torii gates line the lush, wooded hillside, forming a

seemingly endless corridor. The vibrant orange and black gates contrast beautifully with the surrounding greenery, creating a visually stunning and almost otherworldly path that is highly photogenic.

Fushimi Inari Taisha was founded in the early 8th century (711 AD) and is primarily dedicated to Inari, the Shinto god of rice, fertility, sake, agriculture, and industry. As you explore the shrine, you will encounter hundreds of fox statues. Said to be the messengers of the god Inari, who is associated with cereal grains, these fox statues often symbolize the deity. Many of these fox statues are depicted holding a key in their mouths, which is said to open the granary.

Tips: Hiking to the summit of the mountain and back will take two to three hours, but many people go only as far as the Yotsutsuji intersection because there are fewer torii gates beyond this point. It will take 30 to 40 minutes to reach Yotsutsuji.

Next, visit **Kiyomizudera Temple**, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Perched on the hillside of Eastern Kyoto, this temple is renowned for its wooden stage that juts out over the hill, providing stunning views of the city and the surrounding nature. The temple's main hall, constructed entirely without the use of nails, is an architectural marvel. Kiyomizu-dera is also celebrated for its sacred waters, which are believed to have wish-granting powers that draw countless visitors who come to drink from its stream. Don't miss the Hondo (Main Hall), Jishu Shrine, the Otowa Waterfall, and the spiritual experience of the Tainai-Meguri room.

Tips: The scenery at Kiyomizu-dera Temple is distinctively beautiful in each season, offering a unique charm year-round. In spring, the mountains are adorned with charming cherry blossoms; in summer, they are lush with vibrant greenery; in autumn, they are decorated with brilliantly colored leaves; and in winter, they are filled with enchanting trees.

Then, walk up the well-preserved streets of **Ninenzaka and Sannenzaka**. These charming, sloping streets are lined with traditional shops and quaint tea houses, offering a nostalgic glimpse into Kyoto's past. As you stroll through these areas, you can shop for unique crafts, sample local snacks, and perhaps stop at a café to relax and soak in the atmosphere of old Kyoto.

Continue to **Yasaka Shrine**, the guardian shrine of the Gion entertainment district, which dates back over 1350 years. Yasaka Shrine is particularly favored by those seeking beauty and wealth. Visiting this significant Shinto shrine in Kyoto, you may also find yourself gaining some good luck. The shrine is most famous for its Gion Matsuri in July, during which you can witness the procession where the deities of Yasaka are paraded through the city streets.

Adjacent to the shrine, **Gion** is Kyoto's famous geisha district. Here, you might catch a glimpse of Geisha (Geiko) in their elaborate kimonos and traditional makeup. As you wander through the cobblestone streets of Gion, take a moment to appreciate the beautifully preserved machiya (wooden townhouses), ochaya (teahouses), and exclusive ryotei (traditional Japanese restaurants). Gion is particularly enchanting at dusk when the lanterns are lit and geishas and maiko (apprentice geishas) make their way to evening appointments, making the narrow lanes come alive.

1.7.6 Kyoto – Nara – Osaka by Car

In this morning, your group will depart from Kyoto and head to **Nara**, an approximately 1.5-hour car ride. Before Kyoto, there was Nara, Japan's first permanent capital and one of the country's most rewarding destinations. Nara boasts 8 World Cultural Heritage sites, making it Japan's second most culturally rich city after Kyoto.

Visit **Todaiji Temple**, one of Japan's most historically significant temples and a UNESCO **World Heritage site**. It is known for housing the **world's largest bronze statue of the Buddha Vairocana**, which stands just over 16m high and consists of 437 tonnes of bronze and 130kg of gold. It represents Vairocana Buddha and is flanked by two

Bodhisattvas. Todaiji's main hall, Daibutsu-den (Big Buddha Hall), is **one of the world's largest all-wood buildings**, even though the present reconstruction of 1692 is only two-thirds of the original temple hall's size.

Walk to **Nara Park**, adjacent to Kasuga Taisha. This park is famous for its hundreds of freely roaming **deer**, considered **messengers of the gods** in Shinto tradition. Purchase some **shika senbei** (deer crackers) to feed the deer as you stroll through the park.

Head to **Kasuga Taisha** (Kasuga Grand Shrine), Nara's most celebrated Shinto shrine, another UNESCO **World Heritage Site**. It is renowned for its lanterns, which have been donated by worshippers. Hundreds of bronze lanterns can be seen hanging from the buildings, while **thousands of stone lanterns** line its approach and the surrounding woods. These lanterns are lit twice a year during the Lantern Festivals in February and August, creating an ethereal and mesmerizing atmosphere.

After the tour, drive to **Osaka** (typically takes around 45 minutes to an hour). Osaka, Japan's third-largest city and a major economic hub, is renowned for its rich history, diverse cuisine, distinctive culture, and robust economic strength. The city's unique sense of humor and open personality make it an exceptionally interesting place, more colorful than most cities. Acres of concrete are covered with dazzling neon lights and brightly colored storefronts. Osaka is a city that loves to eat, known as the "nation's kitchen", boasting a wide variety of culinary delights.

1.7.7 Osaka Half Day

Osaka, Japan's third-largest city and a major economic hub, is renowned for its rich history, diverse cuisine, distinctive culture, and robust economic strength. The city's unique sense of humor and open personality make it an exceptionally interesting place, more colorful than most cities. Acres of concrete are covered with dazzling neon lights and brightly colored storefronts. Osaka is a city that loves to eat, known as the "nation's kitchen", boasting a wide variety of culinary delights.

In this afternoon, visit **Osaka Castle Park**, one of Japan's most famous landmarks and a symbol of Osaka's historical grandeur. Originally built in 1583 by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, a powerful daimyo who aimed to unify Japan, it was the largest castle of its time. After multiple renovations and reconstructions, today's Osaka Castle has been transformed into an open park, covering a total area of 105.6 hectares, making it a must-visit attraction.

Walking into the scenic area of Osaka Castle, you'll be amazed by the massive scale and precision of the moats, gates, and stone walls. The largest stone slab is 11 meters wide, and many stones are inscribed with the crests of the 64 daimyō (feudal lords) tasked with the castle's construction back in 1620. **Overlook the Main Tower (Tenshukaku)** of Osaka Castle, which stands tall against the sky at the center of the extensive castle grounds. Take some time to stroll through the **Nishinomaru Garden**, which offers a picturesque setting with over **600 cherry trees** and beautiful views of the castle tower from below. This is especially enchanting during the **cherry blossom season**, which usually occurs in late March and/or early April.

Last, enjoy shopping at **Shinsaibashi-suji Shopping Street**, Osaka's busiest shopping arcade. Then, head to the lively district of **Dotonbori**, where waterways are lined with luminous advertisements and signs. It's especially glitzy during the holiday season, with decorations strung across the bridges. Full of fantastic restaurants, clubs, and karaoke bars, it's the city's go-to area for entertainment. Take a photo at the iconic **Glico Man** sign. Try takoyaki, ball-shaped octopus bites, kushikatsu (Japanese deep-fried skewered meat and vegetables), and okonomiyaki, a savory Japanese pancake topped with whatever you like.

Free Time Ideas: visit **Shinsekai** (New World), an old neighborhood known for its nostalgic atmosphere reminiscent of the Showa era. Tsutenkaku Tower is the iconic landmark of this district. It was inspired by cities like Paris and New York. From a modern perspective, this 100-meter-tall steel tower may not seem particularly

high, yet it holds a significant place in local history as a symbol of progress and innovation. Visiting Shinsekai is like stepping back in time, offering both the charm of yesteryears and the excitement of modern urban culture.

1.7.8 Fly Out Next Day

1.8 One guy's plans Hiroshima - Tokyo

Originally had my trip scheduled for July 7-14 and no matter what I did I just couldn't make it work.

Day 1: I'm catching a flight the same day to Hiroshima.

I arrive @ 3:30. My flight to Hiroshima leaves at 6:45 arrives @ 7:25.

Check into hotel then eat and walk around bar hopping for the rest of the night.

Stay the next day and visit **Peace Museum** and **Yamato Battleship Museum** and spend the rest of the day sightseeing with an **Onsen visit** to refresh myself then a night just walking wherever the mood takes me.

Day 2: Hop on the Shinkansen and two hour train ride to Kyoto. I'll catch an early train and store my luggage until my check in time.

Just going to wander around until lunch eat and then a stop @ **BCS gallery** to get one of their beautiful embroidered jackets. Wander around until dinner and then experience kyotos night life.

Day 3: Get up early have breakfast then **visit temples and that alternate bamboo forest** (not the tourist trap one).

I will schedule a real **tea ceremony** with a real geisha for 16:00. Will stop at geisha supply store to buy a small gift for her. Small bribe gift really I have a bucket list photo I want taken. Then dinner and more aimless wandering 🍷

Day 4: I haven't really fleshed this day out yet.

I will hop on a train to Osaka.

Oh almost forgot I have to store my luggage first thing I get there.

Day 5: Just a sight seeing day really. Maybe hit Osaka castle who knows.

Day 6: Hop on a mid morning train to Tokyo.

Will be basing myself in Asakusa.

Once again store my luggage and a Michelin starred ramen for lunch if I can find one.

As it gets later hop on the Yamanote line to Shinjuku.

Hit the sky tower about 6:30pm. I know it touristy but I already reserved my ticket. Spend an hour there then look for the path less traveled. I see a big crowd I'm going the opposite way.

Hop the Hama line back to Asakusa.

Have a beer then check into my hotel.

July 14 will be a day trip to an onsen resort.

Recommendations would be appreciated here.

Maybe stay the night and head back to Tokyo in the morning.

Thinking of the go cart experience I might try that and then to shibuya.

Some people might roll their eyes or I'll get a "DUDE!"

But I'm a single male traveler anime fan and I love a girl in a school uniform. I found a soapland that specializes in that so an hour and a half there then hit akibara for awhile.

