A Journey through the History and Culture of Japan  
January 16-31, 2019

Day 1 – January 16: Arrive in Tokyo, Check-in, Orientation, Welcome Dinner
The program begins with a welcome dinner at the hotel.
   Note: Hotel check-in available from 3:00 p.m.
   Accommodations: Yaesu Terminal Hotel

Day 2 – January 17: Historical Edo, the Samurai & Economic Heart of Feudal Japan
The hotel breakfast buffet includes a variety of items, plus juice, coffee, tea, water.

We’ll begin by setting out on a walking exploration of the Nihonbashi district of Tokyo with our tour leader. Edo, as Tokyo used to be known in the feudal period, was the de facto political and military center of Japan. Nihonbashi was Edo’s heart with the five main highways of Japan terminating here. Continuing our walk with commentary provided as we go, we’ll visit the nearby Imperial Palace Gardens on the site of the former shogun’s castle.

Lunch will be at a local restaurant.

After lunch we transfer to the Tokyo National Museum. This is Japan’s oldest and largest museum and houses over 110,000 objects including 600 Important Cultural Properties. It is located on the edge of Ueno Park, a very pleasant park to stroll through.

Dinner at a local restaurant where we will enjoy a tasty family-style meal.

   Note: The walk from Nihonbashi through the grounds of the Imperial Palace East gardens is 3 miles. In the afternoon, a 30-minute bus ride is followed by an approximately 1 mile walk around the Tokyo National Museum. The return journey to the vicinity of the hotel is 20 minutes via public transport and walking. Total walking for the day is approximately 5 miles.
   Accommodations: Yaesu Terminal Hotel

Day 3 – January 18: Asakusa & Senso-ji Temple, Yanaka & Edo, City of Townspeople

Hotel buffet for breakfast.

After transferring via subway to Asakusa, we will visit the famous Senso-ji temple. Asakusa is the centre of Tokyo's Shitamachi, the low city, and was an entertainment district for the lower classes. Senso-ji is a very popular Buddhist temple that was built in the 7th century with a market and entertainment street leading up to it.

Lunch will be a buffet style meal at a local restaurant.
Next, we’ll travel to the charming neighborhood of Yanaka, a quiet quarter with winding streets, narrow alleyways, and local shops. Yanaka provides perhaps the closest approximation to how life once was in downtown Edo leading up to the pre-war years of Tokyo. As we walk around and soak up the atmosphere, we’ll see a part of Tokyo that survived the air raids of the 2nd World War and learn about the specifics. The remainder of the afternoon will be free for independent exploration. It is a straightforward journey on the Yamanote line back to the vicinity of the hotel.

Dinner at a local restaurant where we will enjoy a tasty family-style meal. Be sure to prepare for check-out and transfer in the morning.

Note: Walking will be approximately 3 to 4 miles throughout the day; gentle pace. Use of transportation including assorted rail and subway transfers; about 1 hour total; some stairs, flat city streets, elevators/escalators sometimes available. Shoes may need to be removed to visit some of the sites today.

Accommodations: Yaesu Terminal Hotel

Day 4 - January 19: The Nakasendo Way, Print Museum, Post Towns of Kiso Valley

Hotel buffet for breakfast.

Once our main luggage has been sent by courier and we are checked out of the hotel, we’ll set off early by bullet train to the picturesque Kiso Valley and the Nakasendo Way. Upon arrival, we’ll learn about the woodblock printing process at the Hiroshige Print Museum, then try our hands at producing some of our own. These iconic prints give great insight into the daily life of Edo-period Japan, particularly along the Nakasendo Way, an old highway of Japan. We’ll then head to a Japanese supermarket for lunch.

You will have time on your own to explore local fare while experiencing the novelty of a Japanese supermarket.
We’ll then board a motorcoach to continue our transfer to Tsumago, a picturesque old post town and probably the most famous in Japan. As we approach, you may choose to embark on an elective walk along the old Nakasendo from the Magome Pass to Tsumago. You may also choose to drive the whole way to Tsumago and spend more time exploring before we all regroup to discover the workings of a traditional high-class inn, and visit the local history museum. Next, we’ll travel onward to Kiso-Fukushima and our lodgings where we will be able to immerse ourselves fully in Japanese culture at an excellent modern Japanese inn with onsen, also known as hot spring baths.

At the ryokan, a traditional Japanese inn, we’ll enjoy a customary Japanese dinner.

Note: Today includes traveling approx. 300 miles; about 5 hours total throughout the day by rail and motorcoach, with stops. Walking approx. 1 mile around Tsumago; elective additional trail hike of about 3 miles; approx. 1.5 hours; some uneven terrain, stone trail. Sleeping in lodgings on traditional futons on tatami mats on the floor. Shoes will need to be removed to enter some of the attractions.
Accommodations: Kisojino-yado Iwaya

Day 5 - January 20: Make Soba Noodles, Barrier Stations
In the ryokan, we’ll have a traditional Japanese-style plated breakfast.

Setting out from the ryokan, we’ll transfer via local bus to our cookery workshop where we’ll roll up our sleeves and learn from a team of local folks how buckwheat soba noodles, a local specialty, are made by hand.

Lunch is at the cookery workshop where we’ll enjoy the noodles we made.

We’ll then return to Kiso-Fukushima the way we came and visit the Edo-period Barrier Station where we will learn more from our leader about how travel worked under the watchful eye of the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Dinner is another traditional ryokan meal. Be sure to prepare for check-out and transfer in the morning.

Note: Transferring via local bus approx. 6 miles one way; about 1 hour roundtrip. Walking approximately 2 miles throughout Kiso-Fukushima; about 2 hours; fairly flat, on pavement. Sleeping on floor in traditional Japanese fashion. Shoes will need to be removed to enter some of the attractions today.
Accommodations: Kisojino-yado Iwaya

Day 6 - January 21: Matsumoto & Castle Towns, Japan’s Alps, To Takayama
Breakfast at the ryokan

Once checked out of the ryokan, we’ll travel via motorcoach to the city of Matsumoto for a visit to the city’s castle. The keep of Matsumoto Castle, an impressive and imposing structure, is an original which dates back to the late 16th century and is one of only five in Japan to be designated a National Treasure.
While here, we’ll be given insights into the establishment and the importance of castle towns under the Tokugawa Shogunate. We’ll also delve into a discussion comparing facts versus myths surrounding the samurai. We’ll then transfer to a traditional miso manufacturer’s facility to learn and see how this essential Japanese foodstuff is made.

At the miso manufacturer’s, we’ll enjoy a delicious lunch featuring their product.

Continuing by motorcoach, we’ll travel through the spectacular mountains of Japan’s Central Alps to the town of Takayama where we will check into the hotel with time to freshen up and relax before dinner.

At the hotel, we’ll enjoy plated meals featuring a specialty of Takayama: Hida beef. Be sure to prepare for check-out and transfer in the morning.

Note: Driving approx. 90 miles throughout the day; about 4 hours total with 1.5 hours in the morning. Kiso-Fukushima to Matsumoto and 2.5 hours in the afternoon to Takayama. Walking approx. 2 miles total in and around Matsumoto Castle; mostly flat, some steep stairs that can be quite steep. Shoes will need to be removed to enter some of the attractions today.

Accommodations: Best Western Hotel Takayama

Day 7 - January 22: An Independent City, Festival Floats Exhibition, To Kyoto

At the hotel, the breakfast buffet will feature both Western and Japanese dishes, plus juice, milk, coffee, tea, water.

On a walking field trip, we’ll explore Takayama, a charming, small mountain town. Its streets are lined with Edo-period shops and houses. Largely isolated by the surrounding mountains, Takayama fiercely protected its independence under pressure from the Shogunate, which eventually had to resort to direct rule. Along our way, we’ll visit the Takayama Festival Floats Exhibition hall where 11 of the floats for this famous festival are kept and displayed on rotation.

Lunch is in a restaurant in town.

We’ll then take some time for independent exploration before regrouping at a predetermined time and place and transferring by rail to Kyoto in the mid-afternoon and checking into the hotel upon arrival.

Dinner will be at the hotel slightly later than usual.

Note: Walking approx. 3 miles during morning group activities; more dependent on personal preference; flat terrain, pavement, roads. Train ride to Kyoto is about 165 miles; approx. 3.5 hours. Shoes will need to be removed to enter some of the attractions today.

Accommodations: Hotel Gimmond
Day 8 - January 23: Japanese Tea Ceremony, Daitoku-ji Temple, Nijo-jo Castle
Breakfast at the hotel.

As we explore Kyoto's history and culture on foot, we’ll first make a visit to the Daitoku-ji temple complex, associated with the ultimate master of the tea ceremony, Sen-no-rikyu. Then, a short walk away, we’ll experience a tea ceremony in the informative and enthralling company of a tea master. We’ll delve into the ceremony, a delightful and deeply meaningful practice far from the rigid image it often has, and also make tea for each other.

Lunch is at a Shojin Ryori, a temple vegetarian restaurant, located by the 56-acre Daitoku-ji temple complex.

To round off the main theme of today, we’ll visit Nijo-jo Castle, the only residence of the shogun still in existence, for a chance to learn about the daily life at the shogun's court.

Dinner is at a local restaurant.

Note: Walking about 3 miles throughout the day; some unavoidable stairs. Taxi transfers. Sitting on either tatami mats or small chairs on the floor while participating in the tea ceremony. Note that space is limited at the tea room, and that large groups will be split into two, reversing the daily itinerary. Sitting on the floor at lunch. Shoes will need to be removed to enter some of the attractions today.

Accommodations: Hotel Gimmond

Day 9 - January 24: Cultural Icons of Kyoto, Free Time
Breakfast at the hotel.

Setting out from the hotel, we’ll begin a comprehensive multi-stop field trip. First, we’ll arrive at the Kyoto Museum of Traditional Arts and begin with an introduction to the city’s splendid artisan crafts before walking to nearby Heian Jingu, a vast Shinto shrine complex that was modeled on an ancient imperial palace. Our next stop will be Ginkaku-ji Temple (Silver Pavilion), built by the 8th Ashikaga Shogun Yoshimasa. Like his grandfather, Yoshimitsu, Yoshimasa was a great patron of the arts but a poor governor of the nation. While Kyoto was engulfed in the internecine and destructive Onin Wars, the Higashiyama culture began and flourished at Ginkaku-ji. Based largely on the ideals and aesthetics of Zen Buddhism and the concept of wabi-sabi, which can be translated as beauty in simplicity, Higashiyama culture centered on the development of the Japanese tea ceremony, ikebana flower arranging, Noh drama, and sumi-e ink painting.

Lunch at a local restaurant.
Free time in the afternoon. Take this opportunity for personal independent exploration to see and do what interests you most. Your Tour Leader will be happy to offer suggestions.

Dinner in one of Kyoto’s abundant restaurants. Be sure to prepare for check-out and transfer in the morning.

Note: Walking approx. 3 miles throughout the morning’s group activities; more depending on personal preference during free time; some unavoidable stairs. Taxi transfers.

Accommodations: Hotel Gimmond

Day 10 - January 25: Tale of Heike, Miyajima Island, Itsukushima Shinto Shrine

Breakfast at the hotel.

After sending our luggage by courier and checking out of the hotel, we’ll head to the train station for our morning transfer by Shinkansen bullet train to Hiroshima, a vibrant city that belies its recent and infamous past. Next, we’ll transfer to Miyajima-guchi then the ferry to Miyajima Island. The island is justly famous for the Shinto Itsukushima Shrine, built out over the sea, which we will visit. The Shrine is over 1,400 years old but its present form was established in 1168 under the patronage of Taira-no-Kiyomori, who established the first samurai government of Japan. The Taira Clan’s fierce and bloody feud with the Minamoto Clan is related in the epic, Tale of Heike. Finally victorious, the Minamoto established the Shogunate at Kamakura in 1192.

On your own to explore the local cuisine of Miyajima. Oysters are a speciality here.

Free time - Miyajima, where vehicles are few, is a pleasant place to stroll around before returning to Hiroshima for check-in at the hotel.

On the top floor of the hotel, we’ll have dinner as we enjoy views over Hiroshima with tea and water; other beverages available for purchase. (TBC)

Note: Bullet train ride of approx. 220 miles to Hiroshima; about 2 hours. Walking approx. 3 miles throughout the day in Hiroshima and Miyajima; mostly flat, pavement, roads. Some short transfers by tram and ferry.

Accommodations: Hotel Sunroute Hiroshima
Day 1 - January 26: Hiroshima – A City Reborn, Peace Memorial Park, Shukkeien

At the hotel, we’ll enjoy a breakfast buffet featuring both Western and Japanese-style dishes, plus juice, coffee, tea, water.

Our day will first bring us to the Peace Memorial Park and Peace Memorial Museum. Within the grounds of the park is the Atom Bomb Dome, which is the ruin of the old Industry Promotion Hall. The Hall was very close to the epicenter of the explosion and its smashed walls and twisted metal frame vividly recall the blast. The museum itself is a thoughtful and non-sentimental exhibition of the effects of the bomb while the park also contains the eternal flame with a serene, underground memorial hall. The whole area is a thought-provoking site but with an overwhelming feeling of the forward-looking, hopeful way the people of Hiroshima perceive their collective experience.

Lunch: at a local restaurant.

We’ll then set out to visit Shukkeien, an archetypal “shrunken” Japanese garden. There are a number of tea houses en route as we stroll around – those who wish can enjoy the beautiful scenery over a cup of green tea before returning to the hotel.

Dinner in one of Hiroshima's many restaurants.

Note: Walking approx. 3 miles total around Hiroshima; mostly flat pavement. Some transfers by tram and taxis.
Accommodations: Hotel Sunroute Hiroshima

Day 12 - January 27: Early Japanese Buddhism, Kunisaki

Breakfast is a buffet at the hotel.

Setting out early from the hotel to the train, the award-winning Sonic Express, we’ll transfer to Kunisaki, a little-known but fabulous area of Japan. Although sparsely populated now, it was once one of the first Buddhist strongholds in Japan with many beautiful temples and thousands of stone Buddhas.
and deities spread throughout the whole of Kunisaki. Common in years past, monks on pilgrimage are now a rare sight but the local religion, which has morphed over the centuries into an eclectic concoction of Buddhism, Shintoism, and various folk religions, is vibrant. While here, we’ll explore the area’s unique scenery and learn about the Japanese countryside and depopulation. We’ll also visit Fuki-ji, one of the most picturesque temples in Japan. In order to protect the treasures inside Fuki-ji temple from the elements, it may not be possible to view the interior of the temple in rainy and windy conditions.

In a local community hall, we’ll enjoy locally-produced, farmhouse plated meals with some of Kunisaki’s residents for lunch.

Kunisaki, like so many rural areas of Japan, suffers from depopulation and decline. In conversations with residents, we’ll examine the problems this raises for the local community and what is being done to reinvigorate a small part of Japan. We continue onto Yufuin to end the day in a high-class resort, an up-market destination famed both for its setting – nestled in a valley below Mt. Yufu-dake – and its onsen hot spring baths. We’ll settle into our Japanese-style accommodation.

At the ryokan, we’ll have a traditional Japanese-style plated dinner.

Be sure to prepare for check-out and transfer in the morning.

Note: Train transfer is approx. 180 miles; about 3 hours. Getting on/off motorcoach for short transfer to temples. Walking about 3 miles total throughout the day; some uneven ground and steep steps. Driving approx. 30 miles to hotel; about 1 hour. Accommodation is mostly Japanese style – sleeping on traditional futons on tatami mats on the floor. Shoes will need to be removed at some locations.
Accommodations: Yufuin UBL Hotel

Day 13 - January 28: Free Time, Mountains and Coastlines of Kyushu, To Nagasaki

At the ryokan, we’ll have a traditional Japanese-style plated breakfast.

Free time to explore Yufuin before boarding the coach to Nagasaki. Our route will take around the rugged scenery of Northern Kyushu, passing between mountains and verdant forests.

You may wish to try a bento packed lunch, purchased before getting on the bus, or enjoy a meal at a Service Area along the way.

As the bus continues to wind its way through mountain valleys, we stop along the way for a breath-taking view of Omura Bay, revealing the beautiful coastlines of Kyushu. Arrive in mid-afternoon in Nagasaki, the most westerly city in Japan. Founded by the Portuguese in the 16th century, Nagasaki is a compact and unusually cosmopolitan city.

Dinner is at a local restaurant near the hotel.

Note: Walking distance dependent on personal preference. Coach transfer is approx. 220 miles; about 3.5 hours with luggage.
Accommodations: Hotel Cuore
Day 14 - January 29: Edo Japan & Trade With the West

At the hotel, we’ll enjoy a breakfast buffet with a variety of dishes to choose from, plus juice, coffee, tea, water.

Setting out on foot we’ll take a tram to get to Dejima where we’ll visit the re-created Dejima, the small Dutch trading post, which was the sole point of access between Japan and the West during Japan’s long period of seclusion from the rest of the world. The buildings have been recreated and these, along with informative displays, provide a very good idea of daily life in the Edo period. We’ll then continue to the nearby Tojin-machi, the still-atmospheric and original Chinese quarter, and Glover Gardens. The latter was the home of an expatriate Scots businessman, Thomas Glover, living in Japan during the late Edo and early Meiji, modern state, period. The gardens, which provide great views over the sea inlet, now contain period houses of other foreign traders brought here from around Nagasaki.

On your own to explore the local fare for lunch.

Free time. Take this opportunity for personal independent exploration to see and do what interests you most. Please refer to the list of Free Time Opportunities. Your Tour Leader will be happy to offer suggestions.

Dinner will be in a local restaurant. Be sure to prepare for check-out and transfer in the morning.

Note: Walking approx. 3 miles in the morning; about 4 hours; with stops and opportunities to rest; gentle pace. Some short public transportation transfers.

Accommodations: Hotel Cuore

Day 15 - January 30: Fukuoka – Japan’s Gateway to Asia

Hotel buffet for breakfast.

Once checked out of the hotel, we’ll transfer via train to Fukuoka where we will set out on an exploration of this lively city, known as “Japan’s gateway to Asia.” En route, we’ll make a stop in Dazaifu, the old western capital of Japan, for a visit to the impressive Tenman-Gu Shrine, dating from 905AD and home to 6,000 plum trees.

Lunch is on your own to sample the regional cuisine.

We’ll then go to the Kyushu National Museum to view the collections of calligraphy, sculpture and arts from Japan and its Asian neighbors. Our tour leader will offer commentary illuminating the stories and influences related to the art.
At a local restaurant near the hotel, we’ll celebrate our journey and review the highlights of the program over our family-style farewell dinner. Be sure to prepare for check-out and departures in the morning.

Note: Express and local trains to Dazaifu (3hrs). Up to 4 miles total walking en route to and around Dazaifu, as well as in the museum.
Accommodations: Hotel Forza Hakata

Day 16 – January 31: Program Concludes
After checking out of the hotel, we’ll transfer by taxis to Fukuoka Airport. This concludes our program.

Hotel check-out by 11:00 a.m. Short transfer via taxi to Fukuoka Airport.

NOTE: This is a very walking intensive tour. Participants must be able to comfortably walk five miles per day.

Program Fee: $6,950.00 per person based on double occupancy; single occupancy supplement $600. All in-country costs are covered including, hotels, lectures, entrance fees, three meals a day, tipping, and ground transportation. Your transportation costs to and from Japan are not included. When you are ready to make your airline reservations please note that the tour begins in Tokyo and concludes in Fukuoka, so you will want to arrange your flights accordingly.

Important note: Travel insurance is always recommended for any travel out of the United States. It protects the passenger’s financial investment, as well as any unexpected medical needs during travel. University of Alaska Fairbanks does not sell travel insurance policies, but there are several ways to purchase coverage. Some credit card companies insure trips that are purchased with their card. Another option is to check with a local travel agency. We advise that you look in to coverage within 15 days of making the deposit, as some vendors require the coverage to be purchased within that time period to receive the most benefit.