



National Trust for Historic Preservation

National Trust Tours

Seasonal Gardens of Japan

November 7 – 18, 2024

from \$7,975

The origin of the Japanese garden lies in simple, gravel-covered forest clearings where the gods could manifest themselves. Over the centuries the gardens have evolved into an idealized reflection of the natural landscape through the careful use of stone and water features, trees, plants and moss. They are places of exquisite beauty, where the eye is led gently to perfectly framed views, often 'borrowing' a distant landscape as part of the picture being created. Trees and plants are carefully chosen for certain qualities of form, colour or texture, all of which combine to create an atmosphere of calm and contemplation. Autumn and spring foliage is particularly highly prized. Many of the most notable gardens are in and around **Kyoto**, the former capital of Japan, and we will have three full days exploring both public and private gardens here. We have included a variety of different styles: landscape gardens, stroll gardens, pond-and-island, each with its own particular charm and beauty. One of the best known is **Kinkaku-ji**, with the three-tiered Golden Pavilion at its heart.

From Kyoto we travel by **Bullet Train** to **Tokyo**, where there will be further garden visits, including **Hamarikyu**. There is so much more to Japan than gardens, of course, and we have also included a wide range of other visits and excursions reflecting the unique culture of the country. Highlights include the historic town of **Omi Hachiman**, the **Imperial Palace Garden** in Tokyo and a cruise on **Lake Ashi**, beneath the snow-capped peak of **Mount Fuji**. We also offer an optional excursion to **Hiroshima** and the **Peace Memorial Park**. We spend our final full day in **Kamakura**, which includes a visit to the **Great Buddha** and **Hase Temple** and is rounded off with a farewell **Japanese-style dinner** at a local restaurant.

Tour highlights:

- The temples and gardens of Kyoto, probably the finest in Japan
- Stepping back in time to old Japan at Omi Hachiman
- Watching the deer roam free in Nara Park
- Riding the bullet train to Tokyo
- The enormous Buddhas at Todaiji and Kamamura
- Stunning scenery in Hakone, including the iconic Mount Fuji
- The pulsating light show that is Tokyo at night
- Everything else!

Day 1

On arrival in Osaka in the morning we transfer by coach to Kyoto where we will visit the gardens of the **Imperial Palace**, which was the residence of Japan's Imperial Family until 1868 when the capital moved to Tokyo. The gardens feature broad gravel paths, lawns and groves of trees, including attractive weeping cherry trees, which should be in blossom for the spring tours.

Day 2

Today following breakfast, we will have another full day in Kyoto, visiting some outstanding gardens. **Daisen-in temple** is a dry-landscape garden of the Muromachi period, featuring some classic white gravel abstract forms and containing a famous boat-shaped rock. Mankind's fate, relationship with nature and place in the universe are all expressed in this masterpiece of dry-landscaped design.

We will then visit two more dry landscape gardens, **Ryogen-in** and **Zuiho-in**. Ryogen-in, founded in 1502, has four gardens in different styles while Zuiho-in, built in 1535, has a modern garden featuring rocks placed in the shape of a crucifix.

Our next visit is to **Kinkakuji temple**. The three-tiered Golden Pavilion was constructed originally in 1397 as a retirement villa for the Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu and it was then converted into a temple by his son. The temple was reconstructed in 1955 following an arson attack in 1950 and it is now the focus of this 'pond-and-island' garden. It exerts a unifying force on the expansive view of the broad Mirror Lake that spreads out beneath it, partly due to the skillful placement of crags and islands. A path behind leads through a leafy forest.

We conclude at **Ryoan-ji temple**, a famous and enigmatic dry landscape garden that often baffles the Western visitor. Created at the end of the sixteenth century as an aid to contemplation for the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism, it comprises five groups of three stones, on a sea of raked gravel running from east to west. All the stones, except one, appear to point upstream and all the stones, except one, are visible from any one viewpoint. There have been many interpretations of the garden's meaning – islands, mountains piercing low clouds, tiger cubs crossing water – and you are welcome to formulate your own theory! It is generally agreed however that the gravel represents the void, the idea of emptiness being central to Zen philosophy, and as you gaze upon this barely furnished garden you are encouraged to fill the void with the fruits of your imagination and let Ryoan-ji's tranquillity spread its magic.

Day 3

Following breakfast, we depart today on a full day excursion to the Prefecture of **Shiga**, to the east of Kyoto. We begin in **Otsu**, which is on the southwest edge of **Lake Biwa-ko**, the largest lake in Japan. Here we visit the ancient temple of **Ishiyamadera**, which was established around the middle of the 8th century by Roben Osho. The main hall, designated as a National Treasure, is located on the grounds containing an exposed wollastonite, which is a natural monument. Enshrined inside the main hall is an image of the Nyoirin-Kannon (Goddess of Mercy), which is designated by the national government as an Important Cultural Property. The Tahoto (a pagoda that enshrines the Buddha), was built by Minamoto no Yoritomo, who ruled at the end of the 12th century. Also contained here are many other historical and cultural properties, including the Todai-mon, a gate which is an Important Cultural Property, as well as the Genji-no-Ma, where it is said the world's oldest novel, Genji Monogatari (The Tale of Genji), was written.

From here we continue along the shores of Lake Biwa-ko to the historic town of **Omi Hachiman**, which has a castle dating from 1585 and was the base town for wealthy merchants. We will see quaint streets with lattice windows, pine trees stretching out from the gardens of private residences, 'udatsu' (roofs of unusual shape) and the **Hachimanbori Canal**, that was the hub of marine transportation. Until the mid-19th century, the town of Omi Hachiman was divided by the Hachimanbori, north of which was a residential area for the warriors while the south was for the townsfolk. The area for the townsfolk was further divided into the merchants' and craftsmen's areas and in the old merchants area we will visit the **Nishikawake House**, the former residence of a wealthy merchant family.

Day 4

Following breakfast, we begin with a visit to the dry landscape garden at **Ginkaku-ji** or 'Silver Pavilion', which was made a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1994. The garden is both enigmatic and startling, with some classic features such as a platform of sparkling white sand raked into parallel lines, and beside it a 6-ft high cone of sand with a flat top, which could be Mount Fuji, or a mound of rice representing prosperity – or a pile of sand for replenishing the platform. The pavilion is not actually silver but an austere black and white, although it was the original intention of the Shogun who built it to cover it in silver leaf, just as his grandfather covered Kinkaku-ji (see Day 3) in gold leaf. There is also a classic stroll garden, which complements and contrasts with the dry garden.

Our next visit is to the private garden of **Hakusa Sonsou** in the site of an old paddy field. The garden was created by a painter, Hashimoto Kansetsu, who visited China on more than forty occasions. He acquired the site at the age of thirty and spent the rest of his life painting here, designing the gardens and teahouses, and collecting the ancient stone lanterns, pagodas and Buddhas that adorn the pathways.

You may also enjoy browsing in the adjoining gallery which is home to several of Hashimoto's paintings – some of his major works appear in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Pompidou Centre in Paris.

We continue to **Kyoto Botanical Garden** which displays over 120,000 plants covering more than 13,000 species. Special features include a rose garden with 2,000 bushes, a 4,600 square metre conservatory, two iris gardens, a bonsai collection, a wild garden, eight sections for Japanese native plants and a forest zone. Around four ponds are precious specimens of trees unique to the Yamashiro Basin and many varieties of maples.

Our final visit is to the **Bamboo Forest Path** in Sagano, a strange, otherworldly forest of dense bamboo, whose soaring trunks shade the path, their leaves rustling musically in the breeze.

Day 5

Today we are free to explore Kyoto at leisure. Alternatively, we offer an **optional excursion**, by train to **Hiroshima**. This was the first city to experience the destruction of an atomic bomb in 1945 and the city is now symbolized by the **Peace Memorial Park**, which is included in our visit. In the park are a museum, the Memorial Cenotaph, the Children's Peace Monument and the Flame of Peace.

Day 6

This morning after breakfast, we transfer to **Nara**, the first real capital of Japan – a title the town held for a 75-year period from the year 710.

We begin with a visit to one of Nara's Unesco World Heritage Sites - the **Todaiji temple**. The temple is famous for housing the world's largest bronze statue of Buddha at 53m and the wooden structure in which it resides is the world's largest wooden building even though it is a reconstruction, built in 1709, and it is in fact a mere two thirds of the size of the original! Fires and earthquakes have dislodged the head of the Great Buddha several times – the current head dates from 1692.

We will also enjoy **Nara Park**, where over a thousand tame deer roam free. In pre-Buddhist times they were said to be messengers from the gods and today they enjoy the status of National Treasures.

We continue to **Kasuga Grand Shrine**, one of Japan's most important Shinto shrines. The original building was completed in 710, but according to the strictures of purity and renewal governing Shinto beliefs, the structure was demolished and rebuilt in identical fashion every 20 years. This was repeated 50 times over the centuries, but the current structure has been preserved since 1863. On the approach walk to the shrine you will see around 3000 mainly stone lanterns, which are lit during local festivals.

Following lunch at a local restaurant (included) we return to our hotel in the late afternoon, where we will have time to freshen up before transferring to the **Kodaiji Temple** for an evening visit. At night this seventeenth century stroll garden is illuminated in different colours to create a magical effect, and lasers project images onto the white sand and walls.

This evening we have a special treat as we transfer to the geisha district of Gion, home to shops, restaurants and teahouses where geisha entertain – if we are lucky, we may spot a geisha, or geiko as they are more correctly known in Kyoto, on her way to or from an engagement. Here we will have **dinner with a maiko**, an apprentice geiko, and learn about the history of geisha/geiko, the traditional Japanese female entertainers who act as hostesses and whose skills include performing various Japanese arts such as classical music, dance, games and conversation, mainly to entertain male customers.

Day 7

This morning, after breakfast, we check out of the hotel and visit the **Heian Shrine**, a rare example of an extensive pond garden in the grounds of a Shinto shrine. The shrine is relatively new having been built in 1895 to commemorate the 1100th anniversary of the founding of Kyoto as the capital. There are actually four separate gardens, set around the main shrine buildings, and designed fundamentally for strolling. With a total area of approximately 33 000 square metres the gardens are designated as a national scenic treasure representative of Meiji-era (1868 – 1912) garden design. Some of the trees in the garden are over 100 years old.

We continue to **Nanzen-ji Temple** complex, a quintessential Zen temple that exudes an air of serenity. Nanzen-ji has been at the centre of Japanese Zen history since 1386, when it was placed in control of Kyoto's Gozan, of five great Zen temples. Most of Nanzen-ji's structures date from the 17th century, apart from the celebrated Western-style aqueduct of 1890, a wonderfully incongruous feature which many Japanese believe to be one of Nanzen-ji's greatest attractions.

This afternoon we leave Kyoto, taking the famous 'Shinkansen' or **Bullet Train** to Tokyo. On arrival in Japan's capital, we are met by a coach and transferred to our hotel.

Day 8

We depart by coach for a full day excursion after breakfast, to the historic seaside town of **Kamakura**, which was the capital of Japan from 1185 until 1333. The town is flanked by wooded mountains on three sides and Sugami Bay to the south. Here we visit the **Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine**, one of the biggest attractions in Kamakura, its approach running between two lotus ponds. The shrine is dedicated to the God of War and features a gingko tree which dates from the 13th century, beneath which a famous political assassination was carried out in 1219.

We then visit the **Great Buddha**, the second largest after the one in Nara. Cast in 1252, the bronze statue is 13.5m (44 ft) high. Having survived tidal waves, earthquakes, fires and typhoons it now has shock absorbers in its base. For a small fee you can go inside the Buddha itself.

After lunch in Kamakura (included) we continue to the **Hase Kannon Temple**. Simple and elegant, the temple is home to a superb 11-faced Kannon, Goddess of Mercy, which is said to date from the 8th century. It is commonly believed that the 11 faces allow Kannon, ever vigilant for those in need of her assistance, to cast an eye in all directions. Beside the temple is the sutra repository – rotating the sutras is said to earn as much merit as reading them. The 1264 bell is the town's oldest. Below it is a hall dedicated to Jizo, guardian of children, surrounded by countless statues to children who have died.

We return to our hotel this evening.

Day 9

We depart today after breakfast, on a full day excursion to **Hakone** and **Mount Fuji**, which begins with a visit to **Onshi Hakone Park**, an area of forested mountains and deep ravines. We will also enjoy a cruise on **Lake Ashi**, the principal attraction of Hakone, 723m above sea-level. The views are dominated by Mount Fuji, the highest peak in Japan at 3776m and instantly recognizable.

Following lunch at a local restaurant (included) we will drive along the foot of **Mount Fuji** for a further photo stop at **Lake Kawaguchi** before returning to Tokyo and our hotel.

Day 10

Following breakfast we have a full day sightseeing in Tokyo today, beginning with a visit to the garden of **Kyu Furukawa**, which was once owned by the Munemitsu Mutsu, a hero of the Meiji era but it became the property of the Furukawa family when Munemitsu's second son became a son-in-law of the Furukawa financial group. The house and western-style garden were designed by British architect, Dr Josiaa Conder - the house is modeled on an English aristocratic mansion, and it would indeed fit easily into a British or European landscape. This is a masterpiece of modern design, combining the authentic Japanese-style with an Italian terraced style garden full of roses. At the centre of the Japanese garden is the Shinji Pond. A waterfall and large stone lanterns heighten the serene atmosphere in the garden.

We continue to **Mukojima Hyakkaen Garden** established in the 1800s by Sahara Kiku-u, a wealthy dealer in antiques. One theory has it that the name "Hyakkaen" was chosen to mean "a garden with a hundred flowers that bloom throughout the four seasons." When first opened, its main feature was 360 ume trees. In later years, many different blooming flowers and plants mentioned in classic Chinese and Japanese works of literature and poetry were collected, enabling visitors to enjoy blooming flowers throughout the year. The garden is the only surviving flower garden from the Edo Period. There will also be an opportunity to visit the **Shunkanen Bonsai Museum** (entrance not included). We return to the hotel where your afternoon is free to enjoy Tokyo at your leisure.

Day 11

Following breakfast, we have a full day sightseeing in Tokyo today. We begin with a visit the **Sensoji Temple**, Tokyo's most sacred temple. Inside a golden image of Kannon (the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy) is enshrined which allegedly was fished out of the nearby Sumidagawa River by two fishermen in 628. The image has remained on the same spot ever since throughout successive rebuildings of the temple. In front of the temple is a large incense cauldron: the smoke is said to bestow good health and you will see visitors rubbing it onto their skin and clothes. Directly in front of the Sensoji Temple lies the **Nakamise-dori**, the temple's shopping precinct, where you will have free time to browse through the stalls which sell everything from haircombs, fans and kimonos to wigs and genuine Edo crafts. There is even a stall where you can buy freshly shaved seaweed – and if you're lucky you may even see the process itself taking place! (Please note that on a Sunday some shops may be closed).

We continue to **Rikugien Garden**, often considered Tokyo's most beautiful Japanese landscape garden. Built around 1700 for the 5th Tokugawa Shogun, Rikugien literally means "six poems garden" and reproduces in miniature 88 scenes from famous poems. The garden is a good example of an Edo Period strolling garden and features a large central pond surrounded by manmade hills and forested areas, all connected by a network of trails.

Our next visit is to the **Imperial Palace East Gardens**. The first Tokugawa shogun began building a castle here in 1590 which over the years after successive upgrades became the largest castle in the world. Now the Emperor and Japanese Royal Family live in the western part of the grounds in the Imperial Palace, rebuilt after the previous one was bombed in World War II. Only part of the grounds are open to the public. In addition, there is an exhibition of artefacts given to emperors over the years. The garden itself has a fine collection of bamboo and Japanese spring blossom.

This afternoon we visit **Hamarikyu Garden** where General Grant stayed with the emperor in 1895, now a popular place for relaxation. It is hard to imagine such a place of tranquility right in the heart of the hustle and bustle that is Tokyo. Hamarikyu has the only seawater pond in Tokyo, and it also boasts a 300-year-old Black Pine – one of the largest in the country. The garden was part of the official hunting ground of the Tokugawa Shogunate in the 17th century and has now been designated a special place of beauty by the National Government. We also enjoy a cruise on the **Sumida River**.

This evening we conclude with a **farewell dinner** at a local restaurant which will feature Japanese specialities.

Meals: Breakfast & dinner.

Day 12

We check out of our hotel today and transfer by coach to Tokyo Airport, where our tour concludes.

Included in the price

- 11 nights' bed & breakfast; six at the 4-star ANA Hotel, Kyoto and five nights at the 4-star Grand Prince Hotel, New Takanawa, Tokyo (or similar)
- Dinner and welcome drink on first evening, a dinner with a Maiko, three lunches and a farewell dinner
- Comfortable coach travel throughout
- All visits as outlined in the itinerary
- Services of a professional tour manager and a local guide

Not included (per person)

- Single occupancy supplement \$2100
- Optional Excursion (Hiroshima) On request