The Best of the West

For our Best of the West Tour you can fly in and out of Kansai International Airport (Osaka) and visit the best that the western mainland has to offer. You will see everything from the modern bustling cities of Osaka and Hiroshima to the smaller more traditional towns of Kurashiki and Tsuwano in rural Japan. No trip to Japan would be complete without visiting Kyoto, where you will start your adventure.

Kyoto
Kyoto is where you will find the Japan of silent temples nestling in bamboo groves, gardens of finely raked sand and bewitching geisha. This city is home to over 2,000 temples and shrines, exquisite crafts and some of the best cuisine in the country. In short, Kyoto is the heartbeat of traditional Japan.
Not to be missed are Kinkaku-ji, Ginkaku-ji and Kiyomizu temples, although be aware that these do become crowded. For a more peaceful, intimate temple experience we recommend the temple complex of Daitoku-ji, in particular Daisen-in sub-temple, and the Arashiyama area to the west of the city.

Hiroshima, Miyajima island
Hiroshima is an attractive, cosmopolitan city which has risen from the ashes of the world's first atomic bomb attack on 6 August 1945. The hypocentre of the explosion is now the Peace Memorial Park, a beautiful expanse of greenery housing monuments to the tragedy. The park is flanked by the A-Bomb Dome, the former Industrial Promotion Hall which is the only surviving building from the blast, and the Peace Memorial Museum which tells of the bomb and the devastation of Hiroshima.
A superb network of trams will transport you around the city to some of Hiroshima's other attractions, namely Hiroshima Castle and Hiroshima Museum of Art. You can also use the tram to take the scenic route to Miyajima island.

Tsuwano and Yonago
A quiet mountain town in rural Japan. The former samurai quarter houses some wonderful old building with colourful carp swimming up and down the roadside water channels. Just outside of town you can ride a cable car to the castle ruins for a beautiful view of the town and the surrounding mountains. The highlight of Yonago is the garden of the Adachi Museum of Art which have been named the best garden in Japan annually since 2003 by the Journal of Japanese Gardening.

Kurashiki
In the Edo period Kurashiki was an important trading town for rice and later becoming known for textiles. Having largely escaped World War II bombing much of Kurashiki’s old storehouses, mills and shops remain in good condition. With arching bridges and weeping willows flanking the Edo period canal, Kurashiki will give you a sense of where people lived and worked in old Japan.

Osaka
Known as the “kitchen of Japan”, Osaka is renowned for its warm-hearted, lively locals. Osaka Castle dominates the city as the old mixes with the very modern skyline and the aquarium is not to be missed. The city comes alive at night with endless opportunities to wine, dine and party. The beautiful port city of Kobe is also a stones throw away.
Itinerary

Days 1-2: UK-Osaka-Kyoto
Fly overnight from London Heathrow to Kansai International Airport (Osaka). From there you will transfer to your hotel in Kyoto for 4 nights.

Day 3: Kyoto
A rich history of religion, art and craft have combined to make this glorious city a spiritual home for the Japanese. For temples we recommend Kiyomizu-dera and Ginkaku-ji in the hills to the east of the city. Nijo Castle is also well worth a visit, and make sure you allow yourself plenty of time for the wonderful craft shops and delightful streets of Gion, the old geisha quarter.

Optional guided excursion: Kyoto Day Tour
Join a guided coach tour. As well as visits to Nijo Castle, Kinkaku-ji (The Golden Temple), Sanjusangendo Temple and Kiyomizu Temple, today's tour also includes a delicious buffet-style lunch.

Day 4: Nara at leisure
Whilst smaller than Kyoto, Nara is no less rich in attractions, with 8 UNESCO World Heritage Sights. The most outstanding of these is Todai-ji temple, the largest wooden building in the world and home to the Great Buddha statue – Japan's biggest. Other essential sights include Yakushi-ji and Horyu-ji temple, whose buildings include some of the world's oldest wooden structures.

Optional guided excursion: Nara Afternoon Tour
Spend the afternoon on a guided coach tour to Nara. Your guide will take you around Todaiji temple and Nara park followed by visits to Kasuga Taisha Shrine before heading back to Kyoto by coach.

Day 5: Kyoto
Spend another day in Kyoto where you may wish to venture out west to the leafy suburb of Arashiyama. Here you will find the magnificent bamboo forests and a hill top monkey park where you can feed monkeys and enjoy a rewarding view of Kyoto.

Day 6: Hiroshima/Miyajima (Start using your 7-Day Japan Rail Pass today)
Check out of your hotel and board the Bullet Train to Hiroshima. The Atomic Bomb Dome and the moving Peace Memorial Park and Museum are sights not to be missed. Make the short trip by ferry to the lovely island of Miyajima. Enjoy the beautiful scenery and fantastic views of the o-tori of Itsukushima Shrine, one of the most famous sights in Japan. By late afternoon the day-trippers will have left the island, and you will spend a magical evening in a ryokan (traditional Japanese inn) where a delicious Japanese dinner and breakfast are included.

Day 7: Miyajima-Tsuwano
After breakfast on Miyajima Island you will make your way to the pleasant and relaxing town of Tsuwano affectionately referred to as “Little Kyoto”. You will find koi carp swimming in the waterways along the beautiful streets of Tonomachi where you can explore the well preserved samurai houses and visit the Katsushika Hokusai Museum of Art, home to a fantastic collection of work by the famous nineteenth-century artist Hokusai. Tonight you will stay in a ryokan.

Day 8: Yonago
Today journey east to visit the renowned Adachi Museum famous for its spectacular 6 gardens (and its collection of contemporary Japanese art). The landscape gardens are composed of the best pines and rocks collected from all over Japan and can be enjoyed in any season. In the late afternoon board the train to Kurashiki where you will stay the night.
**Day 9: Kurashiki**
Wake up in the picturesque town of Kurashiki. Take a stroll along Kurashiki’s beautiful canals and visit a selection of traditional, feudal era warehouses that have been converted into an eclectic collection of museums the finest of which is the Ohara Museum. In the afternoon board the train and bullet train to Osaka where you will stay 3 nights.

**Day 10: Osaka**
Osaka is Japan’s third largest city and will give you a taste of modern Japan. Spend the day enjoying the sights of Osaka including the lively Dotonbori district for shopping, eating and entertainment; Osaka castle and the wonderful Osaka aquarium.

*Optional Tour: Osaka Bay Half Day*
On this tour you will visit the Osaka aquarium, one of the biggest public aquariums in the world. You will then board a replica of Christopher Columbus’ flagship boat the, Santa Maria, for a sightseeing cruise around Osaka Bay.

*Optional Tour: Ukiyoe & Okonomiyaki Experience*
For those wanting to get creative you will get the opportunity to make your own ukiyoe or woodblock print today. You can also sample the well known Osaka dish of okonomiyaki which is best described as a thick savoury pancake.

**Day 11: Osaka**
Spend a day at leisure in Osaka or take a day trip to the beautiful port town of Kobe. Considered one of Japan’s most attractive city, Kobe is sandwiched between the sea and the Rokko Mountain range where you can take a cable car to the top for a panoramic view of the city. You may wish take the opportunity to dine on world famous Kobe beef.

**Day 12: Depart Japan**
Transfer to Kansai International Airport (Osaka) for your flight back to the UK.
PRICE INCLUDES:

- 8 nights hotel accommodation at centrally located comfortable business hotels on a bed & breakfast basis
- 2 night accommodation in a traditional Japanese ryokan (inn) including a delicious dinner and a breakfast
- 7 Day Ordinary Class Japan Rail Pass
- Meet & Greet service on arrival at Kansai International Airport (Osaka)
- Airport transfer to the airport on Day 12

NOT INCLUDED IN PRICE:

- International airfare.
- Meals not mentioned in the itinerary.
- Airport transfer on arrival
- Entrance fees
- Taxi, subway and tramway fees.
- Insurance.
- Optional excursions (see below)

PRICE: £1,345.00 based on twin/double room occupancy.

Single Room Supplement: £250.00

Optional guided excursions:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Cost (per person)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kyoto 1 Day Tour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nara Afternoon Tour</td>
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<td>Osaka Bay Half Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ukiyoe &amp; Okonomiyaki Experience</td>
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All price estimates are based on current rates of exchange and are subject to availability. All prices are good for travel before the end of 2011 but exclude blackout periods which coincide with Japanese National Holidays and some weekends.

To make a booking, a deposit of £200 per person is required.
The balance of the price of the trip must be made 12 weeks prior to departure.