

JAPAN MEDITATIONS



Day 1 : Arrive Tokyo

Upon your arrival in Tokyo transfer to the hotel and time to relax from the flight.

Day 2 : Tokyo

Today after breakfast start the sightseeing tour around Tokyo beginning with the Tokyo Tower where you have a spectacular view of Metropolitan Tokyo from the observation deck. Next visit the Meiji Jingu Shrine, taking in a fine example of Japanese Shrine architecture, nestled in a peaceful and picturesque area. Then drive by Akasaka Palace. Afterwards, enjoy a pleasant walk in the East Garden of the Imperial Palace. After driving through Ginza Shopping District, have a Japanese style lunch. In the afternoon your guide takes you to Hamarikyu Garden which is a typical Daimyo garden in the Edo period with a tidal pond. Move on to Hinode Pier, where you enjoy a short cruise on the Sumida River as you head towards Tokyo's Asakusa neighborhood. Your ride on this historically significant body of water will take you underneath 12 bridges as you enjoy the unique architectural landmarks along the riverbank and see a harmonious blend of old and new Tokyo. Disembark from your boat and spend some time to stroll the Streets of Nakamise. Head on to the Asakusa Kannon Temple where you have the chance to explore Tokyo's oldest and most important Buddhist temple. End the day with a drive through Kappabashi, Ueno and Akihabara.

Day 3 : Sapporo

Today after breakfast transfer to the airport for your domestic flight to Sapporo, the largest city on Hokkaido and the host of the 1972 Winter Olympics. After checking at your hotel you set out on an exploration of the JR Sapporo Tower where you get a bird's eye view of Sapporo while also getting your bearings. In the evening enjoy dinner at the Sapporo Beer Garden, located next to the original Sapporo Beer Brewery.

Day 4 : Sapporo

You start the day at the Nijo Fish Market where locals visit to shop for fresh local produce and seafood such as crabs, salmon eggs, sea urchin and various fresh and prepared fish. On your way to the market, you walk along Odori Park, the venue for the world famous Sapporo Snow Festival held annually in early February. Later enjoy lunch at Ramen Yokocho, a narrow lane lined with shops serving Sapporo's famous miso ramen.

Day 5 : Otaru

Today you take a day trip to Otaru which once thrived as a major trade and fishing port. You begin our tour by visiting the preserved Aoyama family villa, documenting the time when the herring industry played a major role in Otaru and Hokkaido's history and development. After lunch, you will have some free time to explore the Canal area lined with Meiji period warehouses, and the Sakaimichi street with its Music Box Museum and Glass workshops.

Day 6 : Shiraoi

After breakfast this morning you leave for Hakodate. First, you travel to the nearby city of Shiraoi where you visit the Upopoy Ainu Village. Here you learn more about the Ainu, the foremost place in Japan to learn about the Ainu, the indigenous people of northern Japan. Later in the day we continue on to Noboribetsu Onsen, one of Japan's most popular onsens.

Day 7 : Noboribetsu

This day is free to explore the Noboribetsu area. Enjoy the many hot springs or walk around the Jigokudani (Hell Valley) where you find many steam vents, thermally heated pools, and small geysers. You may also simply want to relax and enjoy the baths at the ryokan.

Day 8 : Hakodate

After breakfast you travel to Hakodate. Hakodate was one of the first cities in Japan open to foreigners after the Meiji Restoration. After arriving in Hakodate, we will visit Goryo-Kaku, Japan's first western-style fort. Built in 1864 by the Tokugawa Shogunate in the shape of a five-pointed star, it was designed to trap attackers in a deadly crossfire. You go to top of the tower next to the fort, providing a view of Goryo-Kaku and the surrounding city. You also visit the Moto-machi historic area. Overlooking the western bay at the foot of Mount Hakodate, there are numerous sloping streets lined with 19th century churches, consulates, shops and homes of the foreigners who first opened this area of Japan to commerce. In the evening you take a ropeway to the top of Mt. Hakodate, where we will enjoy a panoramic view of Hakodate's night lights.

Day 9 : Aomori

After breakfast begin the day at the Hakodate morning market where fresh seafood as well as fresh produce are sold. Next you take an express train and Shinkansen bullet train to the city of Aomori in northern Tohoku. Here you stop at the Nebuta Warasse Museum, documenting the city's famous Nebuta Matsuri Nebuta Festival held every year in early August. The Nebuta Warasse Museum attempts to capture the spirit of the festival.

Day 10: Sendai

Today after breakfast you continue your adventure by visiting the Sannai Maruyama Archaeological Site. This is the largest and one of the most complete and best preserved Jomon Period (13000–300 BC) villages in Japan. Unearthed by accident while surveying land to build a community baseball field, the former Sannai Maruyama Village once included over 700 structures and dwellings including long houses, storage structures, roads, and trash and burial pits. Later in the afternoon, you travel to Sendai.

Day 11: Sendai

This morning you take a local train to Hon-Shiogame Station. From here you board a boat for a cruise around Matsushima Bay that takes you to Matsushima. For hundreds of years, Matsushima has been celebrated as one of the Japan's three most scenic views. The Bay has more than 200 small islands covered with pine trees, and the best way to see these is by boat. After arriving at Matsushima, you tour Zuiganji. Zuiganji was a former Tendai sect temple founded in 828, but later changed to a Zen temple in the 13th century. Later visit Godaido, originally built in 807 and contains five statues which were enshrined there by the same priest who founded Zuiganji. The statues are displayed to the public only once every 33 years. The present building is a 1604 reconstruction by Date Masamune. Finish our day by enjoying tea and sweets at Kanrantei. Kanrantei is a Momoyama style tea house.

Day 12: Yamadera

You start the day by traveling to Yamadera. Yamadera is a scenic temple located in the mountains northeast of Yamagata City. The temple grounds extend high up a steep mountainside (the name Yamadera literally translates to "mountain temple") from where there are scenic views overlooking the valley below. The temple was created over a thousand years ago in 860 as a temple of the Tendai sect. Later in the afternoon you continue to Aizu-Wakamatsu, a former castle town with a long Samurai tradition.

Day 12: Aizu-Wakamatsu

Today you explore the Samurai city of Aizu Wakamatsu, beginning with the Sazedo. Built in 1796, it features a double helix staircase similar to the famous Château de Chambord, the French castle. Next you visit the Nissin-kan Samurai School. It was established in 1803 by the Aizu Domain for the purpose of fostering Japan's next generation of samurais. Later continue the day by visiting Tsuruga Castle. Tsuruga Castle was originally built in 1384, however, it was destroyed after the Boshin War of 1868, and rebuilt as a concrete reconstruction in the 1960s. The inside of the castle houses a museum with displays depicting the history of the castle and the Samurai lifestyle. You will retrieve your main luggage after returning to the ryokan.

Day 13: Ouchijuku

This morning after breakfast you travel by train to Ouchijuku. Ouchijuku is a former post town along the Aizu–Nisei Kaito trade route, which connected Aizu with Nikko during the Edo Period. Restrictions set by the shogunate required travelers to make their long journeys on foot, and as a result post towns developed along the route to provide travelers with food, accommodations, and rest. Ouchijuku has since been restored to look as it did in the Edo Period. You continue on to Kinugawa Onsen for overnight

Day 14: Nikko

After breakfast today you travel to Nikko. In the past, Nikko was a center of Shinto and Buddhist mountain worship for many centuries before Toshogu Shrine was built in the early Edo Period. In addition to touring Toshogu Shrine, you also tour Rinnoji and Taiyuinbyo. Rinnoji is Nikko's most important temple, and was founded by Shodo Shonan, the Buddhist monk who introduced Buddhism to Nikko in the 8th century. Taiyuinbyo is the mausoleum of the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu, the grandson of Ieyasu. Later in the afternoon, you travel by local train and Shinkansen to Tokyo and enjoy our Sayonara dinner.

Day 15: Tokyo Departure

It is time to say Sayonara as your Japan exploration comes to an end. You have a transfer to the airport in time for your international departure flight.