



The glories of Japan in cherry blossom season with Joe Swift
Telegraph Tour | 12 Days | Moderate
Tokyo – Yudanaka – Kanazawa - Kyoto - Osaka

Explore the country's wonderful highlights during cherry blossom season. The Gardeners' World presenter and garden designer Joe Swift will join the tour to share his gardening tales as well as his unique insight and knowledge of all things horticultural.

Explore the unmissable cities of Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka

Travel by Japan's famous bullet train at impressive speeds

Experience the unforgettable cherry blossom

Soak up the beauty of iconic Mount Fuji and tranquil Lake Ashi

Visit Yudanaka's famous snow monkeys

Take a wander in Kanazawa's stunning Kenroku-en garden

Choose from one of five exclusive options to immerse yourself in the local culture

Tour inclusions

- Return international economy flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- Meals as stated in your itinerary
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English speaking National Escort (if your group is 10 or more passengers) or Local Guides
- Specialist advice from our experienced travel consultants
- Comprehensive travel guides
- Safe and secure with ABTA, ATOL and IATA

The only thing you may have to pay for are personal expenditure e.g. drinks, meals not included, insurance of any kind, early check in or late checkout and other items not specified on the itinerary.

Moderate tours

The glories of Japan in cherry blossom season with Joe Swift is a moderate tour. This means that the itinerary requires a good level of fitness.

- On several days there will be sightseeing on foot for extended periods of time, often involving steps or uneven ground
- You will be required to get on and off various sizes of boat without assistance

Of course, our National Escorts or local guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary.

About Joe Swift

After leaving school, Joe went to art college and played bass in a band. He then travelled and worked abroad, living in Australia and landscaping in Sydney and Melbourne, before returning to the UK and studying garden design at The English Gardening School. Joe started presenting Gardeners' World in 1998 and in addition to designing gardens, he also broadcasts, writes and hosts the BBC's coverage of the Chelsea Flower Show.

Exclusive Experiences

This unique itinerary includes one of the below Exclusive Experiences per guest, at no additional cost. Each guest will be able to nominate their favourite experience at the time of booking. Spaces are extremely limited and will be offered on a strict first come first served basis.

Kimono Experience, Tokyo - Choosing from a huge selection of designs, experience first-hand the art of formal kimono dressing in this quintessentially Japanese garment, that is worn by both men and women, to explore Tokyo's Asakusa district and the Buddhist temple complex of Senso-ji.

Bonsai Museum, Nagano - Explore the practice of cultivating bonsai, a delicate Japanese art form dating back over 1,000 years, at this fascinating museum and garden. With hundreds of beautiful specimens of miniature trees, the museum also has a gallery of intricately created landscapes to admire.

Tea Ceremony, Kenroku-en - The teahouse is a prominent feature in any traditional Japanese garden and the perfect place to experience the intricacies and procedures of a Japanese tea ceremony. Sip your freshly poured tea and nibble on traditional sweets as you look out over the beauty of the garden.

Geisha dress up (women only), Kyoto - Geisha are the quintessential Japanese characters – so why not have a go at playing them? With the help of dressers and make-up artists, be transformed into a Geisha (with full, intricate make-up). Don't forget to take plenty of pictures!

Zen meditation, Kyoto - Learn the art of basic meditation at a centre of Zen Buddhism Kodai-ji, a 17th-century temple set in classical Zen gardens. Whilst you may not reach transcendence, the act of meditating in a tranquil temple setting is the perfect way to experience this important element of Japanese culture.

ITINERARY - The glories of Japan in cherry blossom season with Joe Swift

Friday 6th April – Saturday 7th April: Fly to Tokyo

Fly overnight to Japan's vibrant and cutting-edge capital, Tokyo. On arrival, you will be transferred to your hotel where you have the rest of the day to settle in.

Check in to your hotel will be from 2pm today, early check in is not included. If your flight arrives in the morning and you wish to arrange this, please speak to your reservations consultant. Meals will be at your own discretion until dinner tonight.



Meals Included: Dinner

Destination Information

Tokyo – one of the world's most cutting edge capital cities, Tokyo is a city of contrasts, famous for its neon-lit landscape, towering skyscrapers, peaceful shrines and lovingly tended gardens. Although long the political and cultural centre of Japan, Tokyo became the official capital when the Meiji Emperor moved it to Tokyo in 1867.

Sunday 8th April: Cherry Blossoms with Joe Swift

Tokyo is a city that is always moving forward – from the ever-changing skyline to the fashions and trends of the population. As modern as it may appear, behind the neon façade is a traditional soul that is easy to find amongst the old alleyways, temples and shrines of Edo. Today, you will experience both sides of the city, ascending the soaring Tokyo Sky Tree, exploring the celebrated Senso-ji Temple and vibrant Asakusa district in your own time. Wander amongst the famous cherry blossoms with Joe Swift, one of the most celebrated garden specialists at the Chelsea Flower Show and the BBC, in Ueno Park, the most photographed cherry blossom scene in the world, and delight in the unusual traditional of Sakura (cherry blossoms in Japanese). This evening, cruise the waters of Tokyo Bay, with dinner and welcome drink, the perfect vantage point to admire the supercharged lights of the city.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Dinner

Please note that the cherry blossoms are weather dependant and it is not guaranteed that they will be in bloom at the time of your visit.

Destination Information

Tokyo Skytree – The tallest structure in Japan and the tallest tower in the world, Tokyo Skytree is predominantly a television and radio broadcast tower and is earthquake resistant.

Senso-ji Temple – An ancient Buddhist Temple and the oldest in Tokyo, the Sensoji temple was originally founded in the 7th century. The temple adorns an image of the Buddhist Goddess Kannon, who was said to have been rescued by two fishermen from the Sumida River in Tokyo.

Ueno Park – A picturesque park and one of Tokyo's most popular cherry blossom spots, Ueno Park is home to over 1000 cherry trees lining its central pathway.

Monday 9th April: Mount Fuji

Travelling by bullet train, take a day trip to Hakone and Mount Fuji. From here, embark on a cruise of the spectacular Lake Ashi, keeping an eye out for the bright vermilion torii gates that occupy both the surrounding hillsides and shallows of the lake itself. You may even catch a glimpse of the cone of Mount Fuji peering over the hills, though once you have flown high above the lake on the Komagatake Ropeway, the views of Mount Fuji will be breathtaking. Travel into the beautiful Fuji Five Lakes area, visit Oishi Park on the shores of Lake Kawaguchi for spectacular views of the mountain, and learn more at the Fuji Visitor Centre before catching the bullet train back to Tokyo.



Meals Included: Breakfast

Destination Information

Fuji Visitor Centre – Provides a comprehensive introduction to the nature, culture, history and ecology of Mount Fuji.

Lake Ashi – Formed over 3000 years ago when Mount Hakone last erupted, Lake Ashi with Mount Fuji in the background, is the symbol of Hakone.

Tuesday 10th April: Travel to Yudanaka

Depart Tokyo by coach and travel to Yudanaka, stopping en route at Matsumoto to visit the magnificent castle. Heralded as one of Japan's national treasures, this is also one of Japan's oldest castles, built in the 16th century – impressively, the interiors are all original. Yudanaka sits at the top of a fertile valley full of orchards and farms, all watched over the distant peaks of the Japanese Alps. It is also well-known as an onsen resort, and your accommodation tonight will be in a traditional ryokan.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Traditional Japanese Ryokan - Staying in a Japanese tatami mat room, you will get an authentic taste of the traditional Japanese lifestyle. The room style is minimalist and will include futon bedding which consists of a comfortable mattress laid directly onto the tatami mat floor and a warm, down duvet. Why not try out the Japanese onsen (shared baths) – a once in a lifetime experience where men and women bathe separately in natural hot springs. It is customary to go completely nude!

Destination Information

Matsumoto Castle – Known as the 'crow castle due to its dark black exterior, the Matsumoto castle dates back to the 16th century and is the oldest wooden castle in Japan.

Wednesday 11th April: Snow Monkeys

Travel up into the hills around Yudanaka to meet the beautiful Japanese Macaques, better known as snow monkeys, who have taken to bathing in their very own hot springs in the forest. A short walk through 'Hell Valley' (named for its steam vents and sulphurous streams) will bring you to the pool, which is frequented by a large population of monkeys, who you can watch bathing, playing and relaxing. Returning to Nagano, catch a bullet train to the cultural and historic hub of Kanazawa. The rest of the day is free to spend as you wish.



Meals Included: Breakfast

Destination Information

Jigokudani Yaen-Koen (Monkey Park) – It is in baths of hot water found deep in the forest that the resident Japanese Macaques like to soak; the monkeys live in large social groups and it can be quite entertaining to watch their interactions.

Kanazawa - The capital of the Ishikawa Prefecture, Kanazawa is known for its beautiful samurai and geisha districts, as well as its stunning Kenroku-en Garden.

Thursday 12th April: Kenroku-en Garden with Joe Swift

The picture of old world Japan, Kanazawa boasts some of the country's best-preserved traditional neighbourhoods, once home to Geisha and Samurai. This scenic settlement is also an exciting, modern city with a thriving modern art, fashion and dining scene. On your visit you will explore the Nomura Samurai House, once home to one of the most powerful families in the city, a dwelling frozen in the sophistication and splendour of the Edo period. Accompanied by Joe Swift, continue to Kenroku-en, a 17th-century garden, one of the 'Three Great Gardens of Japan'. The perfect exhibition of the balance of peace and harmony, Kenroku-en has been long treasured in Japanese society. The rest of the day is free for your own explorations.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Destination Information

Nomura Samurai Family House – A restored Samurai residence with a beautiful garden. Nomura was a high-ranked samurai of the Meiji Period.

Kenroku-en – One of Japan's 'Three Great Gardens', Kenroku-en dates back to the early 17th century and is noticeable for its stunning beauty in all seasons.

Friday 13th April: Bullet train to Kyoto

Board another of Japan's legendary bullet trains and travel to Kyoto. On arrival, you'll have the rest of the day free to start soaking up the incredible history of the city. Why not make your way down to the famous district of Gion, where Geisha can be seen shuffling along the cobbled streets in their kimonos and geta (tall wooden clogs).



Meals Included: Breakfast

Destination Information

Kyoto – Once the ancient capital of Japan for approximately 1,000 years until 1867 when it was moved to Tokyo. Many national treasures can be found in Kyoto and in nearby Nara, including old shrines and temples, screen paintings, beautiful gardens, and statues of Buddha.

Saturday 14th April: Ancient Kyoto

Capital for a millennium, Kyoto was also the heart of religion, philosophy, art and cuisine, making it a treasure trove of Japan's history and culture. Here, the best known cultural arts were born – the tea ceremony, Kabuki and Geisha to name a few. As much as Kyoto's history can surprise and delight, the city still has a youthful vibrancy that makes it a delight to explore. Today you will discover the markets and temple of Kiyomizu, the haunting Shinto shrine of Fushimi Inari, and the golden pavilion of Kinkaku-ji. The rest of the day is free to spend as you wish.

Meals Included: Breakfast

Destination Information

Kiyomizu Temple – A 16th century Buddhist Temple in Kyoto. A highlight is the Hondo's veranda which is perched over the hillside, offering spectacular woodland vistas.

Fushimi Inari Shrine – The Fushimi Inari is a corridor of red torii shrines which stretch through the thick woods of Mount Inari, a truly remarkable sight.

Kinkaku-ji Temple (Golden Pavilion) – A Buddhist temple, the Golden Pavilion is a brilliant golden hue colour and is very minimalistic; it is set in an excellent example of Japanese garden design.

Sunday 15th April: Discover Nara

Another former capital, Nara also has a huge cultural legacy, considered secondary only to Kyoto's. This picturesque, compact city is endlessly charming, something you'll notice as you explore. Admire the magnificent Daibutsu, the world's largest bronze statue of Buddha at Todaiji. The grounds of the temple are occupied by Sika Deer, regarded as messengers of the Shinto gods, and later stroll through Isuien Gardens. Transfer by coach to Osaka where the rest of the day is free time to begin discovering this exciting city.



Meals Included: Breakfast

Destination Information

Nara - With eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites the beautiful city of Nara was Japan's first permanent capital.

Todaiji Temple – A UNESCO World Heritage Site, Todaiji Temple is one the Seven Great Temples of Japan and is home to the world's largest bronze statue, Daibutsu.

Osaka - Japan's third largest city. What Osaka lacks in sightseeing locations, it makes up for with its flamboyance, fun loving people and amazing food.

Monday 16th April: Explore Osaka

Visit magnificent Osaka Castle before discovering the foodie haven that is the Dotonbori District, where you will sample delicious local flavours at lunch before taking a cruise on the Yodogawa River. This evening, sit down to enjoy a farewell meal.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Destination Information

Osaka Castle – Although construction of the original castle dates back as far as 1583 it is now entirely modern. The building has been reconstructed many a time throughout history due attacks and even a lightning strike which resulted in the castle burning down in 1665.

Dotonbori district – Historically a theatre district and still a popular entertainment area today the vibrant Dotonbori district offers an eccentric and electric atmosphere.

Tuesday 17th April: Fly to UK

Transfer to Osaka's airport and fly to the UK, arriving home the same or following day.

Meals Included: Breakfast

Please note: Late check-out is not included, if you wish to book a late check-out for your final day in Osaka, please contact our reservations department who can confirm the additional price and make this arrangement for you, subject to availability at the hotel.



TRAVEL INFORMATION - The glories of Japan in cherry blossom season with Joe Swift

Visas

A visa is not required for UK citizens visiting Japan.

Insurance

It is a condition of booking with us that you take out suitable travel insurance. You must provide us with the name of your insurer, policy number and their 24 hour emergency contact number when you book with us or as soon as possible thereafter. These details will be available to your national escort should they be required. Wendy Wu Tours will not be liable for any costs incurred by you due to your failure to take out suitable travel insurance from the date of booking.

Eating in Japan

Japanese cuisine is delicious, colourful and healthy. Meals are usually served with a bowl of rice and a bowl of miso soup and consist usually of fish, pickled vegetables and meat. Japan's other main staple is noodles, most famous being Udon and Soba. Our schedule of meals is designed so that you can experience the local dishes, their individual flavours as well as the different ways they are prepared and cooked throughout Japan. Food is an important element of Japanese culture. It is a time for families and friends to come together and much of family life revolves around the dinner table. Most food is eaten with chopsticks so best get practicing as cutlery is not always available at restaurants.

Meals included on this tour are stated in the day to day itinerary. Breakfast will be buffet style. Lunches are mostly pre-set options as is custom in many local restaurants. Dinner is usually buffet-style, featuring a wide selection of high quality Japanese and Western dishes. We usually find this style of dining suits the wide and varied tastes of our customers on tour. These are also pre-booked in advance prior to your arrival by your guides. This will provide greater flexibility and allow you to sample a broad range of local cuisines and dishes. All beverages will be at your own expense and are readily available.

On some days where lots of sights are covered, dinner times may be early and your tour group may head directly to the restaurant after sightseeing without stopping at your hotel to freshen up.

Accommodation

Your accommodation is selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family run guesthouse in a smaller town. In more remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have all western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three star standard, but please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between the UK and Japan.

Please note that in Japan hotel rooms and bathrooms are renowned for being small. Rooms booked for single use are usually smaller than a standard double or twin room, contain one small double bed (or one single bed), and are designed for one person to use. All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning, TV and telephone. Hotels in Japan often do not have porters and you will be required to carry your own luggage. If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your National Escort/local guide. Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards meet your needs.

In Yudanaka hotels tend to be more traditional in style and culture, you will be staying in a Japanese tatami mat room. The room style is minimalist and will include futon bedding which consists of a comfortable mattress laid directly onto the tatami mat floor and a warm, down duvet. You may be asked to take your shoes off at the door and store them in a secure locker – this is very traditional Japanese culture.

Transport

Coaches: Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. Roads in Japan are extremely well maintained and are comparatively smooth with the rest of Asia.

Development in Japan

Japan is a developed country and as such matches the west in modernity and technological advances. Japan is an extremely safe country and takes great responsibility in maintaining high safety standards.

Group Size

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by a national escort. There will usually be no more than 30 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so.

Climate

Please refer to our website or brochure for detailed temperature charts.

After your booking

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice followed by deposit documentation, which includes a visa application form (if applicable), and a help sheet. Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately 2 weeks prior to departure.

Itinerary changes

It is our intention is to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate; in these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.