



## Traditions of Japan

Arts, crafts, history, society

**8–20 April 2026 (MM 911)**

13 days • £9,170

*International flights not included*

Lecturer: Reverend Professor Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones

Japanese custom, creativity and character explored during the sublime cherry blossom season.

Modern architecture in Tokyo and historic buildings in Shirakawa and Takayama.

Extraordinary temples and gardens in Kyoto, and the legendary, ancient shrine at Izumo.

Traditional arts and crafts in Kanazawa.

One of the joys of exploring Japan is discovering its many different facets. It is a country of exquisite ancient beauty, but also at the cutting edge of modern design and creativity. Colourfully different characters constantly stride out both in history – such as Minamoto no Yoritomo, the founder of the shogunate – and today, in the pink-haired punks and Cosplay followers of Tokyo's Shibuya. Japan is known for adapting ideas from elsewhere, but it has also always produced art and ideas of wonderful originality.

This tour has been designed to take us to the heart of Japan, to explore the many aspects of the country and its people: its stunning natural beauty and heritage; the continuing work of its crafts-people; art and architecture both old and new; its history and relations with neighbours; and modern Japan and its position in the world.

In the sixth century, Buddhism arrived from China. Kyoto, founded as the new capital in 794, perfectly displays this history through its gardens and Buddhist temples, many of which are located on the hillsides around the city. Even when the seat of power moved to Kamakura and later to Tokyo in 1603, Kyoto remained at the heart of Japan. A visit to an Imperial villa offers a special insight, as does an exploration of the work of Kyoto's traditional craftspeople.

The long tradition of craft skills is also found in Kanazawa, which is well known for its Kutani pottery, lacquer and gold leaf. It is one of the few cities where tea houses and geisha are still in evidence. In the mountains not far away is Takayama, with its old merchants' houses, and Shirakawa's thatched gassho zukuri farmhouses.



*Japanese woodblock.*

At the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the emperor moved from Kyoto to Tokyo and Japan opened its doors to foreigners. Beginning in Tokyo, where there is an abundance of modern architecture, fashion and design, the tour offers a remarkable opportunity to engage with many aspects of this multi-layered country.

### Itinerary

The night of 7th April 2026 is included in the price of the tour to allow for early check-in on Day 1.

**Day 1: Tokyo.** The tour begins in Tokyo with lunch in the hotel (flights from London are not included). There is an afternoon walk in the dynamic and design-conscious Tokyo Midtown. Overnight in Tokyo.

**Day 2: Kanazawa.** Bullet train to Kanazawa (luggage by road, next day service), an attractive city which retains much of its old character. After lunch, visit the Kenrokuen, one of Japan's finest strolling landscape gardens, and the traditional Seisonkaku villa. Nearby, the D.T. Suzuki Museum, designed by Taniguchi Yoshio, commemorates the ideas of a leading Zen Buddhist philosopher. The circular, glass and steel form of the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art is striking. First of three nights in Kanazawa.

**Day 3: Kanazawa.** In the Nagamachi area there remain many old samurai houses. Visit the Nomura House, a beautifully restored example. In the afternoon there is a lacquer maker's studio visit (by special arrangement). A visit to the Noh Museum in the afternoon.

**Day 4: Kanazawa.** Morning walk to include Terajima Kurando's house, the geisha quarter with its charming latticed wooden houses, a gold leaf museum and the Utatsu Shrine. The rest of the day is free for exploration of the market or the Prefectural Museum to see the Kutani pottery for which Kanazawa is famous.

**Day 5: Shirakawa-go, Takayama.** Drive through Japan's central Alps to visit Shirakawa-go, famous for its gassho-zukuri houses with their distinctive thatched roofs, and visit the folk museum. In Takayama, a small town with streets lined with heritage wooden merchant houses, visit Takayama Jinya, the seat of the Edo-period government in the region. Overnight in a *ryokan*, a traditional Japanese inn (sleeping in futon beds on tatami mats).

**Day 6: Takayama, Matsue.** An early morning walk along the Miyagawa river to visit the market and nearby temples before driving to Nagoya Airport. Fly to Izumo (Fuji Dream Airlines), arriving mid-afternoon. First of two nights at Matsue, beside Lake Shinji, in an onsen hotel. Onsen are natural hot springs

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continued

and onsen bathing (optional) is a much-loved Japanese form of relaxation. First of two nights in Matsue.

**Day 7: Izumo, Matsue.** Ancient myths about the origin of Japan tell of Izumo and the Izumo Taisha, dating back before the Heian period, as well as the Kamosu and Yaegaki Shrines, which are all dedicated to early gods. Matsue Castle is one of the few remaining medieval castles. Here in the 1890s the writer Lafcadio Hearn, met his wife Koizumi Setsu and worked on his studies of so-called 'strange things' – Japanese ghost stories and superstitions. His home gives a flavour of his life.

**Day 8: Yasugi, Bizen, Kyoto.** The Adachi Museum, created by Adachi Zenko in 1980, has a spectacular landscape garden as well as his collection of paintings by Yokoyama Taikan, a leader of the Nihonga school in the 1930s. Drive south passing Mount Daisen to Bizen, famous for its brownish natural glaze earthenware pottery, where we visit a kiln. First of three nights in Kyoto.

**Day 9: Kyoto.** A day in the eastern foothills. Visit Ginkakuji, the temple of the silver pavilion built by Ashikaga Yoshimasa in the 15th century. In the Zen temple complex Nanzen-ji there is a famous tiger garden and fine 17th-century painted screens by Kano Tan'yu. Nearby is the intimate sub-temple Konchi-in.

**Day 10: Kyoto.** Ryoan-ji's dry garden is perhaps Kyoto's most famous stone garden. The large walled temple compound of Daitoku-ji, established in the 14th century, is an important foundation of Japanese Zen Buddhism. Its many sub-temples contain dry landscape gardens; one of the finest (and smallest) is in the Daisen-in.

**Day 11: Kyoto to Tokyo.** Morning excursion to Uji, the location of the last few chapters of The Tale of Genji. The Byodo-in temple was a villa made into a temple in 1052 by Fujiwara no Yorimichi (of the Heian period power-holding family). Its Phoenix Hall appears to spread its wings in front of the lake. Bullet train to Tokyo for two nights.

**Day 12: Tokyo.** Nezu Kaichiro's collection of Japanese arts is well presented in the eponymous museum, which also has a delightful garden (subject to confirmation due to exhibition schedules). There is time to explore the Omotesando area, where architecture meets fashion. By contrast,

the Asakusa Kannon Temple in shitamachi (literally 'downtown') is surrounded by busy street stalls.

**Day 13: Tokyo to London.** The tour ends after breakfast. (Flights to London are not included – there is an airport transfer in time for the recommended flight back to London – see Practicalities).

## Lecturer

**Reverend Professor Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones.**

A renowned historian with an extensive publication portfolio, Lloyd's scholarship spans global histories, with an emphasis on cultural interconnections through diplomacy, trade, literature, art and architecture. He has spent considerable time researching in Egypt, Iran, Japan, China and Cambodia and has major interests in the ancient, medieval and early modern Middle East, Far East and South East Asia, with a special focus on court society, monarchy and nobility. He is a regular guest on podcasts such as *Empires* hosted by William Dalrymple and *The Ancients*. In addition, he is an ordained priest in the Church in Wales.

## Practicalities

**Price, per person. Two sharing:** £9,170.

**Single occupancy:** £11,020.

*International flights are not included.*

**Included:** domestic air travel with Fuji Dream Airlines: Nagoya to Izumo; high-speed rail travel (first class) from Tokyo to Kanazawa and from Kyoto to Tokyo; private coach for transfers and excursions; accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 9 lunches and 9 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admission charges to museums; all tips for waiters, drivers and guides; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

**Flights:** international flights from London to Tokyo and from Tokyo to London are not included in the price of the tour. The recommended flight options from London are sent with the confirmation of booking. The cost of a Economy Standard seat with British Airways at the time of going to press is c. £1,600.

We provide airport transfers to meet the recommended return flights from London. For those not taking the recommended flights, airport transfers can be arranged for an additional cost.

**Accommodation. New Otani, Tokyo**

([newotani.co.jp](http://newotani.co.jp)): 4-star hotel located in the centre of Tokyo. It has a historic garden dating from the 17th century. **Tokyu Hotel, Kanazawa** ([tokyuhotels.co.jp](http://tokyuhotels.co.jp)): excellently located 4-star, in walking distance of the city's former samurai district. **Tanabe Ryokan** ([tanabe-ryokan.jp](http://tanabe-ryokan.jp)): centrally located traditional *ryokan* (futon beds on *tatami* mats) with private bathrooms. **Ichibata, Matsue** ([hotel.ichibata.co.jp](http://hotel.ichibata.co.jp)): onsen (hot-spring spa) hotel with views over Lake Shinji; bland décor but it is the best option in town with western and traditional rooms. **Hyatt Regency, Kyoto** ([hyatt.com](http://hyatt.com)): an elegant hotel within walking distance of the National Museum.

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**How strenuous?** A good level of fitness is essential. Unless you enjoy entirely unimpaired mobility, cope with everyday walking and stair-climbing without difficulty and are reliably sure-footed, this tour is not for you. You may be on your feet for lengthy stretches of time. Uneven ground and irregular paving are standard. Average distance by coach per day: 40 miles.

**Group size:** between 10 and 22 participants.