



Kansai Spring Break 2018

March 17-24, 2018

Gnts/9days from: \$2895 dbl/tpl \$3495 single

Reserve by August 31st - Save \$50 per person

We begin in Osaka, four night in Japan's third-largest city, a place where things have always moved a bit faster, where people are a bit brasher and interactions are peppered with playful jabs – and locals take pride in this. Our hotel, perfectly situated just around the corner from the Shinsaibashi Shopping Arcade and Dotonbori. Step outdoors and take in the dazzling neon and vivid storefronts.

Above all, Osaka is a city that loves to eat: it's unofficial slogan is *kuidaore* ('eat until you drop'). It really shines in the evening, when it seems that everyone is out for a good meal – and a good time.

And yet there is so much more, including a full day at Universal Studios, a complete free day for shopping, as well visits to Hiroshima, Miyajima & Nara and not one, but two bullet train rides. You really couldn't ask for a more perfectly balanced tour.

Itinerary/Details

Day 1 – March 17th, 2018- Saturday – Departure from Honolulu

Hawaiian Airlines #449 Departs Honolulu 2:00 pm – Arrive Kansai 7:20 pm +1

Please meet your Panda Travel representative at the Hawaiian Airlines Terminal to check-in for your flight

Day 2 – March 18th, 2018- Sunday – Kansai – Osaka

On arrival in Osaka, please make your way to the baggage claim area and then proceed to customs clearing. On exiting customs, we will be met by our local English speaking guide. A short walk to our charter bus and then off to Osaka. The travel time will be approximately one hour.

Welcome to Osaka, Japan's third-largest city. Ultra-urban, hard-working Osaka is an unabashed antidote to the fashion-forward frenzy of Tokyo and the prim propriety of Kyoto. This longtime capital of commerce is filled with down-to-earth citizens speaking colorful *Kansai-ben* (Kansai dialect) and neon-clad streetscapes bursting with over-the-top 3D signage.

Osaka's real treasures are in the bustling street life in its arcades, markets, and byways. And Osaka really comes into its own at night, when locals come out for delicious eats and good times. Guaranteed, our hotel is right in the heat of everything you would want to experience of Osaka. We are literally right around the corner from the Shinsaibashi Shopping Arcade.

Accommodations for the next four nights are at the Red Roof Inn Plus Osaka Namba, the perfect location, steps from the Dotonbori and the Shinsaibashi Shopping Arcade. This area is second to none, we guarantee it.

Don't be fooled by the hotel name, opened in July of 2016, it is truly a gem. Please check out reviews and see for yourself.



Red Roof Inn Plus Osaka Namba



Accommodations: Red Roof Inn Plus Osaka Namba **free**

Day 3 – March 19th, 2018 Monday – Osaka (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 9:00am as we are off on a day of touring.

The morning begins with a visit to the Osaka Castle, one of Osaka's most popular landmark sights. This is also a popular cherry blossom viewing site. We will be early for peak viewing, but we just may get in a peek.

Travel back in time almost 400 years to feudal Japan on the chaos and violence of an epic conflict—the final one of the samurai era. In 1614 and 1615 hundreds of thousands of samurai—blasting guns, shooting arrows, and wielding swords—unleashed their force on the Osaka castle, inaugurating the downfall of the Toyotomi clan and sealing Tokugawa Ieyasu's position as Japan's undisputed master. Explore the fury of samurai warfare—from gory beheadings to fierce sword fights.

For days Ieyasu's forces barraged the castle's walls with fire from 300 cannon, causing fear and confusion. In January 1615 Hideyori finally signed a treaty, ending what became known as the Winter Siege, or *Fuyu no Jin*. But the truce fell apart, and the Summer Siege, or *Natsu no Jin*, began.

Magnificent Osaka Castle has been destroyed – and restored – several times, with its most extensive refurbishment completed in 1997. As you walk around you can still marvel at its massive stone walls, gold-leaf trim, copper roof, and panoramic views. There is also a fascinating on-site museum that chronicles its tumultuous history.



Osaka Castle



snacks & souvenirs



view from top of castle perch

From here we are off to the Umeda Sky Building, Osaka's most dramatic piece of modern architecture, designed by Hara Hiroshi, who also designed Kyoto Station. Its twin-tower complex is like a space-age Arc de Triomphe, and from the top you can marvel at the incredible sprawl of humanity in all directions. Getting to the top is half the fun – for the final five stories you take a glassed-in escalator across the open space between the two towers.

Below the towers, you'll find Takimi-kōji Alley, a re-creation of an early Shōwa-era market street crammed with restaurants and izakaya.



Umeda Sky Building



views from the ground



city views from top

Next, we are off to the Kuromon Market, one of the main food markets in Osaka. With more than 190 years of history and tradition, this very popular market is known by locals as "Gastronome" and "Osaka's Kitchen".

All kinds of fresh food items are available at this market, fully satisfying the hunger of the people of Naniwa (Naniwa is the old name for this area).

Eat-in shops for sushi or fresh seafood over rice, also grilled fish, shellfish, meat and other food being served in or outside of shops give off mouth-watering aromas.

600 meters long with over 170 stalls, Kuromon Market offers not only fresh fish and food items, but a complete range of household goods and yes even appliances.

Enjoy time to wander around before we make our way over to Doguyasuji (cooking tools street). This street is a unique place in Osaka dedicated to restaurant industry supplies. It's also very fun for home cooks to visit! The shopping street stretches about 100 meters in length. You will find the prices here to your liking as it primarily serves as a wholesale market to restaurant owners. It's well worth a stroll as there's something for everyone.

Meet up at the designated time for the short walk back to our hotel. The remainder of the afternoon and evening is free. Enjoy the time to shop and sightsee.



Famous Blade Runner Neon



Shinsaibashi Shopping



Dotonbori Street

Accommodations: Red Roof Inn Plus Osaka Namba



free

Day 4 – March 20th, 2018 Tuesday– Osaka (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide by 8:30am as we are off for a full day at Universal Studios Japan. The park currently has eight sections: Hollywood, New York, San Francisco, Jurassic Park, Waterworld, Amity Village, Universal Wonderland and The Wizarding World of Harry Potter. Enjoy the many amusement rides, ranging from child-friendly carousels to thrilling roller coasters and simulators based on popular movies such as Spiderman, Back to the Future, Terminator 2 and Jurassic Park.

In addition to rides, the theme park offers many opportunities to take pictures with popular characters' mascots such as Snoopy, Hello Kitty and the puppets of Sesame Street. There are also various shows throughout the day.

Just outside the park's gates is Universal Citywalk Osaka, a shopping mall with a variety of restaurants and shops, including stores selling Universal Studios merchandise and Osaka souvenirs. The Osaka Takoyaki Museum, which is essentially a collection of several popular vendors of the local dish gathered under one roof, is located on the mall's fourth floor.

Our scheduled departure time from the park is 6:00pm, arriving back at our hotel by 6:30pm. Once back, the remainder of the evening is free.



Accommodations: Red Roof Inn Plus Osaka Namba  **free**

Day 5 – March 21th, 2018 Wednesday– Osaka (B)

After breakfast, it's a total free day for you to enjoy either shopping which is just steps away or sightseeing or maybe even a combination of both.



Accommodations: Red Roof Inn Plus Osaka Namba  **free**

Day 6 – March 22nd, 2018 Thursday– Osaka-Hiroshima (B/D)

After breakfast, please meet your guide by 8:00am as we journey to Hiroshima via the bullet train. Your luggage will be sent separately on to Kyoto and all you need for tonight is a small overnight bag.

After a bus transfer to the Shin Osaka Station, we will be boarding our bullet train, Mizuho 605, departing at 8:59am.

Arrival in Hiroshima will be at 10:21am and once here our bus will take us to the ferry station for the short 10-minute ride to Miyajima Island, one of the most scenic spots in Japan. It has long been regarded as an Island of Gods on the beautiful Seto Inland Sea. It is a romantic and historical island where Itsukushima Shrine, a World Heritage site, is located, along with the Virgin Forest of Mt. Misen, and numerous preserved shrines, temples, and historical monuments.

Its star attraction is the oft-photographed vermilion torii (shrine gate) of Itsukushima-jinja, which seems to float on the waves at high tide – a scene that has traditionally been ranked as one of the three best views in Japan.

From the ferry station, we will walk along Omote-Sando, the main street from the port to Itsukushima Shrine. There are many souvenir shops on both sides of the street. You will have time to enjoy souvenir shopping for a Shamoji (a rice scoop) or the well-known Momiji manju, a bun with a bean-jam filling made from maple leaves as well and other crafts.

We will now visit the cultural heritage site, called the "Itsukushima Shinto Shrine" that is dedicated to the God protecting people from sea disasters and wars. It is said that this shrine was constructed around 593; however, after the warlord Taira no Kiyomori (1118-1181) rebuilt it in 1168, it became the magnificent vermilion-lacquered

building it is today. The most interesting feature of this shrine is the Torii (a kind of gate symbolizing a shrine) and the Shaden (shrine pavilion) in the sea, which are both submerged at full tide, but at low tide the sea water recedes completely and it is possible to walk out to the gate.

After lunch on your own and some free shopping time we will ferry back to Hiroshima. With six beautiful rivers flowing through it, Hiroshima is called the City of Water. The origins of the city date back to 1589 when Mori Terumoto, a feudal lord, built Hiroshima Castle at the large delta of the Ota-gawa River. Because the delta resembled a large island, the area was called "Hiroshima", or 'wide island' in Japanese.



Ferry to Miyajima



vermilion torii in the water



Itsukushima Shinto Shrine & approach



Although many only know it for the horrific split second on August 6, 1945, when it became the site of the world's first atomic bomb attack, it is now a modern, cosmopolitan city with excellent cuisine and a bustling nightlife.

Our first stop will be at the **Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park**, located in the center of Hiroshima City. It is difficult to imagine that this triangle shaped piece of land bordered by two rivers was once a busy commercial and residential downtown area. The atomic bomb eliminated everything in the town. After World War II, a group led by a Japanese architect Kenzo Tange designed the park to turn the land into the Peace Memorial Park. It was completed in 1954.

There are many buildings and monuments which commemorate people who lost their lives at that time and represent the people's prayers for peace, such as the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, the Memorial Cenotaph and the Statue of the A-Bomb Children, etc. By imagining the contrast between the misery of the atomic bomb attack and the beauty and tranquility in the park while visiting spots in the park, you will be moved to appreciate how precious peace is.

Our next stop is at the **Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum**, located in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. By standing on the Peace Boulevard side, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, the Memorial Cenotaph, the Peace Flame, and the A-Bomb Dome can be seen along a straight line. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, which opened in 1955, gives people an opportunity to learn of the outcome of the bomb attack and consider what peace really means through many reference materials. The East Wing exhibits photographs, panels, videos, and panorama models showing the actual history of Hiroshima before and after the bomb attack. The main building exhibits victims' belongings and references which show the misery of the bomb attack. You will see a burnt lunch box, a tricycle which a 3-year-old boy was riding, etc., which reflects the instantaneous destruction and strike right at the heart of visitors. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum was designed by a group headed by Kenzo Tange, who also designed the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. The strength of humanity rising from the ruins is expressed in the piloti-style space under the main building.

The last stop today will be at **A-Bomb Dome**, a symbol of peace which most people have at least seen at one time in a picture. The building, which was designed by a Czech architect in 1915, had been used as the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall. Hiroshima citizens back then loved so much European modern-style buildings of the time. In 1912, the National Confectionery Exposition was held in this place. From that exposition, Baumkuchen, which represented German cake, was manufactured, and sold in Japan for the first time. Since the Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotion Hall was located only around 160 meters from the hypocenter, the building was blown up, and all those inside the building died. However, the building was not destroyed completely because the blast of the atomic bomb, which was vaporized in the air, prevented it from totally collapsing. It was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1996 and has been representing people's prayers for a lasting peace.



A-Bomb Dome



Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park



Arrival at our hotel will be approximately 6:15pm. After a short break to freshen up, please meet your guide as we are off to dinner, just a minute from our hotel.

Accommodations tonight are at The Hiroshima New Hiroden Hotel, just 5 minutes from Hiroshima Station.

Our dinner this evening is okonomiyaki, a popular pan fried food that consists of batter and cabbage. Selected toppings and ingredients are added which can vary greatly (anything from meat and seafood to wasabi and cheese). This variability is reflected in the dish's name; "okonomi" literally means "to one's liking". The dish is available all over Japan, but is most popular in the west, particularly the cities of Hiroshima and Osaka.

Okonomiyaki is sometimes translated into English as "As-you-like-it Pancake". However, this may be misleading. Though it does consist of batter cooked on a griddle, okonomiyaki has nothing of the sweetness or fluffiness of pancakes, not to mention that it is usually filled with octopus, shrimp, pork, yam, or kimchi. A more accurate comparison, which is also made, is between okonomiyaki and pizza.



Enjoy watching the steps of your okonomiyaki being created in front of you

After dinner, we will walk back to our hotel, but if you are up for a walk, the Hiroshima JR Station is close by and some shops may still be open.



Accommodations: Hiroshima New Hiroden Hotel  **free**

Day 7 – March 23rd, 2018 Friday– Hiroshima-Kyoto (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 9:00am. It is a short 5-minute walk to the JR Hiroshima Station to catch our bullet train, Nozomi 14 to the JR Kyoto Station. The departure time is set for 9:35am and arriving at 11:16am.

Once here in Kyoto, our bus will meet us as and off we go for an afternoon of touring.

Our first stop this morning is at Kiyomizu Temple, Higashiyama-ku's most famous temple, known throughout Japan for the grand views afforded from its main hall. Founded in 798 and rebuilt in 1633 by the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu, the temple occupies an exalted spot on Mount Otowa.

The main hall has a huge veranda that is supported by pillars and juts out over the hillside. Just below this hall is the waterfall Otowa-no-taki, where visitors drink sacred waters believed to bestow health and longevity. Dotted around the precincts are other halls and shrines. At Jishu-jinja, the shrine up the steps above the main hall, visitors try to ensure success in love by closing their eyes and walking about 18m between a pair of stones – if you miss the stone, your desire for love won't be fulfilled! Note that you can ask someone to guide you, but if you do, you'll need someone's assistance to find your true love.

Before you enter the actual temple precincts, check out the Tainai-meguri, the entrance to which is just to the left (north) of the pagoda that is located in front of the main entrance to the temple (there is no English sign). We won't tell you too much about it as it will ruin the experience. Suffice to say that by entering the Tainai-meguri, you are symbolically entering the womb of a female bodhisattva. When you get to the rock in the darkness, spin it in either direction to make a wish.

The steep approach to the temple is known as Chawan-zaka (Teapot Lane) and is lined with shops selling Kyoto handicrafts, local snacks, and souvenirs.

Kiyomizu's grounds are particularly spectacular in spring during cherry-blossom season and in fall during the turning of the maple leaves.

We ask that you please keep in mind that Kiyomizu Temple is under a multi-year renovation project and at different times certain viewing points may be closed to the public.

Now time at two of Kyoto's most attractive streets, Sannen-zaka and Ninen-zaka, a pair of gently sloping lanes that lead down from Kiyomizu Temple. "Ninen-zaka" means "slope of two years", and "San'nen-zaka" means "slope of three years".

Along the streets, there are many souvenir shops, the shops of kiyomizu-ware (a pottery created around Kiyomizu temple), tea houses and Japanese restaurants. Enjoy time here to explore, shop and have lunch on your own.



Viewing platform at Kiyomizu



plenty of shops & food



Approach to Kiyomizu

Next, we are off to visit Sanjusangendo Temple, originally built by Taira no Kiyamori for retired emperor Go-Shirakawa in 1164 and dedicated to the Bodhisattva Kannon. The temple features a huge hall containing 1,001 figures of Kannon carved in the 12th and 13th centuries.

The original temple building was lost in a fire, but reconstructed in 1266. That structure has remained unchanged for 700 years since then with four great renovations during that time. The long temple hall, which is about 120 meters long, is made in the Wayo (Japanese) style. As there are 33 spaces between the columns, the temple came to be called Sanjusangen-do (a hall with 33 spaces between columns).

The highlight of Sanjusangendo Temple is the 1001 statues of the Buddhist bodhisattva Juichimen-senju-sengen Kanzeon (eleven-headed, thousand-armed, thousand-eyed Kannon), usually simply called Kannon. One thousand standing statues of Kannon (Important Cultural Properties) and one gigantic seated statue (National Treasure) placed in the center are housed in the temple hall. The images are made of Japanese cypress. Among the standing

statues, 124 were carved in the 12th century when the temple was founded, and the remaining 876 were made in the 13th century when the temple was renovated.

From here we make our way to our hotel, the New Miyako Kyoto, ideally located, right across the street from the JR Kyoto Station and just around the corner from the AEON Mall. You are just steps away from so many shopping and dining options. Enjoy the remainder of the afternoon and evening.



Accommodations: Hotel New Miyako Kyoto  **free**

Day 8 – March 24th, 2018 Saturday– Kyoto-Kansai (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide by 8:30am as we are off to make the most of our last day here in Japan.

The day begins with a visit to Kyoto's famed Golden Pavilion. Be it capped by snow in winter or set against a lush green background in summer, nothing is as symbolic of Kyoto as Kinkaku-ji's golden reflection shimmering across the rippled surface of the pond before it.

Kinkaku-ji is one of Japan's best-known sights. The original building was built in 1397 as a retirement villa for Shōgun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. His son converted it into a temple.

In 1950, a young monk consummated his obsession with the temple by burning it to the ground. The monk's story was fictionalized in Mishima Yukio's *The Golden Pavilion*. In 1955, a full reconstruction was completed that exactly followed the original design, but the gold-foil covering was extended to the lower floors.

The temple is set in three stories. The 1st floor is Shinden-zukuri, the palace style. It is named Ho-sui-in. The 2nd floor is Buke-zukuri, the style of the samurai house and is called Cho-on-do. The 3rd floor is Karayo style or Zen temple style. It is called Kukkyo-cho.

Both the 2nd and 3rd floors are covered with gold-leaf on Japanese lacquer. The roof, upon which the Chinese phoenix settles, is thatched with shingles.

The entire temple is surrounded by a beautiful garden with a pond in the front called the Mirror Pond. The stones in the pond give a representation of the Buddhist era.



Golden Temple & grounds

Next, we are off to visit Nijo Castle, built in 1603 as the Kyoto residence of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first shogun of the Edo Period. His grandson completed the castle's palace buildings 23 years later and further expanded the castle by adding a five-story castle keep.

The wide moat, massive stone walls, and heavy yet elaborate gates are still impressive, and were the only fortifications the inhabitants felt necessary, so firm was their grip on power. The grounds are large and contain

several lovely gardens as well as groves of plum and cherry trees. The palace building itself is imposing, yet upon closer examination, is rich in decorative detail.

Inside the palace are several masterpieces of Japanese art, most notably the painted screens of the main chamber. In this room, the shoguns met the daimyo (high-ranking warlord-administrators) who sought an audience. The screens were painted by artists of the Kano school and employ rich colors and large amounts of gilt to depict flowers, trees, birds, and tigers. They were meant to impress. Also in the palace are the famous "nightingale floors," which were designed to squeak when stepped on and thus alert guards to any intruders.

Now off to the Gion, known as Kyoto's, most famous geisha district, packed with bars, restaurants, and traditional teahouses. It is most atmospheric in the early evening, when the lanterns are lit and apprentice geisha will flit about the back streets on their way to their appointments. However, there is also a lot to see here during the day. Enjoy some free time here to explore Gion's picturesque streets and lunch on your own.



Gion Shopping Street



Old section of Gion



beautiful side streets in Gion

Last this afternoon we begin the journey to the Kansai area. Before heading to the airport, a last-minute stop at the AEON Mall for shopping and the opportunity to pick up a dinner bento at the supermarket. Bring it along to the airport and enjoy while waiting on our flight.

Hawaiian Airlines #450 Departs Kansai 9:20 pm – Arrive Honolulu 9:35 am