

Tokaido Road Cherry Blossom Tour 2019

Hanami – The cherry blossom season is coming soon!

MARCH 28TH – April 5th, 2019



7nts/9days fr: \$3395 double/triple & \$3995 single
Reserve by October 1st-save \$50 per person



The beauty of Japan during the **Cherry Blossom Season** is breathtaking.

In the mountains, parks along riverfronts and city street, in school yards.....

From late March through the entire month of April, it's the season of the cherry that tinges Japanese islands in delicate shades of pink. The blossoms that signal the end of winter and the arrival of spring have more than a symbolic presence in Japan's floral culture.

*A long, long time ago, the cherry tree was revered as a "dwelling of the gods"; when in full bloom, people offered sake and food to its splendor in exchange for a good harvest. Today every village, town and city let business-as-usual slide to indulge in days of **hanami**, flower viewing parties, with friends, family, and co-workers.*

Of course, there's far more to cherry blossoms. Join us on one of our most popular tour as we journey from Tokyo to Osaka. We have included the best of Tokyo along with visits to Mt. Fuji Area, Kyoto, Nara, and Osaka. There is a full free day in Osaka so that you can catch up on shopping.

It's the perfect balance, sightseeing with free time for shopping. Leave room in your bag for those favorite omiyages!

Itinerary/Details

Day 1 – March 28th Thursday – Depart from Honolulu

Hawaiian Airlines #855 Departs Honolulu 5:10 pm – Arrive Haneda 10:05 pm +1

Please meet your Panda Travel representative at Terminal 1, formally known as the Hawaiian Airlines Terminal, Lobby 3, Makai side at least 3 hours prior to the flight departure time.

Day 2 – March 29th, Friday – Haneda-Tokyo

After clearing customs, we will be met by our local guide and walk over to our charter bus. Accommodations for the next three nights are at the recently remodeled Sunshine City Prince Hotel, ideally situated in the Ikebukuro section of Tokyo. The hotel is less than a 10-minute walk from the Ikebukuro JR Station. With the recent completion of renovations, it makes for a prefect stay here in Tokyo.

The lobby of the hotel connects to a huge shopping and entertainment mecca with four towers, including a 240-meter-high skyscraper with an observation deck on the top. Sunshine City is typically open from 10:00 am to 8:00 pm seven days a week.

If you need a late snack or beverage, there is a 24-hour Family Mart just off the lobby area. As well, a full-service 24-hour supermarket is steps away.

The drive time should be less than one hour.



Newly remodeled Sunshine City Prince Hotel & lobby



Family Mart in hotel lobby



Accommodations: Sunshine City Prince Hotel  **free**

Day 3 – March 30th, Saturday – Tokyo (B/L)

Please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:30am as we are off on another full day of touring.

The morning begins with a stop at Tsukiji Fish Market which has the distinct honor of being the world's largest seafood market. "Japan's kitchen" moves at a frenetic pace as thousands upon thousands of fish are processed, purchased, and carted off to different corners of the country. The infamous tuna auction starts at 5am and peters out by 8am, when the day's catch has been purchased. By 11am the crowds have dwindled and the sprinkler trucks plough through to prep the empty market for tomorrow's sale.

If you're a foodie, love markets, enjoy photography – or simply like visiting unique places – then you'll probably love Tsukiji.

Little has changed at Tsukiji in its nearly 80 years. The indoor auction was scheduled to be relocated as part of a modernization plan prior to the 2020 Olympics; however, it has been postponed indefinitely.

We will remain here for 1.5 hr. so that you have ample time to walk around and enjoy the outer market, visit knife-making artisan shops, tasting candies, nuts, and spices, and learning more about seasonal produce in Tokyo.

After a good stroll around the market, there's nothing like a sushi breakfast to complete the experience. There are plenty of sushi shops – make sure to choose one where you see locals dining. If you don't feel like sushi, there are other options including ramen, *donburi* and more.

If you finish early we encourage you to visit Tsukiji Hongan-ji Temple, less than one block away. With an Indian-style exterior, was built in 1617 near Asakusa, but was burnt down in a huge fire that swept through Edo (Tokyo) in 1657. The Temple was then rebuilt on the present site but destroyed again by the Great Tokyo Earthquake of 1923. The current main

building was built in 1934. The main building possesses a distinctive ambience not found in other Japanese temples, due to its variety of architectural styles.



Tsukiji Fish Market

From here we are off to visit Asakusa, the traditional, low-rise, down, and dirty Tokyo of yesteryear. Although on the surface it's ye olde Japan, this was the first part of the capital to have significant western influence. It was even the site of Japan's first cinema.

Attractions in the area include one of Tokyo's most historic temples – Sensoji, and the impressive Kaminarimon Gate that marks the entranceway to the temple. Also, you can't miss Phillip Stark's 'Golden Poo' on the roof of the nearby Asahi Breweries headquarters.

Sensoji Temple dates to 645, but with the original destroyed in the air raids of 1945, today's building is a 1958 reconstruction. At the top of the steps, as a mark of respect, clap twice and bow your head. It's also customary to make a small offering by tossing coins into the wooden rack.

The Five Storied Pagoda was built in 1973 and amongst others; it stands in honor of comedians! Standing 54 meters high, reinforced with concrete and steel, and like all pagodas, running down the center is a giant pillar of Japanese Cypress tree wood.

Once through the gate you'll be in Nakamise Shopping Arcade. The street is lined with colorful, lively stalls selling traditional knick-knacks, festival foods, and rice crackers. There are over 50 shops along this shopping street. We will remain here for 1.5 hrs. to allow you time to enjoy the area as well as shop.

Your guide will point out a section here that has a variety of **cherry blossom trees** so that you can enjoy viewing.



Asakusa and Nakamise Shopping Arcade

Now, time for lunch at a local restaurant.

We are now off to Ueno and Ameyoko Shopping Street, famous throughout Japan for its wide variety of products.

The name "Ameyoko" is a short form for "Ameya Yokocho" (candy store alley), as candies were traditionally sold there. Alternatively, "Ame" also stands for "America", because a lot of American products used to be available there when the street was the site of a black market in the years following WWII.

You can get just about EVERYTHING here, clothes, bags, cosmetics, fresh fish, dried squid, and spices are sold along Ameyoko. It is quite the scene to just walk around through the very crowded and narrow streets. An awesome place to sightsee, shop and eat! Enjoy some free time here to explore on your own.



Ameyoko- best spot to find omiyage items

Our last touring spot of the day is close by at Ueno Park where approximately 1,200 cherry trees flourish with pink magical flowers at the 133-acre park. An estimated 2 million people will visit to experience the **Cherry Blossom** viewing while picnicking directly beneath a tree. Simply admire the natural beauty along the paths and take photos.



Cherry Blossom viewing and picnicking at Ueno Park

Our return to the hotel will be approximately 6:00pm and the remainder of the evening is free. Your Panda Travel escort will be available for those first timers to Ikebukuro and show you all these is to do and see steps from your hotel.



Accommodations: Sunshine City Prince Hotel  **free**

Day 4 – March 31st, Sunday – Tokyo (B/L)

Please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:30am as we are off on another fun filled touring day.

The morning begins with a visit to Meiji Shrine, located right in the middle of one of Tokyo's most popular areas is an amazing urban oasis, Meiji Jingu. It is a shinto shrine that is dedicated to the souls of Emperor Meiji and his wife, Empress Shoken. After the Emperor's death in 1912, the Japanese Diet passed a resolution to commemorate his role in the Meiji Restoration and the construction of a shrine where his soul would be enshrined was undertaken. The area around an iris garden in Tokyo where Emperor Meiji and Empress Shoken had been known to visit was chosen as the building's location. With the passing of the resolution, construction began in 1915, formally dedicated in 1920 and finished in 1926.

When you enter the grounds of the shrine, probably the first thing that will get your attention is the, “torii” (the traditional gate to a Shinto shrine) you pass under. It is enormous and majestic, completely impossible to miss. There are three torii in total between the Harajuku entrance and the main building. But once you pass under the first one, you enter the forest which blocks out the sights and sounds of the city.

While walking along the path to the shrine you will pass huge barrels of sake. These barrels are donated every year by Meiji Jingu Nationwide Sake Brewers Association to the enshrined deities at the shrine, and they make for a great photo opportunity for the visitor.

About five minutes past the sake barrels you'll come to the entrance of the main shrine area, from where you can see the Mode Gakuen building far behind in the distance. The two buildings really contrast each other. Mode Gakuen, an icon of the modern age – and Meiji Jingu an icon of ages past, but still relevant in the modern era as it one of the main places for New Years prayers and is still very culturally important.

Being that it is Sunday, we may be lucky to see a Shinto wedding procession in front of the main building. You won't be able to see an actual wedding ceremony itself, but the processions are very impressive. They are quite solemn, led by the priests and miko (women or girls who assist in the ceremonies), and the wedding couple walk under a large red parasol.



Sake Barrels



Meiji Shrine



Wedding Procession

From here, a stop at the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Office Building also referred to as Tochō, offering panoramic view of the Tokyo landscape 202 meters above ground level. If we are in luck and enjoying a clear day famous landmarks such as Mt. Fuji, Tokyo Skytree, Tokyo Tower, Meiji Shrine and the Tokyo Dome can be seen from the observatories. Don't leave that camera behind on the bus!

Now, lunch time to be enjoyed at a local restaurant.

Our afternoon of touring begins with a visit to Shinjuku where you may think of as only a place to shop and eat, but there's one giant serene spot right in its center, Shinjuku's Gyoen Garden, with 1,500 **cherry blossom trees** of many different species. In spring Shinjuku Gyoen is one of the best spots in the city for **cherry blossom viewing**.

Shinjuku Gyoen is comprised of three different types of gardens, the oldest is a traditional Japanese landscape garden featuring large ponds dotted with islands and bridges.

The park's other main gardens include a symmetrically arranged formal French garden, and an English landscape garden featuring wide, open lawns surrounded by flowering cherry trees. The rest of the park consists of forested areas, lawns and several structures including a restaurant, and an art gallery. There is also a beautiful greenhouse with many tropical and subtropical flowers.

Enjoy free time here to enjoy the beauty of this garden and highly suggest a visit to the greenhouse. It will not disappoint.



Gyoen Garden- Cherry Blossoms, flower park and its greenhouse- see it all!

Our last stop today will truly be quite an experience, visiting the Samurai Museum in the Shinjuku section of the city. The samurai has been an iconic symbol of courage, power, and masculinity for over 700 years of Japanese warfare history. Finally, the gripping soul of the samurai can be felt at the Samurai Museum.

“Their belief, “Reputation grudged” shows that samurai is not a simple soldier; they highly valued honor above life. The beauty of samurai spirit is shown in Japanese swords and their costumes.”

The museum, on two floors, provides a near-authentic ambience of historical Japan during the Sengoku period. The museum's founder, Tetsuro Koyano, spent over five years painstakingly gathering a wide array of samurai costumes, head gear, guns, swords, and other related equipment, with a mission to not only impart a comprehensive knowledge of Japanese historical warfare to both locals and foreigners, but also to revive the soul of the samurai.

Displayed under dramatic lighting are more than 70 examples of *samurai* armor, kabuto helmets and weapons gathered here from Japanese and foreign collections. Detailed descriptions for each display are given in English. The highlight is a chance to have yourself photographed in a samurai costume of your choice. We will also enjoy a sword show while here.

From here, we return to our hotel, arrival by 4:30pm and once back, the remainder of the afternoon and evening is free.



Accommodations: Sunshine City Prince Hotel  **free**

Day 5 – April 1st, Monday – Tokyo-Mt. Fuji-Kyoto (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide by 8:00am as we are off to Kyoto via Mt. Fuji area. The luggage will be sent separately to our hotel and meet up with us later this evening. The drive time is approximately two hours and a rest stop will be made along the way.

Once here, our first stop is at the Kubota Ichiku Kimono Museum, located near Lake Kawaguchi with majestic views of Mt. Fuji.

The museum is an artist's paradise. It was built by the artist Kubota Itchiku and highlights his priceless creations. He was a textile artist who dedicated his whole life to reviving and mastering the lost art of Tsujigahana silk dyeing, a traditional dye technique, used to decorate elaborate kimonos during the Muromachi period (1333-1573).

Itchiku Kubota was 20 years old when he first encountered tsujigahana. After suffering through a hard prison life in WWII he came back and began to study tsujigahana. He devoted the remainder of his life to this. 29 years later, in 1977, he had his first exhibition "Itchiku Tsujigahana" at the age of 60.

Its beauty and high-quality technique gained reputation and the exhibition was also held abroad. It went around cities like Paris, New York, and London. He also has received various awards. In 1994, Itchiku Kubota Art Museum was opened.

His works are exhibited in the main building of the museum. This building has a complicated wooden structure using Hiba trees (cypress family) more than 1000 years old. Both traditional artisanal techniques and modern log cabin methods are used to construct the building. The building has an open ceiling and the wooden structure is visible.

There also are a Japanese tea house and a cafe where you can enjoy the view of a waterfall as well as tea and sweets, and a gallery with a collection of glass beads.

Enjoy the beautiful traditional artworks and enjoy walking in the garden and on the path to take full advantage of the beautiful natural environment of the museum.

If it is a clear weather day, enjoy incredible views of Mt. Fuji from the museum grounds



Kubota Icchiku Kimono Museum

Next, we are off to Saiko Lake Iyashi no Sato Historical Village for lunch on your own and as well free time to explore. We will remain here for 1.5 hours so that you have ample time.

Known as the “Healing Village”, this community with incredible views of Mt. Fuji is comprised of 22 traditional thatched roof houses that depict old-time scenery of the Showa Period. Each house highlights traditional Japanese culture through hands-on experiences such as crafts, sampling of local produce, and an opportunity to dress up in armor or kimono.

Enjoy **viewing the blooming cherry trees** in the village. The combination of thatched roof houses, with cherry blossoms and snowcapped Mt Fuji is incomparable.

Below is a list of various houses featuring traditional Japanese culture and therapeutic experiences that you can enjoy.

1. **Wazenya Saiun.** A local Japanese restaurant that specializes in seasonal local cuisine and homemade sweets, with a spectacular view of Mt. Fuji.
2. **Water Mill.** Rarely seen these days, buckwheat, wheat, or rice is grounded here.
3. **General Information Desk.** Tourist information and various bookings are available here.
4. **Local Produce Processing and Marketing Center.** Local specialties, pickles, miso (bean paste), rice cakes, etc. are sold here. Enjoy a complimentary cup of tea!
5. **Kutsurogi-ya (House of Relaxation).** Matrons from the local community cordially welcome guests. Sometimes used for special events.
6. **Seseragi-ya (House of Babbling Brook).** Rustic crafts indispensable for rural life are produced here.
7. **Erosion and Sediment Control Museum.** An exhibit of anti-erosion works, documents, visual data, and dioramas related to the 1966 typhoon that devastated Nenba.
8. **Charcoal Kiln:** A reproduction to educate visitors on charcoal making. Charcoal was once the main industry of Nenba area.
9. **Gorone-kan (House to lay down and doze off).** A house comprised of a recreation room for small concerts and four inviting, cozy rooms.
10. **Takumiya (House of Masters).** This house holds short-term exhibitions of remarkable industrial artists in Yamanashi Prefecture.
11. **Miharashi-ya (House with a view).** Distinctive or prize-winning craftworks from the town and the prefecture are on exhibition here with a splendid view of Mt. Fuji.
12. **Hinomi-ya (Fire-watch house).** The ground floor holds a special collection of armor and kimono called, “Armors and the Periods.” The second floor houses the armor of Civil War Period Commander, Takeda. For 500yen, try

on kimono or samurai armor and take your own photos with Mt. Fuji as your backdrop. Arrive early to avoid the long lines.

- 13. Kayanuma House of Pottery and Incense. Hands on experience of pottery and incense making from fragrant pieces of wood.**
- 14. Kami-ya Sakate Sanbo (Japanese paper workshop).**

From here we are off to Mishima Station to catch the bullet train, Hikari 477 for our journey to Kyoto. The departure is scheduled for 3:48pm and arrival at the Kyoto JR Station at 5:45pm.

Accommodations for the next two nights are at the New Miyako Hotel, just across the street from our arrival point. We will be walking over from the station.

The New Miyako Hotel is ideally located, across from the JR Station and just around the corner from the Aeon Mall. No matter in which direction you turn, a wide variety of food and shopping opportunities are available.



Hotel New Miyako Kyoto



Hotel lobby



Aeon Mall



Accommodations: New Miyako Hotel Kyoto  **free**

Day 6 – April 2nd, Tuesday – Kyoto (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide by 8:30am as we are off on a full day of touring.

“Kyoto is arguably the most popular place for **cherry blossom viewing** in Japan. There are numbers of beautiful places to enjoy amazing collaboration of cherry blossoms and Kyoto’s historical sites.”

The morning begins with a visit to Kinkakuji Temple’s Golden Pavilion, probably Kyoto’s most famous sight. 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. Not even the crowds of tourists — and they come by the thousands — can detract from Kinkaku-ji’s undoubted splendor. The current gold leaf-coated reconstruction was unveiled in 1955, five years after the 14th-century original was torched by one of the temple’s monks.

During this season, Golden Pavilion is a must visit for **cherry blossom viewing**.



Golden Temple & grounds

From here 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. Enjoy time here for **cherry blossom viewing**.

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 two of Kyoto's most attractive streets, Sannen-zaka and Ninen-zaka, a pair of gently sloping lanes that lead down from Kiyomizu-dera Temple. It is here that you are most likely to be able to imagine what Kyoto looked like before modernity descended in full force. You'll find plenty of restaurants and teahouses to refresh yourself as you explore. Enjoy free time here along this pair of pedestrian-only lanes for lunch on your own as well as some omiyage shopping.

This afternoon, just a short distance away we will be visiting 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.

Now, back to our hotel, arriving at approximately 4:30pm. The remainder of the afternoon and evening is free.



Accommodations: New Miyako Hotel Kyoto  **free**

Day 7 – April 3rd, Wednesday – Kyoto-Sekishuku-Nara-Osaka (B/L)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:30am as we slowly make our way to Osaka. Our luggage will be sent separately by truck and meet up with us on arrival.

The day begins with a visit to Sekishuku, the preserved inn town checkpoint along the Tokaido Road.

Seki was the 47th stop along the old Tōkaidō road and was home to about 200 buildings, many of which have been wonderfully preserved, making the post town look like it is stuck in time. Enjoy time here to experience glimpses of old Japan.

From here, we make our way to Nara and once there enjoy a Japanese lunch at a local restaurant.

Nara, the ancient capital city in the Kansai region of Japan. Throughout 2010 the city celebrated its 1300th anniversary. Centuries before anyone had heard of Delhi or Shanghai or London or Paris—and long before anywhere called Kyoto (let alone Tokyo) existed—Nara was the first permanent capital of Japan, and the place where the country began to establish itself as a Buddhist kingdom.

If you think of Japan as a land of bullet trains and J-pop in Shinjuku storefronts, come to Nara—a city filled with rolling hills, ancient temples, and 1,200 entitled deer roaming its old streets.

Our first stop will be at the Nara Deer Park, home to hundreds of freely roaming deer. Considered in Shinto to be messengers of the gods, Nara's nearly 1200 deer have become a symbol of the city and have been designated a natural treasure. You can purchase deer biscuits to feed them. The deer bow immediately when they see you have food.

About 1700 cherry trees are planted across Nara Park outnumbering the deer by around 500. One of the most pleasant **cherry blossom viewing spots** in the park is a large lawn encircled by cherry trees.

Just steps away is Nara's premier attraction, Todaiji Temple, and its Great Buddha (Daibutsu), Japan's largest bronze Buddha. When Emperor Shomu ordered construction of both the temple and Daibutsu in the mid-700s, he intended to make Todaiji the headquarters of all Buddhist temples in the land. As part of his plans for a Buddhist utopia, he commissioned work for this huge bronze statue of Buddha. It took eight castings to complete this remarkable work of art. At a height of more than 15m (50 ft.), the Daibutsu is made of 437 tons of bronze, 286 pounds of pure gold, 165 pounds of mercury, and 7 tons of vegetable wax. However, thanks to Japan's frequent natural calamities, the Buddha of today isn't quite what it used to be. In 855, in what must have been a whopper of an earthquake, the statue lost its head. It was repaired in 861, but alas, the huge wooden building housing the Buddha was burned twice during wars, melting the Buddha's head. The present head dates from 1692.

Be sure to walk in a circle around the Great Buddha to see it from all angles. Behind the statue is a model of how the Daibutsuden used to look, flanked by two massive pagodas. Behind the Great Buddha to the right is a huge wooden column with a small hole in it near the ground. According to popular belief, if you can manage to crawl through this opening, you'll be sure to reach enlightenment. You can also get your English-language fortune for ¥200 by shaking a bamboo canister until a wooden stick with a number comes out; the number corresponds to a piece of paper.

The wooden structure housing the Great Buddha, called Daibutsuden, was also destroyed several times through the centuries; the present structure dates from 1709. It is the largest wooden structure in the world, but only two-thirds its original size.

Enjoy this wonderful **cherry blossom viewing spot**.



Nara Deer Park



Todaiji Temple



The Great Buddha

About 1700 cherry trees are planted across Nara Park outnumbering the deer by around 500. One of the most pleasant **cherry blossom viewing spots** in the park is a large lawn encircled by cherry trees.

From here we make our way to Osaka and the drive time will be a little over one hour depending on traffic.

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. Accommodations for the next two nights are at the Cross Hotel Osaka, the perfect location, just around the corner from the Dotonbori and the Shinsaibashi Shopping Arcade. This area is second to none, we guarantee it.

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.

As you will quickly see once we arrive, literally anything you would like to eat or shop for is steps from the front door. In case you wake up early, there is a 24-hour Don Quijote right across the street.

The Panda Travel guide will be available to take you on a short walk to become familiarized with the area.



Cross Hotel Osaka



Accommodations: Cross Hotel Osaka  **free**

Day 8 – April 4th, Thursday – Osaka (B)

After breakfast at our hotel, enjoy a complete free day to shop til you drop, sightsee, or maybe consider a trip out to Universal Studios Japan.

Just around the corner from our hotel are probably the two most popular streets in all of Osaka, Shinsaibashi and Dotonbori. This is the city's most famous entertainment district and offers abundant dining and shopping choices.

Shinsaibashi's covered arcade shopping street has been Osaka's most important shopping area for 400 years, with hundreds of shops lining this 600-meter long street. From huge department stores like Daimaru and flagship Uniqlo clothing stores to small independent boutiques, there is something for every shopper and every wallet on this street. There are also dozens of delicious restaurants and cafes hidden in the streets and the alleys leading just off it.

Close by is Amerikamura, also known as Amemura. With its American-style boutiques and shops, international bars, and low prices, Amemura is a popular hangout spot for trendy youths who like Western fashion and pop culture. Rather than the big-name brands found in Shinsaibashi or Midosuji, Amemura has indie boutiques and thrift stores that give it its quirky and

lively reputation. Flea markets are sometimes set up on weekends and there are often street performances. This makes this a fun place to visit and hang out to experience the fusion of Japanese and Western culture.

And then there is the Dotonbori, the lively entertainment area and Osaka's most famous tourist destination and renowned for its gaudy neon lights, extravagant signage, and the enormous variety of restaurants and bars. This is one of the most colorful areas in Osaka and an absolute must-visit location when traveling through Kansai region.

The history of this area goes back to 1612 when a merchant by the name of Yasui Doton invested all his personal capital in an ambitious local development project. Doton's plan was to divert and expand the Umezu River into a new waterway that would link the local canal network with the Kizugawa River. Unfortunately, Doton's project was interrupted by war and he himself was killed during the Siege of Osaka in 1615. Later that same year, Doton's cousins completed his work and, in his memory, the new canal was named Dotonbori or "Doton Canal".

Also, close by is Kuromon Market, with more than 190 years of history and tradition, this popular area 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).

Despite its sometime touristy feel, the 150 or so shops here still give you the sense of a local neighborhood market. Local folks in the area come here to do their shopping, buy their produce and fish, new clothes, shoes, and a variety of household items and gadgets. Enjoy free time here to explore.

Just about a block away is Doguyasuji Shopping Street, a 150-meter-long shopping arcade lined with specialty shops selling cookware, kitchen utensils and restaurant supplies. This arcade with its variety of appliances, tableware and cooking accessories provides an interesting counterpoint to Kuromon Market and can also be a good spot for picking up some unique souvenirs.

As you can see, there is quite a lot to see and do on this free day and the best is that it is just a walk from our hotel.

Enjoy your day!



The Famous Runner Neon



One of two Don Quijote stores



Ever popular Daiso



canal cruising

Accommodations: Cross Hotel Osaka  **free**

Day 9 – April 5th, Friday – Osaka-Kansai (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 9:30am as we are off on a day of touring. While it may be our last day on tour, there is still much to enjoy before our flight home later this evening.

Our luggage will be sent to the Kansai Airport separately by truck and meet up with us on arrival.

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.

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 cannons, 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.

With over 4,000 cherry trees planted on the castle grounds, the main tower looks particularly beautiful at this time of the year with the trees in full bloom. The view of cherry blossoms against the backdrop of the main tower is an iconic image of Osaka. Enjoy this very special **cherry blossom viewing spot**.



Osaka Castle



snacks & souvenirs



view from top of castle perch

From here, we are off to visit the Kaiyukan Aquarium and the Tempozan Marketplace.

Kaiyukan is one of Japan's most spectacular aquariums, world-renowned for its innovative presentation. Here you can see the aquatic animals of the Pacific Rim at their most vibrant and dynamic by recreating the natural environment of their habitats.

At Kaiyukan there are over 15 large tanks, each recreating a specific region of the Pacific Rim, taking visitors on a virtual tour of the Pacific Ocean. The tanks include, "Japan Forest," which recreates a sunlit, beautiful Japanese forest; the icy, snow-clad "Antarctica;" and the centerpiece of the aquarium, "Pacific Ocean," a 9-meter-deep, 34-meter-long tank containing 5,400 tons of water, serving as the home of whale sharks, the largest fish species in the world.

To enjoy the trip around the Pacific, take the spiral ramp all the way from the 8th floor to the 4th floor, leaving the land of terrestrial animals to find yourself stepping into the sea all the way to the ocean floor, discovering marine life from a multitude of perspectives, from huge schools of fish to the wonderfully strange world of the deep sea. If you are lucky enough to be there during feeding times, you can also watch the captivating behavior of marine animals as they engage in unique training sessions designed to help them stay healthy.

With 30,000 creatures encompassing 620 species—including otters, sea lions, penguins, dolphins, whale sharks, rays, and jellyfish, to name just a few, this visit will prove to be a deeply rewarding experience.

Just next door is the Tempozan Marketplace with various unique shops, restaurants, and a food court. Enjoy free time to visit the aquarium and then shop and have lunch on your own here at the marketplace.

If you feel a bit adventurous, consider taking a ride on the Tempozan Ferris wheel as it takes you on a 15-minute tour of the sky. It is one of the world's largest, soaring 112 meters into the sky. If we are lucky to catch a clear day, you can enjoy views of offering views of Mount Ikoma to the east, the Akashi Kaikyo Bridge to the west, Kansai International Airport to the south, and the Rokko mountains to the north.

Lastly, there is a small park close by that offers some **beautiful cherry blossom viewing**.

We now make our way to the Kansai Airport, but just before a stop at the ever-popular AEON Mall for some last-minute omiyage shopping. The mall also features a supermarket where you may consider picking up a freshly made bento to take along to the airport and enjoy before the flight.

Once at the Kansai Airport, claim your bags from the bus and we will begin the check-in process.

Hawaiian Airlines #450 Departs Kansai 9:20 pm – Arrive Honolulu 10:00 am