



2020 Land of the Samurai #1

Spring School Break

March 14th-22nd, 2020

 **DELTA** *7nights/9days*

from: \$3195 triple, \$3295 double \$3995 single

Reserve by September 1st-Save \$50 per person!

The samurai were a special class in Japanese society. These revered warriors were highly respected for their strict dedication to their craft, the immense discipline required of a samurai and their indomitable fighting spirit. To many they were heroes.

Although samurai do not have any official status in today's modern Japan, descendants of samurai families still enjoy a high esteem among the Japanese population and have remained an iconic symbol of courage, power, and masculinity for over 700 years of Japanese warfare history.

Roads are an essential part of civilization. They help people travel and discover many different places. In Japan, during the Edo period the Tōkaidō (East Sea Road) was an important key artery for the ruling shogun dynasty to keep control over the country. Stretching along the Pacific Coast from Edo (Tokyo) to Osaka, two to three weeks on foot, was always an adventure.

Does the Tokaido Road and the travelling life of a samurai sound exciting? If so, join us on this unique tour for a taste of what these samurai experienced. Our 21st century version includes among all the favorites, a day at Universal Studios Japan, Ueno Zoo to see the panda bears, 3 hands-on experiences, bullet train, TeamLab Borderless, a world of artworks without boundaries and Tokyo Sea Life Park.

Itinerary/Details

Day 1 – March 14th, 2020 - Saturday – Depart from Honolulu

Delta Airlines #277 Departs Honolulu 11:31 am – Arrive Kansai 4:55 pm +1

Check in for international flights begin 3 hours prior. Please meet your Panda Travel representative, at the Delta Airlines international check-in counter located in Terminal 2.

Day 2 – March 15th, 2020 Sunday – Kansai-Osaka

On arrival at the Kansai Airport, please make your way to the baggage claim area and then proceed to customs clearing. On exiting customs, our local guide will be there to meet us for the drive to the recently opened Karakusa Hotel Osaka Namba.

Talk about location, just a short 2 blocks from the heart of Dotonbori and Shinsaibashi shopping streets. This spot is perfect to feel and see the real Osaka, with limitless dining and shopping opportunities.



Karakusa Hotel Osaka Namba

Welcome to Osaka, Japan's 3rd most populous city and the working heart of Kansai. Famous for its down-to-earth citizens and the colorful *Kansai-ben* (Kansai dialect) they speak, it's a good counterpart to the refined atmosphere of Kyoto. Primarily, Osaka is famous for good eating: the phrase *kuidaore* (eat 'til you drop) was coined to describe Osakans' love for good food. Osaka is also a good place to experience a modern Japanese city. It's only surpassed by Tokyo as a showcase of the Japanese urban phenomenon

After checking in and having some time to freshen up, we are off to explore the Shinsaibashi Shopping Arcade. This covered arcade shopping street has a very long history, site of some of Osaka's historical bridges. It has been around in some form for hundreds of years and is still one of the city's most popular and famous spots.

Shinsaibashi is the perfect spot for window-shopping and strolling. There's no shortage of places to shop, especially flanked by Amerika-mura and the Dotonbori, and Crysta Naghori underground, but this shopping arcade has charm. Not only does it have a wide selection of stores sure to please anyone, but the southern end of the arcade is at the Dotonbori River, a great sightseeing spot and home to that famous 'eat-til-you-burst' Osakan cuisine.

There are many choices for dinner as well as the endless streets for shopping.



Famous Blade Runner Neon



Shinsaibashi Shopping



Dotonbori Street

Accommodations: Karakusa Hotel Osaka Namba  free

Day 3 – March 16th, 2020 Monday – Osaka (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:30am as we are off on a half-day of touring.

The morning begins with a visit to the Osaka Castle, one of Osaka's most popular landmark sights.

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.



Osaka Castle



snacks & souvenirs



view from top of castle perch

From here, a visit to 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.

Now, off to visit Konamon Museum, where you can eat, learn about and make Takoyaki, Osaka's soul food.

First, we start off with a fun hands-on experience making wax samples of takoyaki and then sit back and enjoy a snack of freshly made ones. It's all so yummy!

We end the touring day not far from our hotel, at Amerikamura, the center of youth culture in Osaka. The area is filled with vintage clothing stores, cafes, galleries and much more. America-Mura is always full of young people sporting unique fashions. There are performances and flea markets which create a lively, fun atmosphere.

Enjoy the remainder of the afternoon and evening. You'll find a branch of Eggs and Things as well as Hula Grill in the neighborhood.



Amerikamura



Accommodations: Karakusa Hotel Osaka Namba **Wi-Fi free**

Day 4 – March 17th, 2020 Tuesday – Osaka-Universal Studios Japan-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 at 5:30pm, arriving back at our hotel by 6:00pm. Once back, the remainder of the evening is free.



Accommodations: Karakusa Hotel Osaka Namba **Wi-Fi free**

Day 5 – March 18th, 2020 Wednesday – Osaka-Kyoto (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:30am as we bid our good-byes to Osaka and journey on to Kyoto. Our large bags will be sent separately by truck and meet us in Kyoto at the hotel.

Kyoto is old Japan, made up of quiet temples, grand gardens, and colorful shrines. While the rest of Japan has adopted modernity with abandon, the old ways remain in Kyoto

The morning begins with a visit to 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.



Nijo Castle

From here, off to Maisendo, a shop specializing in fans and where we can enjoy a hands-on experience at painting a folding fan. This fan will have the stamp, "made in Kyoto".

It is said that there are 88 steps in the fan making process and that the oldest fan was found in Kyoto. Being that fans are considered a piece of Kyoto's culture; your completed souvenir can be treasured for many years.

For lunch time, we make our way back to our hotel area where you will have a free afternoon. There are many dining options whether it be at the AEON Mall or the JR Kyoto Station, both steps from our hotel,

Check-in at the hotel will be available from 2:30pm.



Accommodations: Miyako Hotel Kyoto Hachijo **Wi-Fi free**

Day 6 – March 19th, 2020 Thursday – Kyoto (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby as we are off on a full day of touring in Kyoto.

The morning 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, a visit to Kiyomizu Temple. This is 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.

While the rest of Japan has adopted modernity with abandon, the old ways remain in Kyoto. There is no better place to experience this feeling than with visiting two of Kyoto's most attractive streets are *Sannen-*

zaka and *Ninen-zaka*, a pair of lanes that lead down from Kiyomizu-dera Temple toward Nene-no-Michi Lane. The atmosphere of traditional old Kyoto is alive here.

Lined with beautifully restored traditional shophouses and blissfully free of the overhead power lines that mar the rest of Kyoto, this pair of pedestrian-only lanes that make for some of the most atmospheric strolling in the whole city.

In fact, it's 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, including the single most atmospheric teashop in the city, Kasagiya.

Souvenir shops selling Kyoto original goods like dolls and Japanese fans, Japanese restaurants using the reconstructed merchant's house, and ceramic shops stand side by side along the slope. The neighboring famous temples and shrines also attracting people here. Enjoy free time here to explore and have lunch on your own.

This afternoon, another fun hands-on experience at the Kodai Yuzen and Gallery, for a yuzen dyeing. Yuzen are dyed textiles from around the Kyoto Prefecture and they are known for their vibrant colors and intricate designs showing nature, animals and mundane, everyday things. These beautiful hand painted fabrics are often used in Japanese kimonos. They involve an elaborate technique of painting dye directly onto a cloth. What sets Kyo Yuzen apart from other textile dyeing methods is a process called the *itome-nori*. It is when the artist puts starch on the edges of the patterns so that the adjacent colors do not mix together. This technique gives way for designs that look clean and crisp.

Established about 330 years ago and named after the founder, Yuzen-sai Miyazaki. Yuzen-sai, first established himself as a famous painter of the pictures for beautiful Japanese fans, and the admirers praised his works. One day a kimono tailor encouraged him to expand his skill to paint beautiful pictures on Kimono and, after a tremendous effort, he established his unique style of hand-painting the figures on Kimono, and soon his art became very popular all over in Japan.

The gallery was founded by the long-established kimono store "Kodai Yuzen Co., Ltd.", to display the beauty and tradition of Kyoto Yuzen dyed garments, and thus exhibits an array of kimonos to suit each of the four seasons.

We now make our way back to our hotel, arrival by 4:00pm and the remainder of the afternoon and evening is free.



Accommodations: New Miyako Hotel Kyoto  **free**

Day 7 – March 20th, 2020 Friday – Kyoto-Tokyo (B/L)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:30am as we are off to Japan's capital of Tokyo. Our luggage will be sent separately and meet up with us later at the hotel.

We will be walking over to the JR Kyoto Station, right across the street from our hotel for the bullet train to Tokyo. The departure is at 8:35am on Nozomi 216 with an arrival at Tokyo Station at 10:53am.

On arrival, our charter bus will meet us for an afternoon of touring before checking in to our hotel.

Welcome to Tokyo, Japan's capital, and the world's most populous metropolis. Tokyo dazzles with its traditional culture and passion for everything new. Such is the joy of a city that prides itself on constant renewal and reinvention; it seriously never gets old. Tokyo has everything you can ask of a city, and has it in spades: a rich, cosmopolitan dining scene, more cafes, and bars than you could visit in a lifetime.

First, off to lunch at a local restaurant and then

From here, off to 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 for lunch on your own and do some shopping.



Asakusa and Nakamise Shopping Arcade

From here, off to our hotel for the last two nights on tour, the Sunshine City Prince Hotel in the heart of Ikebukuro and just a few minutes' walk from the JR Ikebukuro Station. The arrival will be by 5:15pm.

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.

There is a 24-hour Family Mart located right off the lobby in case you would like beverages, some hot and cold food items or just a snack.

For dinner, the 3rd floor of the Sunshine City Mall offers numerous options and the restaurants remain open until 9:30pm. The Panda Travel guide will be available to take you around the immediate area and show you all that is around.



Sunshine City Prince Hotel & lobby



Family Mart in hotel lobby



Accommodations: Sunshine City Prince Hotel  **free**

Day 8 – March 21st, 2020 Saturday – Tokyo (B/L)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:00am as we are off on a full day tour of Tokyo.

The morning begins with a stop at Tsukiji Fish Market which has the distinct honor of being the world's largest seafood market. While the inner auction market has moved to a new location, this popular outer market is alive and well.

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

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.



Tsukiji Fish Market

From here, off to visit 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 Saturday, 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 bride and groom walk under a large red parasol.



Meiji Shrine

Next, lunch at a local restaurant.

This afternoon we are off to the Ueno Zoological Gardens, established in 1882 and Japan's oldest. It is home to over 3,000 animals from 400 different species. Our visit here today is to see the zoo's highly popular giant panda cub, Xiang Xiang. It is the zoo's first baby panda since 1988.

Xiang Xiang has taken Japan by storm. Born to mother Shin Shin and father Li Li in June 2017, Xiang Xiang is Ueno Zoo's symbol of adorableness (or as the Japanese would say in a high pitch, "Kawaii!").

You will have the opportunity to watch her munching on bamboo shoots and nuzzling her mother. This bright-eyed cub has been the object of major media attention, with visitors clad in panda paraphernalia flocking to see her since her first public appearance.

We plan to remain here for 1.5 hours so that you can enjoy leisure time in the zoo.



Ueno Zoo

Next, close by, 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

Now, back to our hotel, arrival by 5:15pm. The remainder of the afternoon and evening is free.



Accommodations: Sunshine City Prince Hotel **Wi-Fi free**

Day 9 – March 22nd, 2020 Sunday– Tokyo-Narita (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 9:30am. While it may be our last day on tour, there is still much to see and do before our flight home later this evening.

The morning begins with a drive to Odaiba and enjoy quite an experience at TeamLab Borderless, a world of art without boundaries, a museum without a map. Immerse yourself in borderless art, this vast, complex, three-dimensional 10,000 square meter world. Wander, explore and discover.

From here we are off to Divercity Shopping Center where you can enjoy time for shopping and lunch on your own. Don't forget to take a moment and get a photo in front of the Gundam Statue. This new Unicorn Gundam is 24 meters in height whereas the original was only 18 meters.

As we make our way towards Narita, a stop at Kasai Rinkai Park to visit Tokyo Sea Life Park for a global aquatic adventure. The aquarium has 12 areas that feature sea life from the waters of Tokyo Bay to coral reef tropical waters to the icy waves of the Atlantic.

The aquarium's pride and glory is its 2,200-ton cylindrical bluefin tuna tank. It's the first of its kind in the world that allows tuna to replicate their natural swimming patterns. But the aquarium isn't just about fish. Its penguin exhibition is one of the largest in Japan, and there is even a hands-on exhibition where you can get up close and personal with sea urchins, crabs, stingrays, and sharks, too.

Enjoy time to explore the aquarium and as well lunch on your own at a variety of eating venues in the park.

Once at the airport, we begin the check-in process for our flight home.

Delta Airlines #180 Departs Narita 8:45 pm – Arrive Honolulu 8:51 am