

Beautiful Shikoku & Kansai- The Springtime tour- 2022

March 26th – April 3rd, 2022



7nts/9days from: \$3195 triple \$3295 double \$3795 single

Cancel for any reason up to 60 days prior-FULL REFUND!

Maximum Tour size is 24 tour members!

Shikoku Island is the smallest of the Japanese archipelago's four main islands in Japan's southwest, but full of attractions found only here. Whether your first time or returning back-come enjoy Shikoku!

Shikoku is the birthplace of the most revered figure in Japanese Buddhism, the monk and teacher Kobo-Daishi, who brought a populist form of Buddhism to Japan from China in the 9th century. For hundreds of years, a 750-mile pilgrimage route has circled this mountainous island, connecting 88 separate temples and shrines that claim connection to Daishi, also known as the Great Master.

Yet this is not merely a place for passive soul-searching. A rugged and ancient Pacific Ocean coastline, gorgeous free-flowing rivers and mountain ranges all beckon to be explored firsthand. If the inner demons are restless, there's also Takamatsu and Kōchi, attractive and youthful cities with excellent regional cuisine and all the trappings of 'mainland' modernity.

Join us on this truly unique tour of Shikoku and highlights of the Kansai region: Osaka, Hiroshima, and Miyajima Island. Also included, an onsen stay in Dogo, 2 hands-on experiences, Japanese paper making and udon making, a bullet train ride, Naruto whirlpool sightseeing cruise, Aqua Liner cherry blossom cruise, and a complete free shopping day in Osaka!

Itinerary/Details

Day 1 – March 26th, 2022, Saturday – Depart from Honolulu

Hawaiian Airlines #449 Departs Honolulu 1:10 pm – Arrive Kansai 6:45 pm +1

Please meet your Panda Travel representative at the Hawaiian Airlines ticket counter located in Terminal 2, Lobby 4, a minimum of 3 hours prior to the flight departure time.

Day 2 – March 27th, 2022, Sunday – Kansai

After clearing customs, our local English-speaking guide will meet and join us for the walk over to the hotel for the evening, Hotel Nikko Kansai Airport.

Ideally located on the airport grounds, there are many dining and shopping options just steps away. There is also a 24-hour convenience store nearby. Rest up for tomorrow we are off to Hiroshima.

After check-in, your Panda Travel escort will be set a time for those who would like to explore the 3rd floor at Kansai Airport. Here you will find a variety of shop and restaurants.



Accommodations: Nikko Kansai Airport Hotel **Wi-Fi free**

Day 3 – March 28th, Monday –Kansai- Miyajima-Hiroshima (B/L)

After breakfast, please meet up with your guide by 8:45 am. We are off to Hiroshima via train this morning. **Our bags will be sent separately to Hiroshima and meet up with us later this afternoon.**

Our local train departs at 9:16am and arrives at the Shin Osaka Station at 10:06am. We will transfer to the bullet train, Nozomi 15, departing 10:39am and arrives at the Hiroshima Station at 12:03pm. A bento box lunch will be provided on the bullet train.

Once in Hiroshima, we will drive out to the ferry station for the short 10-minute ferry 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.



walk along Omote-Sando, the main street from the port to Itsukushima Shrine.

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 some free shopping time, back by ferry and the drive to Hiroshima.

Arrival at our hotel will be approximately 5:15pm. After time to relax and freshen up, please meet in the lobby by 6:00pm for the short walk over to our dinner venue, just a couple of minutes from the hotel.

Accommodations for tonight are at Hotel Granvia, adjacent to the Hiroshima Station. You really cannot ask for a better spot to spend the evening. Our arrival will be by 5:15pm. The remainder of the afternoon and evening is free. There are many dining and shops within steps of our hotel.



Accommodations: **Hotel Granvia** **Wi-Fi** free

Day 4 – March 29th, Tuesday, 2022 – Hiroshima-Imabari-Dogo (B/L/D)

Please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:30am as we are off on a full day of touring, ending later this evening in Dogo.

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.

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 also 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.

From here, a visit to the **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.



Peace Memorial Park



A-Bomb Dome

We bid Hiroshima good-bye and begin the drive to Imabari City via the Shimanami Kaido, the famous highway across the Seto Inland Sea which connects Imabari city to Onomichi.

Sit back; relax as we cross the bridges of the Seto Inland Sea by bus, beautifully dotted with over 600 islands. This body of water lies between the islands of Honshu and Shikoku.

The Shimanami Kaido, nicknamed for the Nishiseto Expressway is a series of seven bridges linking each of the six small islands. This route was opened in 1999 and has a total road length of 40 miles. The islands of the Shimanami Kaido are part of the Seto Inland Sea National Park, which celebrated its 80th anniversary in 2014, making it one of Japan's three oldest national parks.

Each of the bridges along the route, unique and magnificent structures, rises out of the placid waters to tower above the somnolent scenery. One of them, Tatara, was the longest cable-stayed bridge in the world when it was built (now it's the fifth longest). Its elegant 220-meter-high steel towers represent the folded wings of a crane. Further along the route is the 4,015-meter-long Kurushima-Kaikyo Bridge, the longest suspension bridge in the world.



Shimanami Kaido

From here we are off to lunch at a local restaurant followed by a visit to the Imabari Towel Museum.

The museum sits mountainside outside the city. This imposing building is in an architectural style that is best described as a “modern Japanese château”. Once inside, you quickly realize that the familiar words “towel” and “museum” have been interpreted very broadly.

There are three floors of shops selling various textile items, local produced goods, and a French tea shop. If you're looking for something to take home, you'll find plenty of options.

The museum part offers an exhibit showing the towel-making process from start to finish, from raw cotton, through spinning, and weaving on an automatic loom. Another room features a wall of 1,800 large spools of thread, and various artworks made of towels, or woven in toweling.



Imabari Towel Museum

From here we are off to Dogo onsen, Japan's oldest hot spring with a 3,000-year history. It is in the city of Matsuyama, the capital of Ehime.

The legend is that it healed a deity's illness in ancient time. The main building (Honkan), the symbol of Dogo spa resort, is a communal bathhouse erected in 1894. The magnificent three-story castle-like wooden structure is the first public bathhouse designated as an important cultural asset in its 100 years' anniversary. It is also known as a model of the bathhouse of gods in Hayao Miyazaki's animated film "Spirited Away". It has a watchtower with red glass windows on the roof, where they beat a time-telling drum three times a day.

We will be checking into our ryokan, Dogo Onsen Chaharu by 4:45pm and then have time to enjoy time around the Dogo Onsen Area with our guide. The neighborhood offers quite a bit to do. Enjoy some time to stroll along the Dogo Shopping Arcade where you will find a variety of shops, cafes, and restaurants. The retro-flavored Dogo-onsen Station stands on the other entrance of the arcade, where you may enjoy a restored locomotive "Botchan Train" beeping or the puppet clock tower acting with its music. Consider taking a rickshaw as an easy tour of the area.

Later this evening we will meet up back at our ryokan for a Japanese style dinner at 6:30pm. After dinner, do make a point to enjoy an onsen on their 10th floor, offering a great view of the area. Another rooftop bath is on the 11th floor.



Dogo Onsen Honkan



Shopping Arcade



Rickshaw rides outside Dogo



Dogo Onsen Chaharu

Accommodations: Dogo Onsen Chaharu  free- Japanese style room

Day 5 – March 30th, 2022, Wednesday – Dogo-Kochi (B)

Please meet your guide by 8:30am for a full day of touring and make our way to Kochi, a small and friendly city. Enjoy the casual atmosphere and a dose of southern flair.

The drive time is approximately 3 hours, and we will make several stops along the way at Michi-no-Eki, popular roadside stations along the route. They are also fun stops to pick up a snack or quick shopping.

On arrival in Kochi, we will be visiting Hirome Market, a friendly indoor market and izakaya. Just down the street from Kochi Castle, the market is home to approximately 65 stalls. This is the ideal place to try a variety of Kochi specialties, as you can purchase food and drink from the stalls and enjoy them at the many tables set up. The market is open from

morning to late in the evening, but no matter what time you visit there are sure to find plenty of friendly folks chatting, eating, and sipping some of Kochi's smooth dry sake. Our hotel for the evening is close-by if you want to stop back later.

While discovering the local delicacies is part of the fun, there are a few dishes that are sure to start you off on the right path. Katsuo no tataki (seared bonito) is the soul food of Kochi, and here you can catch the chefs searing the filets over piles of burning straw. Keep an eye out for packs of inaka-sushi (country-style sushi) made with preserved vegetables and crunchy aonori (laver) tempura, as well as other popular dishes like juicy fried chicken and gyoza.



Hirome Market

From here, we are off to visit Kochi Castle, one of just twelve Japanese castles to have survived the fires, wars, and other catastrophes of the post feudal age. It was first constructed between 1601 and 1611, but most of its main buildings date from 1748 when they were reconstructed after a fire.

A unique feature of Kochi's castle is that its main tower (donjon) was not only used for military purposes, but also as a residence. In most other castles, the lords usually resided in separate palace buildings rather than in the castle keep. The castle's wooden interior maintains the appearance of its Edo Period origins, and the lookout point from the castle tower's top floor offers nice view of downtown.



Looking up at Kochi Castle



Kochi Castle



looking down from castle's perch

Now, to the Ino-cho Paper Museum. Opened in 1985, the museum showcases the long history of Tosa paper, with a workshop for visitors to try their hand at papermaking. The process of handmade paper is exhibited according to each stage, making it easier to understand the tedious process.

Japanese paper is known around the world for its high quality and beautiful designs. Within Japan, Tosa Washi, paper produced in Kochi Prefecture, is particularly famous and has been designated an Intangible Cultural Property by the Japanese government.

Kochi artisans have been perfecting the art of paper making for close to 1000 years. This afternoon not only learn about its history but enjoy a hands-on papermaking experience.

From here, off to Katsurahama Beach, one of the most picturesque spots in Kochi Prefecture. Gazing over the Pacific Ocean, a famous stature of Kochi's favorite son, Sakamoto Ryoma. It stands at 44-feet high, surrounded by tall pine trees. He was instrumental in negotiating an alliance between the Choshu and Satsuma clans that helped to bring an end to Japan's feudal age in 1868.

Now, off to our hotel, arrival by 5:15pm. The Crown Palace New Hankyu, city center and just minutes away from Kochi Castle and the covered shopping arcade. You are steps from variety of shops and dining options. Remainder of the evening is free.



Accommodations: The Crown Palais New Hankyu  **free**

Day 6 – March 31st, 2022, Thursday – Kochi-Takamatsu (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide by 8:00am as we will make our way to Takamatsu, the capital of Kagawa, Japan's smallest prefecture. This port city was the main entry point to Shikoku Island until the opening of the Seto Ohashi Bridge in 1988.

The morning begins with drive to visit a replica of Monet's Garden, located in the nature-rich village of Kitagawa. Monet's Garden Marmottan. Kitagawa Village is the world's only facility that can use the name "Monet's Garden."

Approximately 70,000 plants are grown on the premises of about 30,000 square meters and you can enjoy beautiful landscapes that changes from season to season. Blue water lilies that are particularly popular are in full bloom in the garden from around late June to early November.

Monet's Garden consists of three gardens, the Flower Garden, Water Garden and Light Garden. Strolling Flower Garden and Water Garden makes you understand Monet's deep interest in Japanese artworks and culture.

The Flower Garden brings together a large selection of colorful flowers that creates an impression of an artist's palette. The ambience of the flower garden changes throughout the seasons as do the flowers, capturing a new and vibrant atmosphere all year round. These flowers are arranged at varying heights, and are color coordinated to the changing of the four seasons, making them highly appealing to the eye.

The Water Garden is influenced by Monet's fascination for Japanese gardens and collection of Japanese handprints mounted on woodblocks called ukiyo-e. The garden features a taiko bridge arched over a pond, Japanese wisteria trellis, willow trees, bamboo, and a selection of water lilies. This is identical to the Japanese taiko bridge over a pond in a Japanese garden that he built in Giverny in 1883. The ponds give a sense of tranquility when you view the reflections of the sunlight and garden plants on the water. Several replicas of Monet's artworks surrounding the ponds and bridges can also be viewed freely. The most memorable artwork of Monet's life, the water lilies (Les Nymphéas), is also featured in replica form around the ponds, a site not to be missed.

Lastly, the Light Garden is based on Monet's expedition to the Mediterranean Sea at the age of 43, with a fellow artist Renoir Pierre-Auguste. The aim of his expedition to the Mediterranean Sea was to create numerous artworks that capture the beautiful Mediterranean Sea and its surroundings. Utilizing the lush and diverse landscape of the Kitagawa area, palms trees, olive trees and other exotics flowers and plants were planted to give the impression of a Mediterranean style garden. You can enjoy viewing beautiful surrounding landscapes of mountains, forests, ocean from the site of the garden, an experience that can only be offered here.

For our lunch break, a one hour stop in route at the Toyohama Service Area. Enjoy a leisurely lunch on your own with time to shop.

The drive from here to Takamatsu is approximately 1 hour and once there, a stop at Ritsurin Park, awarded three stars in the Michelin Green Guide Japan! If you believe there are two Japans, the hyper new, dizzying Japan, and the vastly old, meditative Japan, then Ritsurin Park exemplifies everything about the latter.

Formerly the retreat of the feudal lord, Matsudaira, the park has all the elements of Japanese beauty and tradition. There is a tea house where tea ceremonies were hosted in ancient time, ponds where the feudal lord and his guests floated boats and appreciated the moon. Walk along the many paths and admire the scenery. There are ample spots to sit and enjoy a soft-serve ice cream or feed the carps.

It is a lush collection of painstakingly trimmed and pruned greenery and historic hut-like buildings that took shape over the past 400 years. The park boasts more than 1,400 pine trees, 100 plum trees, 70 maple trees, thousands of lotuses and irises, and many other species of plants, shrubs, and trees all decorating ponds, streams, a small waterfall, stone paths and hilly hideaways. A mountain, Mount Shiun, in the background completes the scene. Enjoy experiencing the feeling of being away from the modern world - no high-rise buildings in sight.

Ritsurin changes with the seasons as different flowers are in bloom, and perhaps the most popular is during the cherry blossom season, ranked in the top 10 in popularity.



Ritsurin Park

From here we are off to our hotel from the evening, JR Hotel Clement Takamatsu. The hotel offers a commanding view of the islands of the Seto Inland Sea and surrounding nature around the ruins of Takamatsu Castle.

Located in the recently developed shopping district around JR Takamatsu Station, the location is perfect for a free afternoon. If local arcade shopping is more to your liking, we will guide you there. The walk is just 10 to 15 minutes away.

Takamatsu's covered shopping arcade claims to be the longest in Japan. Enjoy an afternoon and evening free to stroll around the area, dine and shop.



JR Hotel Clement Takamatsu

shopping arcade

Accommodations: JR Hotel Clement Takamatsu



free

Day 7 – April 1st, 2022, Friday – Takamatsu-Naruto-Osaka (B/L)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 7:45am as we have a full day of touring, our destination, Osaka.

The morning begins with a visit to Kompirasan, formally known as Kotohiragu, dedicated to sailors and seafaring. Located on the wooded slope of Mount Zozu, it is famous as a guardian god of the sea, attracting about 3 million visitors a year from around the country. Along an approach of the long stone stairway with 785 steps to the main shrine and 1,368 steps to the inner shrine, there are historic buildings designated as national important cultural properties such as “Shoin (drawing room)” and “Asahi-sha shrine,” as well as “Hōmotsu-kan (treasure museum)” which stores highly valued artistic works and cultural properties.

Despite being one of the most difficult shrine approaches in Japan, Kompirasan is a highly popular site visited by pilgrims from across the country. The approach begins among shopping arcade filled with souvenir shops and udon restaurants.

No worries, no need to climb to the top to enjoy the atmosphere here. It is here that we will also enjoy the experience of udon making and afterwards lunch! This is truly a fun experience, guaranteed!



Kompirasan

Now, time for lunch at a local restaurant followed by a fun hands-on udon making experience.



hands-on udon making experience

Our afternoon begins with a drive to Naruto to experience the famous Naruto whirlpool cruise along the Shikoku coast of the Naruto Strait.

The whirlpools are created by large volumes of water moving between the Seto Inland Sea and the Pacific Ocean between high and low tide, combined with the unique underwater geography of the narrow strait.

According to the change of tides, the whirlpools occur roughly every six hours and can typically be seen once in the morning and once in the afternoon for an hour or two. The whirlpools vary in size, depending on the intensity of the tides.

The whirlpools are not dangerous to boats and are best viewed from sightseeing cruises which get right up next to and among the whirlpools. If you are not up for the cruise, no worries as the cruise departure point offers a waiting area with food and shopping.



From here, a visit to Myoukensan Park to view the approximately 300 cherry trees planted along the river.

Now, off to Osaka via Awaji Island, located in the Seto Inland Sea, or Setonaikai, between Japan's largest island of Honshu and the large island of Shikoku. Throughout its history, Awaji Island has acted as a vital connection between mainland Honshu and Shikoku. There is much history to be found here, including the world's longest suspension bridge and several wonderful beaches. The drive time is approximately 2 hours.

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 our last two nights on tour are at the Hotel Monterey Grasmere Osaka. It is a short walk 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.

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 is 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: Hotel Monterey Grasmere Osaka



free

Day 8 – April 2nd, 2022, Saturday– 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 Midotsuji, 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: Hotel Monterey Grasmere Osaka **Wi-Fi** free

Day 9 – April 3rd, Sunday – Osaka-Kansai (B/L)

After breakfast, please meet your guide by 8:30am as we journey off on a full day of touring before our flight home later this evening.

Our luggage will be sent separately later this afternoon to the airport and meet up with us on arrival.

It may be our last day on tour, but we still have much to see and do.

Our day begins with a visit to Osaka Castle-the symbol of Osaka with it's over 400 years of history. Built as a display of power by Toyotomi Hideyoshi after he achieved his goal of unifying Japan. One hundred thousand workers toiled for three years to construct an 'impregnable' granite castle, finishing the job in 1583. It was destroyed 32 years later by the armies of Tokugawa Ieyasu, rebuilt within 10 years, and then suffered a further calamity when another generation of the Tokugawa clan razed it rather than let it fall to the forces of the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

The present structure is a 1931 concrete reconstruction of the original, which was refurbished in 1997. The interior houses an excellent collection of displays relating to the castle, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the city of Osaka. On the 8th floor is an observation deck with 360-degree views. The castle and park are at their colorful best in the **cherry-blossom** and autumn-foliage seasons.

Enjoy the sight of over 4,000 **cherry trees** planted within the grounds and in the parks, that surround the area. Afterward we are off on a sightseeing cruise down the Okawa River (at the rear of Osaka Castle Park) and marvel at the 5,000 or so cherry blossom trees that line its banks.

Next, a special treat, a scenic one-hour cruise along the Okawa River on the Aqua-Liner. During cherry blossom season, this is a great way to enjoy the beauty of the blooms as you just sit back, relax, and take it all in.



Now, off to enjoy a Japanese lunch at a local restaurant followed by a visit to Sakuuranomiya, a riverside park with a beautiful stretch of cherry blossoms that will take your breath. **Enjoy cherry blossom viewing!**

We now make our way towards the Kansai Airport, but an always import visit to the Aeon Mall to get in some last-minute shopping is on tap. This is also a good opportunity to stop in at the supermarket for a freshly made bento to take along to the airport and enjoy while waiting on our flight.

Hawaiian Airlines #450 Departs Kansai 8:45 pm – Arrive in Honolulu 9:25 am