

The Happy Hawaiians -Tokyo, Niigata, and Sado Island Tour



Fall Tour **HAWAIIAN** AIRLINES. 

September 18th - 29th, 2022

10nts/12days from: \$4,095 twin; \$4,695 single

Little visited and often overlooked, Niigata is a beautiful remote region with fabulous sights, great food, and excellent countryside landscapes -deserving much more attention than it gets. 200 miles northwest from Tokyo, the Niigata-Sado Island region offers a very different experience to the hustle and bustle of the Tokaido seaboard.

The tour begins and ends in Tokyo, Japan's capital. It is undeniably one of the planet's most exciting cities. Enjoy the experience of stays in two of the city's more popular areas, Ikebukuro, and Shibuya. While an ultra-modern metropolis, there are hidden time-warps scattered throughout the city that offer a glimpse into Tokyo's past.

The tour itinerary includes visits to Takasaki, home to towering Byakue Kannon statue, and Shorinzan Darumaji Temple, famous for its round daruma dolls, the mountain resort towns of Karuizawa and Minakami and Niigata, on the west coast, facing the Sea of Japan. This fifth largest prefecture is known for its scenic sites, rice fields, sake, and fresh seafood. And then, we venture to Sado Island, offering rugged natural beauty, cultural experiences, and a variety of mouth-watering culinary delights.

Along with our daily touring spots, we have included a bullet train ride, local ferry to Sado, onsen stay, hands-on experiences, and some of Tokyo's best shopping!

Itinerary

Day 1 – September 18th, 2022- Sunday – Depart from Honolulu

Hawaiian Airlines #821 Departs Honolulu at 12:30pm - Arrives Narita at 4:00 pm + 1

Please meet your Panda Travel representative, **Patrick Ganhinhin** at the Hawaiian Airlines international check-in counters located in Terminal 2, Lobby 4 a minimum of 3 hours prior to the flight departure time

Day 2 – September 19th, 2022-Monday – Haneda-Tokyo

On arrival in Tokyo, 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 our hotel, Sunshine City Prince Hotel.

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 am to 8 pm seven days a week. We are also less than a 10-minute walk from the Ikebukuro JR Station. The third floor of the mall is practically all restaurants and stays open until 9:30pm.

There is 24-hour Family Mart convenience store right off the lobby in case you would like to pick up food, snacks, or beverages. Within a 5-minute walk is a 24-hour supermarket, Seiyu, in case all you want is a light dinner bento to bring back to the room.

While most of the mall stores will be closing by 8:00pm, the third floor offers a variety of dining and the restaurants are typically open until 9:30pm.



Sunshine City Prince Hotel & lobby



Family Mart in hotel lobby



Accommodations: Sunshine City Prince Hotel  free

Day 3 – September 20th, 2022-Tuesday – Tokyo (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 9:30am as we are off on our first full day of touring.

The morning begins with a visit to 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 is a great spot to stock up on all your omiyage favorites

From here, we are off to spend some quality time at Tokyo's largest Daiso at Alcahit Kinshicho, one of the largest shopping malls in the region, right beside the JR Kinshicho Station. This Daiso takes up an entire

floor and when you see it, the only words imaginable will be “Oh my gosh, this place is HUGE!”. Enjoy free time here for shopping and lunch on your own.

We will return to our hotel by 3:00pm and the remainder of the afternoon and evening is free. You might have already noticed that Ikebukuro is one of Tokyo’s most dynamic and down-to-earth neighborhoods. It really does not disappoint. For those who may not be familiar with the area, your Panda Travel escort will set a meeting time for a walking tour of the area.

Accommodations: Sunshine City Prince Hotel  **free**

Day 4 – September 21st, 2022-Wednesday – Tokyo-Takasaki (B/L)

The morning begins with a drive to Takasaki, an often-forgotten city in Gunma Prefecture. With a population of just under 400,000, it offers all the comforts of a big Japanese city, a good mix of city and country life combined. The drive time is approximately 2.5 hours, and a rest stop will be made on the way.

Once here, a visit to Takasaki Byakue Dai-Kannon, the chalk-white statue of Kannon soaring into the sky over the city is impressive as well a symbol of Takasaki. Constructed in 1936, the statue, Goddess of Mercy stands at a height of almost 42 meters and weighs 6,000 tons. There are 9 levels inside, with 20 Buddha statues placed at each level. You can walk inside and climb up the 146 stairs to the statue’s shoulder for a wonderful view of the surrounding area. Now, in autumn, enjoy the maple leaves.

Now, off for lunch at a local restaurant.

This afternoon’s touring begins with a visit to explore Dokutsu Kannon, a Buddhist cave that houses 33 statues of deities, gently lit to create a somber, spiritual atmosphere. Built around 100-years ago, this 400-meter-long tunnel took around 50-years to carve out by hand.

Once entering the tunnel, a fantasy world appears, beginning with a cool breeze and the feeling you are entering a new world. The atmosphere inside is very dim and quiet with the Kannon statues all lit up looking solemn giving the visitor a strong spiritual feeling. Close-by is Tokumeien, the most famous Japanese garden of the Kanto region displaying beautiful scenery with seasonal foliage.

Now, off to our hotel for the evening, Hotel Metropolitan Takasaki, directly connected to the JR Takasaki Station and adjacent shopping mall. Our arrival will be by 4:15pm and the remainder of the afternoon and evening is free.

For those who may be interested, it is a short walk to visit the remains of Takasaki Castle. Very little remains of the castle except for a small section of the San-no-maru and moat. The grounds make for a nice leisurely walk. There is a small entrance fee.

Accommodations: Hotel Metropolitan Takasaki  **Free**

Day 5 – September 22nd, 2022 - Thursday – Takasaki-Karuizawa (B/L/D)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 9:00am.

The morning begins with a visit to Daruma no Furusato Daimonya, a shop specializing in the handicraft of daruma beloved as talismans making wishes come true while carrying the spirit of persistence through the

ups and downs of life. Besides observing the production of these daruma by skillful artisans we will enjoy a daruma painting hands-on experience. You can also purchase completed ones as a souvenir from Takasaki.

Next, lunch at a local restaurant, togeno kamamesshi, a tasty treasure box served in a unique shaped pottery container. When visiting this area, it is a must-have. This rice bowl dish has been served since 1958 and consists of Bamboo shoots, burdock root, chestnuts along with other ingredients.

This afternoon we make our way to Karuizawa via the Usui Pass, a significant traveling route during the Edo Period. It was considered one of the paths on Nakasendo, one of the “Edo Five Routes”, which connected Tokyo with five different provinces throughout Japan.

Along the way enjoy viewing Usui Third Bridge, more commonly known as Magane-bashi Bridge. Constructed of bricks and measuring 31-meters tall and 91-meters long, it was completed in 1892. It is the largest arched brick bridge in Japan and designated as an important cultural property.

As we approach the bridge from the road, enjoy the impressive views. Make sure to have your camera ready!

Now, off to a superb viewing spot, Usui observatory, situated at 1200-meters above sea level offers beautiful mountainous views of the Gunma prefecture and Mt. Asama.

Now, off to our hotel for the evening, Karuizawa Prince Hotel, nestled among scenic natural beauty. Our arrival will be by 4:30pm, followed by buffet dinner at 6:00pm. Take a walk around the grounds and enjoy the foliage.

Accommodations: Karuizawa Prince Hotel, West Wing



Free

Day 6 – September 23rd, 2022 - Friday – Karuizawa-Minakami (B/D)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:45am as we are off on another full day of touring.

The morning begins with a visit to Kumoba Pond, one of the 3 major nature attractive spots in Karuizawa town. Nicknamed the Swan Lake, the fall colors reflect vividly in the water. While a beautiful spot year-round, autumn is when it shines best with its autumn colors.

From here, a visit at Karuizawa Shiraito Falls, located in the forests. Shiraito no Taki literally means "the waterfall of white threads", which aptly describes its appearance, as multiple streaks of water drape over the surface forming what seems like a white curtain. Just below the Shiraito, there is a secondary waterfall that is shaped such that water cascades over several steps.

Its lunch time and we will make a stop at a popular roadside area, Michino eki Takumi no sato. Enjoy time to shop and have lunch on your own.

As we make our way to Minakami, enjoy apple picking. It is a perfect autumn hands-on autumn experience.

Now, off to our hotel for the evening, Gensenyu No Yado Matsunoi, a ryokan that features beautiful natural springs. Our arrival will be by 4:30pm, followed by a buffet dinner at 6:00pm. Do enjoy the onsen before and after dinner.

Accommodations: Gensenyu No Yado Matsunoi



Free- Japanese style rooms

Day 7 – September 24th, 2022 - Saturday – Minakami-Niigata (B/L)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 9:30am as we make our way to Niigata.

The morning begins with a ride on the Tanigawadake Ropeway, a 15-minute ride that whisks us up the side of Mt. Tanigawa, one of Japan's famous mountains. Once there, enjoy panoramic views across the area.

Next, a fun visit to Ponshukan Echigoyuzawa, a sake museum where you can sample the leading brands of sake produced by Niigata's 95 breweries. Vending machines offer 117 different brands of sake with a list of rankings to help you in making choices. Not only that, you can bathe in it, a special mix of sake and alkaline hot spring water.

Now, lunch at Uono no sato, Uonuma's largest souvenir shop. After lunch, enjoy free time to shop for local and unique items such as Koshihikari rice from Minamiuonuma, considered to be the finest of Japanese rice. There is also local sake from Echigo, traditional Japanese snacks, sweet and salty.

Do not forget to try the bamboo dumpling soft ice cream. It is famous and popular.

Now, off to Niigata and they drive time is approximately two hours. As we get closer, a visit to the Niigata Furusato Village Bazar, a roadside station offering a wide variety of local flavor. At the bazar pavilion discover an assortment of specialty sake, rice, and fish products from the many towns and village across Niigata.

The entrance offers a nice flower garden that changes with the season. At this time of the year, enjoy viewing the dahlias, gorgeous flowers that bloom from midsummer through autumn. Close by is a park built in the image of the great Shinano river flowing into the Sea of Japan.

Now, off to our hotel, Hotel Okura Niigata, a four-star luxury on the banks of the Shinano River. This modern hotel is right in the heart of Niigata. Our arrival will be by 6:00pm and the remainder of the evening is free.



Accommodations: Hotel Okura Niigata **Free**

Day 8 –September 25th, 2022 - Sunday – Niigata-Sado (B/L/D)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:30am as we are off to Sado Island, off the coast off the coast of Niigata Prefecture and is one of Japan's largest islands.

We will be taking a ferry ride to Sado Island from the Port of Niigata. Our bus will also be traveling with us. The travel time is approximately 2.5 hours.

Welcome to Sado Island, also known as the Butterfly Island due to its outlines. Occupied by people for more than 10,000 years, this historic island's name appears in the Records of Ancient Matters "Kojiki", which is Japan's oldest historical record and the Chronicles of Japan, "Nihon-Shoki", which is the oldest chronicles of Japan.

Due in part to the maritime climate created by the confluence of warm and cold ocean currents and the wealth of natural produce growing on its unique terrain, the interactions of people coming and going here over the years have fostered a unique history and culture. Known as an island of treasures representing a microcosm of Japan's appeal, Sado in recent years has attracted the attention of both Japanese travelers as well as many from overseas.

On arrival in Sado, time for lunch, Japanese style at a local restaurant.

Our afternoon of touring begins with a fun tarai bune (tub boat) ride. It is a traditional Japanese fishing boat found mainly on Sado Island and used for catching abalone and other mollusks. The design originated from need to fish in the narrow coves formed by earthquakes. Now they are used only in six small fishing villages, having survived due to their low cost and durability.

“These tub boats are made of local sugi (Japanese cedar) and madake (timber bamboo). The construction is the same as Japanese coopering, except that the bottom of the tub boat is slightly concave, and the boats are oval. The planking is doweled together with bamboo nails, but the braided bamboo hoops are what really hold these boats together. The braiding of the hoops is now an extremely rare skill. Each hoop is comprised of four 45-foot-long strips of bamboo. The hoops are pounded onto the hull, and each must fit precisely since the hull is slightly tapered. “



Next, we will be visiting Sado Island Taiko Centre, also called Tatakokan was built from local Sado Island timber and features large balconies that overlook Mano Bay and the Osado mountain range, providing visitors with stunning natural views all year round.

Tatakokan is home to two huge taiko drums that were hand-carved from an enormous 600-year-old keyaki (Japanese zelkova) log by members of the Taiko Performing Arts Ensemble Kodo. These one-of-a-kind drums are on display, and we will enjoy a hands-on Japanese drum session. While playing, listen to the drums' deep vibrations echo throughout the wooden hall and surrounding hills.

Now, off to our hotel, Tabino Hotel Sado, opened in July of 2018. The hotel's exterior is based on bamboo and the interiors are accented with traditional Japanese touches. Enjoy the comfortable room featuring tall windows. The large public bath is filled with deep sea water.

As a suggestion, do take a moment to visit the roof top for incredible views of the sunset and sunrise.

Our arrival will be by 5:45pm followed by a western dinner at a local restaurant. Dinner time is set for 6:30pm.



Accommodations: Tabino Hotel Sado  **Free**

Day 9 –September 26th, 2022 - Monday – Sado-Niigata (B/L)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:30am as do some more local touring before making our way back to Niigata this afternoon.

The morning begins with a visit to the Sado Kinzan Gold Mine, the remains of a once flourishing large gold and silver mine on the island, annually producing nearly 400 kg of gold as well as smaller amounts of silver

and copper. The mine was in operation throughout the Edo Period, and served as a major source of funding for the Tokugawa Shogunate which directly controlled Sado Island and its mines.



Sado Gold Mine

From here we are off to the Sado Gold Park, a hands-on facility on the old site of Nishimikawa Gold Dust Mine. This mine dates back over 1,000 years and while no longer in operation you can get an idea of what the gold mining process looked like. You will also have an opportunity to try your hand at panning for gold. Who know, you might just hit the jackpot.

From here, lunch at a local restaurant followed by a visit to Sado Rekishi Densetsukan, where full-size robots tell the history and legends of Sado. This museum has many displays centering around Sado's history. Famous scenes with historical significance are introduced by the robots in elaborate clothing which are exact replicas of historical figures.

We now make our way to the Ryotsu Port for the ferry ride back to Niigata. Arrival at our hotel by 7:00pm, the remainder of the evening is free.



Accommodations: Hotel Okura Niigata **Free**

Day 10 – September 27th, 2022 - Tuesday – Niigata-Tokyo (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:45am. After a half-day tour of Niigata, we are off to Tokyo.

The morning begins with a visit to the Northern Culture Museum, an open-air museum that is the legacy of eight generations of the Ito family. The museum originally served as the mansion of Ito Bunkichi, who lived during the Edo Period and was one of the greatest landowners in Japan. Today, the museum houses calligraphy and ceramics, lacquer ware and documents related to Ito Family's history. The poet Aizu Yachi spent the last days of his life in a building, which is now a part of the museum complex. Here you can find copies of his works and documents related to him. You can also visit the garden; it is a "walking" garden with a big pond.

Next, a visit to Niigata Senbei Okoku, a museum, factory, and gift shop where you can watch the artisans as they make senbei, each producing 2,000-3,000 per day. In total, approximately 4 million are produced here per day.

As the largest rice producing prefecture, Niigata the production of rice confectionery is also the largest in Japan. Here at Senbei Okoku, which means "the kingdom of rice crackers," enjoy the opportunity to try roasting rice crackers by hand, then eat the freshly baked crackers.

Do not forget to drop in at the souvenir shop as they offer a wide variety of items as well as original items that can only be purchased here.

We now make our way to the JR Niigata Station for the bullet train ride to Tokyo on Max Toki 324, departing at 2:13pm and arrives at Ueno Station at 3:54pm. We suggest that you purchase a bento lunch to enjoy on the train ride.

Once in Tokyo, off to our hotel the last two nights on tour, Shibuya Excel Hotel Tokyu, in the heart of Shibuya. Shibuya is one of Tokyo's most colorful and busy districts, packed with shopping, dining and nightclubs serving many thousands of visitors that pass through this district every day.

This 4-star hotel is directly connected to Shibuya Station, a vibrant and energetic location. Next to one of the world's most iconic sights, Shibuya Crossing, it is truly in the center of Tokyo's best shopping and nightlife.

After check-in, meet up with our local guide on a walking tour of Shibuya Sky, a 230-meter tower overlooks famous Shibuya Scramble Crossing. Let us go to the top, an observatory offering a 360-degree view of Tokyo.

From the 46th floor Sky Stage, enjoy many of Tokyo's landmarks, the New National Stadium, Shinjuku, Tokyo Tower, Tokyo Skytree and Tokyo Bay. On clear weather days, Mt. Fuji can be seen and photographed from here.

Shibuya Crossing and shopping area is rumored to be the world's busiest, this intersection in front of Shibuya Station is famously known as 'The Scramble'. It is an awesome spectacle of giant video screens and neon, guaranteed to give you a 'Wow – I'm in Tokyo!' feeling. People come from all directions at once – sometimes over a thousand with every light change – yet still manage to dodge each other with a practiced, nonchalant agility. Enjoy free time to explore. We will set up a meeting time to return to the hotel or you can stay longer and return on your own.

Accommodations: Shibuya Excel Hotel Tokyu



Wi-Fi Free

Day 11 – September 28th, 2022 - Wednesday – Tokyo (B)

After breakfast, enjoy a complete free day to shop, sightsee or maybe a combination of both.

Accommodations: Shibuya Excel Hotel Tokyu



Wi-Fi Free

Day 12– September 29th – Thursday – Tokyo-Haneda (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide by 9:00am as are off to enjoy more of Tokyo's sights. While it is 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 visit to Kappabashi -dori, the shopping street for restaurant owners. Also known as Kitchen Town, the street is lined with several dozen stores selling just about every item that restaurants can use. You will find specialized shop for dishes, pots, pans, cooking utensils, furniture, signs, knives, and much more. Enjoy free time to explore and shop.

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. No worry, you will have time to shop and enjoy lunch on your own.



Asakusa, Sensoji Temple

This afternoon we will be visiting Odaiba, a popular shopping and entertainment district on a manmade island in Tokyo Bay. You will also find some of Tokyo's boldest architectural creations, such as the Fuji TV Building, the Telecom Center, and Tokyo Big Sight.

For anime fans, do walk over to Diver City and take in the sight of the life-size Gundam statue.

Enjoy free time here before we make our way to the Haneda Airport.

Hawaiian Airlines #458 Departs Haneda at 9:20pm- Arrives in Honolulu at 10:00am

