

WINTER IN JAPAN

AN ESCORTED TOUR DISCOVERING THE
WINTER WILDLIFE & WONDERS OF JAPAN

2ND TO 16TH FEBRUARY 2025



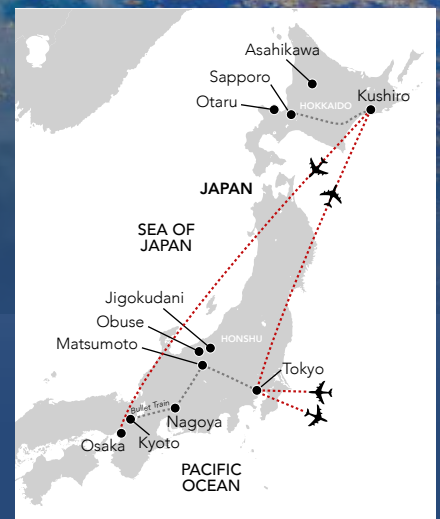
NOBLE CALEDONIA



Our new escorted tour has been designed to experience Japan in the heart of winter when snow-covered plains, frost-fringed wetlands and steaming crater lakes set the stage for an incredible wildlife spectacle, and the traditional culture can be enjoyed away from the crowds. Whether you are discovering Japan for the first time or rediscovering this fascinating country, our tour promises to be enjoyable and enlightening and provides the opportunity to experience what is uniquely Japanese at this time of year.

We begin our exploration with the bright neon lights of Tokyo where the cityscape of skyscrapers is interspersed with ancient temples and scenic gardens before flying to Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost outpost. During our time on this breathtaking island, we will visit some of the most remarkable national parkland including the Kushiro Marshlands where we hope to see Hokkaido's resident red-crowned cranes and witness their splendid courtship displays. Continuing on to Sapporo we have four days to explore Hokkaido's vibrant capital during which we will learn about the indigenous Ainu people and experience the world-renowned winter festival where approximately 400 giant snow sculptures occupy the city's spaces. We will also visit the spectacular Asahikawa Winter Festival with its World Ice Sculpture Competition and sample the delicious ramen noodles for which the city is famous.

Returning to the island of Honshu, our next few days will be spent in atmospheric Kyoto, the former imperial capital which is Japan's cultural treasure house with an astonishing 1600 Buddhist temples, 400 Shinto shrines, a trio of palaces and dozens of gardens and museums. Highlights will include the beautiful Golden Pavilion, the former imperial villa of Nijo Castle and the Gion district, Kyoto's famous geisha district whose winter charm can be enjoyed without the crowds of high season. We will then spend time visiting the Jigokudani Snow Monkey Park, where we will hike through the valley and hope to witness the famous Japanese Macaques as they stave off the cold in the mountain hot springs, Matsumoto Castle and the charming town of Obuse before returning to Tokyo by train for our final night in this truly timeless country.



Sensoji Temple, Tokyo



Red-crowned cranes, Kushiro Marshlands



THE ITINERARY

Day 1 London to Tokyo, Japan. Fly by scheduled flight.

Day 2 Tokyo. Arrive and transfer to our hotel in Tokyo for a two night stay. The remainder of the afternoon is at leisure. Meet this evening for dinner at a local restaurant. (D)

Day 3 Tokyo. This morning after breakfast we will begin our exploration of Tokyo, starting with Asakusa, Tokyo's 'Old Town'. We will visit Sensoji, Tokyo's oldest temple and spend time in Nakamise, a shopping street that has been providing temple visitors with a variety of traditional snacks and tourist souvenirs for centuries. We will then visit the famous Meiji Shrine. Located within a forest it feels as if you are miles away from one of the biggest cities in the world rather than in the middle of it. After lunch in a local restaurant we will continue to the Nezu Museum which contains a wealth of Japanese and East Asian art. Return to the hotel with the remainder of the day at leisure. (B, L)

Day 4 Tokyo to Kushiro. Today we transfer to the airport for the short domestic flight to Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan's main islands. Landing in Kushiro we transfer to our hotel where we will stay for two nights. Dinner this evening will be at a local restaurant. (B, D)

Day 5 Kushiro. This morning we will set out to explore the Kushiro Marshland National Park which was established in 1987 to support the habitat of the endangered Japanese crane. Thought to be extinct, a group of 20 birds was discovered in the marshes around Kushiro in 1926 and through conservation efforts they have made a dramatic recovery and there are now more than 1,000 birds, the only known population. We will start our visit to the National Park at the observatory for views across the marshes. There will also be a visit to the Onnenai Visitor Centre to learn about the park's history and work. From here we will travel to the Tancho Crane Reserve where we hope to see Japanese cranes and witness their spectacular dance. We will also visit the Washo Market, opened in 1949 it is one of the major markets of Hokkaido selling a spectacular range of seafood and local produce. After lunch at a local restaurant there will be a visit to the Kushiro City Museum before returning to the hotel for an evening at leisure. (B, L)

Day 6 Kushiro to Sapporo. After breakfast we will depart Kushiro by train for Sapporo, the capital of Hokkaido. The journey will take us along the coast before turning inland to views of snow-covered mountains and fields. While on the train enjoy a Japanese bento box for lunch. On arrival in Sapporo we transfer to the hotel, our base for the next four nights. Sapporo is home every winter to the Sapporo Snow Festival which started in 1950 when high school students built snow sculptures in Odori Park. Since then it has grown and developed into a major event attracting over two million visitors from around the world. With our local guides we will explore the snow festival taking in the large snow and ice sculptures, some are incredibly intricate and some have even reached over 25 metres wide and 15 metres high. After exploring the festival we will continue to dinner. (B, L, D)

Day 7 Sapporo. Today we will set out to explore the vibrant city of Sapporo. It is the largest city north of Tokyo and is surrounded by nature, with a



Sapporo by night from Mount Moiwa



backdrop of mountains. In winter the city can receive over five metres of snow and even has its own ski slopes. We will start our exploration at the National Ainu Museum, the first museum dedicated to the Ainu people, the indigenous people of northern Japan. The Ainu people it is believed made their way to Hokkaido in the 13th century from the Northern Islands and what is now Far East Russia. They developed their own culture and traditions, and the museum demonstrates their craftworks, clothing and tools and Ainu music with an aim to preserve their culture. From here we will travel to the Sapporo Beer Museum. The Sapporo brewery was the first to be built in Japan in 1876 and is known around the world. It is hard to go anywhere in Japan without seeing an advert for its beer. The museum and brewery offer an insight into Japan as it began to emerge from its period of isolation from the world as it sent brewers to be trained in Germany and employed foreigners to help develop Hokkaido. Lunch will be at the museum with a chance to try some of Sapporo's delicious beer. As the sun sets in the late afternoon we will head to Mount Moiwa, a forest covered mountain in the middle of Sapporo. Taking the cable car to its summit there will be spectacular views of the city lit up. Afterwards we return to the hotel and the remainder of the evening is at leisure. (B, L)

Day 8 Otaru. This morning we will head out of Sapporo to the small harbour city of Otaru. Since the late 1800s and the colonisation of Hokkaido, Otaru served as a major port. Today old warehouses and former office buildings of the shipping companies have been preserved and give the city a distinct character. There is also a beautiful canal area which we will explore by boat, taking in the preserved buildings as we go. Next we explore Sakaimachi Street, the old town where merchants at the end of the 19th century built their houses. As the herring fishing industry declined in the 1950s the makers of glass buoys shifted to the production of refined glassware instead. We will visit the museum of Kitaichi Glass one of the oldest workshops founded in 1901 to explore the variety of their work. Return to Sapporo in the late afternoon. (B, L)

Day 9 Asahikawa. After breakfast we will travel by coach to the city of Asahikawa to explore its snow festival. The city with the Daisetsuzen Mountains in the background is known for its artists and craft workers, as

well as sculptors whose studios line Heiwa street. Lunch today will be ramen, a local dish that the city is famous for. At the Asahikawa Ramen Village there is the opportunity to try ramen from one of the top eight ramen restaurants in the city. Ramen is a dish that has quite specific regional characteristics and is taken very seriously in Japan. This afternoon we will explore the Asahikawa Winter Festival and one of its highlights, the World Ice Sculpture Competition. Teams and individual competitors are given several slabs of ice and three days in which to complete their work and it is displayed as part of the Winter Festival. In the evening the snow and ice sculptures of the festival are illuminated and are a wonderful site. Exploring with our local guides, and with some time for independent exploration, we will explore the festival's two sites before returning to Sapporo for dinner. (B, L, D)

Day 10 Sapporo to Kyoto. This morning we will leave the island of Hokkaido and return to Honshu with a flight to Osaka. From here we will transfer to Kyoto. After a lunch in a local restaurant we will visit the Kiyomizu Temple which is known as the pure water temple, due to the water that comes from the east mountains and flows to the site. The 13 metre high veranda of the temple's main hall offers amazing views over Kyoto and was built without using a single nail. From the temple we will start a walking tour and head towards Gion district, Kyoto's most famous geisha district filled with shops, restaurants and teahouses where geiko and maiko entertain. From here we will continue to our hotel where we will be based for two nights. This evening there will be time at leisure before dinner in a local restaurant. (B, L, D)

Day 11 Kyoto. Today we will continue our exploration of Kyoto. Our first call will be Kinkakuji, also known as the Golden Pavilion, which was originally built as a retirement villa for the Shogun. After the death of Shogun Yoshimitsu it became a Buddhist Temple at his request, with the top two floors completely covered in gold leaf. We will then visit the Tenryuji Temple, one of Kyoto's five great Zen temples and the largest and most impressive temple in Arashiyama. Founded in 1339 at the start of the Muromachi Period, the temple is now considered important cultural property and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In addition to the temple buildings there are beautiful gardens with walking paths. On the way to Nonomiya Shrine the



Japanese snow monkeys, Jigokudani Park



Nijo Castle, outer moat



Yakushi-do of Joko-ji Temple, Obuse Village

path will lead us through the famous Arashiyama bamboo groves which are unlike any other in Japan. Nonomiya Shrine is a Shinto shrine where in ancient times, unmarried imperial princesses would stay for a year or more to purify themselves and is referenced in numerous works of literature, most notably in the world's first novel: the Tale of Genji. After lunch we will visit Nijo Castle, which was built by the founder of the Tokugawa Shogunate as the Kyoto residence of the Shogun and is surrounded by stunning gardens. The ornamental building was completed in 1603 and is well known for its Monoyama architecture, decorated sliding doors and 'chirping' nightingale floors. This evening will be at leisure. (B, L)

Day 12 Kyoto to Matsumoto. This morning we will board the famous Japanese Shinkansen Bullet Train and travel to Nagoya where we will change trains for the city of Matsumoto, nestled at the foot of the Japanese Alps. The journey will take us through winding valleys with snow-covered mountains on either side. On arrival in Matsumoto, we will enjoy its famous soba noodles for lunch. Afterwards we will visit Matsumoto Castle, the city's most famous icon which dates back to the late 16th century. Unusually for a Japanese castle it is not built on elevated ground and is one of the countries remaining original castles. For those who do not mind a few steps and heights, the sixth floor offer beautiful panoramic views of the Japanese Alps and the city. The final visit of the day will be the Matsumoto City Museum of Art which has a wonderful collection of works by the contemporary artist Yayoi Kusama who is known for her bright and vivid pieces including the 'Pumpkin' on Naoshima Island. Check in to our hotel for a two night stay and dinner this evening will be at a local restaurant. (B, L, D)

Day 13 Jigokudani & Obuse. After breakfast we will travel by coach to Jigokudani Snow Monkey Park. After an uphill walk through the snow covered forest we will arrive at the hot springs where we hope to see these famous Japanese macaques taking a bath. The monkeys live in large social groups and its likely you will encounter them along the path to the hot springs though being accustomed to humans they almost completely



Kiyomizu Temple, Kyoto

ignore visitors preferring to lounge in the pool or play with each other. Heading downhill and out of the forest, lunch will be at a local restaurant. In the afternoon we will visit the charming town of Obuse, with its traditional wooden houses, stores and streets. The town is famous for its delicious chestnuts and as the home of Hokusai, the famous painter and printmaker from the Edo period. There will be chance to visit his museum as well as explore some of the 'Open Gardens' that the local residents participate in. We will return to Matsumoto and the evening is at leisure. (B, L)

Day 14 Matsumoto to Tokyo. This morning we will transfer to the train station for our train to Tokyo. On arrival we will transfer to our hotel for an overnight stay. Enjoy an afternoon at leisure and in the evening we will meet for a farewell dinner at a local restaurant. (B, D)

Day 15 Tokyo to London. This morning we transfer to the airport for the scheduled flight to London. (B)

EXPLORING

To best enjoy this tour, travellers should have a good level of mobility as the majority of the sightseeing is undertaken on foot over a range of terrains including cobblestones, woodland paths and there are a number of steps at temples and shrines. Due to the time of year we expect there will be heavy snowfall, especially in Hokkaido, and so pavements and paths may be covered in snow and ice. Waterproof footwear with grips is recommended.

PRICES PER PERSON

Based on double occupancy

Twin **£8995**

Twin for sole use: **£10795**

PRICE INCLUDES: Economy class scheduled air travel • 13 nights hotel accommodation (three nights in Tokyo, two nights in Kushiro, four nights in Sapporo, two nights in Kyoto & two nights in Matsumoto) • Meals as indicated inclusive of drinks with lunch & dinner (B - Breakfast, L - Lunch, D - Dinner) • Excursions with English speaking local guides • Noble Caledonia Tour Manager • Gratuities • Transfers.

Not included: Travel insurance.

Please note: We have timed our journey to meet the traditional times for snowfall but it cannot be guaranteed. For the visit to Jigokudani Snow Monkey Park, although it is highly likely that the monkeys will be present, we cannot guarantee any wildlife sightings or the amount of monkeys you will see as they are wild animals and come and go into to forests as they please.



Golden Pavillion, Kyoto

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Our current booking conditions apply to all reservations and are available on request. Itinerary and accommodation subject to change.
Cover image: Snow monkey at a natural onsen (hot spring), Jigokudani Park.