

## Spring Tour 2011 - Detailed Itinerary

March 31st – April 14th 2011

Day	Schedule	
Thursday 31st March <b>Departure for Japan</b>	We meet at 16:00 at Japan Airlines (JAL) counter, Heathrow Terminal 3 Departures, before assisting you with check-in. Our flight is non-stop JAL402 Departing at 19:15 hrs with a flight time of approximately 12 hours.	
Friday 1st April <b>Arrive in Japan</b>  KYOTO HOTEL	We change in Tokyo for Japan Airlines JL3019, which we will board after customs and immigration, arriving at Kansai airport at 19:05 local time. We'll reach Kyoto about an hour later and you are invited to join us for dinner soon after the check-in formalities are completed.	
<b>Kyoto &amp; Nara</b>	<i>Kyoto has a phenomenal collection of temples and shrines, dating back to its days as the capital city and before. There are about 2,000 temples in total, many having national significance. Nara was the capital before Kyoto's longer reign and although smaller today, it has a number of elaborate temples in the main park. Our three days in Kyoto and Nara give you a perfect introduction but people often return to discover more temples they have not yet seen.</i>	
Saturday 2nd April  <b>Kyoto</b> Gion Kiyomizu Temple  KYOTO HOTEL	On our first morning in Kyoto, we visit Gion with its traditional wooden buildings, cobbled streets and renowned Geisha. You may even be lucky enough to see them, shuffling along in their kimono and clogs. From Gion, a short walk takes us to Maruyama Park and its complex of temples, in the foothills of the mountains east of Kyoto. This is a good opportunity to take part in some temple traditions like throwing a coin and ringing the bell at the temple entrance. The gods will welcome you inside - as long as you take your shoes off! We stroll from temple to shrine, pausing for lunch on the way, then head uphill gradually to another Kyoto icon - Kiyomizu. The main temple rests against the hill slope with 20 metre high wooden stilts supporting it. From here, there are fantastic views over the whole city and you can try the 'love walk' - finding a path from one ancient boulder to another with eyes closed. Superstition states that if you make it, you will be lucky in love but if you don't, there are always plenty of good luck charms to buy instead! As the day comes to an end, we walk back to the hotel or take a taxi for comfort	 
Sunday 3rd April  <b>Kyoto</b> Golden Pavilion Miyako Odori  KYOTO HOTEL	We start the day in the northwest of Kyoto and the world famous Golden Pavilion and Ryoanji temples. As with Christianity, Buddhism has many denominations and each famous temple is often the seat of one particular sect. More religious Japanese people may consider it a personal pilgrimage to visit such temples. The glittering Kinkaku-ji Temple is a three-storey structure overlaid with gold leaf, which was restored in 1988. The stone garden at Ryoan-ji Temple represents Zen philosophy, consisting of fifteen stones of different sizes placed in white sand representing an image of islands and an expanding sea. The simple beauty of Zen inspired rock gardens is intended to give people a blank space in which to imagine their own landscape. The garden is also referred to as 'The Crossing of Tiger Cubs' as it resembles a mother tiger carrying her cubs across dangerous river torrents. After lunch, we enjoy the seasonal performance of 'Miyako Odori'. This is a special celebration of spring in Kyoto which has been held since 1872, supposedly to maintain the city's pride after the capital moved to Tokyo. It is performed by twenty Maiko and Geiko (the real name of Geisha in Kyoto!) on a set adorned with cherry blossom. The eight dances are characterised by the bent shuffling legs of the artists which gives them the appearance of floating across the stage. After the performance, you will have some free time to rest or explore the town centre.	
Monday 4th April  <b>Nara</b>  KYOTO HOTEL	We take the hour-long train journey to Nara following an ancient route through the countryside between Japan's two former capitals. When we arrive at Nara we visit the huge Deer Park which, in addition to the more popular temples and giant buddhas, has many quieter areas of natural beauty. There are also opportunities to try Japanese snacks from traditional food stalls, watch turtles in the ponds and walk in the hills for views over the parkland. As the name suggests, the park is home to many deer - visitors need to be brave to feed them as they are likely to be buffeted from all sides by the greedier ones! For your own meal, you can choose from a traditional bento (lunch box) in the park or a restaurant lunch. We finally make our way back to the station via the main arcade. Even if shopping is not your idea of fun, it is well worth wandering through shopping areas to see how Japanese people live day to day - it is quite different from the average UK high street. We arrive back at the hotel in Kyoto in time to rest before you are treated to a special private dinner with Geisha performance during the evening.	 

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<b>Shinkansen</b>	<i>The Shinkansen is truly a fantastic experience - travelling so smoothly at such a speed. Watching the beautiful landscape whiz by, you soon realise how mountainous Japan is and why the pockets of flat land come at such a premium. The inaccessibility of the mountains has protected the original vegetation and wildlife from human impact. Surprisingly, the extreme landscape did not deter construction of the shinkansen train line for the 1964 Olympics. It was carefully engineered to use the most direct routes, tunnelled through mountains and on tracks over suburban areas.</i>	
Tuesday 5th April <b>Beppu</b> YUFUIN RYOKAN	We experience the shinkansen on its fastest stretch, travelling west from Kyoto and then south on the coastal line to Beppu. We enjoy a bento lunch on the train, reaching Beppu in the early afternoon. The city was founded on 1st April 1924 and is famous for its thousands of sacred onsen (hot springs). Beppu is Japan's onsen capital, containing nine major pools sometimes referred to as the 'Nine Hells of Beppu'. It is a beautiful setting - the sea to one side and mountains on the other with onsen always evident by their columns of rising steam. Most people walking around Beppu wear traditional yukata (kimono-style cotton robes) provided by their Ryokan (Japanese Inn). It is very comfortable and makes a picturesque scene as people potter through the town trying the different baths. We guide you to the various hot baths and the 'devils pools' to see bubbling, boiling mud. For the really ambitious there is usually time to try the hot sand baths at Takegawara Spa. It is a short journey to Yufuin and after arriving at the ryokan we leave you to relax and sample the outdoor baths. You are encouraged to remain in your yukata for dinner as we try some elaborate traditional cuisine in our ryokan (Japanese inn).	 
<b>Ryokan</b>	<i>Staying at a Ryokan allows you to enjoy the very best of Japanese hospitality from a tradition that has hardly changed in the last century. As you enter your room, the distinctive scent of tatami floors and paper and wood doors set the scene. The yukata (kimono-style cotton robes) are neatly folded, ready for you to change and head to the onsen as soon as you arrive. In the evening, enjoy sumptuous Japanese cuisine with round twenty tiny dishes brought to you in stages by your hostess. You may struggle to recognise most of them but you should certainly try them all. With meticulous attention to aesthetics and detail, this is just as much a feast for the eyes as the stomach.</i>	 
Wednesday 6th April <b>Mt Aso</b> YUFUIN RYOKAN	We enjoy a traditional ryokan breakfast before visiting the active volcano, Mount Aso. We leave Yufuin on a private coach, travelling through wide open green landscapes, very different to the typical steep wooded mountains in central Japan. We approach from the north and when the panoramic view suddenly opens out across the caldera, you will see the volcano in the distance. From here the profile is often described as a lying down buddha. The floor of the crater is almost perfectly flat and very fertile making it ideal for the rice fields and other crops which give it a stunning patchwork appearance. After enjoying the views the coach heads down the outer wall of the crater and soon the scale of the towering volcano becomes clear. The coach winds to the top of Mount Aso and we make two stops to take in the views and walk up to the boiling mud cauldron. The volcano was so powerful that the gases here are noxious and constantly monitored to protect visitors (visits are occasionally affected according to the wind direction). After lunch, we travel back to Yufuin stopping for some free time in the picturesque town.	 
Thursday 7th April <b>Hiroshima</b> Peace Park Atomic Dome HIROSHIMA HOTEL	You have time to enjoy the hot spring baths one more time before we enjoy another traditional breakfast. From Yufuin we travel north by train following the valley to Hakata and then east by bullet train on to Hiroshima. We arrive late morning and as Hiroshima is famous for its <i>Okonomiyaki</i> , a dish somewhere between a pancake and an omelette, we head straight for lunch. We then spend the afternoon visiting the Atomic Dome and Peace Park. The <i>Heiwa Kinen Shiriyokan</i> (Peace Memorial Museum) documents the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima on 6th August 1945 and its aftermath, with exhibits demonstrating the tragic destruction of the city and its people and the events leading up to it.	 
Friday 8th April <b>Miyajima</b> HIROSHIMA HOTEL	We reach Miyajima island by ferry from Hiroshima. The temple on the shoreline and the red torii (temple gate) at high and low tides deserves a full day on any schedule. The inland sea swells around the temple stilts at high tide and the torii appears to float magically on the water. At low tide you can stroll across the sand to the huge gate. The village has lots of interesting shops and the park surrounding the area is populated by placid deer patiently waiting for food. We then take the cable car to the island summit for great views or, for the more energetic, there is time for a gentle hike if you don't mind being joined by a few of the local monkeys!	

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<p>Saturday 9th April</p> <p><b>Okayama &amp; Hakone</b></p> <p>HAKONE HOTEL</p>	<p>A short journey by Shinkansen takes us to Okayama where we see one of Japan's three famous walking gardens, Korakuen. Completed in the 17th century, the name means "Garden of Pleasure After", referring to a Confucian quote stating that a wise ruler must attend to his subjects' needs first and only then attend to his own. The first impression may be that of a giant lawn, crisscrossed with wide paths and the occasional teahouse but as you explore you find waterfalls, tiny shrines, miniature maple forests, a lotus pond, and traditional red bridges creating many different but very Japanese landscapes. After lunch, we travel on to Hakone and our first views of Mount Fuji.</p>	
<p>Sunday 10th April</p> <p><b>Hakone</b></p> <p>HAKONE HOTEL</p>	<p>The Hakone checkpoint on the historic Tokaido (east sea) road marks the edge of the Kanto region. While Hakone has its fair share of hot springs and health resorts, the main attractions are the views of Mount Fuji and Lake Ashinoko. Closer inspection reveals that 'Fuji-san' is not quite as perfect as it appears as there are several volcanic craters on its slopes. The area known as Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park is still volcanically active and its Great Boiling Valley is full of sulphurous springs. We spend a day enjoying the Mount Fuji including a cable car ride, a cruise on the lake and a visit to Hakone Shrine. Those who enjoy Japanese art will be thrilled by the Narukawa Museum which houses one of Japan's best collections of traditional paintings and drawings.</p>	
<p>Monday 11th April</p> <p><b>Kamakura</b></p> <p>TOKYO HOTEL</p>	<p>Kamakura, surrounded by mountains and the open water of Sagami Bay, is a natural fortress. Consequently, during the Heian period, it was the chief city of the Kanto region and from 12th to 14th centuries, the Minamoto Shoguns ruled Japan from here. Kamakura is now famous for its temples and shrines. A tsunami destroyed the temple housing the Great Buddha in the 15th century but the statue survived and has weathered the elements ever since. Kamakura's other sites include the Tsuruoka Hachiman Shrine. This was moved by the famed Minamoto Yoritomo, the first shogun of the Kamakura regime in the late 13th century, from a nearby site as a tribute to the Minamoto family.</p>	
<p><b>Tokyo</b></p>	<p><i>Tokyo, like London, has distinct districts, an urban train system with a loop line, numerous parks and expensive department stores. This is where modern Japan thrives and you will be amazed just how advanced and hi-tech it is. Some local trains have replaced posters with LCD displays that share line information with quick fashionable commercials. Most passengers, however, are fully occupied video-mailing on their mobile phones. The famous capsule hotels have been superceded by all-night internet cafes that offer the latest DVDs or games plus high-speed internet access. Sleeping and eating seem a waste of time to busy salarymen so a myriad of fast food stalls offer excellent Japanese food in minutes. Huge screens play pop videos and commercials 24 hours a day in the busiest districts. It is immediately clear why so many sci-fi novels and films have looked to Tokyo for inspiration. Within the busy city, there are pockets of tranquility to be found and we include some of them in the tour.</i></p>	
<p>Tuesday 12th April</p> <p><b>Tokyo</b></p> <p>TOKYO HOTEL</p>	<p>We start the day viewing the Ginza area from our coach on the way to the Imperial Palace, to enjoy our gentle walking tour of the gardens in the home of the Japanese royal family. From traditional Tokyo we pass through to Akihabara, one of the high-tech shopping districts, and from there it is a short journey to Asakusa to visit the Asakusa Kannon Temple. This is the oldest in Tokyo and you may recognise the colossal lantern at the entrance. There is also an avenue leading up to Senso-ji temple, lined with traditional souvenir stalls. We return to the Hotel via the Sumida River sea bus and a stroll through the Hamarikyū Gardens.</p>	
<p>Wednesday 13th April</p> <p><b>Tokyo</b></p> <p>TOKYO HOTEL</p>	<p>After breakfast we take the metropolitan train to Harajuku to visit Meiji Shrine. It is dedicated to the spirits of Emperor Meiji and his wife, hidden away in extensive forests alongside Yoyogi Park. The Park was one of the main locations for the 1964 Olympics and now a favourite for buskers at the weekend. We walk into the Omotesando area, a visually amazing district and one of the centres of Japan's youth fashion. After lunch you are free to enjoy Tokyo at your leisure. Alternatively we would be delighted to take you to the famous Shibuya crossing and other areas of interest in central Tokyo.</p>	
<p>Thursday 14th April</p> <p><b>Return to UK</b></p>	<p>After breakfast at the hotel, we escort you to Narita Airport and assist with check-in for the flight back to the UK. Japan Airlines Flight JAL401 departs at 12:00 arriving at Heathrow Airport (terminal 3) at 16:35 (flight time approx 12 hours)</p>	