

## NORTH JAPAN ALPS TOUR

A fully guided mountain hiking tour. Grade: vigorous.

Some of the very best mountain hiking routes in the North Alps, followed by Kyoto and Nara highlights.

### TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- The Kamikochi Valley, jewel in the crown of the mountains of the Main Island of Honshu, one of the pearls in smouldering necklace that encompasses the Pacific Ocean
- Great views of Yari Peak
- Sensational ridge hiking along the Omote Ginza route, one of the finest in the North Japan Alps
- A traverse of the amazing Alpine Route to Tateyama
- Climbing Tateyama which, along with Mount Fuji, and Haku-san, is one of the three sacred peaks of Japan
- Tokyo, Matsumoto, and the old capital cities of Kyoto and Nara
- Professional mountain guide from start to finish of tour

Day	Places	Itinerary	Meals
1	Tokyo	Arrive Tōkyō. Met at airport. Transfer to Tokyo hotel.	Dinner
2	Tokyo	Full day tour of central Tōkyō, including a visit to the Hamarikyu Gardens near Shinbashi. Now a landscape garden, the villa in the gardens was built by the Tokugawa shoguns in the 17th century. Being close to the tidal Sumida River, these were good hunting grounds in the Edo Period. The villa now has a tea ceremony room. Cruise from Hamarikyu Gardens to Asakusa, passing under the many bridges along the Sumida River, followed by a visit to the popular Asakusa Kannon temple.	Breakfast Lunch
3	Matsumoto	Train to Matsumoto in the morning. After lunch, a guided tour of Matsumoto Castle (known as the before having some free time to explore this small, friendly city. Overnight hotel.	Breakfast Lunch
4	Kamikochi Valley	Hike for 3 hours following the upper Azusagawa River and through beautiful forests to Yokō Sanso mountain lodge. Overnight mountain lodge.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
5	North Alps	Long climb up from the valley floor to the Chōgatake hut located on a ridge offering fantastic views of the Kamikochi Valley, the Hotaka Ridge to the west, Yari Peak, and trail as it heads north. About a 4 or 5 hour hike. Time to enjoy a rest and the views before early dinner (typical in mountain huts). Overnight mountain hut.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
6	North Alps	A long day's hiking along a superb mountain ridge route. Hiking about 8 hours over the perfect pyramidal peak of Jōnen to the small, friendly Ōtenshō Hut. Overnight mountain hut.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
7	Shinano Omachi	The superb ridge walking continues today as we start by circumnavigating Daiten Peak, then hike along a route known as the Omote Ginza. Amazing vistas open up, to the north of the North Alps, to the south where Mount Fuji can sometimes be seen, and of Yari Peak to the southwest. Lunch is at the well-appointed Enzansō Hut, before the steep descent through the forests to the trailhead at Nakabusa Onsen. From there by road to our accommodation in Shinano Ōmachi. Overnight onsen ryokan or hotel.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
8	Murodo	An exciting journey by various means of transport, constructed to allow a linked transit from the Nagano side of Tateyama over the Kurobe Dam to the Murōdo Plateau and beyond. A route which always thrills those who do it. Time	Breakfast Lunch Dinner

		to relax before a hot spring bath and get ready for another challenging hiking day tomorrow. Overnight mountain hut.	
9	Murodo	A stunning hike over one of Japan's three holy peaks, Tateyama. The other two are Mount Fuji and Hakusan. The ascent is steep to begin with, and then follows rocky ridges in the direction of the mighty Mount Tsurugi, before turning south again back to the hut on the plateau. The Murōdo Plateau below Tateyama was formed in the caldera of a volcano. The pools or 'hells' nearby still bubble away. Overnight mountain hut.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
10	Kyoto	Return journey descending the Alpen Route. Then, first by local, then mainline trains and the bullet train from Nagoya to Kyōto, to arrive mid-afternoon. Transfer to hotel for a rest or free time before dinner.	Breakfast Lunch
11	Kyoto	Day exploring Kyoto.	Breakfast Lunch
12	Kyoto	Day trip to Nara. Guided walk of historically and culturally important sites.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
13	Kyoto	Day exploring Kyoto.	Breakfast Lunch
14	Kyoto	Day free in Kyoto on your own.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
15	Tour ends	Onward travel after breakfast.	Breakfast

## THE IMPERIAL PILGRIMAGE ROUTE

A fully guided hiking tour. Grade: moderate.

This tour explores the Kii Mountains as we walk to the Three Grand Shrines along the Old Road to Kumano, before heading north for Yoshino, Asuka, Nara, and Kyoto. We also hike part of the Omine Okugake route used by Shugendo monks. An inspiring mountain journey through an entire peninsula designated an important World Heritage site.

### TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring the Kii Mountains, a UNESCO World Heritage site, and walking parts of the old pilgrimage route to the three Great Kumano Shrines.
- Staying in a Buddhist temple on Mount Koya, as well as in one of Japan's oldest hot spring villages, and lovely old ryokan in Ryujin, Dorogawa, and in the mountain top village of Yoshino
- Hiking the Yoshino mountains
- Exploring the old capitals of Asuka and Nara
- A country walk along the Yamanobe-no-michi
- A country walk along the Yamanobe-no-michi
- Kyoto highlights
- Meeting friends and locals along the way
- The usual delicious food we go out of our way to find on our tours

Day	Places	Itinerary	Meals
1	Osaka	Meet at Osaka city centre hotel in the early evening. Your guide will join you and give some insights on the journey ahead.	Dinner
2	Mount Koya	Transfer to Mount Koya monastery by train. Afternoon walk the Nyonin no Michi around the rim of low hills surrounding the many temples. This is as close as women could approach to the centre of what is regarded as a lotus flower, whose petals are the surrounding peaks.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
3	Ryujin Onsen	This morning we'll have an interesting guided tour of Mount Koya, including visits to Okunoin, the mausoleum where Kukai (later named Kobo Daishi) is enshrined. The walk, through tall cypress trees, passes several hundred thousand tombstones, monuments to emperors, shoguns and samurai, landlords and poets. After lunch we'll drive south from Mount Koya, along the Koya-Ryujin Skyline, to a sumptuous old ryokan (family inn) in Ryujin Onsen. The Kamigoten Ryokan was declared a 'tangible cultural property' (similar to a Grade 1 listed building) in 1999. Dark polished wooden floors, large white cedar baths, and delicious seasonal delicacies will be served for dinner.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
4	Yunomine Onsen	Today you'll start your 4-day walk along the old Nakaheji pilgrimage path to Kumano. From the start at Takejiri Oji, the path climbs steeply up to the ridge-top village of Takahara. The Nakaheji has been established as one of Japan's National Historic Roads. The paths are clearly defined, and flagstones have been laid in some places to make the climbs easier. Although rarely seen these days, there are small bears in the Kumano Mountains and, more commonly, deer and wild boar. Wayside shrines encourage regular rest stops. The small shrine at Chikatsuyu marks the end of the first day of the walk.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
5	Yunomine Onsen	We'll pick up the path again in the hills above the Kumano Hongu Grand Shrine and walk via Hongu to Yunomine, one of the oldest natural hot spring onsen villages in Japan. There is	Breakfast Lunch Dinner

		<p>an increasing sense of solitude and purpose as you progress towards the three great shrines of Kumano, passing small <i>jizo</i> statues on the way. Nobles would rest at points called <i>oji</i>, to refresh themselves and compose poems. You can stamp a booklet as a souvenir of your walk at each <i>oji</i>. Their poetry is engraved on stone monuments sited along the path.</p> <p>At the heart of these sacred mountains, Kumano was said to be the entrance to the land of Yomi, the 'other world' to where spirits travelled in Japanese mythology. The classic style of architecture of the Kumano Hongu Shrine blends perfectly with the surrounding mountains and forests. The shrine uses a mythological three-legged raven symbol, representing the Hongu, Nachi, and Hayatama shrines – the same motif as the one used by the Japan Football Association. The ryokan at Yunomine is comfortable, with an outdoor hot tub fed by local hot springs. Evening soaks under the stars are recommended for tired limbs, as are morning dips before breakfast. Your breakfast eggs might well be boiled in the boiling, sulphurous waters at the spring in the centre of the village.</p>	
6	Nachi Katsuura	<p>Today we'll continue along the next part of the pilgrimage route to Koguchi. This is another off-road section of trail passing through cedar forests and many little wayside <i>oji</i> shrines.</p> <p>Alternatively, we may have the opportunity to visit the secluded village of Koguchi itself on this day where we have, in the past, enjoyed the hospitality of a local mountain priest, having lunch with him in his home. If we do this, then we'll also enjoy a walk around the village.</p> <p>This evening we head for the coast and our hotel in Katsuura.</p>	<p>Breakfast Lunch Dinner</p>
7	Nachi Katsuura	<p>Toady you will visit the amazingly sited shrine and temple complex that overlooks the Nachi-no-taki Waterfall, the highest in Japan (133m/436ft). There will be a hike around Nachi san, the mountain overlooking the Nachi Grand Shrine to the sea beyond, finishing with a short detour - time permitting – to an area of pristine forest above Nachi.</p>	<p>Breakfast Lunch Dinner</p>
8	Yoshinoyama	<p>Before we set out on our journey to Yoshino, we'll visit the third of the Kumano Grand Shrines, Hayatama.</p> <p>We'll then head northward with a drive through the mountains to the pretty hilltop village of Yoshino.</p>	<p>Breakfast Lunch Dinner</p>
9	Yoshinoyama	<p>The Zaodo Hall lies at the heart of Yoshino in Kimpusenji, the head temple of the <i>shugendo</i> sect of mountain priests.</p> <p>Yoshino has played a very important role in Japanese history – it was the base for the Southern Court when it split from the Imperial Court in Kyoto. There will be time to explore the village and enjoy lunch featuring local <i>kuzu</i> (arrowroot) noodles.</p>	<p>Breakfast Lunch Dinner</p>
10	Dorogawa Onsen	<p>The mountain hike today starts at the hut where the warrior turned priest Saigyō lived in seclusion for a time. The path is one of those taken by the Shugendo mountain priests who undertake rigorous spiritual training in these mountains. The tough regime they followed in the past includes walking these mountain paths at an unearthly pace and for many weeks or months on end. We might come across one or two on our hike. Don't worry, our aim is to enjoy it!</p> <p>At the end of the hike we'll travel a short distance to stay in a small, traditional village with old inns and hot springs</p>	<p>Breakfast Lunch Dinner</p>

		where we can relax in an atmosphere which feels like it might have done a century ago.	
11	Asuka	After breakfast it's a short drive to the quiet village of Asuka. Asuka was the first capital of a consolidated Japanese state known as Yamato. It was where culture from Korea and China first took root in Japan. There are large imperial burial chambers as well as the oldest Buddhist statue in Asukadera Temple to see amongst other important site. Asuka is a pleasant area to hire cycles and walk around. We normally hire bicycles as we can get around and see more during the day.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
12	Nara	The Yamanobe no Michi (literally 'path beside the mountains') is a designated historical route. On and off quiet roads, this is a 4 to 5 hour, 13 km hike through countryside with persimmon and mandarin groves, the path winding around imperial tombs. Arrive Nara late afternoon.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
13	Nara	Today we'll enjoy a guided walk around Nara Park. Many of Japan's greatest cultural treasures are concentrated in and around Nara. Indeed, the city boasts eight UNESCO World Heritage sites. The Todaiji Temple, Nigastu-do and Sangatsu-do halls, Kasuga Shrine, Shinyakushi-ji Temple, Kofuku-ji Temple, Shosoin Treasure House, Isuien Garden, as well as the Nara National Museum and the Nara City Museum of Photography are all in or near Nara Park. The parkland is also home to a thousand or more free-roaming deer. Todaiji's Daibutsu-den is the largest wooden building in the world, and houses a 16 metre (52ft) tall bronze image of the cosmic Dainichi Buddha, containing 437 tonnes of bronze and 130kg of gold. Prior to being rebuilt three hundred years ago, the awesome structure was even bigger than it is today. There will be some free time to relax and look around Nara on your own.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
14	Kyoto	From Nara we travel north to Kyoto. Imperial power was consolidated here after the court moved from Nara. Kyoto is such a special place that it would take years to see a fraction of its wonders. In the afternoon, after a <i>ramen</i> noodle lunch, we may visit the Silver or Golden Pavilions and nearby gardens, and explore the colourful backstreets of the Higashiyama area.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
15	Kyoto	If there's sufficient interest, we'll visit the renowned modern Miho Museum in Shigaraki, about 90 minutes from Kyoto. Designed by I.M.Pei, the museum has been sculptured into the mountains, giving you a sense that you have entered a serene world where time stands still. The museum concept is as unique as the Guggenheim in Bilbao. Alternatively we could spend the day exploring the delightful spots Kyoto has to offer in abundance.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
16	Kyoto	A day to explore the gardens, an imperial villa, or possibly the imperial palace. There are a couple of excellent department stores and many interesting shops if you feel a little retail therapy is in order or would like to buy some souvenirs. Shopping culture in Japan has, like everything else they do, been taken to extraordinary heights, and is quite an experience.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
17	Tour ends	Onward travel after breakfast.	Breakfast

## WALKS IN THE HEART OF JAPAN

A fully guided walking tour. Grade: moderate.

A tour featuring walks in the cultural heart of Japan: Yoshino, Asuka, Nara, Kyoto, and a day hiking on Odaigahara Plateau in the important, UNESCO Mount Odaigahara and Omine Biosphere Reserve.

### TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring Mount Koya, the home of Shingon or Pure Word Buddhism and the sacred mountains of Nara
- The hilltop village of Yoshinoyama
- Hiking the Omine Okugakemichi to a remote mountain village
- Hiking on the Odaigahara Plateau
- Exploring the old capitals of Asuka and Nara
- Walking the Yamanobe no Michi
- Historic Nara
- Kyoto highlights
- Fine food

Day	Places	Itinerary	Meals
1	Osaka	Meet guide in central Osaka, short briefing before dinner.	Dinner
2	Mount Koya	Morning train to Mount Koya. Afternoon walk of the Nyoirindo, the path women were permitted to use before being allowed into inner Koya mandala. Overnight temple.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
3	Yoshinoyama	Morning walk of Mount Koya with a local guide. Afternoon by road to Yoshinoyama and our lovely village ryokan.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
4	Yoshinoyama	A day exploring the village perched on a ridge, including a visit to the Zaodo Hall of the Kimpusenji Temple. Special lunch featuring noodles made using local <i>kuzu</i> flour.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
5	Dorogawa Onsen	A mountain hike to an old hot spring village hidden in the mountains south of Yoshino.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
6	Odaigahara	Turning north, we visit Odaigahara and enjoy a hike on a plateau of very high environmental importance.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
7	Asuka	Today we'll explore Asuka, perhaps using rented bicycles to get around the most important historical sites in this carefully conserved village.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
8	Nara	A 5-hour hike along the Yamanobe no Michi, a rural trail passing fruit orchards and rice fields.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
9	Nara	Walking tour of Nara, the capital at the time of the Silk Road before the imperial capital moved to Kyoto in 794AD, with local guide.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
10	Kyoto	Afternoon sightseeing.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
11	Kyoto	Another day exploring Kyoto.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
12	Kyoto	Last day free to enjoy yourself in this buzzing city.	Breakfast Lunch Dinner
13	Tour ends	Onward travel	Breakfast