

JAPAN

DETAILED ITINERARY

Sep 12/23



DEPARTURE DATES & PRICE

Oct 16 - Nov 04, 2024 - **\$10995 USD**

Sep 25 - Oct 14, 2025 - **\$10995 USD**

Central Japan is a region of tall mountain ranges and fast-flowing rivers. It wasn't until recently that roads reached the more remote villages, and today many remain remarkably well-preserved, and evocative of centuries past. Our journey takes us through Japanese history, from modern Tokyo, to end near Kyoto, Japan's capital for 400 years and the repository of much of the country's cultural heritage. From Tokyo we head first to Fuji Hakone National Park, gateway to Mt Fuji. We visit Yudanaka Onsen hot spring where the famous 'snow monkeys' come to enjoy the natural hot spring baths, just like humans. In feudal times people travelling from Kyoto to Tokyo would use the Nakasendo Way – the

FACTS & HIGHLIGHTS

- 20 land days • Starts in Tokyo, finishes in Osaka
- All meals included • Maximum 16 travellers • Witness the snow monkeys of Jigokudani • Visit restored lovely villages of Tsumago and Magome • Enjoy Kyoto and Nara – the cultural heartlands of Japan
- Visit Kanazawa with its charming gardens, samurai districts and old teahouses • Learn about the tragedy & triumph of Hiroshima • Experience Japan's bullet trains • Overnight in Buddhist pilgrim's lodgings & enjoy an up-close experience of life in a Buddhist temple

Activity Level: 2/3

ACCOMMODATIONS Accommodations are a mix of hotels (13 nights), traditional Japanese style inns (5 nights) with futons and possible shared bathrooms, and 1 night at a Pilgrim's lodge attached to a Buddhist temple with shared facilities. Staying at traditional style Japanese accommodations give us an authentic travel experience. Note: due to the unique accommodations, single travelers (including those paying the single supplement) may need to share with same-sex singles for up to 6 nights).

Japan has an excellent public transportation system which we will mainly be traveling on. This will involve lots of walking to and around large train stations, often carrying a day pack containing overnight clothes on luggage forwarding days (approx 6 times). This is considered a walking tour.

ELDERTREKS



**SMALL GROUP
EXOTIC ADVENTURES
FOR TRAVELERS 50 PLUS**



road through the central mountains – one of a network of ancient highways. We will visit one of the best preserved sections in the Kiso valley, where the lovely villages of Tsumago and Magome have been immaculately restored. We then continue on to Takayama with its delightfully historic Sanmachi-suji district, and lively morning markets. Our travels bring us to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Shirakawago, before continuing on to Kanazawa, a vibrant city that retains its traditional charm in the form of gardens, samurai districts, and old teahouses. We then continue on to Kyoto, where we'll explore its cultural heritage before travelling to Miyajima. This sacred island is home to Itsukushima Shrine and its famous torii gate which appears to be floating on water. From here we'll continue to Hiroshima, to learn about the city and its both tragic and triumphant history in the modern age. Nara will be our next destination, where we spend time with the free roaming deer in Nara Park and visit the Todai-ji, home to one of Japan's largest bronze Buddhas. We next enjoy the special opportunity to stay at a shukubo, or Buddhist pilgrim's lodgings, and enjoy an up-close experience of life in a Buddhist temple and discover the ancient capitals of Japan before having some free time in Osaka before travelling home.



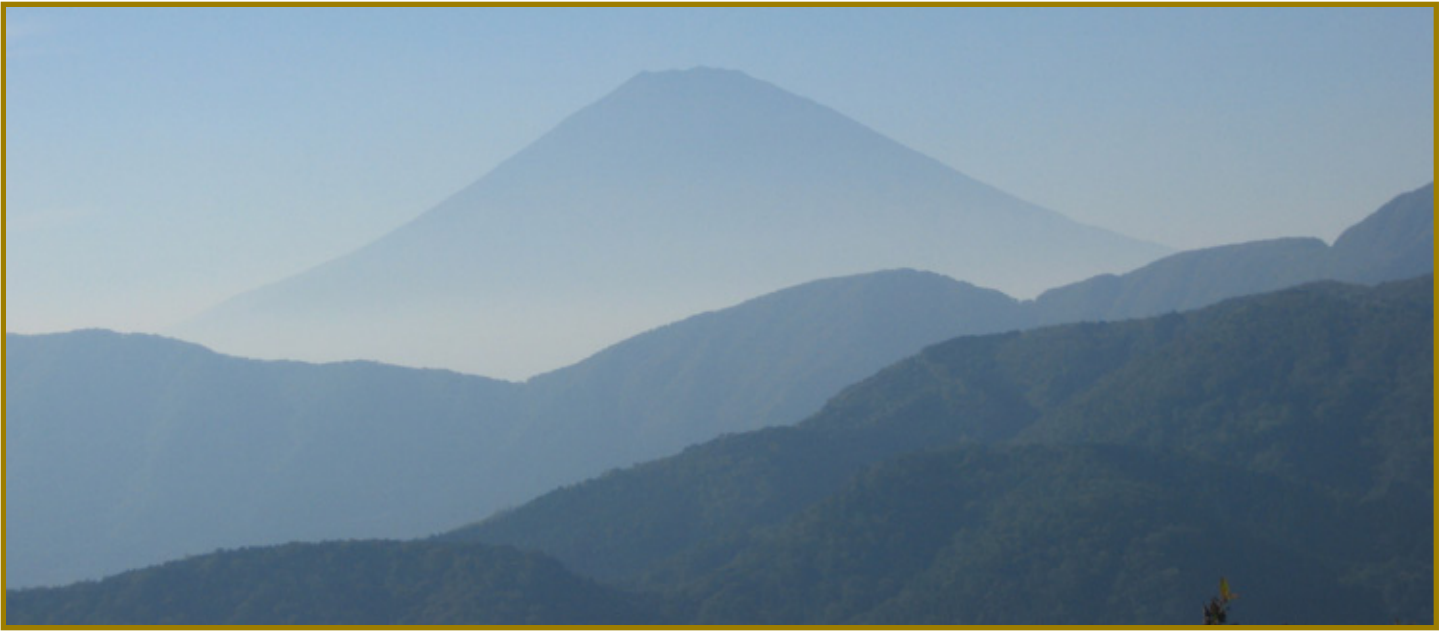
DAY 1 • ARRIVE IN TOKYO, WELCOME DINNER

Arrive at Tokyo Airport and transfer to your tour hotel in central Tokyo this evening. We will have a welcome dinner at a local restaurant.

Overnight in Tokyo.

DAY 2 • SIGHTSEEING OF TOKYO

Our first full day in Japan is a walking tour of Tokyo using the city's efficient public transport to get



around. Today we travel by train to Ueno where we visit the Tokyo National Museum. The museum provides a wonderful overview of the Japanese arts – from calligraphy, to kimono, Japanese swords to Buddhist sculpture. We then take the subway a short distance to reach Asakusa. In Asakusa we visit Sensoji Temple. Then we travel onward by boat to the Hama-Rikyu Gardens, a strolling garden that was once the duck hunting grounds of a powerful lord.

Overnight in Tokyo.

DAY 3 • EXPLORING THE HAKONE AREA AND MT. FUJI

We will enjoy a day in Hakone, visiting the Checkpoint Museum. If the workshop is open, we may also be able to see a demonstration of traditional Japanese yosegi or traditional Japanese parquetry. We'll walk a section of the 'sugi-namiki', a trail lined with Japanese cedar trees that once formed part of the old Tokaido highway, or 'East Sea Road' and enjoy a cruise on Lake Ashi, or Ashino-ko. We travel by ropeway and cable car over the peaks of the Mt. Fuji area, in hopes of catching this notoriously shy icon of Japan. We will arrive at our

hotel in the late afternoon and have dinner.

Overnight in Hakone.

DAY 4 • YUDANAKA HOT SPRING AND SNOW MONKEYS OF JIGOKUDANI

Today we travel by coach to Yudanaka Onsen, a hot spring village famous for its 'snow monkeys'. The Japanese macaques originally came here to warm themselves in the outdoor hot spring bath during the cold winters, and now come all year round. We then stay in a Japanese ryokan, known for its onsen (a Japanese hot spring, bathing facilities and inn).

Overnight in Yudanaka Onsen.

DAY 5 • MATSUMOTO CASTLE & NARAI POST TOWN

We travel by train first to the city of Matsumoto to see its beautiful castle, built in the 16th century. Then, after a tour of a miso factory and miso-based lunch, we continue by train to the Kiso valley and the small town of Narai with its traditional atmosphere of ancient Nakasendo Way, between Kyoto



and Tokyo (or Edo as the city was known in the feudal period). There are many well-preserved houses and former inns.

Overnight in Narai.

DAY 6 • TSUMAGO

After breakfast, there will be time to wander the beautiful streets of Narai. The village is a good place to buy lacquerware and woodcrafts. Short train and bus journeys bring us to the village of Tsumago. Another of the post-towns on the former Nakasendo trail, Tsumago has been beautifully preserved - a living museum, which is still inhabited by the local residents. Wander the streets, taste gohei- mochi, skewered balls of pounded sticky rice covered in a sweet paste of miso, sesame and walnuts and visit the folk museum.

Overnight in Tsumago.

DAY 7 • TRAVEL TO TAKAYAMA

After breakfast, we stroll through Magome and then travel by bus and train to Takayama. Takayama has retained much of its traditional architecture and is well-

known for its crafts, particularly yew-wood carving, Shunkei lacquerware, pottery and furniture. After arriving at our inn, we visit the Takayama Festival Float Exhibition Hall and the Sakurayama-Nikkokan. There may be time to explore the surrounding areas and relax in a hot-spring bath before dinner. In the evening we will try the local Hida beef and perhaps some locally-brewed saké.

Overnight in Takayama.

DAY 8 • TAKAYAMA'S SANMACHISUJI AND HERITAGE SITES

Today we have a full day in Takayama, starting with a visit to the morning market, with stalls of vegetables, crafts, pickles and souvenirs. We see the Yoshijima Heritage House, a precious wooden structure with a famously refined architectural interior. We wander the San-machi area with its rows of old merchant houses, some open as museums. After lunch there will be free time for you to explore the city further and hunt for special treasures to bring home.

Overnight in Takayama.





DAY 9 • SHIRAKAWA-GO

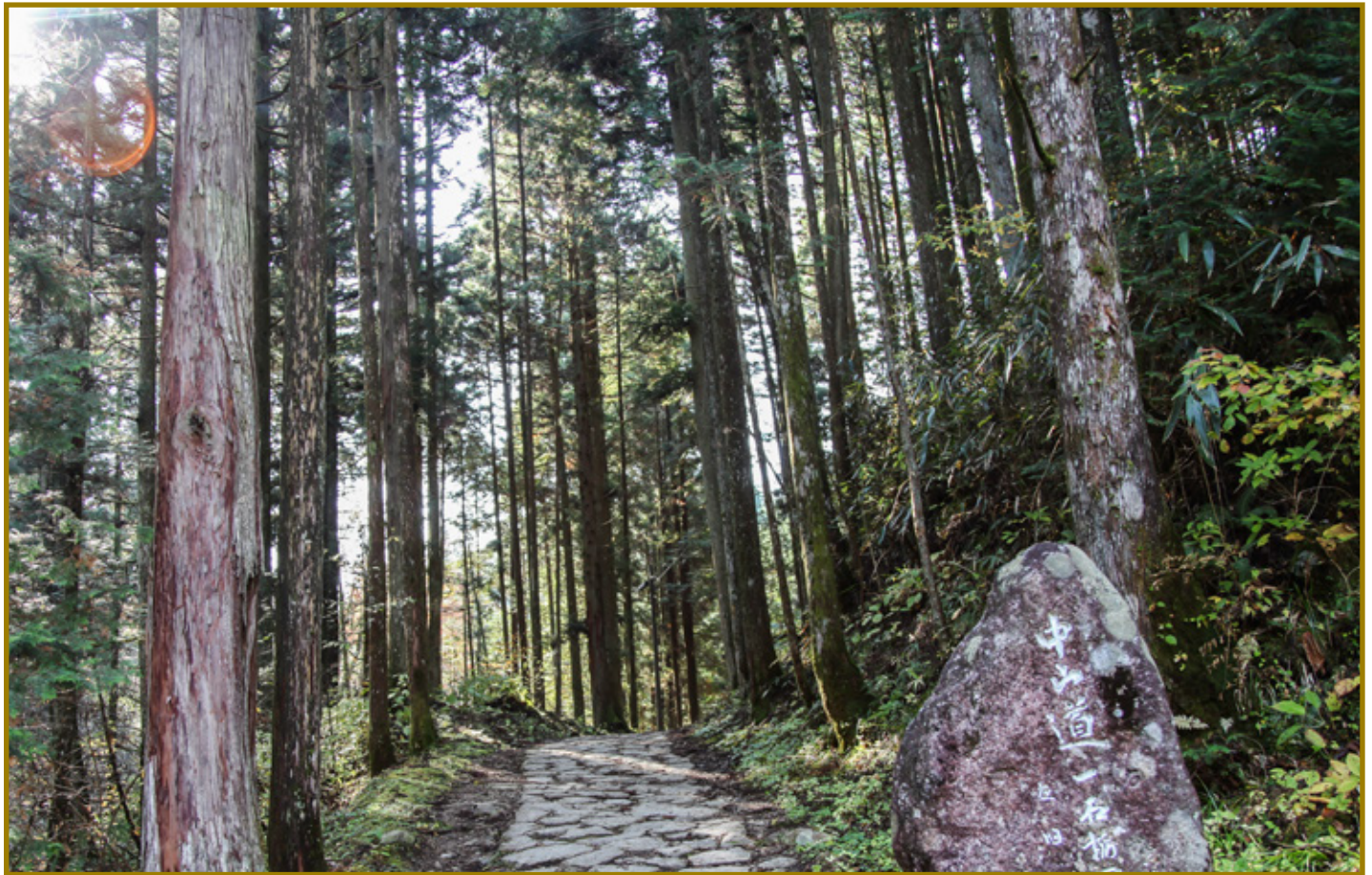
In the morning, we travel to the Shirakawa-go area north-west of Takayama. The village is home to a large number of gassho-zukuri houses, and has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1995. These large wooden houses have steep thatched roofs designed to withstand heavy snow, and the term gassho-zukuri refers to the shape of praying hands formed by the roofs. After time in this lovely village, we then transfer to Kanazawa where we stay this evening. In Kanazawa we will have an opportunity to try our hand at creating our own souvenir using the gold leaf the city is famed for.

Overnight in Kanazawa.

DAY 10 • KANAZAWA: SAKE BREWERY, SAMURAI DISTRICT, HIGASHICHAYA AND KAZUE MACHI DISTRICTS

In feudal times Kanazawa was the seat of the Maeda clan, one of Japan's most powerful, and it rivalled Kyoto and Edo (Tokyo). Kanazawa consists of a number of smaller well-preserved historical districts. Today we'll visit a sake brewery. A brief walk from a bustling shopping district takes you to a tranquil neighbourhood of former samurai homes and gardens. Their traditional buildings and cobblestoned lanes remain. We'll visit one of the samurai houses. Then, we continue on to the preserved geisha districts – the most notable of these being the Higashi-chaya and Kazuemachi-chaya districts - where Kanazawa's geisha entertained with music and dance.

Overnight in Kanazawa.



DAY 11 • MORNING VISIT TO KENROKUEN GARDEN AND ONWARD TRAVEL TO KYOTO

This morning we begin with a visit to one of the highlights of Kanazawa. Kenrokuen gardens were designed as a formal walking garden that displays changing vistas as you make your way along its pathways. Kenrokuen was once the outer garden of Kanazawa Castle. Stone lanterns, koi ponds, and small teahouses dot the scenery. On the periphery of the garden are a number of museums with collections of artefacts collected by the eminent lords of the Kanazawa area.

From Kenrokuen, we travel by train to Kyoto and our hotel in the centre of the city.

Overnight in Kyoto.

DAY 12 • SIGHTSEEING OF KYOTO AND TEA CEREMONY

We begin a day of sightseeing by traveling to Fushimi Inari Shrine, famous for its vermilion torii gates that snake up the hillside. In the afternoon we make our way to the Higashiyama district and to experience a tea ceremony or way of the tea. This ancient tradition is a ceremonial way of preparing and drinking green tea and you'll learn the art from a tea master. From here, we'll take a walk through the Gion district famous for its many Ryotei (exclusive private restaurants) and Geiko (full fledged Geisha) or Maiko (apprentice Geisha).

DAY 13 • KYOTO: KINKAKUJI AND RYOANJI

We have a half-day walking tour this morning. We visit the famous Kinkaku-ji, the Golden Pavilion, originally built by the Ashikaga Shogun in the 14th century as a place of contemplation and rest. From there, we will visit Ryoan-ji, with its famous rock garden of raked gravel and fifteen moss-covered boulders. In the afternoon you have a choice of free time to make your own discoveries, or you may accompany your guide to explore the downtown core. Within a short walking distance of your hotel is Teramachi Street – this section between Sanjo and Shijo streets in Kyoto used to be known as a temple town. If you look carefully off of this street and behind the parallel Shinkyogoku shopping arcades, you'll find ancient temples tucked in behind the shops. Walking a bit further west near the Shijo end of Teramachi Street will also bring you to Nishiki market, for those who wish to explore the culinary offerings of Kyoto. The shopping arcades also provide a wonderful opportunity to purchase souvenirs that reflect the traditional crafts of Japan – washi paper cards, elegant folding fans, brightly decorated tenugui and handkerchiefs can all be found within this area, in addition to traditional Japanese sweets.

Overnight in Kyoto.

DAY 14 • TRAVEL TO HIMEJI, VISIT HIMEJI CASTLE

This morning, following breakfast at our hotel, we will depart by bullet train for Himeji. Himeji Castle is nicknamed “White Heron” Castle because of its white walls covered with white plaster. Himeji Castle is famous for both its huge main tower and its maze-like design. As one of the finest surviving examples of early 17th-century Japanese castle architecture, it is a masterpiece of construction. The castle has recently completed exten-

sive restoration works.

Overnight in Himeji.

DAY 15 • SIGHTSEEING OF MIYAJIMA AND ONWARD TO HIROSHIMA

We leave Himeji and continue by bullet train to Hiroshima. From here it's a short journey on a local train to board our ferry to Miyajima Island. We begin with a stroll along the waterfront offering us outstanding views of the Great Torii and Itsukushima Shrine. The island is so sacred that the Torii stands on 6 pillars so as not to be buried deep within the sea bed. The shrine itself has multiple buildings which are linked by boardwalks.

We will ascend on ropeway to a viewpoint that offers spectacular views over the inland sea. As we leave and return back to the town, we'll spend time exploring its streets and traditional shops before retiring to our accommodations.

Overnight in Hiroshima.

DAY 16 • PEACE PARK AND MUSEUM AND ONWARD TO NARA

This morning we travel to Hiroshima. Known throughout the world as the first city to bear the impact of the use of atomic weapons, Hiroshima today is a vibrant, modern city. Throughout the Peace Park are a number of touching memorials, including the Children's Peace Monument, festooned with brightly colored strings of origami cranes, left by children from all over the world to express a desire for peace. The Peace Memorial and Museum provides context to the impact of the bombing on the city, the country, and the world.

Next, we journey onto the first permanent ancient capital of Japan, Nara which served as the nation's capital from 710 to 784. We visit Nara National Museum before taking a stroll down Naramachi, Nara's old town and the old merchant district with its narrow streets, shops, cafes and restaurants.

Overnight in Nara.

DAY 17 • TODAI-JI TEMPLE AND NARA PARK

Today we have a day of sightseeing in Nara. We start with a walk through Nara Park. Famous for its free roaming deer that are considered sacred. Next, we visit Todai-ji Temple, with its bronze statue of Buddha. The temple is said to be the largest wooden structure in the world. From Todai-ji we continue onto Kasuga Taisha. The shrine was established at the same time the city became the capital and is dedicated to the deity responsible for protecting the city.

Overnight in Nara.

DAY 18 • MOUNT KOYA

We travel along the scenic Nankai Railway Line to Mount Koya, a bowl-shaped valley filled with cedars high in the mountains of the Kii Peninsula. Since the 9th century Mount Koya has been a place of religious devotion and ceremony. Today there are more than 100 monasteries, many of which

have Shukubo (pilgrim's lodging). We stay in one of the elegant temples and dine on shojin-ryori (Buddhist vegetarian cuisine). We walk through the vast Okuno-in cemetery, with thousands of graves and memorials to feudal lords and other past luminaries.

Overnight at Mount Koya.

DAY 19 • MORNING PRAYER SERVICE, ONWARDS TO OSAKA

This morning we rise early to enjoy a morning prayer service with the monks at our Shukubo and then leave the peaceful tranquility of Koyasan behind for the bright lights and hustle and bustle of Osaka - the epitome of modern Japan. It is considered to be the commercial hub of Japan. Behind the neon glare, against the chrome and glass of new skyscrapers and developments, Osaka offers some surprises. We'll have some free time to explore and maybe pick up some last minute souvenirs before we gather together for a farewell dinner.

Overnight in Osaka.

DAY 20 • DEPART OSAKA

Today we transfer to the airport for our flights homebound.



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

1. HOW BIG ARE THE GROUPS?

Each group is limited to 16 participants. Small groups are an important ingredient in adventure travel. They allow for more interaction and more personalized service throughout the itinerary.

2. WHAT IS INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

All accommodations throughout; all meals, starting with dinner on day 1 and finishing with breakfast on departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); bottled drinking water throughout the trip; all internal transportation; airport transfers on day 1 and departure day (i.e. the last day of the ElderTreks tour); all day trips and entrance fees as outlined in the itinerary; tips for hotels (portage), national guide, and bus driver, restaurants and spot guides; services of a trip leader.

3. WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED IN THE TOUR PRICE?

International flights, tips to ElderTreks tour leader, alcoholic drinks, visas and travel insurance.

4. ARE THESE “EDUCATIONAL” TOURS?

Yes, in the broadest sense of the word, “educational”. We visit many temples and historic sites, and have talks and discussions on the region’s history, culture and politics, but this is only one element of what we do. We believe that it is equally educational to get to meet new people on a non-commercial basis, visit their homes and even try to learn a few words in the native language. Sometimes the most “educational” moments are spent walking down a country road.

5. HOW DO WE TRAVEL DURING THE TOUR?

All land transportation is included in the land price of the trip. We travel by trains (bullet trains and local), highway bus, local bus and sometimes taxi.

6. WHAT ARE OUR ACCOMMODATIONS LIKE?

We stay in 3 types of accommodation on this tour. Modern western style hotels with private bathrooms are used in larger cities. Ryokan (or minshuku) which are traditional Japanese-style inns. They may be in modern concrete or older wooden buildings but the rooms are always in the Japanese style with tatami (straw) matting and futons laid out in the evening. Some Ryokan have en-suite

bathrooms, though older buildings generally offer shared facilities. Smaller inns offer domestic-scale bathing tubs used privately in turn by guests; larger inns offer communal spa-style baths, segregated by gender. They are the classic Japanese experience, although because of their small size, the group may be divided into 2 Ryokan for 2 nights. At Mount Koya, we will stay in Shukubo which are lodgings in Buddhist temples originally meant for pilgrims but now open to anyone. Rooms are similar to Ryokan or Minshuku, though without en-suite facilities. It is a wonderful experience to stay in a Shukubo and there is the opportunity to join the early morning religious service provided by Buddhist monks.

7. WHAT ABOUT THE WEATHER?

For September/October and April trips the weather is pleasant and not too hot, but it will be cool in the mountains. Average highs from around 18-25 C (60’s-70’s F) and average lows at night in the 8-12 C range (upper 40’s-50’s F).

8. WHEN IS PAYMENT DUE?

A non-refundable deposit of \$500 USD (plus insurance if you require it) is due at time of booking and will reserve your place on the tour. Payment of the full land cost is due 120 days before departure. Cancellation charges are applicable and are outlined in the “Terms and Conditions” section of our brochure.

9. IS MEDICAL INSURANCE REQUIRED?

Insurance coverage is not included in the cost of your trip. Please note that medical insurance is not required for this adventure but is recommended. ElderTreks offers comprehensive travel insurance and we are happy to provide you with a quote if you call our office. If you are purchasing insurance elsewhere, please ensure you provide the details to ElderTreks as soon as possible.

**Please note those travelers with pre-existing medical conditions must take out travel insurance at the time of deposit*

10. WHAT SHOULD I TAKE ON THE TOUR?

There is a detailed “What to Take” list in our Trip Kit, which we will send to you once you have booked the trip.

Please note that during our stay at the guesthouses, our luggage will be forwarded to the next major hotel and will not come with us to the guesthouse. Therefore you must bring a medium sized backpack to carry your essential overnight items during these nights. We will try to obtain



lockers for your backpacks during the day at train stations, however you should be prepared to carry your belongings on your back in case lockers are not available. This will be the arrangement 6 times during the tour, twice for 2 nights, 4 times for 1 night.

11. WHAT MEALS ARE INCLUDED?

All meals are included, starting with dinner on day 1, and finishing with breakfast on departure day. We eat a variety of local foods prepared in a wide range of settings. In many cases, we simply order a number of dishes and share, allowing you to sample new foods and decide what you enjoy best.

12. CAN YOU ARRANGE MY FLIGHTS?

We would be happy to take care of your air arrangements. ElderTreks has a full air department and we offer highly competitive airfares. Whether you simply want an air quote, or you would like to make an air reservation when booking your tour, just give us a call and we'll work out a routing for you.

13. WHAT IF I WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION?

If you have any further questions about the trip, please do not hesitate to contact our office for additional information. A Trip Kit containing further details on the destination will be sent to those who have booked on the tour.



