

# JAPAN BLUE TOUR

23 FEB – 10 MARCH 2026

retreat|recreate is delighted to present this women's small group tour – a 15 night/16-day *aizome* (indigo dyeing) exploration of Japan.

Visit specialist *aizome* studios, artisan galleries, indigo farms, and indigo museums, and get hands-on in the making of *sukumo* the traditional way, as we explore Japan's indigo traditions in Kyoto, Tokushima, Kurume and Amami Island (part of the Ryukyu islands chain).

Experience **multiple** private workshops including *sukumo* based dyeing (the indigo 'compost method' ), botanical and mud dyeing, and weaving. Explore dye pattern techniques such as *katazome* (rice paste resist), *chusen* dyeing (another resist technique), *kasuri* (Japanese ikat) and *shibori* (tie dyeing, folding, clamping, stitching). Enjoy presentations from a range of indigo artists and farmers, meet master indigo craftsmen designated as National Living Treasures, be inspired by incredible design and craftsmanship and experience traditional Japanese culture and hospitality, all in the company of a small group of twelve likeminded textile and indigo enthusiasts.

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## ITINERARY

as 8 JANUARY 2026



Day 1 Monday 23 FEBRUARY Day 2 Tuesday 24 FEBRUARY

### KYOTO

Hotel Resol Sanjo

Konnichiwa! Welcome to our wintry blue-hued exploration of Japan and its indigo traditions.

Today is arrival day and no activities are planned until evening, to allow for varying arrival times. Make your way to our centrally located hotel in beautiful Kyoto (see the tour page for links to transport options).

There will be a tour briefing this evening at 6:00pm (TBC via WhatsApp) at the hotel. You'll receive your Welcome Pack and we'll run through the itinerary for the next 16 days.

Following the briefing you'll enjoy a welcome dinner at one of our favourite local restaurants and get to know your fellow travellers.

Meals: Dinner

### KYOTO

Hotel Resol Sanjo

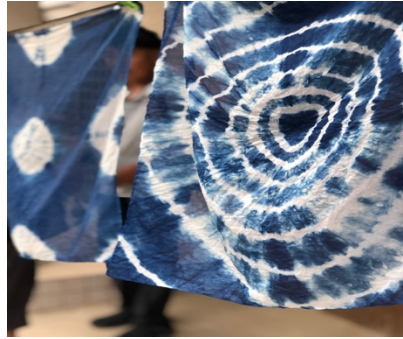
Today, dive straight in with your first experience of the famous 'Japan Blue'.

We have the privilege of a private **workshop at Miyabiori Kobo** indigo dye studio outside Kyoto (we'll take a private coach there). You'll experiment with *shibori* and needlework techniques to create resist patterns, before dyeing a handkerchief in the studio's indigo vats. (Optional upgrade to a bandana or silk shawl available at own cost).

In the afternoon we've lined up a visit to another **Kyoto indigo studio**. We'll enjoy a tour and presentation at the **Awo Fujimou** studio.

If you've travelled with us on a previous textile or our indigo tour, both of today's studios and artisans will be completely new to you. Exciting!

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



### Day 3 Wednesday 25 FEBRUARY

#### TOKUSHIMA Hotel Sunroute

Today we board our private coach and head to Tokushima on Shikoku island, Japan's premier indigo farming region.

The majority of the day will be spent at Watanabe's, one of Tokushima's newest **indigo farms and production houses**. Japanese indigo, known as 'tadeai' is harvested, the leaves dried, and then fermented or composted for 100 days to produce *sukumo*. You'll tour the farm and learn first hand about indigo farming. We first visited Watanabe-san in 2019 when he had just started out and it's wonderful to see his business growing and flourishing!

NEW ADDITION: Tour 2 travellers will not only learn about indigo seedling and cultivation as per the original itinerary, but you will get to enjoy a **hands on indigo dyeing workshop** in Watanabe's dye studio in which you'll dye a tenugui (traditional Japanese hand towel).

Meals: Breakfast

### Day 4 Thursday 26 FEBRUARY

#### TOKUSHIMA Hotel Sunroute

Today, spend the day at **Ai no Yakata Indigo Museum dedicated to aizome, Japan Blue, and Tokushima's indigo traditions**, all set in an historic indigo merchant's house. You can explore the excellent museum displays, which include a multitude of fascinating dioramas representing all phases of indigo production, from the sowing of seed, to harvest and *sukumo* production, through to the preparation of yarn and cloth for various types of dyeing, and finally, scenes showing merchants trading Japan Blue textiles.

At the neighbouring facility that showcases the region's superb indigo wares, you'll meet the very talented and humble *shibori* artist **Chiaki Murakami**. She will lead a a fabulous **workshop** in which you'll learn some intricate stitch patterns (much harder than they look!), after which you will return to the indigo museum across the road to dye your beautiful stitched pieces in the museum's indigo vats. The photo above shows stitched samples before and after dyeing and untying.

It promises to be an inspiring day.

Meals: Breakfast

### Day 5 Friday 27 FEBRUARY

#### TOKUSHIMA Hotel Sunroute

You'll begin today by meeting the charismatic and inspiring artist Kameda Etsuko who came to the world of indigo much later in life, after the death of her husband and when many women would be contemplating retirement. Etsuko san fell in love with *aizome* in her 60s and decided to develop her own homemade *sukumo* recipe. Now in her 80s, she declares she'll have her process perfected in another five or so years! In today's **workshop** we'll have the chance to dye with her homemade vats, which differ significantly in tone and composition from all other vats that we've ever come across. We love her homemade approach. Etsuko makes her own *sukumo* in pickle barrels ☺

In the afternoon, visit the **Awagami washi paper factory**, where among many exquisite kinds of paper, you can also find indigo dyed paper. Tokushima is justly proud of its indigo heritage and as the producer of the country's most superior indigo, and so it is incorporated into all aspects of life and handcrafts, even in handmade paper. You'll have a guided tour of the factory AND see a **demonstration of the washi indigo dyeing process (NEW, TOUR 2 ONLY!)**

Meals: Breakfast

### Day 6 Saturday 28 FEBRUARY

#### TOKUSHIMA Hotel Sunroute

In the morning the group will visit **Mori Toko Ceramic Studio** in the nearby town of Naruto, where for over 230 years they have been making the enormous ceramic pots known as *Otani Yaki*, that are used throughout Japan as indigo vats.

Next up is a presentation at the Nagao Shokufu Factory, a family studio established in 1897 that specialises in Tokushima's signature 'Shijira-ori' textile which is known for its distinctive crinkled texture, using natural indigo.

Later in the day you'll visit one of Tokushima's most famous **chusen indigo dye studios**. Father and daughter duo Toshiharu and Michiko Furusho will provide a tour of their studio, explain the *chusen* technique, and answer all your questions. Their studio is a chaotic, atmospheric treasure trove of blue!

Meals: Breakfast

### Day 7 Sunday 1 MARCH

#### TOKUSHIMA Hotel Sunroute

*Katazome* is the art of dyeing cloth with stencils made originally from washi paper and using rice paste as a resist. This morning you'll experience a **workshop at Waza no Yakata**, a large indigo centre in Tokushima.

Next, we hope to **visit one of Japan's premier master indigo farmers and sukumo makers**. In Japan, nearly every serious indigo artisan will answer the question 'where do you source your *sukumo*?' with 'from Tokushima of course!' We hope to be able to visit Sato-Sukumo traditional indigo farm, however confirmation won't be available it is still TBC.

In the late afternoon, visit the **studio of talented katazome artist Harada Shiro** and enjoy a studio tour and presentation. Shiro-san uses traditional techniques to create modern, stylised patterns. This new addition to our itinerary promises to be a special treat for design and pattern lovers.

The other thing Tokushima is famous for, is that it's the home of Awa-odori, one of Japan's traditional dances. There's the opportunity to catch a performance this evening.

Meals: Breakfast





**Day 8 Monday 2 MARCH**

## KURUME

**Green Hotel**

*Pack overnight bags as your luggage will be sent to Kurume*

Board the shinkansen for Kurume (on Kyushu island) – it's the capital of *kasuri* or ikat weaving. The technique of *kasuri* involves the resist dyeing of either the warp or weft, (or both, as in the case of double ikat) prior to the threads being woven, to create a pattern. Traditional *kasuri* is registered as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage. Because *kasuri* was originally indigo and white, many of the weavers here are also indigo dyers.

The **Kurume Kasuri Museum** is the first stop. Featuring all things ikat, it's a fascinating and informative place. You'll view early and modern weaving looms, see a multitude of *kasuri* pattern examples, and hear the story of the young girl who developed Japanese double ikat in 1800. Double ikat is only practised in four places in the world, including Kurume. It's mind-blowing, trying to wrap your head around how resist dyed weft threads weave through resist dyed warp threads and together create a coherent pattern.

Meals: Breakfast

**Day 9 Tuesday 3 MARCH**

## KURUME

**Green Hotel**

Today we have a fabulous day filled with indigo and *kasuri* studios, and **a hands on workshop**. Beginning at the beautiful traditional wooden home of **Shoji Yamamura, one of Japan's premier kasuri artists**, you'll learn about handwoven ikat techniques and also dye a bandana each in ancient vats.

Then, head next door to another *kasuri* and indigo studio for **a talk and presentation at the studio of Ken Yamamura** (no relation to Shoji san, just neighbours!). The *kasuri* here often features a modern spin on traditional patterns and it's interesting to compare the two neighbours' different design styles. Also, their ancient indigo vats buried in an earthen floor are truly a sight to behold.

After a delightful group lunch, enjoy a tour of large scale commercial *kasuri* **cloth production house Shimogawa Orimono** where you'll view the mechanised loom room and enjoy a presentation from the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation owner.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

**Day 10 Wednesday 4 MARCH**

## KURUME

**Green Hotel**

The full day **workshop** today promises you will 'experience the Kurume Kasuri process in one day instead of three months'. At local *kasuri* studio **Ikeda Kobo** you will learn the art of tying threads to create an ikat resist pattern, then dye the threads in the studio's indigo vats, and finally weave a small coaster, using a tabletop loom.

With a bit of luck there will also be time to explore the busy studio and watch the weavers at work in the loom room, while over the road the dyers work their magic in the indigo vats. There is also a large shop selling handwoven and hand dyed garments and homewares, should you be tempted to take home a souvenir or two.

(Speaking of shops, most of the studios we visit have products for sale so there are several 'shopopportunities' you can indulge in if you so desire. However there's absolutely no pressure to purchase!)

Meals: Breakfast

**Day 11 Thursday 5 MARCH**

## Fukuoka Resol Trinity Hakata

Today, **visit another female indigo dyer and artist in her small studio** where she creates beautiful garments and accessories. Our lovely host **Chiharu Ogomori at Takarajima Senkou** will show the group around her workshop and discuss her dye process. Passionate about only using natural materials and dyestuffs, it will be interesting to see how the process differs from other studios as she uses Indian indigo, rather than Japanese *sukumo*. *This visit is now confirmed for Tour 2 only (lucky group!)*

This afternoon, depart temporarily from indigo and experience **botanical dyeing with cherry blossom! Our workshop host Yasuhisa Komuro** is actually the father of our favourite Tokyo based dyer, Maito san, who we visit on our textile tours. You'll each dye your own beautiful pink cloth.

In the evening, travel to Hakata, check in at the hotel and explore Nakasu, Fukuoka's lively riverside district. Famous for food stalls and nightlife, it should be a fun adventure.

Meals: Breakfast

**Day 12 Friday 6 MARCH**

## AMAMI Bashayama Resort

An early start this morning as the group heads to the airport to fly to Amami Island. Breakfast can be purchased at own cost at the airport before our short flight.

The Amami Islands are famous for their mud dyeing practice and today features the chance to experience this for yourselves. Spend the morning at the atmospheric dye studio **Kanai Kogei** where you'll enjoy a **workshop** learning the traditional Amami art of mud dyeing. Dress warmly, don the workshop's rubber boots and be prepared to get muddy! You'll dye a cotton scarf, *and* you can also bring one personal item to dye at no extra cost (natural fibres such as cotton, hemp, silk or rayon, pre washed please).

After a group lunch, visit **Tatsugo Oshima Tsumugi Training Centre**. You'll tour the centre and interact with the weavers (and be blown away by the intricacy of the woven patterns).

Meals: Lunch, Dinner



Day 13 Saturday 7 MARCH

### AMAMI Bashayama Resort

We'll head to **Oshima Tsumugi Village**, a silk weaving centre to learn all about the intricate and highly prized 1300 year old art of *Oshima Tsumugi* (pongee silk). Woven with silk threads that have been dyed up to 80 times with dye from the sharinbai tree, and mud dyed in local iron-rich mud, the finely patterned silk cloth is highly sought after by kimono makers (and wearers).

Stroll the **Amami Nature Observation Forest** enjoying the panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean. Part of the Ryukyu Islands and known for its sub tropical climate, Amami experiences cherry blossom season from early January to mid February. Enjoy some time at **Amami Park**, before our final destination of the day, the **Isson Tanaka Art Museum**. The museum celebrates the life of Amami painter Isson Kazamura Tanaka. Originally a dyer in a silk pongee workshop, he became famous for his paintings that captured the wildlife and landscapes of his adopted tropical island home.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 14 Sunday 8 MARCH

### AMAMI Bashayama Resort

Two big workshops today for your last full day on the island! At Yumeori no Sato, we'll split the group into two – one group will enjoy a **mud and indigo dyeing workshop**, to create a truly special piece of traditional Amami art. The process is quite involved, with around 20 dips into the mud, then following up with indigo dye for a multi-hued finished item.

Meanwhile the other group will enjoy an **Oshima Tsumugi weaving workshop** in which you'll weave your own fabric on the centre's high end looms.

In the afternoon the two groups will swap so everyone will have the opportunity to enjoy both dyeing and weaving. There's also a 'shopportunity' here at Yumeori no Sato, if you wish (no pressure!)

Meals: Breakfast



Day 15 Monday 9 MARCH

### OSAKA Namba Oriental Hotel

There's a relaxed start today so you can fully enjoy breakfast in the hotel's beachfront restaurant with its beautiful ocean views.

At around 11:00am it's off to the airport for the group flight to Osaka, arriving at around 2:00pm.

After checking in at the hotel, explore Osaka's Dotonbori district, famous as a foodie destination.

Tonight the group will gather for a farewell dinner at one of our favourite Osaka restaurants. It's a time to reflect on this amazing adventure and enjoy a final meal together as a group.

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner



Day 16 Tuesday 10 MARCH

### OSAKA

The tour ends today after breakfast. It's time to pack up your memories and handcrafted blue souvenirs, say your fond farewells to each other and Japan, and head your separate ways after this trip of a lifetime.

Meals: Breakfast

#### Inclusions:

- 15 nights in 3 & 4 star hotels
- 14 breakfasts, 3 lunches, 3 dinners
- Transport: public transport, private coach, taxis, trains, 2 x domestic economy flights
- Multiple workshops (in red)
- Artisan studios & museums (in red)
- Entrance fees for all venues
- 1 x luggage transfer from Tokushima to Kurume

#### Exclusions:

- International airfare
- Travel insurance
- Airport transfers
- Early check in/late check out
- Meals and drinks not included in the itinerary
- Tip for our guide

#### Important Notes:

- Tour 2 is led by our guide only.
- There have been a couple of additions and also subtractions to the itinerary due to schedules in artists' schedules. A couple of activities are still TBC.
- This itinerary is very full to ensure value for money. We strongly recommend you add a few days before and after the tour.
- Please read the Trip Notes and Booking Conditions to ensure you are aware of the fitness and mobility requirements, and our policy regarding sharing of rooms.