

JAPAN BLUE TOUR

4 – 19 NOVEMBER 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 **ELEVEN** 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 a couple of 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 at JANUARY 2026



Day 1

Wednesday 4 November

Day 2

Thursday 5 November

KYOTO

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

Today is arrival day and no activities are planned during the day. Make your way to our centrally located hotel in beautiful Kyoto (see Trip Notes for options). You may wish to arrive a couple of days beforehand to recover from jetlag and explore Kyoto, as we have limited time here.

There will be a tour briefing this evening at 5:00pm (TBC) 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.

KYOTO

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

We have the privilege of a private **workshop** at a renowned Kyoto indigo dye studio. You'll experiment with *shibori* and needlework techniques to create resist patterns, before dyeing your pieces in the studio's indigo vats.

As it's your first full day as a group, lunch will be together.

In the afternoon we've lined up a visit to another **Kyoto indigo studio** for a tour and presentation.

If you've travelled with us on a previous retreat|recreate textiles & handcrafts or our indigo itineraries, both of today's studios and artisans will be completely new to you. Exciting!

Meals: Dinner

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 3 Friday 6 November

Day 4 Saturday 7 November

Day 5 Sunday 8 November

Day 6 Monday 9 November

Day 7 Tuesday 10 November

TOKUSHIMA

Today, say goodbye to Kyoto and head to Tokushima on Shikoku island, Japan's premier indigo farming region. We hope to be able to visit Japan's premier master indigo farmer and sukumo maker. This sukumo master recently retired and the business has been taken over by his daughter. We hope to be able to continue our annual visits to this very traditional and atmospheric indigo farm, however confirmation is still TBC.

The afternoon will be spent at one of Tokushima's newest most modern 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, indigo cultivation, and the sukumo process. November is a very special time in the farm's calendar (and the reason for the timing of this tour) as the nedoko, (sleeping room for the sukumo) is prepared and the dried indigo leaves are laid in the nedoko ready to begin the composting process.

Meals: Breakfast

TOKUSHIMA

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 facilitated by a large indigo centre in Tokushima.

Continuing the day's katazome theme, visit the studio of a very talented katazome artist and enjoy a studio tour and presentation. The artist 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.

In the afternoon we'll explore one of Tokushima's most famous chusen indigo studios. The father and daughter duo will provide a tour of their studio, explain the chusen technique, and answer all your questions. Their studio is a chaotic, atmospheric treasure trove!

Meals: Breakfast

TOKUSHIMA

You'll begin today with another workshop, this time at a dye studio outside Tokushima owned by a delightful indigo artist. As a women's tour company, wherever possible we seek out women artists, particularly as they are outnumbered by men in Japan's rather traditional indigo industry. Our generous host Makiko will teach you the 'maki-age' shibori technique of binding and stitching to create patterns, and then you'll dye your finished cloths in her indigo vats.

In the afternoon the group will visit a ceramic studio in the nearby town of Naruto, where for over 230 years they have been making enormous ceramic pots known as Otani Yaki, that are used as indigo vats.

Meals: Breakfast

TOKUSHIMA

Today, spend the day at a 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 a very talented and humble shibori artist. She will lead a a fabulous workshop in which you'll learn some intricate stitch patterns (much harder than they look!), after which the group 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.

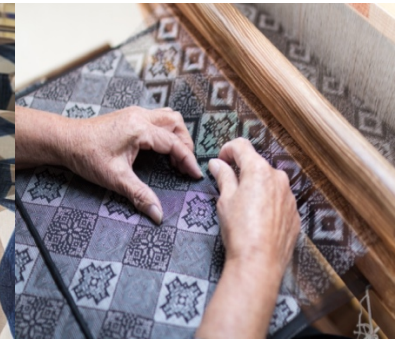
Meals: Breakfast

TOKUSHIMA

Today you will meet a charismatic and inspiring artist 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. She 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. Of course! Tokushima is justly proud of its indigo heritage and reputation as the producer of the country's most superior indigo, and so it is incorporated into all aspects of life and handcrafts, even in the production of handmade paper.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 8 Wednesday 11 November

Day 9 Thursday 12 November

Day 10 Friday 13 November

Day 11 Saturday 14 November

Day 12 Sunday 15 November

KURUME

This morning, pack overnight bags as your luggage will be sent to Kurume

Kurume on Japan's Kyushu island, is the capital of *kasuri*, Japan's ikat weaving tradition. The technique of *kasuri* weaving 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 your 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

KURUME

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 one of Japan's premier (and most delightful) *kasuri* artists and National Living Treasure, you'll learn about handwoven ikat techniques and also dye a bandana each in the studio's ancient indigo vats.

Then, head next door to another *kasuri* and indigo studio for **a talk and presentation**. 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).

Lunch at a delightful café will follow, and then in the afternoon enjoy a tour of a larger scale commercial ***kasuri* cloth production house** where you'll view the mechanised loom room and enjoy a presentation from the 3rd generation owner.

Your luggage will be waiting at the hotel this evening

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

KURUME

Your full day **workshop** today promises you will 'experience the Kurume Kasuri process in one day instead of three months'. At a local *kasuri* studio, 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

HAKATA

Today, **visit another female indigo dyer and artist in her small studio** where she creates beautiful garments and accessories. Our lovely host 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*. (Confirmation of this visit is TBC, as per the artist's schedule).

This afternoon, depart temporarily from indigo, to experience **botanical dyeing with cherry blossom! The workshop** host is actually the father of our favourite Tokyo based dyer, Maito san. 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

AMAMI

An early start this morning as the group heads to the airport to fly to Amami Island. Breakfast is at own cost at the airport before the short flight. Upon arrival, travel to the **Isson Tanaka Art Museum** which celebrates the life of Amami painter Isson Kazamura Tanaka. Originally a dyer, Tanaka san turned to painting the lush landscapes of his adopted island home.

After a group lunch we'll tour a **silk weaving village** 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). We'll meet the weavers and stroll the tropical gardens.

A special treat awaits! For the November tour we have secured a hotel that's part of an Oshima Tsumugi complex comprising a museum, dye workshop and weaving archive.

Meals: Lunch, Dinner



Day 13 Monday 16 November

AMAMI

The Amami Islands are famous for their mud dyeing practice and today features the chance to experience this for yourselves. Spend the morning at an atmospheric dye studio 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!

Stroll the **Amami Nature Observation Forest** with its panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean. Amami is part of the Ryukyu Islands and is known for its sub tropical climate.

This afternoon, visit an **Oshima Tsumugi weaving training centre**. You'll tour the centre and interact with the weavers (and be blown away by the intricacy of the woven patterns).

Day 14 Tuesday 17 November

AMAMI

Two big workshops today for your last full day on the island!

In the morning we will visit the Oshima. Tsumugi Archive and try **indigo and mud dyeing at the workshop centre** that's part of our hotel.

In the afternoon we will **tour the Oshima Tsumugi Museum** that is also part of this complex.

There might also be the opportunity for an **optional Oshima Tsumugi weaving experience** in the hotel lobby if you wish (optional, and at additional cost).

Day 15 Wednesday 18 November

OSAKA

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 a group flight to Osaka, arriving at around 2:00pm.

After checking in at the hotel, explore a scenic stroll at Nakanoshima Riverside, topped off by the beautifully illuminated historic Central Public Hall.

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.

Day 16 Thursday 19 November

OSAKA

Your 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.

There are no activities planned for today and you are free to check out unless you have booked an additional post tour night or two.

Price, twin share:

AUD \$11,550

Single supplement:

AUD \$1500

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
- 11 x workshops (noted in **red**)
- Artisan studios & museums (noted 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:

- This tour will be led by our guide and a retreat|recreate host.
- 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.

Meals: Breakfast

Meals: Breakfast

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

Meals: Breakfast