



retreat | recreate
Japan Garden Tour :: 26 November – 10 December 2026
Trip Notes (as at January 2026)

Konnichiwa!

Welcome to our Japan Garden Tour. Steeped in centuries of tradition, yet hyper modern and avant garde, Japan is a feast for all the senses. The crowds, plethora of shopping opportunities and silver skyscrapers of Tokyo are one side of the story; but you'll also find swathes of tranquil beauty unlike anywhere else – the glimpse of autumnal maples through the window of a temple, the scent of delicate green tea, or the beauty of an ancient landscape. The gardens and botanical sites of Japan encompass the country's deep respect for cultural tradition, meditation, history and beauty. We hope you enjoy our exploration of Japan, its botanical sites, Zen garden design and culture. These Trip Notes function as a kind of FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) and are an adjunct to the itinerary.

Tour Dates

26 November - 10 December 2026

Fully escorted by our English speaking Japanese guide

Disclaimer

We are not horticultural experts, nor landscape designers. However, we are garden and nature enthusiasts with an appreciation for the natural environment, both man-made and untouched. This itinerary is designed to pique and nurture an interest and delight in the aesthetics of Japanese gardens and culture, rather than ticking off a list of Latin-named botanical specimens. There are many tours out there that are led by experienced garden designers and horticultural specialists. This tour is not one of them, but is geared towards general garden and culture enthusiasts 😊

Itinerary

Some changes to the itinerary may occur due to inclement weather or circumstances beyond our control. While we do our best to prevent this happening, it may be unavoidable. It can also happen with little notice so please bear with us if we have to make modifications to the itinerary.

Please note this itinerary was prepared many months before departure. Accordingly, we may make slight amendments depending on altered opening times at various gardens and sites as they are confirmed closer to departure, or if any of our workshop hosts need to change days or dates. We'll always let you know of any proposed changes.

Included activities

Included activities are those specifically listed in the itinerary; any marked as optional are at additional cost. Any activities not outlined in the itinerary are at your own expense. None of the included activities are compulsory however if you take time out from the scheduled itinerary and choose not to participate in any of the included activities, the cost of those activities will not be refunded. Of course we hope and trust you will participate in our itinerary in full, and not depart from it. We have spent an

enormous amount of time researching and planning this itinerary. We respectfully ask that if you intend to join the tour but deviate from the itinerary to pursue your own interests, that you reconsider your application and allow others who intend to fully participate, to have the opportunity to join the tour.

Is this trip suitable for you?

This trip is for active, adventurous, garden enthusiasts who have a curiosity to delve deep into Japanese culture and explore it through the lens of the country's botanical and aesthetic traditions. You don't need to be an accomplished or experienced gardener or horticulturalist; an interest in and curiosity about Japanese gardens and culture is sufficient. You should be a fit, active traveller (see requirements below) who understands the importance of being a generous and tolerant group member, and who values socially responsible travel.

Health, Fitness and Mobility

Please carefully and realistically consider your mobility and health when determining if this trip is right for you.

All travellers must be in excellent physical health and have good mobility to fully participate on this trip. Due to recent experiences on some tours we have made the decision to require all prospective travellers to submit a Fitness to Travel declaration, to ensure all travellers are physically suited to our tours. This declaration must be submitted with your Application Form. The specific physical requirements for this tour are outlined on the Fitness to Travel Declaration and below:

- You will be required to navigate airports and train stations without personal assistance
- You will need to manage your own luggage
- You will need to embark and disembark coaches, train, boats and buses without assistance
- You will spend most of your days walking in gardens, parks, temple gardens and natural landscapes, spending many hours on your feet. The ground may be uneven, paths may be slippery, rocky and/or steep, and handrails may not be present
- We utilise public transport in the cities we visit – the train system in Japan features many stations without escalators or elevators, and many, many flights of stairs. We often have tight timeframes for catching/changing trains and if one member of the group cannot manage stairs at a moderate to fast pace it negatively affects the whole group and the itinerary. From stations we often walk for up to 20 minutes at a moderate to fast walking pace, to our next destination, and that destination generally involves walking around gardens
- Some workshops, meals, presentations and the tea ceremony involve sitting on tatami mats on the floor for the duration of these sessions

- We stay at a traditional Japanese hotel and in simple monks' quarters at a temple where we sleep on thin futons on tatami floors, and the bathroom facilities are communal (ie. shared hot spring onsens). Travellers with tattoos may not be permitted to use the onsens, depending on the size of the tattoos
- This trip is not for you if your fitness is compromised or you use mobility aids. Please carefully consider your physical abilities and contact us if you have any queries before applying for a place. We reserve the right to decline an application if we deem your fitness or mobility levels to be a detriment to your own and others' satisfactory participation in the tour
- The minimum age is 18 at the time of travel
- retreat|recreate is able to provide details on mandatory health requirements; however, we are not medical experts. It is your responsibility to ensure that you obtain medical advice at least two months prior to travel for the latest vaccinations, health requirements and recommendations for this destination
- You must carry face masks and your own personal first aid kit at all times, containing pain relief, bandaids, motion sickness pills, etc, in addition to any personal medications or other requirements (eg spare glasses, contact lenses, asthma puffers etc). For legal reasons we are prohibited from dispensing any type of drugs including antibiotics and headache tablets. Please ensure that you are personally and adequately prepared as flights, bus trips, lots of walking, weather and unfamiliar food can take their toll
- In 2026 there is no longer a requirement for our travellers in Japan to be vaccinated against Covid-19, however we strongly recommend all our travellers are up to date with the recommended Covid-19 vaccination schedule. We also strongly recommend you are up to date with regular vaccinations including flu, tetanus, etc. You may also wish to be vaccinated against Japanese encephalitis or measles if recommended by your health professional
- If you exhibit flu, cold or Covid-like symptoms while on tour, you will be required to take precautionary measures to reduce the risk of transmission, including wearing a mask around others. Depending on the severity of your symptoms you may be required to isolate from the rest of the group. Please bring a few rapid antigen tests and masks with you on tour.

Accommodation

Accommodation on this trip is on a twin room share basis if you are travelling with a relative or friend, or a single room basis if you are a solo traveller.

IMPORTANT: Please note our policy regarding solo travellers on our Japan tours. Due to the (very small) size of Japanese hotel rooms and feedback from past clients, we no longer offer to pair up strangers to share a twin room. If you are hoping for a twin share place, please invite a friend or relative with whom you know you can comfortably share a small, intimate space. (Note, solo twin share options are still available on our tours in other destinations).

The accommodations on this trip are rated as 3 to 4 stars

- The hotel in the Ueno district of Tokyo is Western style
- The second accommodation is a Japanese style ryokan featuring futons, tatami mats, a hot springs onsen and shared/communal bathroom facilities only
- The hotel in central Kanazawa is Western style
- The temple accommodation features simple quarters in a

monastic setting featuring futons, tatami mats, and shared/communal bathroom facilities only

- The hotel in central Kyoto is Western style

Please note that Japanese hotel rooms are often surprisingly tiny.

On rare occasions, we may need to use alternative accommodation due to circumstances beyond our control. Alternative accommodation will be arranged at a similar standard.

Pre tour and post tour accommodation

The itinerary is a full one to ensure value for money; we strongly recommend you consider booking additional days pre and/or post tour. If you wish to book a couple of days before the tour in Tokyo or after the tour in Kyoto through us, we can assist with this, subject to availability. Simply make the request on the Travel Details Form. If our tour hotels have no availability we can book you at alternative accommodations.

Flights

Flights to and from Japan ARE NOT included in the trip price. Please don't book flights until you've received confirmation that you have a place on the tour, have paid your deposit and received confirmation that we have our minimum tour group size and the trip is confirmed as proceeding.

The itinerary *commences* in Tokyo so in-bound flights should be booked to arrive at Narita Airport (NRT) or Haneda (HND) in Tokyo.

The tour *concludes* in Kyoto so you should book your out-bound flight from Kansai Airport (KIX) or Itami (ITM) in nearby Osaka.

Note, you can choose to fly both in and out of the same airport, however ensure you remember to factor in the time (and cost) of travelling to/from your preferred airport at the start/conclusion of your trip.

Please book an arrival flight that allows you to attend the briefing meeting at 6:00pm on Day 1. Allow enough time to clear Customs (30-90 minutes depending on time of day) and then travel into Tokyo (approx. 40 minutes travel time from Haneda and 90 minutes from Narita). If you are not comfortable booking your own flights or buying travel insurance online, you may wish to consult a travel agent.

Transfers to/from airports

Airport transfers ARE NOT included in the tour price however these can be arranged at additional cost. Simply make the request on your Travel Details Form. All Tokyo and Osaka airports have train services or you can book your own transfer.

Transport

Public transport (trains, buses), the occasional taxi, *shinkansen* (bullet train) and a private coach.

Meals & Dietary Restrictions

While travelling with us you'll experience a vast array of traditional Japanese foods. Part of a Japan adventure is trying dango, mocha, raw fish sushi, yuba, eel and okonomiyaki, etc!

Most of the lunches and dinners are not included in the tour price, allowing for flexibility in budgets, however the group will often have lunch together at cafes and restaurants selected by the guide for location and convenience, as you move from morning to afternoon activity. ... cont.

Travellers with dietary requirements or food allergies are required to check with us at the time of applying. While we endeavor to cater for dietary requirements where possible, we recommend that you carry extra snacks in case suitable options are limited. Please note that if you suffer from a particular allergy, it is your personal responsibility to ensure that you do not ingest any foods to which you are allergic. **Unfortunately this tour is not suitable for vegans or coeliacs.** A low gluten preference is manageable but unfortunately a strict medically required GF diet cannot be accommodated safely. The Japanese diet relies heavily on fish and fish products including dashi broth which is used in many many dishes. **Vegetarians are requested to be flexible and be able to accept some pescetarian options on tour.**

Water

It's safe to drink tap water in Japan. Please carry your own refillable drink bottle with you each day so we're not buying bottled water and contributing to waste and landfill.

Safety

Many national governments provide a regularly updated advice service on safety issues involved with international travel. We recommended that you check your government's travel advice site for the travel information prior to your departure. Our guides have the authority to amend or cancel any part of the itinerary if it is deemed necessary due to safety concerns.

We recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt for the safekeeping of your money, passport and airline tickets. Please leave valuable jewellery at home. Some hotels do not have safety deposit boxes for storage of valuables. A lock for your suitcase is recommended.

Depending on where you come from, traffic may be on the 'wrong' side of the road for you. Be alert, particularly when crossing roads.

While travelling there is always the risk of petty theft and pick-pocketing, particularly in touristy areas. Exercise caution when walking at night and take simple measures like carrying your pack on your front, and not hanging your bag over the back of your chair. Having said that, crime levels are low in Japan. Maintain the same vigilance you would at home and take sensible precautions.

Travel insurance

Travel insurance **IS NOT** included in the trip price and is mandatory on our tours. We require that, at a minimum, you are covered for medical expenses including emergency repatriation. We strongly recommend that the policy also covers personal liability, cancellation, Covid-19 related scenarios as far as possible, curtailment and loss of luggage and personal effects. You will not be able to join the tour until evidence of travel insurance and the insurance company's 24-hour emergency contact number have been provided.

We recommend that you take out travel insurance as soon as you pay your deposit. Insurers will generally allow you to adjust the dates for which you are covered, however if you extend the period for which you are covered, additional charges will apply. Some insurers may charge an amendment fee. Please be sure to carefully note the circumstances under which your chosen insurer will cover you for cancellation.

Passports and Visas

Your passport must be valid for at least six months beyond the duration of your trip and have at least one blank page. Please ensure the name on your passport matches the name on your application form and airline tickets.

Money

The official currency of Japan is the Yen (JPY).

Exchange rates as at December 2025:

JPY	AUD	USD	EURO
50.00 coin	0.50	0.32	0.28
100 coin	1.00	0.64	0.55
500 coin	4.90	3.20	2.75
1000 note	9.80	6.50	5.50
5000 note	48.50	32.00	27.65
10,000 note	98.00	64.00	55.30

Japan is predominantly a cash society and locals carry large amounts of cash for daily business. International debit/credit cards MasterCard and Visa can be used at major departments or large restaurants and cash from non-Japanese bank accounts can be withdrawn at all post office ATMs around the country, as well as most Lawson and 7-Eleven convenience store ATMs, making it very easy to get access to cash throughout the trip, 24 hours a day. Remember to advise your bank of your travel dates so your card doesn't get cancelled the first time you use it overseas.

Spending money

Every traveller is different and spending money requirements will vary. Please consider your own spending habits when allowing for drinks, shopping, optional activities, gifts and souvenirs, and tipping. Note that the itinerary includes all breakfasts, two lunches and four dinners – you will need to buy the remainder of the meals. Restaurants and food outlets to suit all budgets can be found.

Tipping

Tipping is not customary in Japan in restaurants, taxis or for other service providers.

However if you are happy with our guide's services, a tip at the conclusion of the tour is appropriate. As a guideline, a suggested amount is approx Y1000 per person per day (paid in local currency please). Please factor this into your budget.

Phone and internet

You **must** have internet access throughout the tour during the day (ie. not just via wifi at the hotels in the evenings) to allow phone contact with the guide and in case you get lost while out and about and the guide needs to call you. **This is not optional.** If you get lost we need to be able to locate you safely and efficiently so as to not negatively impact you, the rest of the group, our workshop hosts, and the day's schedule. We use a WhatsApp group for contact during the tour and to share messages and reminders of meeting times/places etc. Please attend to your phone data arrangements well before the tour commences.

We recommend one of the following options for internet access:

1. Purchase an e-SIM, such as HolaFly or Airalo. This means you can keep your existing physical SIM (and phone no.) in place. Purchase and install before you leave home, then activate upon arrival. If you choose an Airalo e-SIM, feel free to use the code SUSAN7066 for a small discount.
2. Purchase a global roaming package from your mobile/cell provider before you leave home.
3. Rent a 'pocket wifi' device – a quick google will show you several companies that offer this and you can arrange for the device to be delivered to the hotel. Please allow plenty of time to arrange this.

Note that if you need to download or update any apps for use in Japan, please do so before you leave home as app stores often won't work outside your home location.

Emergencies or other issues

While we endeavour to provide the best experience possible, due to the nature of travel, occasionally things go awry. Should any issue occur during the trip, please discuss this with your guide in the first instance so we can do our best to rectify the problem. In the case of an emergency, the local emergency number to dial in Japan is 119. Our tour operator's emergency telephone number will be provided to guests prior to the tour.

Emergency funds

Please make sure you have access to an additional \$1000 for emergencies or in case unforeseen circumstances (eg natural disaster, civil unrest etc) necessitate a change to our route.

What to pack

There will be a suggested **Packing List** uploaded to the tour page prior to the tour. Generally speaking you should pack as lightly as possible as you will be expected to manage your own luggage. One modest sized suitcase with wheels or a backpack is recommended. Please ensure your suitcase weighs well under 20kg and its combined dimensions of height, width & depth do not exceed 200cm as our luggage will be transferred between cities and the courier companies have size and weight restrictions. Remember to also check the dimensions permitted by the airline[s] you'll be flying with. You'll also need a small daypack for day trips, for carrying water, umbrella, camera, etc and most importantly, to function as an overnight bag when your luggage is couriered ahead.

Please ensure all luggage is lockable and clearly labelled.

Responsible travel

Responsible travel is about making good choices. It's about ensuring you have a wonderful trip while also having a low impact, (or rather positive impact on the local environment, community and economy. Broadly speaking this means we try to minimise the negative aspects of tourism on the local culture and environments that we visit and highlight the positive aspects.

How can you be a responsible traveller?

- Choose to travel with a responsible travel company like retreat|recreate!
- Consider offsetting your flights
- Shop local! Eat at local restaurants, buy from local artisans and support social enterprises
- Be respectful of local customs and religious beliefs and sites
- Always ask permission before taking photos of people
- Clothing – we spend time at shrines and temples – as a guideline, consider how you would dress when entering a church, synagogue or mosque in your home country (ie. no plunging necklines, shorts or short hemlines please)
- Be an animal-friendly traveller. it is against our responsible travel principles to take guests to places that supply or serve foods that are on the endangered species list, such as whale, turtle, tiger, birds nest, pangolin and shark. We do not visit any restaurants that serve endangered species. Steer clear of venues that use animals for entertainment
- Say no to plastic – we'll provide you with a reusable cloth bag
- Bring your own refillable water bottle rather than buying bottled water. (Tap water is safe to drink in Japan).

Etiquette

Japan has a truly delightful culture of courtesy and you will find most people are unfailingly polite, helpful and courteous at all times.

Bowing is not only a sign of respect but is frequently used in greetings and farewells. The most useful, and most oft-used

Japanese word to learn is thank you – *arigatou*, or thank you very much – *arigatou gozaimasu!*

Shoes are usually removed to enter homes, temples and some businesses. Ensure you have clean socks!

Blowing your nose and eating in public are considered impolite.

Talking on public transport (trains and buses) is not encouraged.

When using chopsticks, do not stand them upright in your bowl, but rest them horizontally.

Slurping of green tea or noodles is encouraged as a sign of appreciation.

A couple of rules

Our philosophy of travel is one of respect towards everyone we encounter, in particular the local people who make our destinations such special places. You must at all times comply with local laws, customs, and drug and alcohol regulations.

Any illegal activity including the use of illegal drugs will not be tolerated. Possession or use of these substances is not only against the law but puts the rest of the group at risk. The host and guide have the right to expel any member of the group if drugs are found in their possession. If you feel any member of the group is behaving inappropriately in this or any other way, please let us know.

Travelling on a group trip

As you travel on a group trip you will be exposed to all the pleasures and maybe some of the frustrations of travelling in a group. We ask you to be understanding of the various needs and preferences of your group – patience with your fellow travellers is sometimes required for the benefit of everyone's travel experience.

Remember too that you have responsibilities to the group. If you are requested to be at a place at a certain time, please be on time and ensure that you don't keep the rest of the group waiting. We have found time and time again that the very best trips we operate are those where the dynamics within the group work well - this takes just a little effort on everyone's part.



Bring a sense of humour and a sense of adventure!

It's going to be a wonderful trip ☺

Any other questions? Just ask!

Email Susan RO at retreatrecreate@gmail.com