

JAPAN MINGEI & MOTTAINAI TOUR

17 OCT – 1 NOV 2027

retreat|recreate is delighted to present this small group women's tour – 15 nights/16 days focussed on the *mingei* (folkcraft) and *mottainai* (too good to waste!) philosophy of Japan.

On this brand new itinerary you'll visit specialist mingei museums, artisan studios, meet handcraft experts and explore several UNESCO World Heritage sites.

There'll be six private handcraft workshops based around traditional folkcrafts, and/or the principles of mottainai, including sashiko and boro (cloth repair) stitching, kintsugi (ceramics repairing with gold), chiku-chiku stitching, metal work, woodwork, and sakiori (rag rug) weaving. Enjoy presentations from a range of artists, collectors and curators, be inspired by traditional design and craftsmanship in Osaka, Kyoto, Tokyo, Niigata, Kanazawa and Sado Island.

You'll experience traditional Japanese culture and hospitality all in the company of a small group of likeminded handcraft enthusiasts.

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ITINERARY

as at September 2026



Day 1

Sunday 17 October

OSAKA

Konnichiwa! Welcome to our 16 days of *mingei* and *mottainai* themed explorations in Japan.

Today is arrival day so no activities are planned during the day. There will be a tour briefing at the hotel this evening at 5:00pm; please ensure you book a flight that allows you to attend this meeting, noting that it takes time to clear Customs, and then over an hour to travel from Kansai airport to the hotel. See the Trip Notes regarding arrival transfer options.

At the briefing, you'll receive your Welcome Pack, meet the guide, host and group, we'll run through the itinerary and introduce the themes of mingei and mottainai.

Following the briefing we'll enjoy a welcome dinner at one of our favourite Osaka restaurants and get to know each other.

Meals: Dinner



Day 2

Monday 18 October

KYOTO

The Mingei Movement began in Japan in the 1920s, led by the philosopher Yanagi Soetsu (author of 'The Beauty of Everyday Things') and potters Hamada Shoji and Kawaii Kanjiro. The movement was a conscious attempt to distinguish and celebrate the beauty of everyday items and functional household crafts, and can be seen as a reaction to the rapid modernisation occurring in Japan at the time. A visit to the **Osaka Mingei Museum** and its excellent collection of folk crafts is a great introduction to the theme of our tour. Its first director of the museum was the potter Shoji Hamada himself!

After lunch we'll head to Kyoto where we'll enjoy our first **workshop of the tour – learning the art of kintsugi**, the repairing of broken ceramics with gold. Mottainai is a Japanese phrase that expresses the regret felt over waste. Kintsugi is a perfect example of mottainai.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 3 Tuesday 19 October

KYOTO

Today we have three special visits in Kyoto. Firstly we will take you to a small but lovely **pottery museum** that showcases centuries-old handmade Raku-ware ceramics.

Following that we will enjoy a presentation at the home and **studio of one of Japan's famous indigo dye artisans**. The artist and his wife (a clothing designer) will show our group their enormous personal collection of Japanese antique indigo textiles. Their home is also filled with mingei items, such as ceramics by Kawaii Kanjiro and Bernard Leach, and paintings and poetry from the early 20th century.

Last of all, we will visit the former **home and studio of the potter Kawaii Kanjiro**, one of the three founders of the mingei movement. The house is filled with mingei furniture, woodwork and ceramics. You can also see his studio and the extraordinary 'climbing kiln' in the rear of the garden.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 4 Wednesday 20 October

KYOTO

Sashiko, meaning literally 'little stabs', is a technique using a running stitch to reinforce and prolong the life of a fabric or to stitch and recycle old pieces of cloth into new items. Sashiko created warmer and more durable fabrics. Decorative sashiko stitching developed out of this need for warmth and durability and became an embellishment while strengthening the cloth. This morning we have a **sashiko class** with our favourite Kyoto sashiko artist, during which we'll learn traditional sashiko stitch patterns on vintage Japanese textiles specially collected at Japanese flea markets.

In the spirit of mottainai, there's a saying in Japan that if a scrap of fabric can wrap three beans, it's big enough to save. Too good to waste!

The afternoon is free time for you to enjoy in Kyoto before we leave tomorrow.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 5 Thursday 21 October

KANAZAWA

Flea markets are always a highlight of our Japanese itineraries and this morning we'll visit one of the best – the monthly market held at Toji Temple on the 21st of each month. There are always excellent bargains to be found, whether you're after textiles, kokeshi dolls, washi paper, ceramics or woodcraft. If the shopping doesn't entice you, there's always excellent people watching, or you could explore the temple building. Toji temple pagoda has five storeys, making it one of the country's most important cultural sites. The five storeys represent earth, water, fire, wind and void (sky), symbolising the entire universe in Buddhism.

Then it's off to beautiful Kanazawa, via the shinkansen.

Pack an overnight bag as our luggage will be shipped separately to us – we'll be reunited with our luggage the day after tomorrow.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 6 Friday 22 October

KANAZAWA

In the morning we will explore the collection at the **National Crafts Museum**. The museum itself is housed in two Meiji era buildings, and the crafts within are the finest examples of traditional crafts primarily from the 20th century.

The afternoon is free time for you to further explore Kanazawa. Options include wandering the Higashi Chaya District (geisha district and historic buildings), visiting the famous 21st Century Art Gallery, or spending an hour or so strolling the stunning Kenrokuen Garden, one of Japan's 'Big Three Gardens'. It's quite beautiful and as a bonus, the Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of Traditional Arts & Crafts is located within the garden, if you're up for two craft museums in one day! Two further options are the D.T. Suzuki Museum, celebrating the life and philosophy of the man who brought Zen Buddhism to Japan, or the very interesting kimono museum.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 7 Saturday 23 October

JOHANA

Boarding our private coach, we'll head to Nanto, to **Kotokuji Temple**, a 500 year old Buddhist temple and mingei museum renowned for its connection to mingei woodblock artist Shiko Munakata.

The picturesque UNESCO World Heritage village of **Gokayama** in the Toyama mountains is famous for its thatched roof 'Gassho' houses. The village is quiet and uncrowded, with a 'living heritage' feel. We are privileged to enjoy a **private folkdance performance**, just for our group. Upstairs at the same house is a fascinating **silk museum**.

Our accommodation for the next two nights is at a beautiful traditional **temple stay!** This temple is famous for being the site where mingei founder Soetsu Yanagi lived while writing his mingei manifesto.

The temple features futons and tatami mats, shared toilet facilities, twin share rooms. See Trip Notes.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 8 Sunday 24 October **Day 9 Monday 25 October** **Day 10 Tuesday 26 October** **Day 11 Wednesday 27 October** **Day 12 Thursday 28 October**

JOHANA

This morning we'll have a traditional breakfast at our temple accommodation, before our **private tour of the temple** buildings themselves. One of the monks will show us around and we'll hear all about the temple's connection to Soetsu Yanagi. There will also be time to browse the mingei collection and shop at our accommodation building.

The afternoon is free time so you can explore the village, find a café, or relax with a book or craft project.

TAKAOKA

Continuing north towards Niigata, we'll stop at a well known wood carving district. In the morning we'll explore on foot and enjoy a **wood carving demonstration and sake cup carving experience**.

In the afternoon we have our very own **Orin workshop** with a master artisan. Orin are the beaten and shaped metal standing bells used in Buddhist temple rituals. This particular studio has been crafting orin bells for over one hundred years. Currently there are fewer than 10 craftsmen in Japan who can make orin by hand, and three of them are working at this workshop. We are truly in the hands of masters! Orin are made by a method called 'tankin' hammering, a traditional technique in which metal is beaten, forged, and tuned to create the mesmerising ringing sound.

NIIGATA

Today's first stop on our road trip to the north is **Toyama City Folkcraft Village**. Step back in time at this museum celebrating the history of Toyama, filled with items of daily life from the past.

Next up is a tour of the historic **Suwada factory**, famous makers of blades and clippers. We'll enjoy lunch here as well.

Continuing the metalwork theme of the last day or two, we'll make a stop at an **historic hand-hammered copperware studio** for a guided tour. There's also an excellent shop here if you're looking for unique traditional Japanese metalwork souvenirs of superb quality.

Later in the day we'll arrive at Niigata, a port city on the island of Honshu, famous for its food (seafood and rice), sake, and coastal culture.

NIIGATA

We have a special treat today, with a private **'Chiku-chiku' stitching workshop** with the delightful textile artist Akiko Ike! Chiku chiku is an onomatopoeic term that imitates the sound a needle makes when it repeatedly pierces cloth. Firmly within our mottainai theme, Ike san will lead us in a stitching class in which we'll make hanging decorations from pieces of old fabric, Ike san's own threads and other textile elements. This workshop encompasses the philosophies of mottainai AND wabi sabi.

We'll enjoy a delicious lunch prepared by local women, at the atelier by the sea.

We'll pack overnight bags again today, as our luggage will be forwarded to Sado Island for us.

SADO ISLAND

Today we head to Sado Island! We'll take the local ferry, so sit back and enjoy the view.

Sado Island is a small, peaceful island famous for its UNESCO World Heritage sites, old goldmines and beautiful sea views.

In the afternoon, we have a **sakiori (rag rug) weaving workshop** using traditional nemaribata floor looms where the weavers sit on the ground (similar to the backstrap looms of South America and Asia). Sakiori is the ultimate mottainai recycling craft. When cloth from garments or household goods is so worn that it can no longer be patched, it's torn into strips and woven to make new cloth, which can then become homewares or garments.

In the afternoon we'll explore more – including a red clay pottery studio and old gold mining sites.

Meals: Breakfast

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner



Day 13 Friday 29 October

SADO ISLAND

We have a busy morning today, exploring more of the island. We'll begin at one of the excellent **folk museums**, before exploring the historic old shipbuilding town, filled with atmospheric narrow streets and wooden houses. There's the option to experience riding a **traditional tarai-bune tub boat**! This is definitely something you are unlikely to experience anywhere else.

We'll lunch together in a historic merchant house before enjoying a free afternoon. You might relax at our lovely seaside hotel with its sweeping ocean views, or maybe enjoy an onsen (hot springs bath) overlooking the Sea of Japan.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 14 Saturday 30 October

TOKYO

Today is a travel day.

We'll farewell Sado Island and make our way to Tokyo.

We will take the ferry back to Niigata, then taxis to the train station, and from there travel by shinkansen (bullet train) to Tokyo.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 15 Sunday 31 October

TOKYO

A final full day of mingei and mottainai in the busy hub of Tokyo!

We'll begin the day by visiting the **Tokyo folk craft museum**. The sister museum to the one in Osaka that we visited on our first day, it is interesting to compare the two collections. The collection in Tokyo is housed in a stunning historic building that is as beautiful as the objects within. Make sure you take in the furnishings, curtains, floors and cabinets, for they are exquisite artefacts themselves.

We're expecting to end our tour with a **visit to the home of textiles expert Amy Katoh**. Amy will show us her fabulous collection of antique textiles and talk about her passion for mottainai. *(Amy will confirm closer to departure).*

Tonight the group will gather for a farewell dinner - time to reflect on this amazing adventure and enjoy a final meal together as a group.

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner



Day 16 Monday 1 November

TOKYO

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

If you'd like to stay on in Tokyo for a couple of days to explore, you're welcome to request additional nights here, subject to availability. Simply make the request on your Travel Details form.

Meals: Breakfast

Prices in AUD (Australian dollars):

Per person twin share: \$10,950
Single supplement: \$1500
(single supp. not applicable Days 7 & 8)

Inclusions:

- 15 nights in 3 or 4 star hotels & a traditional temple stay
- 15 breakfasts, 6 lunches, 4 dinners
- Transport: public transport, private coach, taxi, train, ferry.
- 6 handcraft workshops (in **red**)
- Multiple artisan studio visits, museums & cultural sites (noted in **red**)
- Entrance fees for all venues
- 2 x luggage transfers (Days 5&11)

Exclusions:

- International airfares
- Travel insurance
- Arrival & departure transfers
- Early check in/late check out
- Meals not noted on the itinerary
- Tip for our guide

Important Notes:

- This tour is fully escorted by a local English-speaking guide and a retreat|recreate host.
- The itinerary is full to ensure value for money. We recommend you add a few days before and after the tour.
- The very simple, traditional temple accommodation on days 7 & 8 involves sleeping on futons on tatami mats on the floor. All travellers will be paired up and will share twin rooms.
- Unfortunately we have limited capacity to accommodate dietary restrictions on this tour. See Trip Notes for details.
- Please note the fitness & mobility levels required to participate in this tour.