JAPAN BLUE TOUR

18 JAN – 2 FEB 2027
&
22 FEB – 9 MARCH 2027

retreat|recreate is delighted to present this small group women's tour – a 15 night/16-day indigo focussed 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 more than ten 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), *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 likeminded textile and indigo enthusiasts.

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ITINERARY

as october 2026





Day 1 ***Monday***

KYOTO **Hotel Resol Sanjo**

Konnichiwa! Welcome to our wintery 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. We strongly recommend you arrive a couple of days beforehand to recover from jetlag and explore Kyoto, as we have very limited time here.

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

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

Day 2 ***Tuesday***

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 renowned Kyoto indigo dye studio Miyabiori. 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 Kyoto-based Awo Fujimou studio for a tour and presentation from young inspirational indigo artist Mou san.

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: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 3 Wednesday

TOKUSHIMA Temple stay

Today, head to Tokushima on Shikoku island, Japan's premier indigo farming region. You'll spend the afternoon at Watanabe's - one of Tokushima's newest most modern indigo farms and production houses. You'll tour the farm and learn first hand about indigo farming.

IMPORTANT: **Tour 1** group will learn about sukumo, the Japanese indigo composting method of dyestuff production and rake the compost pile.
- Tour 2 group will learn about indigo seedling and cultivation, as by February the sukumo process has concluded and the next planting season begins. **The Tour 2 group** will also have the chance to dye a tenugui (Japanese hand towel) in the farm's indigo vats.

Tonight you have the experience of a lifetime, spending the night at a temple! Experience the Goma Fire Ritual after a delicious traditional meal.

IMPORTANT: Temple rooms on tour 1 feature futons on tatami mats, shared toilets, and communal baths and showers (onsen). The tour 2 temple rooms are Western style with private bathrooms.

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner



Day 4 Thursday

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 katazome workshop at the indigo centre Waza no Yakata in Tokushima.

After the workshop, 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!' You'll tour the facility, see the *nedoko* (literally the 'bedroom' where the sukumo is fermented) and learn about the farm's traditions.

Continuing the *katazome* theme from earlier in the day, visit the studio of talented *katazome* artist Hirada Shiro and enjoy a studio tour and presentation. Shiro san uses traditional techniques to create modern, stylised patterns. This visit is a special treat for design and pattern lovers.

Tonight you'll settle into a modern hotel situated in the centre of town. You'll stay at this hotel for the remainder of the Tokushima part of the tour.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 5 Friday

TOKUSHIMA Hotel Sunroute

Today you will 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.

There'll be a relaxed afternoon exploring a nearby historic streetscape, full of traditional buildings, including the previous home of a wealthy indigo merchant now turned into a museum and shop. We'll have lunch in this very pretty street too, at one of our favourite restaurants.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 6 Saturday

TOKUSHIMA Hotel Sunroute

In the morning the group will visit Mori Toki 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.

Later on, tour the fourth generation Nagao Shijira weaving studio, one of only two studios left where they produce 'shijira' style weaving, a technique local to this area. The technique was created by a local woman in the 19th century who was inspired by the texture of fabric left out in the rain. The studio weaves commercial quantities of cloth and uses a blend of synthetic and natural indigo yarn that they dye themselves.

There'll be time for a breather this afternoon. Explore a little of Tokushima at your leisure, maybe take in a performance of Awa Odori the folkdance that Tokushima is famous for, or spend the afternoon relaxing in the hotel's onsen.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 7 Sunday

TOKUSHIMA Hotel Sunroute

Today, spend the day at a 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 talented and lovely *shibori* artist Chiaki Murakami. Chiaki san will lead 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 and is always a highlight of our blue tours.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 8 Monday

KURUME Hotel Yame Green

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 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

KURUME Hotel Yame Green

Today we have a fabulous day filled with indigo and *kasuri* studios, and a hands on workshop. Beginning at the beautiful traditional home of Shoji Yamamura, 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 from Takeshi Yamamura. The *kasuri* here features a modern spin on traditional patterns and it's interesting to compare the two neighbours' different styles. (Also, their century old indigo vats buried in an earthen floor are a sight to behold).

Lunch at a delightful café will follow, and then in the afternoon enjoy a tour of Marugame Ikat Factory, a *kasuri* cloth production house where you'll view the mechanised loom room and enjoy a presentation from the young 3rd generation owners. Their clothing is fabulous if you are looking for wearable souvenirs.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 10 Wednesday

KURUME Hotel Yame Green

Your full day workshop today promises you will 'experience the Kurume Kasuri process in one day instead of three months'. At *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 'shopportunities' you can indulge in if you so desire. However there's absolutely no pressure to purchase).

Today's all day workshop is another highlight in this rich itinerary.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 11 Thursday

HAKATA Hotel Resol Trinity

Today, visit another female indigo 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*. (This visit is TBC closer to departure).

Lunch today is in a café in a traditional wooden building in Akitsyki castle town. There'll be the chance to explore the historic street and stretch your legs before the afternoon workshop.

This afternoon, depart temporarily from indigo, to experience botanical dyeing with cherry blossom at Yumezaiku! You'll each dye your own beautiful pink scarf. There may be some other botanical dye options available if pink isn't your thing.

This evening you'll spend the night in the city of Hakata before you head to Amami Island tomorrow.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 12 Friday

AMAMI Bashayama Resort

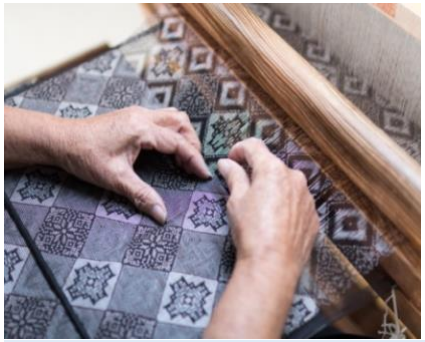
An early start this morning as the group heads to the airport to fly to Amami Island. Breakfast is at own cost at the airport before the short flight.

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 at Kanai Kogei, learning the traditional Amami art of mud dyeing with the bark of the sharinbai tree (a hawthorn) followed by the local iron-rich mud. You may bring one item of your own to dye in the mud baths and/or sharinbai vats if you wish!

After lunch, visit Tatsugo 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).

Dinner this evening is a feast at the beachfront restaurant of our friendly family-run small hotel.

Meals: Lunch, Dinner



Day 13 Saturday

AMAMI Bashayama Resort

This morning's visit is to Oshima Tsumugi Village, a silk weaving centre to learn all about the intricate and highly prized 1300 year old art of *Oshima Tsumugi*. Woven with silk threads that have been dyed up to 80 times with dye from the sharinbai tree, and mud, the finely patterned silk cloth is highly sought after by kimono makers (and wearers). We promise you'll be blown away by Oshima Tsumugi silk.

Next, visit the Amami Nature Observation Forest with its panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean. You'll enjoy a guided nature walk here. Part of the Ryukyu Islands and known for its sub tropical climate, Amami has cherry blossom season from early January to mid February.

Finally, enjoy the island's nature at Amami Park, before your final destination of the day, the Isson Tanaka Art Museum. The museum celebrates the life of Amami painter Isson Kazamura Tanaka who was famous for his paintings capturing the wildlife and landscapes of his adopted tropical island home.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 14 Sunday

AMAMI Bashayama Resort

Two big workshops today for your last full day! We'll split the group into two – one team will enjoy a mud and indigo dyeing workshop at Yumeori no Sato, to create a truly special piece of traditional Amami art. The process is quite involved, with multiple dips into the indigo vats, then followed up with several mud baths for a multi-hued finished item of white, light blue, dark blue and black and all variations in between.

Meanwhile the other team will enjoy a silk 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.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 15 Monday

OSAKA Hotel Resol Trinity

There's a relaxed start today so you can fully enjoy breakfast in the hotel's beachfront restaurant with its beautiful ocean views, or stroll the shore in search of shells and beach glass.

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, there's the option to head out and explore Osaka's Nakanoshima district.

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

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.

If you'd like to stay on in Osaka for a couple of days to explore its famous foodie scene, the castle, or its fabulous folkcraft museum, you're welcome to request additional nights here, subject to availability. Simply make the request on your Travel Details form.

Meals: Breakfast

Inclusions:

- 15 nights in 3 & 4 star hotels
- 14 breakfasts,7 lunches,4 dinners
- Transport: public transport, private coach, taxis, trains, 2 x domestic economy flights
- NUMEROUS workshops (in red)
- Artisan studios, farm visits & galleries (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:

- Please note the two important differences between tours 1 and 2. Tour 2 is led by our guide only. Tour 1 will be led by our guide *and* a retreat|recreate host. The other difference is in the farm activities outlined on Day 3.
- 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, our policy regarding sharing of rooms, and the overnight temple stay accommodation (futons, shared bathroom facilities).