JAPAN GARDEN TOUR

26 November – 10 December 2026

retreat|recreate is delighted to present this fabulous 14 night/15-day autumnal garden tour of Japan

Come and explore this fascinating country through the lens of its botanic delights. Experience various types of Japanese gardens – dry landscapes, moss gardens, pond & stroll gardens, Zen rock gardens, water & mirror gardens and bamboo groves, plus lush landscapes and serene vistas.

Visit our favourite botanical sites including two of the famous 'Big Three Gardens of Japan', Zen temples set in stunning garden landscapes, a UNESCO World Heritage-listed village of thatched roof 'Gassho-zukuri' farmhouses, a traditional papermaking village, world famous museums, and stunning cultural sites in Tokyo, Shogawa, Kanazawa and Kyoto. Participate in multiple hands-on botanical experiences including a bonsai workshop, an ikebana class, a bamboo carving demonstration and a botanical dyeing workshop.

Enjoy a traditional tea ceremony, spend a memorable night in a Buddhist temple and witness the morning fire and drumming rituals, be inspired by superb garden design and craftsmanship, and experience traditional Japanese culture and hospitality, all in the company of a small group of likeminded garden enthusiasts. It's highlight after highlight after once in a lifetime experience on this tour. We hope you love it!

W: www.retreatrecreate.com
E: retreatrecreate@gmail.com

ITINERARY

as at November 2026





Day 1 *Thursday 26 November*

TOKYO Hotel Resol Ueno

Konnichiwa! Welcome to Japan! If you haven't booked an arrival transfer through us, please make your own way to the hotel.

There will be a **tour briefing** this evening in the lobby of Hotel Resol Ueno at 6:00pm (final timing TBC via WhatsApp). You'll receive your Welcome Pack, we'll run through the itinerary for the next two weeks and you'll meet your guide and fellow travellers. Following the briefing meeting, enjoy a **welcome dinner** at a delightful local restaurant.

Meals: Dinner

Day 2 *Friday 27 November*

TOKYO Hotel Resol Ueno

Board your private coach and prepare for a full day trip today. Enjoy the varying scenery as you head out of Tokyo to Mito, capital city of Ibaraki Prefecture and home to one of **Japan's Big Three Gardens**, the exquisite and hugely famous **Kairakuen Garden.**

Kairakuen means 'park to be enjoyed together' and unlike the other two of the Big Three landscape gardens, Kairakuen served not only the ruling lord when it was created in 1841 but was also open for public enjoyment. The garden is famous for having more than 3000 plum trees, a bamboo grove, cedar wood and the '**Kobuntei'**, a traditional Japanese style building with stunning painted screens. Iconic vistas of the garden and nearby Lake Senba can be enjoyed from the Kobuntei.

On the return journey to Tokyo you'll stop to enjoy the vibrant beauty of **Momiji Valley Park,** where over 170 maple trees paint the landscape. The serene pond mirrors the autumnal hues of the changing leaves. Your guide may lead the group in a **forest bathing** meditation, depending on the weather.

Meals: Breakfast (cash provided)



Day 3 Saturday 28 November

TOKYO Hotel Resol Ueno

After breakfast you'll begin with a visit to **Shunkaen Bonsai Museum** and garden. You'll be immersed in the art and tradition of bonsai through a guided garden tour, followed by a private mini **bonsai-making workshop**.

The group will lunch together at a local restaurant.

In the afternoon, visit the inspiring and very beautiful **Koishikawa Korakuen Garden**. Created in 1629, it's the oldest existing feudal lord's garden from the Edo period. Arguably the most beautiful landscape garden in Tokyo, it offers stunning vistas and reproductions of traditional Japanese and Chinese scenery in every season. As you walk the circular path around the pond, enjoy a different view every few steps. Its peaceful atmosphere makes it hard to believe you're in central Tokyo.

Meals: Breakfast (cash provided),Lunch



Day 4 Sunday 29 November

TOKYO Hotel Resol Ueno

A change of pace today with a relaxed morning strolling the fascinating **Edo Open Air Architecture Museum**. Explore leafy streets filled with preserved and relocated Japanese houses and shops from various periods in Japan's history. The entire park is a wonderful way to experience Japanese daily life in different eras, from the humble 200 year old farmhouse to the magnificent 20th century home of a local noble. Several of the more elite homes sit within beautiful garden settings.

You'll return to central Tokyo at around 3:30pm and there will be a little **free time** to pursue your own interests. It's your last day in Tokyo so grab the opportunity to catch an art exhibition, or visit one of Japan's many other gardens. We will provide a list of recommendations closer to departure but an excellent suggestion is the very beautiful Nezu Museum with its excellent range of Asian artworks and stunning garden. After you've explored the artworks, take a stroll through the garden or enjoy the view from the light-filled café as you indulge in a delicious afternoon tea.

Meals: Breakfast (cash provided)



Day 5 Monday 30 November

SHOGAWA Yumetsuzuri

Pack an overnight bag as your main luggage will be sent ahead to Kanazawa.

Enjoy a day of quintessential Japanese experiences today! Take a *shinkansen* (bullet train) to Takaoka on the other side of Honshu island; sit back and relax for a couple of hours as you speed across the country at 300 km per hour. In Takaoka your private coach takes you to **Gokayama Village, a UNESCO World Heritage Site,** a living village (ie. not a museum, but an inhabited village) known for its traditional Gassho-zukuri thatched roof houses and traditional landscape of beech, Mongolian oak and horse chestnut forest. At the village you'll learn all about the tradition of **sericulture (silk production),** an important traditional botanical craft of the area, at a small museum. You'll also be treated to a private performance of the *kokirikouta*, Japan's oldest folk song.

A truly magnificent ***kaiseki* dinner** and a soak in the **open air onsen** at your very beautiful traditional Japanese style accommodation provide the perfect ending to an amazing day.

Note: tonight's accommodation features communal bathing facilities (hot spring bath).

Meals: Breakfast (cash provided), Dinner



Day 6 Tuesday 1 December

KANAZAWA Resol Trinity

Begin the day with a boat cruise along the **Shogawa Gorge**! Relax and enjoy the stunning views of the deep green Shogawa River and the nearby mountains landscape.

Your private coach will then take you to a hidden gem of a temple; a serene sanctuary deeply rooted in local folk art traditions. A private guided tour of **Zentoku-ji Temple** will be followed by a group lunch served at the restaurant of the temple's own **folk craft museum** which celebrates the father of *mingei* (folk craft), Yanagi Soetsu.

Continue on to the lovely city of **Kanazawa**, sometimes known as Little Kyoto, where you can check in and relax at the hotel, and be reunited with your luggage. The rest of the afternoon and evening are free for you to follow your own interests. You could explore **Omicho Market**, known as the kitchen of Kanazawa, head to the **Nomura Samurai House**, or wander the **Higashi-chaya district**, the pretty geisha area filled with beautiful old wooden tea houses, gold merchants and little shops.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 7 Wed 2 December

KANAZAWA Resol Trinity

Today's highlight is another of **Japan's Big Three Gardens**, the famous **Kenrokuen Japanese Garden**. Stroll the meandering paths through this stunning Edo period garden, enjoying views of the lake, one of the country's oldest fountains, the famous stone lantern and numerous tea houses. The garden features all six of the attributes of 'a perfect landscape': spaciousness, seclusion, artifice, antiquity, waterways, and panoramas.

Speaking of tea houses, a highlight is **a tea ceremony** within the garden where you'll learn all about The Way of Tea, view a private ceremony, learn how to properly use a *chasen* (tea whisk) and then prepare your own cup of *matcha*.

You'll have the opportunity to visit the **Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of Traditional Art and Crafts** which is located within the garden.

Later in the day, visit the stunning **D.T. Suzuki Museum,** a Zen masterpiece with its serene Water Mirror Garden, Vestibule Garden, and Roji Garden. The beautiful walk along the canal to get to the museum is a highlight in itself.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 8 Thursday 3 December

MT SHIGISAN Giyokuzoin Temple

Pack an overnight bag as your main luggage will be sent ahead to Kyoto.

Board your private coach once more as you journey to Mt Shigisan. On the way, stop at the traditional washi (Japanese paper) village of Echizen and visit the **Udatsu Paper & Craft Museum t**o see paper being made the traditional way.

Later in the afternoon, you'll experience one of the (many) highlights of this itinerary – **an overnight stay in a Buddhist temple** atop Mt Shigisan. Soak up the serene atmosphere by strolling the temple grounds at night, enjoy a *Shojin ryori* meal (traditional Buddhist cuisine) and sleep on futons and tatami mats in traditional Japanese rooms.

Spending the night at the temple is a once in a lifetime experience that we promise you'll remember forever.

Note: the accommodation tonight is simple and monastic in style, not luxurious. Be prepared for thin futons on the floor, and communal bathing facilities only (onsen hot spring bath).

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner



Day 9 Friday 4 December

KYOTO Hotel Resol Sanjo

Rise early (if you wish) to attend the 5:30am sunrise **Goma Prayer Rituals with fire and drumming** – more once in a lifetime experiences! The sunrise views from atop the mountain are worth the early start. After a Shojin breakfast enjoy a free morning to explore the temple grounds or participate in an optional Buddhist meditation session (at own cost).

Leaving the temple behind, head to a traditional *chasen* village for a **tea whisk making demonstration and workshop at the studio of Tango Tanimura.** Chasen are the traditional bamboo whisks used when making matcha, or green tea. Carved from a single piece of bamboo, a chasen is instrumental in traditional Japanese tea ceremonies. The studio you'll visit is one of Japan's best, providing bespoke chasen to noble families and premier tea masters. This chasen studio is in a pretty garden setting in an out of the way village where there are now only a few families making chasen the traditional way. There is a bamboo grove nearby where the artisans gather their material.

Arrive Kyoto and settle in for a few nights!

Meals: Breakfast



Day 10 Saturday 5 December

KYOTO Hotel Resol Sanjo

Hello beautiful Kyoto!

The **Tofuku-ji Temple** complex with its 25 sub temples, is one of the earliest Zen temples in Kyoto (dating from 1236) and is one of the most visually striking with its dramatic gorge filled with 2000 maples, beautiful **Tsutenkyo Bridge**, and famous **Shigemori Gardens**. Renowned garden designer Mirei Shigemori specialised in subverting traditional zen design, incorporating concrete cylinders in gravel instead of rocks, and contained checkerboards of moss rather than a naturalistic style, and while his designs may have rocked the establishment, they have resulted in some of Japan's most interesting and unusual gardens.

You'll see the **Komyo-in moon temple** and **Hojo Garden**, and enjoy a beautiful lunch at the **Rikkyoku-an** sub temple. A local restaurant creates a special pop up dining experience for the autumn season.

Later, learn all about *ikebana*, the traditional Japanese art of flower arranging, in a **private ikebana workshop** at Sennyuji Temple, an imperial temple not normally open to the public.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 11 Sunday 6 December

KYOTO Hotel Resol Sanjo

Another highlight today, with a full day trip into the mountains to visit the very special **Miho Museum**. This world famous gallery is a bucket list item for anyone interested in art, architecture and landscape.

Designed by renowned architect I.M. Pei for a private collector, the building is situated mostly underground, carved out of a rocky mountaintop. The dramatic entrance to the gallery is by tunnel and tree lined walkway, inspired by the notion of ethereal utopia as described in an ancient Chinese poem.

The museum hosts an extensive collection of eastern art, enough to keep you enthralled for several hours. There's also a lovely café where you can lunch (at own cost) while enjoying views of the surrounding hills, and reflecting on the extraordinary art around you.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 12 Monday 7 December

KYOTO Hotel Resol Sanjo

Another full day trip today as you travel outside Kyoto to rural **Ohara** and discover the art of **botanical dyeing in a private workshop** just for your group at Ohara Kobo Studio.

Your delightful hosts will show you around their farm and teach you the art of natural dyeing. Then you'll **harvest dye plants** directly from the fields and learn the process used to extract dye with which to colour fabric and/or yarn. It's a fabulous and fun day playing with the dye pots and experiencing the magic (and sometimes unexpected results!) of botanical dyeing.

Lunch will be a delicious bento box meal provided by your generous hosts.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch



Day 13 Tuesday 8 December

KYOTO Hotel Resol Sanjo

Today you'll explore some of Kyoto's best Zen temple gardens, beginning at the **UNESCO World Heritage site of Ryoan-ji.** Within the walls of the temple lies the famous Zen rock garden (dry landscape) where 15 rocks lie in a gravel setting. The rest of the temple grounds are given over to a lush strolling garden featuring maples overlooking a lily pond said to have inspired Monet.

This will be followed by a visit to **Myoshin-ji temple**, a monastery complex resembling a medieval village. The complex houses more sub temples than any other and in the oldest one (Taizo-in, founded in 1404) you'll have the privilege of not only a private guided tour of the garden by one of the senior monks, but also **a matcha green tea experience.** This temple visit was a highlight of the 2025 tour!

Options for the afternoon include a walk to Fushimi Inari Shrine, or free time.

Meals: Breakfast



Day 14 Wed 9 December

KYOTO Hotel Resol Sanjo

This morning, enjoy a relaxed stroll through **Gion**, one of the geisha entertainment districts of Kyoto. Admire the architecture of the tea houses and *machiya* (traditional wooden houses) lining the pretty streets. And then for a complete contrast, visit Gion's local temple, **Kennin-ji**, the oldest Zen temple in Kyoto. It was founded in 1202 by the monk Myoan Eisai who brought new Zen teachings from China and founded the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism in Japan.

Equally importantly, Eisai san brought tea seeds back to Japan and promoted the drinking of tea for medicinal purposes, sowing the seeds (literally) for the later development of the Japanese tea ceremony. The gardens at Kennin-ji feature neatly trimmed tea bushes in his honour. There's also a trio of rocks said to represent Buddha and two attendants.

Enjoy some **free time** this afternoon before reconvening for your final **farewell dinner**. We have planned a *very* special treat in a very beautiful location to finish off your tour in appropriate botanical style!

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner



Day 15 Thursday 10 December

KYOTO

Sadly, your tour comes to an end today after breakfast.

It's time to pack up your memories and souvenirs before saying a fond farewell to Japan and each other.

We hope you've enjoyed the botanical highlights of the last two weeks. We are incredibly proud of this relatively new itinerary and hope you enjoyed it as much as we did putting it together.

A list of suggested galleries, museums, restaurants and additional gardens will be uploaded to your tour page to help you plan your free time and/or additional days.

Meals: Breakfast

Inclusions:

- 14 nights/15 days accommodation in 3.5 to 4 star Western and Japanese style accommodations plus a temple stay
- 14 x breakfasts*, 4 x lunches, 4 x dinners *(* update: as our Tokyo hotel is ceasing o offer breakfast as of November 2026, we will provide you with cash of Y1000 per person per day to purchase your own)*
- Transport: public transport (train, shinkansen, bus), private coach, taxi
- Four botanical themed hands-on workshops and experiences
- Guided tours, tea ceremony, fire & drumming ceremonies
- Entrance to all gardens, museums, and excursion venues
- Luggage transfers between cities
- Services of a local English-speaking guide

Exclusions:

- International airfares
- Arrival & departure transfers *(can be arranged at additional cost)*
- Travel insurance (*required*)
- Excess baggage costs
- Visas and passport fees
- Early check in or late check out *(can be arranged at additional cost)*
- Personal spending
- Meals and drinks other than those specified in the itinerary
- Beverages with meals
- Tip for your wonderful guide at conclusion of tour

Notes:

- This trip is for active, adventurous garden enthusiasts who have a curiosity to delve deep into Japanese culture and are keen to explore Japan through the lens of its 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 enough! We are not horticultural experts or landscape designers ourselves, however we are garden and nature enthusiasts. This tour is focussed on enjoying the aesthetics of Japanese gardens, rather than ticking off a list of Latin-named botanical specimens
- This itinerary must be read in conjunction with the Booking Conditions and the Trip Notes, to ensure the trip is right for you. Please ensure you read the health and safety notes, and the fitness and mobility requirements. You must be fit and mobile to participate in this tour
- The itinerary is very full to ensure value for money, although there are a couple of brief periods of free time. We *strongly recommend* you add a few days before and/or after the tour for independent exploration and leisure time.