

ESSENTIAL JAPAN

Tokyo - Kyoto - Nara - Osaka



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

ALUMNI

TRAVELING CYCLONES. ➔

US departure date: **May 29, 2027** |
Tokyo land tour start date: **May 30, 2027** |
Osaka return date: **June 8, 2027**

11 Days from: **\$4298**



START YOUR ADVENTURE

Dear Young Alumni and Friends!

Can you think of a better way to travel than with fellow Iowa State University young alumni?

The Traveling Cyclones young alumni travel program, designed for recent grads in their 20s and 30s, offers you this opportunity by bringing you together with individuals in the same age range, with similar backgrounds and experiences, while enriching you on well-designed, hassle-free tours of the world.

These programs provide social, cultural, and recreational activities and many opportunities for learning, enrichment and enjoying a connection back to Iowa State. Our journeys are of great quality and value, operated by a travel company with over 50 years of experience in the young travel market.

In this brochure you will find a detailed itinerary, travel dates and pricing.

If you have any questions about this tour, please contact our tour operator, AESU Alumni World Travel, by calling 800-638-7640 or email alumni@aesu.com.

To make an online booking, please visit our young alumni tour landing page www.aesu.com/iastate and select this tour to be directed to the tour web site.

We are looking forward to traveling with you this coming season.

Sincerely,



Lainey Heck
Associate Director of Travel
Iowa State University Foundation

Travel insurance is compulsory. Iowa State offers travel insurance. To learn more or secure your own travel insurance, visit: <https://select.travelinsure.com/?pcode=32230>

WHAT'S INCLUDED

Japan is a rush of contrasts, and that's what makes it unforgettable. One minute you are strolling through ancient temples, the next you are under neon lights in the city that never seems to sleep. Get swept up in Tokyo's buzz, wander Kyoto's timeless streets, and dive into the late-night energy of Osaka's Dotonbori neighborhood. Feel the thrill of the shinkansen bullet train, savor street food and hidden izakayas and catch that perfect shot of Mt. Fuji. Dive into a traditional tea ceremony, where every gesture and flavor tells a story, then jump back into the city's energy and discover your next adventure. This journey isn't just about seeing Japan — it's about living it; with stories you'll be telling long after you are home.

11-DAY PACKAGE

Transportation and Lodging

- 9 nights in 3 or 4-star hotels or better, 2-share rooms with private bath/shower
- All intra-Japan transportation by private motor coach as per itinerary
- One-way Shinkansen bullet train from Tokyo to Kyoto (ordinary class)
- Airport transfers included with purchased AESU group airfare

Meals

- 9 breakfasts
- 3 dinners
- 2 lunches

Activities & Admissions

- Guided city tours led by a local English-speaking expert in Tokyo, Kyoto, Nara, and Osaka
- Visits to temples and shrines including
 - Sensoji
 - Meiji Jingu
 - Fushimi Inari
 - Kinkakuji
 - Nijo Castle
- Hakone Ropeway and Lake Ashi cruise
- Hakone Open-Air Museum
- Traditional tea ceremony in Kyoto
- Access to scenic views of Mt. Fuji
- Entry to parks and cultural districts:
 - Nara Park
 - Arashiyama District
 - Dotonbori
 - Umeda Sky Building

Sights & Highlights

- Tokyo: Imperial Palace, Asakusa, Akihabara, Harajuku, Shibuya
- Hakone: Owakudani Valley, Lake Ashi, Mt. Fuji vistas
- Kyoto: Fushimi Inari, Kinkakuji (Golden Pavilion), Nijo Castle, Arashiyama bamboo grove, Gion district
- Nara: Todaiji Temple, Nara Park deer
- Osaka: Dotonbori district, Umeda Sky Building, Shinsekai, Osaka waterfront

Optional Excursions (not included in land package price):

- Sumo wrestling training and sushi making

Also Included

A private tour director for the entire duration of the land tour. All service charges and local taxes are covered. Airfare is an additional cost.

EXPERIENCES

This trip has been carefully designed for young travelers and features fantastic inclusions and highlights. For a glossary of these key aspects, visit: www.aesu.com/experiences



ACTIVITY LEVEL: MODERATE

This tour requires standing and walking for some extended periods of time during city or nature tours, museum visits, and/or outdoor activities.



HOTELS

Hotels are centrally located and many offer great extra amenities such as pools, gyms or rooftop bars. All land package rates are based on two people sharing a room. If a single room is desired, a supplement of \$1275 applies. If traveling solo and not wanting to pay the single supplement, AESU will attempt to arrange a share with a same-gender traveler. If a share cannot be arranged the single supplement will apply.

TOUR DIRECTORS

Our qualified tour directors and staff of local experts mean a trouble-free journey with the added security of group travel. Show your tour director and driver your appreciation with a tip. We suggest \$8-10 per person/per day for your tour director and \$4-5 per person/per day for your driver. To learn more visit www.aesu.com/tour-directors

ITINERARY

DAY 1 – FLIGHT TO JAPAN

We board an overnight flight to Tokyo, already imagining the neon lights, the rhythm of the world’s largest metropolis, and the mix of ancient traditions waiting for us on the other side.

Meals: In-flight

DAY 2 – LAND TOUR START DAY: TOKYO

We land in Tokyo and step into a city that feels like the future yet holds centuries of history. After checking into our hotel, there is time to rest or wander the streets — where vending machines glow on every corner and locals rush past in perfect rhythm. In the evening, we gather for a welcome dinner, our first taste of Japanese cuisine, and toast to the adventures ahead.

Inclusion: Airport transfer with purchased AESU group airfare | Welcome orientation | Welcome dinner

Meals: Dinner

DAY 3 – TOKYO

The day starts at the Imperial Palace before winding into Asakusa, where the giant red lantern of Sensoji Temple welcomes us through the gate. The temple grounds are alive with incense smoke, fortune slips, and locals offering prayers. Just outside, Nakamise Street stretches out in a colorful line of shops selling traditional snacks, souvenirs, and sweets — perfect for grazing as we explore. From here, we shift gears and head into Akihabara, Tokyo’s “electric town.” Once a hub for electronics, it’s now the center of gaming, anime, and manga culture. Neon shopfronts, arcades, and quirky cafés line the streets, and there’s time to wander and take it all in. Later, we find calm again at Meiji Jingu Shrine, a Shinto sanctuary set inside a vast forest that feels like a world away from the city. Then, it’s back to the buzz of modern Tokyo on Takeshita Street in Harajuku, where pop culture, fashion trends, and sweets piled high with whipped cream make for a sensory overload. By evening, we head into Shibuya, the beating heart of Tokyo nightlife. After catching the famous scramble crossing, we dive into a guided food tour that introduces us to izakayas, street stalls, and hidden eateries where locals gather. From yakitori skewers to regional specialties, dinner tonight is a rolling feast through one of Tokyo’s most energetic neighborhoods.

Inclusion: Guided tour of Tokyo, led by a local English-speaking guide

Sights to see: Imperial Palace | Sensoji Temple in Asakusa | Tsukiji’s market | Meiji Jingu Shrine | Shinjuku district

Meals: Breakfast | Dinner

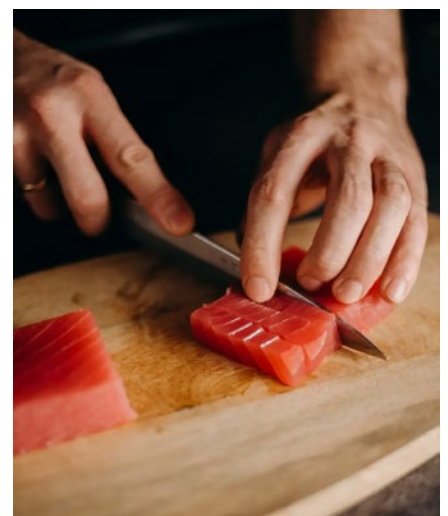
DAY 4 – TOKYO

We enjoy today and explore Tokyo on our own. If you opt to join our excursion this morning, step into the hidden world of sumo. Inside a training stable, wrestlers practice with powerful rituals passed down for centuries. Afterward, we trade the spectator role for hands-on fun: a sushi-making class where lunch is whatever we manage to roll. The evening is open—perfect for chasing down your favorite dish, whether it’s sizzling yakitori or steaming bowls of tonkotsu ramen, washed down with sake or a local craft beer.

Inclusion: Free day to explore Tokyo

Meals: Breakfast

Optional activity: Sumo training stable visit and sushi-making class



DAY 5 – TOKYO – MT. FUJI

This morning, we trade Tokyo’s skyline for mountain air as we journey to Hakone, a lakeside town famous for hot springs and views of Mt. Fuji. Our adventure takes us high above the volcanic landscape on the Hakone Ropeway, a gondola ride that floats over Owakudani Valley, where clouds of sulfur steam rise from the earth. On clear days, the view of Mt. Fuji from here is unforgettable. Don’t miss trying the local specialty — eggs hard-boiled in the hot springs, their shells turned black from the volcanic minerals, said to add years to your life. From the Ropeway we descend to Lake Ashi, where we board a cruise across the caldera lake, surrounded by lush mountains and—if the skies are kind—Fuji’s snow-capped peak in the distance. After lunch in Hakone, we explore the Hakone Open-Air Museum, where sculpture and modern art are scattered across gardens and mountain backdrops, featuring works by Picasso, Henry Moore, and Japanese artists. By evening, we return to Tokyo, with the night free to explore more of the city on your own — whether that’s a quiet izakaya or the endless neon of Shibuya.

Inclusion: Guided visit to Hakone and Mt. Fuji, led by a local English-speaking guide | Transportation by private motor coach

Sights to see: Lake Ashi | Hakone Ropeway | Owakudani Valley | Mt. Fuji | Hakone open air museum | Lake Ashi Cruise

Meals: Breakfast | Lunch



DAY 6 – TOKYO - KYOTO

We board the Shinkansen, Japan’s bullet train, and in just 2.5 hours we cross the country at nearly 200 mph. Bento boxes in hand, we watch tea fields and villages blur past, and if skies are clear, Mt. Fuji makes one last appearance. Arriving in Kyoto, we are welcomed into the quiet elegance of a tea ceremony, each movement deliberate and meaningful. Later, we walk beneath endless red torii gates at Fushimi Inari, paths winding into the hillside. The night is free — lanterns glow in Gion, the geisha district, while lively bars and noodle shops tempt us to stay out late.

Inclusion: Transfer to train station | Separate luggage transfer from Tokyo to Kyoto (same day delivery) | English-speaking assistance for train station transfer | Shinkansen bullet train from Tokyo to Kyoto | Welcome by English-speaking guide upon arrival in Kyoto | Japanese tea ceremony | Fushimi Inari Taisha | Gion District

Meals: Breakfast | Lunch



DAY 7 – KYOTO

Kyoto is where Japan’s history comes alive, and today we walk right into it. The morning begins at Kinkakuji, the Golden Pavilion, its top floors shimmering in gold leaf and reflecting perfectly in the still pond below. From there, we step into the world of the shogun at Nijo Castle, with its imposing gates, painted screens, and “nightingale floors” that chirp as you walk—an old security measure against intruders. By midday, we cross into the scenic Arashiyama District, where mountains meet riverbanks. We have free time to grab lunch from one of the small, cozy restaurants before wandering through shops and traditional streets. If you are up for it, walk the paths beneath the famous bamboo groves, where towering green stalks sway gently overhead. As evening falls, the choice is yours — return to the quiet charm of Kyoto’s backstreets, or join the crowds in lively Gion, the city’s entertainment quarter.

Inclusion: Tour of Kyoto, led by a local English-speaking guide | Private motor coach

Sights to see: Kinkakuji Temple | Nijo Castle | Arashiyama District

Meals: Breakfast



DAY 8 – KYOTO

We escape Kyoto for a day of mountain air and timeless tradition. We begin with a scenic hike from Kurama to Kifune, where mossy cedar forests, mountain streams, and the sacred halls of Kurama-dera Temple set the scene. At the end of the trail, we are rewarded with a traditional riverside lunch in Kifune, the town famous for its shrines dedicated to water and love. Returning to Kyoto, we shift from nature to culture with a Samurai Kembu demonstration and hands-on lesson — donning a kimono or hakama, practicing sword movements, and discovering the artistry of Japan’s legendary warriors.

Inclusion: Assistance of a local English-speaking guide | Private motor coach | Kurama Kifune Hiking | Samurai Kembu experience, demonstration, show + lesson

Meals: Breakfast | Lunch

DAY 9 – KYOTO – NARA - OSAKA

We trade Kyoto’s calm for a day packed with contrasts, traveling by private coach with a local English-speaking guide who keeps the journey fun and full of stories you won’t find in a guidebook. First stop: Nara, where history meets a little bit of magic. Inside the massive wooden halls of Todaiji Temple, a towering Great Buddha greets us with quiet power. Step outside and the mood shifts, Nara Park’s deer roam freely, nudging visitors for snacks and bowing politely in return. By afternoon, we roll into Osaka, a city that feels like it runs on pure energy. The vibe is electric: the neon glow of Dotonbori, street food sizzling at every corner, and oversized signs that practically beg for your next photo op. We cap things off high above it all at the Umeda Sky Building, where glass elevators and an open-air observation deck put the city at our feet—an epic view to toast the night ahead. From ancient icons to late-night neon, this day is all about the mix that makes Japan unforgettable.

Inclusion: Private motor coach from Kyoto to Osaka via Narav | Services of a local English-speaking guide | Visit to Nara Park | See Todaiji Temple | Osaka’s Dotonbori District | Umeda Sky Building

Meals: Breakfast



DAY 10 – OSAKA

Today we make Osaka our own. Sleep in, browse the city’s shops, or revisit neighborhoods that caught our eye. Some may head to Shinsekai for retro vibes and kushikatsu skewers, while others might dive into the city’s café culture or explore the waterfront. Food lovers could even visit the Cup Noodles Museum in Ikeda to design their own ramen cup or check out another of Osaka’s offbeat attractions. For thrill-seekers, Universal Studios Japan is just a short ride away. In the evening, we come back together for a farewell dinner at a local restaurant, celebrating the bold flavors Osaka is famous for and raising one last toast to the journey we shared.

Inclusion: Free day | Farewell Japan dinner

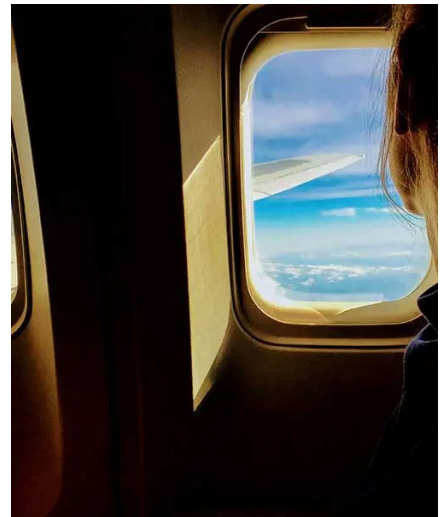
Meals: Breakfast | Dinner

DAY 11 – FLIGHT HOME

Over breakfast we say our goodbyes—or maybe just “see you later” — to new friends and unforgettable days. The flight home begins, but Japan’s sights, sounds, and flavors stay with us.

Inclusion: Airport transfer with purchased AESU group airfare

Meals: Breakfast | In-flight



TOUR MAP

