

Old World Japan Crafts Tour

written by Pam Baker



If you've always been fascinated by origami and sculptured gardens, then a tour of old world Japan to visit many of the country's most respected artisans in person is the perfect vacation for you.

There is a tour offered through tourgallery.com, which is a joint effort between Destination Management and JTB Australia, that will take you behind-the-scenes through the cherry-blossomed air of springtime in picturesque central Japan to private and exclusive meetings with traditional artists in their studios while they create pottery, washi paper, lacquerware, folding fans, wood carvings, indigo dyeing, textile weaving, bamboo art, and, yes, even traditional kimonos. Between these fascinating encounters, you'll enjoy the beautiful scenery and gracious people in the small towns and villages of Hita, Onta, Kurume and Yonezawa, among others - each is well off the tourist beaten track.

Far from the glass and concrete of the modern-side of Japan, these villages present Japan of lore in full regalia. In Onsen, for example, you can relax in the therapeutic waters of a natural spa, dine on true Japanese fare in a traditional banquet and revel in the glory of the ageless appointments in your hotel from shoji (sliding paper doors) to tatami mat floors while comfortably dressed in your yukata (traditional big-sleeved cotton gown) and geta (wooden sandals). Venture outdoors and take a stroll through magnificent gardens accented by beautifully designed carp ponds and ageless stone lanterns that are gently overshadowed by the peaks of ancient Japanese architecture and timeless temples.

But that is not to say that you will miss all of Japan's must-see sights! Kumamoto Castle, Imperial Palace East Garden and Mt Fuji are on the tour list, as are art gallery visits including MIHO Museum, MOA Gallery and Hakone Open Air Museum.

This two-week tour is only available in April and costs about US \$6000 per person, although the rate may vary some according to currency conversion rate fluctuations.

TIP #1: Stay With The Group

Because this tour moves through remote and rural areas, you are likely to encounter a language barrier (unless, of course, you speak very fluent Japanese). The tour guide speaks English very well though, which is why it is better to remain with the group. The places you will visit and the events you will witness are unique and totally foreign to most American visitors. Even bathing, using the bathroom, and sleeping will be totally new experiences for you! Although you will be spellbound by much of what you see, you aren't likely to get the full benefit without an interpreter at hand to explain.

TIP #2: Go Zen

Traditional Japanese people are gracious, well-mannered, conservative, and quiet spoken. So, you also should speak quietly; avoid laughing loudly or touching others in your group or any of the townspeople; and be patient. Here - like no where else on earth - patience is the highest virtue. Go Zen - which is to say relaxed, calm and open to new experiences.

TIP #3: Capture the Memories

On this tour, you will see both natural wonders and human mastery in the arts like nowhere else on earth. Much of what you see will be so breath-taking you'll want to share it with everyone you know --- but without pictures most of it will be very difficult to describe. So click away and bring back plenty of mementos as they will be both affordable and truly one-of-a kind. You may also want to take notes on some of the art techniques and try a few at home.

Story link: http://boomster.com/learn/Adventures/Old_World_Japan_Crafts_Tour/content

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