

# Springtime in Japan: The Photo Enthusiast's Tour

March 31-April 10, 2027

Tokyo-Osaka-Kyoto

**Leader:** Jason P. Odell

Join me on an epic 11-day tour of Japan in springtime. Discover Japanese culture, iconic architecture, and lush landscapes in the land of the rising sun. This private, escorted tour is limited to eight (8) participants seeking to experience the best of Japan with their camera.

## Day 1: Arrival in Japan

Toyko Airports: Narita (NRT) or Haneda (HND)

Arrive in Tokyo and transfer to our group hotel. Our 4-star accommodations are located in central Tokyo, the perfect base for the start of your journey into Japan's history, culture, architecture, and scenery. Today there are no planned activities so you can relax and get to know your fellow photo enthusiasts.

## Day 2: Tokyo City Tour

Today, we'll have a private, escorted tour with an English-speaking guide.

Our tour of Tokyo includes the following locations:

- **Asakusa & Senso-ji Temple:**

Asakusa, a district in Tokyo, exudes the city's old-town charm and offers countless opportunities for photography. The area is most famous for Senso-ji Temple, with its iconic Kaminarimon Gate and massive red lantern that make for striking shots. Narrow streets lined with



SENSO-JI AND ASAKUSA

traditional shops, colorful street stalls, and rickshaw pullers in traditional attire provide vibrant scenes to capture. Cherry blossoms along the Sumida River, and views of Tokyo Skytree in the background make Asakusa a dynamic destination for photographers seeking both cultural and scenic compositions.

- **Meiji Shrine:** Next, we'll visit the tranquil Meiji Shrine, nestled in a lush forested area. Photograph the impressive Torii gates and the serene surroundings of this Shinto shrine. Here, the contrast between the dense greenery and the shrine's architecture creates a peaceful atmosphere and sense of tranquility.
- **Omotesando and Harajuku:** Continuing on, we'll visit Omotesando and Harajuku. Omotesando is often called Tokyo's Champs-Élysées. Capture the striking modern architecture, including the Prada and Omotesando Hills buildings. Explore Harajuku for vibrant street fashion and colorful street scenes. Takeshita Street offers quirky shops perfect for bold, youthful photos.
- **Shibuya:** Shibuya bursts with energy and endless visual possibilities. It sports a mix of old and new, with shrines right in the middle of skyscrapers. At Shibuya Crossing, you'll see people rushing in every direction: Perfect for pan-blurs or longer exposures, where conveying motion is key. Street vendors, neon signs, and busy crowds are always ready to inspire your street photography. You'll also find lots of compelling architectural shots of futuristic buildings and their amazing designs. Shibuya is also known as a hotspot for fashion-forward people. Capture unique street fashion and edgy styles, showing off the area's latest trends and youthful spirit.



SHIBUYA CROSSING AT NIGHT

- **Shibuya Sky:** This is an observation deck 47 stories above Tokyo. Here, you'll be able to capture stunning panoramic views of the city at night.

## Day 3: Nikko

*Includes private charter and English-speaking guide*

Nikkō is a historic mountain town in Tochigi Prefecture, in Japan's Kantō region, 125km north of Tokyo. Nikkō sits at the entrance to Nikkō National Park, where forested mountains rise around the town and the Daiya River runs below. We'll travel by private minibus with our guide.

Nikkō is most famous for its UNESCO World Heritage shrines and temples:

- **Nikkō Tōshō-gū**, the lavishly decorated Shinto shrine dedicated to shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu.
- **Rinnō-ji** (Buddhist temple)
- **Futarasan Shrine**

Together, these sites form the “Shrines and Temples of Nikkō” World Heritage Site, known for ornate carvings (like the Three Wise Monkeys and Sleeping Cat) and richly colored architecture.

- **Nikkō National Park:** Marshlands, mountains, and seasonal foliage make Nikko National Park the perfect place to escape Tokyo's urban scene. Here, we'll be sure to visit Kegon Falls, one of Japan's most famous waterfalls, and photograph the Shinkyo Bridge at the town's edge, a bright red sacred bridge marking the traditional entrance to the Nikkō shrine area.

## Day 4: Leisure Day in Tokyo

Today is a leisure day to spend however you'd like in Tokyo. Visit one of Tokyo's famous camera stores, experience Japanese cuisine, or just use the day to relax and look over your photographs from the first part of the tour!



NIKKŌ TŌSHŌ-GŪ SHRINE

## Day 5: Mt. Fuji and Lake Yamanaka at Sunrise

*Private transportation and English-speaking guide*



**Mt. Fuji & Lake Yamanaka**

We'll be heading out early today for sunrise shooting at Lake Yamanaka at the base of Mt. Fuji. Yes, it will be an early morning departure, but no trip to Japan would be complete without an iconic shot of Mt. Fuji. Early morning provides the best opportunities to see the mountain while the light is soft and the winds are calm. Not only will Fuji-san be prominent, but you'll be able to get shots of it reflected in the mirrored surface of the lake. Bring your tripod, because it will be possible to get long exposures here to further smooth the water in the lake and create negative space. With any luck, we'll have cherry blossoms to frame our shots!

We'll return to Tokyo and pack for our trip to Osaka the next day. In order to expedite our train experience, we'll send our luggage ahead via courier service (Takkyubin) so that we don't have to worry about carrying large bags aboard.

*Note: Prices for courier service vary by bag size, generally \$15-25 per piece.*

## Day 6: Shinkansen to Osaka

*Today, we'll transfer to Tokyo station, where we will board Japan's famous Shinkansen (bullet train).*

Traveling on the Shinkansen from Tokyo to Osaka is an iconic Japanese experience, offering speed, comfort, and efficiency. These are some of the fastest trains in Japan, reaching speeds of up to 300 km/hr (186 mph). You can expect the trip to run between 2.5-3 hours, and along the way we'll pass

through the Japanese countryside. Sit back and enjoy the views, but make sure you get some photos to share your experience with your friends and family. On board the train, boxed meals are available for purchase, and there is usually Wi-Fi connectivity.

Upon our arrival in Osaka, we'll have a private transfer to our hotel in the city center. The rest of the day is yours to enjoy independently, or just to relax.



SHINKANSEN (BULLET TRAIN)

## Day 7: Nara Day Trip

*Private charter and English-speaking guide*

Nara is an ancient city, and was Japan's first permanent capital from 710-784. It's considered to be a cradle of early Japanese civilization and Buddhism. Nara is about 45 minutes from Osaka via our private charter minibus.



NARA PARK

Here, we'll visit:

- Todai-ji Temple, a massive Buddhist temple and home to a 15m high Buddha statue
- Kasuga Taisha Shrine, a Shinto shrine with bright red buildings and hundred of stone and bronze lanterns
- Nara Park, with its population of over 1000 semi-wild deer

We'll also have the opportunity to visit Mt. Wakakusa, a low, grass-covered hill on the eastern edge of Nara Park. From here, you'll be able to photograph panoramic views of the city, deer, and minimalist landscape shots.

## Day 8: Osaka City Tour

*Private transportation and English-speaking guide*

Today we get to explore the city of Osaka in depth. Osaka is Japan's third-largest city and the capital of Osaka Prefecture. It sits next to Osaka bay, and forms part of a large metropolitan area along with Kyoto and Kobe. Osaka has roots going back at least 1000 years, and is an important gateway and port city.

Our stops today include:

- Osaka Castle: Built between 1583 and 1597, Osaka castle was originally intended to be the largest fortress in Japan. It's surrounded by Osaka Castle Park, where we may have the opportunity to photograph cherry blossoms. Osaka Castle has massive stone walls, turrets, and offers city views of the city.



OSAKA CASTLE

- Tenjinbashisuji: A long, covered shopping arcade in Osaka's Kita ward, it is known as Japan's longest shopping street. Here we'll not only be able to photograph the shops and people, but it's also a great spot for lunch!
- Umeda Sky: This pair of 40-story towers has a rooftop observation tower where we can get amazing views of Osaka. It sports a 360° observation deck that's perfect for getting views of the city.
- Shinsekai: A pre-war entertainment district where you can get a retro-downtown vibe. It's known for being far more gritty and nostalgic compared to the modern parts of Osaka. This is also a great spot to get dinner on the cheap!

After our tour, we'll return to our hotel and pack up for our transfer to Kyoto.

## Day 9: Kyoto

*Includes private charter and English-speaking guide*



**LANTERNS AND PATHWAYS IN KYOTO**

Today we leave Osaka by private minibus to our final stop on the tour, Kyoto. After a short drive (45 min), we'll spend the rest of the day on an escorted

tour of Kyoto before checking in to our Ryokan hotel. Ryokan hotels offer traditional Japanese-style accommodations; with futons on the floor for sleeping.

Kyoto is one of Japan's oldest and most culturally important cities. It's been the capital of Japan, a samurai stronghold, and it escaped bombing during WWII, meaning its shrines and temples are original.

Our tour today includes:

- **Fushimi Inari Shrine:** Founded in 711, it is one of the oldest shrines in Kyoto. It's most famous for its *Senbon Torii*, dense tunnels of vermilion gates that line the paths up to Mt. Inari.

- **Arashiyama Bamboo Grove:** This short but iconic pathway through dense bamboo in the Sagano/Arashiyama area, is an experience all to itself. Tall moso bamboo line both sides, creating a tunnel-like effect with filtered green light and creaking bamboo sounds in the wind. Here, explore traditional shots along with long-exposure "swipes" to create unique abstract images.

- **Tenryu-ji Temple:** This is a major Zen Buddhist temple in Kyoto's Arashiyama district and one of the city's most important historic sites. It was founded in 1339 by shogun Ashikaga Takauji. It is home to a famous Zen garden, complete with ponds and areas to stroll and walkways that connect to the bamboo grove.



ZEN GARDEN AT TENRYU-JI

## Day 10: Leisure day in Kyoto

Today is the final day of the tour, and you can spend it however you'd like. Find a local eatery, go shopping and capture any last minute photos before

packing for home. As a special bonus, we will enjoy a ceremonial Japanese tea service today before we say farewell to Japan.



KYOTO NISHIKI FOOD MARKET

## Day 11: Depart for Home

All good things eventually must end. Today we'll transfer to Kansai International Airport (KIX) for your return home. If you'd like to extend your stay in Japan, I can help you make arrangements!

# Trip Information

- **Activity Level:** The activity level on this tour will be mild to moderate. You'll need to be able to walk up to a mile with your camera kit at a leisurely pace. A camera backpack or small shoulder bag is your best option.
- **A valid passport** is required for this tour. Your passport must be valid for the entire duration of your stay in Japan.
- **Travel insurance:** A minimum of \$50,000 accident and illness coverage is required for this tour
- **Group size:** 6-8

## Tour Pricing

- **Tour price:** \$6975 per person, double-occupancy
- **Single supplement:** \$1299
- *Non-photographer companions (smartphones only) save \$350*
- **Deposit:** A \$750 deposit\* reserves your seat until November 1, 2026. The remaining balance will be split into two payments.

*\*Deposits are non-refundable unless the organizer cancels the tour.*

*Please note that due to increased transaction fees, credit card payments will be subject to a 3% surcharge.*

**To Book:** Contact Jason directly: [jason@luminescentphoto.com](mailto:jason@luminescentphoto.com)

## What's Included

- Photography instruction with Jason Odell
- 5 nights 4-star accommodations in central Tokyo
- 3 nights 3.5-star or higher accommodations in central Osaka
- 2 nights Japanese-style accommodations in Kyoto
- Breakfasts at hotels
- Private charter minibus with driver
- English-speaking guide on excursion days
- First-class bullet train tickets from Tokyo to Osaka

- Entrance fees to most locations
- Airport transfer from Kyoto to KIX airport

## Not Included

- International airfare to/from Japan
- Arrival transfers (I will help you arrange transfers individually)
- Meals other than those specified
- Luggage courier service, Tokyo-Osaka (we will arrange for your luggage transfer but it is a separate fee)
- Gratuities for guides and drivers

## What to Bring

- DSLR or mirrorless interchangeable lens camera
- All-purpose zoom lens, such as a 24-120mm or similar
- Wide-angle zoom lens, such as 16-35mm or similar
- Travel tripod
- Smartphone

## Optional Gear

It will be important to pack light on this trip as you'll need to have your kit with you on our minibus and on the trains. You will have to be able to walk moderate distances with your kit. Space-permitting, you could consider:

- Polarizer and solid-ND filters
- Infrared camera
- Fast prime lens for street photography, such as 35mm f/2.0 or similar
- Telephoto zoom lens (70-200mm or similar)

## About Jason P. Odell

I'm a photographer, writer, and educator based in Colorado. I hold a PhD. in biology from the University of California, Riverside. Photography has always been my passion. I started leading photo workshops and



safaris in 2007, and I began leading international photo tours in 2017. My philosophy towards photo tours is simple: I want to take you somewhere where your photos will stand out. That means finding the right light, the best locations, and giving you the space and time to spend in a location so that you can get into the “zone” with your camera. I want to help you find unique ways of capturing the places we visit. On my photo tours, you’ll get expert instruction, creative inspiration, and come home with shots you’ll be proud of.