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Off the Beaten Path: A Different Side of Japan

2027 CHERRY BLOSSOMS GRAND OKINAWA, KYOTO, UJI & OSAKA SHOPPING

Very unique tour itinerary! Let's explore two diverse climates & cultures in one exciting trip!

Enjoy spring blooms and cooler weather, perfect for exploring the sights! Cherry blossoms are in bloom in much of Okinawa in February, adding extra beauty to the sights and attractions of the islands. The cooler temperatures and low humidity compared to the hot Okinawan summers make it the perfect month to sightsee and explore.

11 Nights / 13 Days • 24 Meals (11 Breakfasts, 7 Lunches, 6 Dinners)
Escorted from Honolulu • Includes an English-Speaking Local Guide
January 29 – February 10, 2027 • Tour Manager: Susan Hamada Yee

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OVERVIEW: Okinawa is home to a unique culture that differs considerably from that of mainland Japan. Until the islands were invaded in 1609, Okinawa existed as an entirely separate country from Japan, known as the Ryukyu Kingdom. After the invasion, the Ryukyu Kingdom served as a tributary state to Japan, but continued to be governed by the royal family. It was not until 1879 that the Kingdom was abolished and incorporated into Japan as the Okinawa Prefecture. The castles of Okinawa, known as "Gusuku" in the Okinawan language, are among the most vivid monuments that testify to the unique cultural and historical heritage of the Ryukyu Kingdom. In 2000, five castles and four related sites were designated as UNESCO World Heritage Sites under a collective title.

VISIT: Haneda, Naha, Kitanakagusuku, Onna, Manza, Motobu, Nakijin, Kyoda, Nanjo, Kyoto, Uji & Osaka

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS: Awamori (Rice Liquor) Factory Tour, Shuri Castle, AEON MALL Okinawa Rycom, Ryukyu Mura (Ryukyu Village), Okashigoten Onna Store, Motobu Yaedake Cherry Blossom Festival, Nakijin Castle Site, Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium, Michi-no-Eki Kyoda, Okinawa World, Gyokusendo Stalactite Cave, Habu (Snake) Museum, Kingdom Village, Glass Factory, teamLab Biovortex Kyoto, Kinkakuji (Temple of the Golden Pavilion), Nijo Castle, Chazuna, Byodoin Temple, Byodoin Omotesando, Kuromon Ichiba Market, Dotonbori Shopping, Shinsaibashi Shopping & Osaka Castle

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES: Ryusou Ryukyu Kimono Dress-Up, Coral Dyeing, Local Okinawan Cooking Class, Shisa Painting, Yuzen Dyeing & Matcha (Green Tea) Grinding

UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES: Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu, Kinkakuji & Nijo Castle

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NON-STOP TRAVEL REFER-A-FRIEND REWARDS†

Day 1: Fri, Jan 29 – HONOLULU. Depart Honolulu via Japan Airlines flt #73 at 11:40 am.

Day 2: Sat, Jan 30 – HANEDA. Arrive at the Haneda International Airport at 4:05 pm. After entry formalities, walk to your hotel connected to the airport terminal. Enjoy a buffet dinner at the hotel. HOTEL VILLA FONTAINE GRAND HANEDA AIRPORT (1 Night) (D)

Day 3: Sun, Jan 31 – HANEDA – NAHA. After a buffet breakfast at your hotel, transfer back to the Haneda Airport. Enjoy a bento box at the domestic departure gate. Depart Haneda Domestic Airport via Japan Airlines flt #913 at 10:30 am and arrive at the Naha International Airport at 1:30 pm. Get introduced to Okinawa with a tour of an **awamori (rice liquor) factory**. Awamori is the signature alcoholic beverage of Okinawa and most of the Ryukyu Islands. During the tour, learn the unique process involved in making awamori. Transfer to the hotel. Walk to a nearby restaurant for dinner. HOTEL COLLECTIVE (2 Nights) (B, L, D)

Day 4: Mon, Feb 01 – NAHA. First stop this morning is **Shuri Castle**, the most important castle of the Ryukyu Kingdom, serving both as the central government office and royal residence. The main buildings of Shuri Castle were destroyed in a fire in October 2019, and has been meticulously reconstructed to bring back the castle to its former glory. It is the only castle in Okinawa that has been reconstructed. Only ruins remain of all the other castles. **Dress up in Ryusou Ryukyu kimonos** for a group photo! Then, we head to a special hands-on **coral dyeing** activity, which is only done in Okinawa. Coral is fundamental to the history and culture of the Okinawan Islands. Many areas of Okinawa's main island are made of limestone formed by ancient coral reefs several hundred thousand years ago. Today, coral fossils are often used to create various art pieces in Okinawa. Try your hand at bringing your own art to life. After lunch, return to the hotel, where the remainder of the day is at your leisure. The Local Guide will have suggestions for shopping and dining nearby. (B, L)

*Baggage will be held at the hotel in Naha. Prepare an overnight bag for two nights.

Day 5: Tue, Feb 02 – NAHA – KITANAKAGUSUKU – ONNA – MANZA. After breakfast, we head north to Onna. En route, stop at **AEON MALL Okinawa Rycom**, Okinawa's largest shopping and entertainment complex, for shopping and lunch (on own). After lunch, continue to Onna, where you will explore the **Ryukyu Mura** (Ryukyu Village), a small theme park about Okinawan culture in the form of a recreated village from the times of the Ryukyu Kingdom. The highlight of the village is the eisa show, a form of folk dance that is performed during the obon festival to honor the spirits of one's ancestors. In the finale of the eisa show, visitors can join in on the dance known as kachashi. The word "kachashi" in the Okinawan dialect means "to mix," which implies the idea of sharing happiness to foster a sense of unity. Then, make a stop at the **Okashigoten Onna Store**, the perfect spot to satisfy your sweet tooth and shop for sweets from all over Okinawa! Founded in 1979, this beloved Okinawan confectionary brand is famous for its signature beni-imo (purple sweet potato) tart. If you are not a beni-imo fan, they also have sweets in other flavors, such as chocolate and kokuto (Okinawan black sugar). These are "must have" omiyage items to share with family and friends. Enjoy dinner at the hotel tonight. ANA INTERCONTINENTAL MANZA BEACH RESORT (2 Nights) (B, D)

Day 6: Wed, Feb 03 – MANZA – MOTOBU – NAKIJIN – MOTOBU – KYODA – MANZA. After an incredible breakfast buffet, depart Manza for Motobu. Attend the **MOTOBU YAEDAKE CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL** and walk under a canopy of pink cherry blossoms. With the cherry blossom season in Okinawa typically lasting between mid-January and early-February, you'll be one of the first to see cherry blossoms in Japan! Next, visit the ruins of **Nakijin Castle** and learn about the history of Okinawa. The castle, a former residence of the Ryukyu Kingdom governor during the 14th century, is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site. After lunch, visit the **Okinawa Churaumi Aquarium**, one of the largest and most renowned aquariums in the world. Located within the Ocean Expo Park – a large, multi-attraction recreational complex – the aquarium is widely considered best in Japan. A highlight of the aquarium is the massive Kuroshio Sea Tank, one of the largest tanks in the world, that houses whale sharks. On the way back to Naha, stop at the roadside **Michi-no-Eki Kyoda** for a chance to stretch your legs and get a little shopping done as well. Not only do they provide a clean and convenient rest stop, but you will find an array of farmer-direct merchandise along with other omiyage items. Kyoda offers a wide variety of specialties from the 12 municipalities in the northern region of Okinawa, including hard-to-find products from remote islands such as Iheya Island and Izena Island. Return to the hotel for dinner. The remainder of the evening is at your leisure. (B, L, D)

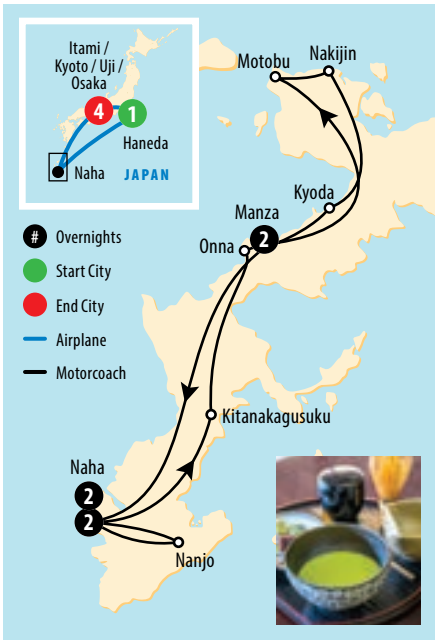
Day 7: Thur, Feb 04 – MANZA – NAHA. The foundation of every culture is rooted in the food that its people eat. Learn about the Okinawan culture as you take a **cooking class for Okinawan cuisine**. Enjoy your tasty creations for lunch. After, let your creative side loose when you **paint a Shisa**, a traditional Okinawan cultural artifact and decoration. Shisas are believed to offer protection from evil, with the left shisa traditionally having a closed mouth to keep good spirits in, and the open mouthed shisa on the right wards off evil spirits. Pairs of shisa can often be seen on rooftops or flanking the gates to houses. Great souvenirs of this trip! Transfer to the hotel in Naha for an evening of leisure. HOTEL COLLECTIVE (2 Nights) (B, L)

Day 8: Fri, Feb 05 – NAHA – NANJO – NAHA. Another full day of exploring is ahead! Start the day with a visit to **Okinawa World**, a theme park about Okinawan culture. The park's main attractions are a massive natural cave, craft village, and **habu (snake) museum**. With a total length of 5km, **Gyokusendo Cave** is the longest of the many caves in the south of Okinawa Island and the second longest cave in the entire country. Approximately 850m of the cave is open to the public and features spectacular stalactites and stalagmites. The **Kingdom Village** is a nice replica of a traditional Okinawan village with workshops showcasing various traditional Okinawan crafts, such as weaving, dyeing, paper making, pottery, sugar cane processing, the making of music instruments, and glass blowing. Colorful **Ryukyu glass** is one of those must have souvenirs when visiting Okinawa. Enjoy a buffet lunch while here. Return to Naha. This evening, enjoy dinner at a local restaurant. (B, L, D)

Day 9: Sat, Feb 06 – NAHA – ITAMI – KYOTO. Depart Naha Airport via Japan Airlines flt #2084 at 11:55 am. Arrive at the Osaka Itami Airport at 1:45 pm. Transfer to by coach to the hotel in Kyoto. The remainder of your day is at your leisure. Your hotel is surrounded by department stores, specialty stores, and restaurants. The Local Guide will have suggestions for dinner. MIYAKO HOTEL KYOTO HACHIJO (2 Nights) (B)

Day 10: Sun, Feb 07 – KYOTO. Depart the hotel for a full day of touring. Begin the day exploring the wonders of **teamLab Biovortex Kyoto**, a new concept by the team behind the international art collective teamLab. This venue focuses on a high-dimensional thinking athletics space based on the concept of perceiving the world with your body and thinking about it high-dimensionally. In a complex and challenging space, you will be immersed in a physically challenging four-dimensional world where time changes with the presence of your body. After lunch, visit **Kinkakuji (Temple of the Golden Pavilion)**, a Zen Temple whose top two floors are completely covered in gold leaf. When the Tokugawa Shogunate fell in 1867, **Nijo Castle** was used as an imperial palace for a while before being donated to the city and opened up to the public as a historic site. Its palace buildings are arguably the best surviving examples of castle palace architecture of Japan's feudal era. Today's hands-on experience is **yuzen dyeing**, which is one of Kyoto's traditional craft dyeing techniques. Since the patterns are dyed by placing a paper stencil over a piece of fabric, such as a tote bag, you can make an authentic piece, even if this is your first time. A great souvenir of this tour! Return to the hotel for a buffet dinner. (B, L, D)

Day 11: Mon, Feb 08 – KYOTO – UJI – OSAKA. After breakfast, check out from hotel. A full day of sightseeing is ahead. Begin the day at the Tea and Uji Community Center, **Chazuna**, where you will **learn how to grind matcha (green tea) leaves** via a grinding millstone. You can brew your own ground matcha in a teapot and drink it. Next, visit **Byodoin Temple**.



Together with its garden, the temple represents the "Pure Land Paradise" and was influential on later temple construction. Byodoin was initially built in 998 as a countryside retreat villa for the powerful politician Fujiwara no Michinaga, not as a temple. After lunch at a local restaurant, explore **Byodoin Omotesando**, the road leading up to the main gate of Byodoin Temple, are long-established tea shops are located. The air is filled with the fragrance of tea. In addition to the long-established Uji tea shops, there are plenty of stores selling unique local products. There are also numerous restaurants and cafés where you can leisurely enjoy a menu full of tea-based dishes, such as tea dumplings, matcha sweets, tea soba noodles, as well as Kyoto-style obanzai (traditional home-cooked dishes). One of the major attractions is the ability to enjoy authentic matcha soft serve ice cream while walking around. Try comparing the matcha soft serve from different shops and find your favorite. Enjoy time to shop here. Transfer to the hotel in Osaka, where the remainder of the evening is at your leisure. The Local Guide will have suggestions on various dining opportunities nearby. HOTEL GRANVIA OSAKA (2 Nights) (B, L)

Day 12: Tue, Feb 09 – OSAKA. Full day at leisure. The perfect day to fulfill the remainder of your shopping list. Your Local Guide will be available to assist as needed. (B)

Day 13: Wed, Feb 10 – OSAKA – ITAMI – HANEDA – HONOLULU. After hotel checkout, start the day with a visit to **Kuromon Ichiba Market**, a lively covered market which stretches for 580m in Osaka's Chuo Ward. The market is famous for its fresh seafood, fruits and vegetables, meats, dried fish, pickles and confectionery. Many stalls will prepare, cook and serve their food to you right on the spot! An excellent place to stroll, sample, and snack on a delicious variety of fresh market foods. Next, visit Dotonbori and Shinsaibashi Shopping Arcade, a couple of Osaka's most popular tourist destinations. **Dotonbori** is a popular shopping and entertainment district that runs parallel to Dotonbori Canal, and is also known as a food destination. At approximately 600m long, **Shinsaibashi Shopping Arcade** and the surrounding area is Osaka's premier shopping center. The unique area combines chain retail stores and trendy boutiques with department stores and top designer fashion labels. Enjoy lunch in the area (on your own). Spend time exploring **Osaka Castle**, arguably one of Osaka's most prominent landmarks. Its impressive structure can be seen from most parts of the city. Transfer to the Osaka Itami Airport for the return flight home. Depart Itami via Japan Airlines flt #126 at 4:30 pm and arrive at the Haneda Domestic Airport at 5:45 pm. Depart Haneda International Airport via Japan Airlines flt #74 at 9:00 pm and arrive Honolulu at 8:45 am the same day. Aloha and welcome home! (B)

UNESCO World Heritage Sites: Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu (2000), Kinkakuji (1994), Nijo Castle (1994)