



Japan 2025 Itinerary

Travel Dates: May 13 – 23, 2025

May 13th -14th – Day 1&2 - Tampa – Osaka

- Students meet their travel group in the U.S. and fly overnight to Osaka, Japan. When the group arrives in Japan the next day (Day 2), the group meets the tour director at the airport.
- Later, the group enjoys dinner in Osaka.

May 15th – Day 3 – Osaka – Hiroshima

- Students and faculty truly begin the program today. The group travels from Osaka to Hiroshima via the Himeji Castle (姫路城, Himejijō), also known as White Heron Castle (Shirasagijo) in Himeji, Hyōgo Prefecture.
- The Himeji Castle is the largest castle in Japan. According to UNESCO, “Himejijo is the finest surviving example of early 17th-century Japanese castle architecture, comprising 83 buildings with highly developed systems of defense and ingenious protection devices dating from the beginning of the Shogun period. It is a masterpiece of construction in wood, combining function with aesthetic appeal, both in its elegant appearance unified by the white plastered earthen walls and in the subtlety of the relationships between the building masses and the multiple roof layers.”
- As ‘Japan’s best preserved feudal castle’, the Himeji Castle will introduce students to the feudal history of Japan and how that history influenced modern Japan and its relationship with the outside world.
- Finally, the group ends the day with dinner in Hiroshima.

May 16th – Day 4- Hiroshima

- The group is in Hiroshima today. Hiroshima (広島) is the principal city of the Chugoku Region and home to over a million inhabitants. When the first atomic bomb was dropped over Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, the city became known worldwide for this unenviable distinction. The destructive power of the bomb was tremendous and obliterated nearly everything within a two-kilometer radius.
- The stay in this thriving city and surrounding areas will highlight both the folly and promises of humanity. Through these various sites, the group will learn a lot about the history of Japan. This day in particular will introduce students to a city and region which following the A-bomb tragic experience has rebuilt itself and now attempts to show the world today the horrors of nuclear weapons and the value and principles of peace that Japan believes nations of the world must pursue to ensure the survival of the human race.
- Overall, the group will start the day with an excursion to Miyajima Park, also called the "Sacred Island". Miyajima (宮島) is a small island less than an hour outside the city of Hiroshima. It is most famous for its giant torii gate, which at high tide seems to float on the water. The sight is ranked as one of Japan's three best views.
- Then, the group will visit Itsukushima Shrine. The centuries-old Itsukushima Shrine (厳島神社, Itsukushima Jinja) on Miyajima is the source of both the island's fame and its name (...) The shrine is known worldwide for its iconic "floating" torii gate (...) In 1168, Taira no Kiyomori, the most powerful man in Japan during the end of the Heian Period, selected the island as the site of his clan's family shrine and built Itsukushima Shrine.
- Following the visit to Miyajima Island, the group will tour the city of Hiroshima with an expert local guide. The group will visit the Peace Memorial Park and Museum, a UNESCO heritage site. The entire park is dedicated to 'remembering the drop of the atomic bomb'.
- The visit in the city of Hiroshima ends with the group leaving for Kyoto via the Shinkansen (bullet train) to Kyoto, the imperial capital of Japan.
- The class will enjoy dinner there too.

May 17th – Day 5 - Kyoto

- Today, the group is in Kyoto (京都, Kyōto). The city "served as Japan's capital and the emperor's residence from 794 until 1868. It is one of the country's ten largest cities with a population of 1.5 million people and a modern face".
- As Japan's capital for over 1,000 years, Kyoto holds important historical value for understanding the country's political and economic evolution and its place in the world. The group starts touring the city of Kyoto with an expert local guide and learns about the history and culture of the city.
- Then, the group will visit Nijo Castle, a structure built almost entirely out of Japanese cypress and UNESCO world heritage site. Nijo Castle (二条城, Nijōjō) was built in 1603 as the Kyoto residence of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first shogun of the Edo Period (1603-1867). His grandson Iemitsu completed the castle's palace buildings 23 years later and further expanded the castle by adding a five-story castle keep.

- Until the Meiji Restoration in 1868, which returned full powers to the Emperor of Japan, the country was under the rule of military rulers/dictators known as shōgun. ‘The shogunate government, also known as bakufu, which means 'tent government' in reference to its origins as a title held by a commander in the field, was based on the feudal relationship between lord and vassal. At the top of the social and political pile was the shogun or regent shogun who distributed land to loyal followers in return for their military service (both personal and of their individual private armies of samurai).’
- After Nijo Castle, the group visits the Gold Pavilion. The temple known in Japanese as ‘Kinkakuji (金閣寺, Golden Pavilion) is a Zen temple in northern Kyoto who’s top two floors are completely covered in gold leaf. Formally known as Rokuonji, the temple was the retirement villa of the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, and according to his will it became a Zen temple of the Rinzaï sect after his death in 1408.’
- The next attraction is the Inari Taisha Shrine. “Fushimi Inari Shrine (伏見稲荷大社, Fushimi Inari Taisha) is an important Shinto shrine in southern Kyoto. It is famous for its thousands of vermilion torii gates, which straddle a network of trails behind its main buildings. The trails lead into the wooded forest of the sacred Mount Inari, which stands at 233 meters and belongs to the shrine grounds.”
- After that, the group will see a Kimono show at the Nishijin Textile Center. The latter is “is named after the city district in Kyoto and its local kimono weaving technique. It offers interesting displays on kimonos, and a kimono fashion show is held several times a day. Visitors can observe kimono weaving and decoration demonstrations or participate in a hand weaving workshop. There is also a large shopping section, where kimono and accessories can be purchased.”
- The day ends with a group dinner in Kyoto.

May 18th – Day 6 - Kyoto

- Today, the group continues to visit Kyoto by touring the Arashiyama Bamboo Grove with the tour director. According to CNBC, “located on the outskirts of Kyoto, Arashiyama Bamboo Grove — or Sagano Bamboo Forest, as it’s also called — is Japan’s most famous bamboo forest. It’s believed to be one of the most photographed places in Kyoto, and perhaps one of its most photographically enhanced, too.”
- After today, the group will conclude its stay in the ancient imperial capital city of Japan. The group will have learned and seen the history of Japan.

May 19th -Day 7 – Kyoto/Hakone – Atami Area

- Today, the group is set to leave Kyoto and head by bullet train to the Hakone–Atami area.
- The group will have an opportunity to stop to snap a photo outside of Odawara Castle. The latter was ‘originally built around the middle of the fifteenth century, Odawara Castle is a three-tiered, five storied castles keep located in the city of the same name. Known for its flora-filled park complete with a mini train and small amusement park, the site is only an hour away from Tokyo, making it a convenient and fun place to get a sense of Japan's feudal history.

- The group will then visit Hakone National Park, known for its hot springs, lakes, historic sites, and close-up views of majestic Mount Fuji. “Hakone (箱根) is part of the Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park, less than one hundred kilometers from Tokyo. Famous for hot springs, natural beauty and the view across Lake Ashinoko of nearby Mount Fuji, Hakone is one of the most popular destinations among Japanese and international tourists looking for a break from Tokyo.”
- The group follows that with a boat cruise on Lake Ashi [Lake Ashinoko (芦ノ湖, Ashinoko)] and soaks in views of Mt. Fuji. The latter is a very powerful symbol in Japan. “Throughout Japan’s history, the image of Fuji was used to bring together and mobilize the populace. During World War II, Japanese propaganda employed the mountain’s august outline to promote nationalism; the United States exploited the image of Fuji to encourage surrender—leaflets imprinted with the silhouette were dropped on Japanese soldiers stationed overseas to induce nostalgia and homesickness.”
- Finally, the group wraps up the day with a cable car ride up Mount Komagatake. The Komagatake Ropeway is one of two ropeways in Hakone that takes you up one of Hakone’s highest peaks for views of Fuji, the Pacific Ocean, and a historical mountain top shrine.
- The day ends with a traditional dinner in Hakone.

May 20th – Day 8 – Hakone-Atami Area • Kamakura • Tokyo

- Today the group travels via Kamakura to Tokyo. The groups starts with a visit of the Hachimangu Shrine, dedicated to the patron god of the samurai. “Tsurugaoka Hachimangu (鶴岡八幡宮, Tsurugaoka Hachimangū) is Kamakura's most important shrine. It was founded by Minamoto Yoriyoshi in 1063 and enlarged and moved to its current site in 1180 by Minamoto Yoritomo, the founder and first shogun of the Kamakura government. The shrine is dedicated to Hachiman, the patron god of the Minamoto family and of the samurai in general.” Samurai principles still regulate Japanese society to this day. As History.com observes, “The samurai would dominate Japanese government and society until the Meiji Restoration of 1868 led to the abolition of the feudal system. Despite being deprived of their traditional privileges, many of the samurai would enter the elite ranks of politics and industry in modern Japan. More importantly, the traditional samurai code of honor, discipline and morality known as bushido—or “the way of the warrior”—was revived and made the basic code of conduct for much of Japanese society.”
- Then, the group on its own spends time exploring Kamakura.
- This is followed by a visit of the Great Buddha of Kamakura, which stands over 37 feet tall. The Great Buddha of Kamakura (鎌倉大仏, Kamakura Daibutsu) is a bronze statue of Amida Buddha, which stands on the grounds of Kotokuin Temple. With Shinto, Buddhism is another one of Japan’s main religions. “Buddhism was imported to Japan via China and Korea in the form of a present from the friendly Korean kingdom of Kudara (Paikche) in the 6th century (...) Today, roughly two thirds of the Japanese population consider themselves Buddhists. However, the religion does not directly affect the everyday life of the average Japanese very strongly.”
- The day concludes with a dinner in Tokyo.

May 21st – Day 9 - Tokyo

- This is the first full day of the group in Tokyo. The day commences with a visit of the Asakusa Kannon Temple, Tokyo's oldest temple. “Sensoji (浅草寺, Sensōji, also known as Asakusa Kannon Temple) is a Buddhist temple located in Asakusa. It is one of Tokyo's most colorful and popular temples.”
- Then, the group goes on a guided tour of Tokyo. With the expert local guide, the group will get to see the following:
- Harajuku shopping district, the trendy district popular among younger locals
- Shibuya district, home to the famed Shibuya crosswalk that has upwards of 3,000 people crossing at a time. Go-Tokyo, the official Tokyo travel guide describes Shibuya as “the epicenter of modern Japanese culture”. There, the group will get to witness for itself what makes Japan and its culture so fascinating to the rest of the world.
- And finally, the Shinjuku district, a large entertainment and business area.
- The group will continue the day with a visit of the Meiji Shrine and its elaborate wooded inner garden. “Surrounded by a lush green forest right in the heart of Tokyo, this Shinto shrine is dedicated to Emperor Meiji (1852-1912) and Empress Shoken, who led Japan to become a modernized nation (...) Emperor Meiji led the nation in building relationships with some of the world's great powers. Like many other major sites in Tokyo, the shrine's buildings were destroyed during World War II but rebuilt following a public fundraising effort.”
- On that same day, the group will get to see the Imperial Plaza and Metropolitan Government Building. “The current Imperial Palace (皇居, Kōkyō) is located on the former site of Edo Castle, a large park area surrounded by moats and massive stone walls in the center of Tokyo, a short walk from Tokyo Station. It is the residence of Japan's Imperial Family.” For its part, the Metropolitan Government Building is the site of Tokyo’s city government.
- After meandering through the center of Japanese national and Tokyo city governments, the group will spend time exploring Akihabara on its own and enjoy free time for lunch in the Harajuku area.
- The day ends for all with dinner in Tokyo.

May 22nd – Day 10 - Tokyo

- This is the group’s second full day in Tokyo. The group will take a walking tour of Shibuya and get to know the area with the tour director.
- Then, the group gets to spend half a day exploring Tokyo on its own.
- The day concludes with the group participating in a local exchange visit with Japanese students to learn more about their lives.

May 23rd – Day 11- Return to Tampa

- The group leaves Tokyo and flies back to Tampa, FL.