
JAPAN
Your first journey
An Understory travelguide

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A note from the author

I don't work in the travel industry.

I'm simply someone who loves planning journeys.

For me, traveling starts long before boarding a plane. It begins with maps, books, railway timetables and countless evenings spent imagining what it will feel like to stand in a place I've never seen before.

Japan fascinated me long before I visited it for the first time.

This guide is the result of months of research and a journey carefully designed to balance iconic places with authentic experiences.

I hope it helps you create memories of your own.

How to use this book

This book is divided into two parts.

The first introduces the destinations that make a first trip to Japan unforgettable.

The second follows a complete 15-day itinerary, showing how those destinations can be connected into a relaxed and enjoyable journey.

Feel free to follow the itinerary exactly, adapt it to your own pace or simply use it as inspiration while creating your own adventure.

The journey at Glance

Day 1 — Tokyo • Shinjuku & Shibuya

Day 2 — Tokyo • Harajuku & Meiji Shrine

Day 3 — Hakone

Day 4 — Tokyo • Odaiba • Toyosu • Ginza

Day 5 — Nikko

Day 6 — Tokyo • Asakusa • Akihabara • Ueno

Day 7 — Takayama

Day 8 — Shirakawa-go & Kanazawa

Day 9 — Kyoto

Day 10 — Kyoto

Day 11 — Nara

Day 12 — Hiroshima

Day 13 — Miyajima

Day 14 — Osaka

Day 15 — Kamakura & Tokyo


JAPAN ITINERARY
15 DAYS JOURNEY
1 Tokyo (Shinjuku & Shibuya)
2 Tokyo (Harajuku & Omotesando)
3 Hakone
4 Nikko (Day Trip)
5 Tokyo (Odaiba)
6 Tokyo (Asakusa & Ueno)
7 Takayama
8 Shirakawa-go → Kanazawa
9 Kyoto
10 Nara (Day Trip)
11 Hiroshima
12 Miyajima
13 Osaka
14 Tokyo
15 Departure
NIKKO
KANAZAWA
TAKAYAMA
SHIRAKAWA-GO
TOKYO
HAKONE
KYOTO
NARA
HIROSHIMA
MIYAJIMA
OSAKA
LEGEND
Shinkansen / Train
Local Train
Bus
Ferry
Ropeway / Cable Car
Walking
Flight

Journey map

Overview

Japan is a country of striking contrasts, where centuries-old traditions coexist with cutting-edge innovation. In a single day, you can travel from one of the world's busiest cities to a peaceful temple, then end the evening with an unforgettable meal.

This guide is designed to help you plan your first trip to Japan by focusing on the places that truly deserve a spot on your itinerary. Rather than simply listing attractions, it aims to help you experience the country, discover hidden gems, and understand what makes each destination unique.

The first part of the guide introduces Japan's most iconic destinations and highlights the experiences that make each one memorable. The second part brings everything together in a practical itinerary, helping you make the most of your journey while discovering the authentic spirit of Japan.



Itsukushima Shrine

Tokyo (東京)

Japan’s capital is a city of fascinating contrasts, where cutting-edge innovation coexists with centuries-old traditions. Rather than having a single centre, Tokyo is a collection of distinctive neighborhoods, each with its own character. Shinjuku is known for its skyscrapers and nightlife, Shibuya for its famous crossing and youth culture, Asakusa for its temples and traditional atmosphere, Ginza for luxury shopping and fine dining, and Akihabara for anime, manga and electronics. Together they create one of the world's most exciting cities to explore.

Shinjuku

Shinjuku is the perfect place to begin your exploration of Tokyo. Home to one of the busiest railway stations in the world, it welcomes almost three million passengers every day through more than 200 exits. The district is a striking mix of futuristic skyscrapers and nostalgic alleys. Wander through Omoide Yokocho, a narrow lane lined with tiny izakayas serving authentic Japanese food, then head to Kabukicho to experience Tokyo's vibrant nightlife. For panoramic views, visit the free observation deck of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building. it is a place of contrasts where modernity meets the kitsch for example in Godzilla road, where a statue of the monster is over the terrace of Gracery hotel. It’s a place full of light during the night and for this reason is the heart of Tokyo nightlifeWhen you need a break from the city's energy, Shinjuku Gyoen offers a peaceful retreat with beautiful gardens, ponds and seasonal cherry blossoms. This is the relaxing spot with trees, lakes and a perfect harmony inside. There are different areas to see like the forest mountain villages, the cherry trees (different type that can blossom from mid March to mid April), the formal garden in French style, the English landscape

garden and the green house rich in tropical trees, orchids, ponds and waterfall. In this building you can find tree different areas the jungle, the pond and the tropical area.



Gyoen garden

What you will remember:

The glow of neon lights reflecting on wet streets and the sight of office workers gathering in tiny izakayas after a long day.

What most guides misses:

- To visit the modern area of Shijuku with its iconic design building and without tourists.
- Gyoen garden is close to Tokyo Olympic park, that could be interesting to see.

Shibuya

Shibuya is famous for its iconic Scramble Crossing, where thousands of people cross from every direction each time the lights change. The experience is impressive at street level, but even better from above at Shibuya Sky or one of the cafés overlooking

the intersection. Beyond the crossing, explore lively streets such as Center Gai, Spain-zaka and Dogenzaka, browse the many shops, or visit PARCO, home to one of Tokyo's largest Pokémon Centers. Exiting the metro station there is another famous landmark the Hachico Statue, a dog that for years war waiting his owner at the station. But Shibuya is more than this, there are a lot of streets to see full of shops, restaurants, shopping malls and bars where you



Shibuya Crossing

can also find craft beer. So a small tour around is the best way to discover this area.

What you will remember:

The number of people in the famous crossing, the feeling to get lost, the order after the traffic light turns to red.

What most guides misses:

- To visit also the small streets around and not only the bid Center Gai.

- The vibrant spirit of this area during the night.

Harajuku

Harajuku is the colorful heart of Tokyo's youth culture. Takeshita Street is packed with fashion boutiques, quirky cafés and famous treats such as oversized rainbow cotton candy and freshly made crêpes. Arrive before 11 a.m. to avoid the biggest crowds, then wander through the quieter side streets to discover the neighborhood's more authentic atmosphere.



Takeshita street entrance

What you will remember:

The huge number of sweeties and their size, the shops and all the accessories and seifuku dresses of all the girl that would like to wear student's clothing.

What most guided misses:

All the lateral and minor streets around this quarter, Takeshita is very crowded but often the other streets are really quiet.

Omotesando

Just a short walk from Harajuku, Omotesando offers a completely different atmosphere. Its elegant tree lined boulevard is home to luxury boutiques, striking contemporary architecture and stylish cafés. Nearby, Meiji Jingu, set within the peaceful Yoyogi Park, provides a welcome escape from the city's pace. Before reaching the shrine, notice the rows of sake barrels and French wine barrels, symbolizing the friendship between Japanese and Western cultures. It is also a popular place for **traditional Japanese weddings**, where visitors may occasionally see ceremonies in progress so if you are lucky you can see one during your visit. Omotesando area is



Japanese wedding



Meji Jingu

close to Harajuku and its heart is a big avenue. This street is large, elegant with most famous brands. The main attractions are the Tokyu plaza shopping mall, Kiddyland with everything for kids and the Oriental bazar. A very particular street just after Kiddyland is



Wine barrels



Sakè barrels

Cat street, here you can find an European style not so common in Tokyo.

What you will remember:

The contrast between the elegance of Omotesando and the peaceful environment of Yoyogi park.

What most guided misses:

Cat Street is an hidden gem, so different from other Japanese streets, a little corner of Europe.

Odaiba

Odaiba is a futuristic artificial island in Tokyo Bay, connected to the city by the spectacular Rainbow Bridge. One of its main attractions is the life-sized Unicorn Gundam statue outside DiverCity Tokyo Plaza, which transforms and comes to life with a light show several times a day. A short walk away, you'll find a replica of the Statue of Liberty and one of the best panoramic views of Tokyo's skyline, especially after sunset. The waterfront promenade is perfect for a



Gundam unicorn

relaxing stroll, offering a different side of Tokyo away from the city's busiest districts.

What you will remember:

- The panoramic ride on the Yurikamome Line and the beautiful views beneath the Rainbow Bridge.
- Tokyo's skyline illuminated at night.

What most guided misses:

Seasonal festivals and food events frequently held on the waterfront during the summer.

Toyosu

Just a few stops from Odaiba lies Toyosu, home to Tokyo's modern wholesale fish market. Arrive early if you want to observe the market activity, then stay for one of the outstanding sushi restaurants, where master chefs prepare every piece right in front of you. After lunch, head to the rooftop garden before visiting the nearby teamLab Planets, an immersive museum combining light, water and mirrors into unforgettable interactive installations.

Ginza

Ginza is Tokyo's most elegant shopping district, famous for luxury boutiques, refined restaurants and remarkable contemporary architecture. Don't miss the Tokyo International Forum, an architectural masterpiece that is free to visit, or the traditional Kabuki-za Theatre. Nearby Yurakucho Yokocho offers a striking contrast, with narrow alleys full of cosy izakayas beneath the railway tracks.



Ginza



Yurakucho Yokocho

What you will remember:

The difference between the luxury area and the local restaurants in Yurakucho Yokocho

What most guided misses:

- There is another city underground to discover
- The Tokyo international forum building, its free but very impressive

Asakusa

Asakusa preserves the atmosphere of old Tokyo. Enter through the iconic Kaminarimon Gate, browse the traditional shops along Nakamise-dori, and reach Sensō-ji, Tokyo's oldest and most famous



Kaminarimom Gate