

Japan

15 days Kyoto to Hiroshima

Kyoto - Ancient Cities - Coastal Cycling - Shinto Temples - Nara - Hiroshima

Japan is such an eclectic mix of sights and sounds, landscapes, history and culture that it is a joy to visit. This cycling tour takes in the cultural centres of Kyoto and Nara, both cities are outdoor museums revealing Japan's grand and fascinating history, as well as the monastic Koya-san mountain where Buddhism still thrives today. The cycling component will consist mostly of a crossing of Shikoku Island, Japan's smallest and least populated of the main four. This route will take us through the central mountains into the Iya valley, famous for its clear running rivers, gorges and ancient vine bridges. We take in a rural Japan not experienced by most visitors: handpicked home-stays and local inns, onsens (hot springs) to soak those weary muscles and traditional local culinary specialities. Our final days riding are sure to be a highlight as we leave Shikoku and island hop across several small islands over a series of bridges on a dedicated cycling path to the main island of Honshu. From there we transfer to Hiroshima and get a chance to soak up this city's historical ambience before taking the shinkansen, or bullet train, back to Kyoto.

Itinerary

Day 1 | Arrive Kyoto

This is arrival day and you are free to explore this fascinating city before our scheduled group meeting where we will go over all the formalities for the trip. There will be information at the local inn (ryokan) to let you know where to go for the group meeting and after that meeting we'll head out for some famous Kyoto fare in Gion district with a chance to do some Geisha spotting. (D)

Day 2 | Kyoto

This is a free day to explore Kyoto's many temples, shrines and palaces including Nijo Castle, Ryoanji Zen garden, Kinkakuji 12th century temple and the Philosophers' Walk. There will be bikes available to cycle around this ancient capital and we'll get you started on a bike tour to take in all the sights.

Day 3 | Cycle to Nara | 50km

We leave Kyoto to cycle one of Japan's few cycle paths to Nara. This is a flat ride with great views all the way and a good warm up to get the legs ready for the rest of the trip. Nara city predates Kyoto as a political centre and, like Kyoto, has many interesting temples and gardens to explore. We will have time to check out Nara's important sights such as Todaiji temple, the largest wooden building in the world, and its 7th century 250 ton bronze Buddha. Tonight we stay in a local ryokan. (B,L,D)

Day 4 | Cycle to Koya San | 65km

Today is a big day's cycling to the base of Buddhist mountain retreat at Koya san. We'll take a break in Asuka on the way where we have a chance to see the remnants of Japan's first capital dating back to the 7th century and the huge burial



mounds for which the area is famous. The first half of the day is flat until we begin our climbing on quiet mountain roads to the base of Koya where we transfer to the summit of the mountain. We'll be staying in a working monastery and will have a chance to meet and talk to the resident monks. The vegetarian food prepared by the monks is a real treat. (B,L,D)

Day 5 | Tokushima

We rise early today so that we can take part in morning prayer, zazen, with the monks if we wish. We'll have time to do a bit of hiking around the mountain to visit the many temples of Koya san and its famous 1200 year-old cemetery, before heading to Wakayama for our afternoon ferry crossing to Tokushima and the start of our Shikoku Island ride. (B,L)

Day 6 | Cycle to Koyadaira | 55km

From Tokushima we head inland. It's a tough start as we hit a couple of really steep hills. We are treated to beautiful views of an isolated area of Japan on little travelled paved roads before stopping for the night in a local ryokan (guesthouse). Throughout this area we will come across many onsen, or hot

Islands of Japan

Tour Notes



springs, and this night will be our first – a famous onsen used by the locals in the area. (B,L,D)

Day 7 | Cycle to Kazurabashi | 85km

This is a big day's ride where we take on the toughest hill on the trip. It is very steep, has countless hairpins and we cycle almost to the peak of Tsurugi san for a well-earned lunch. The afternoon is all downhill cycling through gorges and villages. We stay in a ryokan again as we do as often as we can on this trip. Ryokans offer an insight into Japanese life as our hosts will be a local family and we will have lots of time to meet them and enjoy their particular brand of hospitality. This Ryokan has one of the best outdoor onsens in Japan! (B,L,D)

Day 8 | Kazurabashi

Today is a free day to relax and do as you wish. There are numerous things to do in the area. One of which is an optional, but highly recommended, visit to a 350 year-old farmhouse, Chiiori, for some locally produced tea and traditional home made noodles. This farmhouse was restored by Alex Kerr, the only foreigner to win a Japanese literary award for a book he wrote in Japanese. Also, on offer are visits to the ancient vine bridge or a swim in the nearby beautiful Iya River. (B)

Day 9 | Cycle to Kotohira | 80km

Our last day in the Iya valley takes us downhill for the first 30 kms and then a big climb before winding down into Kotohira. For those with energy left in the legs, a walk up to Kompirasan, formally known as Kotohiragu (a highly popular shrine in the wooded hills of Kotohira), will show off some of Japan's finest temple architecture. Great views are to be had of the surrounding country-side. (B,L,D)

Day 10 | Cycle to Kanonji | 70km

An awesome day's cycling through flat rice farming communities until we hit the coast at Marugame. Here we break to visit Marugame castle, one of only a few remaining intact castles in Japan. From here it is another spectacular ride with lots of ups and downs on coastal roads which will allow us to absorb Japanese life in seaside and farming

communities. This section has great views of the inland sea and its numerous islands and beaches and we'll have lots of time to swim and meet the characters who live along this beautiful coastline. (B,L,D)

Day 11 | Cycle to Inland Sea track | 47km

We start today with a morning transfer to Imabari. Stunning views of small uninhabited islands provide the backdrop as we fly across the inland sea that lies between Shikoku and Honshu. We cross this inland sea track via a series of 7 impressive bridges linking one island to another on a dedicated cycle path. We'll stay on one of the islands to take in this unique crossing and be treated to some wonderful home-cooked traditional Japanese food. (B,L,D)

Day 12 | Cycle to Hiroshima | 40km

We finish the last of our "hops" in Onomichi, pack up the bikes and board a train for an hour to Hiroshima. Metropolitan Hiroshima is imbued with history but is firmly entrenched in the future. With a great atmosphere and much to see we have plenty of time here to take in all that Hiroshima has to offer. In the evening we'll head out for a delicious Okonomiyaki dinner and a beer or two to celebrate the end of our ride! (B,L,D)

Day 13 | Hiroshima

This is a free day to explore the sights of Hiroshima. Highly recommended is a visit to Miyajima Island. (B)

Day 14 | Kyoto

We'll get today started with a visit to Hiroshima's War Memorial Park where we'll invite one of the locals to talk about their experiences of the devastation the city suffered and how it has shaped the thinking of its people – an unforgettable experience. After lunch we'll take the shinkansen (bullet train) to Kyoto. We'll arrive with enough time to check in to the hotel and head out for our final dinner. (B,L)

Day 15 | Departure Day

You are free to leave any time today. (B)

Tour Details

Style

Fully supported bicycle tour.

Inclusions

2 nights in comfortable hotels, 11 nights in ryokans (guesthouses), 1 night in a monastery, all transport en route, support vehicle, vehicle transport from Koya San to Wakayama, Ferry to Tokushima, Train Onomichi - Hiroshima, Shinkansen train from Hiroshima - Kyoto, Mountain Bike, mechanic, Bike tools and spare parts, support vehicle

Group Size

Minimum 4, maximum 12.

Food

Included meals: 13 breakfasts, 10 lunches, 9 dinners, plus water and snack food on cycling days. You should consider bringing some of your favourite energy snacks and electrolyte powder for the cycling days.

Accommodation

The sleeping arrangements are for twin-share so if you are a single traveller you will be paired up with someone of the same sex. This ensures that whether you are travelling solo or with friends, everyone is paying the same rate. We will be staying in a mixture of hotels and guesthouses. We choose hotels (where possible) that are comfortable, centrally located places which are adequate in every way. They have private bathrooms. Guesthouses are more basic with shared washing and toilet facilities

Arriving in Kyoto

You will need to arrive at the starting point hotel in time for the group meeting, which will be held on the evening of day 1. The hotel is Heianbo Ryokan, which is a 5 minute walk from Kyoto Train Station. From Osaka Airport (Kansai Airport) take the Haruka (express train, 1 hour 10 minutes, one per hour) to Kyoto station. Take the north exit. Once you have exited the station and are facing north you will see Kyoto Tower in front of you. To your left will be Kyoto Central Post Office. To the north next to that is a Lawson convenience store. Cross the street across from Lawson's and then turn left. The first right is Shinmachi Dori. Take this north for two streets, past the fire station and supermarket until you reach the corner with the primary school. Turn right and Heianbo Ryokan is 100 meters down on the left side. Take the phone number with you to call and ask the helpful English speaking staff if you become lost or print out this map to show someone (there is a helpful Tourist Office in the station).

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Travel Details

Visas

Most participants will need to obtain a Japanese visa, either through a travel agent or directly from the Japanese embassy/consulate. For the latest information, see your travel agent.

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of participating in a Grasshopper Adventure that you hold travel insurance for the duration of the trip. Insurance must include comprehensive medical and emergency evacuation. Your travel insurance details will be checked by your group leader on arrival at the starting point hotel.

If you are looking for an insurer we can recommend World Nomads. [Click to see more details.](#)

Flights

International flights to the starting point and from the finish point are not included in the price of this tour. We can assist with the purchase of inter-Asia flights and provide advice if you are considering overland travel.

Money

The official currency of Japanese is the Japanese Yen (JPY) which should be used for all transactions. Japan has a modern banking system with ATMs and money changers everywhere. You should carry some travelers cheques as a backup. Most international currencies can be exchanged so it is not necessary to bring only US dollars - AUD, EUR, CAD, NZD, GBP are all acceptable.

For current exchange rates visit:
www.oanda.com

Packing

While we do have a support vehicle to carry your luggage during the cycling days, you will be required to carry your own luggage at times. Luggage will need to be loaded on and off buses and up and down stairs at hotels. For this reason we recommend that you pack as lightly as possible in a backpack. You should consider bringing the following items:

Personal

Backpack
Long trousers
Shorts
Shirts
Warm jacket
Thermals
Woolen socks
Jumper
Hat
Sandals/Light Shoes
Swimming Costume
Rain/Wind coat
Sunglasses
Light Rain Coat
Toiletries
Tampons (hard to get in China)
Small Towel
Sunscreen
Goves/Scarf
Beanie
First Aid Kit
Mosquito Repellent
Camera and Film/Memory
Alarm Clock
Gloves/Scarf

Travel

Passport with 6 months validity and spare pages
China/Nepal Visas
Passport photo
Travel insurance details
Flight tickets
Money - cash/credit cards/travellers cheques
Phrase book

Bicycle

Something to carry your personal belongings in while cycling, eg. day pack, bum Bag, handlebar bag
Helmet
Cycling gloves
Bicycle water bottle
Bike shorts with something to put on over the top while off the bike

Costs

We recommend that you allow approximately US\$30 for food and general living costs per day. Shopping money should be considered extra to this amount. It is not customary to tip the guides and drivers in Japan, however, should you wish to do so they will certainly appreciate it.

Electricity

Japan works on a 100 volt system and uses two flat pin plugs.

Plugs look like this: | |

Climate

Japan has a temperate climate with warm to hot summers, cold winters and pleasant weather in spring and autumn. You should expect all weather conditions on this tour from cold mornings to warm days.

Cycling Details

Cycling Days and Distance

8 days - 469km

Difficulty

Moderate/Difficult - You will need to a good level of fitness to participate in this trip. There are eight cycling days in total, with most days cycling up to 80km on sealed roads. This trip involves some very steep and long mountain climbs, with one lasting for 25kms on a steep gradient... up! The first half is very hilly, whilst the latter part of the trip is more gently undulating. The cycling is done at an altitude between sea level and 1500 metres.

Cycling Conditions

The cycling terrain is all sealed surfaces, with some sections of the trip on cycling paths! On the roads we will encounter few cars, but you still need to be constantly alert for vehicles.

Bikes

Bikes are included in the trip cost. Our mountain bikes are entry level standard. We keep them well maintained and we travel with all necessary tools and a variety of spare parts. We use Cannondale bikes with the following specifications: hard tail (front suspension) with Shimano Alivio 21 speed gears, Shimano v-brakes, off road tyres, one bottle cage, ergonomic seat, sizes 15", 17", 19" or 21". Please specify your bike size when booking. You may wish to bring your own pedals, cleats, saddle or handlebar extensions, as we can easily fit them to our bikes.

You can bring your own bike for this trip. The best bike for conditions in Japan would be a good working mountain or hybrid bike with 21 gears or more and hybrid tyres to cope with the varying conditions. You should have your bike serviced by a professional bike mechanic before travelling to ensure that it is in good working order. While we do provide mechanical assistance and carry some spare parts during the trip you will need to bring spare parts (including tubes) for your bike as different bikes use different parts and we cannot guarantee that we will have a part to suit your bike.

Helmets

For safe cycling we highly recommend wearing a helmet whilst cycling on our trips.

Transporting your bike

Most international airlines consider bicycles as part of your regular luggage weight allowance, so you will need to pack light. The best way to transport a bicycle is to package it in a bike box. Most bicycle stores are happy to give away boxes for free. You will need to remove the front wheel (and sometimes the rear wheel), handle bars, pedals and seat post. Tape any loose parts to the bike frame and pack a few extras in the box such as your helmet. You can keep your box until the end of the trip to pack it for the trip home.

Support Vehicle

For the cycling days we will have the backup support of a small bus that will carry our luggage, snacks, water, and anybody not cycling. You can use the support vehicle whenever you feel like no longer cycling.

Positive Impact

An integral part of traveling is to have a positive impact on the country that you are visiting. On this trip there are a number of things you can do to have a positive impact on the communities that we visit.

Dress

Parts of Japan are still quite conservative. In rural areas and temples overly revealing clothing is considered offensive. You should make an effort to dress more conservatively in these situations. Walking around a village in bike shorts is not

appropriate so if you wish to cycle in just bike shorts you should have something with you on the bike to put on over the top (eg long, loose shorts or a skirt/sarong). When visiting temples shorts are acceptable providing they cover the knee. Singlet tops are not acceptable in temples.

Phrase Book

A highly memorable part of your travels will be the local people you meet. In the tourist areas some people will speak some English but away from these areas you should learn a few words of Japanese. We will teach you some of the basics but if you want to really interact we recommend bringing a phrase book.

These notes last updated: 13 May 2008

Important

All information in these tour notes is researched with care and provided in good faith. The information subject to change, and does not form part of the contract between the client and Grasshopper Adventures.