

2018 Fall Photography Tour of Japan

The Autumn season is my favorite time to visit Japan and I am excited about the opportunity to bring a small group (max of 8 participants) to experience it in October and November in 2018 in Japan! The temperature is moderate, humidity is low, chances of rain are lower and the leaves of Japan are spectacular as they change colors! There are so many wonderful places to visit in Japan to see the Autumn leaves, but here are the places I plan on bringing you to:

13 Nights, 14 days

Oct 22nd, Tokyo (1 Night)

Oct 23rd - 24th, Kamikochi (2 Nights)

Oct 25th, Matsumoto (1 Night)

Oct 26th - 27th, Karuizawa (2 Nights)

Oct 28th - 31st, Kyoto (4 Nights)

Nov 1st - 2nd, Kawaguchiko (2 Nights)

Nov 3rd, Tokyo (1 Night)

The timing of the fall leaves changing colors isn't an exact science and we can't always count on mother nature to be on time, but the places we plan to visit will have fantastic photo opportunities even if we are a little early or late for the leaves. Also, I don't think it is enough to just visit Japan, but always like to include optional cultural experiences as well. These will be arranged depending on the preferences of the group but could be such experiences as cooking lessons in a Japanese home, tea ceremony, flower arrangement, traditional Japanese music/art, or something more along the lines of ninja/samurai experience or even visiting a master sword smith.

Another popular option is to have a portrait session with a real maiko/geiko (geiko is the commonly used term for geisha in Kyoto) while in Kyoto or some locals wearing Japanese traditional clothes like kimono or yukata. If you have other interests or requests, please let me know as it might be possible!

Intro & Highlights

The basic plan will be in the next section, but here is a little about each place we plan on visiting.

Tokyo | 1 night

If New York is the city that never sleeps, [Tokyo](#) is the city that doesn't even slow down! A truly unique megalopolis, full of energy, lights and more food experiences that you could hope to try. For a city of this size (greater Tokyo area is around 35 million), Tokyo is amazingly clean, safe, provides ample and on time public transportation. Except for some random or early trees, we will be too early for colors in Tokyo.



Kamikochi | 2 nights

Kamikochi is my favorite place in Japan that isn't a city. In addition to beautiful scenery, it often provides opportunities to photograph monkeys and other animals as well. Kamikochi doesn't allow private cars so it's best explored by foot on the easy walking trails. Like the timing of the leaves, of course I can't guarantee that you will see monkeys during your stay there, but I've had 100% success so far! The header image for this tour page is from Kamikochi. In an average year, we should have good timing for leaves in Kamikochi.



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Matsumoto | 1 night

On the way from Kamikochi to Karuizawa we will make a brief stop in Matsumoto, a quaint castle town in Central Japan. Matsumoto Castle is a National Treasure and the oldest standing castle in Japan, making for a great short stop along the way to our next location. While it's possible for some leaves, the main goal here is the castle.



Karuizawa | 2 nights

Karuizawa is a small upscale mountain resort town in central Japan. With nearby waterfalls and ponds, the Autumn colors should combine to provide wonderful photographic opportunities. The town itself is also quite pleasant to walk around and photograph. In an average year, we should have good timing for Autumn leaves.



Kyoto | 4 nights

[Kyoto](#) is my favorite city in Japan and perhaps the world. It has a wonderful mix of modern and traditional Japan with food that is just as rich as Kyoto's history. Truly a unique place! Highlights include some spectacular temples and shrines like the Golden Pavilion, Ryoanji, Nanzenji, Kokedera and Fushimi Inari Taisha. Also we will check out some of the historic areas of Kyoto like the Geiko District (Geisha in Kyoto are referred to as Geiko) of Gion, beautiful Higashiyama neighborhood and the relaxing Path of Philosophy. Except for some random or early trees, we will be too early for colors in Kyoto.



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Fuji Five Lakes | 2 nights

Perhaps Japan's most iconic symbol, Mt. Fuji is best seen from afar rather than climbing! Though the mountain has a reputation of being "shy" by hiding behind clouds, October - February offer the best percentage of days to see the mountain clearly. We will base our stay in the resort town on [Lake Kawaguchi](#) though will also stop by some of the other [five lakes searching](#) for spectacular views of the mountain, hopefully with fall leaves, which in an average year we should have good timing for some areas of elevation in the area.



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Tour Itinerary

Here is the basic itinerary for the 2018 Fall Photography Tour of Japan. Dates are where we are staying that night and B = breakfast included, D = dinner included.

Oct 22nd, Tokyo | B

The group will meet in Tokyo on October 22nd though if you wish to arrive early of course you can! You can fly into either Narita or Haneda airport. The plan for this first day will depend on everyone's flights, but in most cases we will start with something in the afternoon or welcome dinner.

Oct 23rd - 24th, Kamikochi | BD

After breakfast we will take an early, direct bus to Kamikochi to avoid multiple transfers via train and bus. We should arrive around lunch time so after dropping our bags at the hotel, we will grab lunch and then off to explore Kamikochi by foot. The following day we will explore more of Kamikochi, a paradise for (easy) hiking, by foot in search of various wildlife and spectacular views of the mountains.

Oct 25th, Matsumoto | B

On the way from Kamikochi to Karuizawa we will make a brief stop in Matsumoto, a quaint castle town in Central Japan. Matsumoto Castle is a National Treasure and the oldest standing castle in Japan, making for a great short stop along the way to our next location. While it's possible for some leaves, the main goal here is the castle.

Oct 26th - 27th, Karuizawa | B

Karuizawa is a small upscale mountain resort town in central Japan. With nearby waterfalls and ponds, the Autumn colors should combine to provide wonderful photographic opportunities. The town itself is also quite pleasant to walk around and photograph. In an average year, we should have good timing for Autumn leaves. We have two days to spend here before heading to Kyoto.

Oct 28th - 31st, Kyoto | B

After two days in Karuizawa, we will head to Kyoto. While we will probably be too early for leaves in Kyoto, it's full of charm and always photogenic no matter what time of year! Highlights include some spectacular temples and shrines like the Golden Pavilion, Ryoanji, Nanzenji, Kokedera and Fushimi Inari Taisha. Also we will check out some of the historic areas of Kyoto like the Geiko District (Geisha in Kyoto are referred to as Geiko) of Gion, beautiful Higashiyama neighborhood and the relaxing Path of Philosophy.

Nov 1st - Nov 2nd, Kawaguchiko | BD

After Kyoto we will head back North East to spend time with Japan's most iconic mountain (perhaps most iconic anything), Mt. Fuji! Though the mountain has a reputation of being "shy" by hiding behind clouds, October - February offer the best percentage of days to see the mountain clearly. We will base our stay in the resort town on [Lake Kawaguchi](#) though will also stop by some of the other [five lakes searching](#) for spectacular views of the mountain, hopefully with fall leaves, which in an average year we should have good timing for some areas of elevation in the area.

Nov 3rd, Tokyo | B

Our trip is coming to an end and after breakfast on the 3rd we will transfer back to Tokyo. Depending on the interests of the group we may have a portrait session in Tokyo, a cultural experience or explore Tokyo.

Nov 4th | B

Of course you are welcome to stay as long as you want in Japan but if you are just sticking to the plan, November 4th is the day you should fly out of Tokyo. Either Narita or Haneda airport is okay.



Extension

There is currently no extension planned though please let me know if you are interested in one!



Accommodations

While Japanese accommodations are typically smaller than other countries, we will stay in a combination of Japanese Ryokans and "Western" style hotels, that will typically be 3 or 4 star accommodations. Japan is generally a very safe country, but certainly all of the places we will stay will be in safe locations as well as

being convenient to our trip itinerary and being comfortable. Here are a few of the hotels I often reserve to give you an idea of the types of accommodations you can expect:

Tokyo | [Royal Park Hotel, The Shiodome](#)

Kyoto | [Royal Park Hotel, Kyoto](#)

Miyajima | [Miyajima Hotel Makoto](#)



There are some areas of Japan where we will not be able to find hotels to stay in as nice as these or times when we may sacrifice slightly on luxury in order to spend more time sleeping (in other words, staying closer to our photography locations in Japan), but all accommodations will be clean, safe and comfortable enough to get good night's rest.



Investment

Fall Tour (13 nights) | \$6850 USD

Single Occupancy Fee | \$550 USD

Your investment per person, for this tour included:

- 3-4 star accommodations for 13 nights for two people per room. Single rooms are available for a supplement of \$550 USD and are due to availability.
- Services of your photo leader and other local guides when applicable.
- All transfers within Japan when we are together as a group, which will likely include a combination of bullet train (shinkansen), chartered transport or express highway bus.
- Breakfast on all days and some other meals indicated on the itinerary.
- Most temple, shrine and park fees are included unless there are some optional experiences you wish to take part in.

Your investment does not include:

- Airfare to/from Japan or any fees associated with your tickets. Japan Photo Guide does have a relationship with a travel agency in Japan and can help you with airfare, but this is completely optional. If making your own reservations, it is very important to contact Japan Photo Guide before doing so to make sure times will work with the group.
- Participants from from some countries may need a visa to visit Japan. Japan Photo Guide can help you with the process, but there may be additional costs.
- Any meals/activities/experiences during free time are not included and some of these while together are optional and are not included.
- While some meals will be included, often there are additional beverages that are not included like alcohol and sometimes soft drinks.
- All personal expenses are not included.
- Medical or travel insurance is not included.

Other Notes About Your Investment

These prices are in United States Dollars are based on a group of 5 or more participants. **If the group turns out to be 4 or less participants, there is small group fee of \$500 USD per person. 8 would be the maximum number of participants.**



Photo Leader



Evan Pike, professional photographer and founder of Japan Photo Guide will be your main guide in Japan. Evan spent more than 4 years living and traveling around Japan as a freelance photographer. Though currently living in the USA, Evan returns to Japan 3 - 5 times a year for weeks at a time. Through personal experiences and connections gained by living/traveling within Japan, Evan offers assistance and photography tips, to create a much more meaningful vacation for those visiting Japan. The main idea behind Japan Photo Guide is to create unique experiences and memories that will last much longer than the vacation itself. When not in Japan, Evan runs a boutique portrait studio in Cary, NC and is a photographer for USA Today Sports Images. Evan can speak intermediate Japanese-conversational, situational and functional.



Testimonials

Japan Photo Guide has helped more travelers from more 11 different countries visit and experience Japan. Please take a look at the [testimonial](#) page for the most recent reviews of guided tours of Japan, but here are a few quotes taken from the reviews:

Thanks Evan for a trip of a lifetime. You are a wonderful guide and fantastic person. I feel I made a new friend.

Your ability to bridge the gap between U.S. and Japanese culture made the country come alive for me. You made it easy for me to see and do things that would have been extremely difficult and in some case impossible.

Nothing is more valuable when visiting a new place than someone with first-hand knowledge of and experience with the geography, the culture, the people, and the sights. Your energetic and enthusiastic guidance through Tokyo made our trip effortless and maximized our enjoyment of this amazing city.



Gallery





Additional Notes

Earthquakes

Earthquakes occur daily in Japan but high majority of them are so small they are not felt. In most cases, buildings in Japan are built to strict regulations to withstand moderate earthquakes but of course no place is completely safe nor can we predict earthquakes. In the unlikely event that we experience an earthquake of significance, it is important to be familiar with safety procedures. Japan Photo Guide highly recommends searching the web for this information but [here is a good place to start your search](#).

Transit and Accommodations

All accommodations and hired transit (as well as public transit) will be clean, safe and hotels will have private bathrooms and showers. In general, Japan is a very safe and clean country, but still be mindful of valuables and your camera gear.

Health and Fitness

Please be aware that while we will not be taking place in any extreme workouts, there will be a considerable amount of walking and participants should be in good physical condition and health. Plan to have comfortable walking shoes as we will be walking not only a lot and on flat surfaces but also sometimes uphill/stairs.



Terms and Conditions

Insurance

Japan Photo Guide requires you to have health insurance that covers you while traveling. Travel insurance is strongly encouraged to help reduce risk of financial losses that could occur. Different restrictions and limitations apply to travel insurance so please contact your insurance provider of choice and read over the details of their policy carefully. Take into account factors such as weather, missed connections, unable to travel due to sickness, family emergency, injury, unexpected financial problems, airline strikes, or other personal issues.

Health Requirements

In most cases, tours in Japan require moderate activity levels but there will be a lot of walking. Additionally, you may find it difficult to adjust to multiple time zone changes depending on your country of origin. Waking up before sunrise for morning photography sessions also need to be taken into consideration as well as carrying your own photography equipment.

It is important to contact Japan Photo Guide before booking with any health or dietary concerns.

Most of the trip we will not be too far from hospitals or medical facilities, but there could be some days and time during transit where we are not within close range of immediate medical care.

Booking, Deposits, Cancellations and Refunds

Booking is available by first come first serve basis. To book a tour, you must submit the booking form and your deposit of \$800 USD per group. Your spot is not reserved until you have submitted a booking form for your party and deposit per person. When booking less than 4 months in advance, payment in full is necessary.

If you need to cancel, you must submit the cancellation form and agree to the following conditions:

100 Days or more | You can receive a refund minus a \$275 USD minimum cancellation fee per person plus any associated costs/fees (including credit card fees) charged by companies providing services, accommodations and experiences in Japan. Depending on the trip, fees could be in the amount of 25% to up to 100% of tour cost.

61 - 99 Days | You can receive a refund minus \$550 USD minimum cancellation fee per person plus any associated costs/fees (including credit card fees) charged by companies providing services, accommodations and experiences in Japan. Depending on the trip, fees could be in the amount of 25% to up to 100% of tour cost.

60 Days or less through end of trip | No refund.

Tour Plan and Potential Changes

Japan Photo Guide designs tours with specific plans and goals in mind to experience all Japan has to offer, but in some cases, changes may need to be made without advance warning. Such changes could include but not limited to, accommodations, sightseeing schedule and experiences. When these changes need to be made, especially if weather is the factor for change, when possible, Japan Photo Guide will try to get input from the group when possible.

Model Photography Release

Japan Photo Guide reserves the right to use your picture, portrait, or photograph taken on tour in all forms and media and in all manners, including composite or distorted representations, for advertising, trade, or any other lawful purposes. Any photographs submitted to Japan Photo Guide also may be used online or printed for promotional use.

Note about the use of the word "Guide" in Japan Photo Guide:

I am not an official licensed guide in Japan or anywhere else! Japan has very strict guidelines on becoming an official guide. Basically there are 3 levels:

1. English Speaking Guide(ESG): Officially licensed guide. She/He can do guiding, escorting, interpreting and so on
2. English Speaking Escort(ESE): Non-Licensed. She/He can escort the group and give them the instruction or information but cannot provide the history, culture, tradition and so on.
3. English Speaking Assistant(ESA): Non-Licensed. She/He will just help boarding train or bus, or helping check-in etc.

I am number 2, ESE. This means that I cannot be paid to teach you about Japanese history, culture, traditions and so on. The "guide" in Japan Photo Guide is meant for photography guide, not guide of Japan.

Any payment is not to hire me as an "English Speaking Guide" in Japan.



Tour Schedule

Tour dates: Oct 22th - Nov 4th, 2018

Extension dates: TBD

Cost

6850 USD\$ per person