

## May 2025: Nature and Culture of Japan

18 - 30 May 2025

*Unusual itinerary that combines the history and traditions of the ancient Nakasendo trade route, with a naturalistic adventure in the wildest part of the island of Hokkaido and the Japanese Alps. We will venture into the Alps in search of the Japanese Macaques in the Jigokudani Monkey Park and the imposing snow walls of the Kurobe Tateyama Alpine Route. We will travel part of the Nakasendo trail, dating back to the Edo period, stopping in some characteristic post villages where pilgrims could stop to rest in traditional Ryokans, as we will do too. Finally we will explore the wild heart of Japan, the eastern part of the northern island of Hokkaido. In May we will still find cherry trees in bloom and high numbers of Orcas, as well as Brown Bears, Red-crowned Cranes, Whooper Swans, Japanese Deer and the elusive Foxes. The itinerary is exclusively designed for our group limited to a maximum of 12 people.*

### PROGRAM

#### 18 May

Arrival in Tokyo.

Overnight at Hotel Shinjuku Washington or similar\*\*\*.

#### 19 May

After breakfast we will leave for the **Japanese Alps and the Joshinetsu Kogen National Park** where we will visit the **Jigokudani Monkey Park**, Jigokudani means hell due to the evident volcanic characteristics of the area dotted with blowholes and boiling waters. Here we will have the opportunity to meet the group of **Japanese Macaques** who enjoy the hot springs during the long and freezing Japanese winter.

At the end of the visit we will drive to the city of Nagano.

Overnight at Hotel Metropolitan Nagano or similar\*\*\*\*.

#### 20 May

Today an exciting excursion awaits us, we will drive to the **snow walls of the famous Kurobe Tateyama Alpine Route, in the heart of the Japanese Alps**. Private vehicles are not allowed on this pass, so it is a group excursion aboard **bus, cable car and train, that will take us to Murodo at 2450 metres, at the foot of Mount Tateyama**. When spring arrives, the road is literally carved into the snow between **impressive 15 or more meters snow walls**. If we are lucky we will have the opportunity to watch **White Ptarmigans**, quite common in the area.

At the end of the excursion, we will return to Nagano.

Overnight stay at Hotel Metropolitan Nagano or similar\*\*\*\*.

#### 21 May

In the morning we will reach **Narai, once the richest among the eleven post towns along the Nakasendo of Kiso**, so healthy to be called Narai of a thousand houses. Its main street extends for over a kilometer and here we can **enjoy the atmosphere of the Samurai era**. The two-level wooden buildings house all manner of businesses, from soba restaurants and sake shops to souvenir vendors and lacquerware artisans, as well as temples and merchants' homes.

Overnight stay at Ryokan Onyado Iseya or similar.

(Simple accommodation in a traditional Japanese structure)

## 22 May

After breakfast we will walk the **Nakasendo trail to Yabuhara**, it is an easy walk that will last all morning. Upon arrival, we will take the local train to **Kiso Fukushima** which we will visit in the afternoon. During the Edo period, **Kiso Fukushima was the most important post town in the Kiso Valley**. In addition to the historic center and museums, there are several **Zen Buddhist temples** in and around the city.

Overnight at Ryokan Onyado Tsutaya or similar.

(Spartan accommodation in a traditional Japanese structure)

## 23 May

After breakfast we will head to **Tsumago**, one of the best preserved post towns in Japan where we will step back in history to the Edo period.

We will continue to **Magome**, another important postal town. A walk along the cobblestone path will truly make us feel like travelers from another era!

We will end our day in **Hida Takayama**.

Overnight at Hotel Takayama Green or similar\*\*\*\*.

## 24 May

Today we leave the Kiso valley to head towards the **traditional villages of Shirakawago and Gokayama, UNESCO World Heritage Sites**. Surrounded by high, rugged mountains, those villages in winter are subject to heavy snowfall, for this reason the houses have exceptionally steep thatched roofs. Many of the **buildings were built in the late 1600s** and were designed to withstand heavy snow, furthermore the large space in the attic offers an ideal area for cultivating silkworms.

In the evening we will reach **Nagoia**.

Overnight at Hotel Four Points by Sheraton Nagoya Chubu Airport or similar\*\*\*\*:

## 25 May

In the morning we will move to the **island of Hokkaido**.

Flight Nagoia-Sapporo-Memambetsu and transfer by minivan to **Rausu**.

Overnight at Hotel Daiichi or similar\*\*\*.

## 26 May

After breakfast we will sail along the coast of the **Shiretoko peninsula, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, aboard a small boat chartered by us in search of the Brown Bears**. Waking up from hibernation in April, from the beginning of May all bears are active, including females with their cubs. The slopes where the snow melts earlier are favored by hungry bears who can eat the fresh new vegetation.

In the afternoon we will sail the waters of the **Nemuro Strait**. Located between Hokkaido and the Russian island of Kunashir, the strait is only 17 km wide at its narrowest section. Here we will have the opportunity to observe **flocks of Shearwaters** coming from Tasmania that stop here to rest during their migration and **groups of Orcas** that inhabit these waters in spring before heading further north, and enjoy the wild panorama of the coasts. This is a group excursion shared with other people.

In the evening we will have the opportunity to observe and photograph the **Blakiston's Fishing Owl**, the largest living species of owl.

Overnight at Hotel Daiichi or similar\*\*\*.

## 27 May

In the morning we will return to the **Nemuro Strait for a second group cruise in search of Orcas**.

The afternoon will instead be dedicated to a **land exploration of the Shiretoko peninsula, including the famous Shiretoko pass** from where the views is spectacular.

Overnight at Hotel Daiichi or similar\*\*\*.

## 28 May

In the morning is planned a **second private cruise in search of Brown Bears**.

After lunch we will head towards the **Notsuke peninsula**, a narrow strip of sand 28 kilometers long facing the Nemuro Strait that is an excellent place to observe the **Japanese deer**, the subspecies present in Hokkaido is called Ezo, and the **Red Foxes** as well as a multitude of **sea birds and ducks**. Very interesting are the **dead forests of fir and oak trees**. We will continue south to explore the eastern coast of Hokkaido until we reach **Lake Furen, a brackish lake famous for its variety of ducks and wild swans**.

Overnight at Hotel East Harbor or similar\*\*\*:

## 29 May

After breakfast we will **explore the surroundings of Nemuro in search of the famous and elegant Red-crowned Cranes**, one of Japan's iconic animals, and the elusive **Sea Otters** living in the area.

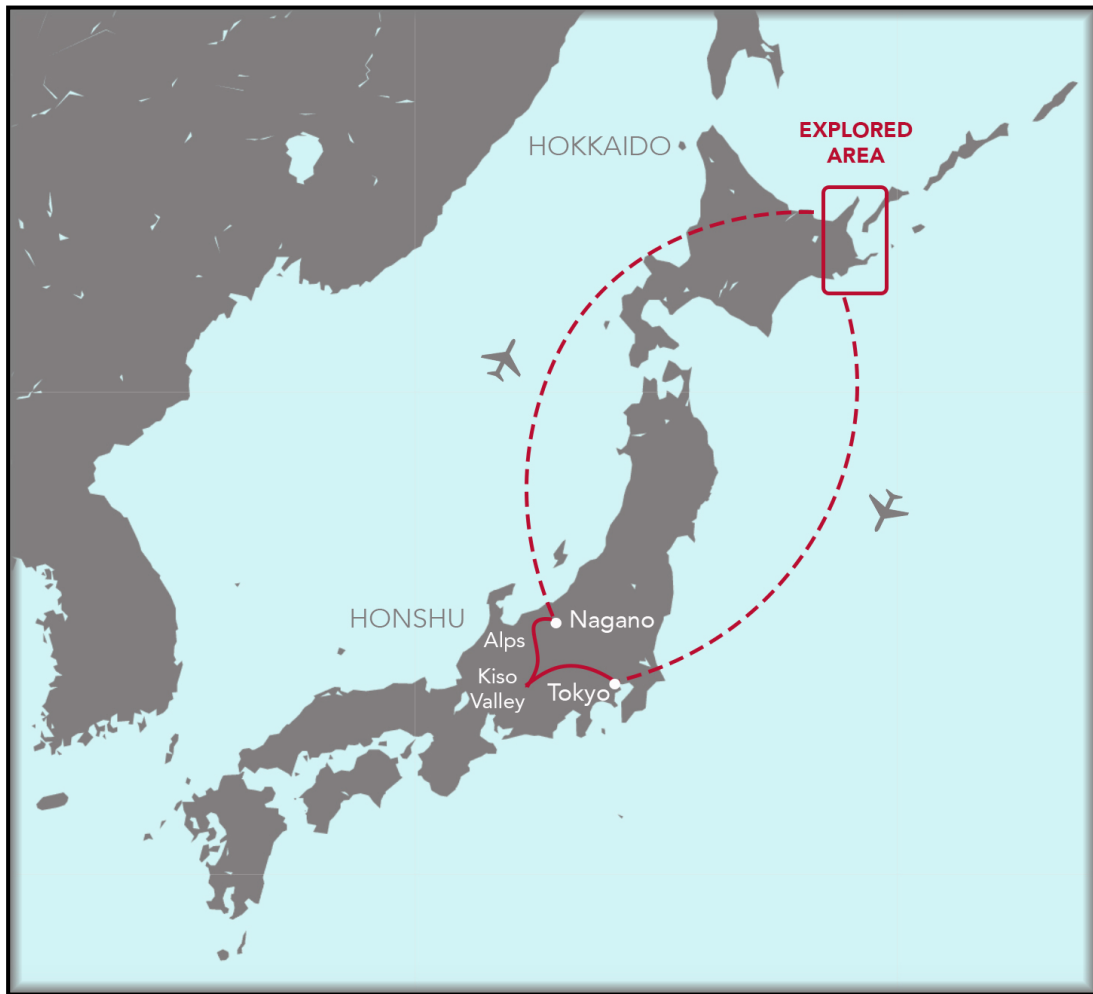
We will then reach Nakashibetsu Airport in time for the flight to Tokyo.

Overnight at Hotel Excell Tokyu Haneda or similar\*\*\*.

## 30 May

Departure.

## VOYAGE MAP



PRICE PER PERSON Euro 7800.00

Included in the price:

- Double room accommodation breakfast included.
- All meals from 19 to 29 May.
- All mentioned excursions.
- Domestic flights
- English speaking guide.

Not included:

- Lunches on 25 and 29 May.
- Intercontinental flights
- Any unforeseen additional costs associated with weather and/or layovers in Hokkaido or Tokio including flight changes, additional hotels and meals.