

Best of Japan and South Korea

“Sumo, Shrines, Sake and Joy for Your Senses”

September 12-22, 2020

*Asia is calling! Join us on an adventure to 2 countries where millennia-old traditions blend with cutting edge technology in ultra-modern cities. **Japan** and **Korea** ignite any travelers’ wanderlust and dazzle your senses! 2020 is the year for Japan as they gear up for the Summer Olympics. We’ll be there after the crowds, taking advantage of so many new venues. Even if you’ve been here, this will be a whole new experience like no other!*

*We begin in trendy **Tokyo**, a bustling city with a kaleidoscope of enticements – from its crazy animal, robot or even cuddle cafes to streets of endless noodles. Our past groups loved to just lose themselves in this city where it seems like a land of fantasy brought to life. Enjoy epic walking tours through hidden alleys with gleaming skyscrapers towering above. There’s free time to soaking thermal onsen baths and visit the new Digital Museum that will leave you spellbound. “The Land of the Rising Sun” has a new meaning because you won’t want to sleep to take it all in. We even add a full day to witness majestic **Mt. Fuji** with Hakone Hot Springs.*

*A high-speed **bullet train** whisks us to the seaside resort town of **Kobe**, land of priceless Kobe beef. Savor beef and sake as we explore a brewery’s centuries old methods of distilling rice wine. Then it’s on to glorious **Kyoto**, a haven of pagodas, shrines, temples and gardens. This land of geishas is the Soul of Japan, where it’s all about beauty and balance of your inner being. Become one with nature as you walk among the tame deer in the fabled Deer Park.*

*We wing our way to **South Korea** – a country that is hot on travelers’ lists for its tantalizing mix of old traditions and dynamic modern cities. One glimpse of **Seoul** and you’ll know why its trending. No city in the world is more adept at developing fads. It’s a whirlwind of action Gangnam style– voted the “#1 Party City in the World.” Food is at the heart of South Korea with endless culinary delights from kimchi to BBQ. It’s also the wholesale capital for shopping sprees. See 5000 vendors at Gwangjang Market after our city tour of the coolest neighborhoods. Visit the **DMZ** at the border of North Korea. Witness the changing of the guard at the sprawling Gyeongbokgung palace and indulge in our sizzling **Nanta** dinner show!*

There’s so much included. We have a great air on Asiana Airlines and gorgeous hotels. Come explore the Yin & Yang of 2 countries and to experience the world’s most unique food, art, fashion and cultures in one exhilarating vacation. Tokyo, Kyoto, Mt Fuji, Kobi and Korea will encompass all your dreams. You have to see it to believe it. Let this Asian Affair begin!

Our Glorious AFS Itinerary

Sept 12 – Depart USA to Tokyo

Details in Trip Tips.

Sept 14 – Tour Tantalizing Tokyo. (Land portion begins)

Arrive at Narita airport and be taken to our ultra-modern hotel, the Shinjuku Prince in the heart of Tokyo's popular Kobuki-cho entertainment district. We'll get a chance to settle in a bit before meeting up for a walking tour to discover a stunning City Scape, the cool Pop Culture and the best places to eat and drink your heart out.

We'll start in **Omoide-Yokocho** (Memory Lane). This retro style alley is filled with old fashioned food stalls offering tasty local favorites like 'yakitori' and 'oden.' Continue through to the eastern end of Shinjuku, known locally as **Kabukicho**, or Tokyo's Red-Light District. Get lost amidst the flurry of neon signs as you snap photos of famous landmarks like the Godzilla on top of Toho Cinema. Then it's on to the famous **Golden Gai** nightlife area, home to tiny drinking dens that populate its narrow streets. This is the perfect place to end the tour so that you can enjoy your evening to explore on your own

Overnight: Shinjuku Prince Hotel (3 nights)

Sept 15 – Morning Free, Afternoon City Tour B/D

The entire morning is free and there are some great options you may want to consider. Team Lab Digital Museum (<https://www.teamlab.art/>) should be at the top of the list. The world's first digital art museum will boggle your mind with its use of computers and projectors to help fascinate and stimulate your imagination. It's popular, so you may want to [buy your tickets online](#) because on-site entrance tickets may run out (or not be sold at all).

Or you may want to take part in the ancient Japanese bathing rituals by visiting the nearby Heiwajima-onsen public hot springs facility (<https://www.heiwajima-onsen.jp/en/>), also near Odaiba. Soak to your heart's content in one of the finest natural hot springs in Tokyo.

We'll meet at 2pm in the hotel lobby for a half day Tokyo sightseeing tour, including **Meiji Shrine** at the center of Yoyogi **Park**. Honoring Emperor Meiji, this Shinto shrine is considered one of the holiest in Japan. Next, it's a total shift as we explore the colorful and trendy **Harajuku** fashion district. Harajuku is the center of Japan's most extreme teenage pop cultures and fashion styles, made famous by the so-called "Harajuku Girls," a term used to describe women and teenage girls who wear outlandish fashion in a street culture style. We'll head to the stunning **Imperial Palace** and walk around the **Niju-Bashi Bridge** area for a great photo op of the Palace grounds.

Dinner is going to be at the fun-filled sumo-themed **Hananomai Ryogoku**. The food here is spectacular but we'll also have the opportunity to learn all about the Sumo traditions.

Overnight: Shinjuku Prince Hotel

Sept 16 – Mt. Fuji Full Day Tour B

Set out after breakfast to for a full day to visit the stunningly beautiful snowcapped **Mt. Fuji**, one of Japan's most enduring images. The extinct volcano rises more than 12-thousand feet and is the highest mountain in Japan. It's obvious why this special place is UNESCO World Heritage site. We'll get personal with the mountain, traveling halfway up to what is known as the **Subashiri 5th station**. This is where many hikers set out for the summit. We'll also stop at the popular Michi-no-Eki station on the northern piedmont of Fuji. It has excellent views of the mountain and is a popular

lunch spot with great shopping opportunities. Another highlight is a cruise on the crystal clear **Lake Ashi** with Mt.Fuji as a backdrop. Lake Ashi was formed in the caldera of Mt Hakone after the last eruption of it over 3000 years ago.

Our final destination is the scenic **Owakudani Valley**, or “Great Boiling Valley. We’ll get a bird’s eye view of the steaming activity by taking gondolas on the **Hakone rope way** across this volcanic valley, known for its bubbling Sulphur vents and **hot springs**. Fun food to try is the "kuro tamago"- black eggs, cooked in the naturally hot spring water. We’ll be back in the early evening and your night is free to enjoy.

Overnight: Shinjuku Prince Hotel

Sept 17 – Bullet Train to Kobe

B/L

It’s time to hop the bullet train (fastest in the world at 199MPH) to be whisked across Japan to Shin Kobe, a beautiful seaside resort that is also flanked by mountains. We arrive at lunch time and begin our visit by enjoying the famous **Kobe beef** at a local **Teppanyaki restaurant** where food is cooked on hibachi grills as we watch. After lunch, we head to the Nada district where we tour a **Nada Sake Brewery**. The brewing of sake dates back to the 17th century in this region and we’ll be shown the process as well as savoring a tasting.

If time permits, we’ll take a quick tour of Kobe, before checking in to the elegantly unique and fun Kobe Meriken Park Oriental Hotel. This hotel will give you the sense of being on a cruise ship with its ocean views from every room. Our evening is free so you may want to take advantage of the hotel’s free shuttle bus service to Sannomiya, city center of Kobe. Here, you can shop to your heart's content along one of Japan's longest shopping street. Or you can head over to Japan's famous **Nankimachi** neighborhood (Chinatown) and the nearby [Daimaru](#) Department Store. The area has over a hundred Chinese restaurants, shops, and a Chinese temple dedicated to Kuan Yin – the Goddess of Mercy.

Overnight: Kobe Meriken Park Oriental Hotel (2 Nights). [Link](#)

Sept 18 – Kobe to Kyoto and Nara

B/L

We have a full day ahead of us as we head to nearby **Kyoto**. The original capital of Japan, Kyoto was home to emperors from the 8th century. It is known for its colorful temples and historic shrines. Among the most popular is the massive, mountaintop **Kiyomizu Temple**. It’s located in the historic and well-preserved **Higashiyama District**, known for its restaurants and shops. We’ll enjoy lunch at one of them before continuing to **Nara**.

Dating from 708, Nara flourished for centuries and Japan’s “Nara period” is known for its prosperity. We’ll visit **Todaiji Temple**, the world’s largest wooden building and home of the world’s largest bronze Buddha. Hundreds of tame deer await in the **Nara Deer Park**, where we can have the opportunity to even feed them for a great photo op. The park is also home to the **Kasuga Taisha Shrine**. This Shinto shrine was originally built in 768, but it is destroyed every 20 years and rebuilt as a way to maintain its purity. We’ll be back to Kobe in late afternoon and will have the evening free.

Overnight: Kobe Meriken Park Oriental Hotel

Sept 19 – Fly to Seoul

B/L

Morning offers some last night leisure time in Tokyo and in the afternoon, we transfer to Osaka International Airport to fly to Seoul, Korea.

We arrive late afternoon and go immediately to our hotel, the Courtyard by Marriott Seoul Namdaemun. Located in the heart of Seoul, this ultra-modern hotel is within walking distance to the **Myeongdong** district, home to world-class shopping. Your evening is free to explore.

Overnight: Courtyard by Marriott Seoul Namdaemun (3 Nights)

Sept 20 – Free Day or Optional DMZ

B

Today is all yours to explore Seoul, or you can choose to take advantage of a **half day Demilitarized Zone tour**. This rare opportunity to visit the DMZ leaves from the hotel in the morning. Our first stop is **Imjingak**, a park housing statues and monuments dedicated to the Korean War. We then continue to the **Freedom Bridge** and the 3rd Infiltration Tunnel before heading to the **DMZ Museum**, where you check out artifacts and photographs. The **Dora Observatory** offers us an opportunity to look across the border into North Korea using binoculars which they provide. Although we can't go into N. Korea, we can get a sense of what it is like by visiting **Kijongdong**. Known as **Peace Village**, it's a model North Korean village. Also visit **Dorasan Station**, which once connected North and South Korea by train. Your guide will explain the station's symbolic significance. Finally, pass by **Unification Village**, a model farming community in South Korea. We expect to finish the tour by early afternoon. And you may have a free time at Imjingak for your own lunch, before returning to Seoul.

The rest of the day is free. You may want to take the time to head to Mount Namsan and the top of the North Seoul Tower for some spectacular views or explore the picture-perfect Bukchon Village, a neighborhood of traditional Korean homes known as hanoks. Many are private, but there are also numerous galleries, shops and cafes.

Overnight: Courtyard by Marriott Seoul Namdaemun

Sept 21 – Palace and Market City Tour

B/D

After breakfast, we discover the rich cultural traditions of Korea as we visit Seoul's palaces and markets. The massive **Gyeongbokgung Palace** has more than 7,700 rooms. Originally the main palace of the Joseon Dynasty, it has been rebuilt twice, once after being destroyed by fire in the Imjin War and then again during the Japanese occupation. The palace is arguably regarded as being the most beautiful and grandest of all five palaces. It also houses the National Palace Museum of Korea. From the serenity of the palace ground we proceed to the hustle and bustle of Seoul's markets, **Insadong** and **Namdaemun**. Inasdome is an indoor/outdoor collection of everything from antiques to art to galleries while Namdaedmun is the largest and oldest traditional market in Korea. Lunch is on your own and this is a great opportunity to enjoy some of the wide variety of food stalls.

There will be free time in the afternoon. We'll meet again in the evening for a night of comic entertainment with the popular show **Nanta**, a hilarious farce about catering mishaps before a wedding feast. Executed with high-energy body language but without dialogue, this show provides a modern twist on 'samul nori' — a Korean tradition of percussion played with four instruments. The performance involves four chefs running out of time to cook and kitchen implements tapping out drumbeats. Nanta is the longest-running show in Korea, first opening to acclaim in 1997 in Seoul, and still going strong to this day.

Overnight: Courtyard by Marriott Seoul Namdaemun

SEP 22 Back to the US

B

We will head to Incheon International Airport in late afternoon to board our flights back home. We again cross the International Date Line, you could get home before you left!