

Sept 12 – Depart USA to Tokyo

Full details coming soon in AFS Trip Tips.

Sep 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 CityScape, 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 Tokyo 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.

FUJI TOUR

This guided one-day tour takes you to majestic Mt. Fuji and Hakone. It includes a trip up to Mt. Fuji's 5th Station at an elevation of 2,300 meters, a cruise on pristine Lake Ashi, and a ride on the Ropeway.

08:00 Depart hotel with a guide

10:30 Mt. Fuji 5th Station

13:00-14:00 Lunch at Local Restaurant

14:30 Lake Ashi Cruise

16:30 Mt. Komagatake Ropeway

19:00 Arrive at Hotel

Owakudani Valley - may not be covered - I am double-checking if they can include it. 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.

MAY NOT COVER: 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.

INCUEDED: Mt. Komagatake Ropeway

The Hakone Komagatake Ropeway, leads from the shore of Lake Ashinoko to near the Komagatake peak of Mount Hakone. When visibility is good, panoramic views of Lake Ashinoko and Mount Fuji can be enjoyed from the ropeway's upper station.

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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 lunchtime 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 a 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).

Sept 18 – Kobe to Kyoto and Nara

B/L

Narrow streets of the historical part of Kyoto

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 the late afternoon and will have the evening free.

All new - Osaka added! The Bright Heart of Osaka after Kyoto and Nara

Enroute from Nara to Kobe, we can arrange for bus to stop at the bustling heart of Osaka as an extra bonus for the group. After a day of traditional castles, temples and shrines, change pace by visiting the most vibrant district in Osaka, the 2nd biggest city in Japan.

The lively entertainment area of Dotonbori is Osaka's most famous attraction, renowned for its gaudy neon lights, extravagant signage and the enormous variety of restaurants and bars.

Osaka's obsession with food is aptly expressed in the slogan "kuidaore", translated as "eat till you drop"! All kinds of street foods, many originating in Osaka, are available for sample along the bustling streets: Takoyaki – octopus dumpling shop where the delicious snack is cooked right there on the street. Along the side alleys are many izakaya or drinking places where you can try barbecued skewered chicken, fried kebobs skewered fish and vegetables.

After exploration of this dining and shopping area, you can take the train back to Kobe on your own.

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

[caption id="attachment_8933" align="alignleft" width="285"]
History[/caption]

Be Apart of Living

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. This isn't cheesy, like Check Point Charlie today with a manikin. It's the real deal - actual history before your eyes!

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.

You'll finish this tour by early afternoon and you may have 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**. Inas dome 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!
