

JAPAN FOR AMERICANS · CUSTOM TRIP PLAN

Seven days in Japan, planned for Mark & Lisa.

Tokyo, then Kyoto, with Hakone, Nara and an Osaka evening around the edges. Built for a couple on a first trip who came for the food and the history, and who would rather not set an alarm every morning.

Dates	Wed 12 May – Wed 19 May 2027 · 7 nights
Travelers	Couple, first time in Japan, from Chicago
Pace	Balanced · two early starts in the whole week, both earned
Bases	Ginza, Tokyo (3 nights) · Downtown Kyoto (4 nights)
Fly	Into Tokyo Haneda (HND) · home from Kansai (KIX)
Asked for	Fushimi Inari · one really good sushi meal · Mt Fuji if possible · not too many temples

Tokyo ● ————— ● Kyoto ————— ● Nara · Osaka

Five calls we made for you

Most of a good week in Japan is decided before you land. These are the decisions that shape yours, and why we made them the way we did.

1 • Two bases, not five, and fly open-jaw

Seven days is the classic first trip, and it works only if the route stays simple. You sleep in Tokyo, then Kyoto, and reach everything else as a day trip. Book your flight into Tokyo and home from Kansai (KIX), so you never ride back to Tokyo to fly out. That saves you most of a day.

2 • Ginza in Tokyo, downtown in Kyoto

You asked for food and history, and you don't want to be woken by nightlife. Ginza is Tokyo's polished dining district: revered sushi counters, department-store food halls, quiet at night, and a short hop to Tokyo Station for the bullet train. In Kyoto, downtown puts Nishiki Market and Pontocho at your door, and Gion is a short walk across the river. The trade-off: Ginza costs more, and downtown Kyoto is less postcard-pretty than Gion itself.

3 • Skip the Japan Rail Pass

Your only long train ride is one Tokyo → Kyoto leg. Since the 2023 price rise, even a full Tokyo–Kyoto round trip covers only a bit more than half the cost of a 7-day pass, and you're doing half a round trip. Buy a single Shinkansen ticket for Day 4. Everything else runs on a Suica card.

4 • Only two early mornings, and we spent them where they matter

You asked to avoid early starts. We kept two: Fushimi Inari (Day 5), because its lower sections are at their most crowded once the day gets going, and the Higashiyama lanes on the same morning, which are, in our own guide's words, a different place before 9am. Every other day starts after breakfast.

5 • A cap on temples

Kyoto's classic mistake is six temples a day until they blur. You get at most two or three major ones a day, grouped by area, with markets, gardens and long meals in between. We dropped Ryoan-ji and the Silver Pavilion on purpose. If you find you want more, they're easy to add.

MATCHED TO YOUR BUDGET AND TASTE

Where to stay

Three picks per base, from comfortable to splurge. Our pick (navy) is the best fit for a food-and-history couple at \$200–400 a day each.

Tokyo • Ginza 3 nights • Wed 12 – Sat 15 May

MUJI Hotel Ginza **OUR PICK**

Calm, natural-material rooms above MUJI's flagship store, with its own restaurant. Quiet at night, and a short walk to both Tsukiji and the Ginza sushi counters.

Design hotel • the hotel says its prices stay the same all year, which helps in a busy May • [Map](#) →

Mitsui Garden Hotel Ginza Premier **COMFORTABLE**

Consistently among Ginza's best-rated hotels on booking sites. A polished, reliable base if MUJI is full.

Larger hotel • straightforward, good value for the area • [Map](#) →

The Tokyo EDITION, Ginza **SPLURGE**

Intimate and design-led, steps from the flagship boutiques and Michelin counters. Likely above your range; worth it only if this trip is a celebration.

Luxury • fewer rooms, more atmosphere • [Map](#) →

Kyoto • Downtown 4 nights • Sat 15 – Wed 19 May

Good Nature Hotel Kyoto **OUR PICK**

A wellness-minded hotel with a serious food program, about a block from Nishiki Market. Made for people who travel to eat.

Upscale • opened 2019 • Kawaramachi-Shijo • [Map](#) →

Izutsu Hotel Kyoto Kawaramachi Sanjo **COMFORTABLE**

A small 31-room hotel steps from Kawaramachi Street, a 7-minute walk to Nishiki. Quieter and more personal than a big chain.

Small hotel • guests praise the location and the luggage help • [Map](#) →

Hotel Musse Kyoto Shijo Kawaramachi Meitetsu **VALUE**

The most central of the three: 4 minutes on foot to Nishiki Market and about 12 to Yasaka Shrine in Gion.

Mid-range • the easy choice if the others are full • [Map](#) →

All checked open in October 2026. Book directly or on your usual site, and book early: Kyoto rates climb close to the date.

Where to eat

Your sushi meal · Ginza Thu 13 May, dinner

Sushi Roku (Ginza Sushi Roku) **OUR PICK**

A dinner-only omakase of 14 pieces plus extras, about ¥18,000 a person at our last check. The real counter experience, inside your budget.

Book about a month ahead · [Book](#) → · [Map](#) →

Sushi Ginza **EASY**

A chef's-choice nigiri course at lunch or dinner, about ¥8,000 including service. The fallback if Roku is full.

No seat choice · lunch or dinner · [Book](#) → · [Map](#) →

Ginza Sushi Matsumoto **SPLURGE**

Michelin-starred Edomae sushi. If you want the once-in-a-lifetime version, this is it.

Bookings open in rounds · reservation fee · cancellation charges from 15 days out · [Map](#) →

Kaiseki lunch · Kyoto Sun 16 May

Roan Kikunoi **OUR PICK**

The two-Michelin-star sibling of Kikunoi, and the most approachable way into that kitchen. Lunch seats at 12:00–12:30.

Reservation required · [Kikunoi site](#) → or ask your hotel · [Map](#) →

Kinmata **EASIER**

Traditional Kyoto kaiseki, lunch and dinner by reservation, and easier to get into than the Kikunoi pair.

Email at least 3 days ahead · [Map](#) →

Kikunoi Honten **SPLURGE**

Three Michelin stars, Kyoto kaiseki at its most famous. Lunch seats at 12:00–12:30.

Hard to book · months ahead · [Kikunoi site](#) → · [Map](#) →

Nara lunch & Osaka evening Tue 18 May

Hiraso, Nara **OUR PICK**

Kakinoha-zushi, the persimmon-leaf sushi, from a specialist. Ask for a wooden take-away box and eat it in Nara Park.

About 10 minutes' walk from Kintetsu Nara · lunch from 11:30 · [hiraso.jp](#) → hours vary · [Map](#) →

Kushikatsu Daruma, Dotonbori **OUR PICK**

Osaka's famous fried skewers since 1929, in its most central branch, a short walk from the Glico sign.

Walk in, counter seating · one dip in the sauce, never two · [Map](#) →

Yaekatsu, Shinsekai **LOCALS' PICK**

The 1949 kushikatsu counter locals prefer, in retro Shinsekai, if you want the old-Osaka version.

Walk in · a short ride from Dotonbori · expect a queue · [Map](#) →

If your first choice is full: sushi → Sushi Ginza; kaiseki → Kinmata; Daruma queue too long → Yaekatsu. **Dietary:** omakase and kaiseki are set menus built on fish and dashi, so give allergies or restrictions when you book; vegetarians should ask for *shojin ryori* instead. Prices are as listed in October 2026 and can change. Confirm Sunday opening when you book the kaiseki lunch.

Days 1–2

1

Wed 12 May

Land, settle in, eat well without trying

- Your Suica works on the train in from Haneda, so you're in central Tokyo in about half an hour.
- Walk instead of napping: staying up resets your body clock faster. Dinner from a *depachika* food hall needs no reservation and no queue, which is right for a jet-lagged first night.



Afternoon	Land at Haneda → train into central Tokyo, about 30 minutes
~16:00	Check in at MUJI Hotel Ginza, then walk Ginza
~18:30	Depachika dinner, early night

Running late? Skip the Ginza walk and go straight to dinner.

Open today's route in Google Maps →

2

Thu 13 May

Old Tokyo and the sushi dinner BOOK AHEAD

- Tsukiji before noon: many stalls wind down by early afternoon.
- Senso-ji in the afternoon means crowds. That's the price of not starting early, and the evening sushi is the day's real event. If Sushi Roku can't be booked, a high-end lunch set gives nearly the same quality for a fraction of the dinner price.



10:00	Leave the hotel → Tsukiji Outer Market, a short hop from Ginza · about 1½ hours
12:30	Subway to Asakusa → Senso-ji and the Nakamise arcade · about 1½ hours
15:00	Tokyo Skytree, if the sky is clear · about 1 hour
17:30	Back to the hotel to rest
19:00	Sushi Roku

Running late? Drop Skytree. Never cut the sushi dinner.

Open today's route in Google Maps →

Days 3–4

3

Fri 14 May

Mt Fuji, if the forecast says yes

- Hakone only pays off under a clear sky. Check the forecast the night before and choose.
- Either way, the evening is Omoide Yokochō: two or three tiny counter bars in a lantern-lit alley. Carry cash, and expect a small seating charge (*otoshi*).



08:30	Your third, optional early start: Hakone's loop takes several hours
09:00	Odakyu Romancecar from Shinjuku → Hakone-Yumoto, about 85 minutes (reserved seats)
10:30–16:30	The Hakone loop · if the Owakudani ropeway is closed for volcanic activity, take the bus alternative
~18:00	Romancecar back to Shinjuku → Omoide Yokochō, right there

Running late? Cloud or a late start? Take the city plan instead: Meiji Shrine 10:30, Harajuku lunch, Shibuya afternoon.

[Open today's route in Google Maps →](#)

4

Sat 15 May

Bullet train to Kyoto, then Nishiki and Pontocho

- Buy an *ekiben* (station bento) for the train, and sit on the right for your second chance at Fuji.
- Nishiki is "Kyoto's Kitchen": pickles, tofu, sweets, seafood. Some stalls ask you not to eat while walking. From May, many Pontocho restaurants set up *kawayuka* platforms over the river, so ask for one.



10:00	Check out → Tokyo Station, a short hop from Ginza
10:30	Shinkansen to Kyoto, 2h15–2h30 · right-hand side for Fuji
~13:30	Drop bags at the hotel (ask for early luggage storage)
15:00	Nishiki Market · about 1½ hours
18:30	Dinner on Pontocho

Running late? Move Nishiki Market to Day 6's free evening.

[Open today's route in Google Maps →](#)

Days 5–6

5

Sun 16 May

Fushimi Inari, then the eastern hills

EARLY START

- Your first early morning, on a Sunday, spent where it counts: Fushimi Inari's tunnels of torii are calm early, and the Higashiyama lanes are a different place before 9am.
- Kaiseki at lunch is Kyoto's multi-course cuisine at its most affordable. The afternoon is deliberately slow: matcha, then Gion at dusk.



07:00	Leave the hotel → JR to Inari Station
07:30–09:00	Fushimi Inari: walk partway up. The full summit loop takes a couple of hours and you don't need it
09:15	Taxi to the Higashiyama lanes (buses are slow at peak hours) → Ninenzaka, Sannenzaka
10:30	Kiyomizu-dera · about 1 hour
12:00	Taxi to Roan Kikunoi: seated 12:00–12:30
15:00	Back to the hotel to rest → tea house → Gion at dusk

Running late? Turn back at the first gates at Inari, and see Kiyomizu-dera's veranda from outside. Keep the lunch: it's booked.

Open today's route in Google Maps →

6

Mon 17 May

Arashiyama and the Golden Pavilion

- The bamboo grove and Tenryu-ji sit side by side. *Yudofu*, simmered tofu, is Arashiyama's temple-cuisine specialty.
- Kinkaku-ji is far enough away that a taxi saves the day, and it's your temple cap reached: stop there.



08:30	Leave → JR to Saga-Arashiyama
09:15	Bamboo grove, then Tenryu-ji's garden beside it · about 2 hours
12:00	Yudofu lunch in Arashiyama
14:00	Taxi to Kinkaku-ji: the visit is short and one-way · about 45 minutes
16:00	Bus or taxi back downtown

Running late? Keep Kinkaku-ji, drop Tenryu-ji's garden.

Open today's route in Google Maps →

Days 7–8

7

Tue 18 May

Nara by day, Osaka by night

- Nara is the easiest day trip in the region and mostly on foot once you arrive. Buy deer crackers only from official vendors.
- Then Osaka, where the food is the point: takoyaki, Osaka-style okonomiyaki, kushikatsu. One dip in the shared sauce, never two.



09:00	JR Nara Line from Kyoto Station, about 45 minutes (bus from JR Nara to the park)
10:00–12:30	Todai-ji, the deer, Kasuga Taisha
12:30	Hiraso, about 10 minutes' walk from Kintetsu Nara · take the box into the park
15:00	Kintetsu from Nara to Namba, under an hour
17:00–20:00	Dotonbori: takoyaki, okonomiyaki, kushikatsu at Daruma
~20:30	Keihan or Hankyu line back to Kyoto

Running late? Drop Kasuga Taisha. Leave Osaka by 21:00 for an easy last night.

Open today's route in [Google Maps](#) →

8

Wed 19 May

Home from Kansai

- Flying home from Kansai is what made the route work: no ride back to Tokyo.



Departure —4h	Leave the hotel for Kyoto Station
	Haruka limited express to Kansai Airport, 75–90 minutes, luggage space

Running late? Nothing to cut. Give yourself the margin.

Open today's route in [Google Maps](#) →

What to book, and when

WHAT	WHEN	WHY
☐ Flights: into Haneda, home from Kansai (KIX)	Now	The open-jaw route is what makes seven days work.
☐ Sushi Roku , Ginza, Thu 13 May	About a month ahead	Small counters fill first. Fallback: Sushi Ginza (page 4).
☐ Hotels: MUJI Hotel Ginza (3 nights), Good Nature Hotel Kyoto (4 nights)	Soon	Kyoto's best stays book early, and rates climb close to the date.
☐ Roan Kikunoi lunch, Kyoto, Sun 16 May	A few weeks ahead	Reservation required. Ask your hotel to book, and confirm Sunday service.
☐ Shinkansen Tokyo → Kyoto, Sat 15 May	Closer to the date	A single ticket. No rail pass (call 3).
☐ Optional: a Nishiki Market food tour	A few weeks ahead	Good for a first visit, and popular.

Phones and payments

Add a **Suica** to Apple Wallet at home, before you fly. It works on a US iPhone with no Japanese account and covers every train and subway on this trip, in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka.

Top it up with your Amex or Mastercard, not your Visa. US-issued Visa cards are refused in Wallet, and that's the most common place Americans get stuck. Do a test top-up on your sofa, not at a gate in Shinjuku.

On Android? You'll need a physical Suica from a station machine instead.

Small things that help

Carry some cash for tiny bars and counters. No tipping, anywhere, ever.

At Kyoto temples, at most two or three a day. When one starts to blur into the last, stop and go eat.

US passport holders enter Japan visa-free for up to 90 days.

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