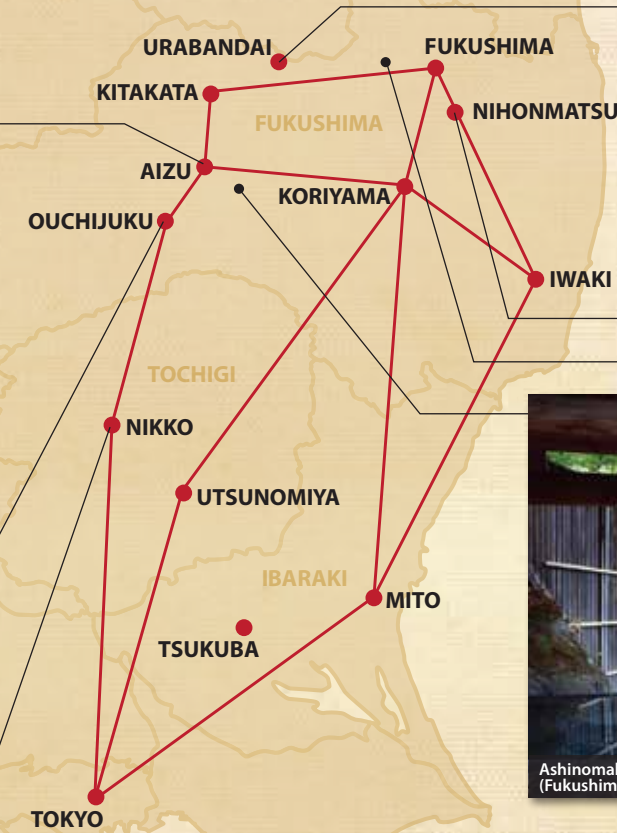


DIAMOND ROUTE EXTENSIONS / THE SAMURAI SPIRIT

INTRODUCING TOKYO'S NORTHERN NEIGHBORS: FUKUSHIMA, IBARAKI AND TOCHIGI PREFECTURES

Samurai Spirit is a set of morals, a way of living, a code of honor. Learn about the fascinating samurai history and participate in a variety of samurai-related experiences, including Japanese archery and kendo. Or visit a private studio of a master artisan specializing in restoring the katana (Japanese swords).

Easily reached from Tokyo via the JR Tohoku Shinkansen, Fukushima Prefecture is known for its many relaxing onsen (hot springs), unique culture and fine local cuisine, beautiful nature, old castles and fertile lands that produce some of Japan's best fruit and sake.



Itinerary:

PLAN A Fukushima, Aizu (1 night / 2 days)

Day 1 • Tokyo » Nihonmatsu » Fukushima » Iizaka Onsen

Meet your English-speaking guide at your hotel. Depart from Tokyo Station for Koriyama Station by bullet train (1h 20 min). Transfer to Nihonmatsu by private vehicle (30 min). Begin your exploration by visiting the ruins of Nihonmatsu Castle and the surrounding park. Learn about the history of the castle and its role in the Boshin War. Then, participate in a private kendo practice. Your next stop is Fukushima City, the capital of Fukushima Prefecture. Visit the Fukushima Prefectural Museum of Art featuring a 3,800 piece collection ranging from French impressionism, Japanese modern paintings, prints, to textiles. Alternatively, visit one of numerous fruit orchards the city is known for where you can pick (and eat) a variety of fruits straight from the trees. Next, you will be transferred to Iizaka Onsen (20 min) by private car. This traditional hot spring town features a variety of Japanese-style inns, eateries, and nostalgic shops.

Overnight: **Onyado Kawasemi Ryokan** or similar

OPTION on Day 1: Ebisu Circuit for drifting fans (15 min from Nihonmatsu).

Day 2 • Iizaka Onsen » Aizu-Wakamatsu » Tokyo

After breakfast, embark on a full day of touring with your guide. Enjoy a scenic drive to Aizu-Wakamatsu (1h 30 min), a castle town known for its award-winning sake and its samurai traditions. Your first stop will be at Aizu Nisshinkan Samurai School that gained national recognition at the best place for Japan's youth to gain an exemplary samurai education (you can also try out Japanese archery here). After lunch at a local restaurant, visit Tsuruga-jo Castle, Japan's only red-and-white castle that has been important to local history (including the tragic tale of the Byakkotai). Then, stop by Iimoriyama, the site of suicide by a group of young soldiers. Your next stop will be Suehiro Sake Brewery, one of the most prominent sake breweries in the Tohoku region, making sake for special events and high-profile figures. You will then be taken to Koriyama Station by private vehicle (1h) where you will board your shinkansen train bound for Tokyo.

PLAN B Fukushima, Nikko Area (2 night / 3 days)

Day 1 • Tokyo » Utsunomiya » Nikko

Meet your English-speaking guide at your hotel. Depart from Tokyo Station for Utsunomiya Station by bullet train (1h 9 min). Then, transfer to Nikko by private vehicle (37 min). Begin your sightseeing with a visit to Toshogu Shrine built in 1617 as a mausoleum of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder and the first Shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate. This World Heritage shrine is Nikko's most majestic attraction. Then, stop by Tamozawa Imperial Villa, former Nikko residence of the Imperial Family. The villa was erected in Nikko in 1899, using parts of a residence that originally stood in Tokyo. After lunch, you will take the famous Irohazaka winding road to Kegon Waterfall, located at Lake Chuzenji in Nikko National Park.

Overnight: **Hoshino Resort KAI Nikko** or similar

Day 2 • Nikko » Utsunomiya » Koriyama

After breakfast, a private car will take you to Utsunomiya Station (1h). You will then board the bullet train bound for Koriyama (47 min). Visit a local master artisan that restores the katana, Japanese swords that have become rusty or chipped. After lunch at a local restaurant you will be driven to Nihonmatsu (26 min) where you will have an opportunity to participate in a private kendo lesson. Next, visit the ruins of Nihonmatsu Castle and the surrounding park. Learn about the history of the castle and its role in the Boshin War. After a busy day of exploration, you will then be driven to your ryokan. Rest of the day free at leisure.

Overnight: **Yomogino Ryokan** or similar

Day 3 • Koriyama » Urabandai » Koriyama » Tokyo

After breakfast, embark on a full day of sightseeing. Your first stop is Urabandai, known as Bandai-Asahi National Park. Following a massive eruption of Mt. Bandai in 1888, the ensuing massive landslides blocked rivers and created a number of lakes and marshes. Enjoy a short hike (approx. 1h) to the mysterious Goshikinuma Ponds. The combination of the weather, seasons, and volcanic substances in the water give mysterious hues such as emerald green and pastel blue. Next, visit Lake Hibara, the largest lake in the Urabandai region and enjoy the beautiful panoramic views of Mt. Bandai. Depending on weather conditions, you can also go kayaking on the lake. Your next stop is Morohashi Museum of Modern Art, located in the heart of the Bandai Asahi National Park. The museum is one of the only handful of museums in the world with a permanent Salvador Dali exhibition. At the conclusion of your tour, you are transferred to Koriyama (55 min) by private car. Catch the bullet train to Tokyo (1h 20 min).

PLAN C Fukushima, Nikko Area, Ibaraki (3 night / 4 days)

Day 1 • Tokyo » Mito » Koriyama

Meet your English-speaking guide at your hotel and depart for Mito by Limited Express train (about 90 min). Mito was the power base of the Mito clan during the Edo Period (1603-1867), one of the three families of the Tokugawa regime that dominated Japan during that time. Visit Kairaku-en Garden, Mito's main tourist attraction (considered one of Japan's top three landscape gardens). Next, transfer to Utsunomiya Station by private car (1h 13 min). Then, take the bullet train to Koriyama (39 min) and transfer to your hotel. Rest of the day free at leisure.

Overnight: **Yomogino Ryokan** or similar

Day 2 • Koriyama » Urabandai » Aizu-Wakamatsu

After breakfast, set on a full day of touring by private car. Your first stop is Urabandai, known as Bandai-Asahi National Park. Following a massive eruption of Mt. Bandai in 1888, the ensuing massive landslides blocked rivers and created a number of lakes and marshes. Enjoy a short hike (approx. 1h) to the mysterious Goshikinuma Ponds. The combination of the weather, seasons, and volcanic substances in the water give mysterious hues such as emerald green and pastel blue. Then, visit Lake Hibara, the largest lake in the Urabandai region and enjoy the beautiful panoramic views of Mt. Bandai. Next, travel to Aizu-Wakamatsu (47 min). Visit Tsuruga-jo Castle, Japan's only red-and-white castle that has been important to local history (including the tragic tale of the Byakkotai). Then, stop by Iimoriyama, the site of suicide by a group of young soldiers and see Sazae-do temple that was built in the form of a double helix slope, and, has a completely different route up and down.

Overnight: **Harataki Ryokan** or similar

Day 3 • Aizu-Wakamatsu » Ouchijuku » Nikko

After checking out of the hotel, depart for Ouchijuku by private car (approx. 40 min). This was a former post town along the Aizu-Nishi Kaido trade route, which connected Aizu with Nikko during the Edo Period. Today, Ouchijuku has been restored and the main street is lined by thick thatched roof buildings which house a variety of shops, restaurants and small inns. After lunch, a private car will take you on a scenic drive to Nikko (approx. 1h 55 min). Visit Toshogu Shrine built in 1617 as a mausoleum of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder and the first Shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate. This World Heritage shrine is Nikko's most majestic attraction.

Overnight: **Nikko Kanaya Hotel** or similar

Day 4 • Nikko » Utsunomiya » Tokyo

This morning, set off on a full-day tour of Nikko by private car. Your first stop is Futarasan-jinja Shrine, a Unesco World Heritage Site. The name of Nikko is derived from Futarasan, where the god of marriage dwells in the hallowed ground. Next, visit Tamozawa Imperial Villa, former Nikko residence of the Imperial Family. The villa was erected in Nikko in 1899, using parts of a residence that originally stood in Tokyo. After lunch, you will take the famous Irohazaka winding road to Kegon Waterfall, located at Lake Chuzenji in Nikko National Park. The almost 100 meter tall Kegon Waterfall is the most famous of Nikko's many beautiful waterfalls. At the conclusion of your tour, you will be transferred to Utsunomiya Station where you will board your shinkansen train to Tokyo.

