

JAPAN

— Tokyo · Kyoto · Osaka · Hiroshima · Sapporo —

“Tokyo welcomes you with your favourite video game character — a giant Mario waving at us before we'd even cleared customs — and somehow that already feels right.”

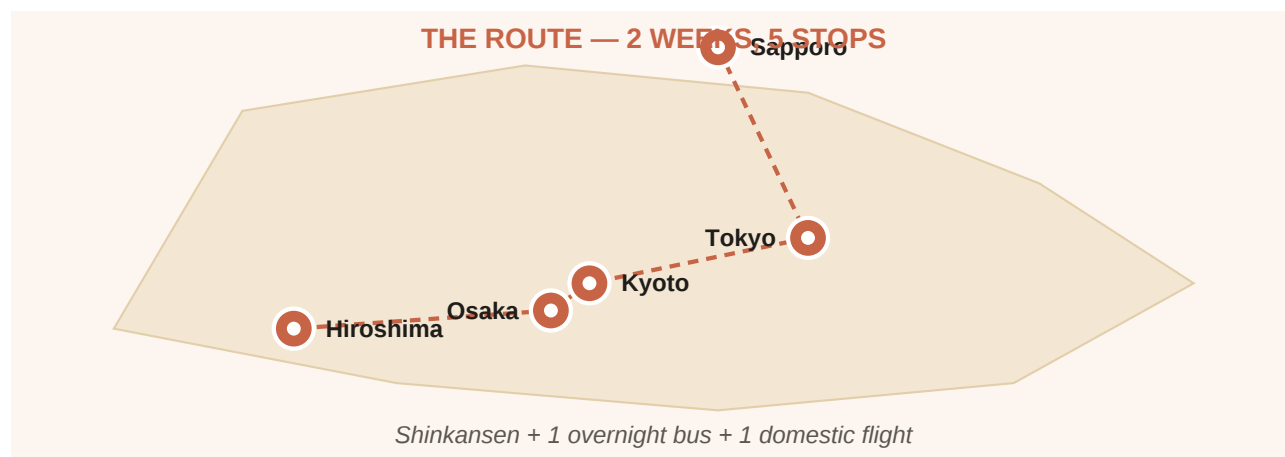


desk2destinations.com · Honesty over hype. Slow over rushed. Practical over pretty.

By Ayushi & Harshit Jain

Japan at a glance

We did the classic Golden Route plus Hokkaido in two weeks — Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, a one-day reckoning in Hiroshima, and a quick Sapporo flight up north. Roughly 1,200 km of Shinkansen, one overnight Willer bus, one domestic flight.



Best time	Cherry blossom season runs late March to early April in Tokyo and Kyoto; Hokkaido blooms two to three weeks later, so late April is a sweet spot if you want sakura twice. Autumn (October–November) is gentler with maple foliage, and December–February is the ski/snow window in Hokkaido.
Visa (IN)	Japan now offers an eVisa for Indian passport holders — processing is roughly five working days through the official VFS portal.
Currency	JPY (¥)
Getting around	JR Pass for inter-city Shinkansen hops — the 7-day pass starts paying off the moment you do a Tokyo–Kyoto–Hiroshima loop. Suica/Pasmo IC card for everything local: metro, buses, vending machines, and convenience stores.
If we did it again	Skipping Miyajima to make the overnight Willer bus from Hiroshima is the one regret — we should have stayed an extra night to see the floating torii at Itsukushima.

The top 10 — our personal highlights

Ten moments worth flying back for. Ranked roughly in the order they made us go “oh.”

- 1

Mt. Fuji day trip from Tokyo · Tokyo
Willer highway bus from Shibuya to Kawaguchiko. Take the red Fuji loop bus to Oishi Park, then sprint to Chureito Pagoda for the postcard view.
- 2

Senso-ji at 7:30 a.m. · Tokyo
The Asakusa landmark is a different temple before the crowds arrive — quiet, almost empty, completely worth the alarm.
- 3

Shibuya Crossing & Hachiko · Tokyo
Cross it three times. Then go up for the free upper view from a mall before lunch at Falafel Brothers in Parco.
- 4

Meiji Shrine & the forest in the megacity · Tokyo
Wine barrels, the oldest wooden Torii, and a hush that should not exist this close to Shibuya.
- 5

Fushimi Inari hike · Kyoto
Walk through the vermilion Torii tunnels to at least the first viewpoint — the city opens up below you.
- 6

Uji matcha day trip · Kyoto
An hour from Kyoto. Whisked matcha, parfaits, the Murasaki Shikibu statue, and matcha soba to take home. Most shops shut by 6 p.m., so go early.
- 7

Kinkaku-ji in the rain · Kyoto
The Golden Temple goes liquid in soft rain and the pond doubles it perfectly. Better than in the sun.
- 8

Dotonbori at night + Don Quijote · Osaka
The Glico running man, the canal reflections, the yellow Ferris wheel above Donki. Block out 3+ hours for Don Quijote alone.
- 9

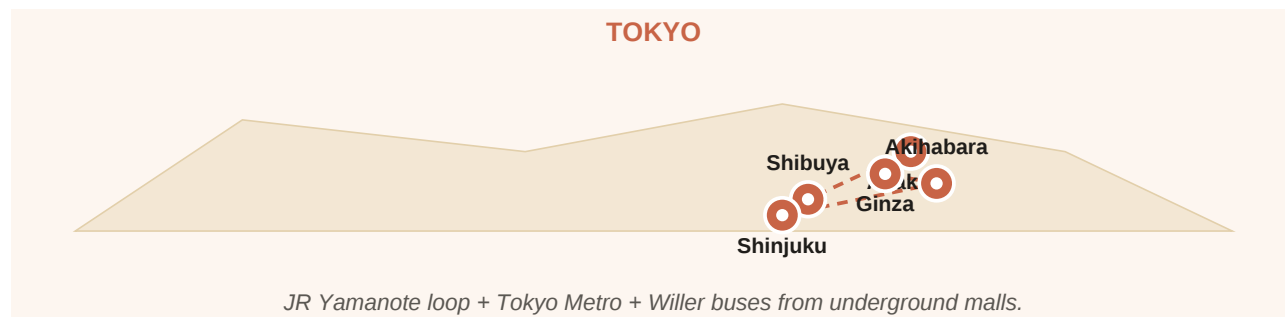
Peace Memorial Park & the A-Bomb Dome · Hiroshima
Stand in front of the Genbaku Dome. Walk the park slowly. The 3D projection inside the museum is essential and difficult.
- 10

Hill of the Buddha (Tadao Ando) · Sapporo
1.5 hours out of central Sapporo, but the tunnel approach and lavender-ringed Buddha statue are worth every minute. Then ice-cream your way home.

Tokyo

You don't ease into Tokyo. You land, you blink, and you're already in love.

Seven days here, split into two stints — Asakusa for the first five, then a quick pit-stop hotel night before our Sapporo flight, and a final rainy day after.



Top 5 here

- **Asakusa** — Senso-ji at sunrise, then the market for daifuku and matcha ice cream.
- **Shibuya** — Crossing, Meiji Shrine, Harajuku, Shinjuku in one perfect day.
- **Akihabara** — BIC Camera and Yodobashi — eight to twelve floors of electronics each.
- **Jimbocho** — Books district with the Sanseido bookstore, then dinner at OBIC À in Ginza.
- **Ginza** — Shopping by day, multiple matcha pilgrimages, date-night Italian dinner.

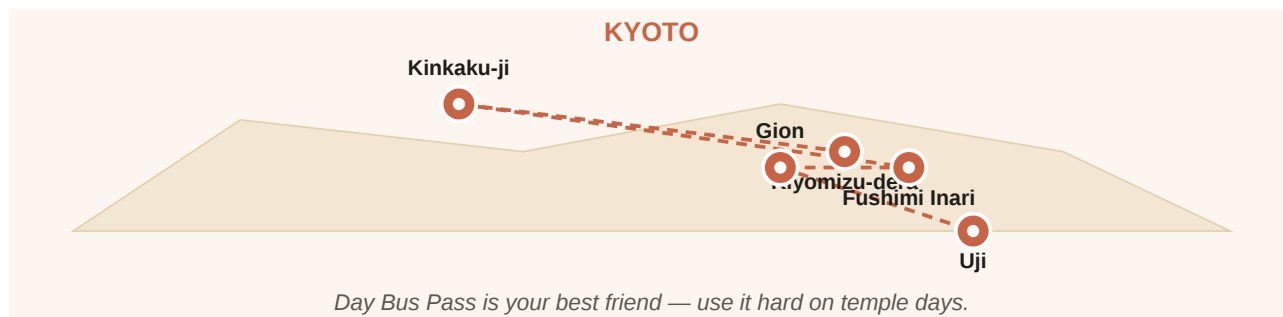
Days	7 days + 2 nights
Where we stayed	Hostel Wasabi, Asakusa for the first stretch — spotless, stone's throw from Senso-ji, free luggage hold till early evening. Then Almont Inn near Tokyo Station for the pit-stop; they held suitcases for two days in Hokkaido.
Getting around	Suica card on the metro and JR lines. Willer Express bus from Shibuya 5th floor mall for Mt. Fuji and the overnight to Kyoto. Tokyo Station is its own underground city; map it before you go in.
Where we ate	Fujifuku for vegan Japanese set course. T's TanTan at Tokyo Station for the famous vegan tantanmen. Afuri for ramen near Akihabara. Falafel Brothers in Parco. OBIC À for date-night Italian.
Reality check	Tokyo Station is a maze; budget an extra 30–45 minutes the first time. Akihabara rewards walking energy, not shopping-list energy — we spent four hours in BIC Camera and didn't see half the floors.

→ Read the full Tokyo guide on the site: desk2destinations.com/japan-tokyo.html

Kyoto

If Tokyo is acceleration, Kyoto is deceleration.

Three slow, rain-soft, matcha-soaked days. We arrived at Kyoto Station at 5:30 a.m. on a Willer overnight bus and watched the city slowly wake up.



Top 5 here

- **Uji** — Matcha town with parfaits, whisked tea, matcha soba, and the Murasaki Shikibu statue.
- **Kiyomizu-dera** — In soft rain, then Sannenzaka and Ninenzaka downhill with warm apple pie.
- **Kinkaku-ji** — The Golden Temple goes liquid in soft rain and the pond doubles it perfectly.
- **Fushimi Inari** — Vermilion Torii tunnels at 1:15 p.m. up to a clearing where the city opens out.
- **Markets** — Nishiki, Shinkyogoku and Teramachi when the rain refuses to quit.

Days	3 days + 3 nights
Where we stayed	Kiori Exec — small premium over a hostel but the lobby is comfortable enough to nap in at 6:30 a.m. Free umbrellas at the door.
Getting around	Day Bus Pass over Suica — breaks even at four hops and goes into profit at five. Just don't lose it inside Kinkaku-ji. Trains to Uji and Fushimi Inari.
Where we ate	Vegan Izakaya for gyoza. Kyoto Engine for the best ramen ever. Ain Soph for burgers. MACCHA HOUSE for matcha parfait and seasonal lattes. Delhi Restaurant for chole bhature and onion parantha.
Reality check	Kyoto refuses to be rushed — even the rain in Kyoto walks. Give Kyoto three nights, not two. Kimono rental plans may yield to weather; the money is better spent on a second matcha parfait.

→ Read the full Kyoto guide on the site: desk2destinations.com/japan-kyoto.html

Osaka

Tokyo is order. Kyoto is calm. Osaka is the friend who pulls you into the night with shopping bags and laughs the loudest.

Two days, one castle, six pairs of shoes. Osaka is barely 1 hour 15 minutes from Kyoto and rewards walking into the neon.



Top 5 here

- 📍 **Rinku Outlet** — 250 shops, open-air near Kansai airport. We walked out with three pairs of Nike.
- 📍 **Osaka Castle** — Gold trim, green roofs, families spread out for picnic on a Sunday.
- 📍 **Don Quijote** — Dotonbori location for 3.5 hours of skincare, snacks, KitKats, matcha lattes.
- 📍 **Dotonbori** — The Glico running man, canal reflections, giant yellow Ferris wheel above Donki at night.
- 📍 **Rikuro's** — Cheesecake at Daimaru Mall — reach before 8 p.m. shutter and eat it in bed.

Days 2 days + 2 nights

Where we stayed Garner Hotel, central Osaka — loyalty signup got us free early check-in and complimentary water bottles. Exact address in Maps before you walk back; Garner runs five hotels in a 3 km radius.

Getting around Metro and city buses got us everywhere; we used Suica throughout. Pre-booked extra-space seats on the Shinkansen to Hiroshima with three suitcases plus backpack — the right call.

Where we ate Mercy Vegan Cafe near Dotonbori. Rikuro's jiggly Osaka cheesecake closes at 8 p.m. sharp. Nepalese roti and sabzi stand near Don Quijote on Sunday. Okonomiyaki is the city's signature.

Reality check Compare prices across at least two Matsumoto Kiyoshi stores before bulk buying — same product, sometimes 20–30% apart in the same lane. And if you spot a KitKat 14-flavour gift box, just buy it; we didn't, and we still talk about it.

→ Read the full Osaka guide on the site: desk2destinations.com/japan-osaka.html

Hiroshima

If you only saw the rest of Hiroshima — the trams, the kids on bikes, the lemon sorbet by the lake — you'd never believe what this city has lived through.

One full day, packed. We came in by Shinkansen at 7:50 a.m. from Osaka, dumped luggage in a station locker, and left on the overnight Willer bus to Tokyo at 6:05 p.m.



Top 5 here

- 📍 **Genbaku Dome** — The A-Bomb Dome left exactly as it was on 6 August 1945. Stand in front. Read the plaque slowly.
- 📍 **Peace Museum** — 3D projection reconstructs the bombing minute by minute. The burnt tricycle and stopped watch stay with you.
- 📍 **Peace Park** — The Cenotaph arch frames the Dome by design. Walk it slowly and sit by the river.
- 📍 **Hondori** — Covered shopping street near the park. We found a Sketchers outlet here.
- 📍 **Lakeside** — Lemon sorbet at Caffè Ponte by the river — the city's quiet way of telling you to breathe.

Days	1 day + day pass
Where we stayed	We didn't stay overnight. Station lockers held two suitcases and a backpack for the day. Hostels and Booking.com hotels around Hiroshima Station are reliable if you want a slower visit (which, with hindsight, we recommend).
Getting around	Hiroshima Day Pass + the friendly red Hiroshima sightseeing loop bus covers the Dome, Peace Park, museum and city in one ticket. Trams are quietly wonderful if you have time to spare.
Where we ate	Vegetarian onigiri from convenience stores at Osaka Station — carry on the Shinkansen. Indian restaurant near Peace Park for reliable veg lunch. Hiroshima okonomiyaki is the city's signature; queue if you can.
Reality check	One day is too tight. Miyajima Island and the floating Itsukushima torii is a 2.5-hour round trip and we couldn't fit it. Stay a night. Plan a half-day for Miyajima at minimum — it is the visit we will come back for.

→ Read the full Hiroshima guide on the site: desk2destinations.com/japan-hiroshima.html

Sapporo

Hokkaido is the version of Japan no one warns you about — quieter, colder, bigger, and somehow more generous.

Two days. Late-season sakura, sulphur volcanoes, and an indecent amount of ice cream. Hokkaido feels like its own country inside Japan.



Top 5 here

- **Hill of Buddha** — Tadao Ando tunnel approach, lavender field, Buddha reveal. About 1.5 hours from central Sapporo.
- **Late-season sakura** — Get off one bus stop before yours and just walk. Hokkaido blooms two to three weeks after Honshu.
- **Pole Town** — A kilometre of underground shops, warm even in cold weather, gloriously easy to get lost in.
- **Noboribetsu** — Sulphur, steam, red-orange rock — a film-set landscape for a day-tour excursion.
- **Lake Toya** — Calm mountain-ringed water with two surprise dairy farms for yogurt and ice cream tastings.

Days	2 days + 2 nights
Where we stayed	Sapporo Park Hotel — our first proper 5-star of the trip. Beautiful lobby, comfortable bed. No AC (it's Hokkaido in April), thin white curtains let the 4:30 a.m. sunrise wake us up the second morning. Recalibrate your expectations and you'll love it.
Getting around	Airport Limousine Bus from central Tokyo to Haneda at 5 a.m. — quietly genius. New Chitose Airport bus on the other end (~1 hour 15 min into Sapporo). Inside the city, metro and Pole Town walking. For Day 2 we booked a tour bus for Noboribetsu, Bear Ranch, Mount Usu and Lake Toya — Hokkaido's modest public transport can't link those in a day.
Where we ate	Holistic Bio Cafe Veggy Way for gentle, plant-forward reset after a 5 a.m. start. Kintoya Bake for warm baked cheese tarts. Donguri, the legendary tray-and-tongs bakery — we raided it twice. Hokkaido soft-serve ice cream at every stop: each region's milk tastes different, so each cone is research.
Reality check	Two days is not enough. Hokkaido feels like its own country. If you've already seen New Zealand's geothermal landscapes, Noboribetsu may feel a little thunder-stolen. Also: skipping Bear Ranch and Mount Usu ropeway tickets to shop instead is the call we don't regret.

→ Read the full Sapporo guide on the site: desk2destinations.com/japan-sapporo.html

Costs — where the rupees went

Mid-range, vegetarian-friendly, two travellers splitting stays. Numbers are per-person, rounded honestly. Flights vary the most.

Category	Detail	Approx ■ / pp
Flights	IN → Tokyo (return)	55,000–1,10,000
JR Pass	7-day	25,000–32,000
Stays	Hostel bunk / night	3,000–5,000
Stays	3-star hotel / night	5,000–8,500
Food	Per day per person	1,500–3,000
Attractions	Per day	500–1,500
Local transit	Per day	500–1,500
Intercity	Tokyo → Kyoto bus	2,500–4,500
Intercity	Hiroshima → Tokyo bus	5,000–8,500
Intercity	Sapporo flight (one-way)	4,000–8,000

Total: ■2,80,000–3,20,000 per person all-in

One last thing

Willer overnight buses are cheaper than the Shinkansen and surprisingly comfortable for long hops on a budget.

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