



## **Yoga & Culture in Japan with Ann Dyer May 15 – May 24, 2018**

### ***May 15, Tuesday: Arrival day, Tokyo***

Welcome to Tokyo! Upon arrival at the Narita International Airport and completion of your entry procedures you will be met by your guide and delivered to our group hotel to rest and relax after your long journey. The transportation time is approximately 1-1.5 hours. There will be an opening gathering in the later evening once everyone has arrived. The next few days will be spent exploring Tokyo, the center of modern Japan. Tokyo is a huge metropolis, which has surprises in store for you at every street corner. This is an exciting, vibrant, and bustling city, where everything and everyone moves at high speed. Get some rest this evening so you'll be ready to hit the streets tomorrow!

### ***May 16, Wednesday: Tokyo***

Your first full day in Tokyo will start with morning yoga and breakfast. After you've had a chance to stretch you will head out into the city to visit some of Tokyo's most famous sights. We will start at the Asakusa Kannon Temple, dedicated to the Bodhivista of Mercy, which provides a striking juxtaposition with its city surroundings. Next we will explore the winding streets of Akihabara, the tech center of Tokyo. This is where you will get to see the highly photographed giant neon signs, arcades, and the technology, which Japan is renowned for. We will also visit the Tsukiji fish market, subject to permission.

Our sight seeing will be followed by the Goma Fire Cleansing ritual: Anoint yourself in the smoke of cedar branches at this small temple devoted to Shingon Buddhism. You can be overwhelmed by the power of the drumming accompanying this ritual meant to cleanse the body and belongings of the supplicants who visit. Nakmise shopping street also an option.

Return to the hotel for dinner and time to relax or explore on your own.

### ***May 17, Thursday: Tokyo to Kanazawa***

Today, you will head to Tokyo's trendiest and most fashionable areas. Many of Japan's most unique pop and sub cultures, fashions, and trends have developed in these districts right alongside the most culturally significant shrines and temples in Japan. You will spend today in the center of the action, seeing the fusion of traditional and modern Japan as formed by today's young artists and creators. From Tokyo, you will then travel by bullet train to Kanazawa – the city of artisans. Kanazawa has a rich heritage of crafts and artisanship ranging from gold leaf production and kimono dyeing, to ceramics, lacquer ware, decorations and so much more. Kanazawa also boasts one of Japan's most renowned gardens, an old samurai quarter, a preserved geisha district, and a modern art museum that has won international awards for its innovative architecture.

Optional workshop: Noh is a play form stretching back from Feudal times. Each step, movement and sound is perfectly crafted to express each unique character. No two are alike, and each player has his own style. Enjoy an introductory workshop at a private theatre of an ex Noh performer to explain the basics of Noh.

### ***May 18, Friday: Highlights of Kanazawa***

Yoga and breakfast will be followed by the sights of beautiful Kanazawa. We will visit the famous Kenrokuen Garden, a preserved samurai house, a local market, and a Geisha house. In the afternoon, travel by private bus to the artisans region known as Kaga, famous across Japan for its beautiful pottery and lacquer ware. Your accommodation for the next two nights is special, as it is a traditional ryokan- a type of traditional Japanese inn that originated in the Edo period. You will sleep on soft futon mattresses on tatami floors and enjoy the local ingredients in a gourmet kaiseki dinner, as well as the quintessential experience of Japan; soaking in a natural hot spring bath.

### ***May 19, Saturday: Artisans in the countryside***

Today, begin your day with a tour of a stunning Buddhist temple complex, Natadera. With luck we may have a chance to meet the head priest for a tour of the complex. After the tour, enjoy traditional Shojin Ryori, temple cuisine - completely vegetarian and very delicious prepared by volunteers at the temple. After lunch we will be introduced to the crafts of Kaga. Time permitting we will visit a private workshop for a guided tour, lead by the artist himself, and also visit the beautiful main street and shops of this small town. For those who are interested you will have the chance to enjoy a sake tasting at a local gallery. Sake is an icon of Japanese culture, however many travellers are unaware of the subtle difference behind each kind of sake, the process of making and the history of this complex beverage. In this tasting and presentation you will be introduced to the different kinds of sake, and you will sample several kinds made locally in the Kaga region.

### ***May 20, Sunday: Countryside to Kyoto***

Departing Yamashiro onsen, we will travel on to Japan's former capital, Kyoto. The next few days will be dedicated to Kyoto - the hub of traditional culture in Japan. This is a city that for hundreds of years has been an island of tradition in the swirling whirlpool of continual progress in urban Japan. Kyoto has 17 World Heritage Sites - the most properties in one city - each a masterpiece representative of the era in which it was constructed. During your time in Kyoto, you will encounter the history, cultural

aesthetics, religion, and the daily tales that make up the Japanese puzzle. You will discover and experience the past rippling through the every day life of locals. Upon arrival in Kyoto, you will stop at one of Kyoto's most photographed shrines, and walk along its hushed paths, framed by thousands upon thousands of brilliant red torii gates, each one erected by a company or business owner hoping to get the blessing of the god of commerce said to reside in these ancient hills. We will carry on to our hotel for the evening and your time is free to relax or explore!

### ***May 21, Monday: Classic Kyoto***

Today, you will visit Kyoto's sights deepening your knowledge of Kyoto and Japan. You will be exposed to the fundamentals of aesthetics, Zen, architecture, and horticulture through visits to famous places such as the distinguished stone garden at Ryoanji temple, the spectacular Golden Pavilion, and the Shogun castle. As a group we will participate in a traditional Japanese Tea Ceremony Experience, a keystone of Japanese culture. During the Sado Tea Ceremony you will sip the rich flavor of matcha green tea while a master of the tea ceremony gives you an inside look into the small details that make the ceremony the serene moment of pure contemplation and togetherness that it is. Learn about the ceremony's connections to Zen and Buddhism, and how so many elements of Japanese culture permeate through every step and motion. The evening is yours to relax and enjoy.

### ***May 22, Tuesday: Mountains of Kyoto***

Today we continue our journey in Kyoto, and visit the graceful garden of Heian Shrine, the acclaimed Silver Pavilion, and a leisurely walk along the tranquil and meditative Path of Philosophy. We will then continue to one of Kyoto's most photogenic areas, the Sanenzaka and Ninenzaka slopes, crowned by the can't-miss-it Kiyomizu temple, with its fantastic view of Kyoto city. Gaze at the grand architecture of one of the most famous temples in Japan, take in the grand panorama view of Kyoto, and walk down the winding hillside streets, perusing the small, specialized shops and cafés set against the backdrop of the Eastern Mountains. We will have the option to silence our minds and relax our bodies in a simple, quiet Zen meditation experience. Hosted in a small local temple in north west Kyoto, the monk will show you the basic of breathing and explain the concept of Zen before you join him in a session of quiet meditation.

### ***May 23, Wednesday: A day in Nara***

Today we make our way to Nara, Japan's first capital, where you will find an impressively large wooden building housing the even more impressive Great Buddha statue. You can stroll around a huge park in the middle of town where deer roam freely, often interacting with travelers passing through. This evening we will have a private meeting with a Geisha where we will have the opportunity to speak with one of these masters of Japanese tradition, and experience up-close some of Japan's most classical arts, an affair conventionally reserved for Japan's rich and well connected. At one of Kyoto's local restaurants, guests are treated to a performance that has been refined through years of schooling and apprenticeship. Our personally-selected geisha and guides make the evening even more memorable as they remove communication and cultural barriers, inviting you to participate in a few of the geisha games of old, and encouraging you to directly ask questions about the geisha lifestyle and life in Kyoto. By the end of the evening, you will have fascinating stories

to take home, memories to cherish, and photographs that any fellow traveler will envy!

***May 24, Thursday: Departure***

After breakfast we will make our way from Kyoto back to Osaka to catch our international flights home. For those departing out of Tokyo additional arrangements can be made.

NOTE: The exact timing and schedule may vary from above.