

## **JAPAN'S NATIONAL PARKS, ART & CULTURE**

**on board HERITAGE ADVENTURER**

**14 - 29 May 2025**



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### **Day 1**

**Wednesday 14 May 2025**

**Osaka**

Meeting at our hotel in Osaka, Hilton Osaka, we connected with the Heritage Expeditions staff in the lobby. We met a few of our fellow adventurers, perhaps to share a meal to mark the start of our Japan's National Parks, Art and Culture expedition. As we started to get to know our fellow adventurers better, we indulged in an Asian Fusion buffet and dessert. With our cabin numbers on our luggage tags, we closed the evening catching up on sleep from international flights or went on a self-exploration of the famed Dotonbori with its numerous kitchens and attractions.

### **Day 2**

**Thursday 15 May 2025**

**Osaka and departure**

At breakfast, we had the chance to reconnect with those we met at dinner or meet some new fellow adventurers, before heading out on our pre-selected activities in Osaka.

Some visited Nara Park, well known for its bowing Sika Deer and once the largest wooden structure in the world, the Todai-ji Temple. The deer were ever-present and quick to determine who might have a food offering. The temple houses one of the largest Buddha statues in the world carved entirely from bronze. En route, we learned from our Japanese guide Taku, that huge timbers, such as those used for the temple, are now exhausted in Japan and must be imported from places such as Canada.

The rest of us started with Minoh National Park, one of Japan's smallest National Parks, to view the 33-metre-high Minoh Waterfall. After a stop in the spectacular shopping area of Dotonbori for lunch and to soak in the atmosphere, we continued to the Sakai Traditional Crafts Museum where high-quality knives were a popular way to support the Japanese economy.

All had the opportunity to visit the impressive 8-storey Osaka Castle. As we approached the castle, we were first impressed with the magnificent dry-stone wall construction of the giant moat and the lovely castle gardens. The castle itself held a commanding position over the surrounding area. Exhibits on each floor told the Samurai history of the area.

In the late afternoon, we arrived at the port, under the huge Ferris wheel, to board our beautiful new home for the next 15 days, *Heritage Adventurer*. We scattered to explore, then came together for the lifeboat drill. No sooner had we finished, we were treated to a farewell violin performance as we headed toward the Pacific Ocean.

We assembled in the lounge for the introductory briefings where Hotel Director, Andrew, introduced us to life aboard, and Expedition Leader, Nathan, told us what to expect during our travels and introduced the expedition team and local Japanese guides – the large team of experts who will help us get the most out of our time in Japan.

Shortly thereafter we had our first chance to sample the delights provided by the galley and dining room staff. We were indeed delighted and off to a great start.





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### **Day 3**

**Friday 16 May 2025**

#### **Ise-Shima**

Some of the early risers were treated to the sight of a pod of dolphins. What a nice surprise. We knew that we would be away from *Heritage Adventurer* for the whole day, with a Zodiac shuttle at the start and end, so we made sure to get a hearty breakfast. That was certainly not a problem at the buffet in the dining room.

We found the mud rooms, and our Zodiac life jackets and then it was down the gangway and onto the Zodiacs for a short shuttle ride across the flat, calm sea to the wharf and fishermen at Ōyahama Beach. The day was warm with a hazy sun. At the shore, we split into our 3 pre-selected option groups and boarded the coaches.

The first stop for the Option 1 group was the Ise-Shima Skyline for a panoramic view of the surrounding area. We continued to Mount Asama for more wide-angle vistas of Ise Bay and the surrounding mountains.

We stopped for a delicious lunch of sushi and tempura, before visiting Futamiura Park, home to the iconic Meoto Iwa (Wedded Rocks), the two sacred stones connected by a Shimenawa Rope. Our final stop was at Yokoyama Visitor Center, to learn about the area, before hiking to the Observatory Deck for a fantastic view over Ago Bay.

Option 2 started with a scenic drive through the wooded hills on narrow roads to the outer



shrine (Ise Jingu Geku) of the Ise shrine. There we learned that these shrines date back 2000 years, but the buildings themselves are rebuilt every 20 years to exactly the same plans using the same ancient techniques. We walked past the site to be used in 2033, for the next rebuild, to reach the current buildings. From there, it was a short drive to the inner shrine (Ise Jingu Naiku). Naiku has been a pilgrimage site for centuries, so it was no surprise that we joined a large crowd of local people to cross the river and traverse the splendid park-like gardens to the shrine.

We stopped for lunch at one of “Japan’s most famous restaurants”, or so the sign said. The “casual sushi” bowl was delicious enough to be famous for sure. Our tour continued in Osatsu, a coastal village historically known for its Ama divers - women who free dive to collect shellfish and seaweed. Local guides showed us the museum and the very nice Shinto shrine. At the Shrine, we were introduced to the priest and given a lesson on the proper way to pray. In fact, the best part of this visit was chatting with several generations of local women who explained their unique cultural heritage and explained that they keep diving because they enjoy their time in the sea.

Option 3, like the Option 1 group, drove to the Yokoyama Visitor Center and walked to the Observatory Deck. After a stop for a hot pot lunch, we had a chance to discover the art of pearl harvesting. We each opened our own oyster, and were able to keep the pearl that it contained. What a bonus.

Like Option 2 we visited the Ise Jingu Naiku shrine and then continued to explore Okage Yokocho, a charming shopping district that preserves the atmosphere of the Edo period. We joined the large pilgrimage crowd to sample sweets or find souvenirs or gifts.

All 3 groups arrived back at the beach to find that the tide had dropped, making the wharf unavailable. So, it was off with the shoes, onto the sand, and into the Zodiacs. It is not often that the *Heritage Adventurer* gangway is trodden in bare feet – but that day the toes were ours.

We managed to get our shoes back on before joining the Captain’s Welcome Cocktails in the lounge. There we met the heads of all the ship’s departments and toasted the weather, which Captain Jacek made clear was our responsibility.

Expedition Leader Nathan’s briefing immediately made clear that we had our work cut out for us, as the forecast was for winds and rain. We knew that we needed to be ready for expeditionary conditions as we went downstairs to enjoy our Captain’s Welcome Dinner.



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#### **Day 4**

**Saturday 17 May 2025**

#### **Oshima Island**

The weather on arrival at Oshima Island was as forecast, wet and windy. For many of us, this was the signal to have a quiet morning in the comfort of *Heritage Adventurer*. The rest of us made the short Zodiac shuttle to the harbour over a gentle sea. Once ashore, we could see that maybe we were not doing too bad a job of controlling the weather after all, as the rain was light with even a bit of sunshine.

Those who had selected Option 1 came ashore first and boarded the coach for the drive to Mount Mihara. Oshima is a volcanically active place with the caldera of the mountain a defining feature of the island. As we ascended, we learned that the weather in the highlands was far wetter, windier and foggier than at the beach. On the journey, Urika-san told us fascinating stories of island life.

At the top, undaunted, we walked through the fog to the Crater West Lookout stopping at outcrops to learn the volcanic history, and the adaptations required for the plants to survive. We passed the surviving section of a shrine destroyed in the 1986 eruption and braved the gale at the lookout. On our return, we stopped to explore the Great Road Cut. During road construction in the 1950's a large section of the hillside was cut away to expose volcanic rock layers. They tell the story of Mount Mihara's eruptions over the centuries, providing a fascinating look at the island's volcanic history.

The Option 2 group drove around the coastline and through several villages to an overview of Habu Port. This small circular, very sheltered, port had been formed when a volcanic crater near the coastline was breached by a tsunami to create the opening. During the Edo Period this small opening was enlarged by the removal of rocks, which was certainly a mighty effort. We stopped at the Great Road Cut, for that strange bit of geology, before visiting the Camellia Oil Factory. Squeezing into this small workshop to meet the fourth-generation owner, and see the 100+ year old press, was fascinating. He showed us the process of grinding and crushing the nuts gathered from wild Camellia Trees, which thrive in the volcanic soil. We took the opportunity for a walk through the narrow streets in the old neighbourhood around the factory, or for a stop at the Tsubaki Tunnel, made from Camelia Trees, which must be wonderful in flower.

Both groups were gifted “goodie bags” with local Camelia and salt products, and invited to the gift shop at the harbour, which was opened just for us. There we had a tasting of local spirits and saw the local glassware. As we emerged to board the Zodiacs the heavens did finally open and, even in the calm sea, it was a wet ride. But, no worries, we were soon warm and dry, and in the dining room for soup and a warming lunch.

The storm had produced a bit more motion of the ocean as we headed out on our transit through the open ocean. We secured our cabins, and, with the afternoon at sea, had the opportunity for some education. First up was Casey with Phone Photography, followed by Hide-san’s lesson in Japanese Etiquette, and John’s Overview of Japanese History.

The recap and briefing gave us even more information, so our minds were well filled as we went to dinner to fill our bodies. So, all in all, it was a full and exciting day.

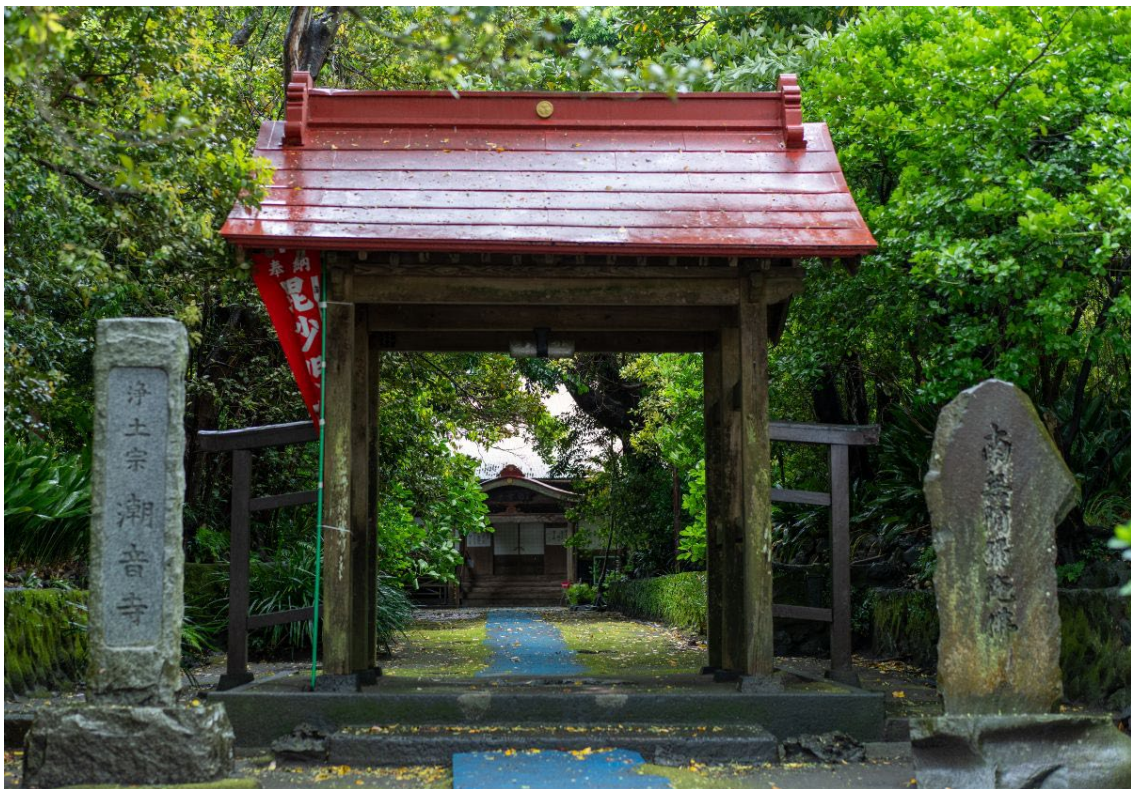




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## Day 5

**Sunday 18 May 2025**

### Ishinomaki

Overnight *Heritage Adventurer* had continued to change course to the west, giving us a calmer sea and a smoother ride. With a morning at sea, we knew that we had a rare opportunity for a sleep-in and a leisurely breakfast. When we finally reached the outer decks or the window, we saw that a warm sun was shining over a slight swell.

The education programme started with the team of Glenda and Mat D. helping us to understand the Geology of Japan and continued with Hide-san's insights into Religion in Japan. The schedule called for an early lunch after our late breakfast, so we were well fortified for our midday arrival at the port of Ishinomaki.

As the tugboat assisted us to the wharf, a large welcoming committee was out in force. The Taiko drumming was outstanding, especially as we could right up close as we boarded the coaches and tried the free samples of local products, including beer.

Option 1's destination was Matsushima Bay which is celebrated as one of the three most scenic views in Japan. We crossed the iconic long red bridge for a walking tour of Fukuurajima Island. The trail meandered through the lush forest which consisted of cherry trees, maples, Camellias, and cedars populated by a host of interesting birds. We walked past many outlooks into the bay and a fascinating temple. At the boat terminal, we boarded a different watercraft for a one-hour cruise to get close-up views of some of the more than 260 islands in the bay. Each island is uniquely shaped and named for its distinct appearance, or for the Japanese poetry that it has inspired.

The first destination for Option 2 was the Ishinomori Manga Museum. This futuristic building celebrates Shotaro Ishinomori, known as the 'King of Manga'. The many colourful displays of statues and dioramas of his famous characters had us as happy and entertained as the many children and families on their Sunday afternoon outing.

A short drive brought us to Kashimamiko Shrine. On the hilltop we overlooked the plains that were devastated by the March 3, 2011, earthquake and tsunami. It was an eerie feeling thinking of the many people who climbed this hill to escape while watching the death and destruction below. The shrine itself was worth a visit even without this history. With several shrine buildings dedicated to different deities placed around a central plaza, it was understandable why this was an appropriate place to honour the nature gods. Just down the hill was the old Kadonowaki Elementary School, which stands preserved in the shattered and burned-out state in which it was left after the disaster. No lives were lost at the school, but it remains standing and has been turned into a museum and memorial. It is located in the Ishinomaki Minamihama Tsunami Memorial Park, a place to remember the nearly 4,000 lives that were lost in Ishinomaki and 19,000 in the wider area. The Park also serves to symbolise the community's resilience and recovery and works to ensure that preparation and awareness of natural disasters are part of everyone's everyday life.

We arrived back at *Heritage Adventurer* in time to cast off at 1700 hours as the many local



people stood waving fans in farewell. Who knew that we had a “fan club” (Sorry).

The evening routine was now familiar, so we were in the lounge for recap, and briefing, and then in the dining room to share stories and enjoy another superb meal.



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**Day 6**  
**Monday 19 May 2025**  
**Hachinohe**



A cool and breezy day greeted us as we docked at the port of Hachinohe, making the colourful flags held by the welcoming committee wave vigorously. Down the gangway, we had a warm welcome from the Hachinohe City Mascots who are a hybrid of Squid (Ika) and Black-tailed Gull, both famous in Hachinohe.

The group who selected Option 1 were ready for a vigorous day of walking at Tsuta Numa Lake, in the heart of Towada-Hachimantai National Park. On the drive, we wound through large areas of newly planted rice paddies as we gradually approached the mountains. Once there, we enjoyed walks of various lengths, but primarily doing a circuit to see the many ponds and verdant growth in this wetland area. The bright sunshine and still conditions made for beautiful reflections.

Our lunch stop was at a pair of restaurants right on the shore of Lake Towada. Both served a simmering plate of beef and onions with side dishes of pickled vegetables, salad and rice plus our choice of beer, sake, apple juice or soft drinks. After lunch, we drove to Oirase Gorge for a choice of walks: long, medium or short. We walked along the crystal-clear waters of the Oirase Stream. The walls of the gorge supplied impressive waterfalls, and the river valley was covered in greenery of all sorts with numerous cascades and rapids through the logs and boulders on all sides. At the end of the trail, many of us stopped for well-deserved ice creams or drinks before boarding the buses for the drive back to our trusty expedition vessel.

The first stop on Option 2 was the Hachinohe Portal Museum also known as 'Hachi' (Meaning eight). Hachi is like a community centre in many ways, and we arrived just in time to witness the mechanical clock. Beneath the clock, mounted on the wall, are several wooden mechanical Komainu heads (Doglike guardians). As the clock chimes, the Komainu perform a synchronised routine with their jaws chomping and their heads swinging side to side. It was a short walk from Hachi to the Hachinohe Museum of Art, where we learnt the process of Ukiyo-e (Woodblock prints). Among the collection of prints was a series from an artist from the Edo period, Utagawa Yoshitsuya.

We took a short trip for a delicious bento box lunch. This was followed promptly with a musical performance from an all-female cultural group dressed in kimono and playing various instruments. Taiko drums banged, Shamisen plucked (a 3-stringed instrument) and the piercing vocals filled the room while performers danced in elegant synchronicity wielding traditional umbrellas (Wagasa).

A brief stop was made at Hasshoku Center for a local market filled with seafood and other goods used in everyday life, a great insight into local life. Next up, was a visit to Kabushima Shrine which sits atop a small mountain overlooking the ocean. Kabushima Shrine is famous as a nesting ground for Black-tailed Gulls. We saw many gull chicks and managed to avoid missiles from above courtesy of the Black-tailed locals.

To round out this exciting day, we finished at the Ashigezaki Scenic Overlook and indulged in some ice cream before heading back to our trusty expedition vessel.

Back aboard, we found hot towels and a cool drink waiting at the top of the gangway, and tasty treats available in the lounge. Just a bit later, the flags were waving again as we left

the port in the setting sun.

The day's activities continued with recap, briefing and dinner as a presentation from the artist Lisa Reihana, Te Tumu Toi Laureate winner and renowned multidisciplinary artist, of her works which was held in the evening. In this spellbinding session, Lisa gave us a personal view of the story, and backstory, of *the Pursuit of Venus [infected]* and her more recent work.



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## **Day 7**

**Tuesday 20 May 2025**

### **Muroran**

The early risers saw us pass under the Hakucho (Swan) Bridge, to enter Muroran. As we docked, the cool grey clouds started to drop a light rain. The wet weather stayed with us until late morning when the sun and blue skies transformed the day.

Option 1 began with a scenic drive to Lake Toya for another very foggy mountain viewpoint. Happily, the walking was enjoyable, and Glenda and Mat kept our geological education going. Our ascent on the Usuzan Ropeway cable car to Mount Usu's summit continued this voyage's pattern of enjoyable foggy hikes. In this case, the entertainment was supplied by the video, ramen and ice cream in the visitors' centre.

After lunch on board, we travelled to Hell Valley where we overlapped with the Option 2 group in the appreciation of the harsh beauty and energy of the Earth.

The group that opted for Option 2 crossed over the Swan Bridge to reach the Upopoy National Ainu Museum and Park. There we learned about the rich culture, and difficult history, of the Ainu people, the Indigenous inhabitants of Hokkaido. They lent us umbrellas to get around the park-like grounds, to the beautiful theatre for a delightful multi-media cultural performance, and to the replicas of their traditional houses. The new museum complex was a treasure trove of information and unique experiences. Our restaurant for lunch served up a traditional Japanese meal of sukiyaki – a hotpot of broth, noodles, and pork.

After lunch, we split into two groups. One choice was to head to the Noboribetsu Onsen, to experience a Japanese bathhouse and relax in the mineral-rich waters, which are said to have healing properties. The alternative was Hell Valley, a bubbling landscape of steam vents, hot springs, and sulphurous streams. The sun was out, and the trails were well signposted as we saw the source for those healing waters.

Returning to *Heritage Adventurer*, we took the chance to visit the nearby grove of cherry trees still in blossom this late in the season due to the cooler northern climate. We were soon making our way back under the Swan Bridge with time for a presentation from John on the Live of a Geisha, before recap and briefing. Then it was, somehow, once again time for dinner. Never a dull moment.





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## Day 8

**Wednesday 21 May 2025**

**Akita**

Our management of the weather remained patchy at best. With heavy rain falling as *Heritage Adventurer* approached the dock in Akita, and more predicted, an announcement informed us that the plans were being changed. We gathered at the Expedition Desk to select our new options, which had been crafted by Nathan and the team to give us the best chance to experience Akita despite the conditions. As it transpired, several different destinations were visited as the groups formed and re-formed for the morning and afternoon.

The nearest place was the Selion Tower, just a few minutes' walk from our floating home. We rode the lift to 100 metres for the panoramic view, shopped in the ground floor boutique, and sampled the local lunchtime cuisine.

The walk around Senshu Park, once the grounds of Kubota Castle, struck a dry section of the morning. We found the castle remains scattered around a large, lovely urban garden. The history was surrounded by dazzling Azaleas and a spectacular Wisteria flowering by the fountain in the pond. The architecture at the Akita Museum of Art was spectacular and the exhibit of sushi made from wood was a hit. A local onsen attracted a few of us in the afternoon for a soak in the hot spring waters.

Another excursion was along the coast, and into the heavily wooded mountains, to the



Namahage Museum. Along the way, through the fog, we saw many wind turbines, terraced rice paddies and faint glimpses of the coast. On arrival, we were led into a traditional thatched-style Japanese house, where we learned about the tradition of ogres that visit on New Year's Eve to search for lazy children or wives. The re-enactment was both fun and a bit scary. The Namahage were loud and noisy and then sat and questioned the father on all the bad behaviours of his family for the last 12 months.

In the museum, we saw the many styles of their costumes and dressed up as Namahage ourselves. The video presentation of Namahage visits was thought-provoking, as we saw children having the living daylights scared out of them when the ogres entered their homes to check their behaviour. Outside, we all took the time to explore the delightful grounds and visit the shrine.

The drive to Mount Kanpu took us up the hill for what, on a good day, would be sweeping views of the dramatic volcanic landscape. Alas, we had more sweeping views of fog. We did enjoy the chance to stretch our legs, with some steep sections for the longer walkers alongside beautiful daisies and lilies, and yet another dollop of ice cream at the observation building.

We returned to *Heritage Adventurer* for the serenade farewell as we left the dock, before some time for a hot shower, cool drink, recap, briefing and dinner.

The day was not yet complete, as after dinner a special Kimono Workshop was held. The history was discussed by our Japanese guide, Nozomi-san, who through each of the many layers of robes and obi to explain the special cultural significance of this uniquely Japanese garment.



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## **Day 9**

**Thursday 22 May 2025**

### **Niigata**

Our string of grey days continued in Niigata. Likewise, our string of getting out and doing things while preparing for any weather continued in Niigata. Both options started with a scenic drive through the town and out into the countryside where the dominant view was over huge areas of rice paddies. We saw why this area is one of the most productive areas of Japan for growing rice.

Option 2 left the cruise terminal first for the journey to Mount Yahiko and the walk through a luxurious Japanese Cedar Forest in the heavy rain. Our cable car journey was unfortunately hampered by the conditions, as, at the top of the 650-metre ropeway ascent, the views were of nothing but fog. Still, with umbrellas in hand, we walked to the small Shinto shrine and onward to the summit and back through the broadleaf canopy.

After lunch aboard in clearing weather, we made the drive to the Fukushima Lagoon. Our perseverance was rewarded with good conditions for our exploration. At the striking 6-story viewing tower we learned the history of the effort to save this area from conversion to rice fields. The effort was certainly worthwhile as this is the home to Japan's largest population of Tundra Bean Geese which migrate to/from Siberia. We relished our free time in the wetlands viewing Grebe, Herons, Cuckoos and a lonely turtle – especially because it wasn't raining!

Option 2 arrived through the rice paddies to the Gokaibishi Sake Brewery to see how some of that rice gets used. We had a look at the brewery and then tasted the fruits of their labours. Many took home bottles for more sampling later.

At the Northern Culture Museum, the home of one of Niigata's wealthiest landowners during the Edo period, the classic wooden architecture, large tatami mat rooms, and elegant gardens, left staggering impressions. After a classically Japanese lunch in the banquet room, we had the chance to explore further the historic cottages and museum-quality artefacts.

Our visit to the Niigata Prefectural Botanical Garden included time to tour the Niitsu Art Gallery or the Niigata Prefecture Archaeological Research Center. Here we had markedly different opportunities, from tropical plants in the dome to Rhododendrons in the park, an artist in residence with his work and 5000-year-old pottery being re-assembled in the workshop.

We arrived back to *Heritage Adventurer* for the latest in our series of exuberant and generous Taiko drumming farewells. We were about halfway through this voyage, and well into the rhythm. We know how to pace ourselves through the day and evening, and how to ensure ample time to recharge our batteries. On this voyage, tomorrow is sure to be busy and full of discovery.







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**Day 10**  
**Friday 23 May 2025**  
**Kanazawa**

We were excited, and delighted, to see the bright sun shining as we approached Kanazawa. We checked at the Expedition Desk at breakfast to confirm our choices, as we had three different options to choose from.

Option 1 started with an amazing bus ride to Shirakawa-go where the sun was shining, the temperature was warm, and the scenery transitioned from bustling cityscapes to tranquil mountains. Upon arrival, the sight of Ogimachi Village, with its iconic Gassho-zukuri farmhouses was captivating. We eagerly stepped off the bus and began exploring the village. Each historic house seemed to whisper stories of the past. Inside the Kanda House, known for its impeccable preservation, we saw first-hand the traditional architecture. The steep thatched roof and the spacious, wooden interiors gave us a glimpse into the ingenuity and lifestyle of the village's former inhabitants.

For our traditional Japanese lunch there was a tasty assortment of local food. Most of us struggled with the whole fish, until Hide-san showed us how to eat it, starting with the head! Following lunch, we walked along a quiet country road, passing the local people going about their daily lives. To finish our adventure, we went to another village, Saganuma, again, with thatched roofs, but much smaller, with a local man who was born there to explain it all to us. Simply spectacular! Setting course for home, the mountains, now bathed in the soft light of the afternoon sun, seemed to bid us farewell.

Option 2 started with a city tour, with the first stop at the Omicho Market, where we had time to explore an incredible array of seafood and fresh produce — including some of the biggest oysters we'd ever seen. As the market began to buzz with morning energy, we regrouped and set off for the Nagamachi Samurai District. There, we wandered through the elegant Nomura Samurai House, with its refined tatami mat rooms and a serene courtyard garden. We also browsed displays of Kutani-style porcelain, beautifully arranged on shelves and in alcoves.

Later in the afternoon, some explored Kanazawa's geisha district, Higashi Chaya. We strolled its atmospheric streets, lined with traditional teahouses — quiet reminders of a bygone era. The district's charm was undeniable, with artisan shops offering handcrafted goods and local delicacies. We had the chance to try our hand at making chopsticks using traditional gold leaf techniques or explore the local streets for curious ice cream flavours and hidden gems.

Option 3 drove south through a rice, wheat and vegetable farming area to Yunokuni no Mori, a traditional handicrafts village. The village was created by relocating old-style houses onto a hillside site, with each house dedicated to a particular traditional craft. We had the place almost entirely to ourselves, making for a relaxed and peaceful atmosphere. We tried Japanese paper making, gold inlaid lacquerware, buckwheat noodle making, and more, with the help of the skilled attendants at each house. In addition to the crafts, the shopping at each house offered high-quality merchandise from that craft, and many

carried little parcels home. What a lovely morning.

Multiple options visited the famed Kenroku-en Garden, one of Japan's most celebrated, and always ranked in the nation's top three strolling gardens. Dating back to the 17th century, it combines six characteristics of spaciousness, seclusion, artifice, antiquity, water sources and magnificent views, embodying the ideal garden attributes.

We all returned aboard just in time for *Heritage Adventurer* to cast off. We pulled away from the wharf to the music from traditional instruments including flute and Koto (13 stringed instruments played by plucking). The characteristic sounds of classical Japanese music made for a touching send-off. After dinner, Tommy entertained and educated us with his presentation on Japanese Folklore.



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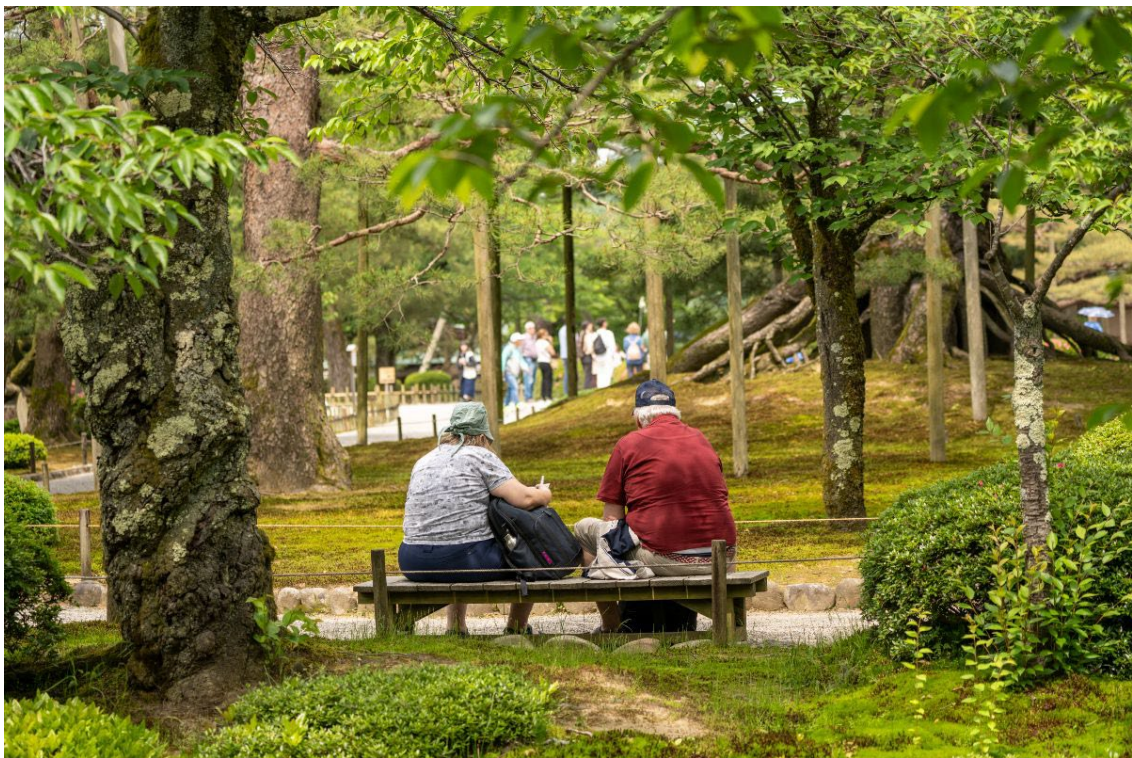


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## Day 11

**Saturday 24 May 2025**

**Sakaiminato/Matsue**

Looking outside as we approached Sakaiminato at breakfast-time, we were not surprised to hear the announcement that our plans had been disrupted by the wet weather. We had a chance to re-think our options and select between 2 excursions, or for a relaxed morning aboard *Heritage Adventurer*.

One excursion set off for Matsue Castle often along lake shores and over bridges, giving ample evidence for Matsue's claim to being "The Water City". We climbed the stairs to reach the base of the castle. Once inside there was excellent signage in English explaining the history, construction and preservation of one of Japan's 12 remaining original castles. The big old posts and beams, and stone-dropping-windows, told stories of days gone by.

We strolled the pathways of Yuushien Gardens where the consistent rain actually enhanced the experience. The very small crowds, deepened colours, and dripping leaves and petals added to the beauty of the central red bridge, the moss-covered banks, and the mist-covered central pond.

The second contingent of adventurers drove to the Adachi Museum of Art. Opened in 1970, this museum's most unique feature is the use of beautiful Japanese garden vistas that are framed by windows as living art. No strolling here, but the garden was brought to full life by the rain. One floor up, the art gallery was completely dedicated to the works of Yokoyama Taikan, a core member of the modern Japanese art world in the 20th century. To

mark the 55th anniversary of the museum, their full collection of his work was displayed. Superb on both levels.

Our stop at the Shoji Ueda Museum of Photography allowed us to see the collected work of this famous photographer in a viewing space especially constructed to match his art. The building was quirky, and we had fun playing with the specially constructed views and props, including a hat and red balloon.

As we returned to *Heritage Adventurer* for lunch, and to clear immigration out of Japan, we admired the small troupe of traditional musicians and dancers who persevered through the conditions to give us a long and heartfelt farewell.

The afternoon at sea, at the start of our crossing of the Sea of Japan, gave a chance for Hide-san to teach us how to make origami paper cranes. We will use these as an offering of peace and remembrance when we visit Hiroshima in a few days' time. The ever-ready galley team seized the chance to serve us a gala afternoon tea before Nathan gave us an overview of his, and his family's, history in his presentation *Heritage Expeditions – The Story So Far*.

The late afternoon was a great time for reading, photo sorting, chatting or napping before we again got together in the lounge for recap and briefing. After a late lunch, and afternoon tea, we were not all that hungry for dinner, but, knowing that the flavours and choices were not to be missed, we made room for another excellent meal.





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**Day 12**  
**Sunday 25 May 2025**  
**South Korea**

The early risers got the full effect of the industry that powers the economy of South Korea as we entered the port of Ulsan in the morning sunshine. This warm sun stayed with us the whole day.

We waited while the immigration officials set up in the lounge and then passed through the thermal camera and the passport station before getting our day in South Korea underway.

Once we finally satisfied the immigration authorities that we were not a threat, we headed out to explore Gyeongju or Busan. We passed through the active heart of Ulsan, “Hyundai City” and into the countryside.

The Gyeongju group made their first stop at Bulguksa Temple where we were among the weekend crowds streaming in to enjoy the splendour of the beautiful grounds and temples. Originally built in the 8th century, but destroyed in the 16th by the Japanese, the temple has been faithfully restored with detailed paintings and decorative motifs throughout. Some lotus blossom and offering lanterns for the Buddha’s Birthday were hanging in the plazas with wishes and prayers attached. We approached to see the original golden Buddha statues and pagodas.

From there, it was off to lunch at a fun, huge buffet restaurant. We waded past the many stations serving hotpots, sushi, fruit, BBQ, ice cream and so much more. Having made our choices, we served ourselves and then went back for more, and then even more for some. The Gyeongju National Museum allowed us to see the golden treasures of the Silla Kingdom; plus, numerous other national treasures collected from the region.

From the museum, we went to the burial tombs of the Silla Kingdom, known as The Kingdom of the Heavenly Horse, because of the artwork recovered from the tombs. The Silla Empire had ruled this region, and much of the Korean Peninsula, for a thousand years up to circa 1000 AD. Hundreds of their rulers were buried in large mounds, only a very few of which have been excavated. For a bit of relief from the hustle and bustle, our last stop was at the Taehwagang River Bamboo Forest. Here we were again among the locals as they enjoyed the park, set in what had once been a polluted river. Well done to them.

The Busan group started with a drive south to Busan City, which we were told has seen a reducing population during the last 14 years. Our visit started at the Haedong Yonggungsa Temple, one of the very few Buddhist Temples located on a cliff above the ocean. Following the bustling Sunday crowd, we descended a path, through street food shops, to make our way to the Buddha facing the ocean, and then to the temple itself. The views from the rocky point looking back to towards the site, and along the coast, were quite spectacular.

The up-market beach district of Haeundae-gu was a big change from the temple. This area has the highest real estate prices in Busan with apartments costing up to 7 million US



dollars. Our destination was the tallest building in the area, BUSAN X the SKY. This 100-story building provides amazing views and the highest Starbucks in the world, but for some, the 'Loo with a View' was the highlight.

On to lunch at an extravagant local buffet restaurant where we selected from local delicacies and the wonderful fresh fish for which Busan is known. We definitely needed a walk after lunch, and the Gamcheon Culture Village did the trick. Once a refugee village, it is now a labyrinth of streets winding along a hillside with painted houses and a multitude of galleries. Murals and souvenir shops line the way with locals and tourists alike taking in this very colourful, unique neighbourhood.

Our last visit was back on the coast at the Jagalchi Fish Market, which truly showed us the diversity of seafood available in this part of the world. The locals had finished their Sunday shopping and were enjoying the sunny day out on the pier. Groups of fishermen and their wives were having a wonderful time dancing to a live band. Some of us couldn't resist and joined in the fun.

We were back aboard for tasty treats in the lounge before recap and briefing. We cast off while this was in progress and enjoyed another view of the busy port in the setting sun as we said goodbye to South Korea.







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## Day 13

Monday 26 May 2025

### Shimonoseki

Our morning started with administrative activity as we needed to clear customs and immigration back into Japan. We were eager to get going as we could see the lovely day that awaited us. Soon enough we were down the gangway and onto the coaches for our adventure to begin.

Option 1 started with a beautiful drive into the mountains behind Shimonoseki. We had great views of landscapes, bamboo forests in the valleys and, at higher elevations, the Karst rock formations.

We arrived at an empty car park and entered one of Japan's largest and most impressive limestone caves, Akiyoshido Cave. We took our time exploring the massive subterranean caverns with the river flowing through them. The huge limestone formations, and pools with reflections of the ceiling and walls, were quite jaw-dropping for all. As we neared the exit, the stunning views continued but changed to beautiful greens as the forest opened in the sunlight and the river flowed down under quaint wooden bridges. Then, the highlight for some was the ice cream shops offering 130 different flavours, including wasabi and salt, plus other shops selling the famous Hagi-yaki pottery.

We returned to *Heritage Adventurer* for lunch before heading out for above-ground activities in the afternoon. We crossed the bridge over Kanmon Strait to Kyushu Island – making 3 of the 4 major islands of Japan that we visited on our voyage. Our destination was Shiranoe Botanical Gardens, located on a hillside overlooking the Seto Inland Sea. Some of us made the 111-metre climb to the top, but all walked the lovely paths through the wide variety of trees, shrubs and flowers. We had the place to ourselves, so it was a lovely, quiet interlude. From there we crossed back to Honshu and along the banks of the Strait to Chofu Garden. There we found another tranquil haven, and a masterpiece of traditional Japanese garden design. We ambled over the graceful ornamental bridges and around the teahouses, or just found a quiet place to sit and take it all in.

Option 2 drove off the man-made island where *Heritage Adventurer* was berthed, and rode in lovely sunshine, across the Kanmon Bridge, to Kitakyushu and the Museum of Natural History and Human History. The most interesting section of this large museum was on the arrival and early development of the native peoples of Japan. The displays provided a great insight into their lives. Along the way, we took time to study the remarkable collection of skeletal displays of dinosaurs and early animals, through to the animals of today.

On to the Kokura Castle for a tour through this rebuilt castle, with modern styling including an elevator to the top floor, where there was a café! The views from the top and the interactive displays were wonderful.

We were back aboard our trusty expedition vessel for lunch, before we headed to the Akama Shrine near the Kanmon Strait waterfront. It was an enlightening experience, as our guide, Nozomi, helped us understand the complexities of Japanese Shintoism. We crossed the street to walk along the waterfront boardwalk, enjoying the sunshine and



perhaps an ice cream as we watched the never-ending procession of ships navigating the Kanmon Strait.

When we returned to *Heritage Adventurer*, we found that, even though our wharf was some distance from town, we had a large contingent of enthusiastic schoolchildren waving to us. We waved back as we pulled away. We had crossed over (and in one case under) the narrow Kanmon Strait during the day, and now it was our turn to join the parade of ships making the passage under the famous bridge.

We learned at our recap and briefing and then had a special experience as the galley and dining team turned on a Japanese Dinner. Then Phil added to our education with his presentation on *The Silk Road*.







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**Day 14**  
**Tuesday 27 May 2025**  
**Hiroshima**

We seemed to have finally shaken off our weather woes as Hiroshima turned on a glorious warm, sunny day. We spent the morning in and around the Peace Park and Museum. The museum gave a stark depiction of the horrors and suffering of the victims of the nuclear



bomb that exploded over the city on the morning of August 6, 1945. It was sobering, especially as we were often in close company with the many school groups also making the tour.

The Peace Park has been set aside to commemorate the bombing and the result. The people of Hiroshima have made it their mission to ensure that the world does not forget the horrors of nuclear war. It contains the Cenotaph, the Eternal Flame, the Atomic Bomb Dome, and the Children's Memorial. It was a very touching moment when, while we were placing our offering of paper cranes, a school group assembled to sing a song of peace and leave the cranes that they had folded. Despite the sombre subject, the city's message of peace shone through.

Over lunch, *Heritage Adventurer* relocated across the bay, in position for our afternoon at Miyajima. We could not have picked a better time, place or conditions for our final Zodiac shuttle of the voyage. The boat ride in the warm sunshine over the sheltered waters of the Inland Sea was a fun way to reach "Shrine Island".

Some had chosen to ascend sacred Mount Misen, on foot or via the ropeway. Either way, the views from the top were spectacular, and our expedition's curse of the cable car was finally broken.

Closer to sea level, we made our way past the tame Sika Deer to the Itsukushima Shrine, famous for its floating torii gate, albeit that, at low tide, our view was of the visitors walking over the sand and through the gate. Nonetheless, walking the raised pathways through the sacred area gave us a sense of why the site was chosen back in the 12th century.

In the 21st century, there was plenty of opportunity to explore the charming town and sample local delicacies including Momiji Manju, a delightful maple-leaf-shaped cake, and coffee ice cream. Some ducked into the shops offering unique souvenirs and crafts. For a peaceful alternative, just up the hill, we found the Buddhist Daisho-in Temple and a hillside of small statues dedicated to the Bodhisattva Jizo, protector of children who died too young to know the way to the afterlife.

On our return Zodiac ride we passed oyster farms, and soon after our return aboard, we were invited up to the pool deck to sample some of their product. Huge, fresh local oysters and a glass of sake courtesy of the galley team. Yum.

The briefing, unfortunately, mentioned the "disembarkation" word. So, as if to make up for it, we were called onto Deck 6 aft for a BBQ. The Land of the Rising Sun turned on a balmy evening, complete with pastel sunset, and the galley team had us filling our plates again. Yum.

As we cruised the Seto Inland Sea, Tommy, Anthony, Richard and others led the singing and dancing to finish another full and unforgettable day.

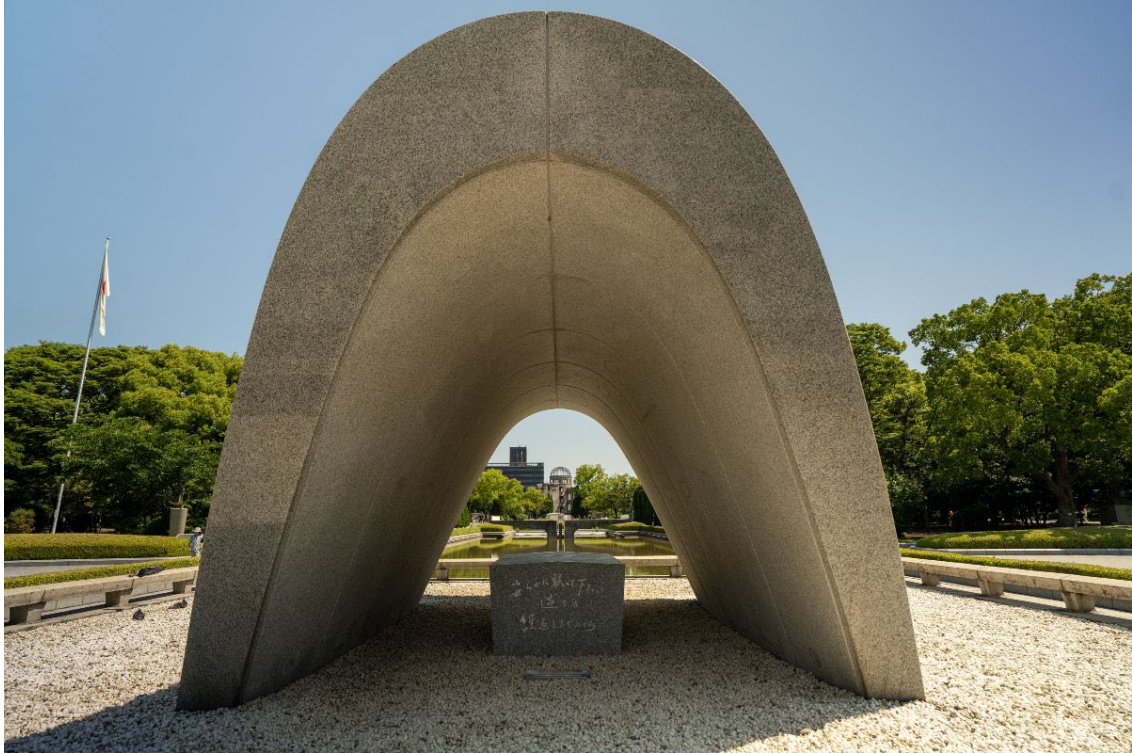


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## Day 15

**Wednesday 28 May 2025**

### **Takamatsu**

The skies were cloudy on the warm morning of our arrival in Takamatsu. Many of us were planning a full day ashore, so we prepared for any eventuality and headed to the coaches.

Option 1 first travelled to the Ritsurin Garden. We beat the rush and had plenty of time and space to explore this large and picturesque garden from the Edo period. Like Kenroku-en in Kanazawa, it regularly features as one of Japan's top 3 strolling gardens. The feudal lords who created this masterpiece made sure that their design featured many small climbs for overviews of the lakes, streams, stone lanterns and rustic tea houses. A short walk took us to Wasanbon making - the art of crafting fine-grained sugar unique to Shikoku. Our teachers instructed and entertained us with a puppet show before we made our own moulded sugar shapes – and ate them! We stopped at the Takamatsu Art Museum to view their collection of traditional lacquer ware and contemporary sculptures, before returning to *Heritage Adventurer* for lunch.

We left our trusty expedition vessel to walk to the Kagawa Museum where we admired the various weapons used in the Edo period, such as the bear pelt-covered spears and samurai armour. Also on display was the diorama of Japan's Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers as they cornered a mammoth, and the tusk of a mammoth un-covered from the area dating back 20,000 years. This was part of the comprehensive display of artefacts taking us through from the Jomon Period right up to the Meiji.

Nearby was the Takamatsu Castle site, known as Tamamo Park. The castle was built in 1590 and was one of the few Japanese Castles built along a waterfront. It was a large castle back in the Edo Period but has been reduced to the stone walls and re-built watch towers surrounded by the moat. It was most interesting to hear the history and try to visualise it in its prime. It was only a short walk back to *Heritage Adventurer* from here as we finished an exciting day of activity.

Option 2 also started at the Ritsurin Garden and finished at Takamatsu Castle, Tamamo Park. In between we stopped at Shikoku-mura, an open-air museum that showcases traditional buildings from across Shikoku Island. Our visit was predominantly a 'self-guided' walk to the interesting buildings, giving a great insight into life in a village on Shikoku, and some of the day-to-day activities. One of the most popular attractions was a vine suspension bridge. Lunch was at a local restaurant for an interesting mixture of starters - rice, vegetables, beans, and chicken. Next course was tempura vegetables, followed by Udon Noodles, cold, with a cold dipping sauce. It was all delicious, as expected here in "Udon City".

Those on Option 3 left *Heritage Adventurer* first, for the short walk to the adjacent ferry terminal and the transit to the island of Naoshima, for a full day of art appreciation and exploration. The first stop was the Art House Project Area, where we separated into smaller groups to explore and discover individual treasures in the unique collection of art installations set within traditional houses. We had lunch at Naoshima Hall, before continuing our tour with visits to Benesse House Museum and Chichu Art Museum. Both designed by renowned architect Tadao Ando, and rendered in huge spaces, to show off the world-class collections of modern and contemporary art. We added a photo opportunity with the iconic Yellow Pumpkin designed by Yayoi Kusama, before making our way to Miyanoura Port and the return ferry trip.

Some were lucky enough to be onboard for the late afternoon performance of the Takamatsu Girls Technical High School Calligraphy Team as they danced and painted a huge banner on the wharf in front of us. What a treat to see this uniquely Japanese art take shape before our eyes, thanks to the skill and energy of the team. Spectacular!

Alas, it was then time for Captain's Farewell Cocktails where we had the chance to thank many of the members of the crew who have made our Japan's National Parks, Art & Culture voyage so singular, and for a special recap of the entire voyage – the slideshow. Casey somehow managed to encapsulate the expedition in a series of images that showed how much we have seen and done. What a wonderful way to remember and share



this wonderful adventure. We headed off to dinner with the memories fresh in our minds to laugh and remember all the special highlights.



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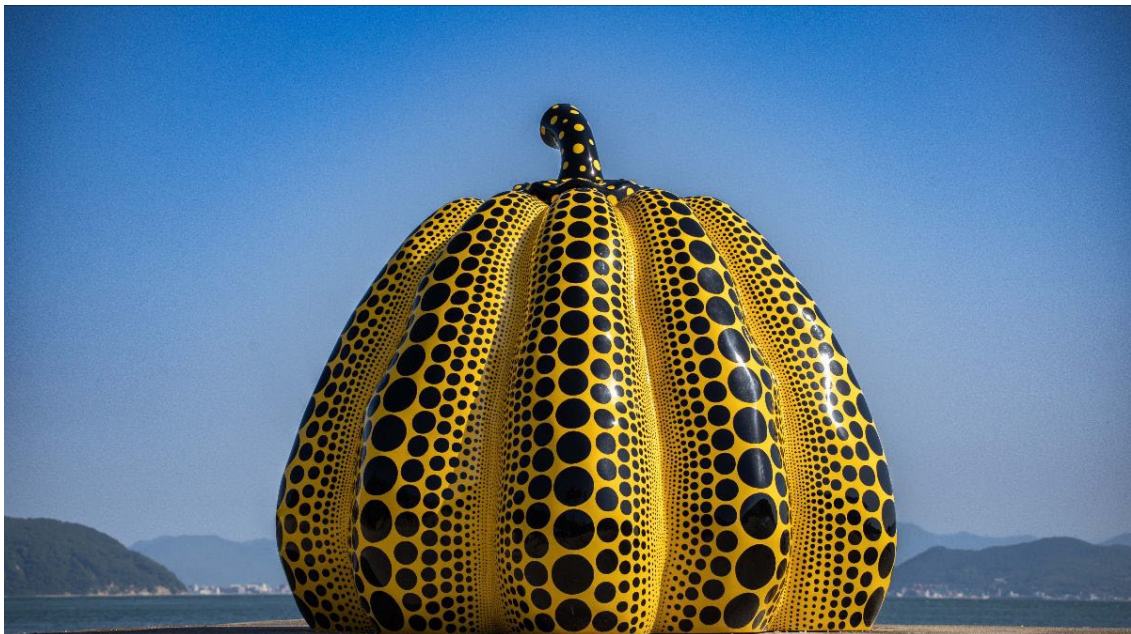


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**Day 16**  
**Thursday 29 May 2025**  
**Osaka and departure**



Our adventure came to an end as we put our luggage outside our doors before enjoying one last breakfast together and exchanging contact information with new friends. Time then for a final walk down the gangway and one last farewell to the Expedition Team as we headed off on new adventures, secure in the knowledge that this expedition, and our time together onboard *Heritage Adventurer*, will linger in our memories for a very long time.



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