

CHERRY BLOSSOMS OF JAPAN CRUISE

on board HERITAGE ADVENTURER

31 MARCH - 11 APRIL 2026



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Day 1

Tuesday 31st March 2026

Tokyo

As we arrived at our hotel, The Westin Tokyo, we met the Heritage Expeditions staff in the lobby, along with a few of our fellow adventurers. After settling into our rooms, we came down to enjoy a meal marking the start of our Cherry Blossoms of Japan cruise.

We began getting to know our fellow travellers while enjoying a generous buffet featuring a mix of Japanese and Western favourites. With our room numbers attached to our luggage tags, we ended the evening either catching up on sleep after international flights or braving the drizzle for a self-guided exploration of the local area.

Day 2

Wednesday 1st April 2026

Tokyo and departure

We enjoyed a fabulous breakfast buffet, which gave us the chance to reconnect with those we had met at dinner or meet new fellow travellers before heading out for our activities in Tokyo. Although light rain lingered, it held off for much of the day as we strolled among locals admiring the Sakura (cherry blossoms) in Ueno Park and explored exhibits at the Tokyo National Museum.

Lunch was a hands-on experience at a teppanyaki restaurant, where we grilled our own delicacies at the table. Afterwards, we visited the glass-enclosed National Art Centre before making our final stop in Tokyo at the viewing platform of Tokyo Tower, taking in sweeping views of the city skyline. From there, we continued to the port to board our beautiful new home for the adventure ahead, *Heritage Adventurer*.

We scattered to explore our expedition vessel before coming together for the mandatory lifeboat drill as we departed Tokyo Harbour. On board, Hotel Director Greg welcomed us to life at sea, followed by Expedition Leader Nathan, who outlined what to expect during our voyage. He also introduced the expedition team, and local Japanese experts who will help us make the most out of our time on this voyage.

Shortly afterwards, we had our first opportunity to sample the delights prepared by the galley and dining room staff. It quickly became clear that our taste buds were in for a treat, and we may need to keep an eye on our waistlines over the coming days.



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Day 3

Thursday 2nd April 2026

Shizuoka / Mt. Fuji

We found blue or green tickets on the doors of our rooms, indicating whether we would join Option 1 or 2 for the day. Both excursions travelled through the city and into the mountains, passing through many tunnels beneath low cloud. We knew Mt. Fuji was somewhere beyond them, and we remained hopeful that the forecast clearing weather would hold true.

One group began with visits to a family-run blueberry and soybean farm, where we made and tasted our own tofu, followed by a stop at a tea plantation to learn about and sample different varieties. We then strolled through the sculptured tea fields before continuing to the lava cliffs above the Shiraito and Otodome waterfalls. There, we caught our first glimpses of Mt. Fuji slowly emerging through the clouds. Lunch was a traditional bento box, and as we ate, the skies cleared – revealing increasingly clear, and then full, views of the snow-capped summit. The day concluded with a gentle riverside walk beneath blossoming trees.

The other group began with a walk through the rain at Iwamoto Mountain Park,

climbing a forested slope to a ridge where Mt. Fuji remained hidden. Oscar pointed out several bird species, and we enjoyed the cherry blossoms along the way. After a lunch of Japanese specialities, we visited the striking architecture of the Mt. Fuji World Heritage Visitors Centre, where we watched the mountain gradually reveal itself through shifting clouds. At Fujisan Sengen Shrine, as we posed for our group photo, we were finally rewarded with a full view of the sacred peak.

Back on board *Heritage Adventurer*, we waved farewell during a fireworks send-off as Mt. Fuji glowed rose-tinted in the sunset – truly magical. The evening continued with Captain’s Welcome Cocktails, where Captain Sergei introduced the heads of the departments of *Heritage Adventurer*’s crews who would be looking after our safety and comfort. This was followed by the Captain’s Welcome Dinner, a feast that confirmed that once again, this voyage will satisfy both our appetite for exceptional cuisine and our desire for new experiences.



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Day 4

Friday 3rd April 2026

Nagoya

Preparing for today with a delicious breakfast, we joined joining the coaches, tickets in hand. The day began in sunshine and only improved as we made our way around the attractions of Nagoya.

Both groups included castles in their itineraries. For one group, the first stop was the impressive Nagoya Castle. While the main keep was closed, the restored Hommaru Palace showed the opulence and elegance of the Shogun's residence. Its intricate artwork and wooden structures have been carefully brought back to life by modern craftsmen using traditional techniques – spectacular to see. Cherry blossoms surrounding the castle grounds added to the beauty of the experience.

After lunch on board, we continued to the Toyota Museum, where we learned that the company originally began with the manufacture of weaving equipment. The exhibits included working machinery demonstrations and early automotive prototypes, alongside robots used in production. Historical vehicles illustrated the evolution of the brand, while a humanoid robot playing the violin provided a fittingly modern finale.

The excursion concluded with a visit to the Atsuta-jingu Shrine, a sacred site with serene grounds framed by Torii gates. Here, we participated in traditional purification rituals practised by Shinto devotees, with some taking time for personal prayers.

Group Two visited Tokoname, a historic pottery village that remains active today. We wandered narrow streets lined with both large-scale ceramic installations and everyday wares, learning about traditional climbing kiln techniques. A highlight was a small museum featuring a beautifully tiled kiln room.

At Inuyama Castle – one of only 12 original castles in Japan – we climbed the hill past Shinto shrines to reach the keep, surrounded by cherry blossoms in full bloom. Our evening followed the now-familiar rhythm of recap, briefing, dinner and beverages.



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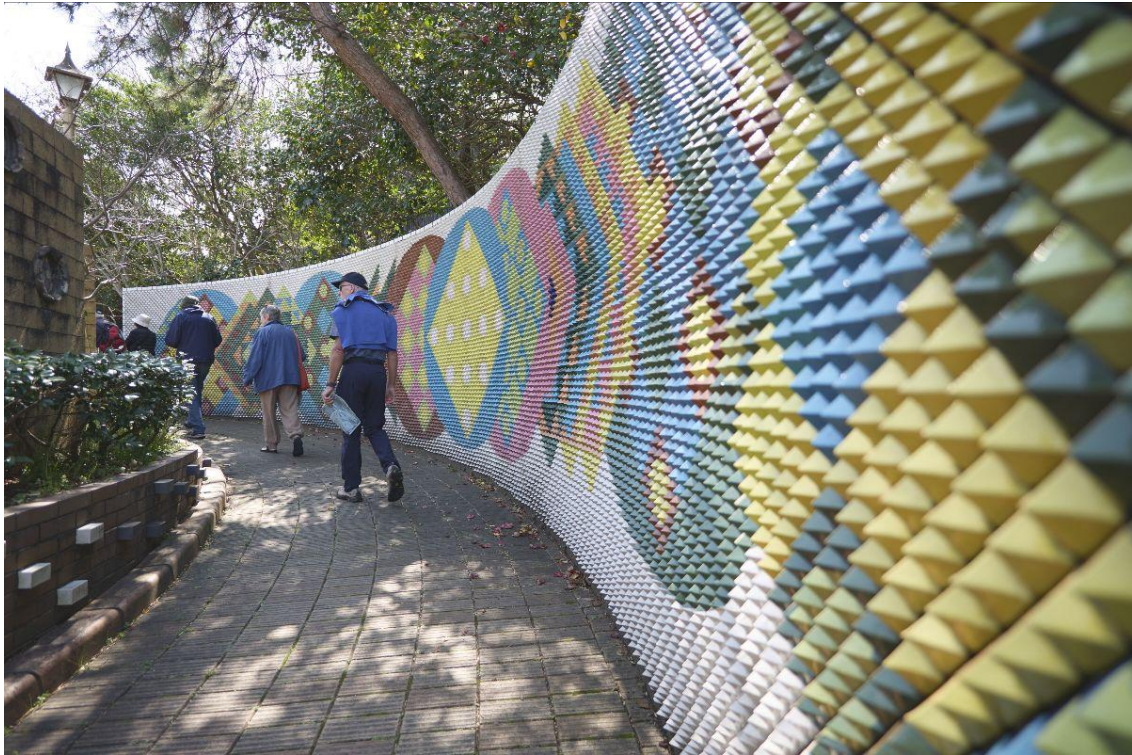
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Day 5

Saturday 4th April 2026

Owase

Nathan had made it clear that they would take care of everything except the weather, which was our responsibility. We had done well at Mt. Fuji, but the forecast for Owase was looking challenging. To make matters more interesting, this was also our first day involving a Zodiac shuttle. The morning was calm, cloudy, and dry, with very gentle seas, making the outbound Zodiac ride an easy one. From the fishing port, we boarded the coaches for our morning excursions.

Most of us chose the visit to local sites, beginning in the fishing village of Kuki. We walked the steep stairway 'streets', climbing to the local Shinto shrine and lighthouse. It was clear the village was facing the challenges of a declining population, with many abandoned houses, but it nonetheless offered an authentic glimpse of rural Japanese life.

That impression continued as our visit coincided, with the monthly farmer's market, where we joined locals in sampling tasty treats and watched the tuna harvest in progress. Tanemaki Gonbei Park featured superb rows of Sakura – perhaps the best of the trip so far – and a lovely lakeside path. Best of all, the raindrops began falling just as the last of us boarded the bus. Our Zodiac ride back to our home away from home was livelier than our one this morning, as we got a taste for authentic expedition cruising.

The other group began with a coastal drive to the start of Daimonzaka Trail, part of the famous Kumano Kodo pilgrimage route. With our local guide, we hiked approximately 1,000 stone steps to reach the sacred Nachi Taisha Shrine and Buddhist Temple. From the heights, we overlooked the ancient pagoda and spectacular Nachi Falls. We descended to the falls, making wishes at the brazier and soaking in the atmosphere before retracing our steps to *Heritage Adventurer*.

As we left the coast and entered the Pacific Ocean, conditions became noticeably livelier. Whitecaps dotted the sea, winds freshened to 50 knots, and swells built to seven metres. *Heritage Adventurer* deployed her stabilisers to help smooth the voyage, and many guests chose to enjoy a restful afternoon in the comfort of their rooms. While attendance at the recap and briefing was lighter than usual, those who joined enjoyed the evening's activities, while others wisely conserved their energy for the adventures ahead tomorrow.



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Day 6

Sunday 5th April 2026

Kochi

After experiencing the motion of the ocean, we were pleased to find calm, warm conditions as we docked in Kochi for our first visit to Shikoku Island.

The Option 1 group headed out to visit Chikurin Temple, nestled within the forest with its classic five-story pagoda rising above the trees. Directly next door, the Makino Botanical Garden housed an impressive collection of plants from around the world, and we oohed and aahed over the glasshouse filled with beautiful orchids.

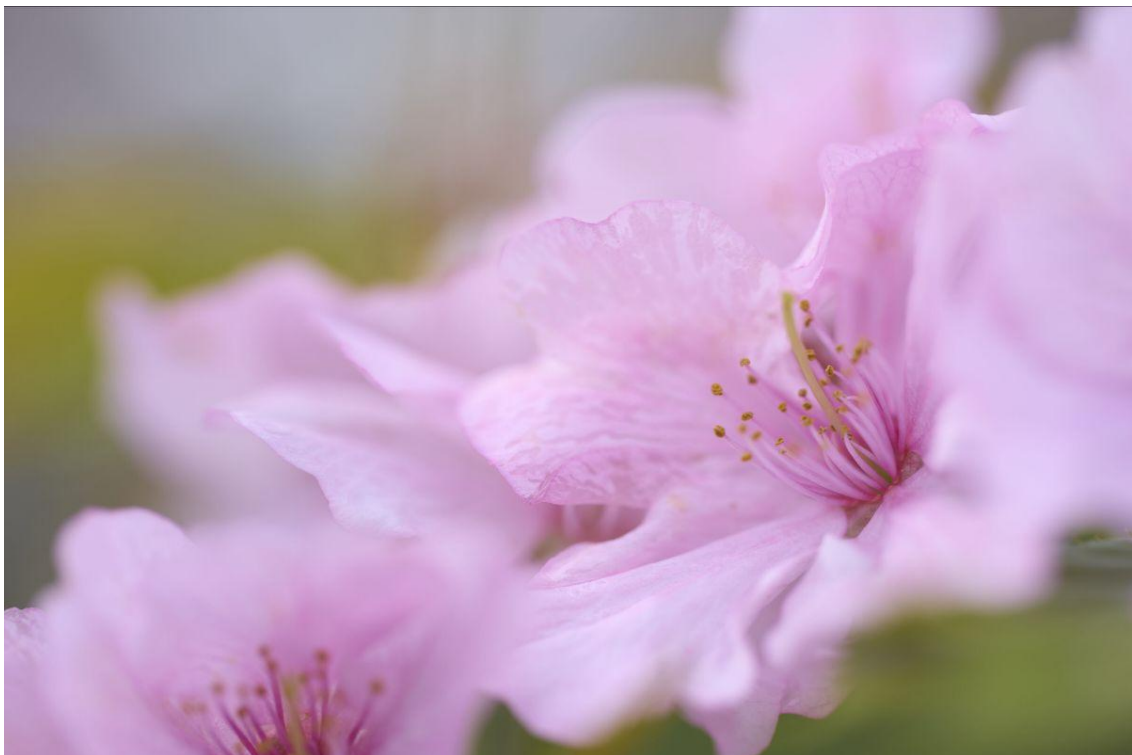
Meanwhile, the group that had selected Option 2 spent the morning at Ryūgadō Cave and a local sake brewery. The cave is famous for its interior streams and waterfalls, and after the overnight rain, they were running at full speed and volume. The narrow, twisting trail led us past numerous limestone formations and into caverns once inhabited by cave dwellers thousands of years ago. At the family-run sake brewery, passed down through six generations, we learned about the brewing process and sampled their gold medal-winning products.

Both groups spent the afternoon at Kochi Castle and the nearby Hirome Market. The castle is one of Japan's 12 remaining original castles – survivors among the thousands that had once existed. Built on terraced grounds, it required climbing stone steps to reach the keep. Along the way, numerous families were taking advantage of the Sunday sunshine for 'hanami' (flower viewing) picnics. Inside the castle, we ascended wooden staircases from floor to floor, rewarded by informative displays on the castle's history (in English). At the top, we were treated to sweeping views over the city and surrounding hillsides.

Back downtown, both the weekend street market and food court were in full swing. Favourite local delicacies included seared bonito and grilled Moray Eel. We returned to *Heritage Adventurer* to enjoy a farewell performance by an accordion, guitar, and drum trio accompanied by a troupe of energetic costumed dancers before casting off for recap, briefing and dinner. After dinner, Tommy gave an engaging overview of Japanese folklore.



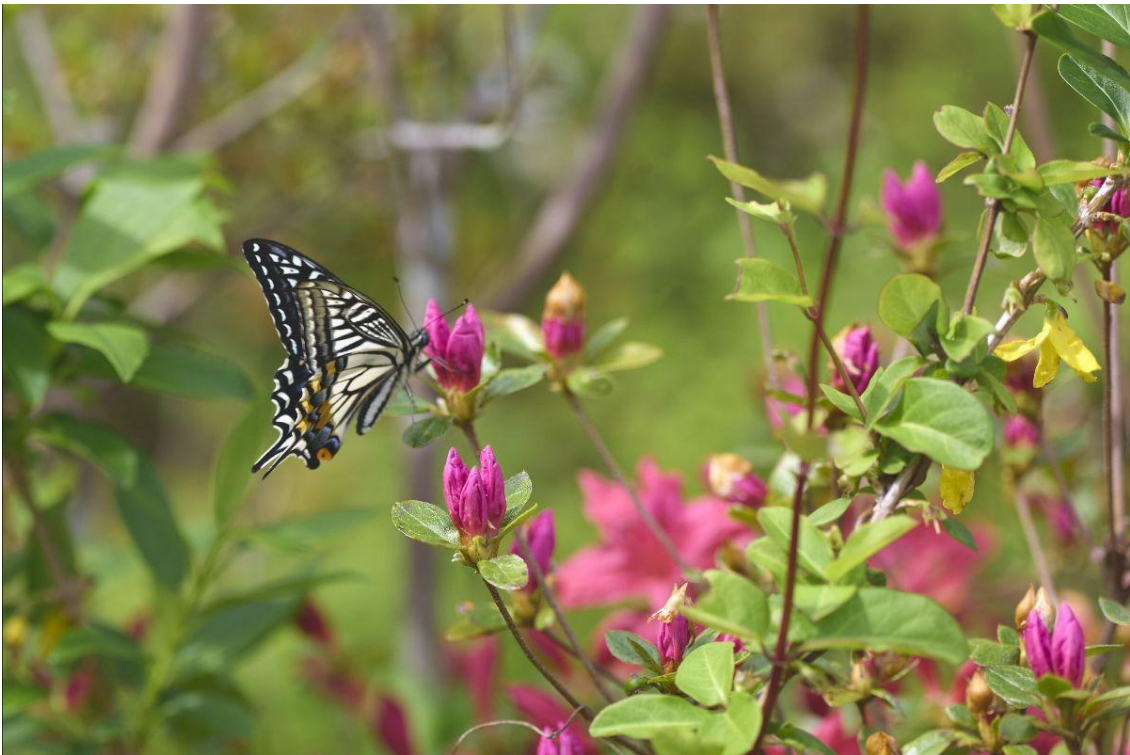
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Day 7

Monday 6th April 2026

Uwajima

On our early morning approach to Uwajima, we were joined by flag-waving escorts in fishing boats. A small group were first ashore, heading to Yakushidani Gorge for a lovely forest walk through mature cedar trees. The meandering trail crisscrossed a tumbling mountain stream with crystal clear water, waterfalls, and bridges galore. Two of us even took a dip at the furthest waterfall. We also had the chance to try a flowing noodle experience, grabbing noodles from running water with chopsticks. At the Yusumizugaura Terraced Potato Fields, we climbed the terraces for lovely views over the bay and fish farms, before enjoying a tasting of fresh potato crisps.

The rest of us spent the morning visiting three different attractions. At the Doi Pearl Company, we saw first-hand how cultured pearls are created. The second and third generations of this family-run business gave us a hands-on demonstration, and for many, the highlight was seeing a pearl emerge from the oyster under the gentle pressure of the old man's thumb. The pearl industry supports many local people through every stage of oyster cultivation and jewellery production, and the beautiful pieces in the shop proved highly tempting.

Tensha-en Garden is a small strolling garden built during the Meiji Restoration by a feudal lord of the Date clan. Its name— 'a place where a greater power allows us to enjoy our life' —reflects its intended purpose as a place of relaxation in retirement. The Sakura were in full bloom, while the Wisteria were just beginning to flower, their colours creating delightful reflections on the mirror-like lake.

The climb up to Uwajima Castle began gently through the forest but ended with a series of uneven, twisting staircases built as part of the castle's defences. Those who made it to the top agreed it was worth the effort for the chance to see another of Japan's 12 original castles. At the castle, and in parks along the way, our cherry blossom tour continued to live up to its name.

Back at *Heritage Adventurer*, we were treated to a taiko drumming and flag-waving farewell from the residents of this friendly, picturesque town. With the afternoon at sea, there was time for further enrichment: John's overview of Japanese History, a gala high tea on the high seas, and Nathan's family history presentation in '*The Story of Heritage Expeditions So Far*'. We then made our way westward through the

Seto Inland Sea and into the Sea of Japan via the narrow, rugged Kanmon Strait.



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Day 8

Tuesday 7th April 2026

Busan, South Korea

Having cleared customs and immigration into South Korea, we met our local guides and set off to explore. For most of us, the first stop was the Jinhae Cherry Blossom Festival, where we strolled along a small stream beneath a pink canopy of blossoms. Every street in the town seemed lined with cherry trees in full bloom. We stopped at a traditional Korean restaurant for lunch, enjoying rice bowls, green onion 'pancakes' and spicy kimchi.

With full bellies, we continued to Gamcheon Culture Village. Once a slum, this small neighbourhood has transformed into an eccentric streetscape filled with souvenir shops, craft galleries, food stalls, cafes, and eateries. Built on a hillside, it features brightly painted retaining walls and countless quirky hidden touches. We explored the shops, admiring the many handcrafted items.

At the 100-story Sky Building, a super-fast elevator transported us to the top. The animation inside the lift was fun, and the view over the sprawling city was impressive. Some took the opportunity to enjoy a coffee at the world's highest Starbucks.

Others chose a different path for the day. Their first stop was Haedong Yonggungsa Temple, which was bustling with visitors. The walking trail was dotted with small shrines, Buddhas, and stone statues, including a row of horoscopic animals and even a couple of golden pigs said to bring good luck. A steep set of stairs led to the temple bridge, symbolic of the divide between earth and the holiness of the temple. A sign proclaimed it "The Most Beautiful Temple in Korea," and it was easy to believe – the combination of the rocky coast, ornately carved buildings, and colourful Buddha's Birthday lanterns created a splendid scene.

A short drive brought us to a nearby park with a riverside walkway crossing several small bridges and stretching along a long pathway. Hundreds of Sakura blossoms overhung the trail, and the breeze sent petals drifting through the air like snow. Lunch was served in a quaint mud-earth-style building set into the side of a hill. Seating was on the floor in traditional style, and the tables overflowed with shared dishes featuring a variety of flavours, including a spicy tofu soup. Our coach then took us on a bit of an adventure, winding through more cherry blossoms as we

climbed the mountain. The view from the top was spectacular, with almost 360-degree vistas of the city and surrounding mountains. After another exciting day, we were happy to settle into our evening routine, reflecting on a wonderful day in South Korea.



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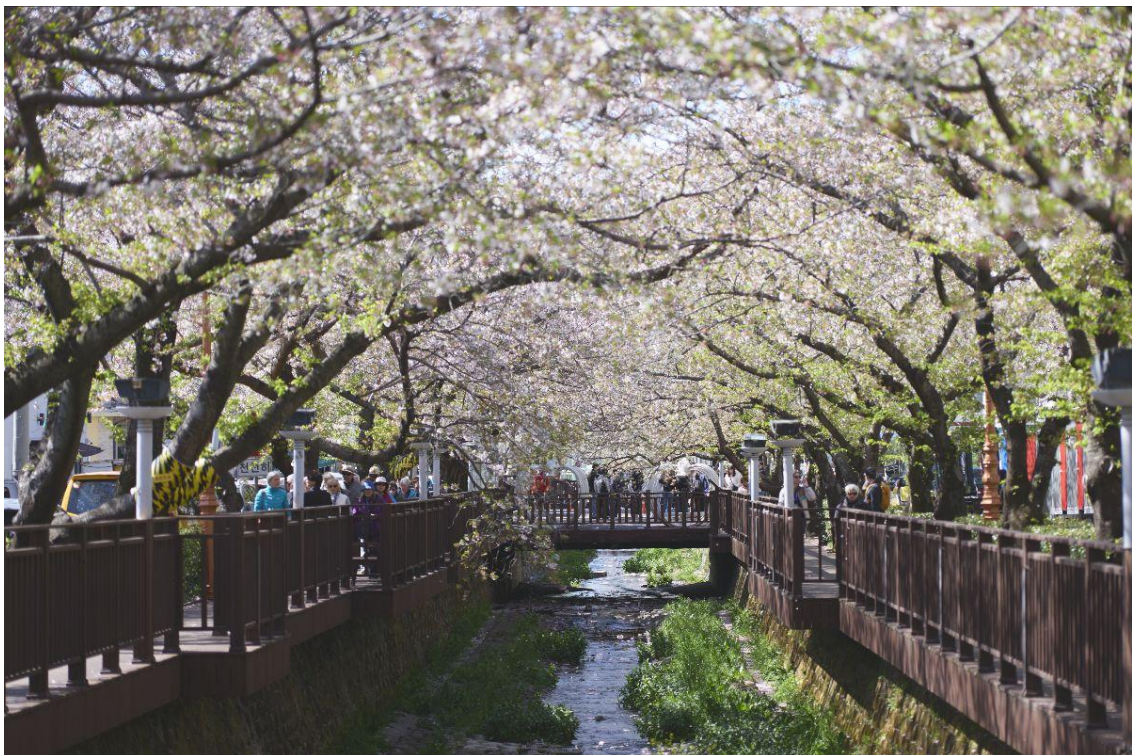
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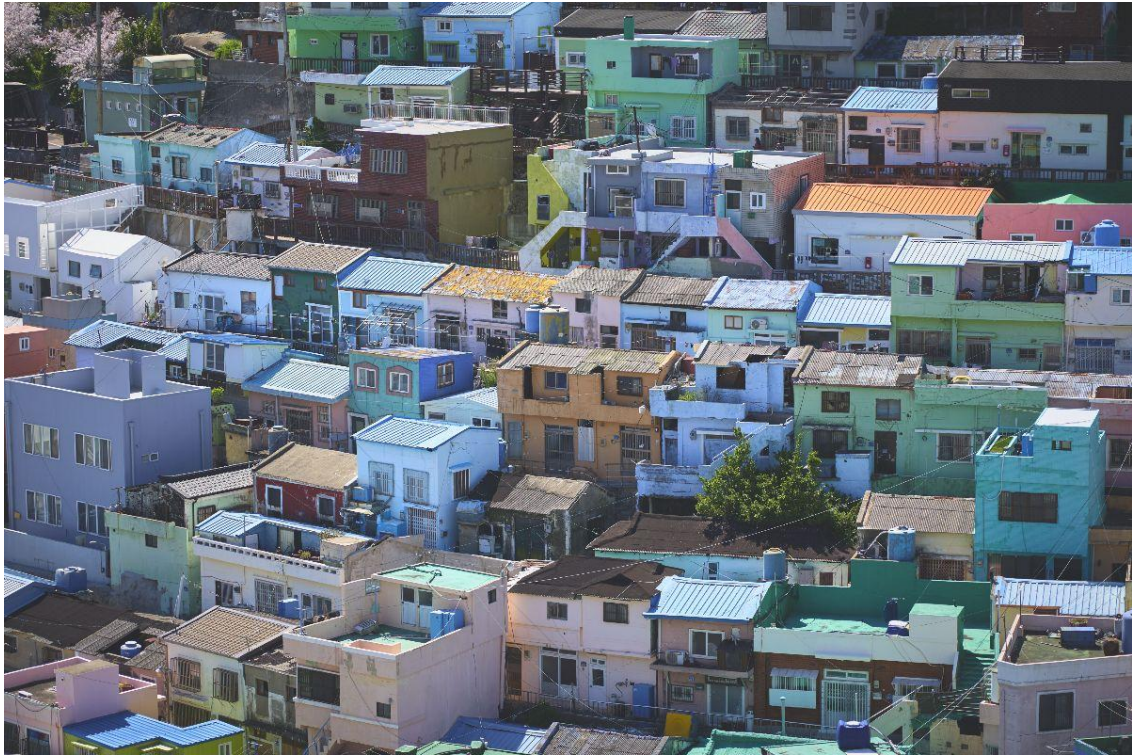
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Day 9

Wednesday 8th April 2026

Fukuoka, Japan

We were greeted by another beautiful blue-sky day as we landed in Fukuoka on Kyushu Island. The first group headed off for a morning exploring Tachibana Mountain, passing traditional Japanese houses and groves of citrus trees before entering the cedar forest. The climb was steady, and after an hour, we reached the 367-metre summit, and all the exertion was worth it as we were rewarded with spectacular views over Fukuoka below. We enjoyed some time to recover before heading back down and returning to *Heritage Adventurer* for a well-earned lunch.

Our afternoon took us to the most stunning strolling garden in the centre of the city. Behind its walls, we entered a tranquil oasis of moss-lined pathways, maple trees, and Sakura. We enjoyed a leisurely walk, and some even partook in matcha tea and wagashi sweets in the traditional tea house overlooking the pond and gardens – a perfect end to a wonderful excursion.

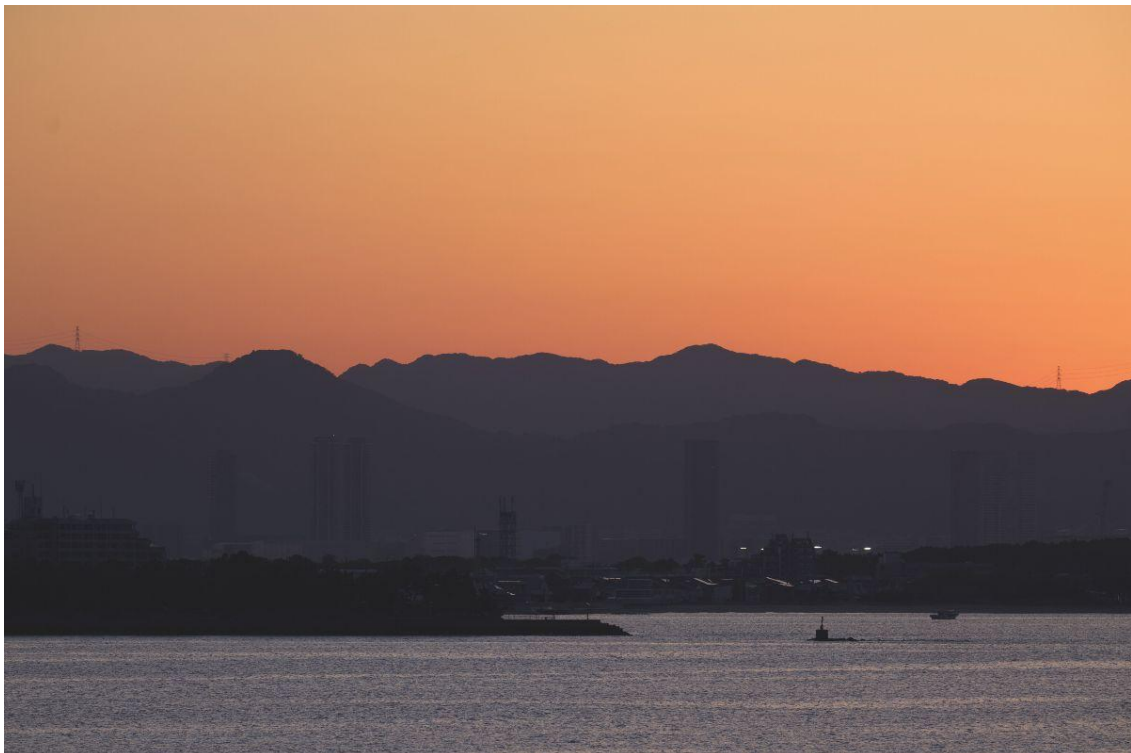
Back in Japan, we set off for a relaxing morning at Ohori Park, a beautiful green space nestled in the heart of Fukuoka. We had free time to explore the park's many

attractions, including a peaceful traditional Japanese garden and the Fukuoka Art Museum, which featured exhibits ranging from Buddhist statues and tea ceremony ceramics to contemporary art and a giant pumpkin.

There was also the option to head across the road to the Maizuru Park, home to the ruins of Fukuoka Castle. From the viewpoint at the former main citadel, it felt as though you were floating above a forest of cherry blossom trees, looking down upon a sea of pink.

After lunch, we made the short trip back into town for a bit of retail therapy—or at least window shopping—in the Nakasu District. There we found the popular shopping arcade and Don Quijote for bargain hunters, as well as the opulent Riverain Mall for more luxurious options.

Afterwards, *Heritage Adventurer* cast off for the transit back through the Kanmon Strait and the Seto Inland Sea to Hiroshima. Along the way, our local guides instructed us in folding origami paper cranes to make peace offerings, following the example of bomb victim Sadako Sasaki.





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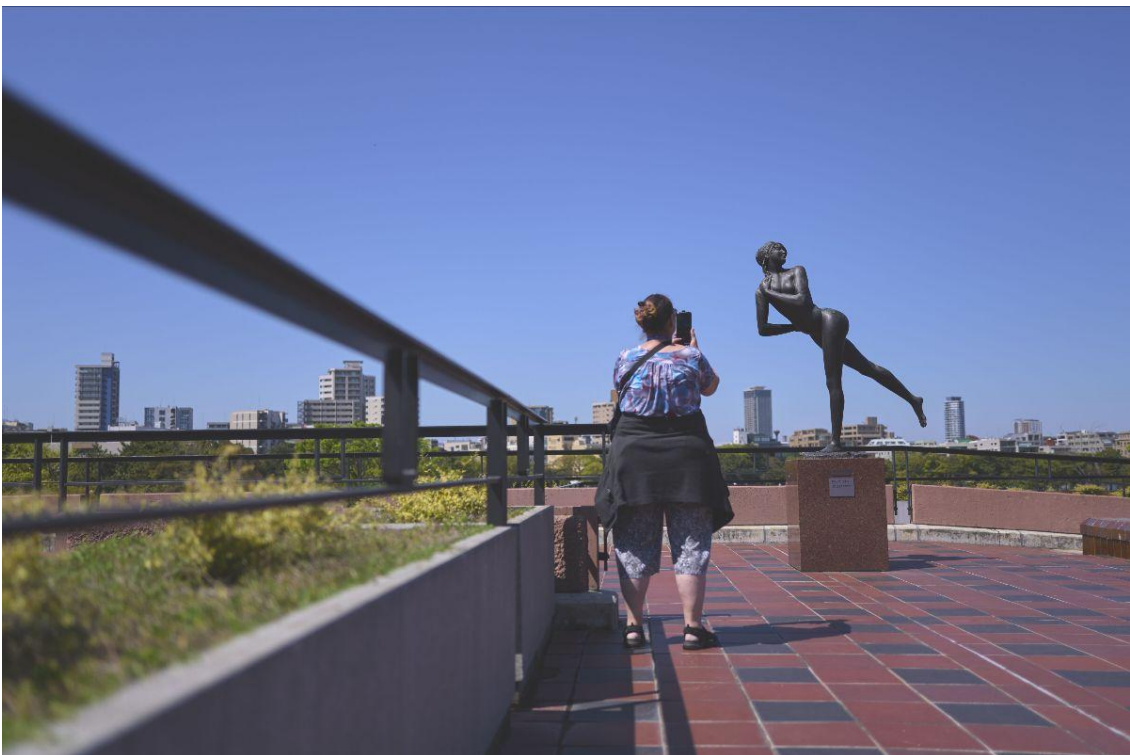
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Day 10

Thursday 9th April 2026

Hiroshima and Miyajima

It was both appropriate and poignant that we arrived at the Hiroshima Peace Museum just after 0815 hours, for it was at 0815 hours on a similar morning that the atomic bomb exploded—killing hundreds of thousands, changing lives, and perhaps altering the world, forever.

Peace Memorial Park has been set aside to commemorate the bombing and the atrocities that occurred. The people of Hiroshima have made it their mission to ensure the world does not forget the horrors of nuclear war and to continue their quest for world peace. The museum offers a stark depiction of those horrors and the suffering endured by the victims.

The surrounding park contains the cenotaph, the eternal flame, the Atomic Bomb Dome, and the Children's Peace Monument dedicated to Sadako Sasaki and the other young victims. There, we delivered our offering of the paper cranes we had folded. Despite the sombre subject matter, the park and the city's message of peace shine through.

Lunch was back aboard *Heritage Adventurer*, where we enjoyed a delicious BBQ on the Aft Deck. We then put our Zodiac training to use and headed to Miyajima Island—literally meaning ‘Shrine Island’. Our first destination was Itsukushima Shrine and its famous ‘floating’ torii gate, but there was much more to see. We climbed the hill to the many pavilions of Daisho-in temple. The bell rang regularly over the hillside path, which was lined with 500 small Buddhas wearing red caps. They are said to guide children who die too young to know the way to the afterlife.

The town was charming and offered plenty of retail and food options. It was a fantastic experience on Miyajima as we explored the streets alongside the resident deer population. We then returned on board *Heritage Adventurer* to reflect, relax and prepare for tomorrow's adventure and enjoy delicious local oysters.



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Day 11

Friday 10th April 2026

Tamano

We approached the port of Uno Ko in the breaking dawn. By breakfast time, we were secured to the wharf and excited for the adventures ahead. The Option 1 group set off for Okayama Castle, the imposing, all-black 'Crow Castle'. As a reconstruction, it features many modern elements compared with the other castles on our itinerary. Inside was a substantial museum of samurai artefacts. The stone ramparts, built in the late 16th century, and the ports in the walls for dropping stone or firing guns made us glad we were not an invading army. The gold leaf on the rooftop ornaments dazzled – even in the light rain.

We then crossed the bridge to Koraku-en Garden, first established by the castle's daimyō (feudal lord) during the Edo Period. This 'strolling garden' is set around a large pond and is consistently ranked among the top three gardens in Japan. It was easy to see why, with its quirky bridges, Koi carp and turtles in the pond, and numerous quiet nooks for contemplation. Japan's famous, red-crowned cranes were also on display in an aviary.

Back in the coaches, we travelled across town to the historic district of Kurashiki. Our first stop was at a local restaurant for a traditional bento box lunch. Afterwards, we joined the locals for another stroll – this time along canals lined with white-walled kura (storehouses), many of which had been repurposed into shops selling local arts, crafts, and tasty treats. One section, with numerous shops dedicated to all things denim, even offered denim-coloured ice cream. Most of us sampled it – especially the peach-flavoured variety. The drive back to the port was uneventful and provided a pleasant rest from the bustle of the day.

For a change of pace, the Option 2 group began with a short walk. We crossed the park past sculptures of sea bream made from rubbish collected from local beaches – well done, Team Uno Ko. We boarded our coaches and drove onto the ferry bound for Naoshima, famed as a home of some of Japan's finest contemporary art. Our visit began at the Art House Project, a unique collection of art installations set within traditional houses. We viewed a variety of installations, including one housed within a Shinto shrine. We stopped for a bento box lunch at a pleasant seaside restaurant, from which it was only a short stroll to the famous Yellow Pumpkin.

We then drove up the hill and split into groups to visit Benesse House Museum and

Chichu Art Museum, both designed by renowned architect Tadao Ando. The buildings themselves are giant works of art, designed to provide large, naturally lit spaces for the celebrated works they contain. Perhaps most notable was the large room housing Claude Monet's *Water Lilies* at the Chichu. Both coaches made it back to the ferry just in time to walk out to the famous Red Pumpkin and capture one last memory of Naoshima.

Back aboard, we began packing and freshened up for the Captain's Farewell Cocktails and Dinner. This was our opportunity to thank the many people who had worked together to make this adventure so enjoyable for all of us. We skipped the usual recap and briefing, but instead enjoyed a special recap of the entire voyage – the slideshow. Ewen somehow managed to encapsulate the expedition in a series of images that showed just how much we had seen and done. What a wonderful way to remember and share this remarkable Cherry Blossoms of Japan cruise. We headed off to dinner with the memories fresh in our minds, laughing and reminiscing over all the special highlights.



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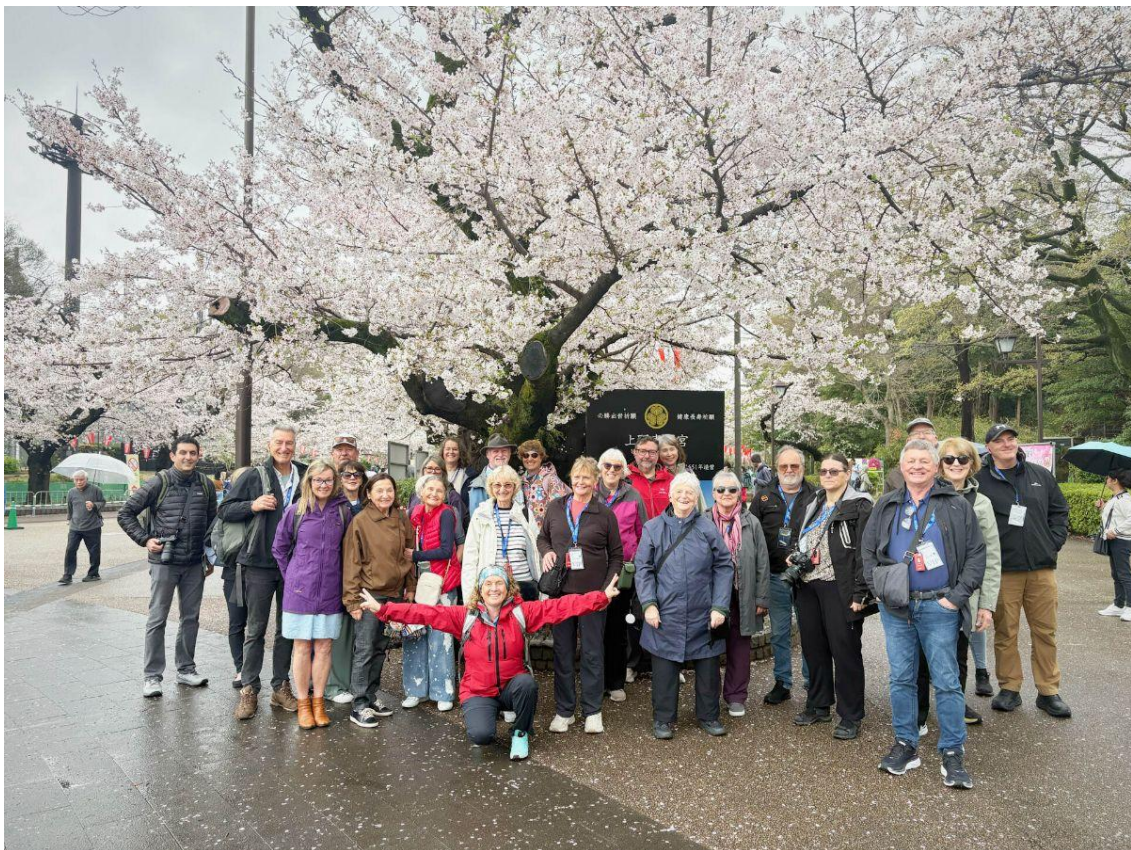
Day 12

Saturday 11th April 2026

Osaka and departure

Our adventure came to an end as we placed our luggage outside our doors and gathered for one last breakfast together, savouring the final moments onboard and exchanging contact details with new friends we had made along the way.

It was then time for a final walk down the gangway and one last farewell to the Expedition Team, whose care, knowledge, and enthusiasm had helped bring every destination to life. As we stepped ashore and headed off on our separate onward travels and home to all corners of the globe, we did so secure in the knowledge that this expedition, and our time together on board *Heritage Adventurer*, will linger in our memories for a very long time.



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