

SACRED JAPAN AND SOUTH KOREA

on board HERITAGE ADVENTURER

6 - 15 May 2026



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Day 1

Wednesday 6th May 2026

Osaka

Our Sacred Japan and South Korea adventure was underway! We arrived from all corners of the world, gathering at the Osaka Hilton Hotel, where several members of the expedition team warmly welcomed us. After some free time to settle in and explore, we came together for a relaxed Japanese buffet dinner. Following the long journey, some chose an early night to rest and prepare for the adventure beginning the next day, while others headed out to experience the vibrant energy and nightlife of the city.

Day 2

Thursday 7th May 2026

Osaka & Kyoto

With options to choose how we would explore on this adventure, those visiting Kyoto began at the remarkable Sanjūsangen-dō Temple, home to more than 1,000 carved wooden Buddha statues, each covered in gold leaf and over 800 years old. The atmosphere inside the temple was unforgettable, heightened by the sound of a temple monk chanting prayers while ringing a gong.

From there, we wandered through the streets of Pontocho, part of Kyoto's famous Geisha district. The narrow alleys, lined with fascinating wooden buildings dating back to the Edo period, were filled with shops, cafes and enticing food stalls. We then made our way to a modern covered shopping street, completely pedestrianised with no cars, and bustling with activity. Here we explored the many lunch options along the lively food street. Armed with a packet of spending money, we sampled whatever caught our eye, with the incredible sights and aromas providing a feast for the senses.

Our exploration continued along Kyoto's historic canal system, once used to transport rice and sake. Along the waterfront, we passed a traditional sake brewery before arriving at a modern brewery, where we watched a short film explaining the sake-making process and the history behind the brewery's success. The visit concluded with a delightful sake tasting and the opportunity to purchase some of the delicious products on offer.

Meanwhile, guests exploring Osaka began their morning with a visit to Minoh National Park, one of Japan's smallest national parks. Here, Japanese Macaques entertained us around the car park before we enjoyed a scenic walk through vibrant green forest to the spectacular 33-metre-high Minoh Falls.

We then travelled to Osaka's famous Dotonbori district, soaking up the sights, sounds and aromas of the city's renowned street food scene. Lunch was a delicious experience, featuring a variety of skewered local delicacies.

In the afternoon, we visited one of Japan's most iconic landmarks, Osaka Castle. After arriving by coach, we walked along the winding stone paths leading towards the inner citadel. The immense stone walls and vast moat created an awe-inspiring first impression. The castle tower stood proudly above us, its sweeping green-tiled roofs and gold accents shining brilliantly. Inside, exhibits recounted the

story of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Japan's dramatic Warring States period through displays of armour, scrolls, and folding screens. From the observation deck, we enjoyed panoramic views across Osaka's skyline, with the moat and castle walls stretching far below.

Next was a visit to the Sakai Traditional Crafts Museum, where we learned about the artistry behind traditional Japanese knives and swords. Skilled craftsmen shared insights into the history and techniques of their craft.

After a full day of exploration, we arrived at our new home, *Heritage Adventurer*, where we settled into our spacious rooms before taking part in the mandatory safety drill. The evening concluded with expedition briefings and a delicious three-course dinner.



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Day 3

Friday 8th May 2026

Uno-Ko

This morning we arrived into the port of Uno Ko under beautiful blue skies, the perfect start to another memorable day in Japan.

Guests in the Option Two group set off for Okayama Castle, the imposing black-clad 'Crow Castle'. Although a reconstruction, the castle incorporates many modern features not seen in some of the more traditional castles on our itinerary. Inside, we explored an impressive museum showcasing samurai artefacts and displays from Japan's feudal past. The massive stone ramparts, first built in the late 16th century, featured defensive openings once used for dropping stones or firing guns at invaders – a reminder of the castle's formidable history. Above us, the gold leaf ornaments on the rooftops glittered brilliantly in the sunlight.

Crossing the bridge beside the castle, we entered the beautiful Korakuen Garden, originally established during the Edo period by the local Daimyo (feudal lord). This

celebrated strolling garden, centred around a large pond, is consistently ranked among Japan's three finest gardens, and it was easy to understand why. Quirky bridges, graceful Koi carp, turtles basking near the water's edge, and secluded corners for quiet reflection created a tranquil and elegant atmosphere. We also enjoyed seeing Japan's famous Red-crowned Cranes in a dedicated aviary.

Our journey then continued across town to the historic district of Kurashiki. After enjoying a traditional bento box lunch at a local restaurant, we joined the locals for a leisurely stroll along the picturesque canals lined with white-walled storehouses known as Kura. Many of these historic buildings have now been transformed into charming shops selling local arts, crafts, and delicious treats. One area was especially devoted to all things denim - including, believe it or not, denim-coloured ice cream. Many of us sampled the ice cream – especially the peach-flavoured variety. The relaxing drive back to the port provided a welcome opportunity to recharge after a busy and enjoyable day.

For the art lovers among us on Option One, today's adventure led to the extraordinary Naoshima, an island internationally renowned for its unique fusion of contemporary art, architecture, and natural beauty. Home to just over 3,000 residents, the island offered a fascinating full-day immersion into Japan's modern creative culture.

Following a scenic ferry ride from Shikoku, we arrived on Naoshima's peaceful shores and began exploring the quiet residential streets of Honmura. Along the way, we learned about the traditional use of Japanese cedar in local homes, where the timber is lightly charred to improve durability and resistance to insects.

Our first stop was the Ishibashi Art House Project, a beautifully restored traditional home re-imagined as an immersive art space where light and architecture work together to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary. We then visited Haisha, part of the island's renowned Art House Project created by Otake Shinro. Once a former dental clinic, the building now houses an eclectic collection of large-scale artworks, including a replica of the Statue of Liberty spread across its quirky two-storey interior.

After enjoying our bento box lunch, we visited the Yellow Pumpkin, the iconic polka-dotted sculpture by Yayoi Kusama. Her playful and instantly recognisable work, deeply influenced by her personal experiences with mental illness, brought both vibrancy and emotion to the coastal setting.

In the afternoon, we explored the remarkable Chichu Art Museum, designed by celebrated architect Tadao Ando. Built largely underground to preserve the surrounding landscape, the museum's geometric concrete spaces created an almost otherworldly atmosphere. The carefully controlled natural light illuminated installations by artists including James Turrell, Claude Monet, and Walter De Maria.

Our final stop was the Benesse House Museum, also designed by Ando, where art, architecture, and nature blend seamlessly together. Expansive windows framed beautiful views across the Seto Inland Sea, while the museum itself felt like a living artwork filled with unexpected discoveries.

Back on board, we gathered for our evening briefing before enjoying another delicious dinner together.



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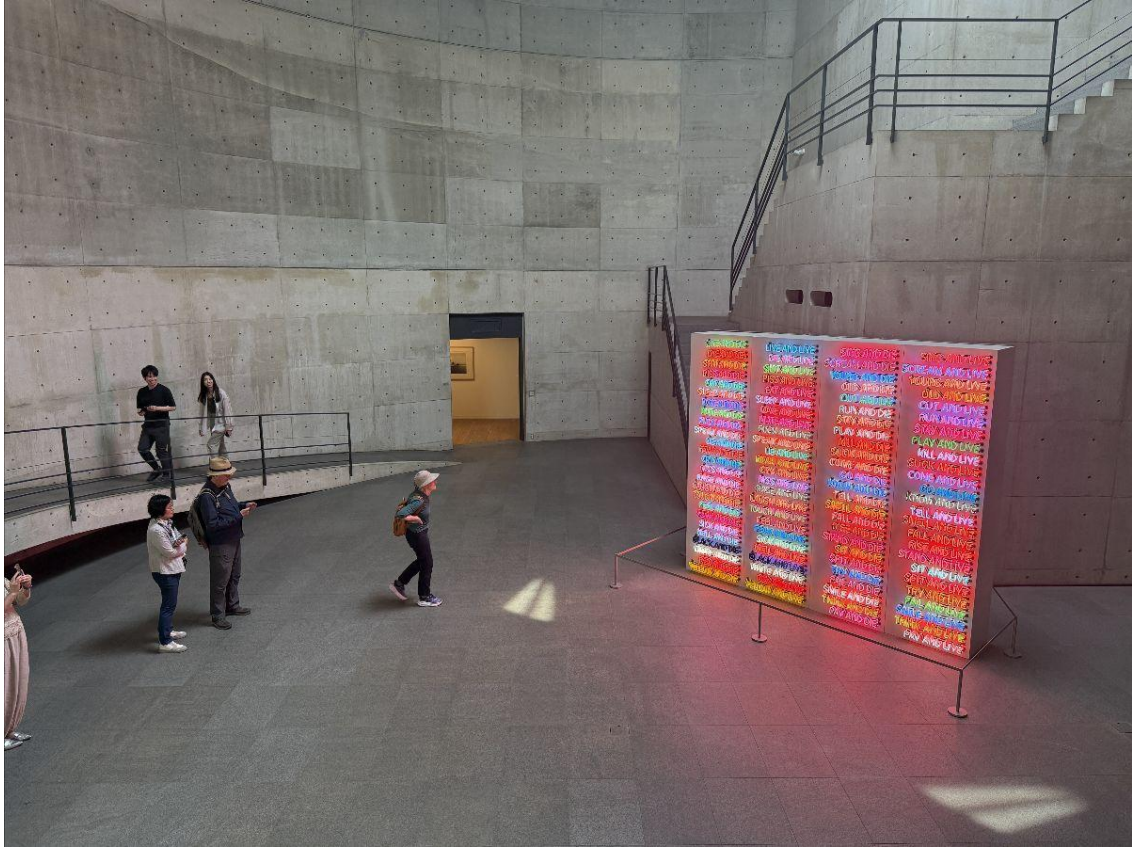
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Day 4

Saturday 9th May 2026

Hiroshima and Miyajima Island

We arrived at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, where we gathered with our group as our Japanese guide provided a brief orientation. From the moment we stepped inside, the museum commanded our full attention with its deeply solemn atmosphere. Through photographs, video testimonies, and preserved personal belongings of those who perished, the exhibits recount the tragic events of August 6, 1945, and the devastating human cost of nuclear warfare. It is a profoundly moving space that encourages reflection and a renewed commitment to peace.

Afterwards, we walked through the tranquil grounds of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, with its lush greenery, winding paths, and memorials dedicated to the victims. At the Cenotaph for the A-Bomb Victims, we paused to read the inscription: 'Let all the souls here rest in peace, for we shall not repeat the evil.' Nearby, colourful paper cranes fluttered gently in the breeze around the Children's Peace Monument, left by visitors from around the world in honour of Sadako

Sasaki, whose story has become a powerful symbol of hope and resilience. Here, we added our own string of paper cranes, carefully folded during the on board origami workshop the evening before. Our visit concluded at the haunting remains of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, more commonly known as the A-Bomb Dome. Its skeletal structure remains a powerful reminder of destruction, survival, and remembrance.

Back on board, we enjoyed a sun-soaked barbecue lunch on the Bistro Deck as *Heritage Adventurer* sailed the short distance to our afternoon anchorage off Miyajima Island.

In the afternoon, we travelled ashore by Zodiac to Miyajima Island, where we had several hours to explore its many fascinating attractions either independently or alongside one of our Japanese guides for a deeper dive into the island's history and culture. Popular with locals and visitors alike, this seaside gem is renowned for its natural beauty, spiritual significance, and charming streets lined with shops and eateries. Several hundred Sitka Deer wandered freely among the visitors; regarded as sacred messengers of the gods, they are carefully protected and revered on the island.

Welcoming us at high tide was the iconic 'floating' Torii Gate, one of Japan's most recognisable landmarks, appearing to float gracefully upon the sea. We wandered through the elegant open-air wooden corridors of Itsukushima Shrine, originally founded in the sixth century. Built on stilts over the water, the shrine blends harmoniously with the tides, sea breezes, and lush surrounding landscape. Local guests quietly tied handwritten prayers and wishes onto the railings as offerings.

Some guests ventured further to explore Daisho-in, a peaceful Buddhist Temple complex tucked away from the typical tourist trail. Moss-covered statues emerged from the greenery, rows of Buddha figures wore hand-crocheted red hats, and prayer wheels etched with ancient sutras invited moments of quiet reflection. Back in town, many of us sampled Miyajima's famous oysters, enjoyed ice cream, or tried the locally made Momiji Manjū — delicious maple-leaf-shaped pastries traditionally filled with red bean paste or other sweet fillings. Of course, we had to remain vigilant, as the island's inquisitive deer showed great interest in our treats as well.

To conclude the day, expedition guide and historian John Rogers delivered an

engaging lecture on the history of Japan, enriching our understanding of the remarkable places we had visited.



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Day 5

Sunday 10th May 2026

Hagi

At Hagi, we sailed past numerous picturesque islands before heading ashore by Zodiac in perfect conditions. Arriving in a beautiful bay fringed with palm trees, the warm breeze and tranquil setting gave the area an almost tropical atmosphere.

Some guests travelled through the town and surrounding rice paddies, passing many abandoned houses before walking onto the limestone plateau to visit Akiyoshido Cave, one of Japan's largest and most spectacular limestone caves. Upon arrival, we descended through the dramatic 'time tunnel,' where theme park-style lighting gradually gave way to the natural underground world of the cave system. The immense scale of the caverns quickly became apparent as we joined the main underground river.

Many of the cave's remarkable formations were illuminated and accompanied by English commentary. As the cave narrowed, we encountered terraces of creamy

white limestone pools reflecting the overhanging stalactites above. Emerging back into daylight, we were then faced with the difficult decision of choosing from more than 100 flavours of ice cream on offer nearby.

Other highlights included a visit to the Yoshika Taibi Memorial Museum and workshop. Here we learned about the origins of Hagi-ware (Hagi yaki) pottery, introduced from Korea centuries ago, and the transformation of these everyday ceramics into highly regarded works of art by Yoshika Taibi, founder of this pottery business. We admired his stunning creations in the museum before watching skilled potters at work on their wheels. Naturally, many of us also took the opportunity to support the local economy in the gift shop.

Another stop brought us to the ruins of Hagi Castle, once home to the powerful Mori clan, who ruled the region from 1604. We wandered through the moats and stone foundations where the castle keep once stood. These atmospheric ruins stirred the imagination, evoking scenes from 400 years ago. The surrounding gardens and old teahouse made for a particularly peaceful stroll.

Nearby, we explored Hagi's historic Samurai district, once home to the warriors who served the local Daimyo. Here we visited the Kikuya Residence, the former home of a wealthy Edo-period merchant from a family closely connected to the ruling lord. The beautifully preserved traditional house, garden, and collection of historical artefacts offered a fascinating glimpse into what life was like for a close supporter of the Daimyo.

We then continued to Tōkō-ji Temple, an impressive Buddhist temple that serves as the burial site for the odd-numbered generations of the Mori dynasty. The temple grounds are lined with more than 500 stone lanterns, which are illuminated by candlelight during the equinoxes each year – undoubtedly a breathtaking sight.

Following another enjoyable Zodiac ride back to *Heritage Adventurer*, we presented our passports to clear Japanese immigration formalities. With that completed, our thoughts turned towards the next stage of the journey - South Korea, here we come.



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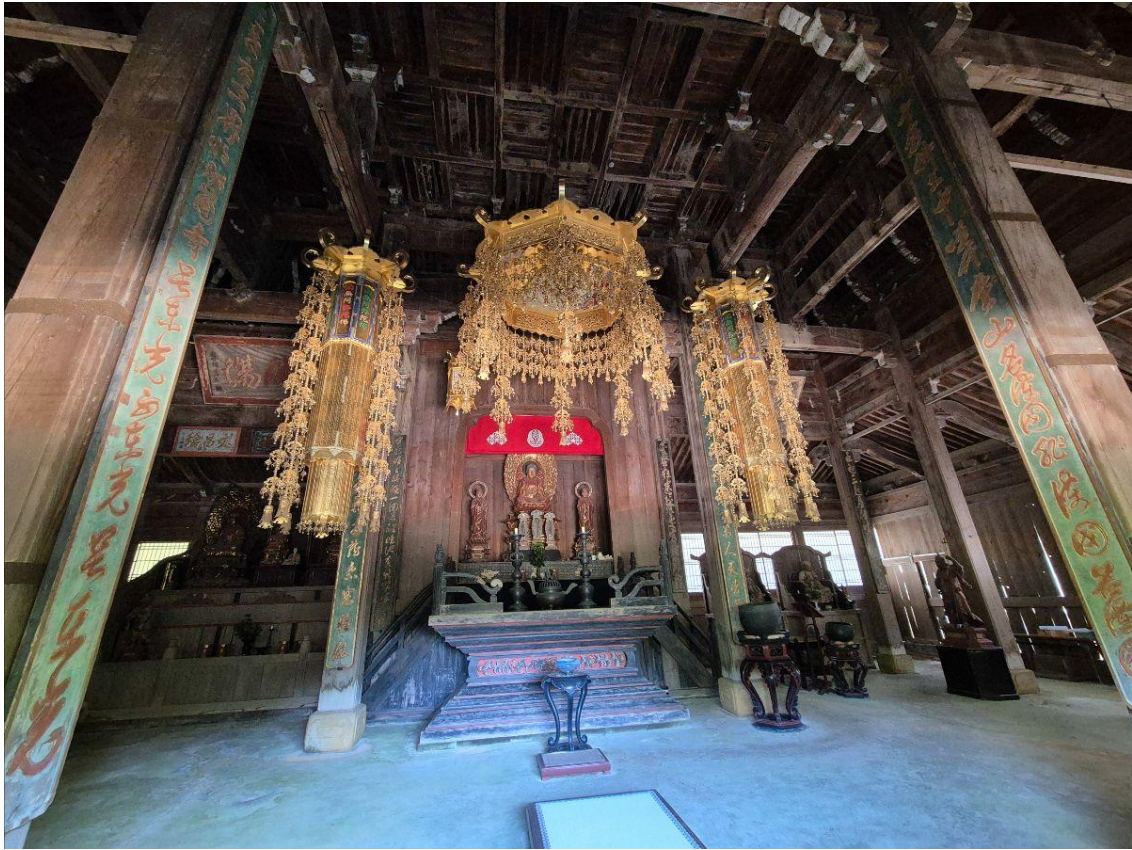
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Day 6

Monday 11th May 2026

Ulsan, South Korea

After crossing the Korea Strait overnight, we arrived early this morning in the industrial powerhouse of Ulsan, South Korea. In stark contrast to the small ports we had recently visited in Japan, we were immediately struck by the immense scale of the harbour and the impressive logistics operations underway. Thousands of new Hyundai vehicles lined the docks awaiting shipment around the world. With clear skies and temperatures forecast to reach 26°C, we set off enthusiastically to discover what South Korea had to offer.

Guests on Option Two set off for a scenic hike up Ganwolsan Mountain, enjoying spectacular views across Ulsan along with sightings of birds, butterflies, and beautiful scenery along the trail. Afterwards, we were treated to a delicious lunch of Bibimbap, one of Korea's most famous dishes. In the afternoon, we visited Daewangam Park, where rocky coastlines, windswept pine trees, and colourful seafood stalls created a lively seaside atmosphere before we returned to *Heritage*

Adventurer to continue our adventures back in Japan.

Guests on Option One travelled to Gyeongju, the ancient capital of the Silla Kingdom, beginning with a visit to Daereungwon Tomb Complex. Exploring the excavated royal tombs was a particular highlight, offering fascinating insight into Korea's ancient history. We wandered through the peaceful gardens in the dappled sunshine before making our way to a nearby shopping street filled with Korean street food vendors, gift shops, and colourful photo booths. Lunch was an incredible meal of pork bulgogi at a local restaurant before continuing on to the magnificent Bulguksa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The temple's beautifully painted buildings were adorned with colourful lotus lanterns carrying the wishes and prayers of visitors.

At the Ulsan Museum, our local guide introduced us to a fascinating collection of Korea's cultural treasures. Highlights included a huge ceremonial temple bell, exquisitely crafted gold crowns once worn by royalty, and delicate ceramics that offered insights into everyday life centuries ago. We later explored Tumuli Park, home to several royal burial mounds from the Silla Kingdom. Entering one of the excavated tombs allowed us to view replicas of ancient treasures and artefacts, including elaborate gold crowns that provided a glimpse into Korea's royal past.

After a rewarding day, we returned to *Heritage Adventurer* for another delicious dinner whilst we made our way back towards Japan. Later in the evening, Expedition guide Tommy entertained us with his bedtime stories exploring the weird, wonderful, and often mysterious world of Japanese folklore.



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Day 7

Tuesday 12th May 2026

Sakaiminato/Matsue, Japan

After a leisurely morning at sea, including a presentation on Japanese etiquette by our guide Hide-san and an early lunch, we arrived in the port of Sakaiminato, where we were warmly welcomed by two very cute Japanese mascots. With sunshine overhead and perfect conditions for exploring, we eagerly set off to discover the highlights of the region.

One group ventured into Daisen-Oki National Park and up the slopes of Mount Daisen, often referred to as the 'Mountain of the Great God.' Revered as a sacred site since the eighth century, Mount Daisen has long been associated with mountain worship and spiritual pilgrimage.

Partway up the mountain, we visited Daisen-ji, a historical temple founded in 718 AD by the ascetic monk Koren Shonin. Over time it became an influential Buddhist centre protected by powerful clans during Japan's turbulent Sengoku period.

Although the buildings appeared quiet and almost abandoned, our guide explained that the temple is only open when a resident monk is in attendance, something now far less frequent than in more accessible religious sites.

Higher on the mountain, we reached Ōgamiyama Shrine, a tranquil shrine dedicated to the mountain deity and nestled among towering cedar trees at the top of ancient stone steps. The pathway to the shrine was lined with large, uneven stones and narrow channels carrying cool mountain water gently downhill. Along the trail we passed hikers descending from the summit carrying trekking poles and large packs. The peaceful forest surrounding provided the perfect setting for the Japanese practice of 'forest bathing', immersing oneself in nature to relax and recharge.

Meanwhile, the rest of our travellers visited the renowned Adachi Museum of Art, where the immaculately maintained garden left us speechless. Designed purely for viewing rather than walking through, the gardens are appreciated from the museum's wide corridors and expansive windows, transforming each framed view into a living artwork. The changing perspectives beautifully demonstrated how Japanese gardens themselves are considered an art form. Inside the museum, the collection focused on the works of Yokoyama Taikan, one of Japan's most celebrated artists.

We then travelled to Matsue Castle, one of Japan's 12 remaining original castles, dating from 1611. Inside the castle, the steep wooden staircases provided insight into the defensive design of these historic fortresses. From the upper levels, we enjoyed excellent views across the surrounding area, including Grey Herons nesting high among the nearby pine trees.

To conclude a spectacular day, both groups gathered at the stunning Yuushien Garden, which had been reserved exclusively for our visit. Here, we enjoyed a wonderful and unexpected feast of seafood and vegetarian sushi, nigiri, hot tea, and fruit jelly before strolling through the exquisitely designed gardens. Elegant rocky landscapes softened by moss and ferns were enhanced by fine mist drifting through the garden, helping maintain ideal conditions for the plants and adding to the magical atmosphere.

Back on board that evening, Expedition Guide Tina delivered an insightful presentation titled '*The Essence of Japanese Gardens*', offering a fascinating

introduction to the design principles and symbolic meanings behind these remarkable landscapes.



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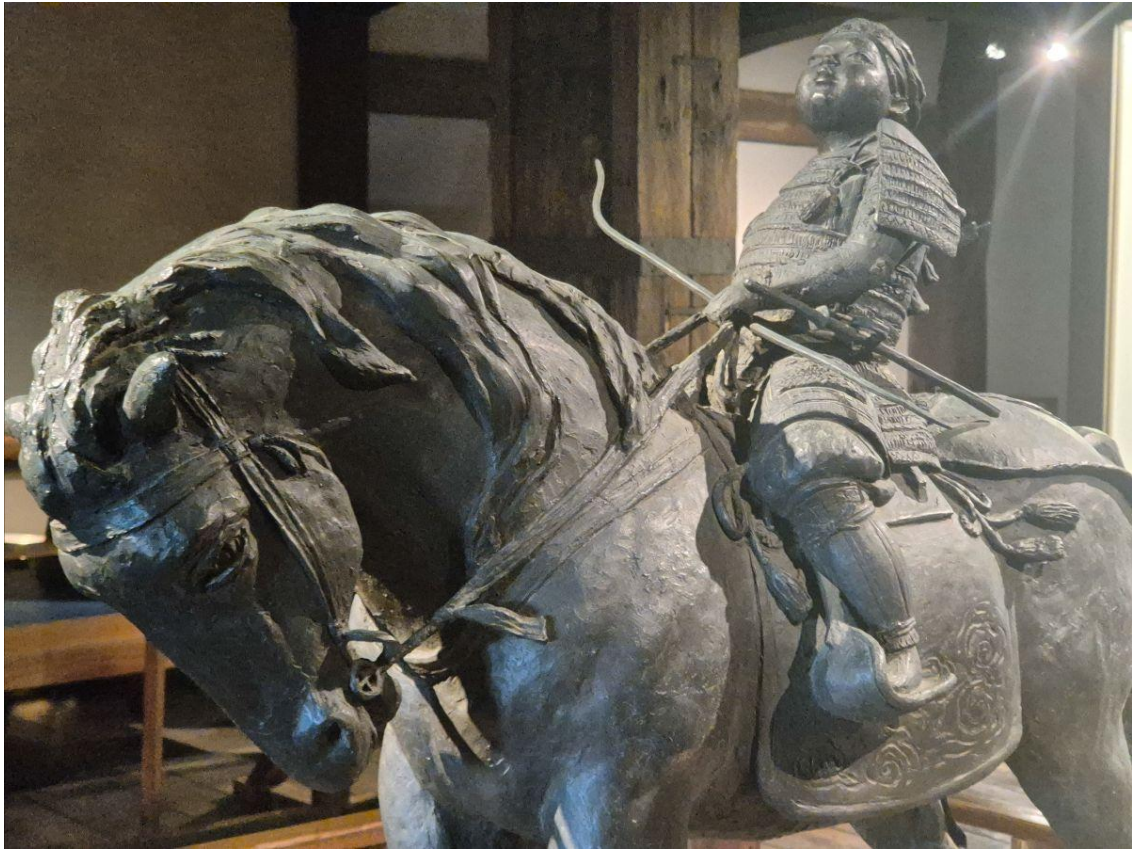
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Day 8

Wednesday 13th May 2026

Kanazawa

Kanazawa, a coastal city and the largest in Ishikawa Prefecture, is famed for its gold leaf production, traditional handicrafts, and beautifully preserved Edo period atmosphere. Just out of Kanazawa lies Ogimachi Village in Shirakawa-go, a UNESCO World Heritage Site renowned for its steeply thatched Gassho-zukuri farmhouses. Arriving by coach, we crossed the pedestrian suspension bridge spanning the Shō River and entered a village alive with visitors strolling the streets, photographing the rice fields, and admiring the unique architecture. Its picturesque setting reminded some of us of a charming German Alpine village—only with gentler surrounding mountains.

A visit to Kanda House felt like stepping back in time. Before entering, we removed our shoes, as generations before us have done, to protect the worn wooden floors. Inside, the farmhouse was cool and quiet, filled with the scent of aged timber and woodsmoke. Massive beams stretched overhead as we explored the rooms and

paused beside the old hearth where families once cooked and kept warm. The upper floors displayed tools and artefacts used in raising silkworms, offering a fascinating glimpse into life in rural Japan.

Lunch was enjoyed at a nearby restaurant, where traditional dishes made with local ingredients were served—beef with miso (or tofu for the plant-based option), accompanied by soup, pickled radish, and beautifully crisp vegetable tempura. Delicious! From there, we set out on foot, meandering along peaceful mountain roads and through the nearby village of Gokayama while our guide shared stories of local life and history. Our final stop was Suganuma, another enchanting village dotted with gassho-zukuri houses. With few visitors around, we enjoyed browsing souvenir shops filled with local delicacies and handcrafted goods—a wonderful finale to our day.

Others explored the highlights of Kanazawa, including Kenroku-en garden, considered one of Japan's three most celebrated strolling gardens. Dating back to the 17th century, it combines the six classic attributes of the ideal garden: spaciousness, seclusion, artifice, antiquity, water features, and magnificent views.

Next, we explored Nagamachi Samurai District on foot. Once home to the city's elite samurai families, the district's narrow lanes are lined with traditional wooden houses and earthen walls. Inside the former residence of the Nomura-ke family, we admired the elegant architecture and design, with tatami mats underfoot and sliding doors opening onto an exquisite courtyard garden filled with stone lanterns, lush greenery, and giant koi gliding through the pond. We also explored the surrounding streets, browsing shops selling sweets and vibrant Kutani pottery known for its intricate designs and vivid colours.

After lunch onboard, we returned to our coach and continued to the historic Higashi Geisha district, where some even sampled the area's famous gold-leaf ice cream.

Our final excursion gave us the opportunity to exercise our creative talents as we learned the art of Gold Leaf Pasting. Using the gold leaf that Kanazawa has produced for more than 400 years, we created our own personalised keepsakes to take home – a perfect reminder of this memorable journey.



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Day 9

Thursday 14th May 2026

Sado Island

Fantastic blue skies welcomed us as we sailed into port at Sado Island this morning. We were treated to an especially warm welcome from the locals, including an appearance by Sado's famous 'Toki' mascot, the endangered Red-crowned Ibis, along with energetic taiko drumming and a lively dance performance by an Oni demon performer.

Sado Island, Japan's sixth-largest island, is home to around 50,000 residents and is known for several unique attractions, including its famous taraibune tub boats. Traditionally used by local fishermen to gather seafood in the shallow coastal waters, these wooden tubs now offer visitors scenic rides around the bays. We enjoyed a relaxing journey with a highly skilled pilot, who guided us through a picturesque sheltered bay of crystal-clear turquoise water. Beneath us, seaweed

and fish life were clearly visible, while a charming red arched bridge connected the bay to small headlands offering stunning coastal views.

A short coach ride then brought us to the National Taiko school. The island hosts many festivals throughout the year celebrating its world-renowned drumming traditions, and we were fortunate to experience this firsthand. Under the guidance of two wonderful instructors, we had the opportunity to try our hand at taiko drumming. Soon we were playing together in rhythm before creating our own individual beats – a fantastic experience and enormous fun.

Meanwhile, those on the alternative tour explored the island’s beautiful coastline on foot. After admiring the stunning scenery, we made it to the Folk Museum, where exhibits showcased how the sea and shipping routes once brought prosperity to the island through coastal trade between Osaka and Hokkaido. We also visited Edo period houses that demonstrated the islanders’ long and enduring connection to the ocean. The tour concluded with the popular taraibune tub boat rides and the unforgettable taiko drumming experience.

Our final evening on board began with the Captain’s Farewell Cocktails, followed by the final slideshow and a sumptuous five-course dinner – a fitting celebration to conclude a truly memorable journey.



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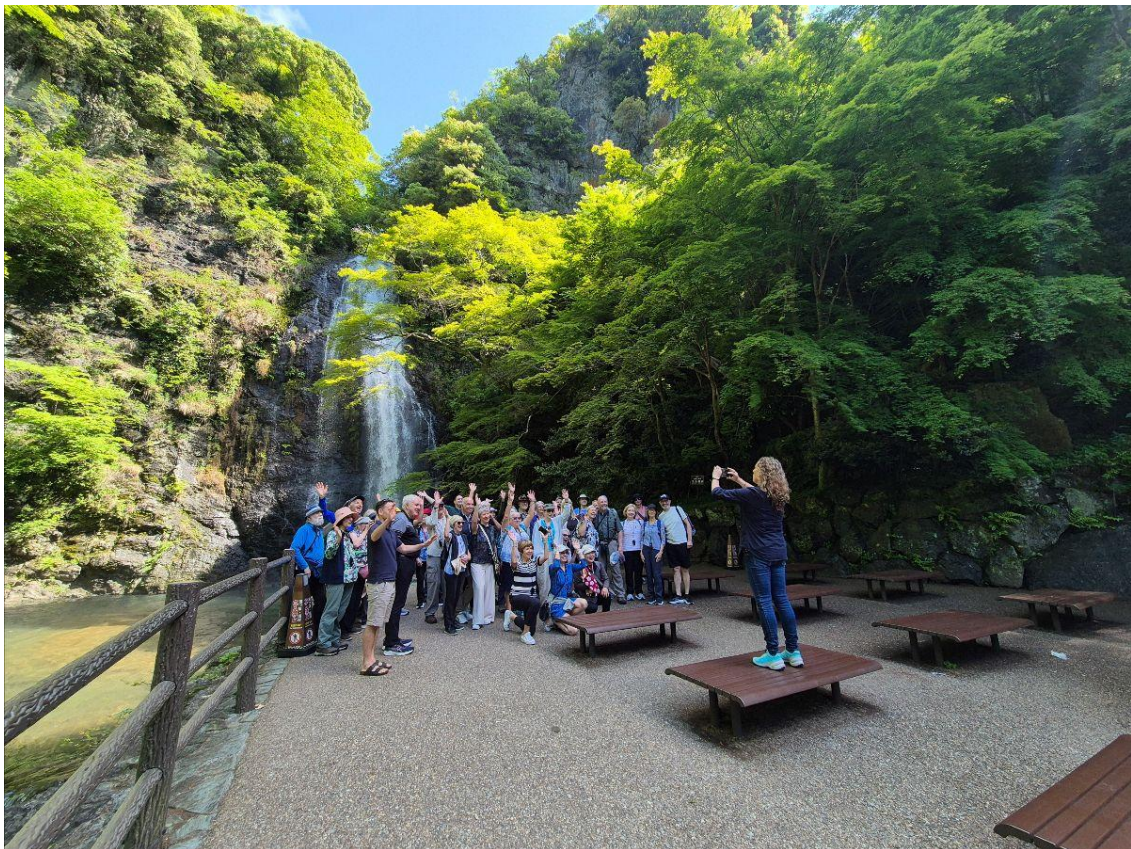
Day 10

Friday 15th May 2026

Niigata & departure

We awoke to our final morning aboard *Heritage Adventurer* and gathered one last time to enjoy a delicious breakfast together. Over coffee and conversation, we reflected on the many unforgettable experiences shared throughout our Sacred Japan and South Korea voyage, and exchanged contact details with newfound friends, promising to share photos and stay in touch.

Soon it was time for heartfelt thank yous and farewells to the wonderful team from Heritage Expeditions, whose warmth and dedication made the adventure so memorable. Finally, we said goodbye to our home away from home, *Heritage Adventurer*. As we disembarked, we carried with us treasured memories, new friendships and stories of a truly special voyage. Some guests would return home to their different corners of the globe, while others would continue onward to new adventures.



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