Day 1 Depart USA

Day 2 Arrive Tokyo
Travel by private car transfer to our downtown hotel, the four-star Marunouchi Hotel, in the centrally-located Marunouchi district and adjacent to Tokyo Station.
Accommodation: Hyatt Centric Ginza Tokyo
Meals included: None

Day 3 Tokyo
We’ll start our time in Tokyo at Meiji Shrine to learn about Shinto and experience kagura, a blessing ceremony of ancient, sacred music and dance. A short walk through Harajuku, a center of Japan’s renowned youth fashion and culture, is followed by a walking tour on nearby Omotesando to see contemporary architecture and trendy street life. We will lunch today at a restaurant specializing in tofu and unique Japanese creations. After lunch, visits to some of the interesting museums in Tokyo Midtown will be followed by a private presentation at Nuno Gallery, known for innovative textiles and clothing by renowned designer Reiko Sudo. This evening you are free to enjoy dinner on your own.
Accommodations: Hyatt Centric Ginza Tokyo
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

Day 4 Tokyo
Today, we will set out to enjoy a leisurely walking tour of the Ginza neighborhood, including a visit to one of Tokyo’s famed department stores for the opening ceremony. After lunch we will visit a small, architecturally significant museum (pending exhibit announcement), before heading to Aoyama, home to some of Tokyo’s most fashionable and elegantly civilized stores and shops. Our visits there will include the Noguchi Sculptures on display at Sogetsu Hall. End the evening with a welcome dinner in one of Tokyo’s fine restaurants, which are continually re-interpreting traditional cuisine.
Accommodations: Hyatt Centric Ginza Tokyo
Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 5 Tokyo
This morning we’ll take a stroll through one of the quiet sections of Tokyo where we’ll get introduced to a Nihonga artist, who creates delicate Japanese masterpieces on paper and silk. We’ll end our touring day with a guided tour of the Tokyo National Museum. Afterwards you will be on your own for lunch and to explore other areas of Tokyo—Asakusa and the famous Senso-ji Temple; perhaps the Edo-Tokyo Museum and the nearby Sumo Museum or even to enjoy shopping in the newly revived Nihonbashí district.
Accommodations: Hyatt Centric Ginza Tokyo
Meals: Breakfast
Day 6 Matsumoto
Today we will start our journey back in time. We head by train to Matsumoto where we will enjoy lunch in a restaurant set in a beautifully restored traditional storehouse. We'll then start our touring at Matsumoto Castle, circa 1595, one of four remaining from Japan's feudal period in its original condition. We will have some free time for you to explore Nakamachi, a pretty neighborhood of historic homes, many of which have been converted to cafes and galleries for crafts and antiques. Afterwards, we continue by coach to our ryokan for the evening, the deluxe, Relais & Châteaux property, Miyojinkan, where you can enjoy the onsen (hot spring) baths and a full-course kaiseki (multi-course) banquet dinner served Japanese style.
Accommodation: Miyojinkan Ryokan
Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 7 Narai Juku/Kyoto
After our luxurious Japanese ryokan breakfast, we will travel by coach to one of the original eleven post-towns along the Nakasendo Road. The winding and arduous road through the mountains and the Kiso valley connected Kyoto to the capital in Edo. Several post towns have been carefully restored and a visit to one of these truly is like walking the path of the samurai and ronin of old. Narai Juku was a prosperous inn town (called Narai Senken – a thousand inns) and its unique architectural style of overhanging second-floors survives to this day. We will have several hours to stroll through the town, explore the small local temples and lunch on your own. Afterwards, we will transfer by express train to Nagoya before heading to Kyoto via Shinkansen (bullet) train. Our hotel for the remainder of our tour is the five-star Hyatt Regency Kyoto, located in the quiet Higashiyama area. Dinner will be at your leisure this evening.
Accommodation: Hyatt Regency Kyoto
Meals included: Breakfast

Day 8 Kyoto
Start our touring day with a tea ceremony where you will be given a basic introduction to the Way of Tea, including the proper etiquette, in a private, authentic setting. Spend the rest of the morning at nearby Daitoku-ji Zen monastery, including visit to Koto-in and Zuiho-in. After a Zen-style vegetarian lunch travel to eastern Kyoto to visit a young Rinzai zen priest at Zenge-in in the eastern hills, for a chat about his years cloistered in a classic Zen monastery and his new life as the abbot of a small Zen temple. To end the day, we visit a friend’s gallery for an introduction to Japanese ceramics. Afterwards you can have an optional walk along the Philosopher’s path or a visit to Ginkaku-ji (Silver Pavillion). Tonight we will enjoy a shabu-shabu dinner of luxurious Wagyu beef and crisp vegetables dipped into bubbling broth tableside and served with traditional condiments and dipping sauces.
Accommodation: Hyatt Regency Kyoto
Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner
Day 9 Kyoto
This morning we travel to eastern Kyoto to visit an artisan whose intricately woven silk cords and tassels are commissioned by shrines, temples and Tiffany and Co. Our next stop is Renge-ji, a classic Taoist-inspired garden with special symbolism, including references to the crane and the turtle as well as the land of the Immortals. A Kyoto-style lunch will be served in a private room at Kyoto’s oldest inn and garden, located along the Takano River. The current proprietor is the 20th generation in his family to run the inn. Afterwards we will have an ikebana demonstration featuring a wide array of ceramics and baskets used to enhance the display of seasonal blooms. End the day with a visit to the studio of a calligraphy master and performance artist to see him wield his gigantic brush to create a masterpiece-in-the-moment. After a special event, dinner will be on your own this evening.
Accommodation: Hyatt Regency Kyoto
Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

Day 10 Kyoto
We begin today in Western Kyoto in Arashiyama, where the hills will be ablaze with the bright scarlet and burnished gold of fall foliage. We will start at Tenryu-ji, one of the oldest gardens in Kyoto, dating from the early 14th century. The garden was designed by Muso Kokushi, a renowned priest, diplomat, meditation teacher and garden designer. After a short walk through the Bamboo Forest, we will have a private tour of the Hogo-in villa, which is not open to the public. The villa is an outstanding example of highly refined and inventive sukiya-style carpentry. After our group lunch, we have a visit to one of Kyoto’s many stroll gardens, made special by the autumn foliage. the Nishijin textile district to meet a 5th generation master of gold leaf. In his beautifully preserved, traditional Kyoto-style merchant house, he will introduce you to his intricate process used to create custom obi.
Accommodation: Hyatt Regency Kyoto
Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch

Day 11 Kyoto
This morning, the early risers may decide to join our tour guide for an optional temple visit to attend a full Buddhist service, including a fire ceremony, performed by 40 chanting monks. After breakfast, start touring next to our hotel, with a visit to Sanjusangendo Hall, a 900-year old structure that holds an extraordinary collection of statuary in one of Japan’s longest wooden buildings. The 1001 wooden statues of the Kannon, well-known from Sugimoto’s “Hall of Thirty-Three Bays”, sit row upon row for the length of the building with their phalanx of 28 National Treasure guardian entities in front. End the morning with a walking tour of the Kiyomizu and Gion area, which a short introduction into the life of the geisha and maiko for which Kyoto is so well known. The rest of the day is free for lunch and to explore Kyoto on your own. Some suggestions include touring with Esprit’s custom shopping map in hand, visiting such iconic sights as Kinkaku-ji (Golden Temple), the 10,000 bright vermilion torii gates of Fushimi Inari or traveling by train to nearby Nara. Tonight would be a good night for an excursion to one of the many temples and gardens in Kyoto that are lit up to highlight the start of the fall foliage season. Your tour leader will have a list of available temples and directions. Tonight we will have a farewell dinner in one of Kyoto’s many fine restaurants.
Accommodation: Hyatt Regency Kyoto
Meals included: Breakfast
Day 12 Departure
You’ll have the morning free to take in the sights, shop or simply stroll Kyoto’s varied neighborhoods one last time. Transfer by reserved van shuttle, per individual flight times, for your pre-arranged return flight from Osaka Kansai International Airport or Osaka Itami Airport. Meal included: Breakfast

Note: Actual visits and events will be finalized approximately 30 days prior to departure to allow for the inclusion of special exhibitions, visits and events, and are dependent on the schedules of our Japanese colleagues. A final itinerary will be sent to you about two weeks prior to tour departure. The itinerary is subject to change at any time.

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BENESSE EXTENSION

Day 12 Naoshima Island
This morning travel via train and ferry to Japan’s premier art site, Benesse Art Site, three islands located on the Inland Sea of Japan. Today we will visit Teshima Island to experience the Archive and the Teshima Museum before having a quiet lunch at a local restaurant. Travel on via ferry to Naoshima Island to check into the Benesse Park hotel. This Tadao Ando signed hotel houses numerous art pieces and is located right along the island’s edge. Each room has its own installed art for you to enjoy while you are in residence. Dinner tonight will be at the Terrace restaurant, serving continental cuisine.
Accommodation: Benesse Park Hotel
Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 13 Naoshima Island
Today we will take time to explore some of the installations and museums, including the Chichu Museum, the Lee Ufan Museum and the Art House Projects. For dinner this evening, enjoy dinner at Issen restaurant in Benesse Museum. We will be served a contemporary interpretation of traditional kaiseki (multi-course, exquisitely presented meal) served on an array of artistic functional ware from kilns all over Japan. We will then explore the Museum after hours.
Accommodation: Benesse Park Hotel
Meals included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day 14 Departure
Transfer by ferry and train to Osaka this morning for your return flights from Osaka Kansai International Airport or Osaka Itami Airport. Flights should be arranged for after 4:00pm to allow for ample time for travel and customs.
Meal included: Breakfast

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