

# Tokyo's Festival of Flowers 2021 Tour



April 20<sup>th</sup> -27<sup>th</sup>, 2021 non-stop via



**Cancel for any reason up to 60 days prior-FULL REFUND!**

**Maximum Tour size is 24 tour members!**

**6nights/8days from: \$2395 double/triple \$2795 single**

*Since ancient times, Japanese have been attuned to the passing of spring, summer, autumn, and winter through the blooming of flowers. Japans' spring flowers are an explosion of colors! No soft greens and little flowers. Japan goes all out, gathering in masses to witness the spectacle that nature stages.*

*Now, with summer approaching, join us on this truly unique tour and be introduced to wonderful flowers of the season. With Tokyo as our base, not only ideal for visiting flower festivals, but it has everything you can ask of a city. Such is the joy of a city that prides itself on constant renewal and reinvention; it seriously never gets old.*

*Only one hotel, Sunshine City Prince Hotel, located in one of Tokyo's best spots, Ikebukuro. Couple this with 5 flower festivals, Mt. Fuji Area, some of Tokyo's best omiyage shopping, 2 hands-on experiences, a free day, the biggest Daiso in Tokyo, and TeamLab Borderless, a world of art without boundaries, a museum without a map.*

## Itinerary/Details

**Day 1 – April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021 Tuesday – Depart from Honolulu**

**Hawaiian Airlines #863 Departs Honolulu 12:55 pm – Arrive Haneda 5:10 pm + 1**

International check in begins 3 hours prior to the departure time. Please meet your Panda Travel representative, at the Hawaiian Airlines check-in counters, Terminal 2, Lobby 4. After clearing security, you will meet up once again at the gate area.

**Day 2 – April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2021 Wednesday – Narita-Tokyo**

On arrival in Tokyo, please make your way to the baggage claim area and then proceed to customs clearing. On exiting customs, our local guide will be there to meet us for the drive to our hale for the next 6 nights, The Sunshine City Prince Hotel.

The lobby of the hotel connects to a huge shopping and entertainment mecca with four towers, including a 240-meter-high skyscraper with an observation deck on the top. Sunshine City is typically open from 10 am to 8 pm seven days a week. We are also less than a 10-minute walk from the Ikebukuro JR Station. The third floor of the mall is practically all restaurants and stays open until 9:30pm.

There is 24-hour Family Mart convenience store right off the lobby in case you would like to pick up food, snacks, or beverages. Within a 5-minute walk is a 24-hour supermarket, Seiyu, in case all you want is a light dinner bento to bring back to the room.

After checking in, please meet you Panda Travel escort for a walk around the area. The mall close by 8:00pm; however, the restaurants on the third floor typically open until 9:30pm.



**Remodeled Sunshine City Prince Hotel & lobby**



**Family Mart in hotel lobby**

**Accommodations: Sunshine City Prince Hotel**



### **Day 3 – April 22nd, 2021 Thursday – Tokyo (B)**

After breakfast, please meet your guide by 8:30am as we are off on a full day of touring.

If you have ever dreamed about melt-in-your-mouth, out-of-this-world sushi, then you might have heard of Tsukiji, the largest fish market in the world. Most of Tokyo, and even high-end sushi restaurants in Hong Kong and San Francisco, gets their fish from this cultural landmark near the center of Japan's capital city.

Tsukiji sits on some of the most valuable real estate in Tokyo. While the inner auction market has moved to reclaimed land on Tokyo Bay, the charm of this unique spot remains.

Opened in 1935, Tsukiji sprang to life after the Great Kanto Earthquake destroyed most of Tokyo in 1923. It has since become one of the most popular tourist destinations in the city. Every morning sightseers start lining up at 3 a.m. to watch the frozen tuna auction. The more expensive fresh tuna auctions – where a single Bluefin once sold for nearly \$1.8 million- are privately conducted.

If you are a foodie, love markets, enjoy photography – or simply like visiting unique places – then you will love Tsukiji.

After a good stroll around the market, there is nothing like a sushi breakfast to complete the experience. There are plenty of sushi shops – make sure to choose one where you see locals dining. If you do not feel like sushi, there are other options including ramen, *donburi* and more.



### **Tsukiji Outer Market**

From here we are off to Asakusa, the traditional, low-rise, down, and dirty Tokyo of yesteryear. Although on the surface it is ye olde Japan, this was the first part of the capital to have significant western influence. It was even the site of Japan's first cinema.

Attractions in the area include one of Tokyo's most historic temples – Sensoji, and the impressive Kaminarimon Gate that marks the entranceway to the temple. Also, you cannot miss Phillip Stark's 'Golden Poo' on the roof of the nearby Asahi Breweries headquarters.

Sensoji Temple dates to 645, but with the original destroyed in the air raids of 1945, today's building is a 1958 reconstruction. At the top of the steps, as a mark of respect, clap twice and bow your head. It's also customary to make a small offering by tossing coins into the wooden rack.

The Five Storied Pagoda was built in 1973 and amongst others; it stands in honor of comedians! Standing 54 meters high, reinforced with concrete and steel, and like all pagodas, running down the center is a giant pillar of Japanese Cypress tree wood.

Once through the gate you will be in Nakamise Shopping Arcade. The street is lined with colorful, lively stalls selling traditional knick- knacks, festival foods, and rice crackers. There are over 50 shops along this shopping street. We will remain here for 1.5 hrs. to allow you time to enjoy the area as well as shop.



### **Asakusa and Nakamise Shopping Arcade**

Now, off to Yanaka Ginza, one of the last remnants of Tokyo's past. With more and more of Tokyo being modernized and rebuilt to make room for its ever-growing population, enjoy the opportunity to explore Yanaka before it is gone forever.

While not a big shopping street, Yanaka Ginza is prized for its atmosphere of how life was back during the Edo Period. There are approximately 70 shops along this 175-meter-long street. Here you can find old and new crafts, old and new food, as well as souvenirs and gifts.

A Western-style bakery that boasts an oven made with stone from Mount Fuji stands next to a shop that sells traditional Japanese sweets. There is a shop entirely devoted to items handcrafted from bamboo, a tiny stall where you can get T-shirts custom-printed with illustrations of various animals, and a shop that sells traditional wooden and straw-rope sandals.

Also special about Yanaka, the window it offers on everyday life of the neighborhood. This shopping street sells everything practical that locals could need. Some of it is familiar: a drugstore, small grocery, fish shop, butcher, and clothing and handbags from the cheap to the fashionable. As well, you will find unique offerings, a shop that sells just pickled vegetables and another offering various kinds of fish paste.

Enjoy free time here to walk around, shop, browse and have lunch on your own while experiencing everyday life in a Japanese neighborhood.

Two shops we recommend you consider stopping at are Mammies Apple Pie Shop and directly across the street is a wonderful recycled kimono shop. The quality of the fabric and prices are incredible.



**Yanaka Ginza Shopping Street**



**Mammies Apple Pie Shop**



**Kimonos from 500 yen!**

Our last stop on tour is a visit to Nezu Shrine, believed to have been established more than 1,900 years ago. For 11 months, out of the year it does not attract that much attention from the outside world, then spring rolls around, and its remarkable crop of azaleas burst into bloom.

It is home to some 3,000 azalea plants – roughly 100 varieties in total, including rare breeds such as the black karafune flower – and must find space for at least as many flower aficionados during the month-long Bunkyo Tsutsuji Matsuri.

Nezu Shrine is always worth a visit, thanks to its wonderful historical buildings nestled down in the hilly landscape, the torii path, and the beautiful and detailed decorations of the main hall, but the highlight of the year is the **Bunkyo Azalea Festival**. Enjoy free time to explore and enjoy the scenery.



**Bunkyo Azalea Festival**

Now, back to our hotel, arrival by 4:30pm and the remainder of the afternoon and evening is free.

**Accommodations: Sunshine City Prince Hotel**



#### **Day 4 – April 23rd, 2021 Friday – Tokyo-Mt. Fuji-Tokyo (B/L)**

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:00am as we are off to Mt. Fuji area and a visit to the **Fuji Shibazakura Festival**. With its stunning scenery and fragrant beauty, this is one spring festival you do not want to miss!

While Japan's sakura cherry blossoms make headlines throughout April, there is another type of sakura that is adored by the masses, only this one blooms up from the ground beneath your feet. Enjoy this most specular display of shibazakura, otherwise known as "moss phlox", right here at the base of Mt. Fuki.

Shibazakura is a flower that grows thickly, covering the ground like a lawn. The shape of its pretty flower petals looks like that of sakura (cherry blossoms) and it comes in a variety of colors including different shades of pink, white, and light purple, with some petals having striped patterns.

We will remain her for two hours so that you can enjoy leisurely time here. There is also two gift shop and a variety of shops to enjoy a bite to eat or even a snack. Do not fill up too much as we have lunch coming up.



#### **Fuji Shibazakura Festival with Mt. Fuji views along the drive**

From here, a Japanese lunch at a local restaurant and then a fun visit and hands-on experience at the Shingenmochi Factory. It all begins with a factory tour where you can see how quickly and hygienically these workers work the production line. It only takes them 6 seconds to wrap the mochi and on a typical day 12,000 shingen mochi are produced.

Our hands-on experience activity is "tsume houdai", which translates into "pack as much as you can". You will receive a plastic bag and then fill it up as much mochi as you can.

Enjoy some time at the souvenir shop where besides mochi you can find other omiyage items, mochi flavored candies, biscuits, dorayaki and roll cakes. If this all makes you hungry, there's shingen mochi ice cream.

We now begin our drive back to Tokyo, arrival at our hotel by 5:30pm. Once back, the remainder of the afternoon and evening is free.

**Accommodations: Sunshine City Prince Hotel**



## Day 5 – April 24th, 2021 Saturday – Tokyo (B)

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 8:30am.

The morning begins with a visit to the **Peony Festival** at Ueno Toshogu Shrine. These carefully tended flowers are laid out in a maze-like formation, with the delicate petals protected by dozens of paper umbrellas. There are multiple species of peonies, some from as far afield as South America. We will remain here for 1.5 hours.



### Peony Festival at Ueno Toshogu Shrine

From here we are off to Ameyoko Shopping Street, famous throughout Japan for its wide variety of products.

The name "Ameyoko" is a short form for "Ameya Yokochō" (candy store alley), as candies were traditionally sold there. Alternatively, "Ame" also stands for "America", because a lot of American products used to be available there when the street was the site of a black market in the years following WWII.

You can get just about EVERYTHING here, clothes, bags, cosmetics, fresh fish, dried squid, and spices are sold along Ameyoko. It is quite the scene to just walk around through the very crowded and narrow streets. An awesome place to sightsee, shop and eat! We will remain here for 1.5 hr., so you can shop at leisure.



### Ameyoko- best spot to find omiyage items

We are now off to Arcakit Kinshicho for some serious shopping time at the largest Daiso in Tokyo. This train station area offers many more shops and eating venues. Shoppers, you have 1.5 hours here, to shop and enjoy lunch on your own.

Our last stop on today's touring, Kameido Tenjinja Shrine, best known for the arched Drum Bridge located over a pond in its charming garden. This wooden Drum Bridge was originally built around the same time as the shrine, but what we see today is the newer version re-constructed after the original was destroyed in the WWII bombings.

The shrine is also known for Fuji Matsuri, or the **Wisteria Festival**, celebrated on the grounds every year from the end of April to the beginning of May. It is said that the wisteria was planted here when the shrine was constructed

Many thousands come here to view the beautiful site of over a 100 wisteria plants blooming in their full amethyst color. The sight is made even more beautiful when the colorful flowers are reflected in the many ponds of the shrine grounds, giving the place a beautiful violet shade.



**Kameido Tenjinja Shrine Fuji Matsuri**

The arrival back at our hotel will be by 4:00pm and the remainder of the evening is free.

**Accommodations: Sunshine City Prince Hotel**



### **Day 6 – April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021 Sunday – Tokyo-Ashikaga-Hanyu-Tokyo (B)**

After breakfast, please meet your guide in the lobby by 7:30am as we are off on a full day of touring.

The morning begins with a visit to the **Ashikaga Flower Park**, one of the best places to view wisteria (known as fuji). Japanese love flowers and the wisteria is among their favorites. The drive time is approximately 1.5 hours.

Three massive wisteria trellises extend for more than 1000 square meters, in addition to a large trellis of rare double-petaled wisteria. One large fuji tree is 100 years old and its branches are supported to create a huge umbrella of blue fuji flowers. There is also an 80-meter tunnel of white fuji flowers, while a tunnel of yellow kingusari needs a little more time to become an actual tunnel. Yae-fuji, a variety with more than the usual number of petals, can also be viewed.

Besides the fuji, you will find many other flowers, restaurants and a shop selling plants and local products. Pale red and great wisteria are usually in full bloom during this time.

Enjoy free time to walk around and the viewing. We will remain here for 1.5 hours.



### **Ashikaga Flower Park**

We are now off to the Onihei Edo-dokoro parking area, a surprisingly different and quite popular rest spot than you have ever experienced in Japan.

As you drive up, the appearance is of Japanese townscapes from the Edo Period. You are welcomed in through a pretentious gate in the traditional building style with large lanterns. Hanyu PA (parking area) is not just a reproduction of any Edo town, but that of the town where the main character of the TV drama “Onihei Hankacho” lived.

This once popular Japanese TV drama was set on the Edo Period where its main character, Heizo Hasegawa, known as Onihei cracked down on arson, theft, and gambling. These were all grave offences during that period. Period dramas of “good defeats evil” are very popular in Japan and this series aired for two decades, having been loved by many.

Enjoy free time here to have lunch on your own. The restaurants offer typical meals served in the drama. In addition, they also a variety of traditional dishes loved by Japanese people since the Edo period, such as eel, soba noodles, tempura, kuzu-mochi arrowroot cakes, and amazake sweet sake.

The shops here are also quite unique, the atmosphere is that of a traditional Japanese fair. You will find unique souvenirs that you may not find elsewhere. Many of the souvenirs are related to the TV drama; however, there are other more traditional good, wagashi Japanese sweets, pickles, tabi socks, and tenugui hand towels with traditional Japanese patterns.

Now, a visit to the Izome Furusato Museum, to enjoy a hands-on experience, indigo dyeing.

From here we will make our way to Omiya to visit the Bonsai Art Museum. Opened in 2010, the museum is the world’s first publicly run museum dedicated to bonsai art and boasts a collection of more than 120 bonsai masterpieces and bonsai-related artifacts. These include bonsai pots, miniature landscape stone called suiseki, books and woodblock prints, etc.

Selected in accordance with the four seasons, about 60 pots of bonsai are always displayed in the garden and some in the gallery. After walking around inside, do step outside into the large courtyard, where most of the museum’s bonsai are displayed around a central water feature. These are much larger than their indoor counterparts, which allows you to see in greater detail the care that has been taken in shaping and potting these artful plants. The majority are Shohaku (evergreen) varieties such as Japanese Five Needle Pine or Yezo Spruce, as well as of deciduous bonsai.





### **Bonsai Art Museum**

From here we make our way back to Tokyo and our hotel, arrival by 5:15pm. Once back, the remainder of the evening is free.

**Accommodations: Sunshine City Prince Hotel**



### **Day 7 – April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021 Monday – Tokyo (B)**

After breakfast, enjoy a complete free day in Tokyo to do whatever you please. There is still much to enjoy and quite a bit to do right at your doorstep. Being that today is a national holiday, the shop and restaurants will all be very busy. Enjoy!

Ikebukuro offers plenty of entertainment, shopping, and dining opportunities. It is the battle ground between the Tobu and Seibu conglomerates which operate large department stores on each side of the station. Recently it has also seen fierce competition from two of Japan's largest electronic retailers, Bic Camera and Yamada Denki.

Enjoy time at Sunshine City, a huge shopping mall connected to our hotel. It has four towers including a 240-meter-high skyscraper with an observation deck on the top. The main tower is the second highest building in Tokyo. The Sunshine City Prince Hotel is housed in one of the smaller towers at the complex. The lower levels of Sunshine City are a monstrous maze of shops and tourist attractions, as well as a theatre.

The tower's elevator is an attraction, being the fastest in the world it takes only thirty-five seconds to reach the top. The highlight of the ride would have to be the illuminated dolphins and unicorns, ambient music and beautifully dressed lift operators making the trip to the top an interesting journey.

The center opened in 1978 and is Tokyo's oldest "City within a City". It sits on land that was once occupied by Sugamo Prison.

The Sunshine International Aquarium is a popular attraction where there are plenty of great underwater exhibits to entertain the whole family. There are the usual sharks, stingrays, tropical fish, and sea life, but the most popular exhibits are the penguins, seals and sea otters which are well worth the entry fee. The aquarium sits on the 10th Floor, which gives it the title of the world's highest aquarium.

There are feedings at the aquarium every hour and one of the largest tanks holds over 120 tons of water. The seals do performances during the day.

Another great family attraction is the planetarium, where you can learn about the solar system and the universe. The Cosmic Safari takes visitors on a journey to see the wonders in outer space.

The Bunka Kaikan building is home to the Ancient Orient Museum which has an amazing collection of artifacts and is well worth a look.

The Sunshine City complex is also home to the Namco Namja Town. Namja Town is a collection of food theme parks and other interesting dining establishments. The center has a series of kittens as mascots and there are plenty of them to choose from in the gift shop. Some of the food parks include Ice Cream City and the Tokyo Dessert Republic. Then for the Gyoza lover, there is Ikebukuro Gyoza stadium, the list goes on with dozens of tasty attractions. There is a small fee to enter the complex and then the fun begins. There are various carnival amusements at Namja town too, like a haunted house, merry-go-round, and video shooting games. Make sure you go hungry as there is so much to try across the two jammed packed floors of food and adventure.

One store no visitor to Japan should miss is Tokyu Hands, a shop that can only be described as a cross between a hardware store and a hobby shop. It is a great place for gift shopping, as many of the items for sale cannot be found outside Japan. This store is one of their largest and has a rather odd attraction.

Do you just love finding the latest Kit Kat flavors? Take time to visit the recently opened Kit-Kat Chocolatey, at the Seibu Department Store, Ikebukuro train station and shop at the world's first Kit-Kat boutique.

**Accommodations: Sunshine City Prince Hotel**



### **Day 8 – April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021 Tuesday – Tokyo-Haneda (B)**

It is our last day here in Japan, but still much to do and see before our flight later this evening.

Please meet your guide by 10:30am as we are off on a full day of touring ending at the Haneda Airport for our flight home.

The day begins with a visit to Rikugien Garden, often considered Tokyo's most beautiful Japanese landscaped garden. Built around 1700 for the 5th Tokugawa Shogun, Rikugien literally means "six poems garden" and reproduces in miniature 88 scenes from famous poems. The garden is a good example of an Edo Period strolling garden and features a large central pond surrounded by manmade hills and forested areas, all connected by a network of trails.

Enjoy free time to explore and do stop by Fukiage Chaya teahouse for matcha and Japanese sweets while overlooking the central pond. There are two other teahouses, one on the southwestern side and the other on the northern side.

From here, a drive to Odaiba for free time to enjoy lunch on your own as well as last minute shopping. Do not forget to take a moment and get a photo in front of the Gundam Statue. This new Unicorn Gundam is 24 meters in height whereas the original was only 18 meters.

Our last touring spot is a visit to TeamLab Borderless, a world of art without boundaries, a museum without a map. Immerse yourself in borderless art, this vast, complex, three-dimensional 10,000 square meter world. Wander, explore and discover.

Now, off to the Haneda Airport and begin our check-in process for the flight home.

**Hawaiian Airlines #864 Departs Haneda 8:15 pm – Arrive Honolulu 8:30 am**

