

JAPAN'S WATER SHANGRI-LA MINAKAMI, OZE NATIONAL PARK & NIKKO 6 days



Our journey starts in the charming town of Minakami, at the source of the Tone River, Tokyo's major drinking-water supply . In addition to being Japan's largest river-basin, Minakami boasts a cornucopia of attractions which belie its size and comparative anonymity and all relate to its unparalleled bounty of water. A highly popular hot-spring resort just an hour by Bullet Train from Tokyo, its position at the gateway to the Southern Alps make Minakami not only one of Japan's most famous ski-resorts in winter, but its unquestioned river-activity mecca from spring through autumn. And, its strategic location on the historic Mikuni-Kaido trade-route, ensures that Minakami has a depth of history and culture to match its plethora of active options.

After enjoying the dynamic river-valleys of Minakami to the full, we move just an hour east into the Oze National Park, a vast & serene Wetland, centred on one of Japan's finest Marshlands, and Ponds, both sitting well over 1,000 metres above sea-level. The surrounding mountains make this one of Japan's premier hiking areas, showcasing uniquely beautiful vistas and nature from Spring through to Autumn.

Continuing east, just an hour from Oze , we reach Nikko, home of not only some of Japan's finest natural scenery, but arguably its single most impressive Shrine. Another hugely popular hot-spring resort, Nikko's famous Chuzenji Lake, created by a volcanic eruption of Mount Nantai 20,000 years ago, is surrounded by stunning waterfalls, and the source of the Daiya River which runs down through Nikko, under the enchanting Seikyo Bridge, before merging with the Kinugawa River, and ultimately, just north of Tokyo, the Tone itself.

Highlights:

- Experience Japan's finest canyoning & rafting at the country's river-sports mecca
- Enjoy some of Japan's finest hikes at one of its best kept secrets, Oze National Park
- An opportunity to experience the natural beauty of rural Japan by bicycle
- A culinary journey through the realm of Japanese cuisine born of its purest water
- A must-see Shrine, rarely-visited yet stunning Temple & numerous cultural interactions

Location:

Minakami, Gunma

Oze National Park

Nikko Yumoto, Chuzenji & Nikko, Tochigi

Main Activity: River Sports (Canyoning & Rafting)

Difficulty: 3

Availability: Recommended from May until October

Tour Duration: 5 Nights 6 Days

Pax: Minimum 4 Maximum 16

Price per person: JPY 365,000 per person for 10 paying persons (in half-twin) with no free JPY 67,000 as sole-use supplement

[Route map](#)

[Day-by-day Itinerary](#)

[What's included](#)

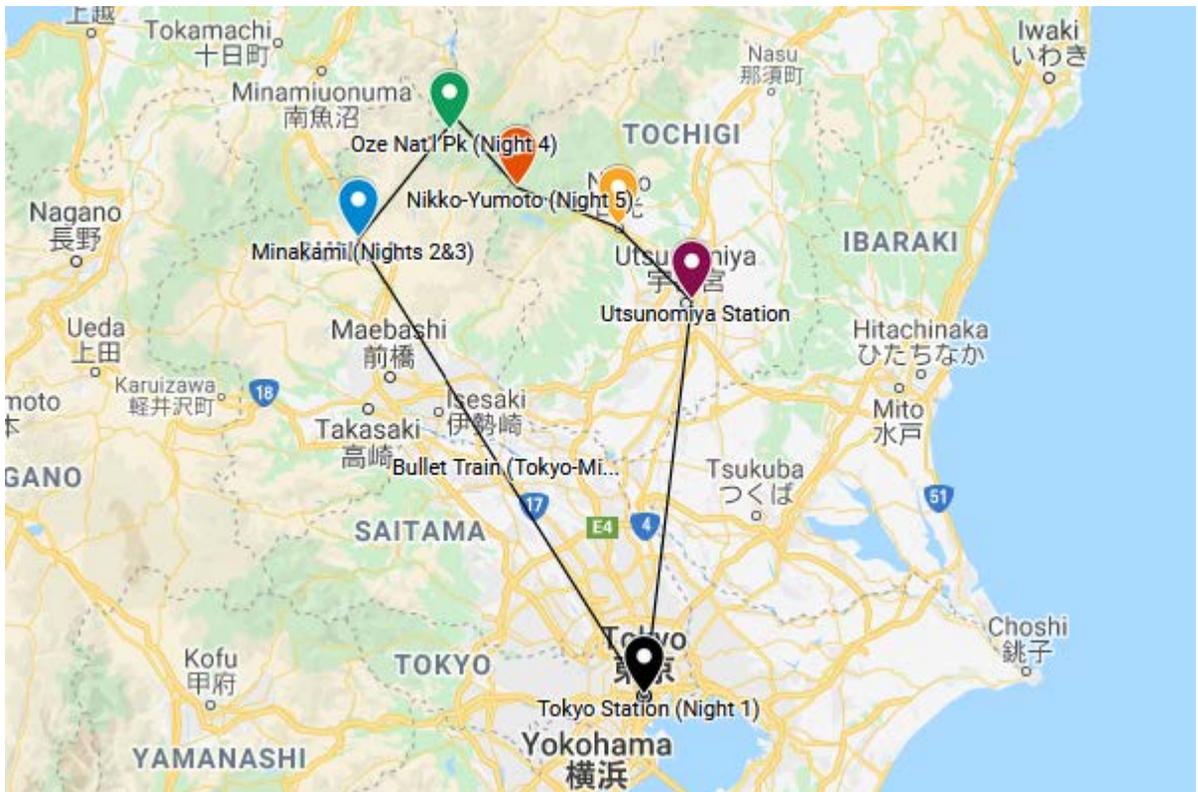
[We provide & What to bring](#)

[About us](#)

[Information and Requirements](#)

[Reservation & Cancellation policy](#)

Route map



<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1ZCPS3YBf12Qlx6HI21SHd2r-X-gRyPCo&usp=sharing>

Day-by-day Itinerary

Day 1 – GATHER AT HOTEL – BRIEFING OVER DINNER – OVERNIGHT TOKYO

Before embarking on our journey through Japan's Water Shangri La, gather at 18h00 in the lobby of the Metropolitan Marunouchi Hotel, adjacent to Tokyo Station's Nihombashi (North) Entrance, where Kazuko, our tour guide will welcome all of the group.

Dinner is just a short walk from the hotel, but in Tokyo Station, the world's fourth busiest railway terminus (the top 3 are in other areas of Tokyo!), even a short walk is an adventure. Observe some of the almost one million people who pass through the station daily navigating the evening rush-hour on their journey home.

During dinner, Kazuko will run through the tour schedule, briefing everyone on details and the highlights ahead, as well as providing information and hints to help with final preparations for the adventure ahead. After dinner, you're free to head straight back to the hotel, or to explore the Tokyo Station & Ginza areas a little more, as you prefer.

Dinner

For this only organized meal in one of the World's great metropolises, enjoy the type of dinner Japan's famous 'salary-men & women' office workers enjoy almost every day, in an 'izakaya' tavern under the throbbing transit hub that is Tokyo Station

Activity: Not applicable (n/a)

Difficulty: n/a

Day 2 – BULLET TRAIN TO MINAKAMI – TEMPLE & SAKE BREWERY VISITS COUNTRYSIDE CYCLING TOUR – O'NT AT TRADITIONAL RYOKAN

Today, our first encounter with Minakami, introduces two elements intrinsic to Japanese culture – Buddhism at Kichijoji Temple, with its expansive yet tranquil gardens, and Sake at the nationally-renowned Nagai Brewery. After a locally-foraged lunch, get fully in tune with the pace of country life through a cycle ride, before a traditional ryokan experience.

Breakfast

As befits a station hotel, an expansive breakfast is available from 06h30 in the 27th floor Tenqoo Restaurant, so fuel up early for an energetic and active day rural Japan, and remember the temperature will drop 5 degrees during our hour train journey!

On arrival in Minakami, we'll head straight to Kichijoji Temple, where the Head Monk will offer a larger-than-life welcome, suitably accompanied by warm green tea & a seasonal Japanese cake. After learning about the Temple's inherent relationship with water, and the nearby source of the Tone River, we move on to the neighboring Nagai Brewery, to discover the importance of water-quality in the making of Japan's most famous tippie, Where better to learn the processes, culture and, optionally of course, taste of Sake than at a 135 year-old brewery boasting its own spring water and surrounded by rice fields.

Lunch

From Nagai Brewery, we'll head west across Minakami to the charming restored settlement of Takumi-no-Sato, where one of the old residences is now home to 'Takumi-no-Sato Shokudo', a warm & simple country restaurant offering local fare foraged that morning and then cooked by the owner-chef.

After lunch, work off some calories with a bicycle ride thru the lush, expansive countryside around the Takumi-no-Sato Settlement. Discover the charm of hidden shrines; the inherent stillness, softly punctuated by colors of nature, which highlights so much of rural Japan; and, most memorably, the warmth of local people, as we stop en-route to visit local houses and chat with their residents. An energetic, yet inherently relaxing afternoon!

Dinner

Arriving at our Ryokan in late afternoon, there will first be an opportunity to stroll along the Mikuni-Kaido old trade route, on which it stands. Then, enjoy a slow-food Japanese dinner featuring locally-harvested vegetables, and meat from the surrounding Gunma prefecture, while enjoying local tales & anecdotes related by the head of the family which continues to own & operate this 140-year-old ryokan.

Activity: Cycling

Difficulty: 2



HIGHLIGHTS OF DAY 2:



HIGHLIGHTS OF DAY 3:



Day 3 – CANYONING, RAFTING & WATERSIDE BARBECUE – EXPERIENCE THE ENERGY AT THE SOURCE OF ONE OF JAPAN'S GREAT RIVERS

Venturing deeper into the significance of water in Japanese life, today we experience its power beyond everyday life, to present commercial opportunities & generate new culture in rural areas. With skiing in winter & river sports from spring thru autumn, Minakami is now a year-round resort, the majority of whose visitors come from the Greater Tokyo area whose everyday life is underpinned by water from the same rivers. Let's experience those rivers!

Breakfast

This morning, enjoy one of the most authentic breakfast experiences Japan can offer. In Japan, change is a measured and often slow process, sometimes frustratingly so, but in the context of culture and food, maintaining traditions is more vital now than ever, and our ryokan is a perfect example of the value & charm of traditional practices.

Canyoning is certainly not a traditional Japanese pastime. However, like ski-ing, Japan's unique climate and geography offer, in places, an ideal environment for the river sports now so popular around the World. Minakami was the cradle where canyoning & rafting in Japan were born 25 years ago, and continues to be its unquestioned mecca, offering venues encompassing all levels of difficulty, each with its own breathtaking natural landscape. This morning (or afternoon, as weather dictates) enjoy as much, or little, canyoning as you want!

Lunch

As befits a day spent mainly in a wetsuit, lunch today is a casual meal designed to re-energise for an afternoon of rafting on some of Japan's finest whitewater. The riverside canteen ensures minimum time-loss & maximum refreshment opportunity.

Few activities capture the raw power of rivers more vividly than rafting, and Minakami, with its northern backdrop of alpine peaks and peaceful verdant rural surroundings presents a perfect environment to experience and enjoy it. Individual pack-rafting is becoming a popular option in more confirmed areas, but the scale and force of the Tone River make larger-boat full-scale Rafting the perfect way to experience nature, get to know companions, even let off a little steam, and create adrenaline-packed memories.

Dinner

Once again, the food focus will be strongly on local ingredients, but this evening the environment will be closer-to-nature, in the form of a riverside barbecue, a great way to enjoy the incredible flavors of local fare, and to enjoy the company of and get to know some of the locals involved in the arrangements for our tour.

Activity: Canyoning & Rafting

Difficulty: 3 (can be adjusted to meet individual preferences)

Day 4 – DISCOVER ONE OF JAPAN'S HIDDEN JEWELS – OZE NATIONAL PARK

After one further ride of discovery through the upper areas of Minakami, today we move on to the other highlight of this course, the superb wetlands of Oze National Park, one of the ever-dwindling areas of Japan not yet discovered by mainstream international tourism.

Breakfast

Breakfast is served in the riverside canteen at our riverside camp, offering a wide-range of options and plenty of carb- and protein-loading options ahead of a day which will predominantly be spent cycling or walking.

Our final hours in Minakami will be spent exploring the upper areas of the town which welcome so many skiers in winter. Sticking to the gentlest inclines, ride through the stunning natural beauty which, while just an hour by train, feels a world away from Tokyo and its 15 million inhabitants. Again, our journey will be punctuated by stops to encounter locals and interact with them, their traditions and culture.

Lunch

After an energetic morning ride, enjoy a stamina-building lunch of local-speciality Hoto-Udon Noodles, guaranteed both to heat you up and fill you with energy for the afternoon of hiking ahead.

Early in the afternoon, we arrive at Hatomachi, the western entrance to the Oze National Park, a superb natural expanse open only to walkers. Disembarking from our coach, it's backpacks on for an energetic 20k afternoon walk through the Park,. The first hour will be spent heading north to reach the Ozegahara Marshlands, where we turn east into the heart of the Park. Not only is the scenery wonderful, and the air crisply refreshing, but even the infrastructure in the Park, two simple elevated wooden walkways along which hikers travel, is an intrinsically Japanese solution to the question of how to protect the Park's environment while making it an enjoyable place to venture.

After checking-in, enjoy a highlight of hiking in Oze – sunset over the western mountains,

Dinner

After two expansive slow-food dinners, tonight we go to the other extreme with the set-menu dinner in a small Lodge in the Park. The fare is simple, but lovingly made to refresh all of the lodge's visitors & power them into their following day's exertions.

After dinner, don't forget to look up at the array of stars in Oze's boundless night sky

Activity: Mountain Biking & Hiking

Difficulty: 3



HIGHLIGHTS OF DAY 4:

HIGHLIGHTS OF DAY 5:



Day 5 – OZENUMA WETLAND POND, NIKKO YUMOTO & LAKE CHUZENJI

An early start, as we continue to traverse Oze National Park, heading first for Ozenuma Pond, in its centre, before climbing out thru the southern exit of Oshimizu. In mid-afternoon we re-board our coach to head for a final night at Nikko Yumoto hot-spring resort, deep in the hills behind Nikko, which for many years was the preferred summer residence of high-society Tokyo.

Breakfast

Our earliest start of the tour is a case of rising with the birds, or rather the whole of nature, in the gloriously isolated natural oasis of Oze National Park. Breakfast is eminently simple, but with a warm drink provides all the fuel necessary to enjoy the unique beauty of early-morning surrounded totally by nature.

After 2-3 hours of walking as the sun rises higher, reach the picturesque Ozenuma Pond, where we'll break for an early Bento-Box lunch, before our final climb to Oshimizu Car Park, the entry/exit point at the south of the Park. From here, it's just an hour's driver to Nikko Yumoto, where we'll stop again for a mid-afternoon snack. After check-in, optional challenges are a walk around Lake Yuno for the hikers, a SUP experience on Lake Chuzenji for those happier near water, or the opportunity to enjoy the ryokan at the end of 4 busy days.

Lunch

As befits a day far from the beaten-track, today's lunch is a packed meal, allowing the opportunity to experience another of Japan's charming cultural gifts to the World, bento-boxes.

After lunch, embark on the final leg of our journey through Oze, climbing to the Oshimizu exit, where our coach awaits, for the eastward drive of just over an hour to Nikko Yumoto. On arrive, after check-in, there will be one final active challenge, a choice between a 2-hour walk around the perimeter of picturesque Lake Yuno, or a short drive down to Lake Chuzenji for an opportunity for water-sporters to challenge themselves with a SUO experience, enjoying in the superb natural surroundings of Chuzenji..

Dinner

To balance today's relatively light lunch, our final dinner is the total package of a full-course traditional Japanese kaiseki meal, a succession of beautifully presented small dishes to create the most complete Japanese dining experience.

Activity: Hiking, and choice of mini-hike or SUP experience

Difficulty: 3

Day 6 – NIKKO TOSHOGU SHRINE, GYOZA-MAKING LUNCH & BACK TO TOKYO

This morning, we start the final leg of our journey back to Tokyo by driving from the mountain-embraced Nikko Yumoto down the famous 'iroha' pass to Nikko, one of Japan's cultural jewels. After visiting the famous Toshogu Shrine, move on to Japan's gyoza-capital, Utsunomiya, for a gyoza-making and eating lunch, before a final hour on the Bullet Train back into Tokyo. .

Breakfast

Japanese ryokan breakfasts are another charming experience, offering plenty of sustenance, while balancing Japanese and more international elements. We recommend a hearty breakfast, as the morning visit to Toshogu will require plenty of walking to enjoy the full beauty of the Shrine.

The iroha Pass descending from Chuzenji to Nikko is a fascinating road, not only for its seemingly endless series of hairpin bends, but as a rare example of a public road designed as two long-distance one-way routes. We will take the descent-only section of the road, while there is an almost identical ascent-only section accessing Chuzenji from Nikko. In Nikko, visit Toshogu Shrine, not only a beautiful Shrine, but a truly stunning architectural achievement built by Japan's first and most famous Shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, in Nikko, directly north of Tokyo, to protect his new capital against dangers from the North. After visiting the Shrine & its Pagoda, we'll stop at the charming Shinkyo Bridge over the Daiya River.

Lunch

From Nikko, we head south to the industrial city of Utsunomiya. Famous as the R&D hub of the Honda Motor Corp., Utsunomiya has, in recent years, gained further fame as Japan's Gyoza capital, boasting the largest per capita consumption of the succulent dumplings anywhere in Japan. Today, try your hand at making

After lunch, move on around 20 minutes to Utsunomiya Station, to board a Bullet Train for the one hour journey back to Tokyo Station, where we will arrive around 17h15, heralding the end of our tour.

From here, everyone is free to move on according to their individual plans.



HIGHLIGHTS OF DAY 6:



Accommodation :

Minakami (1st night) : Hoshi Onsen Chojukan Ryokan
<http://hoshi-onsen.com/english/>



Minakami (2nd night) : Riverside Oasis (Waterfront Tents)
<https://canyons.jp/en/tour-areas/minakami/glamping>



Oze National Park: Yashiro Lodge, Miharashi
<http://www.84658.jp/>



WHAT'S INCLUDED

- All transportation during the tour as detailed above
- A professional through guide for the duration of the trip
- Qualified activity guides for all activities detailed above.
- All accommodation (based on twin-share, with single-use option) & meals detailed above
- All equipment for activities (including wetsuits & helmets for water activities – see below)

WHAT WE PROVIDE & WHAT TO BRING

We provide

- All equipment for activities (bicycles, rafts, SUP, canyoning equipment)
- Cycling helmets for cycling activities (sizes are limited)
- Wetsuits (heights 150-200 cms/weights 40-100 kgs), helmets (sizes are limited), life jackets and water shoes (up to size 28) for water activities

N.B. Guests with size needs outside those shown above are requested to advise details in good advance

What to bring

(a) Must-haves:

- (For watersports) Sports Sandals with a heel strap
- (For watersports) Swimwear
- (For hiking) Comfortable, waterproof hiking shoes with good undersole grip
- (For hiking) Sunglasses, a hat/cap with a brim, and sunblock (or sunscreen)
- (For hiking) Backpack/Rucksack suitable to carry overnight pack
- (For hiking) Protective clothing for sun, rain & wind
- A water bottle

(a) Nice-to-haves:

- A light camera with case & neckstrap OR a smartphone with a strong protective case
- A map App which works in Japan
- Recharging cords for any devices you carry
- Adaptor plug for Japanese electrical consents (Type A)

ABOUT US

The J Team was Japan's first specialist Inbound Destination Management Company,. Alchemizing out-of-the-box thinking, an engaging and energetic Team of hands-on coordinators, and a lovingly developed and unrivalled country-wide network of partners representing every element of Japanese culture, we consistently create unique activities, experiences and stories, far beyond our two physical Tokyo & Kyoto offices, in every corner of the jewel-box that is Japan.

All of this is underpinned by an uncompromising level of professional service, attention-to-detail and risk management attainable only through the years of successful on-site experience which have earned The J Team its reputation as Japan's leading specialist DMC..

Through Guide

During her 15 years as a licensed guide, Kazuko has travelled to almost every corner of Japan and experienced ... most everything! As shown here, Kazuko is hands-on, and willing to give anything a try in her desire to allow all of her guests to experience the full spectrum of Japanese culture to the maximum. And, having recently gained certification as a qualified Geo-guide, the stunning landscapes and geographical features of Minakami & Oze are a particular favourite.



Information and Requirements

Dietary Restrictions

With advanced notice, almost every dietary preference or restriction can be accommodated, but in certain cases (especially halal) this may involve the provision of completely separate meals, sometimes from a separate supplier and possibly boxed and delivered. Within a week of notification of specific preferences, we will reconfirm the capacity to cater for that preference at each meal, flag any problems and suggest an optimum solution.

Emergency Response Plan

Our through guides are trained in Emergency Medicine, Wilderness First Aid and Rescue protocol, and are in constant contact with our HQ throughout the course of any tour. Additionally, all activity guides have full emergency training in their specialist field. And, based on experience gained during the Great Tohoku Earthquake & Tsunami of 2011, and subsequent large-scale earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and other natural disasters, The J Team has full emergency protocols which are regularly reviewed and updated, and automatically implemented in case of any natural disaster or crisis.

Information required in the absence of Tour Manager accompanying a Tour

Should our through guide be required to act as Tour Manager, in addition to Through Guide, we kindly request that the following information on every Tour Participant is provided no later than one calendar week before the first guest's arrival in Japan:

- Nationality, Passport Number & Date of Birth
 - Height, Weight, any pre-existing conditions, allergies & prescription medications taken
 - And dietary preferences or restrictions, as detailed above
 - And emergency contact name and telephone number
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Reservation & Cancellation Policy

Payment Methods

A full booking confirmation, accompanied by an invoice for the full cost of tour arrangements will be sent by email no later than 30 days before the start of the tour. Settlement of the invoice is required within 10 days of dispatch of the invoice, and non-receipt of payment by the due date will result in cancellation of the booking. We accept payment by bank transfer, all major credit cards and TransferWise.

Cancellation

In case of cancellation, the following fees will apply:

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| Cancellation more than 28 days before arrival : | No charge |
| Cancellation between 15-27 days before arrival: | 25% of previewed costs will be charged |
| Cancellation between 8-14 days before arrival: | 50% of previewed costs will be charged |
| Cancellation between 4-7 days before arrival: | 75% of previewed costs will be charged |
| Cancellation within 72 hours before arrival: | 100% of previewed costs will be charged |

Disclaimer & Liability

Disclaimer

The J Team reserves the right to cancel or change the itinerary of a tour. In the event of the tour being cancelled due to exceptional or unavoidable circumstances, we will refund all your costs. In such an event, The J Team is not responsible for compensation relating to any sundry costs incurred by the customer, such as flights.

Liability

In the performance of this travel contract, we will compensate a participant for any damage caused intentionally, or due to a mistake by us or our agents, provided that the participant notify us of the damage in question within two years from the day after the damage occurs, and that the damage is subsequently reaffirmed by ourselves or the agent in question.

Damage to baggage will be compensated up to a limit of JPY 150,000 per traveller (except in cases of damage caused intentionally or due to serious negligence by us) provided that notification is received within 14 days from the day after the damage occurs,.

The J Team is not liable to pay compensation for damage/suffering due to the following reasons:

- Damage/suffering resulting from natural disaster, war, riots, government decree, fires, or suspension of accommodation services
- Damage/suffering resulting from food poisoning
- Damage/suffering resulting from a participant's wilful negligence
- Damage/suffering resulting from other reasons beyond our control or that of our agents

Tour Operator / Contact

The J Team Co. Ltd.

(Tokyo Metropolitan Government Authorised Travel Service Operator No. 20055)

Level 6, VORT Toranomon South, 3-13-7 Nishi Shinbashi,
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