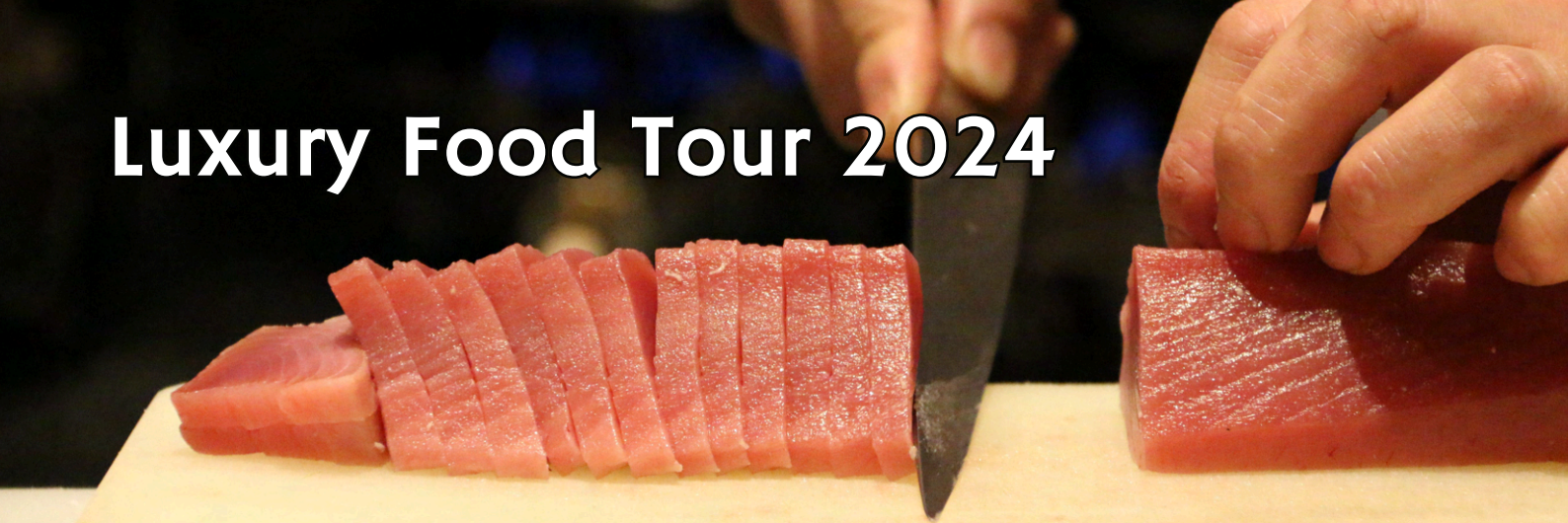


Luxury Food Tour 2024



12 days/11 nights

Late Spring: Kyoto & surrounds
culinary culture

Price: PP AUD \$26,500 (twin
share \$25,990 pp)

Guest co-host - Chef Peter Gilmore
of Quay and Bennelong

Dates: 10 – 21 May 2024

Hotel: Kyoto Hyatt Regency,
King rooms

Guests: *8 people min, 10 max
–requires 8 ppl to run

This tour is operated by Zenbu
Travel, our industry friend

Our exclusive tour takes a deep and textural dive into the fascinating city of Kyoto and its culinary culture – and its beautiful gardens.

Designed and hosted by Japanophile food and travel writer Jane Lawson (who's spent 40 years travelling the length and breadth of Japan's islands, educating herself and developing relationships), this tour features a guest co-host for the first time, but not just any host... we warmly welcome Executive Chef Peter Gilmore, of Sydney's prestigious Quay and Bennelong restaurants.

Join us for this exploration of Kyoto's culinary heart in late spring - from elegant and traditional eateries to highly contemporary yet respectful gastro-temples, and all that shoots, fronts and buds in between.

We'll enjoy a wide range of cuisine including all manner of snackery, fondle artisan utensils, textiles, lacquerware and incredible ceramics, meet local culinary and cultural experts and characters, wander blissful spring gardens, sip Japanese sake, Whiskey, phenomenally good local wine and painstakingly-poured-over coffee, and slurp freshly whisked matcha alongside wagashi (tea sweets)- as we explore the city and countryside of Kyoto - also Japan's cultural heart. Whether it's your first time to Japan or you simply crave a deeper Japanese culinary experience you must not miss this evocative, entertaining, and sublimely delicious sojourn.

Why May?



We love Japan in May, not just because it's the most underrated month for travel on the Japanese calendar (well, except for Golden Week's extended national holiday - the Japanese absolutely make the most of this glorious this fair-weathered month) and not just because it's less busy at than earlier in spring when Sakura (cherry blossoms) beckon the hoards – but because it's a time of transition, with incredibly vibrant gardens, fresh produce at its prime, sunshiny days with gentle breezes and a special energy that simply needs to be experienced.

Our dates carefully side-step the jostling, peak tourist madness so that we can instead immerse ourselves in Kyoto's divine late spring colours, fragrance and warmth as early summer edges closer enticing a wider range of flowers to show their pretty faces. Think Iris, Azalea, Water Lily, Wisteria and roses - possibly early lotus if we're lucky! Young, lime-green Ginkgo leaves wave breezily at passers-by as they acknowledge the on-coming summer, and lesser-known maples glow in shades of red - rarely seen outside the autumn months. While we'll certainly witness a variety of gardens, green spaces, and serene mountain vistas they more-so form a majestic backdrop to the greater cultural experience and, more specifically, our culinary enjoyment!

About your hosts



Jane, former food publisher at Murdoch Books, first met Peter when she acquired what would become the award-winning QUAY cookbook – around 15 years ago. During the production of both Quay and follow up title Organum, the duo developed significant trust and a strong and binding friendship. They've travelled to Japan together previously, but never as tour co-hosts. They cannot wait to share their combined Kyoto and Japan adoration and insight.

Jane Lawson

Has travelled Japan extensively for 4 decades, lived in Kyoto for several years where she studied local cuisine and culture for her book Zenbu Zen - finding food, culture and balance in Kyoto. She also lived a short time in Tokyo in her early 20's, and a few months in 2016 while researching for the popular Tokyo Style Guide. She's also the author Yoshoku (Japanese food Western Style) and A little taste of Japan All titles published by Murdoch Books.



Peter Gilmore

Peter's deep fascination for Japanese cuisine and aesthetic has a considerable influence on his culinary style. His return to Japan in May '24 will mark his 3rd Japanese culinary research trip with Jane, and his inaugural venture into co-hosting Zenbu's luxurious tours. Peter's expertise and passion for food, design and Japanese ceramics (fun fact, he's a whizz on the pottery wheel and designs bespoke tableware for Quay and Bennelong) will add another layer of insight and wonder to this itinerary for the cuisine-curious.





Tour Inclusions

Accommodation: 11 nights in the luxurious Hyatt Regency Kyoto

Food and Drink: Full Breakfast daily. Most lunches and dinners, allowing us to explore a wide range of the best traditional and contemporary Japanese cuisine available. We purposely allow a couple of meals at leisure to give our bodies a little rest from indulging, if we need it, or for you to enjoy making your own discoveries. Restaurant and other details provided prior to departure. Beverages – as mentioned in the itinerary e.g. welcome drinks, occasional coffee stops etc.

Transport: All ground transport for the duration of the tour (i.e.. travel to, from and between destinations/activities included in the itinerary) including luxe, air-conditioned private bus/ taxis/ luxury train carriages where available.

Entrance fees & activities: All temple, shrine, museum, gallery, experience, and entrance fees as per itinerary

Spa voucher: 1 x voucher to the exclusive Riraku Spa at the Hyatt Regency Hotel

Host/Local Guides: All guide and host fees and all activity costs and entrance fees whilst with the group. Activities in your leisure time will be at your own expense.

Tipping/ Gifts: There's generally no tipping in Japan however we sometimes provide gifts for hosts/guides which are taken care of by Jane, no extra cost to guests. You are welcome to bring a small thank you gift for people we meet along the way if you so desire.

Insider knowledge: yep, that's what you're here for right?! Not to mention access to the workings of the mind of one of the world's nicest, most talented and respected chefs, and a peek into tour developer and host Jane Lawson's head and heart to find out why they she loves Japan so!

...oh and: there might be a few little surprises along the way...

Please note the following are not included as part of the package:

- Airfare and airport transfers
- Travel Insurance
- Activities/meals/ transport during your leisure/free time
- Drinks (except as noted) throughout the itinerary.
- Personal expenses

This tour is perfect for you if you like the idea of:

- in-depth, layered, luxury travel experiences with like-minded, well-travelled, down-to-earth folk with a sense of humour
- incredible hospitality / passionate, knowledgeable, caring Japanophile host (co-hosts/guides)
- incredible new food and drink – from rustic locals to Michelin stars – we're there as long as it's great
- fascinating cultural experiences, traditional architecture, beautiful artisan works and wares, style and form, people, philosophy and sometimes, the unexpected.. / exploring both tiny villages and larger cities

- plenty of walking in the fresh air, but nothing too strenuous (note there are sometimes stairs or slopes to climb, but we take everything slowly, if Jane can do it – you can too!) / downtime to relax, absorb or further explore
- a good laugh /banter with fellow guests

AND... you're over 21, open-minded, will try anything once food wise and are interested in life and the universe generally .. then, you'll fit right in, and we look forward to having you join us soon!

On the other hand,... oh gosh, do we really have to say this?? (the answer is yes, sadly) ...

If a person/persons are disrupting the group to the point of despair or anywhere near it – they will be asked to leave the tour and their money will not be refunded. We've never had this happen, but came close once... Don't get us wrong, we're not party poopers. We appreciate a great or quirky sense of humour, or indeed some colourful language in good jest (we're all adults) but we will not tolerate anyone mistreating any guest, host, hotel or waitstaff - or generally making life miserable for the group..

Ok, now that's out of the way!

Your enjoyment is paramount, and our aim is to provide Zenbu Tours guests with the very best Japan food and culture experience possible whilst ensuring individuals are very well looked after. As such, we are continually refining itineraries right up to departure (as per above) - which may mean occasional changes to daily schedules or activities (left purposely without too specific detail) and the ability to consider special or last-minute requests where possibly. Rest assured; any adjustments will be advantageous to the group. Tour dates and accommodation etc are of course already locked-in!

Important to note

While we attempt to cater as best we can for people who have genuine food intolerances, we sadly cannot recommend this tour for folks who aren't open to trying everything, or eating around them in the event a dish or menu cannot be changed or substituted. We apologise for any inconvenience.

Entry and Visa requirements

Fortunately, Japan has now waved the visa programme which was required during the height of the pandemic. No visas are currently needed for Australian citizens. All travellers with Zenbu Tours (zenbutravel.com) are required to supply details of their own travel insurance which should include coverage in the event of illness from Covid 19.



Day 1. Fri 10 May 2024

(Welcome drinks, D + Sake)

We shall kick off our tour in style this evening over welcome drinks with Jane in the bar of the dreamy **Hyatt Regency Kyoto** – our home away from home for the next 11 nights. We'll enjoy a mesmerising **sashimi & sushi** demonstration before moving into the elegant **Touzan Restaurant** for our first meal together and your introduction to **Obanzai (traditional Kyoto homestyle share dishes)**, prepared by the hotel's executive chef, as we commence our informal sake appreciation journey, with one of the hotel's own **Nihonshu** aficionados! Tonight, provides the perfect opportunity to get to know your main host and each other a little, and to begin your acquaintance with the ever-fascinating customs and culture of Japan. The first few days are an opportunity to ease into the Kyoto way with Jane by your side, before Peter joins the tour, adding his own unique perspective.



Day 2. Sat 11 May 2024

(B,L,D)

After a sumptuous breakfast overlooking the hotel's tranquil Japanese garden, Jane will walk and talk you through the wonderful **Nishiki-kōji** food market, known to the locals as Kyoto daidokoro or Kyoto's kitchen and one of Kyoto's **best depachika** (food hall). Expect an eye-popping assortment of supremely fresh seafood, meats, pickles, tofu, miso, hand-crafted kitchen knives and utensils, Kyoto's renowned vegetable varieties (**Kyo-yasai**) and many other local delicacies including divine local tea and hand-crafted tea sweets. We shall **lunch on ethereal tempura**, each ingredient cooked to order – as only it should be, from Kyoto's best tempura restaurant before attending a private home to **learn the art of the traditional tea ceremony and the meaning of omotenashi**. We'll take some time to freshen up at the hotel before our excellent **yakitori** dinner, feasting on some of the finest grilled chicken in the land. Perhaps afterwards we'll take a **stroll along the atmospheric, lantern-lit alley way of Pontocho**.

Day 3. Sun 12 May 2024

(B,L,D)

After an early breakfast we'll take a scenic drive by private bus into Kyoto's northern mountains, on route, picking up a local friend who'll share tales of life in Kyoto. We'll stop for freshly roasted pour-over coffee, and perhaps a handmade traditional treat, at small organic market before a micro meditation on a serene temple deck concealed within a peaceful green oasis with a heavenly traditional garden. We'll enjoy a relaxed, rustic farm to table lunch before wandering through fields which supply Kyoto's best restaurants, learning about the produce, revered Japan-wide, from the farmers themselves. Afterwards we'll return to the city where we might pop into a Kyoto Gin distillery for a pre-dinner martini made on Kyoto Botanicals. Tonight, we'll sup on crisp, golden Tonkatsu of the finest quality, butter-tender Buta-niku (pork) to finish off a long day in the fresh country air.



Day 4. Mon 13 May 2024

(B,L, Drinks, D)

This morning after breakfast we'll visit the striking Heian Jingu (one of Kyoto's most important shrines and cultural properties) and its sprawling stroll garden which blooms with Iris for a short time, only in May. We'll take a walk around the Historical Okazaki area, dropping into a fabulous museum to find out how Kyoto's traditional crafts are made – think kitchen utensils, swords, hair ornaments, tatami matting, lacquerware, fans, masks and the like. We'll lunch in a charming restaurant on a willow lined canal - where their focus is pristine local produce. Afterwards, we'll meander through the handsome precinct, through an old shotengai (covered arcade) to one of the city's prettiest pockets, so photogenic in the afternoon light, before returning to the hotel where you'll have time to relax before we welcome Peter Gilmore's arrival with drinks in Jane's room, followed by relaxed dinner over share plates at a cosy izakaya.

Day 5. Tues 14 May 2024

(B,L)

This morning we'll enjoy an early stroll through **Arashiyama's bamboo forest** and gently climb the path of a **sublime villa garden overlooking Kyoto city and its beautiful mountain surrounds**, perhaps visiting a couple of **hidden ceramics stores**, before enjoying a wonderfully **creative and leisurely Kaiseki lunch** at one of Kyoto's most acclaimed **temples of gastronomy**. Here we'll **chat about Peter's previous travels in Japan** and **learn how Japanese cuisine influences his own culinary brilliance** at Quay and Bennelong restaurants in Sydney. This evening is free for putting your feet up, sinking deep into your bath and ordering room service, taking the opportunity to use **your spa voucher** at the hotel's beautiful **Riraku spa**, if you haven't already or, or simply exploring on your own. Rest up – we have an early start tomorrow.



Day 6. Wed 15 May 2024

(B,L,D)

Unless you prefer a lay-in this morning, join us early at the wonderful **Handmade Craft Market** - packed with stalls selling an eclectic mix of quality handicrafts, foodstuffs and artsy bibs 'n bobs – think gorgeous accessories made from pre-loved traditional textiles, ceramics, antiques, and quirk. Or just come for the excellent people watching! We'll return to the hotel to drop off our goodies and pick up any late risers before being delivered to our **elegant, Michelin star Japanese-French lunch in a beautifully restored traditional building**. Kyoto is often called the Paris of the east, and not without reason... think a beautiful low-line city scape with a wide river at its heart - and just try counting the boulangerie, patisserie and hand-crafted chocolate shops! Late afternoon is at your leisure – or join us for a leg stretch through **the historic Higashiyama area** before taking a short break at our hotel to relax (perhaps another opportunity to use your spa voucher at the divine Riraku Spa in our hotel). Tonight's **dinner will be a light affair, perhaps featuring delicate handmade tofu and yuba** (tofu skin).

Day 7. Thurs 16 May 2024

(B,L,D)

This morning, accompanied by a renowned ceramics expert, we'll journey to a **charming pottery village** on Kyoto's outskirts, dropping into a couple of studios to meet the artists, and, no arm twisting, but perhaps snaffling an original piece or two, before lunching on **regional specialities** such as **divine handmade soba noodles**, in an **original post town** on the **old Tokaido highway**, still lined with **Edo period architecture**. Perhaps we'll drop in to a traditional Shoyu (soy sauce shop) or michi no eki (road-station featuring local delicacies) before returning to our guide's **gallery** in the late afternoon to drool over his incredible wares whilst **sampling sake** - from both **ceramic and glass vessels**, the difference is fascinating. Nearby, at a cosy restaurant focussed on **Kyo-yasai** (Kyoto's wonderful vegetable varieties) **we'll enjoy a range of dishes cooked on an open hearth** and hear about **Peter's own journey with the restaurant ceramics he designs and prototypes with his own clever hands!**



Day 8. Fri 17 May 2024 (B,L,Tea experience, D + Sake)

After wandering through the lush **Kyoto Botanical gardens** this morning we'll stop for **coffee and an early lunch**. We'll chat with Peter about his **love of plants**, and his own experimental food garden and **how what he grows, directly effects the development of the intricate dishes on Quay's menu** – both the food and the vessels. We'll then visit the largest of Kyoto's **Hanamachi (Geisha districts)** before attending a **highly contemporary tea experience** - a striking contrast to a traditional tea ceremony, **matching tea cocktails and mocktails with creative twists on traditional wagashi (tea sweets)**. We'll take a little time to freshen up at the hotel before heading out to dinner in a **fabulous, new-style izakaya!** Both afternoon and evening activities **showcase the innovation of Kyoto's talented young chefs and entrepreneurs**, their feet rooted in tradition but minds and hearts free to wander.

Day 9. Sat 18 May 2024

(B,L,D and Japanese wine sampling)

Today we'll spend some time with an incredible, and incredibly lovely local cook who will demonstrate a few typical Kyoto style spring dishes in her traditional home and introduce the benefits of umami dense miso and fermented Japanese foods as she chats about life in Kyoto and her fishmonger family. She'll also introduce us to some of her favourite culinary utensil and artisan food stores and the people behind them, as we take a stroll around her neighbourhood. A fun and informative day will lead us into a wonderful Michelin star dinner tonight in restaurant which so beautifully continued to weave the umami thread - this time between Italian and Japanese cuisine to produce a unique range of flavours and textures! We'll take the opportunity to sample some Japanese wine too.



Day 10. Sun 19 May 2024

(B,L, Whisky)

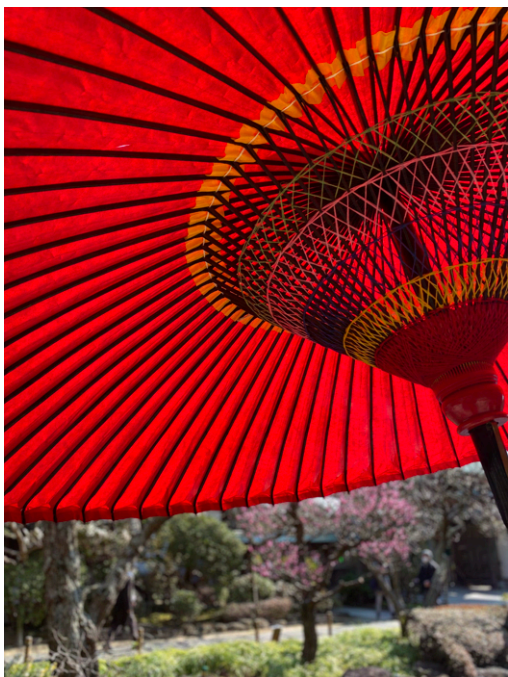
This morning we'll take an early morning drive to beautiful Nara, the ancient capital before Kyoto's reign where we'll be joined by a local guide and spend time in the vast green expanse of Nara Park filled with sacred deer and explore the traditional culture and foods of the handsome old town precinct. We'll enjoy a lunch of incredible shojin ryori (Buddhist vegan fare) whilst discovering exactly what that is and how it came to be.

Dinner tonight, at great contrast to our lunch, will feature incredible Wagyu (Japanese marbled beef) in a rustic, true local restaurant with one very entertaining chef. A little Japanese whisky tonight? Purely for digestive purposes...

Day II Mon 20 May 2024

(B,L, Farewell Drink + Dinner with alcohol or non-alcohol pairings)

After a peaceful morning walk along the **Path of Philosophy** and coffee together in a gorgeous cafe you'll free to enjoy a full day at leisure - perhaps explore the hidden galleries, shops, tiny temples and gardens of this area. Or stroll the blissful Kamogawa (river) for relaxation or people watching – maybe take a little picnic and sit under a Ginko or Cherry tree. Jane will also be available to guide those interested through a handful of speciality shops - think stylish bamboo ware, books on Japan, divine Japanese incense or cookware (with a few pointers from our chef friend of course..), very much going with the flow and general appetite of the group. Whatever the day brings – please return to the hotel in time to frock up for drinks in Jane's room before we head out to our magnificent farewell dinner - taking over an incredibly stunning Kappo (counter style) restaurant where creative young chefs produce magical results.



Day 12. Tues 21 May 2024

(B)

After an early morning optional jaunt to an excellent flea and antique market, followed by a leisurely breakfast it will be time to say our farewells. It's always hard to say goodbye after a beautiful trip together, but we promise a tight hug as we bid you safe onwards journeys – whether that's home or elsewhere. Sayonara, ja mata ne... (Goodbye and we hope to see you again!) Arigatou gozaimashita! (Thank you..) or as we say in Kyoto, Okini from Jane & Peter!

Contact us for more information or
booking requests

japantravel.com.au/contact

