

JAPAN HOLIDAY, 2017 (A POTTER'S LIFE)
Proposal by Matthew Dagher-Margosian, Asia Art Tours

GUESTS

SUMMARY

Day 1	Arrive TOKYO	Hotel Claska
Day 2	TOKYO	Hotel Eclat
Day 3	TOKYO	Hotel Eclat
Day 4	Beijing	Hotel Eclat
Day 5	Beijing/Shanghai	Hotel URBN
Day 6	Shanghai	Hotel URBN
Day 7	Shanghai	Hotel URBN
Day 8	Shanghai/Taipei	San Want Residences
Day 9	Taipei	San Want Residences
Day 10	Taipei	San Want Residences
Day 11	Depart Taipei	

GROUND TRANSPORTATION

To be environmentally friendly, we typically recommend using public transportation and eschew private cars except for longer day trips. Tokyo's public transportation in its modern cities is first-rate, and we will time our trips to avoid peak occupancy on the subways, buses and bicycle networks.

ITINERARY

DAY 1 _____ ARRIVE TOKYO

HOTEL: HOTEL CLASKA

TRANSFER

A driver will collect you from the airport. He will be holding a sign with your names on it when you enter the arrivals hall. After meeting you he will drive you to your hotel. Please note for guests who don't require this service, you can take either the airport express or multiple shuttle buses to your hotel.

AIR & TRAIN TICKETS

*ASIA ART TOURS, 3-1-24, TAIPEI 150-0001
+81 3 6455 5154 | ASIAARTTOURS.com*

We will be dropping off your train tickets at your hotel front desk, prior to your departure from Tokyo (via High-speed Rail). We will be using a JR Pass for the majority of your trip

WIFI

We will be purchasing mobile wifi for the duration of your trip. This will also allow you to take pick-up car service (UBER, LYFT, ETC...) whenever you wish.

SET DINNER AT GALLERY SHUN

Depending on your arrival time your dinner plans may change, but if things click we will be taking you to one of our favorite Ceramics Galleries and restaurants in Tokyo Gallery Shun . Here traditional Japanese fare and the plates they are served upon are both works of art. The ceramics here are antique Iwami-Ware and you will be surrounded by an astounding collection of modern and avant-garde ceramics, of which you'll get a private tour after your meal. After taking in the gallery we can either pick you up by private car or you can head back to your hotel via the metro or pick-up car service.

DAY 2

Tokyo

CAR: Taxis when needed otherwise we will use Metros or Ubikes

Today we'll be touring some of Japan's best galleries for a primer on the trends of current ceramic styles, as well as better insight as to what is currently sought after by collectors. Our first stop will be the expat friendly gallery of Marco Polo. This gallery in the Yoyogi district is used to foreign customers, and the owner Masumi Narita will be happy to answer your questions in English. Her eclectic displays will place rare items next to common ones and masters next to rising new talents. It's a great way to see multiple styles in a single location and learn about them from a friendly host.

Our next stop will be Kou. This gallery will have us jumping from multiple ceramic styles to the singular vision of artist Tsuneko Tanaka. He works primarily in the "Nobu Style" that tends to fuse traditional elements of ceramics with the perspective of a more contemporary lifestyle.

Then we'll be heading to Tsuchi-No-Hana for a chance to browse ceramics made from porcelain clay and lovingly filled with beautiful ikebana displays or freshly cut flowering branches. This is also a great place to scout the work of Yasushi Fujihara, who delicately leaves his palm-prints on all his pieces as his artist signature.

We'll stop for lunch after this, heading early to the nearby Tempura Masa to scoop up their great Tempura Lunch Set. Ginza is also a very fun atmosphere for seeing Japanese shopping.

Then after lunch we'll be driving out (by private car) to Weekend Gallery Muu (please note their opening hours are a bit idiosyncratic so this will be subject to change. This converted farmhouse is roughly 1.5 hour outside of Tokyo but will take us into beautiful Yamanashi Prefecture. Once we arrive we will have roughly 10,000 square feet and over 500 artists to explore taking in the full scope of works from the collection of owner Yuki Yoshiaki

NARISAWA

After freshening up for dinner, we can either take the metro or private car to one of Japan's most elite restaurants, Narisawa. This is most definitely a premium price, but should prove to be a once in a lifetime meal as we sample meals from Chef Yoshihiro Narisawa. His passion about the environment and individual dishes comes through in both menus and individual courses that mimic the Japanese seasons. As nature will be one of the defining themes of our tour, we find this restaurant to be fitting.

Afterwards you can return to your hotel via metro, private car, or car service.

DAY 3 _____ TOKYO

CAR: Taxis when needed otherwise we will use the Metro or Ubikes

A MASTER OF SHAPE AND FORM, TEA WITH MASTER POTTER: SHINOBU-KAWASE

We will have a relaxed morning (we'd recommend taking the time to stroll through one of Japan's gorgeous parks, or if you're still on the hunt for ceramics, to check out either the functional kitchenware of Kappabashi Street, our favorite shop there is SOI, for its mix of antique furniture and exquisite ceramics). We'll also be providing recommendations for lunch or are happy to handle reservations.

After lunch we'll be meeting you at your hotel to take you (via metro or private care) to visit the private gallery of master potter Shinobu Kawase. Featured at galleries such as the MET Shinobu-san is from a 3rd generation family of potters, who since the 1970s has been specializing in celadon pottery. This type of pottery with its refined but otherworldly shapes is heavily influenced by 12th century Song Dynasty pottery techniques. In addition to the shaping, the glaze is quite beautiful, coming in shades of green, blue or grey and using iron to inspire this effect.

We will be having tea with Master Shinobu-san, as well as viewing his private collection, this is a rare chance for serious collectors to discuss art and philosophy with one of Japan's true master potters.

A NIGHT WITH THE NEXT GENERATION

After meeting and tea with your master potter we will return you to the hotel where you will be free until the evening. At that time you will be met at your hotel by one of our favorite ceramic artists Ottillia Stephens. The son of a master English Potter, Ottillia came to Japan due to her fascination with Japanese pottery styles and has since become a translator for some of Japan's most well-known potters and museums.

Ottillia will be taking you on a tour of some of her favorite haunts for the next generation of Japanese artists and ceramics. This tour can be catered to your needs, so we can make this a rather formal affair, stopping in only at pedigreed galleries and restaurants, or a more casual, stopping in at some of the Izakayas, cafes and boutiques that showcase the eclectic talents and perspectives of Japan's youth.

Along the way you'll stop for a bite. Our recommended restaurant for this evening is YAKUMO SARYO. Designed by Shunichiro Ogato and his firm Simplicity, this

beautiful tea house and restaurant serves Kaiseki on absolutely gorgeous ceramics and wood plating, with a strong focus on presentation and quality of ingredients.

if you wish a drink, and discuss with Ottilia about how Japanese artistic perspective has effected her, what she looks for in talented Japanese potters and artists, as well as her own perspective on how East and West are meeting to create a new generation of Japanese artists.

DAY 4

TOKYO

In the morning, we'll begin dipping our toes into Wabi Sabi, with a focus on how it can be seen in man-made elements (we'll be focusing on natural elements within Kyoto.)

To accomplish this we'll be visiting the Wa Space, The first boutique and gallery in Tokyo solely focused on the concept of Wabi Sabi. Their space regularly features artists throughout Japan, ranging in price from a few hundred yen to the millions, but the unifying theme of Wabi-Sabi runs through all work here. The staff will be touring with you and your guide and talking about some of the themes of Wabi Sabi that can be found in their pieces, and how this can be seen as echoing through the ceramics on display here.

BROKEN IS BETTER: THE ART OF KINTSUGI WITH MASTER POTTER

After having spent so much time around completed pieces, we feel that an introduction to the Japanese practice of Kintsugi, will give you even more appreciation for Japanese aesthetics.

It is through the practice of Kintsugi that Japanese collectors restored value to damaged or cracked pieces of ceramics. Cracks or defects were expertly filled in with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered precious metals such as gold or silver. Designed to repair the piece at certain points in history Kintsugi-infused pieces became so popular that some collectors deliberately smashed valuable pottery so that Kintsugi could be used to increase their value. This was due to multiple factors but perhaps most prominently, the preciousness of the metals used and to the perceived extra elements of wabi sabi that were added.

You will learn all about the history of Kintsugi, its connections to Japanese tea ceremonies, and the deep philosophy of embracing an objects history rather than trying to replace it during your workshop. Along with being taught the centuries old practice of Kintsugi yourself, and being able to take home your very own Kintsugi-enffused ceramic piece as a memento.

DINNER AT CUJORL

To complete our exploration of form, we'll be having dinner at Cujorl, this restaurant is run by chef Masayo Funakoshi. Prior to opening Cujorl and creating her inventive contemporary cuisine, she was a trained sculpter, and this aesthetic and appreciaton of design runs throughout the presentation of her dishe, such as the absolutely incredible and bold "Mushroom Cappuccino w. Milk & Sugar?". This dish like many others found her is a playful take on the elite molecular gastronomy that Funakoshi specializes in, though also with an artist's perspective in mind on presentation.

DAY 5/ TOKYO- MASHIKO-KYOTO

HOTEL: PRIVATE MACHIYA

This morning, please leave your luggage outside your door, it will be forwarded to your Kyoto hotel. We will be meeting you in the lobby where we will be departing to Mashiko via Shinkansen (or private car if you prefer. After our time in Mashiko we will be departing for Kyoto.

A COUNTRY POTTERY

Today we will be leaving for the roughly 2 hour day trip from Tokyo to the countryside village of Mashiko. It was here that one of Japan's greatest potters, Shoji Hamada (a living national treasure), called home. Our time spent in Mashiko will be one mixing history and the hands on. We will be able to through the various museums, displays and gorgeous countryside climbing kilns, see how Mashiko-Yaki ceramics ware is made from excavation from mountainside to being fired in one of its 300 kilnsits display in galleries.

We will be exploring Mashiko by bicycle, which should give you better insight into the scale of ceramics production in this town, as we pass by barns holding tools, clay samples, and thousands of broken shards of pottery from pieces that were not up to artistic standard. This will also expose us to the environment that so inspired potters that it's been host to hundreds of foreigners looking to reach the heights of Hamada-San, such as Kawa Kanjiro and the English Potter Bernard Leach.

We will get to see the works of these potters at the Mashiko Reference collection museum, and if we like even try our hand on the wheel here, or set up a private spinning session (and lunch) with a local pottery master.

After our time here it will be onward to Tokyo. We will head back together to Tokyo Main Station, where you will board your Shinkansen bullet train for Kyoto. Upon arrival we will be waiting for you with a private car that will transfer you to your traditional Japanese home (Machiya). Dinner will be waiting for you there.

Day 6

Kyoto

Morning

In the morning please enjoy a leisurely breakfast and take in the sites of the local Kyoto neighborhood that your Matchiya will spoil you with. Your guide will be meeting you after breakfast to begin your tour. We will be traveling with a mix of bus and metro in Kyoto.

SEARCHING FOR A PERFECT CUP

Today we will be focusing on showing you some of the best places in Kyoto to browse or purchase traditional tea sets, tea cups and other accessories of Kyo-Yaki. Depending on what you are looking to purchase, we can also set up private workshops at several of the pottery studios (Please note typically Studios will require guests to purchase work as a token of appreciation). Some of our favorite studios to take guests to are as follows:

UNRAKU-gama: With over 125 years of history (since the Edo Era), UNRAKU-gama is one of the oldest studios in Kyoto. During that entire time it was owned by a single family (Unrako) and has been passed down from generation to generation,

now being run by Unraku Saito the Third. They say that their kilns are one of the most unique elements in their pottery production.

Chawan-zaka: Not a shop but an area leading up to Kiyumizudera temple, this is a network of shops that specializes in selling teacups and teabowls. Within this area is also a museum dedicated to the work of Living National Treasure Yuzo Kondo. The best store here would be nearby Toutensei which is pottery offered by an 8th-generation potter. The building itself is a work of art, a 110 year old Machiya still in its original form. Here if you'd like we can also organize a tea ceremony. (we have one planned for later in the day, but matcha and sweets can be had and enjoyed more than once!)

Asahi-Yaki: Finally before our tea ceremony we can continue onto Asahi Workshop. This pottery has been in production for over 400 years and is linked to the tea culture of Japan's most famous tea mecca: Uji. Here pots, bowls and Matcha have been gifted to royalty and prepared by tea masters for hundreds of years. It is also the birthplace of the Japanese spouted teapot (kyusu), designed to specifically enhance the flavor of the tea it holds. The workshop is currently supervised by its 15th master: Matsubayashi Hosai.

CHADO: THE WAY OF THE TEA

Depending on when you visit, we may be able to arrange a tea ceremony out of rare and ancient Raku-Yaki at one of the local museums. Should this not be available, we will instead focus on having you drink of the best quality tea as we head by private car roughly 1.5 hours from Kyoto central to the Mountainside Tea mecca of Wazuka. Here we will participate in a half-day of activities revolving around some of Japan's best tea. This will include walking through gorgeous tea fields (Tea is an evergreen plant so the area is beautiful year round). Sampling of multiple varieties of tea and eating lunch of soba at a charming countryside restaurant. Though Uji is famed for its tea, over half of Uji's tea is actually sourced from Wazuka, which has grown tea since the Kamakura period began over 800 years ago.

After our time in this tea mecca, learning to define, differentiate and tastes the notes and nose of different tea varieties, we will return to Kyoto by private car in the

early evening. We can either have dinner prepared for you at your Machiya or make reservations for you at the below recommended restaurant (or any other you'd like!)

GIRO GIRO HITOSHINA

One of our favorite places in Kyoto for Kappo Cuisine (similar to Kaiseki, though more informal). Located in a quiet street adjacent to the Kiso River, if you're lucky you'll bump into Geishas being shuttled to private members-only clubs for performances. The food here is traditional meets modern and always attracts a hip crowd (We recommend securing reservations the night before if selecting this venue).

MAP: <https://goo.gl/maps/Mk8YYrCCB9g2>

Day 7

KYOTO

Today will be entirely about centering ourselves in landscapes, and looking for elements of Japanese design and wabi-sabi in natural settings that we will see and have seen in the recurring themes of our ceramics.

JAPANESE GARDEN WALK WITH REAL JAPAN GARDENS.

First in the morning we will be joining the incredible team of women behind Real Japanese Gardens. Through both love and a high level of expertise, they have managed to catalog most of the major Honshu Japanese gardens, and stratified them based on a demanding and unique set of criteria. They will meet with you for breakfast and discuss with you some options, then by public transportation they will escort you to gardens that match what you're looking for in perspective, design and philosophy and educate you on some of the finer points of Japanese Garden techniques and history. After the tour we will stop for lunch at a charming local restaurant.

ARASHIYAMA, KYOTO'S GREAT FOREST.

Afterwards we will meet you by taxi at your restaurant and transport you by to ARASHIYAMA. Arashiyama has been a pleasure district in Kyoto since the Heian period, and is especially popular for its bamboo groves, fall colors and its numerous venues for spirituality.

Within the complex there are several temples to visit. We would recommend exploring the following sites:

-The famed bamboo groves of ARASHIYAMA. Though the walk is only 15 minutes, it will provide you a scenic backdrop that we feel is unmatched within Kyoto.

- The TOGETSUKYO BRIDGE is known as Arashiyama's central landmark with beautiful shops, restaurants and fun activities for visitors nearby.

- TENRYUJI TEMPLE is known as one of Kyoto's five great Zen Temples. This UNESCO world heritage site is filled with beautiful temple buildings to explore as well as several photogenic gardens.

If you have time to spare before your reservation at the MOSS TEMPLE, we would recommend exploring both the ADASHINO-NENBUTSUJI and OTAGI-NENBUTSUJI TEMPLES

- Adashino-Nenbutsuji is an eerie monument to the work of famed monk Kobo Daishi who placed stone statues to mark the souls of the dead.

-Otagi Nenbutsuji is famed for its thousands of Rakan (carved statues representing followers of Buddhism). This temple was restored recently in the 1980s, with the Rakan carvings have been provided by famed artist and Tokyo University of Arts Professor Nishimura Kocho. He taught amateurs how to make these amazing avatars of faith then left them to build their own, leading to a diverse array of sculptures.

No matter what route you decide to explore, roughly 30 minutes before your reservation time at the Moss temple, please return to Tenryu-ji temple and walk to the Arashiyama Bus Stop. Here your driver will meet and transport you to the SAIHO-JI MOSS TEMPLE

THE MOSS TEMPLE

Upon arrival at the temple, please make sure you have prepared the ¥3000

entrance fee (Per Person) and your invitation letter. (Which will have been delivered to your hotel)

Saiho-ji (also known colloquially as Kokedera or “Moss Temple) was originally a prince’s villa that was converted into a temple. When funds couldn’t be met to maintain the temple fell into disrepair, thus allowing the famed moss (over 120 kinds) to take over the temple until it was then ‘rediscovered’ for its now famous natural beauty.

Upon arrival you’ll be asked to present your invitation letter as well as the ¥3000 per person fee. Afterwards you’ll be invited into the temple compound to observe the practices of Kito and Shakyō (the chanting and copying of Buddhist scriptures). After honoring this practices for 30-45 minutes, you’ll be led into the garden giving you the opportunity to take photographs and freely explore.

Whenever you finish at the Moss Temple, please take a taxi or metro back to your hotel. Dinner is not currently reserved (though we would be happy to arrange this for you) instead we would recommend the following local recommendations for you to enjoy.

YAKINIKU (BBQ): Grill your own Japanese beef and vegetables at your table. Hiro is a chain of ‘yakiniku’ restaurants, including one that overlooks the river.

In summer they have some outdoor tables on a terrace above the river.

[Requires advance reservation.]

MAP: <https://goo.gl/maps/su2H6egFxeN2>

OSEN: A welcoming local restaurant specializing in ‘obanzai’ cuisine – Kyoto-style home cooking. Be sure to take a walk down the nearby Pontocho Street before or after dinner – it’s very atmospheric.

MAP: <https://goo.gl/maps/DN8DWNJxYXJ2>

Day 8

KYOTO

Please note this day is structured for serious collectors of Japanese pottery and involves two of the more rare masters of Japanese ceramics. If guests would like an

activity centered around more general activities please give us very far advance notice so we can tell the masters

MAKUZU-YAKI

In the morning we will be meeting with a 6th generation master of Makuzu-Yaki, Kousai Miyagawa. Historically one of the highest brands associated with Chado, the cups and tea ceremony ceramics found here are exceptionally rare. We will have a chance to enjoy a more formal and traditional tea ceremony (centered more on the ritual more than the tea itself) as well as a chance to browse, intimately chat with and discuss the life of a modern ceramics master.

THE YAKIMONO ENCYCLOPEDIA: ROBERT YELLIN

The highlight of your time in Kyoto will be touring with Robert Yellin, acclaimed author, lecturer, reporter, all around polymath and perhaps the best living foreign expert on Japanese Ceramics. We will start at Robert's private gallery where he will show you a collection that's taken a lifetime to gather. You will be sure to encounter multiple cutting-edge pieces and styles so obscure that they remain unknown even to many Japanese Masters. Though perhaps the most prominent style you will see is that of yakishime: High-fired unglazed stoneware of which the beauty is the strange and delicate mingling of clay and ash.

Then (Using public transit) Robert and you will venture out and enter the world Robert so vividly captured in his decade long ceramics column in the Japan Times. You will visit multiple kilns, masters, and friends that share Robert's deep and unending passion for ceramics. Along the way you'll also have a chance to talk to Robert, who truly does count as one of Japan's great advocates for the arts as well as philosophers for the soulful way he captures the modern disconnect between the owner and his wares. As well as how through the philosophy of Shokunin, the spirit of the craftsman, we can reconnect, to art, nature and ourselves. After your tour with Robert you can return to the hotel until dinner.

DINNER AT TEMPURA ENDO

To conclude our time in Kyoto, we have arranged a spectacular meal for you. Tempura Endo is one of the best in the city: you'll never be able to eat tempura again outside Japan after this! The restaurant

resembles a private house and you'll be served by ladies in kimono, and chefs wearing classic white uniforms.

CANCEL POLICY: Penalties for cancellations from 3 days before.

CREDIT CARDS: Accepted

ENGLISH MENU: Yes

SELECTION: ¥13,000 prix fixe course pre-ordered for you

SEATS: Counter seats (need to remove shoes)

STYLE: Smart (not a formal dress code)

ADDRESS:

京都市東山区小松町 566 天ぶら圓堂

566 Komatsu-cho, Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto Japan 605-0811

Tel: 075-551-1488

MAP: <https://goo.gl/maps/NTcrGVf61mA2>

DAY 8

KYOTO-KURASHIKI

HOTEL: RYOKAN KURASHIKI

THE OTHER BEVERAGE IN THE BEAUTIFUL CUPS

After a late Breakfast please head via metro to FUSHIMI INARI SHRINE. Your guide will be meeting you in this neighborhood at Noon so you have as much time as you'd like before to explore what many consider to be Japan's most beautiful Inari (Fox God Shrine). At noon, please head to the entrance gate where your tour will begin.

we want to introduce you to the other beverage that has filled the beautiful ceramics of Kyoto, a sake tour with one of our favorite Japan Residents, Jason Davidson. Jason is a fellow Midwesterner who has been living in Japan for the past ten years and has become intimately acquainted with the food and beverages of Kyoto. He will be showing you the stunning amount of varieties that can be found in the historic Fushimi Sake brewing district, as well as how to differentiate between high-quality sake, and that which is merely a Veblan Good.

This tour will include several stops varying from high-end shops, sake breweries to local Izakayas. Lunch will be at a charming local establishment and then you will

*ASIA ART TOURS, 3-1-24, TAIPEI 150-0001
+81 3 6455 5154 | ASIAARTTOURS.com*

head back to Kyoto Main Station (Your luggage having already been ported to Kurashiki). To head to Kurashiki for your Machiya Stay.

Though there are several lovely Ryokans in Kurashiki, I tend to find the best value at the **HONMACHI ONSAKA no LE**. This Machiya was redesigned and is maintained by a team of historians and modern designers. Although made of modern materials and with modern amenities (a beautifully done kitchen, a high-tech Japanese bathroom), retains traditional design that blends in with the architectural heritage of Kurashiki. It is located roughly 1 minute outside the Bikan Neighborhood and perched on a hill allows for a glorious view of its traditional merchant houses, as well as being located near to several of the towns best restaurants and grocery stores.

DAY 9

KURASHIKI

HOTEL: HONMACHI ONSAKA no LE

WALKING FROM THE EAST TO THE WEST

Today, after breakfast we will first be enjoying the gorgeous tiled roofs and architecture of the Bikan Historical Quarter, which contains beautiful examples of Edo-era (1603-1867) storehouses, mills, and shops. As well as beautiful examples of textile manufacturing architecture from the MEIJI Restoration. Many merchants became incredibly wealthy from the sugar and rice trade here, leading also to the construction of absolutely gorgeous merchant family houses which can still be explored by visitors.

Coming in from the JR station you walk through the modern section of Kurashiki, until you reach the Bikan Neighborhood, here is where the city's preserved edo-era architecture begins. It's a very auspicious beginning as you enter. You will first see traditional houses and then one of Kurashiki's most photographed landmarks, the town's Canal. Lined with willows and featuring trumpeter swans it does make for a beautiful site.

Afterwards I recommend heading to the **Ohara Art Museum**, the first museum with Western Artwork to be opened in Japan. Founded by Kurashiki entrepreneur Ohara Magosaburo in a tribute to his ward Kojima Torajiro, a western style painter who Magosaburo sent to Europe on multiple occasions to study and collect the works of

Western Artists who Torajiro admired and who Magosaburo acquired in respect to Torajiro's interests.

Housing works of true western masters both past (Cezanne, Monet, Munch, El Greco, Degas, Gauguin) and contemporary masters (Picasso, Miro, Rothko, Pollack) as well as covering Japanese modern art and pottery. In addition the main gallery's neo-classical architecture could be considered its own work of art!

For Ceramics the museum has an adjacent building dedicated to potters surrounding the Mingei Movement. Beginning in 1925 *mingei* was coined by a philosopher of aesthetics, Soetsu Yanagi, and denotes utilitarian objects of beauty, and finding meaning within ceramic pieces that could be used everyday, or even be considered tools. The Vanguard of the Mingei movement ironically some of Japan's most skilled potters and the collection here varies but expect to see works from famed émigré Bernard Leach, Kanjiro Kawai, Keisuke Serizawa, and best known Shoji Hamada, whose piece "Tea Pot, Cut-sided in Black Glaze" led Magosaburo Ohara to begin collecting Mingei Pottery.

THE MUSEUM OF FOLK CRAFTS

Kurashiki Museum of Folk Crafts is located along the main canal and has an outstanding collection of textiles, woodblock prints and ceramic ware. The architecture of this museum should also be considered a work of art as its centered inside a traditional converted storehouse, with great examples of traditional crossbeams and stone floors. Here you will get to see a more pure expression of the Mingei movement as many of the ceramic pieces here were strictly intended for utilitarian functions, and the majority of pieces are unsigned and without attribution beyond the kiln where they were fired.

The museum gift-shop is also a must stop for the quality of traditional Japanese items that can be purchased.

After your time at the two museums here we strongly recommend wandering off on your own. We are happy to make recommendations (particularly in terms of where you can purchase authentic Bizen-yaki), but Kurashiki truly is a art-lovers paradise. There are more shops than can be listed and more museums than can be counted here.

However for dinner we would like to recommend: **Takataya**: A legendary Yakatori

ASIA ART TOURS, 3-1-24, TAIPEI 150-0001

+81 3 6455 5154 | ASIAARTTOURS.com

joint, with a huge line (Daily!) of both locals and tourists. Takataya is very affordable (100-500 yen for nearly any skewer) but it's the taste that people coming back. Wonderful lived-in atmosphere pairs beautifully with the restaurant's old-school exterior.

DAY 10

KURASHIKI-BIZEN

Today we will be taking a full day tour by private car in and around the city of Bizen. Bizen is one of Japan's oldest forms of pottery, existing since the 2th century. It is typified as unglazed stoneware usually fired with red pine wood. Though it was popular from roughly 1333 until 1867, the modern affection for Bizen ware comes from the 1930s and Potte Kaneshige Toya reviving the ancient techniques, with an estimated 90% of current Bizen potters dedicated to making the same style and type of pots as those found in the 1500s (The golden age of Bizen).

Of the numerous legends who have come from Bizen we want to highlight the works of three in particular. **Harada Suroku** is famed for building his own kilns, the elements of Aji and Keshiki that can be found in his works, and for the mysterious goma (marks made from ash) that can be found in his pots.

Mori Togaku is considered the great genius of Bizen pottery, who is credited for reaching deep into the wabi-sabi of bizen itself, and continuing its history while making something new. His largest accomplishment was the reintroduction of the ogama (large single-chamber tunnel style kiln) that was the hallmark of the Muromachi period that many regard as the golden age of Bizen production and the height of Bizen pottery's sophistication. No manuals existed for how to build an Ogama but through trial and error Togaku managed to reconstruct one using over 300 tons of clay and nearly 200 tons of red pine to fire (Loading the kiln itself took 30 days!)

Besides the accomplishment of building an Ogama, Togaku's pieces are considered some of the finest in the world for complimenting tea. He prefers a highly minimalist style that is unlike nearly any other Japanese pottery.

Abe Anjin is perhaps best known for of all modern Bizen potters, being best able to recreate pieces in the quality, spirit and AJI of Momoyama golden era. What's more

striking is that Abe started out as a painter years ago and switched to pottery. He is less well known than the two previously mentioned potters, but would be considered amongst the most highly prized for collectors.

This will be a full day spent in a private car where we will be driving to some of Bizen's best galleries (Our favorites perhaps being **Kamamoto** led by ceramicist Bifu Kimura as well as **Gallery Omori** which features work from Kakurezaki Ryuichi and Namakura Rokuro), kilns and meetings with some of its best potters. We will also try to have your guide be a local american who is considered one of the best foreign bizen potters, though is availability is a bit more limited these days.

After your time in Bizen we will head back to Kurashiki for a final night. For dinner we will secure reservations at **Restaurant Vingt-Cinq Kurashiki**. Here you can find sophisticated and affordable French food, with a romantic atmosphere to boot! The Head Chef Tomoyoshi Yokota spent 6 years living and training in France and worked with Paul Bocuse. The restaurant is located just outside the Historic Bikan Neighborhood.

Day 11

ZEN TEMPLE- HAGI

DESIGNER ZEN

After seeing the traditional yesterday in Bizen, we will head today by private car to **Shinshoji Temple**

Shinshoji is not a traditional Zen Temple, but rather a collection of several buildings (designed as sort of 'hyper traditional'.) that are designed to give patrons insight into 'zen lifestyle'. There is a building for Onsen, a building housing traditional zen artwork, a center where you can be taught traditional zazen meditation, two restaurants/teahouses designed to give you a 'zen meal', and several gorgeous gardens. This center teaches from both the Rinzai School of Zen (founded in 1191 by Monk Eisai and significant in its use of Koans/riddles to teach Zen) and the Soto School of Zen (founded in 1244 by Monk Dogen at the Eijeiji Temple and significant for its focus on Zazen meditation to unlock the secrets of Zen). The art center also contains works from the famous monk Hakuin who asked the famous Zen Koan "What's the sound of One Hand Clapping"?"

No matter what one thinks of "Designer Zen" or perhaps "Yuppie Wabi Sabi", you truly can admire much of the beautiful architecture, designed by a dream team of Japanese Architects, including Terunobu Fujimori, Kohei Nawa, and the tea house

master Sen no Rikyu. The grounds and Architecture here are truly incredible, as well as the philosophical wrestling as to if Zen can possibly be 'disrupted'.

Afterwards we will return by private car to Okayama for our Shinkansen to Yamaguchi. From Yamaguchi it's a 1 hour busride to our final destination, the UNESCO studded city of Hagi, perhaps the least famous to foreigners and most famous to Japanese city in all of Japan.

HOTEL: SENSHUNRAKU RYUOKAN

Your stay in Hagi will be one of my favorite hotels in all of Japan, the Senshunraku Ryokan. The rooms was absolutely gorgeous, with ikebana, it was huge (really the size of a suite!) with a large couch facing a window that overlooked a rooftop sculpture garden, pine trees and the gorgeous Kikugahama beach. The Ryokan was able to offer me a delicious fugu-themed kaiseki dinner in a private dining room and would make for a good introduction for guests looking to try this deadly delicacy. Beyond that the Ryokan has an brilliant Onsen both indoors (roughly the size of a swimming pool!) and outdoors facing the Pacific Ocean. There is nothing more relaxing than a hot soak in the cool night air with the sound of waves combing the beach head. The Ryokan also features a sprawling exhibit of Hagi-Yaki Pottery that, while mostly focused in the lobby, covers the whole hotel. These are not simple decorations created in mass-production Kilns but works ranging from local masters, to living national treasures like **Miwa Kyusetsu XI** (from a 400 year old dynasty of potters!)

As a last heaping of praise, the Ryokan is adjacent to both the beach and the UNESCO castle town, both of which can easily be explored by beach or by renting one of the property's bicycles. Hagi is also famed for its Fugu (pufferfish) so if you'd like we could reserve you a delicious and dangerous meal for your time in Hagi!

Day 12

HAGI

HOTEL: SENSHUNRAKU RYUOKAN

Today we'll start with a deep dive into **Hagi-Yaki**, This pottery, brought to Japan via captured Korean Potters. This form of pottery has perhaps the most wabi-sabi of any pottery we've seen thus far, to the point where some potters have completely abandoned focusing on form and instead only care for the atmosphere or *wa* that the piece possesses. Each piece becomes unique to the owner as the glaze used in Hagi-Yaki Pottery will darken after each use.

*ASIA ART TOURS, 3-1-24, TAIPEI 150-0001
+81 3 6455 5154 | ASIAARTTOURS.com*

For a fun and refreshing start we'll head to the **Senshunraku Jouzan Pottery School and gallery** to meet with **Potter Kaneko Nobuhiko**. Here we'll be treated to a show of his private gallery (which he'll open only for invited guests) and witness his more abstract and wild work (representing everything from Black Holes, to Volcanos to surreal interpretations of flowers), along with a hands on pottery class where he will coach you on making your own piece that will be fired and mailed to you in a month.

Afterwards will be a trip to **Hagi Uragami Museum** which when it was opened in 1996 was the talk of the Japanese Art World. This museum perhaps hold the best collection of Ukiyo-E woodblock prints in all of Japan, as well as one of Asia's (ranging from ancient china and korea to modern contemporary world wide artists) best collections of ceramics.

The museum's primary collection was donated by the fascinating Japanese self-made man Toshiro Uragami, who made his fortune in mining and art. His art fortune was made in the 1960s by buying and selling Ukiyo-e woodblock prints when they were being vastly undervalued by the Japanese domestic market. The 36 Views of Mt. Fuji, The Great Wave of Kanagawa, The Seven Foibles of Young Women: The Telescope are just a few of the priceless works of art housed amongst the nearly 5000 works of Ukiyo-e and nearly 2,500 pieces of pottery.

If available for your time above we will try to connect you with one of our favorite Local Ukiyo-e experts, but the museum's English translations will be intelligible in case they are unavailable.

Afterwards we headed to **Chiyo** for one of the most beautiful bento boxes I have ever seen and some masterfully prepared sushi and sashimi. Then, to see how Hagi sources some of its incredibly fresh seafood we will head to The **Myojin Pond and Itsukushima Shrine** built in 1686 and dedicated to the God of Fishing, you can do your own fishing here, for Hawks! An unusual number of kites gather here to pray on the abundant sealife (Sea Bream, Halibut, Stingrays!) found in the saltwater tidal pond. Locals have adopted the hawks as a fun activity and for generations come here to throw bread for them to eat. Unlike pigeons, the hawks will swoop down and grab the bread out of mid-air, making for some thrilling arial shows, close calls and great oportunties for photographs. (you can buy the bread at a small manned booth.)

Finally with a local history buff, we will to Hagi's **UNESCO Samurai and Merchant section of Castle Town**. This section of town was constructed originally in 1600 and for the next 260 years functioned as the political heart of Hagi. There are numerous small samurai houses to duck into, but the star attraction is the **Kikuya Residence** .

The family here were given their residence by the Mori Clan and allowed to upgrade its appearance and luxury to receive elites from the Tokugawa Shogunate.

The House is absolutely one of a kind, even in a country full of preserved traditional dwellings. There is a huge private garden in the back (open a couple of times of year) and absolutely gorgeous antiques, room designs and architectural features to be explored over the course of your stroll. As we are wandering this section of town we will also be sure to point out a few of the small family-run galleries where excellent Hagi-Yaki can be purchased.

Dinner that night will be at **Midoriya** a wonderful Yakiniku restaurant that sources its beef directly from farms it directly owns, and a great example of the many "Farm to Table" restaurants to be found in Hagi. The beef used here is a cross-breed between the critically endangered Mishima-Ushi brand of cattle (A nearly extinct Japanese purebreed and only resides on a small island roughly 30km of the coast of Hagi) and Dutch breeds to form a new kind of beef known as Kenran-Gyuu.

The Yakiniku here I found to be wonderful, fresh and all the more enjoyable by the fact that the butcher-shop is right next door! This restaurant is also next to the **Christian Martyrs Park**, dedicated to followers who were willing to lose their lives in Yamaguchi rather than renounce their beliefs.

Day 13

HAGI

In the morning we will continue our exploration of Hagi Yaki at **Nanmyouji Gama Pottery**. The owner and Potter Mr. Pierson is Swedish and was trained at the Royal Copenhagen Academy. His style is quite unique in that he offers a fusion of styles between Western Ceramics and that of Hagi-Yaki.

Afterwards, we'll drive through a beautiful a beautiful neighborhood to visit **Tenryuu Pottery** and its head artist **Kaneta Masanao**. Here you'll sip on Matcha Tea served from Hagi-Yaki bowls the master had made himself as through your guide you'll discuss form, value and what inspired him to stretch the definition of Hagi-Yaki to birth such abstract shapes and presentations found throughout his work.

Lunch will be held in a place that serves some of Hagi's most beautiful Kaiseki on some of its most beautiful Hagi-Yaki.

Finally you will head to the birthplace of the most important men in the history of Hagi, and perhaps Japan, viewing the school, homes and teacher who produced the **Choshu Five** at the **Shonku Sonjuku Academy Complex**.

These 5 men and the teacher who would forever change Japan by helping to bring western Science to Japan, spearheading the overthrow the Tokugawa Shogunate and bringing the era of the Meiji Restoration into being. These men deserve their own book (much less their own travel itinerary!) but suffice to say the first Prime Minister, Head of Banks and First head of Railroads all came from the Choshu 5

Kaiseki Ryori Ajiro: One of the hardest to reserve restaurants in Hagi, and frequented by visiting dignitaries such as former Prime Minister Koizumi, Kaiseki Ryori Ajiro offers some of the best Kaiseki in West Japan, and for those in the know, serious discounts during its lunch service. The restaurant's setting in Hagi's UNESCO Castle district (within talking distance of the fame **Kikuya Residence**) and design (featuring a Kyoto-Inspired Courtyard to reflect on the seasonal nature and freshness of Kaiseki Ryori *Haute Cuisine*). Some of the restaurants highlights (though they change with the seasons) include **Gomadofu, Tennen Torafugu** (Tiger Pufferfish) served as Tempura. As well as grilled **Amadai** fish fillet.

Next we'll return to Hagi's stunning preserved Architecture and History by heading to **Hamasaki:** North of the Town's Center this 400 year old neighborhood has preserved both its feudal architecture and atmosphere. This former bustling harbor district from the Mori era houses 200 year old houses of revolutionaries against the Tokugawa Shogunate (like the home of **Umeya Shichibei** who smuggled 1000 british firearms to be used against the shogunates samurais). This district also houses dry docks from the feudal era and

Dinner tonight will be at your Ryokan

Day 14 _____ HAGI-KYOTO/TOKYO-
DEPARTURE

Prior to leaving Hagi, in the morning we will head to perhaps its most beautiful architecture and the gravesites of the clan who built the city into an independent power center that eventually ushered in the beginning of Modern Japan: These are the **Tokoji and Daishoin Temple**

The 300-year old Chinese influenced **Tokoji Temple**, which with it's forested setting and 500 stone lanterns, is known to have one of the most beautiful graveyards in all of Japan.

The other Graveyard can be found at the Rinzaï Zen Buddhist **Temple of Daishoin**. Which is also gorgeous and one of the most photogenic sites in Hagi.

Finally before leaving we'll take you up to a key vantage point where you can take in all of Hagi's seaside beauty. Then we'll be heading by bus to Yamaguchi where we'll board the Shinkansen for Kyoto or Tokyo (depending on your departure flight).

Before saying goodbye we'll have a beautiful last meal at **Isuzu**: A high-end *Koryori* (Ala Carte) Restaurant. Isuzu is nationally famous for their two dishes of Uni-Meshi and Amadai Misoyaki. This small restaurant has a counter and a tatami seating area with 3-4 tables. Very few dishes are served here but they are incredibly fresh and executed to a gourmet level. Another dish to keep your eye out for (these all depend on the season) is the Ni-Anago (Sea EEL).

We hope you've enjoyed discovering Ceramics with us and we can't wait to welcome you back on your next Asia Art Tour!