

Places

# Exploring Japan by Sea: From Matsue to Okinawa & Beyond

Anastasia Mills Healy | Lindblad | 3 Min Read

"In 1600, an Englishman went to Japan and became a samurai," James Clavell read in his daughter's history textbook. That one sentence set into motion the runaway bestselling novel *Shōgun* followed by a miniseries that glued 130 million viewers to their TVs.

Japan's ancient traditions, artistic sensibilities, and appreciation for nature, form, and balance have intrigued *gaijin* (non-Japanese people) the world over through the centuries. Greatly magnified by the country's isolationist policy during the Shōgun era, from the early 17th to the mid-19th century, the interest in all things Japanese swept the world when Commodore Matthew Perry finally opened the country to international trade in 1854.

From the time of that first English explorer, William Adams, to the eras of Commodore Perry, *Shōgun* fans, and beyond, travelers have long known that the island nation of Japan is best explored by sea.

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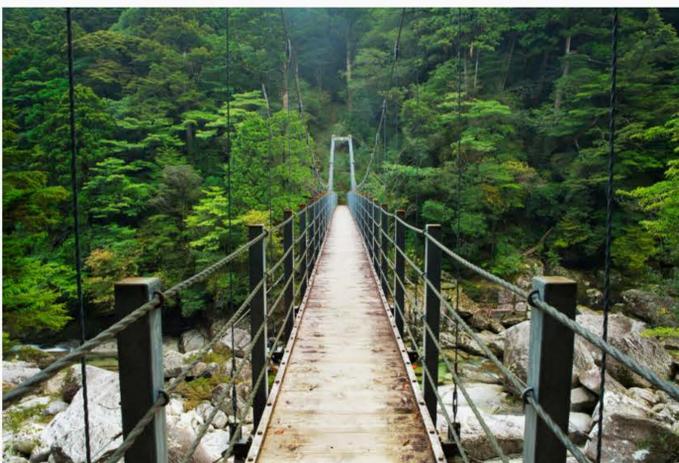
## Effortlessly visit wide-ranging locations



Himeji Castle, also known as the White Heron, is one of Japan's best preserved feudal castles.

From Tokyo's high-energy Ginza district to the serene hilltop Himeji Castle and the remote coral beaches of the Yaeyama Islands, Japan's wide-ranging attractions are found on mountaintops, far-flung atolls, and forested lakes. Going by land alone likely means missing out on some of these diverse sights. But aboard ship, you'll be able to cover much more ground. In just over two weeks, our expertly planned itineraries include bustling cities, iconic shrines, peaceful gardens, ancient forests, and secluded beaches throughout the 1,500-mile nation, which spans four main islands and 6,852 smaller islands.

## Enjoy easy access to less-visited islands and remote destinations



A suspension bridge crosses a lush rainforest on the island of Yakushima, where you'll find some of Japan's oldest trees.

Traveling by expedition ship, we have direct access to less-visited locations not well connected to public transportation like the picturesque castles towns of Hagi and Matsue on the Sea of Japan.

Island travel is clearly more efficient by ship, allowing opportunities to visit Naoshima, the cutting-edge art island; the enchanted rainforest on Yakushima Island; and the amazing dive sites of the tiny and remote Miyako and Yaeyama Islands.

Each itinerary also includes the bonus of experiencing the outstanding sights of a neighboring country, made easily possible by expedition ship. On our [Imperial Dynasties & Modern Culture](#) itinerary, marvel at the remains of the ancient capital of the Silla kingdom in Gyeongju, South Korea; while our [Sailing the East China Sea](#) voyage ends with time to explore Taiwan's impressive seaside gardens, unique waterfront geological formations, and the cultural treasures of Taipei.

## Explore a colorful undersea world



A school of bluespotted snapper off the coast of Okinawa Island.

Japan's natural wonders include an unexpected and lesser-known element: a [thriving undersea world](#). The chain of volcanic islands explored on our Sailing the East China Sea voyage enjoy the warm waters of a sub-tropical climate where pristine coral reefs burst with life.

The clear, brilliant blue water of the Kerama Islands, home to 250 kinds of coral, inspired the naming of a new color. Three species of sea turtles frequent these islands and the 100 shallow reefs of Miyako Island, whereas the remote Yaeyama Islands are known for manta rays. A relation of the manatee, the elusive Okinawa dugong can sometimes be spotted in the sea grass of its namesake island.

Entering their world surrounded by butterfly fish, lionfish, and golden sweepers, you can dive or snorkel or explore remote islands by kayak or paddleboard. Our expedition ships carry all the necessary equipment and expert guides lead the way to discover the country's incredible marine experiences.

## Travel easily with experienced guides



Sunset at Senso-ji, Tokyo's oldest and one of its most significant temples.

Exploring this magnificent country can present language and cultural challenges but our experienced expedition teams and our expertly crafted itineraries ensure seamless visits to iconic sites throughout the country. With no logistical worries and unpacking only once, your time is optimized and you are free to relax and fully immerse yourself in the history, culture, and natural beauty of the truly timeless Land of the Rising Sun. In addition, there are plenty of opportunities to sample local specialties both in the regions we visit and on the ship but Western options are also always available.

Explore the Land of the Rising Sun on [two brand-new itineraries aboard National Geographic Orion](#).

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