

7-Day Tokyo & Kyoto Itinerary: Neon Streets to Quiet Temples

Tokyo and Kyoto are the two cities almost every first-time Japan trip is built around — neon-lit crossings and quiet forested shrines within a two-hour bullet train ride of each other. This loop splits the week evenly between them.

DURATION

7 Days

BEST TIME TO GO

March – May

cherry blossom season

FROM

\$1,500 USD / person

for 2 people

Day 1

Arrive in Tokyo, Settle in Shinjuku

Land at Narita or Haneda and make your way into the city — Shinjuku is a central, well-connected base for the Tokyo half of the trip, with the station itself worth a wander on arrival.

Narita Express (N'EX) — Narita Airport to Shinjuku

~90 minutes · About \$22 USD one-way (reserved seat)

The most straightforward way in from Narita — direct, reserved seating, no transfers. Flying into Haneda instead cuts this to a ~30-minute train or taxi ride.

JR East · jreast.co.jp

Overnight — Hotel Gracery Shinjuku

From \$200–240 USD / night, for 2 people

A well-located Shinjuku hotel (with the famous Godzilla head on the terrace) an easy walk from Kabukicho, the station, and the Golden Gai bar alleys.

Hotel Gracery Shinjuku · hotelgracery.com

Day 2

Shibuya, Harajuku & Meiji Shrine

A day of contrasts — the scramble crossing and fashion streets of Shibuya and Harajuku, then quiet forest paths at Meiji Shrine a few minutes' walk away.

Shibuya Sky Observation Deck

~1 hour · About \$18–20 USD / person

An open-air rooftop deck above the Shibuya Scramble Crossing — go near sunset for the city skyline lighting up. Book a timed-entry slot online in advance.

Shibuya Sky · shibuya-scramble-square.com

Harajuku & Takeshita Street

~1.5 hours • Free to wander (shopping extra)

Tokyo's youth-fashion strip — crepe stands, thrift shops, and people-watching. Loops naturally into the calm of Meiji Shrine's forested approach a few minutes away.

Dinner in Shinjuku

Est. \$20–35 USD / person

On your own — Omoide Yokocho's tiny yakitori stalls or the ramen shops around Shinjuku station both deliver without a reservation.

Overnight — Hotel Gracery Shinjuku

From \$200–240 USD / night, for 2 people

Second night at the same hotel.

Hotel Gracery Shinjuku · hotelgracery.com

Day 3

Asakusa & teamLab Planets

Old Tokyo in the morning at Senso-ji, immersive digital art in the afternoon — two very different sides of the city on the same day.

Senso-ji Temple & Nakamise Shopping Street

~1.5–2 hours • Free (temple grounds)

Tokyo's oldest temple, reached through a market street selling snacks and souvenirs. Go early to beat the tour groups.

teamLab Planets TOKYO

~2–3 hours • About \$24–26 USD / person

A barefoot, walk-through digital art museum — mirrored water rooms and projection-mapped gardens. Book a timed ticket online well ahead; popular slots sell out.

teamLab Planets · teamlab.art/e/planets

Overnight — Hotel Gracery Shinjuku

From \$200–240 USD / night, for 2 people

Third and final night in Tokyo before the transfer to Kyoto.

Hotel Gracery Shinjuku · hotelgracery.com

Day 4

Shinkansen to Kyoto, Fushimi Inari

The bullet train to Kyoto takes barely over two hours — leave Tokyo after breakfast and you'll have the whole afternoon for Fushimi Inari's thousands of torii gates.

Shinkansen — Tokyo to Kyoto

~2 hours 15 minutes · Covered by a 7-day Japan Rail Pass (about \$330 USD), or ~\$130 USD one-way without one

A 7-day Ordinary JR Pass (about ¥50,000) pays for itself on this trip once you count the Narita/Haneda transfer, this ride, and the day trip back to the airport — buy it online before you fly.

Japan Rail Pass · japanrailpass.net

Fushimi Inari Taisha

~2 hours · Free

Thousands of vermilion torii gates climbing the forested hillside behind the shrine — the lower loop takes under an hour, but it's worth continuing higher for thinner crowds.

Overnight — Hotel Granvia Kyoto

From \$260–300 USD / night, for 2 people

Directly connected to Kyoto Station, which makes it an easy base for day trips by train in both directions.

Hotel Granvia Kyoto · granviakyoto.com

Day 5

Arashiyama Bamboo Grove & Kinkaku-ji

A full day of Kyoto's best-known sights — a walk through the bamboo grove in the morning, the Golden Pavilion in the afternoon.

Arashiyama Bamboo Grove

~45 minutes · Free

A short, quiet path through towering bamboo — arrive right at opening (around 8am) to beat both the heat and the crowds.

Kinkaku-ji (Golden Pavilion)

~1 hour · About ¥500 (roughly \$3.50 USD) / person

A gold-leaf-covered pavilion reflected in its own pond — one of Kyoto's most photographed sights, and one of its most crowded, so a mid-afternoon visit helps.

Overnight — Hotel Granvia Kyoto

From \$260–300 USD / night, for 2 people

Second night at the same hotel.

Hotel Granvia Kyoto · granviakyoto.com

Day 6

Gion, Kiyomizu-dera & Nishiki Market

Kyoto's historic geisha district and its most photogenic temple, finishing with an evening browsing food stalls at Nishiki Market.

Kiyomizu-dera Temple & Gion District

~3 hours · Temple admission about ¥500 (roughly \$3.50 USD) / person

A wooden temple stage with sweeping city views, then a walk down through the preserved streets of Higashiyama and Gion — Kyoto's classic afternoon combination.

Traditional Tea Ceremony Experience

~1 hour · About \$45–60 USD / person

A hands-on introduction to matcha preparation with an English-speaking host — a calmer counterpoint to a day of walking. Book a small-group or private session in advance.

Camellia Tea Ceremony · tea-kyoto.com

Nishiki Market Food Crawl

Est. \$25–40 USD / person

On your own — Kyoto's "kitchen," a covered market street of small food stalls good for grazing your way through dinner.

Overnight — Hotel Granvia Kyoto

From \$260–300 USD / night, for 2 people

Third and final night in Kyoto.

Hotel Granvia Kyoto · granviakyoto.com

Day 7

Depart from Kansai Airport (KIX)

Last leg of the trip — the Haruka Express runs directly from Kyoto Station to Kansai Airport, so there's no need to backtrack through Tokyo.

Haruka Express — Kyoto Station to Kansai Airport (KIX)

~75 minutes · About \$25 USD one-way (reserved seat, or covered by an active JR Pass)

Build in buffer time before an international flight, and confirm your JR Pass validity window covers this ride if you're relying on it for the fare.

JR West · westjr.co.jp