

Discovering Our Planet Together



The Soul of Japan

An Intimate Journey into Ancient Heritage & Living Traditions

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Trip Details:

Days

11 Days /
May–Jun,
Sep–Oct

Price

From
\$\$17995

The Soul of Japan

An Intimate Journey into Ancient Heritage & Living Traditions

In Japan, exquisite attention to detail shapes everyday experience—from the careful preparation of a simple meal to quiet rituals that mark the changing seasons. Ancient practices continue within one of the world's most dynamic modern societies, where daily routines reflect deep respect for craft and place. This journey traces a deliberate arc across the country, from Tokyo's vibrant neighborhoods to verdant foothills, coastal villages, and the classical heart of Kyoto. Along the way, we are welcomed into kitchens, workshops, temples and homes by chefs, artisans, monks, and families whose work reflects generations of local heritage. Tapping our access via long-standing relationships, this journey into Japanese culture offers an unhurried perspective on traditions that shape and inspire everyday life.

Trip Highlights

Step inside shrines, kitchens and craft studios—places where rituals, techniques and foodways flourish through authentic daily use over generations

Prepare sushi in a working kitchen, meditate with a Zen monk, and spend time with master artisans whose skills are honed through years of mentorship and discipline

Contrast the urban montage of Tokyo and Kyoto with mountains, farms and fishing villages—wander forest trails, soak in an onsen, and explore the sea coast

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Itinerary At A Glance

Day 1

Tokyo, Japan

Day 2

Tokyo—Hie-jinja Shrine / Nezu Museum / Architectural Walk

Day 3

Tokyo—Culinary Market Tour / Temple Visit / Sushi-Making / Sumi-e Artist Encounter

Day 4

Bullet Train from Tokyo to Toyama / River Retreat Garaku

Day 5

Tateyama Foothills—Sacred Shrines & Sake-Making

Day 6

Ine—An Encounter with Traditional Fishing Village Life

Day 7

Kyotango—Blue Zone Cooking / Craft Workshop

The Soul of Japan Itinerary

An Intimate Journey into Ancient Heritage & Living Traditions

Day 1: Tokyo, Japan

Arrive in Tokyo, Japan's dynamic capital, where centuries-old traditions persist within one of the world's most contemporary cityscapes. Transfer to The Kitano Hotel, a Relais & Châteaux property overlooking the Imperial Palace gardens—a quiet vantage that offers a sense of calm amid the capital's constant motion. With the journey behind us, there is time to rest, refresh and begin adjusting to Tokyo's rhythm from a vantage point that feels both central and removed from the city's bustle.

This evening, gather with our Expedition Leader for a welcome dinner at the hotel's rooftop restaurant overlooking the city. Featuring seasonal ingredients and thoughtful preparation, the meal offers a first introduction to Japanese culinary traditions and the attention to detail that shapes daily life here. Over dinner, we begin to orient ourselves to the journey ahead, setting a relaxed, unhurried tone before exploration begins in earnest the following day.



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Itinerary At A Glance

Day 8

From Miyama to Kyoto—Rural Heritage & Classical Culture

Day 9

Kyoto—Zen Meditation / Taiko Drumming / Textile Craftmanship

Day 10

Shinto Shrine / Wazuka—Tea Fields & Ceremony

Day 11

Kyoto / Depart

Day 2: Tokyo—Hie-jinja Shrine / Nezu Museum / Architectural Walk

This morning, enjoy an introduction to Tokyo at Hie-jinja Shrine, a hilltop sanctuary in the city center that is one of Tokyo's major sites honoring the practice of Shinto, Japan's indigenous faith focused on worshiping divine spirits found in nature. Passing through a corridor of 90 bright-red torii gates to enter the shrine, we move from the metropolitan hustle into a quieter space. Workers pause here before offices open, caretakers tend the grounds, and serenity prevails above the glass and steel cityscape below.

Continue to the Nezu Museum, showcasing masterworks of Japanese and Asian art. National treasures include Japanese ink paintings and ancient Chinese bronzes, plus a special gallery to an elaborate tea ceremony collection. The museum's garden is an extension of the collection, with stone paths, water features and plantings that comprise their own aesthetic. This afternoon, we walk through Aoyama and along Omotesando, districts where contemporary architecture reflects careful attention to form, material and scale rather than spectacle.

This evening, enjoy a dinner at a discreet restaurant overlooking the city. The intimate enterprise highlights seasonal cuisine, introducing us to Japanese culinary culture through its thoughtful preparation. Afterward, return to the hotel for a quiet evening at leisure.

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Day 3: Tokyo—Culinary Market Tour / Temple Visit / Sushi-Making / Sumi-e Artist Encounter

Early this morning, discover Tsukiji Outer Market, Japan's "Food Town," alongside a professional sushi chef whose day typically begins before dawn. In this mecca for culinary pros and the public alike, we find a mixture of wholesale and retail shops along with numerous restaurants and food stalls. Narrow lanes hum with commerce as fishmongers unload their catch, knives are tested for balance, and purchase decisions are made quickly based on long-standing relationships.

Leaving the bustle of the market behind, step into the serene environs of Fukagawa Fudodo Temple, established in the 18th century where it serves an esoteric branch of Shingon Buddhism. If our timing is right, we may witness a goma fire ceremony—an ancient Buddhist practice marked by monks chanting sutras, drumming, and controlled flame. Office workers, local residents and temple caretakers move in and out, with ceremonies unfolding not as a performance, but integral to daily spiritual life in modern Tokyo.

Later, we learn the fundamentals of sushi-making in a restaurant kitchen. The chef demonstrates the techniques that reveal a culinary craft shaped by precision and discipline. This afternoon, we are welcomed by a sumi-e master to witness a meditative ink-painting tradition rooted in Zen philosophy. With a limited palette and a single brush, each deliberate stroke embodies years of training as the artist seeks to capture the essence of nature using ink and wash. The precise art uses controlled brush pressure, ink dilution and speed to create varying shades of black and gray, different textures, and emotional depth. Conclude the afternoon with an immersion in everyday Japanese life in Kagurazaka, a neighborhood defined by narrow lanes and daily routines. Here, small restaurants, artist studios and family-run shops reflect continuity at human scale.

Day 4: Bullet Train from Tokyo to Toyama / River Retreat Garaku

Leave Tokyo's sprawl behind as make the swift and scenic journey west across the country by bullet train to Toyama. Apartment blocks thin, light brightens and the view widens as we glide across the Japanese Alps toward the Sea of Japan. Along the way, our Expedition Leader offers insight into how geography, climate and natural resources have influenced local life in Japan for centuries.

Arriving in Toyama, continue to River Retreat Garaku, a small luxury resort where nature, tradition and art converge in harmony. The serene property embodies classic ryokan style, with woven tatami floor mats, sliding shoji paper doors and minimalist decor for a peaceful, rejuvenating atmosphere. In this mountainous region of flowing waters and hot springs, our ryokan features an exclusive, art-focused onsen experience overlooking the Jinzu River, with both indoor and outdoor baths, a red rock-lined hot spring, saunas and a jacuzzi. Dinner is a highlight, too, with the hotel's Michelin-starred restaurant showcasing seasonal ingredients in its French and Japanese menu.

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Day 5: Tateyama Foothills—Sacred Shrines & Sake-Making

Accompanied by a local monk who has spent years walking and maintaining these grounds, enter the forested foothills of Tateyama, where we find an enduring tradition of spiritual pilgrimage rooted in mountain worship. At Ashikuraji Temple and Oyama Shrine, religious practice is sustained through acts of caretaking alongside formal ritual. Paths are cleared, stone steps repaired, water sources tended. Moving slowly through the forest, we observe how such responsibility is interwoven with ancient beliefs, carried forward season after season.

Drawn from sacred mountains, the region's pure waters also underpin its local sake production. This afternoon, we're welcomed inside a local brewery to observe the sake-making process, learning how mountain water, locally grown rice and careful timing shape each stage of production. A tasting follows, enjoyed at a slow pace that allows us to uncover the intricate layering of flavors in the rice wine samples we sip. Return for dinner and a quiet evening at our ryokan hotel, where we unwind in stillness and simple, attentive hospitality.

Day 6: Ine—An Encounter with Traditional Fishing Village Life

Travel to the Sea of Japan to arrive in Ine, a picturesque fishing village in the northern part of Kyoto Prefecture known for its historic *funaya*—distinctive boathouses built directly over the water. Serving a dual function, boats are stored below with living quarters above, a design that has served the livelihoods of local fishing families on Ine Bay for generations. Household routines are closely tied to harbor rhythms, with boats departing and returning according to tides and weather. About 230 *funaya* front the bay, preserved not as artifacts but working homes, maintained and adapted as each new generation continues to fish these coastal waters. On a walk through the village, we observe the cadence of daily life, then board a sea taxi for a closer view of the boathouses from the water. Look, too, for abundant birds, including sea hawks. This evening, we arrive at our seaside ryokan, where dinner incorporates local ingredients drawn from land and sea.

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Day 7: Kyotango—Blue Zone Cooking / Craft Workshop

In the northernmost part of Kyoto Prefecture, Kyotango lies on the Sea of Japan coast, famous for its sandy beaches, spectacular sunsets and spring cherry blossoms. Along the Tango Peninsula, small farming and fishing communities have long relied on local harvests over imported goods. This region is a part of Japan's famous "Blue Zone," celebrated for its inhabitants' healthy, long lives that are closely linked to everyday habits focused on fresh, seasonal food, physical activity, moderation, and strong community relationships. Home gardens, adjacent fields, and clean, coastal waters supply much of what appears on the table—integral elements of a food culture focused on seasonal availability and uncomplicated preparation. A local host welcomes us into her kitchen to share cooking practices rooted in regional ingredients and traditions. Meals are prepared simply, at an unhurried pace that defines everyday life and embodies a way of eating long associated with the area's exceptional longevity.

Later today, we meet with two innovative craftsmen whose work is supported by DENTO, an organization devoted to sustaining endangered craft traditions. We witness how inherited skills are adapted to contemporary needs, which often means the difference between continued use and gradual disappearance. Late this afternoon, there's time to walk to Yuhigaura Beach, famous for its long stretch of white sand, just a few minutes from our roykan, or enjoy the private open-air hot springs before dinner, and again after our meal.

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Day 8: From Miyama to Kyoto—Rural Heritage & Classical Culture

In the mountains north of Kyoto, we reach Miyama, a rural village known for its thatched-roof farmhouses. Here, we observe traditional thatching methods and, when appropriate, take part as we are instructed in this ancient practical building art. Bundles of grass are lifted, aligned and secured by hand, each step requiring balance and coordination. As we watch and work alongside local people who maintain these roofs year after year, we gain insight into the deep value of a craft sustained through necessity.

This afternoon, leave behind a rustic landscape defined by small-scale agriculture to reach a city celebrated for its imperial court culture and formal traditions as we arrive in Kyoto. Kyoto served as Japan's imperial capital and cultural heart for over 1,000 years, from 794 until the capital was moved to Tokyo in 1868. Founded by Emperor Kanmu, it was designed on a grid pattern modeled after ancient Chinese capitals. It remained Japan's center of power and culture, escaping major destruction during World War II to preserve thousands of temples and shrines. Protected as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Kyoto today remains a premier destination for traditional Japanese heritage.

Arriving in Gion, the cultural heart of Kyoto, we stay in a setting little changed over the centuries, among wooden townhouses, traditional tea houses, and lantern-lit flagstone lanes. Gion, Kyoto's most historic sector, is also its premier entertainment district, a status that arose when artistic endeavors flourished for religious pilgrims traveling to Kyoto's sacred shrines. Today, Gion is known as the center of geisha culture, where these "women of the arts," highly trained in music and dance, perform for visitors and locals alike. At dinner this evening, we're joined by a geisha whose artistic talents reflect years of training, mentorship and discipline. Nearby, our peaceful hotel is next to the temple gardens in the Okazaki quarter, with hidden paths through lush foliage offering a quiet space for contemplation.

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Day 9: Kyoto—Zen Meditation / Taiko Drumming / Textile Craftmanship

Our day begins at a temple where a Zen Buddhist monk welcomes us for an encounter with monastic life. During a guided meditation, time slows. Breath, posture and stillness take precedence, offering a glimpse into contemplative practice sustained through close attention and disciplined routine.

A vivid contrast is in store this afternoon as we take part in a taiko drumming experience, a 2,000 year-old art form used historically in Shinto and Buddhist ceremonies to communicate with the gods, and in battlefields to intimidate opponents. Today, taiko drumming is often part of festivals and rituals, featuring huge, thunderous drums that symbolize Japan's cultural, musical and spiritual soul. Drumming ensembles present high-energy, choreographed performances that mesmerize audiences with their synchronized power and theatrical energy.

Later, we visit with a textile artisan whose intricate work reflects Kyoto's longstanding role as a center of refined technique in fabric production. Learn about the materials, tools and process for producing exquisite cloth as we witness how tradition is perpetuated through diligent practice.

Day 10: Shinto Shrine / Wazuka—Tea Fields & Ceremony

Head south of Kyoto to spend the morning with a local family entrusted with the care of a Shinto shrine, learning from our hosts how spiritual responsibility is carried forward generationally. Then continue to the tea-growing region of Wazuka, where verdant plantations blanket the rolling hills in precise, straight rows of *Camellia sinensis*. Walking through the carefully tended fields with a tea master, gain insight into how weather, terrain, and timing affect each harvest. A traditional tea ceremony follows, distilling centuries of cultivation expertise into a classic Japanese ritual. This evening, we gather for a farewell dinner in Kyoto.

Day 11: Kyoto / Depart

Transfer to the airport this morning for departing flights, leaving Japan with a deep appreciation for all that is tended, prepared and shared each day.

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Accommodation Details:

Kitano Hotel Tokyo

River Retreat Garaku

Kaikatei Hanagozen

Hotel Okura Kyoto Okazaki Bettei

For detailed descriptions, visit nathab.com/cultural-journeys/japan-cultural-tour/accommodations

The Soul of Japan Accommodations

An Intimate Journey into Ancient Heritage & Living Traditions



Kitano Hotel Tokyo

Near Tokyo's Imperial Palace, this Relais & Châteaux retreat offers silk-lined suites, marble soaking tubs, and Michelin-starred dining shaped by Japanese seasonality and handcrafted design.



River Retreat Garaku

A modern ryokan with private open-air baths, forest-view spa treatments and seasonal *kaiseki*, designed for guests seeking stillness and immersion in Japan's onsen culture.



Kaikatei Hanagozen

A seaside ryokan on Kyoto's northern coast offering tatami rooms, open-air baths and crab-focused winter dining—all grounded in tradition, craftsmanship and the flavors of Kiotango.

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Hotel Okura Kyoto Okazaki Bettei

A quiet hotel near temple gardens in Kyoto, where artisan-made interiors, hinoki soaking tubs and seasonal cuisine come together in a contemporary space rooted in centuries-old tradition.

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A Different Way to Experience Japan

Japan is often experienced through a tightly scheduled circuit of iconic sites and polished cultural demonstrations. But understanding Japan requires more than seeing its landmarks—going deeper is essential, with slower pacing, exclusive access, and authentic context. This unique journey reveals how Japanese culture is sustained through lived experience rather than spectacle. In contrast to a standard tour route, our itinerary moves through neighborhoods, rural regions and working communities where we witness daily life at its own pace, with access shaped by trust built through long-standing relationships. Discover the difference you'll experience:

1

Japan Beyond the Standard Tourist Circuit

Far from conventional tour routes, our journey explores neighborhoods, rural regions, and coastal communities where daily life unfolds with little regard for outside attention. Rather than moving from highlight to highlight, guests spend time in places shaped by the rhythms of daily life: work, land stewardship, food preparation, spiritual practice and local responsibilities—offering a more grounded understanding of Japanese life as it is actually lived.

2

Exclusive Access Rooted in Working Relationships

We are welcomed into temples, kitchens, studios and workshops by monks, chefs, artisans and caretakers who actively uphold their disciplines. These encounters take place within genuine environments rather than staged settings, allowing experiences to unfold naturally and at an unhurried pace. We are received as guests, rather than tourist observers, with time for attentive observation, conversation and shared activity. We witness how Japanese culture is sustained through lived practice rather than formal preservation.

3

Supporting Craft Traditions Through DENTO Partnerships

In select regions, we meet master artisans whose skills are increasingly fragile, threatened by aging practitioners and shrinking local markets. These encounters are made possible through our partnership with DENTO, an organization that sustains traditional crafts by connecting artisans with new audiences beyond Japan. Inside working studios, we see how inherited techniques are adapted for contemporary relevance—which often means the difference between continued practice and ultimate disappearance. Our presence supports this effort, helping ensure that rare skills remain living traditions rather than museum artifacts.

4

Understanding Culture & Values Through Shared Time with Families

We are welcomed into private homes to meet local families and experience their daily lives in diverse settings. Through conversation, cooking and spending time together, gain insight into how values are carried forward between generations—not through formal instruction, but through lived example and everyday domestic practices.

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5

Small Groups Make Intimate Access Possible

With a maximum of just 12 guests, our small group size allows access to spaces where larger groups are neither practical nor appropriate. This scale supports unhurried encounters, meaningful conversation and hands-on participation in cultural activities with our hosts, while respecting customs and traditions in the communities we visit.

6

Locally Owned Accommodations with Character

On a journey with Terra & Tu, where you stay should be as memorable as what you do. That's why we choose our small hotels, inns and private retreats for their intimate scale, local ambience and hospitality. You'll be warmly greeted and cared for, as if you were a personal guest.

7

Insightful & Sensitive Leadership Throughout

A Terra & Tu Expedition Leader accompanies the group throughout the journey, providing cultural context, facilitating introductions, and connecting experiences across regions. Our guide's role is not to lecture but to interpret, translate and create space for observation, reflection and dialogue as our journey unfolds.

8

Built on Nat Hab's Expertise

Terra & Tu is built on the same experiential travel philosophy, operational rigor and leadership standards that have defined Natural Habitat Adventures for decades. From small groups facilitating deep local engagement to guide selection, training and on-the-ground execution, this journey embodies a proven approach to immersive travel across diverse destinations worldwide.

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Dates & Pricing Summary:

Prices:
From \$17995

Group Size:
Limited to 12 Travelers

The Soul of Japan Dates, Pricing & Info

An Intimate Journey into Ancient Heritage & Living Traditions

2027 Departures

Departure	Return	Notes
May 11, 2027	May 21, 2027	\$18495 USD
May 18, 2027	May 28, 2027	\$18495 USD
May 25, 2027	Jun 4, 2027	\$17995 USD
Jun 8, 2027	Jun 18, 2027	\$18495 USD
Jun 22, 2027	Jul 2, 2027	\$17995 USD
Sep 7, 2027	Sep 17, 2027	\$18495 USD

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Dates & Pricing Summary:

Prices:
From \$\$17995

Group Size:
Limited to 12
Travelers

Departure	Return	Notes
Sep 21, 2027	Oct 1, 2027	\$18495 USD
Oct 12, 2027	Oct 22, 2027	\$18495 USD

2028 Departures

Departure	Return	Notes
! Prices and dates not confirmed for 2028		
May 9, 2028	May 19, 2028	\$18995 USD
May 16, 2028	May 26, 2028	\$18995 USD
May 23, 2028	Jun 2, 2028	\$18995 USD
May 30, 2028	Jun 9, 2028	\$18995 USD
Jun 6, 2028	Jun 16, 2028	\$18995 USD
Jun 13, 2028	Jun 23, 2028	\$18995 USD
Jun 20, 2028	Jun 30, 2028	\$18995 USD
Sep 5, 2028	Sep 15, 2028	\$18995 USD
Sep 12, 2028	Sep 22, 2028	\$18995 USD
Sep 19, 2028	Sep 29, 2028	\$18995 USD
Sep 26, 2028	Oct 6, 2028	\$18995 USD

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Departure	Return	Notes
! Prices and dates not confirmed for 2028		
Oct 3, 2028	Oct 13, 2028	\$18995 USD
Oct 10, 2028	Oct 20, 2028	\$18995 USD
Oct 17, 2028	Oct 27, 2028	\$18995 USD

Pricing

See <https://nathab.com/cultural-journeys/japan-cultural-tour/dates-fees> for the latest pricing details.

Included

Accommodations, services of Nat Hab's professional Expedition Leader(s) and local guides, all meals from lunch on Day 1 through breakfast on final day, some alcoholic beverages, some gratuities, airport transfers on Day 1 and final day, passage aboard the bullet train from Tokyo to Toyama and Toyama to Tsuruga, all activities and entrance fees, all taxes, permits and service fees.

Not Included

Travel to and from the start and end point of your trip, some alcoholic beverages, some gratuities, passport and visa fees, optional activities, items of a personal nature (phone calls, laundry, etc.), required medical evacuation insurance, optional travel protection insurance.

Important Information About This Trip

This special journey offers far more than typical sightseeing and cultural activities. It's an authentic, in-depth experience in parts of Japan rarely seen by travelers. By venturing into the side streets of major metropolises and to the northern coast where few Westerners visit, we step away from tourist crowds and into a world where traditional lifestyles flourish. But that's only the beginning. With Terra & Tu, you will have personal interactions with artisans safeguarding ancient crafts, see traditional homesteads and lifestyles still in practice, and experience the handmade care of one of the world's most celebrated cuisines. This itinerary is thoughtfully curated through our meaningful connections within these communities, ensuring a unique encounter with Japan's living heritage.

During your journey in Japan, you will have the opportunity to experience one of the country's most cherished traditions: the *onsen*, or Japanese hot spring bath. *Onsens* use naturally heated mineral water from underground springs and represent an important cultural ritual for many Japanese people. Accordingly, it is critical that visitors adhere to local etiquette. This typically entails dividing baths by gender, requiring bathers to be completely nude, and sometimes prohibiting guests with visible tattoos from entering. Onsen experiences on this journey are entirely optional and take place in the evenings, allowing for flexibility in the schedule for guests who do not participate.

Given ample notice, our team can accommodate many dietary needs and restrictions. Please contact us with specific requirements.

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Getting There & Getting Home

This trip begins in Tokyo and ends in Kyoto. Because this is a long international journey, **we recommend that you arrive the night before Day 1** to rest from your travels and begin the trip refreshed. For guests who come in early, recommended hotels will be included in your pre-departure materials.

If you plan to arrive on Day 1, you must arrive in Tokyo by 3 pm in order to meet your group for an orientation and dinner.

You may depart Kyoto at any time on the final day.

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Extension Details:

Vietnam Cultural Journey
\$12695

The Wild Side of China: A Nature Odyssey
\$13995

Wild China Photo Expedition
\$16295

The Soul of Japan Extensions

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Vietnam Cultural Journey

This journey invites you into the everyday life of Vietnam, where culture is shaped by place, people, and history. Moving slowly through North and Central Vietnam, we explore villages, waterways, and historic towns while experiencing living traditions—shared meals, local practices, and quiet encounters that bring the country's character to life.

\$12695



The Wild Side of China: A Nature Odyssey

Discover a side of China most travelers never see on our unique itinerary revealing wild panda habitat, rare wildlife and Chinese nature at its most entrancing—including close-up panda encounters.

\$13995



Wild China Photo Expedition

Photograph striking mountain landscapes and rare wildlife including golden snub-nosed monkeys, get close-ups of giant pandas at research bases, and document life in traditional Tibetan villages—plus the Terracotta Army!

\$16295

