

MRS Gunma Vacations

Kings, Castles & Silk Tour

Short Description

Dive deep into the ancient culture of Japan in a private tour based at a historic villa in a castle town.

Summary of a Sample Itinerary

Day 1

Welcome → Tomb Visit and Picnic Lunch → Samurai & Ninja Dressing → Dinner & Onsen

Day 2

Breakfast at villa → Mountain Shrine & Gondola ride → Picnic Lunch → Ninja Museum → Railroad Cycling → Dinner & Onsen

Day 3

Breakfast at villa → Japanese Gardens & Samurai House → Castle Grounds → Farewell

Kings, Castles & Silk Tour			
Description	Travel back in time to the ancient Jōmon and Kofun periods when kings ruled the land, and to the tumultuous warring Sengoku Period when castles sprung up throughout Japan with loyal samurai and ninja serving their lords. With a stay at a former silk mill manor house on the 'hondori' main road leading up to the expansive grounds of one of the top 100 castles of this era, Minowa Castle, you will be immersed in history throughout your stay. This region provides a multitude of castle and silk related activities to suit the interest of guests of all ages.		
Availability	Year round		
Lodging	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Kiyomizu House</td> <td> <p>This historical villa, at the main entry road to the castle, is surrounded by gardens, museums, mountains, spiritual and nature sites.</p> <p>Castle-size home with timber sourced from all the mountains of Gunma. Massive interior with fun and food in mind: Everything from table tennis to wine coolers</p> </td> </tr> </table>	Kiyomizu House	<p>This historical villa, at the main entry road to the castle, is surrounded by gardens, museums, mountains, spiritual and nature sites.</p> <p>Castle-size home with timber sourced from all the mountains of Gunma. Massive interior with fun and food in mind: Everything from table tennis to wine coolers</p>
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Itinerary		
Day 1	<p>Travel from Tokyo to Takasaki, Gunma</p> <p>Sightseeing in Takasaki</p> <p>Activities at Kiyomizu House</p> <p>Dinner & Onsen</p>	<p>For taxi pick up: JR Annaka-Haruna Shinkansen Station</p> <p>For car rental: JR Takasaki Station</p> <p>When driving your car: Go directly to Kiyomizu House</p>
Activities	Period Dressing	Dress as a samurai heading to the castle, a ninja and in a hot spring yukata to head to the onsen
Visit Suggestions	<p>Kamitsukeno Haniwa-no-Sato Park & museum, Hodota Tombs & JA Hagukumi Haniwa no Sato Farmer's Market</p>	Explore two tombs, one with terracotta haniwa statues of objects representing everyday life that were used in king's tombs, and the other keyhole shaped tomb covered in sasa bamboo. Enjoy the majestic 360 degree view of the mountains encircling Gunma, then enter the tumulus and view the stone boat-shaped tomb. The museum
	Minowa Castle Grounds	Feel the magnitude of the warring powers of the 1500s in this massive 47 hectare (116 acre) expanse at the foothills of Mt. Haruna Fuji that offers a strategic view of both Takasaki and Maebashi cities from this 30m hilltop. Although the main castle tower is not standing, visitors can enjoy hiking throughout the paths, deep moats and take commemorative photos at the reconstructed gate, bridge, massive well and peace monuments.
	Kyu-Shimoda-tei Gardens & Samurai Shoin	After the fall of Minowa Castle the land area where Kiyomizu House is located was granted for the family of its vassal, Nagano, and two huge estates were built. In the late 1600s, the renown swordsman, Horibe Yasube, built the Kyoto-style gardens next to the Samurai Shōin, entertainment and martial arts practice rooms. Enjoy the pond with carp, moss-lined paths, kura storage house, massive red pine and other trees which can be seen from Kiyomizu House.
Day 2	【Higashi-Agatsuma】	Travel 45 min north on a scenic drive to

		Agatsuma, the valley on the way to Kusatsu Onsen. Here, guests can enjoy a multitude of activities in one central area.
	(1) Ninpaku Ninja Museum	housing Japan's largest collection of ninja tools and offering modern activities for all to enjoy.
	(2) Jōmo Era Heart-Shaped Clay Figure Workshop	Make earthenware figurines that were placed in Jōmon era tombs
	(3) Iwabitsu Castle Ruins visit	(3) Enjoy an Indiana Jones-like adventure at the Iwabitsu Castle Ruins grounds
	(4) A-Gattan railway tracks bike ride & Yamba Dam	(4) Ride a bike "A-Gattan" attached to railway tracks that are no longer in use while enjoying the scenery of Yamba Dam
Optional Sightseeing	Haruna Shrine Lake Haruna, Mt. Haruna Fuji	For a half-day of Higashi-Agatsuma activities, you can enjoy the sights of Haruna on the way there or back. This beloved sacred area is one of Gunma's most scenic and popular attractions.
	Meals	Breakfast at Kiyomizu House Lunch in Higashi-Agatsuma Kaiseki Dinner in Maebashi
Day 3	【Takasaki & Tomioka】	Explore the silk history of Gunma
	Lake Narusawa	Early morning walk around Lake Narusawa with panoramic views of Mt Haruna's mountain range and Takasaki. Start your last vacation day with a breakfast picnic. 5 min drive from Kiyomizu House.
	Nippon Silk Center	A 10 min drive from Kiyomizu House. Lovely Japanese-style buildings houses an expansive permanent and seasonal collections of silk making and kimonos that are a visual treat. Cocoon craft making classes available. Reservations and Japanese necessary.
	UNESCO World Heritage Site Tomioka Silk Mill	Collaboration between the French and Japanese to establish the industry of mechanical silk reeling and spark the industrial revolution.

	Return to Tokyo	
Optional Activities		
Takasaki	Byakue Dai-Kannon Statue, Kannon Caves, Japanese Gardens	Admire the majestic white statue from afar and climb the stairway to the top for a glorious view of Takasaki ~ Insides filled with sacred statues and artwork.
Takasaki	Daimonya Daruma Atelier & Shorinzan Daruma Temple	Huge variety of Daruma good luck dolls and Maneki-neko Welcome cats in the gift shop. Make a reservation to paint the tortoise and crane on your own doll alongside a master craftsman in the private atelier
Matsumoto, Nagano	Matsumoto Castle	It's a 2h drive from Gunma, but worth the trip if you have time. This rare original castle structure is absolutely stunning, especially during the cherry blossom season.
Karuizawa, Nagano	Prince Shopping Plaza & Ski Resort	This premiere resort town in Japan often comes with prohibitive price tags. Take advantage of staying is the low-cost Gunma and taking a day trip to this fantastic area. The outdoor walkways of the plaza share haute couture, show dogs and grassy slopes with a central pond and mountain backdrop. If you are traveling via shinkansen, why not end your trip here as the station is right at the plaza and ski resort.
	Senju Hiroshi Museum	About a 10 min drive from Karuizawa's shopping plaza, this one-of-a-kind blend of nature and art is not to be missed.
Seasonal Activities		
Jan-March	Skiing & Snowboarding	There are 20+ ski resorts within a 1 ½ h drive of Kiyomizu House. Ski or snowboard during the day, and enjoy a snow-free evening and early morning. You get the best of both worlds by staying in Takasaki where snow rarely stays on the ground.
March	Plum Blossom Festival	Kiyomizu House is surrounded by plum trees, and the largest grove in Kanto is just a 5 min drive away. The hillsides cascading in pinks and whites offer a view similar to the sakura season, with the blossoms generally

		lasting longer.
Late March - Early April	Cherry Blossoms ~ Sakura Season!	The neighborhood park offers a cherry tree lined river walkway as well as a 360 degree circle of blossoms around a huge grass field. So few people, even at the peak. This is Gunma ~ See flowers, not people!
Mid April - Early May	Shibazakura Park	Swirls of phlox moss “shibazakura” in cute heart shapes and other fanciful designs adorn the hillside a 5 min drive from Kiyomizu House.
Late May - June	Spring Foliage	Patches of bright green
Mid-Late October	Koizumi Cosmos Festival	Millions of beautiful flowers with the vermilion Koizumi Inari gate in the backdrop. The perfect Instagram moment!
Late October - Mid November	Fall Foliage Illumination at Kyu-Shimoda-tei Gardens	The cluster of about 15 massive maple trees is stunning during the day, and jaw dropping during the week-long illumination period. Lucky Kiyomizu guests need only stroll 3 min from their lodging to enjoy this spectacular sight. When the red leaves fall and make a carpet that blends seamlessly into the branches. Exact dates vary. Please inquire.
Most of December	Lake Haruna Illumination Festival	Over half a million festively shaped lights sparkle in the clear winter sky in the high elevation. Lazer lake show and occasional fireworks display
Events		
Last Sunday in October	Minowa Castle Festival	Witness reenactments of a the samurai procession to the castle in preparation for battle, as well as their skillful movements when engaging with the enemy
October	Kitsune no Oyome-iri (Fox Wedding Festival)	The ancients believed that at times a person could be possessed by a fox, and the way to appease it would be to perform a marriage ceremony with its host. This
October	Misato Fall Music Festival	Misato City Hall & Kyu-Shimoda-tei Japanese Gardens & Samurai House (next to Kiyomizu House) Concert, games, food stall, tea ceremony

October	Kamitsukenosato Kofun (Tombs) Festival	Enjoy a reenactment of the king's ritual, make haniwa and , see over 300,000 cosmos flowers sway in the autumn breeze with a majestic backdrop of Gunma's mountains Museum entry free on this date. Ask for details.
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