1. Tokyo (A) – Day 1 and 2 (4 nights)

The original and more detailed itinerary can be found here: http://nerdnomads.com/japan-two-week-itinerary

Start your Japan adventure in the urban, modern and energetic big-city Tokyo. Spend two full days here, as there are plenty to do and see in this city. Tokyo is the place to experience the modern side and culture of this amazing country.

2. Nikko (B) – Day 3 – as a day trip from Tokyo

In the morning of day 3, activate your JR train pass in Tokyo, and take an early morning train up to Nikko (2 hours north of Tokyo) for a day-trip. Use the whole day walking among these amazing colorful shrines and temples tucked away in the green and lush forest.

In the evening head back to Tokyo for the night.

Read more about what to see in Nikko here: http://nerdnomads.com/temples-of-nikko

3. Hakone (C) – Day 4 (1 night)

Take a morning train south to Hakone (2 hours). Spend the day walking around in Hakone town and its peaceful surroundings, and admire the spectacular view of Japan’s highest mountain Mount Fuji (3776 meters), and one of Japan’s three sacred mountains.

Spend the night in Hakone, and in the evening indulge in one of the many hot springs/ Onsen here. Be sure to read our guide to how to take Onsen to save yourself some embarrassment before jumping in :)

Read more about what to see and do in Matsumoto here: http://nerdnomads.com/matsumoto

4. Matsumoto (D) – Day 5 (1 night)

The next day, head north up to Matsumoto after breakfast (4,5 hours by train). Spend the day visiting the beautiful Crow Castle, and walk around the cozy streets by the river in the evening.

Spend the night at one of the many nice hotels in Matsumoto.

Read our complete and detailed Alpine Route guide here: http://nerdnomads.com/alpine-route-japan

5. Alpine Route – Day 6

Get up real early in Matsumoto, and do the Alpine Route Tateyama-Kurobe (we spent 9 hours altogether on this route, but it can be done faster if you don’t want to walk around on the mountain as much as we did).

In the evening, take the train to Kanazawa city on the west coast of Japan.

Read our complete and detailed Alpine Route guide here: http://nerdnomads.com/alpine-route-japan

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6. Kanazawa (E) – Day 7 (2 nights)

Spend a full day in the beautiful Kanazawa city, visit Kanazawa Castle, go for a walk in the stunning Kenroku-en garden ranked as one of the top three gardens in Japan, and stroll through the Samurai district and the geisha district. Top off your day in Kanazawa with some shopping and a delicious Japanese meal downtown in the evening. Stay two nights in Kanazawa.

Read more about what to see and do in Kanazawa here: http://nerdnomads.com/kanazawa

7. Shirakawa-go (F) – Day 8

Take the bus to Shirakawa-go the next day (1.5 hour). Stroll around the narrow streets of this World Heritage Site and admire the over 110 famous gassho-zukuri farmhouses, many of which are now museums and restaurants. Take the bus to Takayama city in the evening (50 minutes).

Read more about what to see in Shirakawa-go here: http://nerdnomads.com/guide_to_shirakawa-go

8. Takayama (G) – Day 9 (2 nights)

Spend a whole day in the beautifully preserved old city of Takayama, and indulge in old Japan history and museums. Takayama is also a great place to try a traditional Ryokan hotel.

If you want, hire a bike and bike out to the Hida Folk Village and the Teddy Bear Museum(!) just outside of Takayama center.

Read more about Takayama and staying in a Ryokan here: http://nerdnomads.com/staying-in-ryokan

9. Kyoto (H) – Day 10, 11 and 12 (3 nights)

There are plenty to see and do in this amazing city, like exploring hundreds of beautiful temples, going for a stroll through the magic bamboo forest and walk under thousands of bright red torii gates at Fushimi-Inari Shrine.

Trust me, time will fly in this big city, so if you have a few days more, spend them in Kyoto.

Read more about some of the Kyotos highlight here:

Kyoto Bamboo Forest: http://nerdnomads.com/bamboo-grove-kyoto
Fushimi-Inari Shrine: http://nerdnomads.com/fushimi-inari-shrine

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10. Hiroshima and Miyajima Island (I) – Day 13

Take an early morning train from Kyoto to Hiroshima (2 hours) and spend the day visiting the Hiroshima Atomic Bomb Museum, and head out to Miyajima Island to see the floating torii gate. In the evening, take a late train to Nara (3.5 hours). Spend the night in Nara.

Read more about Hiroshima here: http://nerdnomads.com/peace-memorial-ceremony-hiroshima
Read more about what to see in Miyajima Island here: http://nerdnomads.com/miyajima-island

11. Nara (J) – Day 14 (1 night)

Nara is home to the greatest Buddha image in Japan and is Japan’s first permanent capital. Visit some of the oldest and biggest temples in Japan, and feed and cuddle the deer that walks freely around the city and temples.

Head back to Tokyo in the evening (4 hours) and enjoy the astonishing cuisine that Tokyo has to offer on your last nights out in this great metropole.

The End

That’s it, our recommended 14 days itinerary to see the best of Japan. This is, however, a quite packed itinerary. If you want to take things a bit slower, you can cut down on the temples and shrines and choose either Nikko or Nara and not both.

You can also skip both of them as you will be able to see plenty of shrines and temples in Kyoto and Tokyo. Then you can put in an extra day or two in Kyoto or Tokyo. Or you can add a couple of days in Osaka to your trip.

This itinerary can also easily be expanded to suit a three-week trip, that would give you more breaks from traveling, and more time to enjoy each place. You can buy a three week JR Pass, but they are more expensive than the two weeks ones.

Japan is expensive compared to other Asian countries, but it is possible to travel Japan on the cheap. We highly recommend that you buy a JR train pass to cut down on your travel expenses.

Read our tips and tricks on how to save money on your travels in Japan: http://nerdnomads.com/expensive-japan-travel-cheap
Check out our guide of what to eat in Japan: http://nerdnomads.com/japanese-food

Happy exploring!

Best Regards,

Maria & Espen