



MINI SEMESTER



**pacific
discovery**
inspiring educational adventures

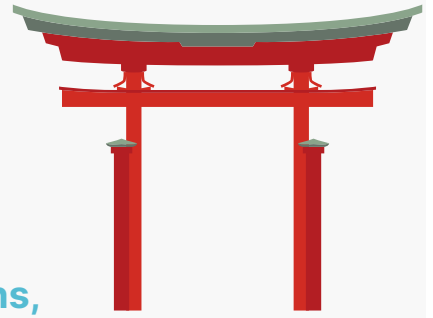
Japan Mini Semester Program

CULTURE, ADVENTURE &
COMMUNITY CONNECTION

www.pacificdiscovery.org



Overview



Uncover the spirit of Japan through ancient traditions, modern innovation, and authentic community connection.

Japan is a country where timeless traditions meet modern innovation, where sacred temples stand beside neon skylines, and where every encounter invites you to slow down and connect. This mini semester offers an immersive journey through Japan's cities, countryside, and mountains — a perfect blend of culture, community, and adventure.

Over five transformative weeks, you'll explore Tokyo's urban pulse, hike through the tranquil Japanese Alps, learn the art of tea ceremony in Kyoto, and reflect on peace and resilience in Hiroshima. Along the way, you'll stay with local families, volunteer in conservation projects, and discover how Japan's reverence for nature shapes its future.

If you're curious about how the old and new harmonize, and want to experience Japan beyond the surface — this journey is for you.





Safety

With our 20 years of operation and more than 100,000 student days in the field, we have an excellent safety record.

We even got voted as one of the Top Gap Year Providers for Safety by students on Go Overseas! Safety is something we pride ourselves on at Pacific Discovery, so it feels amazing to be recognized for the efforts we go through.



Accreditations

We have had our safety management systems assessed and accredited by the Gap Year Association (USA), Year Out Group (UK), and OutdoorsMark (New Zealand). Assessors have commented that our systems are among the best they have observed.



Who We Are

We are an accredited gap year provider that offers experiential gap semester and summer programs to some of the most amazing places on earth. Our programs are deliberate overland journeys, blending authentic immersion in diverse cultures, meaningful service-learning projects, rewarding adventures, wilderness exploration, and personal development.



Our Programs

Our programs are more than simply a travel, time-out or study abroad experience. Each is instead an overland journey of discovery, where students are immersed in a facilitated learning environment, designed to maximize the educational and life-skills potential.



Our Philosophy

We want to make the world a better place by providing extraordinary learning adventures that assist students in gaining the skills, confidence and insight to realize their potential in an increasingly global society; developing empathy for other cultures; furthering understanding of international issues; and heightening appreciation for the earth's wilderness and diversity.

Core Educational Components

Our programs are as much a journey of personal development as they are a physical journey, and participants are supported in reflecting together and thinking about their values, goals and what they wish to gain from the program experience.

PRE-PROGRAM

Prior to program start, participants are asked to create some goals for the program – this is personal and unique to each individual group member. Participants are given a suggested outline of skills and competencies that they can choose to focus upon.

DURING PROGRAM

At program orientation, goals participants have identified are discussed in a meeting with the program leaders. Throughout the program, ideas, tools and strategies are discussed that can be useful to help participants achieve their goals both on the program and for the rest of their lives. Participants are encouraged to journal during the program to assist them in clarifying their thoughts and define what they are learning.

TRANSFER AND FOLLOW UP

At the conclusion of the program, participants give a presentation to their group and leaders, summarizing how they've been challenged, what they've learned, how they've grown and how they intend to apply what they've learned to their lives after the program.

Towards the end of the program participants are also asked to write a letter to themselves imagining where they want to be in 6 months' time and identifying behaviors, habits and changes they wish to put in place. These letters are sent to them 6 months after program conclusion, helping reinforce the learning that has occurred.



Program Design

Each of our programs incorporate the following six core program components. These six interdependent components, provide immense opportunity for students to learn about themselves, to push their boundaries, question their assumptions, to stimulate problem solving and inquiry skills.



EDUCATIONAL FOCUS

Our programs are experiential education programs, meaning that learning is hands-on and tangible. For example, students will learn about a country's history and culture by immersing themselves in it, meeting local people and hearing life stories.



ETHICAL TRAVEL & SUSTAINABILITY

Students show respect for local customs, develop meaningful cross-cultural relationships, learn minimum-impact grassroots travel techniques and come to understand social and ecological issues on a deeper level.



OUTDOOR EXPLORATION

Immersion in the wilderness is an opportunity for students to become grounded, teaches appreciation for wild places and provides us the opportunity to explore local environmental issues and relate these issues to global environmental themes



SERVICE LEARNING

Volunteer elements built into our programs allow students to really immerse themselves in a place and share an experience with local people, bridging the gap that often exists between visitor and host.



CULTURAL IMMERSION

We immerse students in the local culture, through homestays, volunteer projects and language study. Students learn empathy for other cultures and build bridges of shared understanding.



PERSONAL & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Throughout the program, students are given leadership opportunities from facilitating reflection to coordinating the daily schedule.



Sample Itinerary

***This is a guide to what you can expect to do on program.
The order in which the activities occur might vary***

WEEK 1 | TOKYO: URBAN EXPLORATION & CULTURAL IMMERSION

Welcome to Japan! On arrival in Tokyo, you'll meet your Pacific Discovery program leaders and settle into accommodation in Shibuya or Asakusa.

Explore Tokyo's blend of old and new — from the peaceful Senso-ji Temple and Imperial Palace gardens to the bustling neighborhoods of Shinjuku and Harajuku. Visit the Tsukiji Fish Market for a sushi breakfast and learn about Japan's culinary traditions.

Then, move into a homestay experience where you'll live with a Japanese family, gaining firsthand insight into customs, etiquette, and daily life.



WEEK 2 | KYOTO & NARA: TRADITIONAL HEART OF JAPAN

Travel to Kyoto, the cultural capital, and stay in a traditional ryokan. Visit World Heritage temples including Kiyomizu-dera, the Golden Pavilion (Kinkaku-ji), and Fushimi Inari Shrine with its famous torii gates. Participate in a meditative tea ceremony and discover the artistry of Japanese tea culture.

Take a day trip to nearby Nara, where friendly deer roam freely and the massive bronze Buddha at Todai-ji Temple symbolizes Japan's ancient spiritual roots. Enjoy a kaiseki dinner — a beautifully arranged meal celebrating Japan's seasonal produce.



WEEK 3 | TAKAYAMA & JAPANESE ALPS ADVENTURE

Head north to the mountain town of Takayama, known for its samurai heritage and Edo-period streets. From here, embark on a hiking adventure through the Japanese Alps — staying in local lodges or mountain huts. Learn about Japan's relationship with nature, forest conservation, and traditional mountain life.

Optional activities include cycling through rural villages or taking part in a washi (paper-making) or sake-brewing workshop.



WEEK 4 | COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSERVATION

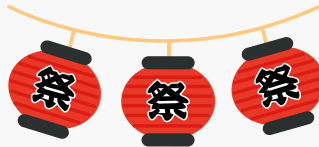
Join a local environmental or community project, assisting with forest restoration, school-based cultural exchange, or sustainable farming initiatives. This phase offers a deeper look at Japan's environmental philosophies — emphasizing harmony between human habitation and nature.



WEEK 5 | HIROSHIMA & MIYAJIMA: PEACE, REFLECTION & FAREWELL

Travel to Hiroshima to visit the Peace Memorial Park and Museum — a powerful reminder of resilience and hope. Take a ferry to Miyajima Island to see the floating torii gate of Itsukushima Shrine, hike Mount Misen, and enjoy sweeping coastal views.

Wrap up your journey with a group cooking class, learning to make Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki. During your farewell dinner, reflect on the lessons, friendships, and memories gained throughout your time in Japan.



Program Highlights

- Explore Tokyo's vibrant city life, temples, and markets
- Experience a homestay with a Japanese family
- Take part in a traditional Kyoto tea ceremony
- Visit Nara's giant Buddha and friendly deer park
- Trek through the Japanese Alps or Shikoku's pilgrim trails
- Volunteer with community and conservation initiatives
- Visit Hiroshima's Peace Memorial and Miyajima's floating torii gate
- Learn to cook authentic Japanese dishes
- Experience the perfect blend of culture, reflection, and adventure



COUNTRY INFORMATION

Japan: An island nation of contrasts, Japan combines ancient Shinto and Buddhist traditions with cutting-edge modernity. From snowy mountains and bamboo forests to futuristic cities, it is a land where precision, beauty, and respect for nature permeate every aspect of life.

CLIMATE

Japan experiences four distinct seasons.

- **Spring (Mar–May):** Cherry blossoms and mild weather (10–20°C / 50–68°F).
 - **Autumn (Sep–Nov):** Crisp air and colorful foliage (12–22°C / 54–72°F).
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MEALS

Japanese cuisine is celebrated worldwide for its freshness and balance. Expect to enjoy dishes like ramen, tempura, sushi, donburi, and miso soup — and learn how cultural values like mindfulness and respect influence the act of eating.

TRANSPORT

We'll travel by private van, trains (including the bullet train), and ferries during this program.

SUITABILITY

Designed for students aged 17–22 with an interest in culture, sustainability, and adventure. No prior travel experience required — just curiosity, teamwork, and a willingness to step outside your comfort zone.

ATTITUDE

The program is a shared group experience. We would like you to join the program with an open mind and a willingness to work together with your group mates to make the program an amazing experience. The programs focus on group cohesion. We appreciate you for being open to learning and challenging your ideas and assumptions in order to get the most from this abroad experience.

GROUP SIZE

Group sizes vary per program and are generally 12-14 students, accompanied by two experienced and qualified Pacific Discovery program instructors. Local guides assist with interpretation of some historical sites, cultural experiences, and activities.

PROGRAM LEADERSHIP

We have selected a dynamic team of inspiring, supportive, resourceful, and highly experienced instructors to lead our programs. Our program instructors are committed to putting your welfare and safety first. They are people in whom you can trust and confide, who remain objective whatever the circumstances, and who take a genuine interest in your well-being. They implicitly understand the importance of balancing the needs of individuals with group objectives, facilitating a high level of group cohesion, inspiring a genuine appreciation for the areas visited and an awareness of minimum impact travel ethics. All of our instructors have Wilderness First Responder (WFR) first aid certification, and extensive group leadership and risk assessment/management training.

ACCOMMODATION

A mix of hostels, traditional ryokan inns, homestays, and mountain lodges. All clean, comfortable, and selected to enhance immersion and safety.

FREE TIME

Programs are heavily scheduled so that we are always on the move and having lots of structured fun; but we highly value rest and reflection. There will be some designated free time in a town or city each week so that you can catch up on email and laundry and rest.

HEALTH

One component of all of our programs is outdoor adventures like hiking, biking and kayaking, so while you don't need to have done any of these before, you will need to be prepared and have the fitness level to give them a go. If you have any queries regarding health recommendations for travel, please contact your doctor, or a travel doctor, to discuss this.

For further information refer to: [http:// wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/)

We also recommend you be up to date on specific vaccinations that are required to travel in this region.

We recommend that you carry a personal first-aid kit as well as any personal medication. Please be aware that for legal reasons, our program instructors are prohibited from administering any type of drug. Please ensure that you are adequately prepared.

SPENDING MONEY

Spending money usually goes towards drinks and snacks, personal shopping, laundry, email, entertainment, and optional activities. We recommend you budget approximately \$100 a week for this, but this varies per student and per program. The amount of spending money you bring depends on your budget and shopping habits. You need to bring this money yourself.

Optional activities are available on many programs that can add to this cost, such as skydiving, bungee jumping, extra surfing lessons, etc.

KEEPING IN TOUCH

Our students value the opportunity to wind down, immerse in their surroundings and talk to each other. We encourage students to self manage their phone use, and we strongly encourage flight mode. This allows students to still take photos and send updates to family when in wifi, but allows them to be fully connected to the locals, service work and community when they're out and about. You are able to purchase a SIM or use international roaming plans if you wish. The easiest option is to use the WIFI available at places we stay in main cities and towns. Family and friends will also be able to keep in touch and follow your adventures through Pacific Discovery's social media pages, and through an online Facebook album for your group (which your instructors will upload photos to each week).

PASSPORTS AND VISAS

Travel abroad requires a passport. If you don't have one, you need to apply for one as soon as you apply for this program.

US Government Passport website: <http://travel.state.gov/passport/>

If you already have a passport, it must be valid for more than 6 months after program end, otherwise you need to get a new one issued before joining the program. Pacific Discovery will contact you regarding visa requirements and arrangements after you apply for the program.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Pacific Discovery requires all students to purchase a comprehensive travel insurance policy for the duration of the program. Travel insurance provides cover in the event of medical expenses due to illness, injury, and emergency medical evacuation. Travel insurance may also include cover for loss of baggage or personal effects, and trip cancellation or trip curtailment.

To arrange your policy, [click here to go to our website](#).

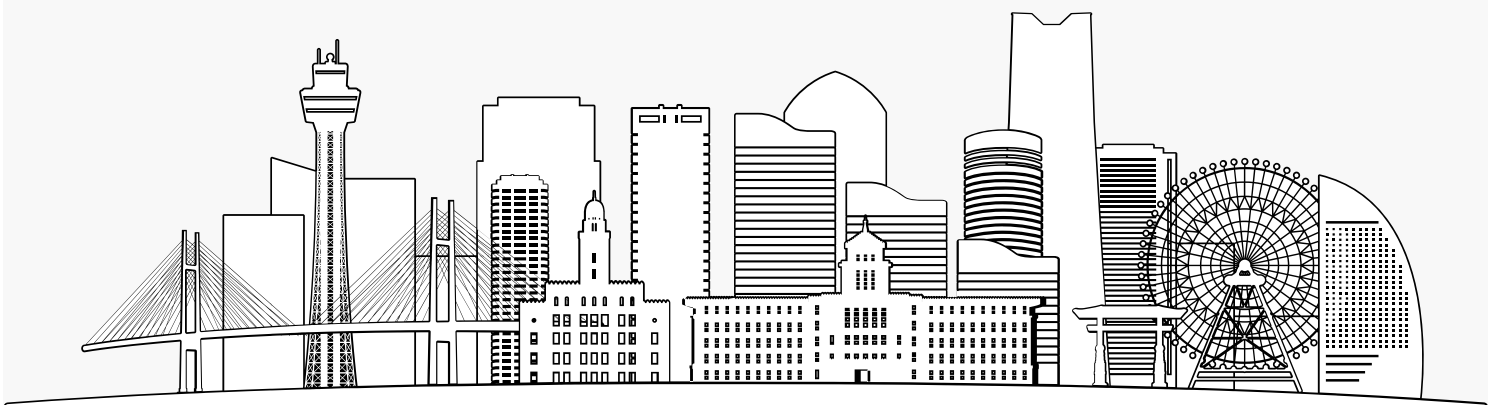
COVID-19

COVID-19 has impacted all of our lives greatly, and Pacific Discovery has developed rigorous policies for safety based on professional advice and endorsement. The health of our students is of the utmost importance at all times. We are working closely and regularly with health professionals on our COVID-19 policy, as the situation continues to develop.

[Read our full COVID-19 policy here.](#)

PEACE OF MIND

Pacific Discovery is an educational travel organization accredited with American Gap Association (USA). Since its inception in 2001, Pacific Discovery has taken several thousand students, graduates, faculty, family and special interest groups, on experiential travel and volunteer programs, utilizing a staff of experienced and qualified program instructors. We have an exemplary safety record, comprehensive Risk Management Systems and a database of alumni, parents, advisors and faculty, who are happy to be contacted for feedback. The program carries public liability insurance, and student funds are held securely until disbursement.



Program Tuition & Costs

A \$250 application fee is due when you apply. Upon acceptance onto program, a deposit is due within 14 days. Balance of program cost to be paid 60 days prior to departure.

Included in Program Tuition

- All in-country travel and transport
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All activities, excursions, entry fees and adventure travel as described in the itinerary
- Informal lectures from resident experts on conservation and sustainability, history, and culture.
- Experienced program Instructors and local guides.

Not Included in Program Tuition

- Travel (international flights) between your home and the program
- Internal flights
- Visas
- Spending money (we suggest allowing \$15 per day for drinks, snacks and personal expenses)
- Travel insurance
- Optional academic credit
- Optional activity costs ie skydiving, bungee jumping, and additional surf lessons.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Students should not book their travel until after they have received the flight confirmation email from Pacific Discovery with the program flight requirements and travel agent details. This is sent out 2-3 months ahead of program departure. This information is also made available in the student portal login section of our website.

Our preferred groups travel agent, [The Travellist Co.](#), can assist you to arrange international flights from your nearest regional airport, and return home. We prefer you to arrange your flights through our group travel agent to simplify arrival logistics, and so that you are traveling to and from the program with others in your group.





College Credit

Our programs are a structured syllabus with clear learning outcomes that offer true personal growth and global awareness. As a reputable gap year provider since 2001, we have developed strong industry connections, including two educational institutions which we offer college credits through for our programs.

Pacific Discovery partners with Seattle Central College and the University of Montana to offer college credit, a recognized educational provider who offers exceptional study options for students. We have been running college credit options for students for several years now with these providers, and as long as requirements are completed, the system has been an excellent option for students in regard to continuation of study, deferment and easy transfer to other institutions.

If you're keen to explore this option further, please reach out to us using the contact details provided at the end of this catalogue. We'd love to help you identify what options are available to you and support you throughout the process.

Scholarships & Financial Aid

We want to make our programs as accessible as possible. Although we charge the minimum we can for our programs, we recognize that they can still be difficult to fund for many families. Please note that these scholarships go directly towards the tuition costs for the program and do not include assistance towards the cost of international flights. We expect scholarship recipients to demonstrate their commitment to this opportunity by fundraising for their international flights, personal spending, and the balance of tuition.

Our students supplement the program costs in a variety of ways. We encourage you to get creative! Create a GoFundMe, find a part-time job, fundraise. Think big and small. Each dollar adds up to one amazing adventure abroad.

- Exploration Scholarship
- Diverse Voices Scholarship
- Financial Need Scholarship
- Gap Year Ambassador Fellowship

To apply, please go to [pacificdiscovery.org/need-to-know/scholarships-financial-aid](https://www.pacificdiscovery.org/need-to-know/scholarships-financial-aid)



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