Contemporary Japan | Small Group Tour

Reading List

A Geek in Japan: Discovering the Land of Manga, Anime, Zen, and the Tea Ceremony
by Hector Garcia

For every fan of manga, anime, J-pop, or Zen, A Geek in Japan is a hip, smart and concise guide to the land that is their source.

Comprehensive and well informed, it covers a wide array of topics in short articles accompanied by sidebars and numerous photographs, providing a lively digest of the society and culture of Japan. Designed to appeal to the generations of Westerners who grew up on Pokemon, manga and video games, A Geek in Japan reinvents the culture guide for readers in the Internet age.

Spotlighting the originality and creativity of the Japanese, debunking myths about them, and answering nagging questions like why they're so fond of robots, author Hector Garcia has created the perfect book for the growing ranks of Japanophiles in this inspired, insightful and highly informative guide.

Modern Japan: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)
by Christopher Goto-Jones

Japan is arguably today's most successful industrial economy, combining almost unprecedented affluence with social stability and apparent harmony. Japanese goods and cultural products are consumed all over the world, ranging from animated movies and computer games all the way through to cars, semiconductors, and management techniques. In many ways, Japan is an icon of the modern world, and yet it remains something of an enigma to many, who see it as a confusing montage of the alien and the familiar, the ancient and modern. The aim of this Very Short Introduction is to explode the myths and explore the reality of modern Japan - by taking a concise look at its history, economy, politics, and culture.

Bending Adversity: Japan and the Art of Survival
by David Pilling

A pacy, fresh and surprising portrait of Japan and the Japanese - from David Pilling, award-winning writer and Asia Editor of the Financial Times

Despite years of stagnation, Japan remains one of the world's largest economies and a country which exerts a remarkable cultural fascination. David Pilling's new book is an entertaining, deeply knowledgeable and surprising analysis of a group of islands which have shown great resilience, both in the face of financial distress and when confronted with the overwhelming disaster of the 2011 earthquake.

The resulting tsunami, which killed some 19,000 people, and nuclear catastrophe highlighted both the deeply impressive practical resilience of ordinary Japanese and a political culture of extraordinary carelessness and arrogance. Pilling describes the emergency and its aftermath, but then writes far more broadly about many aspects of Japan which are little known to outsiders and which do so much to explain these contradictory responses to the earthquake. Bending Adversity is a superb work of reportage and the essential book even for those who already feel they know the country well.

For Fukui's Sake: Two years in rural Japan
by Sam Baldwin

Far from the high-tech, high-rise of the super-cities, there lies another Japan.

A Japan where snakes slither down school corridors, where bears prowl dark forests and where Westerners are still regarded as curious creatures. Welcome to the world of the inaka – the Japanese countryside.

Unhappily employed in the UK, Sam Baldwin decides to make a big change. Saying sayonara to laboratory life, he takes a job as an English teacher in a small, rural Japanese town that no one – the Japanese included – has ever heard of.

Arriving in Fukui, where there’s ‘little reason to linger’ according to the guidebook, at first he wonders why he left England. But as he slowly settles in to his unfamiliar new home, Sam befriends a colourful cast of locals and begins to discover the secrets of this little known region.

Helped by headmasters, housewives and Himalayan mountain climbers, he immerses himself in a Japan still clutching its pastoral past and uncovers a landscape of lonely lakes, rice fields and lush mountain forests. Joining a master drummer’s taiko class, skiing over paddies and learning how to sharpen samurai swords, along the way Sam encounters farmers, fishermen and foreigners behaving badly.

Exploring Japan’s culture and cuisine, as well as its wild places and wildlife, For Fukui’s Sake is an adventurous, humorous and sometimes poignant insight into the frustrations and fascinations that face an outsider living in small town, backcountry Japan.

A Concise History of Japan (Cambridge Concise Histories)
by Brett L. Walker

To this day, Japan's modern ascendancy challenges many assumptions about world history, particularly theories regarding the rise of the west and why the modern world looks the way it does. In this engaging new history, Brett L. Walker tackles key themes regarding Japan's relationships with its minorities, state and economic development, and the uses of science and medicine. The book begins by tracing the country's early history through archaeological remains, before proceeding to explore life in the imperial court, the rise of the samurai, civil conflict, encounters with Europe, and the advent of modernity and empire. Integrating the pageantry of a unique nation's history with today's environmental concerns, Walker's vibrant and accessible new narrative then follows Japan's ascension from the ashes of World War II into the thriving nation of today. It is a history for our times, posing important questions regarding how we should situate a nation's history in an age of environmental and climatological uncertainties.

An Introduction to Japanese Society
by Yoshio Sugimoto

Now in its fourth edition, An Introduction to Japanese Society remains essential reading for students of Japanese society. Internationally renowned scholar Yoshio Sugimoto uses both English and Japanese sources to update and expand upon his original narrative in this sophisticated yet highly readable text. This book explores the breadth and diversity of Japanese society, with chapters covering class, geographical and generational variation, work, education, gender, minorities, popular culture and the establishment. Updates include an exploration of the 'Cool Japan' phenomenon and the explosion of Japanese culture overseas. This edition also features the latest research into Japanese society, updated statistical data, and coverage of recent events including the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, and the change in government. Written in a clear and engaging style, An Introduction to Japanese Society provides an insight into all aspects of a diverse and ever-evolving contemporary Japan.

Lost Japan
by Alex Kerr

An enchanting and fascinating insight into Japanese landscape, culture, history and future.

Originally written in Japanese, this passionate, vividly personal book draws on the author's experiences in Japan over thirty years. Alex Kerr brings to life the ritualized world of Kabuki, retraces his initiation into Tokyo's boardrooms during the heady Bubble Years, and tells the story of the hidden valley that became his home.

But the book is not just a love letter. Haunted throughout by nostalgia for the Japan of old, Kerr's book is part paean to that great country and culture, part epitaph in the face of contemporary Japan's environmental and cultural destruction.

Winner of Japan's 1994 Shincho Gakugei Literature Prize.

Alex Kerr is an American writer, antiques collector and Japanologist. Lost Japan is his most famous work. He was the first foreigner to be awarded the Shincho Gakugei Literature Prize for the best work of non-fiction published in Japan.