

# SKEPTIC

With Distinguished Guest Lecturer  
**PROFESSOR JARED DIAMOND**

## JAPAN THROUGH THE AGES:

Exploring Nature, History, Culture & Society

Aboard the *Mitsui Ocean Fuji*

September 11 – 27, 2026



Tenmangu shrine, Dazaifu, Hakata, Japan



# SKEPTIC

Dear Friends,

In September 2026, join us on an incredible journey to discover northern Hokkaido, western Japan and the southern Nansei Islands. Throughout the voyage, we will be accompanied by special guest lecturer **Jared Diamond**, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of some of the most influential books of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In a series of lectures and discussions, Professor Diamond will bring his experience and expertise to bear, providing insight into the significance of the history and culture we encounter.

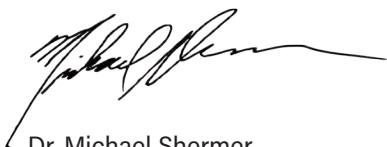
Japan is a land of contrasts. It is one of the largest economic powers in the world: ultramodern and technologically advanced, yet it honors and cherishes its unique customs and ancient heritage. Glittering, dynamic modern metropolises coexist with centuries-old shrines and feudal castles. Throughout our journey, we explore these contradictory aspects as they are reflected across Japan's well-preserved historic towns, gardens, and villages, futuristic cities, and idyllic rural landscapes.

Traditional elements are apparent in the architecture and adornments of sublime Shinto shrines, the castle at Kumamoto, the open-air Historic Village of Hokkaido, and the Hakodate Museum of Northern Peoples. Ancient aesthetics come alive in the exquisitely designed gardens of Suizenji Jojuen, the Prefectural Traditional Crafts Center in Kumamoto, and the continued production of Oshima Tsumugi silk. Modernist impulses are evident in thriving urban centers like Sapporo and Fukuoka, in Moerenuma Park featuring the work of sculptor Noguchi Isamu, and at the Space Center on Tanegashima Island.

As a nation of sprawling islands, Japan is best explored by sea, and we have the ideal vessel for the task. Aboard the *Mitsui Ocean Fuji*, guests enjoy an immersive cruise experience rooted in Japanese heritage and traditions, including omotenashi, the art of heartfelt and meticulous hospitality. During the voyage, guests may participate in authentic Japanese cultural activities from tea ceremonies and calligraphy workshops to performances by Japanese artists, enriching the overall travel experience. With a long company history of sailing Japanese waters, *Mitsui* has unparalleled expertise in navigating Japanese routes, and its dedicated English-speaking Japanese officers and international hotel crew possess deep knowledge of Japan's known and hidden treasures.

We look forward to welcoming you aboard this extraordinary voyage to explore Japan's history, culture, nature, and society.

Warm regards,



Dr. Michael Shermer  
Executive Director  
The Skeptics Society

## DISTINGUISHED GUEST LECTURER

### JARED DIAMOND



**Jared Diamond** is a Pulitzer Prize-winning author of six best-selling books, translated into 38 languages, about human societies and human evolution: *Guns, Germs, and Steel*; *Collapse*; *Why Is Sex Fun?*; *The Third Chimpanzee*; *The World Until Yesterday*, and *Upheaval*. As a professor of geography at UCLA (University of California at Los Angeles), he is known for his breadth of interests, which involves conducting research and teaching in three other fields: the biology of New Guinea birds, digestive physiology, and conservation biology. His prizes and honors include the U.S. National Medal of Science, the Pulitzer Prize for Non-fiction, the Tyler Prize for Environmental Science, and election to the U.S. National Academy of Sciences. He is a director of World Wildlife Fund/U.S. and of Conservation International. As a biological explorer, his most widely publicized finding was his rediscovery, at the top of New Guinea's remote Foja Mountains, of the long-lost Golden-fronted Bowerbird, previously known only from four specimens found in a Paris feather shop in 1895.

## ABOUT THALASSA JOURNEYS

**Thalassa Journeys** is a tour company founded by the men and women who, working as Travel Dynamics International, pioneered educational and cultural travel in the 1970s in partnership with the leading educational, research, cultural and performing arts institutions in the United States. For more than 45 years our mission was to provide robust, intellectually stimulating experiences to lifelong learners who see travel as an opportunity to expand their understanding of the world and their place in it. This same mission guides us today. We believe that the most rewarding travel experiences happen when small groups of like-minded individuals share an enthusiasm for engaging with the richly varied environments of the world, and with the history, culture, ideas and ideals of the people who inhabit them.



# INTRODUCING THE ELEGANT ALL-SUITE *MITSUI OCEAN FUJI*

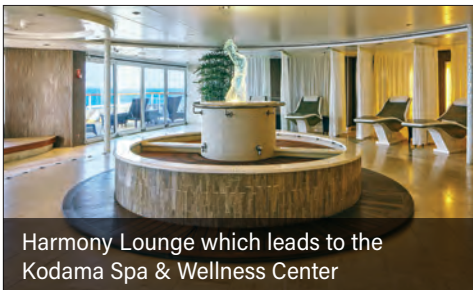
The only cruise ship operating in Japan that offers  
an authentic Japanese experience



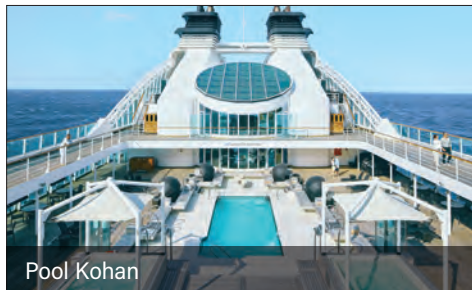
Bedroom of the spacious suites



Hokusai Restaurant



Harmony Lounge which leads to the  
Kodama Spa & Wellness Center



Pool Kohan



Food aboard the *Mitsui Ocean Fuji* includes  
Japanese and international specialties

The *Mitsui Ocean Fuji* is the only ship to offer a culturally authentic Japanese experience. With a gross tonnage of 32,477 GT, she could carry over a thousand passengers. Instead, *Mitsui Ocean Fuji* accommodates a maximum of 458 guests in 226 spacious suites. A favorable guest-to-crew ratio ensures that guests experience refined service and omotenashi - heartfelt and meticulous hospitality - from the ship's 330 English-speaking crew members.

The luxurious *Mitsui Ocean Fuji* is at the cutting edge of hospitality and environmental responsibility. Along with an ambitious emissions reduction goal to reach net-zero, the ship's innovative LFC® biodigester technology drastically reduces her carbon footprint by transforming food waste into environmentally safe water which can be released into the ocean without harming marine

ecosystems. Thus with peace of mind, guests can fully enjoy the *Ocean Fuji*'s delicious dining experiences.

Under the direction of celebrated Chef Kiyomi Mikuni, four venues offer Japanese and globally inspired cuisine including Mikuni's "Japonisée" style, a masterful fusion of Japanese flavors and French gastronomic techniques. Lounges offer locally sourced specialties, and complimentary beverages and in-suite dining are available throughout the voyage. Activities aboard the ship abound: from immersive Japanese cultural workshops and traditional performances to the ship's pools, fitness studios, Spa and Wellness KODAMA, and generous open spaces offering stunning views. Complimentary unlimited Wi-Fi is available throughout the ship.



# ITINERARY



Friday, September 11, 2026  
**DEPART THE US FOR TOKYO, Japan**

Saturday, September 12  
**TOKYO, Japan**

Arrive in Tokyo's Narita Airport and transfer to the *Hilton Tokyo Narita Airport* (or similar) for the night. Dinner will be available at the hotel this evening. (D)



Onuma Quasi-National Park, Hakodate, Hokkaido, Japan

Sunday, September 13  
**TOKYO/HAKODATE, Hokkaido**

Transfer in the morning to Haneda Airport for the flight to Hakodate. Located on the south shore of Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island, Hakodate was one of the country's first ports to open to international trade after Japan's era of isolation. Influence from the Western world is visibly evident throughout this picturesque city. Check in this afternoon at the *Hotel & Spa Resort La Vista* (or similar) for three nights. This evening, meet your fellow travelers officially for a welcome dinner. (B,D)

Monday, September 14  
**HAKODATE**

Begin this morning with a city tour, starting at the atmospheric Asaichi Morning Market, with over 250 vendors selling fresh seafood and local produce. Continue to Hakodate-yama, an inactive volcano that provides spectacular views over the city and surrounding bay, followed by the steep streets of the architecturally intriguing Motomachi neighborhood. Later, visit Fort Goryokaku, Japan's first citadel built in Western star-shaped style at the end of the Edo period. Today's tour ends at the Hakodate Museum of Northern Peoples, with exhibits that relate to the Ainu culture and those of other Indigenous peoples. The afternoon is at leisure for independent activities. (B,L)

Tuesday, September 15  
**HAKODATE/ONUMA QUASI-NATIONAL PARK/HAKODATE**

Today's excursion to the Onuma Quasi-National Park is ideal for nature lovers, with a trio of beautiful lakes to admire from the peak of dormant Mount Komagatake. The eruptions of this volcano shaped the surrounding landscape and created the fertile conditions that give the park its lush greenery. Onuma's expansive scenery is punctuated by smaller ponds and islands, some connected by a network of charming humpback bridges. (B,L)

Wednesday, September 16  
**HAKODATE/SAPPORO, Hokkaido**

Depart Hakodate this morning via coach to Sapporo, the vibrant capital city of the Hokkaido Prefecture. Sapporo is the 5th largest city in Japan and lays claim to several "firsts". It was the first city in Asia to host the winter Olympics (in 1972), and is the birthplace of Japan's oldest beer brand, the eponymous Sapporo beer. It is also recognized as a city that pioneered the adoption of Western technologies in Japan, beginning in the latter half of the 19th century. Accommodations for the next three nights are at the *Sapporo Grand Hotel* (or similar), built in 1934 as the city's first hotel in European style. (B,L,D)

Thursday, September 17  
**SAPPORO**

Explore Sapporo in the morning. First visit the beautiful Hokkaido University Botanical Gardens and its Museum with a collection of countless scientific specimens. Continue to Hokkaido-jingu, Sapporo's main Shinto shrine. This morning's tour ends with a visit





**Gyeongju Historic Area, Busan, South Korea**

to the Sapporo Beer Museum and Garden, housed in a building dating from 1891. In the afternoon, drive to Sapporo's outskirts to visit the Moerenuma Park, which was designed by the internationally-renowned Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi and displays several of his works, along with other intriguing features. (B,L)

**Friday, September 18**

### **SAPPORO**

This morning, enjoy an excursion to the Historic Village of Hokkaido. Located in the lovely Nopporo Forest Park, this open-air museum consists of sixty buildings, divided into four sections to present faithful representations of a large Hokkaido town, a fishing village, a farm village, and a mountain village during the Meiji and Taisho Periods. The park is also home to the impressive Hokkaido Museum, whose collections showcase the island's history from prehistoric times to the present. Spend the afternoon at leisure. (B,L,D)

**Saturday, September 19**

### **SAPPORO/OSAKA/KOBE – EMBARK THE MITSUI OCEAN FUJI**

Fly this morning from Sapporo to Osaka. Upon arrival, transfer to Kobe to embark on the cruise ship *Mitsui Ocean Fuji* and settle in for your 8-night voyage. The ship sails in the evening. (B,D)

**Sunday, September 20**

### **HAKATA, Kyushu**

Located on the northwest coast of Kyushu Island, Hakata is the former merchants' quarter of the dynamic city of Fukuoka. Our

tour of the area includes the Kushida-jinja shrine, which is Hakata's oldest and presents an intriguing contrast surrounded by the rest of Fukuoka's notably futuristic modern architecture. Visit also the Hakata Machiya Furusato-kan, an interesting folk museum spread between three machiya, or traditional Japanese townhouses. Later, drive south of the city to visit the small town of Dazaifu, which rose to prominence in the 7th century. Many of Dazaifu's historic sites have survived through the centuries, such as its magnificent 10th-century Tenmangu shrine. (B,L,D)

**Monday, September 21**

### **BUSAN, South Korea**

The *Mitsui Ocean Fuji* arrives in Busan, South Korea. From this thriving port city, take an excursion to the Gyeongju Historic Area, ancient capital of the Silla Kingdom which enjoyed a golden age from the 7th to 10th centuries. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Gyeongju is a virtual open-air museum with distinctive burial mounds, pagodas, ancient temples, and palaces as well as outstanding examples of Korean Buddhist art from the flowering of Silla culture. (B,L,D)

**Tuesday, September 22**

### **YATSUSHIRO/KUMAMOTO, Kyushu**

From the port town of Yatsushiro, drive to nearby Kumamoto, built in 1607 during Japan's feudal era. The town's center is dominated by the formidable Kumamoto-jo, an imposing fortress complex with foundations that date to 1467 and widely regarded as one of the best-fortified castles ever built in Japan. Later visit the Suizenji



**Kushida-jinja shrine, Hakata, Kyushu, Japan**



**Asaichi Morning Market, Hakodate, Hokkaido, Japan**

Jojuen, a splendid traditional Japanese garden founded in 1632, and the excellent Prefectural Traditional Crafts Center which displays traditional crafts by local artisans, many of which are for sale. (B,L,D)

Wednesday, September 23  
**YAMAGAWA/IBUSUKI, Kyushu**

Arrive in Yamagawa for an excursion to Ibusuki, a small town with an unparalleled setting between sweeping Kagoshima Bay and the perfect stratovolcanic cone of Mount Kaimondake. The thermal activity of the volcano has caused Ibusuki to become known for its 800+ hot springs, the delightful therapeutic benefits of which we can try. Today's excursion also includes Satsuma Denshokan, a gorgeous building designed in the Nara/Heian style that was constructed to house the art and history collection of its owner. (B,L,D)

Thursday, September 24  
**AMAMI OSHIMA ISLAND, Nansei Islands**

Call this morning in the Amami Islands, a group of small islands scattered south of Kyushu. Our destination is Amami Oshima, notable for its lush forests, pristine white sand beaches, and the production of the unique Oshima Tsumugi silk, which is primarily used in making kimonos. Explore this seldom-visited island and enjoy its natural beauty. (B,L,D)

Friday, September 25  
**TANEGASHIMA ISLAND, Nansei Islands**

Another of Japan's small subtropical southern islands, Tanegashima has a long history. Excavations have revealed that it was home to a well-developed culture that dates back to the 4th century AD. The island is also a designated Important Bird Area, and home to the Tanegashima Space Center, which is Japan's largest space development center. Today's activities feature a visit to the Space Center and exploration of the island. (B,L,D)

Saturday, September 26  
**AT SEA**

Enjoy the ship's amenities, attend lectures, and participate in Japanese cultural events during the day at sea en route to Kobe. (B,L,D)

Sunday, September 27  
**KOBE, Kansai/DISEMBARK/OSAKA/HOMEWARD**

After breakfast onboard, disembark in Kobe and transfer to the Osaka airport for flights homeward. (B)

**POST - CRUISE EXTENSION TO KYOTO**

An optional three-day post-cruise extension to Kyoto is available, featuring visits to the rock garden at Ryoan-ji, the glittering Golden Pavilion and gardens of Kinkaku-ji, the Arashiyama district, the "Pure Water Temple" of Kiyomizu-dera, and a traditional tea ceremony known as *chanoyu*.

Rate: \$ 1,990 per person, double occupancy.  
Single room supplement: \$ 490.

**ALL ACCOMMODATIONS ABOARD MITSUI OCEAN FUJI ARE ELEGANT SUITES THAT COMBINE SPACIOUSNESS, COMFORT, AND LIGHT.**

Each suite has an expansive and unobstructed ocean view, with a comfortably furnished living space and bedroom that can be divided by a partition at the occupants' choice for a restful in-suite experience. Each private ensuite bathroom includes a bathtub and separate shower, sophisticated Japanese-style toilet, and a marble vanity thoughtfully designed to accommodate two sinks.

**SUITES FEATURE:**

- All suites have picture windows and 95% feature a private balcony with daybed or sun lounger for relaxation. Suites measure between 272 and 284 sq. ft.
- Queen or twin beds with luxury Egyptian cotton linen bedclothes and duvet.
- Lounge area with seating and dining/coffee table.
- Spacious walk-in wardrobe and vanity table.
- Plush robes, slippers, towels, and luxury bath products.
- Fully-stocked in-suite minibar, replenished once per voyage.
- Multilingual infotainment system with on-demand movies and TV channels.
- Individual climate and lighting control.

RATES		
CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	PER PERSON / DOUBLE OCCUPANCY
B	Oceanview Suites	\$ 12,890
A	Veranda Suites	\$ 13,890
Solo occupancy rates: Category B \$14,490 total; Category A \$15,990 total.		



## PROGRAM INCLUSIONS

The rates are all-inclusive. There are no hidden costs and no additional charges such as shore excursions and embarkation and port charges. Other than the international airfare and expenses of a personal nature, all else is included. Specifically, the rates include the following:

- One night at *Hilton Tokyo Narita Airport* (or similar) in Tokyo, three nights at *Hotel & Spa Resort La Vista* (or similar) in Hakodate, and three nights at *Sapporo Grand Hotel* (or similar) in Sapporo prior to embarkation.
- Cruise aboard the *Mitsui Ocean Fuji* as described.
- Domestic flight from Tokyo to Hakodate and from Sapporo to Osaka.
- Welcome dinner in Hakodate, and 16 meals prior to embarkation.
- All meals aboard the ship, with a selection of wines, beer and soft drinks during lunch and dinner.
- Airport/hotel/pier transfers and handling of luggage on program arrival and departure dates.
- Lectures and discussions with Jared Diamond on Japanese history and culture.
- Onboard activities and enrichment lectures centered on Japanese culture, traditions and lifestyle.
- Traditional Japanese entertainment offerings such as rakugo (the art of Japanese storytelling).
- Complete program of shore excursions and activities, led by professional English-speaking local guides and onboard experts.
- Specialty teas, coffees, and juices available at any time.
- 24-hour room service.
- Gratuities to the ship's crew, guides, porters and drivers.
- Welcome sweets on embarkation day for each suite.
- Wi-Fi aboard the ship with unlimited Internet service.
- Access to onboard motion and fitness studios, where some fitness classes and yoga are complimentary.
- Access to complimentary self-service laundromats throughout the voyage.
- Services of an English-speaking hotel crew member, and local guides, porters and drivers.
- Services of an experienced Thalassa Journeys Trip Director.
- All local taxes and service charges, including port and embarkation taxes.
- Complete pre-departure material.

**NOT INCLUDED:** International airfare; travel insurance; expenses of a personal nature; experience fees for Hokusai Fine Dining and Omakase Sushi in the Terrace Restaurant Hachiyo; treatments in Spa and Wellness KODAMA; any items not mentioned in the itinerary or the above inclusions.



Hokkaido-jingu, Sapporo, Hokkaido, Japan



Ibusuki, Kyushu, Japan

### ACTIVITY LEVEL

Travelers can expect an estimated daily total of 2-4 hours of walking. Featured sites and nature excursions may involve walking on uneven surfaces such as cobblestones, unpaved paths, or stairs without handrails. During some site visits guests may need to stand briefly if seating is not available. Embarking and disembarking from motor coaches and other transportation methods will be necessary.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

SKEP 26F-0911

**PAYMENT SCHEDULE:** A deposit of \$1,500 per person is required to reserve your space on the tour. Final payment is due 90 days prior to departure. Payment can be made by personal check or charged to a credit card.

**CANCELLATIONS & REFUNDS:** All cancellations are subject to a \$300 per person administrative fee. Cancellations received 71-90 days prior to departure will be assessed a penalty equal to 50% of the total program cost per person. Cancellations received within 70 days of departure are subject to 100% cancellation penalties. Requests for cancellations must be made in writing. No refunds will be made for any part of this program in which you choose not to participate.

**INSURANCE:** We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance, which is available for coverage of expenses in conjunction with cancellation due to illness or accident. Baggage insurance is also recommended. In the event that you must cancel your participation in a travel program, trip cancellation insurance may be the only source of reimbursement.

**ITINERARY:** The itinerary, accommodations and arrangements are subject to change at the discretion of Thalassa Journeys.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** Please read carefully the following terms and conditions, which constitute the sole, legally enforceable agreements between the traveler and Thalassa Journeys. Thalassa Journeys acts solely as agents for the traveler with respect to all transportation, hotel and other tour arrangements. In that capacity, we exercise all reasonable care possible to ensure the traveler's safety and satisfaction, but, we neither assume nor bear any responsibility or liability for any injury, death, damage, loss, accident, delay or irregularity arising in connection with the services of any ship, airplane, train, automobile, motor coach, carriage or other conveyance, or the actions of any third-party, involved in carrying the traveler or in affecting these tours. We are not responsible for damages, additional expenses, or any other losses due to cancellation, delay or other changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, civil disturbances, acts or threats of terrorism, travel warnings or bans, termination or suspension of war risks or other carrier insurance, quarantine, acts of God or other causes beyond our control. All such losses must be borne by the traveler, and tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. In the event of cancellation, delay or rescheduling mandated by any of the aforesaid causes beyond our control, the traveler shall have the option of accepting in lieu of the original tour such rescheduled tour or other substituted tour(s) as may be offered by us, or else, receiving a refund of as much of such advance tour expenditures as we are able to recover on the traveler's behalf from carriers, third-party tour vendors, etc., but, we shall not have any obligation or liability to the traveler beyond the foregoing. We reserve the right to make alterations to the tour's itinerary and to substitute hotels, transportation methods, or lecturers if this is required. We reserve the right to cancel, delay, or reschedule any tour prior to departure, and, so long as this is not due to any of the aforesaid causes beyond our control, the traveler shall be entitled to a full refund of all monies paid to that point if he/she so desires. No refund shall be made for any unused portion of any tour. By forwarding their deposit(s), the traveler certifies that he/she and/or their dependents, minors or others covered thereby do not have any mental, physical or other condition of disability that could create a hazard for them or other travelers. We reserve the right to decline to accept or to decline to retain any person as a member of any tour should such person's health, condition or actions adversely affect or threaten the welfare or safety of other travelers or impede the tour. Baggage or valuables brought on the tour shall be transported, handled or stored at the traveler's risk entirely, and, we shall bear no liability or responsibility for any damage or other loss thereto. Resolution of any disputes arising hereunder shall be effected exclusively in the state or federal courts presiding in Florida, pursuant to applicable Florida law.

**RATES:** Tour costs are based upon current airfares, tariffs, and currency values. While we do everything possible to maintain the listed prices, they are subject to change.

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# SKEPTIC

## JAPAN THROUGH THE AGES

With **Jared Diamond**

September 11 – 27, 2026



Kumamoto-jo, Kumamoto, Kyushu, Japan

**FOR RESERVATIONS AND INFORMATION**

**PLEASE CALL**

**THALASSA JOURNEYS AT**

**866-633-3611**

or email

**[reservations@thalassajourneys.com](mailto:reservations@thalassajourneys.com)**