

The heavenly mountain

When they said a long weekend camping, Emily Manley never expected it to be in luxury yurts under the shadow of Japan's Mount Fuji

IT'S been an 18-hour travel day and I'm honestly pretty delirious at this point but two hours into our car ride, we curve around a hill, the busy sprawl of Tokyo is left behind and a goliath vision melts through the mist, leaving me bewitched.

The Japanese have a word 'yugen', similar to the English 'sublime'. It means a 'mysterious profundity or beauty that is partially perceived but fully felt.'

That's what it is to be in the presence of Fuji. The force of it is forged into the beautiful rolling hills, peppered with cherry blossoms and draped in an ethereal mist that leaves me with an overwhelming sense of peace - both body and soul. This feeling stays with me during my week in Japan.

Glamping Villa Hanz is about a four-hour drive from Haneda Airport in Tokyo. Emphasis here needs to be placed on the glam because it is the most beautiful 'campsite' I've ever experienced. It offers three types of accommodation.

'Pao' tents are the most 'rustic' option, each with their own private food prep area and bathroom, including the toilets I know you're dying to try, wrapped into a cosy little forest and encouraging a community campsite feel with a festival-style bar and communal fire-pit.

Villas sit at the base of a spellbinding Fuji view. They sleep two to four in a boujee cabin setting, each including a wood-burning stove, whirlpool bath and indoor barbecue area. Larger groups have the option of the guest house, which sleeps ten, and looks like the winter retreat of a Bond villain. It has its own kitchen, indoor/outdoor barbecue area and indoor traditional fire-pit with a suspended bamboo chimney.

The first two nights are spent in the guest house. We gather around the fire-pit and are served food almost too beautiful to eat. The first course is all veggie: tofu in fried paste and dumpling format; lotus root with a miso paste I shamelessly eat even once the radish is gone, and cherry

blossom tea.

The textures are so different to anything I'm familiar with - emphasis on soft, spongy and jelly. It's delicious, strange and most importantly feels like I've fallen straight into something

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Peak of her powers: Emily tried the kimono experience on her trip to Mount Fuji, above

GETTY

'It feels like nourishing your soul with magic'

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drawn by Studio Ghibli. I'm up early the next morning and drift outside to again be hit by overwhelming awe and peace looking at the misty mountain that watches over the campsite.

What strikes me most about Villa Hanz is the attention to detail that leaves you feeling connected to nature but still luxuriously comfortable.

It's not just about styling: the site provides a delicious breakfast buffet but also camping stoves on every

table with iron skillets to cook your own eggs. They encourage you to participate in their many wholesome outdoor activities, such as wood-chopping and slacklining, a balancing training that looks a bit like tightrope walking. There's also a sauna and onsens, natural hot spring baths.

The wood-chopping I'm perhaps a little over-enthusiastic with, but full marks for my efforts in the onsen, which involves great skill in submerging myself in 41-degree water and allowing it to heal me.

Best of all was the tap in the centre of the site with water straight from Fuji, infused with many beneficial minerals and for overly excited aesthetic people like me, the feeling that you have nourished your soul with magic.

There's a lot to offer nearby but it will involve a drive. As daunting as it seems, I'm here to calm some nerves and tell you to just hire a car. You'll be driving on the same side as you do at home, Google maps can direct you in English and drivers are generally calm

and respectful. There are also car parks at every location we visited. It's worth it. The first full day is packed with trips to the enormous and

deeply peaceful lakes of Saiko, Shojiko and Motosuko – all with stunning views of Fuji (if a little misty). The serene natural beauty is only occasionally broken, hilariously, by flocks of swan pedalos.

Following this, we head to Minobusan Kuonji, a revered Buddhist temple. We enter through a beautifully dramatic gate for a 300-step pilgrimage up a mountain.

It's a climb but at the top a profound sense of euphoria overwhelms me as I take in the sensational architecture, framed by cherry blossom petals blown like confetti on an incense-scented breeze. We are taken on a tour by a very smiley monk who points out the stunning decadence of the temples and lets us sit in on a Buddhist service. Ceilings drip with gold and the watchful eyes of magnificent dragon murals.

After exploring more temples, just a cable car ride up the mountain, it was back down for a traditional Buddhist monk meal. This is a feast for the eyes and stomach – the food is exquisite, the room is exquisite with shoji doors and a painted silk mural. It's a truly captivating taste of the essence of Japanese Buddhist culture, which leaves me inspired and quite literally grounded sitting at the low table.

The second day starts with a traditional kimono experience, two lovely women wrap me into the kimono, which has about five layers. Then there are photo opps in front of Mount Fuji at Villa Hanz followed by a stop at Yamanakako, another beautiful lake.

We eat delicious noodles at Soba Dokoro Shochian before heading to Kitaguchi Hongu Fuji Sengen, a shrine dedicated to goddess Konohanasakuyahime, the deity of Mount Fuji. It holds all the dark drama you would expect from a shrine dedicated to Fuji worship. It is located amid a dense old forest, which today continues to denote

ties to the spirit world with looming cedar trees and gothic stone lanterns on the long approach.

That evening we are moved from the guest house into our own villas and have an amazing barbecue, prepared as a kit by Villa Hanz, and finish the night at the bar sampling the house-made spirit – Japanese

shochu, infused with fruit. The traditional plum is my favourite and tastes like liquid Christmas pudding – which is dangerous.

It is with great sadness and surprisingly absolutely no hangover (thanks to what I assume is very clean alcohol and/or magic Fuji water) that I have a final breakfast with a view of Fuji before leaving Villa Hanz the following day.

On our way to Tokyo we stop at Café Bakery Isola and greedily cram trays full of gorgeous pastries. Personal highlights include a cherry blossom bun and cream puff the size of my head.

We spend the day at two wineries, Château Mercian and Marufuji, both located in Katsunuma. Both locations provide tours and tastings and are generous with their knowledge and passion for creating wine.

I could do with another three days here. Actually, make that years.

Accommodation

Prices at Glamping
 Villa Hanz:
 From ¥32,000/
 £157 per pao,
 sleeping two
 people per
 night on a room
 only basis.
 From ¥86,570/
 £424 per villa
 sleeping up to
 four people per
 night on a room
 only basis.
 From ¥350,000/
 £1,715 for five
 bedrooms in the
 guest house
 sleeping ten
 people per night.
 Breakfast is
 ¥2,500/£12pp.
 A standard
 barbecue from
 ¥6,600/£32 pp

Transfer

JR Kanto bus from
 Tokyo to
 Kawaguchiko
 station from
 ¥2,000/£11 pp.
 Direct train from
 Tokyo to
 Kawaguchiko
 station from
 ¥2,360/£11.50
 (70 minutes).
 Taxi transfer from
 Tokyo Haneda
 Airport to Villa
 Hanz from £146
 for a car seating
 three people with
 luggage.

Airport to Villa
 Hanz from £146
 for a car seating
 three people with
 luggage.

Activities

Minobusan
 Kuonji Temple –
 free to visit.
 Minobusan
 Ropeway – cable
 car priced from
 ¥1,400/£7pp for
 return trip.
 Fuji Sengen Shrine
 – free to visit.
 Château Mercian
 Winery – tour
 priced from
 ¥3,000/£15.50 pp
 with tasting of
 four wines.
 Marufuji Winery
 – tour priced from
 ¥2,000/£10.30 for
 15 minutes and
 tasting of five
 wines costs from
 ¥500/£2.50.

Restaurants

Soba Dokoro
 Shochian
 Café Bakery Isola

> 28 April 2025 at 0:00



**Mountain
 marvel:**
 Mount Fuji
 and the Tokyo
 skyline (main)
 and Kitaguchi
 Hongu Fuji
 Sengen
 shrine, above



Food for thought: A monk's meal



Heritage: The temples are a must see

> 28 April 2025 at 0:00



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Getting there
Flights

Return from
London Heathrow
to Tokyo Haneda
with a stopover in
Hong Kong from
£820pp with
Cathay Pacific.