*** Japan ***

7th to 30th September 2019 – 24 days
$12595 ex Auckland. Trip leader: Stefan Fairweather

Based on a minimum of 8 people and maximum of 12 people, and subject to currency fluctuations
Any payment by visa or mastercard adds $350 per person

Traversing the ‘mainland’ island of Honshu,
this trip explores the cultural aspects of ancient and modern Japan
while walking the national parks and beautiful landscapes that abound
in this safe and welcoming country

PRICE INCLUDES:
• Flights - Auckland to Tokyo and Osaka to Auckland, one internal flight and airport transfers
• Land transport – trains (including Shinkansen Bullet Trains), buses and vans, boat trip, on foot
• Accommodation - Hotels, Minshuku (family run B & B’s), Ryokan (traditional Japanese inn’s)
• Many meals – all breakfasts, 3 lunches and 8 dinners as shown by B.L. D. in the daily itinerary (includes a special welcome to Japan dinner and an end of trip celebration dinner)
• Entry to hot springs where indicated, entrance fees to places of interest, cultural performances as shown in the itinerary
• Experienced Kiwi leader, payment to FMC

PRICE DOES NOT INCLUDE:
• Meals not otherwise included
• Personal spending outside the itinerary, hot springs or other options not otherwise included
• Travel insurance (mandatory)
Trip Leader

I’m delighted to introduce Stefan Fairweather to lead this trip to Japan. Stefan is a medical doctor from Canterbury who has a special affinity to Japan, having lived there for three years, travelled and tramped extensively there on numerous occasions. His knowledge of the language and local customs is extensive. He is a fanatic tramper and genuine Japan-ophile! Stefan has also spent a few years trip leading for Adventure South, the NZ based adventure operator. I cannot think of a more well rounded and excellent guy to lead our trip in 2019!

We believe the itinerary is the best of many worlds, and it includes places that visitors seldom get to, particularly in northern Honshu. It is a well rounded programme that ticks many boxes.

We hope you will be attracted to the trip and look forward to your commitment. Stefan also welcomes your contact at stepthekiwi@gmail.com

Trip Structure

Features are:

- The trip is based on Honshu the largest island, home to Tokyo and other big cities like Osaka and Nagoya, the majority of the population, and the Japanese Alps along with Mt Fuji – perhaps Japan’s most loved and well known physical feature.
- Our programme mixes hiking with appropriate cultural experience and exploration of what makes the country and its people tick. From mega cities to villages, tramping in national parks and other natural areas, to an ancient pilgrimage trail revealing Buddhist and Shinto influences. Lots of variety and a good overview of what can be seen and done over three weeks. Essentially, this is a programme of day tramps from a base, and one trail walked continuously, where main luggage is separately moved to the next accommodation by the highly efficient bag courier system.
- Accommodation will be a mix of styles appropriate to the location and purpose and include the typical Minshuku and Ryokan styles unique to Japan (types of inns or guesthouses, usually small and family run) for the maximum authenticity. Twin shared rooms, often with bathrooms are the norm. Expect simple styles of bedding and furnishing, very clean and orderly.
- Japanese transport is typically very efficient, whether the city trains, buses and trams or superfast bullet trains (Shinkansen) on longer distances. We also use plenty of local transport to link the itinerary together. For a large section of the northern part of the tour, we will have our own bus and driver. High population densities support the extensive transports available. We have also included an internal flight with transfers.
- Japan is a food lover’s paradise and the cuisine is very varied with numerous regional specialities. Always fresh and beautifully presented, the meals we enjoy will be a highlight. Western styles are more obvious in larger cities, but to get properly acquainted we need to immerse in the local cuisine. Many meals are included in the trip price and Japan does not have a tipping culture related to food. A wide variety of excellent beers are brewed across the country and sake or rice wine is both cultural and a must try. Tipping is not part of the Japanese way, but a small gift may be given in lieu of a cash tip for anyone who has performed an exceptional service and for local guides.
- Inclusions are there to enrich your experience. There is nothing like lowering yourself into the tub at a classic onsen (natural hot spring bath). The Japanese have turned the simple act of bathing into a folk religion and the country is dotted with temples and shrines to this most relaxing pastime. Many of our accommodations include onsens. We’ll also include a Geisha dance/tea ceremony and Sumo wrestling performance – intrinsically part of Japanese culture.
- Note that a pre-trip newsletter is produced. This will contain much information that cannot be included in this initial trip dossier. Such aspects as more info’ about culture, a schedule of accommodation, recommended gear list and many other pertinent items. The newsletter is compiled after viability is confirmed and arrangements begin.

Our programme on Honshu

Honshu is the largest island (50% larger than our South Island) and considered ‘the mainland’ island and is where modern mega cities like the capital Tokyo, and Osaka and Nagoya are located. The population is concentrated in the
cities and only short distances from urban areas are forests, mountains, lakes and other natural areas. Of Japan’s 125 million people, 103 million reside on Honshu.

Beginning in the capital, Tokyo – this amazing city provides an overload for the senses, being an ultra modern metropolis sprinkled with beautiful parks, museums, grand temples, elegant gardens and much more. In the realm of culture, a couple of things are worth including here – the Tsukiji Fish Market (world’s biggest) and a sumo wrestling tournament. We will secure tickets to the latter, which begins on the Sunday of our arrival.

Note that you are welcome to consider arriving a day or so earlier to see more of this great city, ahead of meeting up with the rest of the group. Once the trip is confirmed, that is the time to set up pre-trip arrangements and adjusted flights with John Dobbs.

The first stop heading north is to Nikko and we are immediately back to the 8th to 19th century Edo period, a wonderful and beautiful place of World Heritage listed sites. The adjacent national park is good for a day tramp before continuing into north-central Honshu. This is the rugged north, a land of hulking volcanic massifs and remote hot springs, of ancient folk beliefs and unique customs born of centuries of isolation. A land superb for an off the beaten track adventure and where we begin our explorations and week long tramping programme. Threading our way through the north as far as superb Towada-Hachimantai National Park, we finish our time in the north at the old castle town of Morioka before taking a flight down to Kyoto and the next phase of the trip.

Kyoto has all the things associated with the Land of the Rising Sun: ancient temples, colourful shrines and wonderful gardens – it is the storehouse of Japan’s traditional culture boasting no less than 17 World Heritage sites. To the traditional architecture add Geisha dances and an incredible array of shops and restaurants.

Japan has a history of Shinto and later Buddhist thinking and philosophy, which lead to the development of early pilgrimages by nobility. The Kumano-Kodo is one of the finest of these and crosses the Kii Mountains to the south of Osaka/Kyoto. Shrines were constructed and over time the Kumano faith was established, morphing these earlier influences and more of the general populace completed pilgrimages. Today the Kumano-Kodo has World Heritage ranking. In practical terms it is a route from west to east across the Kii Peninsula, the route connects the shrines and traverses mountains, forests and beautiful countryside with authentic accommodations sprinkled along the route. We take five days to complete the trail, carrying just a day pack while main luggage is transported to the accommodation each night. This is a strong culturally immersive tramp and was such a highlight of our 2017 inaugural trip to Japan that we had to include it again. Home cooked dinners and breakfasts and personalised family service add another dimension.

We will also head west to Hiroshima – this vibrant city was of course the devastated victim of an atomic bomb. The Peace Memorial Park and Museum reveal the terrible reality of that event. A final return to Kyoto to celebrate our wonderful trip before heading to Osaka Kansai Airport to fly home.

**Itinerary**

**Day 1. Sat 7th Sep. Arrive Tokyo**

Tokyo is one of the world’s greatest cities and huge with perhaps 30 million people. Yet, the various districts that make up the city are all different, fascinating and worth visiting. You will find the ancient and the ultramodern side by side, the air cleaner than most other mega cities, the transport systems efficient, safe and frequent, the shopping and cuisine fantastic. Our centrally located hotel is a great base to explore from. Tonight or tomorrow, a welcome to Japan dinner and drinks at a local restaurant. D.

**Day 2. Sun 8th Sep. Tokyo explorations**

Unpack some of the sights today – perhaps the Royal Palace and gardens, shrines, nearby neighbourhoods such as the Ginza and more besides. Tonight, the opening night of the Tokyo Sumo Wrestling Tournament. We have secured tickets to this amazing cultural event, as much theatre as sport. The ticket includes the Sumo Museum too. Experiencing Sumo was a surprising highlight of the 2017 trip. B.
**Day 3. Mon 9th Sep. Train to Nikko and exploration**

We travel by train to beautiful Nikko, about 100 kms north of Tokyo and nestled in hilly woodland, with the national park of the same name nearby. This stronghold of the 17th century Edo period actually dates back to the 8th century founding. Its shrines, temples and architecture are a splendour and some of the sites have World Heritage status.

**Day 4. Tue 10th Sep. Day tramp in Nikko area**

Nikko National Park sprawls over 1400 sq kms across four Prefectures and features extinct volcanoes, lakes, waterfalls and marshlands. There are good hiking trails and we will have an enjoyable whole day warm up tramp to build up for the next section. Return to our accommodation in Nikko.

**Day 5. Wed 11th Sep. Train to Yamagata, overnight on Mt Zao**

Travel north on the Shinkansen Line as far as Yamagata this morning, about 270 kms and the ‘back and beyond’ for many Japanese. A province ringed by mountains and made famous after the 16th century wanderings here by the Buddhist scholar, Matsuo Basho. We meet up with our local transport operator and driver, who’s services we have for the next section. This will enable us to complete one way tramps that we would not otherwise be able to do, plus ease transport links in certain places. After lunch, a short ride to the village of Yamadera, an area of temples on lush, wooded mountain slopes. Yamadera was founded in AD 860 by priests who carried a sacred flame from Kyoto, and supposedly the same flame is alight today. It is believed that Yamadera’s rock faces are the boundaries between this world and the next! A fascinating area to discover, don’t miss the rock hewn staircase leading up the mountain to the sacred flame. Two nights in a pleasant local hotel on Mt. Zao.

**Day 6. Thu 12th Sep. Day tramp in the area, overnight on Mt Zao**

We’ll head up through the magical conifer forests of the north to the summit of Mt Zao and to Lake Okama. Around 5 – 6 hours hiking depending on whether we get the ‘assistance’ of the chair lifts down the mountain. Back to the hotel for a hot soak!

**Day 7. Fri 13th Sep. The western Yamagata area**

We start the day with a drive to the Mogami River and boar cruise through the misty forest-cloaked valley. Then in the van again for another short ride to Mt. Haguro – only 2446 stone steps to the pagoda at the top! Mt. Haguro is one of the three ‘dewa-sanzan’, the three holy mountains of the north of Honshu. They are sacred to adherents of the Shinto religion and popularised by Basho on his journeys. Our accommodation is in the city of Tsuruoka in the western part of the prefecture, in anticipation for the following day’s hike.

**Day 8. Sat 14th Sep. Climb the holy mountain Mt Gassan**

The menu for today is another full day walking to climb the 1979m Mt. Gassan, the second of the three holy mountains of the dewa-sanzan. Buddhist monks used to starve themselves to death while deeply meditating on these slopes, their mummified remains becoming a major pilgrimage site. No actual mummies (mira, in Japanese) remain today, though we hike through the area where this extreme ascetic practice was observed.

**Day 9. Sun 15th Sep. Travel to Tazawako**

From Tsuruoka we travel north up the west coast of Honshu into Akita prefecture and beneath the slopes of the towering 2400m Mt Chokai. This is one of the highest mountains in northern Japan, and we will have a half day hike on its slopes. Further north from Akita city, we travel east towards Lake Tazawako and the town of Kakunodate with its impressive collection of old samurai homes surrounded by cherry trees and manicured gardens – a veritable living museum. We’ll spend the night here and you’ll have the opportunity to hire bicycles to explore the streets and many old homes. The following 3 days will be exploration and hiking in Towada-Hachimantai National Park.

**Day 10. Mon 16th Sep. Hachimantai National Park tramp, overnight Tamagawa**

After a brief sightseeing jaunt to Lake Tazawako (the deepest lake in Japan), it is an hour to the start of our climb up Mt. Akita-komagdake, towering 1600m above the lake. Like many trail heads, our minibus takes us relatively high onto the peak taking a lot of the ‘oomph’ out of the ascent. It’s around 4 – 5 hours of hiking to and around the summit before we make our way off the mountain and drive even deeper into the heart of the northern Honshu mountains. After the hike you will have the option of a soak in the springs of the famous Nyuto onsen. Tonight, we’ll stay at one of Stefan’s favourite hot spring resorts, Tamagawa. The afternoon affords time to explore the geothermal area at your own pace. The sights include roaring, sulphur crested steam vents, boiling mud, and the ‘gensen' (hot spring source) pumping out an amazing 8600 litres a minute of water with a pH of 1! The hot spring resort pipes this water and dilutes it down to give a number of baths in a beautiful, aged cedar bath house.
Day 11. Tue 17th Sep. Hachimantai National Park, overnight Tamagawa
Time to climb again. Today it’s up Mt. Yake, straight out the door of our hot spring resort. Mt. Yake is an active volcano (like so many mountains in Japan) so we’ll make sure it’s not playing up too much before we climb it to the hut at the summit, have lunch and drop down the other side of the mountain to Goshogake hot spring where after another unique hot spring experience, we take a short minibus ride around Mt. Yake and back to our accommodation at Tamagawa. Around 5 hours hiking today. B.

Day 12. Wed 18th Sep. Hachimantai to Matsukawa, overnight Morioka
In midwinter, the Hachimantai plateau is buried by up to 10 m of snow and the conifers transform into juuyho, or ‘snow monsters’. In spring the road is ploughed and the Hachimantai Aspite Line (the road between Akita and Iwate prefectures) becomes a major tourist attraction as people come to ogle the 7 – 9 m snow walls that line the roads. The road goes within 500m of the summit Mt. Hachimantai and we will take a leisurely stroll up here before embarking on a relatively flat then downhill 6 hour walk through the high alpine forests of the national park to Matsukawa Hotspring. After a well deserved soak in the sublime waters, we travel south to the city of Morioka, in good position for the flight south tomorrow. B. L.

Day 13. Thur 19th Sep. Fly to Osaka, transfer to Kyoto, rest of the day at leisure
An early transfer from Morioka to the regional airport and a direct flight to Osaka Itami Airport. Transfer to Kyoto and check into the accommodation. Rest of the day at leisure with an early evening meet back at the hotel. Head to the Gion District, Kyoto’s famous entertainment and geisha district and enjoy the historical architecture. Stefan will line up an evening performance of geisha performances and tea ceremony tonight! B.

Day 14. Fri 20th Sep. Kyoto explorations
A full day to visit the temples, shrines, Imperial Palace and Park and more besides. B.

Day 15. Sat 21st Sep. Begin the Kumano-Kodo Trail, overnight Takahara
The train route heads south and follows the western side of the Kii Peninsula to Kii-Tanaba on the coast. Meet staff at the station for an orientation of the Kumano-Kodo Trail, collect maps and other information for our self guided walk. After lunch we take a bus ride to Takiri-Oji where we begin walking. Following a mix of paved village paths and mountain trails for the next few days, crossing the central mountains to descend once again to the coast. This afternoon is 4.4kms with a 370m ascent. Main luggage will be sent through to the accommodation to the lovely ryokan at Takahara. This is a beautiful village and the views here are panoramic. The adjacent onsen will be very inviting before our home cooked dinner. B.D.

Day 16. Sun 22nd Sep. Takahara to Chikatsuyu
A lovely journey of 14.5kms featuring several shrines enroute – an 850m ascent and 520m descent. Plenty of time to relax at the family-run minshuku. B.D.

Day 17. Mon 23rd Sep. Chikatsuyu to Nachi-san
The trail continues through small villages and forested areas over the Kii Mountains to the Kumano shrine at Hongu, one of the three ‘Grand Shrines of Hongu’. From the shrine, a short bus ride connects to Yunomine Onsen, one of the oldest natural hot spring villages in Japan, with its wonderful outdoor bath. Enjoy a relaxing soak before dinner. Walking distance is 24kms with an 820m ascent and 1140m descent. A local bus could be used to reduce the walking distance today. B.D.

Day 18. Tue 24th Sep. Ukegawa to Koguchi
Explore atmospheric Yunomine Village before taking a bus to Ukegawa to begin the 12.5km walk to the remote village of Koguchi, over Kogumoto Pass. Here we stay at a small minshuku run by a retired couple. Explore the Kumano River before dinner. Ascent and descent both around 500m. B.D.

The final section of trail goes over Ogumotorigoe Pass with glimpses of the Pacific Ocean, then descends to Nachi Tasha (Grand Shrine) and a beautiful waterfall. The overnight accommodation will either be in Nachi-san close to the shrine, or a 20 minute bus ride to the coastal town of Kii-Katsuura. Distance is 15km with 980m ascent and 920m descent. B.D.
Day 20. Thu 26th Sep. Finish Kumano-Kodo Trail, by train to Osaka and Shinkansen to Hiroshima
Kii- Katsuura is an active fishing port and has a lively early morning fish market. We will then travel by train to Osaka and change here for the Shinkansen Bullet Trail to Hiroshima, with balance of the day at leisure. B.

Day 21. Fri 27th Sep. Whole day in Hiroshima, then late Shinkansen to Kyoto
Enjoy the whole day to explore this fascinating city. On 6th August 1945, Hiroshima became the target of the world’s first atomic bomb attack. Hiroshima’s Peace Memorial Park is a constant reminder of that day, and it draws visitors from all over the world. Most sights can be easily reached on foot or a short tram ride. Much later, we return to Kyoto by Shinkansen train. B.

Day 22. Sat 28th Sep. Final day sightseeing in Kyoto
Your own time to explore, perhaps pick up souvenirs of your trip and enjoy a final dinner out together to celebrate a wonderful trip. B.D.

Day 23. Sun 29th Sep. Depart Osaka Kansai Airport
After breakfast, transfer to Osaka Kansai International Airport and check in for flights back home. B.

Day 24. Mon 30th Sep. Arrive Auckland
On arrival into Auckland, travel arrangements have ended.

Booking Conditions : FMC Travel Club and Travel Smart Napier

1. The FMC Travel Club (FMC) offers this small group trip in conjunction with Travel Smart Napier (TSN). All travel arrangements for the operation of the core trip are made with TSN. Participants agree to all terms and conditions by signing the Registration Form.

2. FMC and TSN are not responsible or liable for any injury, damage, loss, accident, delay or irregularity which may arise from weather, defect in any vehicle, vessel or aircraft, or through the acts or default of any person or company engaged in carrying out any of the arrangements of the trip.

3. We reserve the right to cancel the trip if minimum numbers don’t eventuate. In such an event, all monies paid will be fully refunded. We also reserve the right to make any modifications that may be essential, or to offer a modified trip to a smaller number of people.

4. The trip includes a payment to FMC.

5. Registrations are accepted in good faith on a first comers basis on receipt of the Registration Form. The deposit is $5000 per person and will be invoiced once a core minimum number of registrations have been received. Registrations close by 31st January 2019 (or earlier if the trip fills) and final balance is due by 31st May 2019. All payments may be made by cash, cheque, EFTPOS, internet banking, visa or mastercard to the offices of TSN. All or any payments by Visa or Mastercard adds $350 to the final trip price. Our preferred method of payment is internet banking. Please use : 010685 0151601 46 at ANZ Napier. Heerlen Ltd T/A Travel Smart Napier (with a covering email).

6. Events beyond our control such as currency fluctuations or any unforeseen additional costs may affect the overall trip price. We cannot guarantee the price until such times as full payment has been received. Upon full payment, the trip price is guaranteed.

7. Cancellations. If you need to cancel your registration for any reason, you must advise TSN in writing as soon as possible. An email is acceptable, a phone call alone is not. Travel insurance will cover you for unforeseen circumstances but will not cover you for changing your mind after committing to the trip. Cancellation fees apply as follows :
   - Cancellations received from 1st February to 31st May 2019 incur a fee of $5000 (the deposit)
   - Cancellations received from 1st June 2019 onwards incur a fee of 100% of trip costs.

8. Travel insurance is mandatory. We recommend Kiwi Holiday Insurance and a brochure/application by email is available any time, just ask. Details of any travel insurance other than Kiwi Holiday Insurance must be provided before departure. For your own protection, travel insurance should be effective not later than 28th February 2019, the date that trip deposits become non-refundable.
Registration Form – Japan 2019

Complete and send to John Dobbs at TSN with a passport copy. Registrations ideally close by 31st January 2019 (or earlier if the trip fills). So your earliest commitment is appreciated. All or any payments by Visa or Mastercard adds $350 per person to the final trip price. Our preferred payment method is internet banking into: 010685 0151601 46 at ANZ Napier (with covering email please). Do not send the deposit initially, this will be requested once a core minimum number of participants have registered and viability established.

Your full name(s) as per passport(s) and please underline or highlight preferred first name(s)

Mailing address

Day phone Night phone Mobile

Email. Date(s) of birth

What are your recent tramping experiences? How often do you tramp? Please extend your answers overleaf or on separate paper, or by email.

Specify any dietary requirements, allergies or medical conditions

Contact person in NZ for any emergencies: name, address, contact phone numbers, email and the relationship to you. In the event of any emergency, this is the sole person you are authorizing us to liaise with

I/We have read the full trip dossier and I/We agree to pay all trip costs by due date, as advised by invoice. I/We understand that the final trip price is subject to minimum numbers and other cost impacts as detailed under the Booking Conditions section; therefore the final trip price cannot be guaranteed until such times as full payment has been made.

.......................................................................................................................... signed and dated by each person registering

Send to: John Dobbs, FMC Travel Club Convenor
Travel Smart Napier.
Civic Court, Dickens Street, Napier 4110. P: 06 8352222 E: john@travelsmart.co.nz