



The Way of Walking

Luxury tour operator helps clients put best foot forward

WALKJAPAN

■ www.walkjapan.com

An award-winning pioneer of off-the-beaten track tours, Walk Japan provides authentic, culturally sensitive, and sustainable treks and expeditions across Japan.

Creating original tours that cover the country's rich geography and illustrious history, the company has been recognized as a leader in the industry, and selected by National Geographic as one of the 200 Best Adventure Travel Companies in the world.

According to CEO Paul Christie, Walk Japan offers quality, one-of-a-kind tours that provide interest, entertainment and understanding.

"Our first-rate tour leaders—both Japanese and foreign—not only have a deep knowledge of and affinity for Japan, its people, language and culture," Christie says, "they also have a great enthusiasm for walking, sharing their knowledge, and leading visitors through the beauty that the country has to offer. Many of our customers are repeatedly join us on tour."

EXPERT KNOWLEDGE, COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Christie himself is no stranger to Japan and leading expeditions. A graduate of economics and Japanese language studies who worked as an analyst at Japan's leading financial newspaper, as well as in TV news, documentary production, and directing for some of the country's principal TV companies, Christie joined the company as a tour leader in 1997.

"I've been a keen walker for much of my life and jumped at the chance to lead tours for Walk Japan in 1997," Christie says. "I ended up leading the company in 2003. Working with colleagues and local communities, we ensure that all our tours meet the highest standards of efficiency, sustainability, integrity, and professionalism."

"That's why, for instance, we rely as much as possible on small-scale, family run businesses, including inns and restaurants, to ensure that locals benefit from the visitors that we introduce to their communities."

TRADITIONAL TRAILS

One of five ancient highways that run from Kyoto to Tokyo, the Nakasendo Way represents the crown jewel in Walk Japan's offerings. As the company's first product, the 11-day, 10-night tour from the old imperial capital to the present one passes through some of the most beautiful countryside in Japan, including the Kiso Valley, Kaida Plateau, and the Japan Alps. It has been a long-term, best seller.

"For good reason, it is a fantastic tour with echoes of the Edo period. That helps us unveil and understand modern Japan and its friendly people, the latter being Japan's greatest attraction," Christie says. "For centuries, samurai, messengers, pilgrims, poets, and others made their way up and down the Nakasendo Way. In their footsteps, we cover about 130km of the route's 544km."

UNESCO APPROVED

To complement its main tour, Walk Japan offers 18 other walks, including an exploration of the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage, a nine-day, eight-night tour starting in Osaka and finishing in Ise on the Kii Peninsula.

The pilgrimage path is one of only two such walking routes in the world that has been recognized by the World Heritage lists of UNESCO.

The company's walking tours—which span between two and 11 days—run the length and breadth of Japan, from Hokkaido to Okinawa and along trails through many prefectures in between.

Some tours include outdoor water activities, such as kayaking, paddleboarding, and snorkeling. The company also offers bespoke tours for private groups and schools, as well as walks geared to the time of year.

"For the upcoming winter season, we have our seven-day, six-night Snow Country Trek tour in Nagano Prefecture, where we explore on snowshoes a winter wonderland virtually untouched by others," Christie explains.

"And in February, we have our Winter Photography Workshop tour, which includes a prize-winning professional photographer who instructs visitors on all aspects of the art."

CUSTOMIZED EXPEDITION

In addition to its signature tours, Walk Japan offers a number of specialty excursions, including custom-made luxury expeditions for high-net-worth individuals. Such trips may involve personalized dining with a celebrity chef, a private visit to one of Japan's top fashion designers, or a journey to a yoga retreat.

A hit with professionals from North America, Europe, and Australia, the company's tours have recently enjoyed growing interest from countries in Asia, including Singapore, Hong Kong, and, naturally, Japan.

THEN AND NOW

Walk Japan was founded by Dick Irving and Tom Stanley, academics at Hong Kong University in 1992. Respectively specialist on Japanese rural issues and Japanese history, they began the tours as field-study walks for their students along the Nakasendo Way. Soon after, colleagues and others expressed an interest in joining, and Walk Japan was born.

For families and friends, and even couples and individuals, Walk Japan's unique tours capture the imagination and enthrall visitors as they pass across some of the most outstanding areas of natural beauty and interest in Japan. ■