

This journey finds your heartland.



Heartland JAPAN

What is “Heartland Japan”?

Born and raised in a small fishing town in Yamaguchi Prefecture, Heartland Founder/CEO Keijiro Sawano grew up feeling inferior to his peers from the city. This is a very common phenomenon in Japan. People in the countryside often feel embarrassed about their rural roots. As he matured and grew up, he began to question why this was the case.

Post war Japan experienced a period of enormous growth. During this time almost all of the capital and human resources were concentrated in the big cities. Social attitudes made city life seem desirable, convenient and cool. The countryside was left with nothing to offer its younger inhabitants. There was a huge urban migration. One that continues to this day. By the year 2040, 523 of the 1,718 in Japan municipalities are likely to “disappear”. Many people’s hometowns have been lost already.

Against this backdrop, Keijiro Sawano lamented the town in which he was born and raised. He had no confidence in his roots and often lied about his upbringing to hide his shame. It was a chip on his shoulder that followed him around wherever he went.

When eventually he snapped out of it, he didn't want to see more kids growing up with this sense of shame. He wanted to shift the paradigm and create a society where rural was cool and where locals could be proud of where are from.

Tourism is one of the tools that we can use. It can create both a source of income and pride for the residents. Once taken for granted, the natural environment, the cultural customs and the skills of the locals can be channeled into tourism and their value reassigned. Through this method, not only do financial circumstances change but also social attitudes. The countryside may become a desirable place to live and the locals can take pride in their hometowns.

It is often said that the home is where the heart is. And by sharing our homes we share our hearts. This kind of local, intimate travel touches both the visitor and the host in a meaningful way. It can pave the way for future generations to live in and love the Japanese countryside again. So, let's go on a deep adventure into Japan's countryside where authentic cultures and lifestyles remain.

This is “Heartland Japan”

Why we do what we do?

To see the awe filled faces of visitors who can't believe the side of Japan they are seeing.

To see the reactions of the locals as foreign visitors admire their beautiful environments and precious traditions.

To reignite the flames of adventurous spirits whose spark has been lost on places with too many tourists.

To show them something different that will stay with them forever.

To show the rural Japan's towns and villages that they are valued by the world.

This is our reward.

Customers wanted:

Do you ...

want to go to a lesser-known place?

want to travel like a local?

want to meet a uniquely different culture?

want to travel in a different way?

want to know the true Japan as it is?

want to transform yourself through your travels?

People who seek a transformative adventure are not going to be satisfied with Japan's "golden route". These people are on a quest to know something deeper and truer.

We have created tours of non-touristic, uncommercial Japan, deep in the countryside. These trips are especially reserved for the travelers with a hunger for such a thing. By sharing these places and cultures with people, we hope that they can take a part of what they saw and learned with them.

This is the role of Heartland Japan.

Experience the Japanese countryside through your ...

Body - Hike on ancient cobblestone trails. Kayak on pristine coastlines.
Cycle through rice fields as far as the eye can see.

Head - Meet traditional craftsmen and try their techniques for yourself.
Watch traditional Japanese performing arts. Don't just try Japanese food and drink but see how they are made and how to enjoy them.

Heart - Talk with the locals and see how they live. Learn the local folk tales of the Japanese countryside and maybe share some of your own. Make real connections.



Nature

When you think of Japan, you're probably instantly hit with images of neon lights and bustling city streets. You can't find that in the countryside, but you can find a whole lot else. Mountains, rivers, oceans, hot springs and more. You can walk along ancient trails preserved in time and hear stories of feudal lords and samurai. You can kayak the coast and let the rugged coastline explain to you Japan's volcanic past. Human-powered transportation gets you deeper in the landscapes and culture. It also gives you the time to process what you are seeing.

Culture



Spirituality is one of the best ways to learn about Japan. Doing so can lead to the biggest adventures. There are said to be 8 million gods in Japan. And the Shinto faith believes that everything in nature has a spirit. To this day the Japanese revere and worship their mountains, forests, harvests and more.

You can experience this culture for yourself through meeting *Yamabushi* (mountain monks), attending morning Buddhist services and ancient rituals still practiced at Shinto shrines.

Lots of Japanese culture is still largely unknown to foreigners.

One such thing is *kagura*, entertainment for the gods. This ancient form of storytelling told through dance is done to show gratitude for the harvests.

Rural, local *kabuki* is called *jikabuki*. This form of the traditional performing art differs in many ways from mainstream city *kabuki*. It even features actors of both genders. Be one of a very select few foreigners to see a *jikabuki* show.



Activity

Currently the top attractions for visitors to Japan are food & drink, history, cultural sites etc. The outdoor industry actually thrives in Japan domestically with amazing, rugged, pristine environments aplenty. Despite the excellent quality of these attractions, outdoor locations remain largely unknown to foreign tourists.

In recent years the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage and the Nakasendo ancient road have been gaining in popularity. However, Japan has so much more to offer! Seas, mountains, rivers, lakes and skies. You can experience Japan's uniquely volcanic landscape through all sorts of activities. Kayaking, trekking, mountain biking, paragliding, you name it. And best of all, after a long tiring day, you can rest up in natural hot springs for the next day's adventure.

People



The thing that is often most lacking in trips to Japan is human interaction. Japanese people are known to be shy and the language barrier is a very real thing. This issue is elevated in the countryside where people are even less exposed to foreign visitors. However, though there are hurdles, these connections are so important not only for your trip but also for the local communities. This is the part of your adventure that sets Heartland apart. We create opportunities to interact and bond with real local people. We actively encourage it. This is a glimpse into a lifestyle that not many foreigners know, a chance to make special memories and maybe, just maybe, change the way you live your life too.

Our Approach

Our sustainable revitalization activities have gradually gained recognition in Japan. The number of requests that we get from rural areas and local governments to create a window to small scale foreign eco-tourism has increased.



We are currently working on various projects for national and local government agencies. Through these projects, we are able to understand regions deeply. These long and slow relationships help us to make tours that express the true nature of an area, while working with real locals in the community. We are the bridge between these remote regions and foreign travelers.

We have earned the trust of government agencies and are now promoting inbound development projects all over Japan. These are some of the agencies we work with.



An aerial photograph of a beach with intricate, wavy sand ripples. The ripples are formed by the receding tide, creating a series of parallel ridges and grooves that stretch across the entire frame. The sand is a light tan color, and the overall texture is very rhythmic and organic. The lighting is soft, highlighting the contours of the ripples.

Through local governments and DMOs, we are developing tours, creating a welcoming environment and establishing the infrastructure for areas to establish tourism. We also focus on human resources such as the training of local guides with stories to tell and local coordinators too. As professionals of rural tourism, we work closely with communities to provide travelers with safe and secure adventures. We also create and sell tours made in collaboration with local governments and DMOs.

Currently people in small towns and villages of rural Japan are digging. They are researching their history, their culture and restoring traditional crafts. They are making tours and itineraries and relearning their folk stories to share with you.

And in all honesty, some elements are still being refined. Still developing and growing. But that is the beauty of it. There is a genuineness in the raw truth of the countryside. Something real and unpretentious. Something that we embrace.

Above all, with us you can get to know an area honestly.

We divide tours and activities into four categories, each with five levels.

1. Fitness level (according to ATTA standards)

The level of physical strength and load on the body.

		Activity	Hiking Distance	
Level 1	Relaxed	1-3 hours	Up to 4 km	Cultural tour walking in a flat area
Level 2	Easy / Active	2-5 hours	Up to 9 km	Activities that even beginners without high fitness levels can do
Level 3	Moderate	4-7 hours	Up to 16 km	Requires moderate athletic ability and good health. Activities such as easy mountaineering.
Level 4	Vigorous	5-8 hours	Up to 19 km	Requires good athletic ability and excellent health. Experience is preferred.
Level 5	Challenging	Over 8 hours	Over 19 km~	High athletic ability is required. Participants who have no experience cannot participate.

2. Skill level

The level of technique required to participate in the activity.

		Canoe & Kayak (example)
Level 1	Beginner	For people with very little or no experience.
Level 2	Advanced novice	Familiar with canoes / kayaks and water. Knows basic technique. Has experience in rivers and lakes.
Level 3	Intermediate	Even in the presence of waves can confidently control the vessel. Can assist in rescue.
Level 4	Advanced	Several years of experience, Can self-rescue.
Level 5	Expert	Has several years of experience and is not only highly skilled, but can also exercise sound judgement, No problem in a challenging environment.

3. Culture level

Japan was divided into more than 260 counties in the 17th century. Dialects, crafts, performing arts, industry, spirituality, local cuisine, etc. developed divergently in each. Due to the Japan's long and narrow shape as well the mountainous terrain these cultural differences remain distinct. However, the number of people who inherit these cultures is decreasing. And some are so rare that most Japanese don't even know about them. Others are so deep in meaning that it may take some prior knowledge to understand (though we'll try our best to explain!). How can we quantify such a thing? We have our own level.



Level 1	It exists all over Japan. Even people with no prior knowledge of the country can enjoy it.
Level 2	For those who already have some cultural knowledge about Japan but want to learn more.
Level 3	This is something unique to the area. People who know about Japan to some extent and understand the different area may enjoy it more. =
Level 4	Will be enjoyed most by people who not only know Japan well, but have also learned the history and culture of the area in preparation for their trip
Level 5	Something extremely rare that requires a deep knowledge and understanding of Japan to get the most out of. Basically, for real Japan nerds.

4. Heartlander level

Finally, we get to the heartlander level. Since our tours include areas and experiences that even Japanese people do not know, we have created the heartlander level to measure them.

The level is decided by a combination of the places name-recognition, remoteness, commerciality, and how much prior knowledge of Japan is necessary for it to be appreciated. The higher the level, the deeper, more remote and less touristic it will be. Higher levels will also mean more inconveniences and hardships along the way.

For most people we wouldn't recommend a level 5 straight away. Get used to the country first at levels 1 to 3. After gaining some experience and knowledge, raise the level. When you get to level 5 let us know and Heartland will make a level 6 tour just for you.

Level 1	First trip to Japan	Popular tourist destinations that even families can enjoy.	The Golden route, The Dragon route (Kanazawa > Hida Takayama > Shirakawago)
Level 2	Second or third visit to Japan	Areas known to some extent overseas	Yakushima, Naoshima, Niseko, Kumanokodo Nakahechi route, Hakuba, Nakasendo, Koya-san, Seto Inland Sea
Level 3	Fourth to fifth visit to Japan	Areas known in Japan but not overseas. Areas with few visitors due to a lack of transpiration	Izumo, Iwami Ginzan, Kumano kodo Iseji route, Aso, Kagoshima, Kirishima, Hagi, Tsuwano, Narita, Sahara, Choshi
Level 4	Sixth to seventh visit to Japan	A developing area that isn't well known as a tourist destinations even in Japan. Perfect for finding hidden treasures only known to those in the know	Ina valley, Miyako, Tsugaru, Shimokita peninsula, Saba kaido
Level 5	Eighth visit to Japan and beyond	An experience that is little known or commercialized in Japan. It takes a certain amount of preparedness and a spirit of challenge to enjoy it. You can enjoy deep Japan that no one knows.	Hiramaru Myoko City, Shimane Peninsula, Gotsu (Gonokawa), Susa, Esaki, Nago

And more destinations waiting to be discovered.

Kumano Kodo Ise-ji Trail

Long trip : 7 Days 6 Nights

Short trip : 4 Days 3 Nights

Activity: Trekking, Sea kayaking*, Ancient style boat cruise*
(* included in Long trip only)



You may have heard of the Kumano Kodo before. The Kumano Kodo refers to a network of pilgrimage roads in the Kii Peninsular which date back over 1,000 years. It is only the second road network in the world to be awarded World Heritage status in 2004, following the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage in Spain and France.

However, what you may not know is that the vast majority of tourists who walk the Kumano Kodo take the Nakahechi route. A beautiful route, but we want to show you something different that others won't. Our tour takes the lesser-known Iseji route. This beautiful pilgrimage takes the sacred coastal path that connects two of Japan's most sacred sites, Ise Grand Shrine and the *Kumano Sanzan*.

Take in views of the shining sea and rugged coasts from rolling mountain tops. Hike along ancient cobble stone roads. Stroll through small fishing towns and interact with locals. Pray in a shrine to the rhythm of the iconic Japanese taiko drum. Learn to cook rice traditionally and make a local delicacy. This tour shows you what a real Japanese pilgrim sees/saw.









Izumo Iwami Ginzan & Gonokawa River Trail

Long Trip : 6 Days 5 Night

Short Trip : 3 Days 2 Nights

Activity : Walking



This tour starts in Japan's oldest shrine, Izumo Grand Shrine. It is said that millions of gods from all over Japan meet there every November. It is also said to be the birthplace of Japan and has a mystical, spiritual feeling. You can feel this energy as you stroll on the beach where the gods arrive each year.

This area is also home to Iwami Ginzan. This silver mine was once responsible for creating two thirds of the world's silver output. It was founded in the 16th century and back then its name was known all over the world. It was certified as a World Heritage Site in 2007. Omori Preservation Area is a wonderful old-fashioned cityscape that is comparable to Magome and Tsumago of the Nakasendo. However, it is pretty much unknown abroad due to the San'in regions poor access.

You can also experience *kagura*. This is a sacred dance dedicated to the gods. It tells a story through explosive dances, haunting masks and traditional music. It is far more dynamic than the better-known *kabuki*. Even Japanese people think of *kagura* as exotic and out of reach. On our tour, you can watch a performance, create your own *kagura* mask and even participate in the practice of the locals.





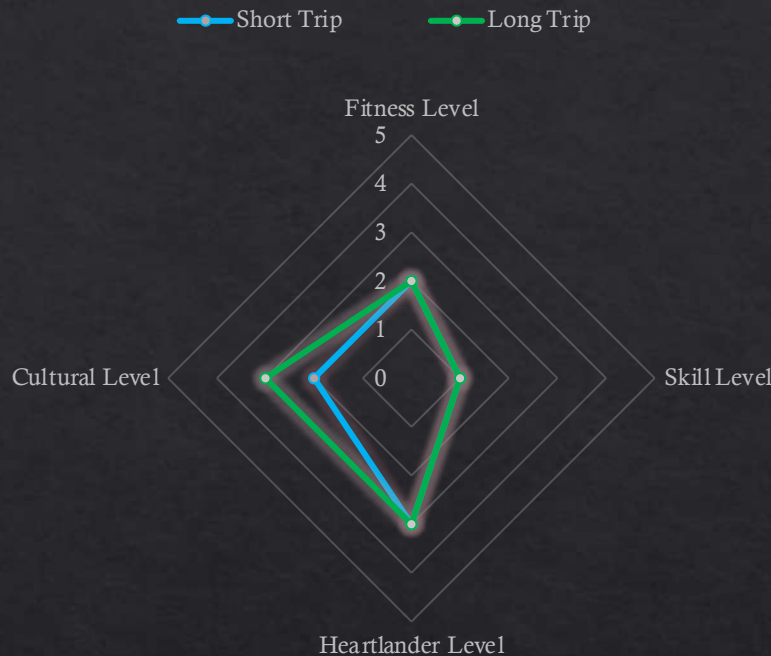


Tsuwano & Hagi-Okan Walk

Long Trip : 8 Days 7 Nights

Short Trip : 3 Days 2 Nights

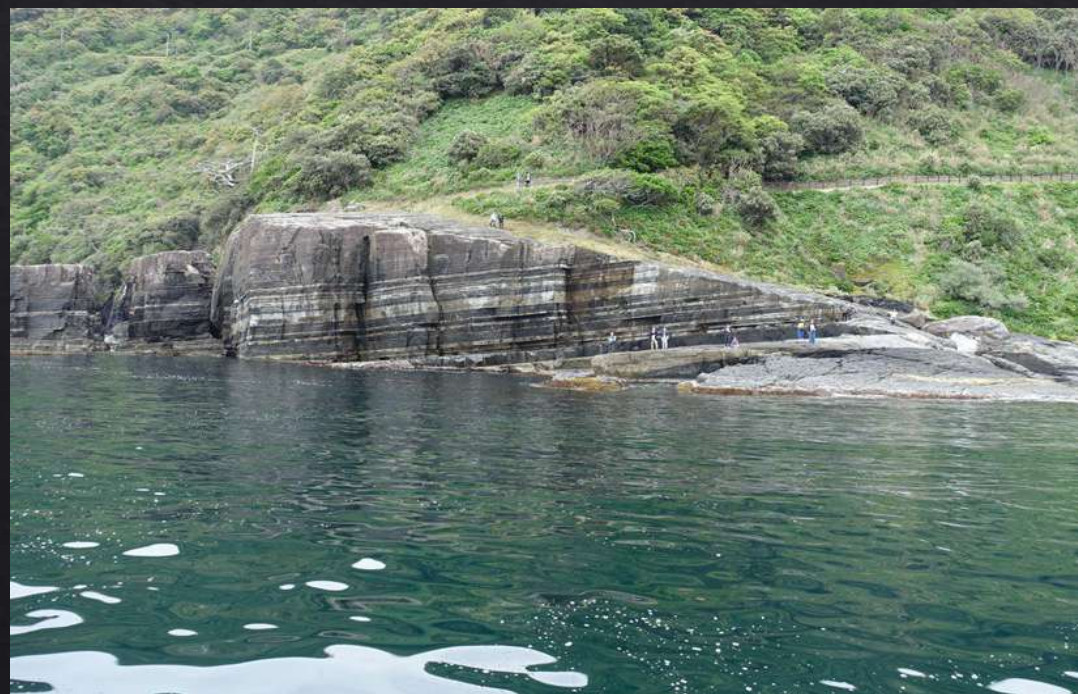
Activity : Walking

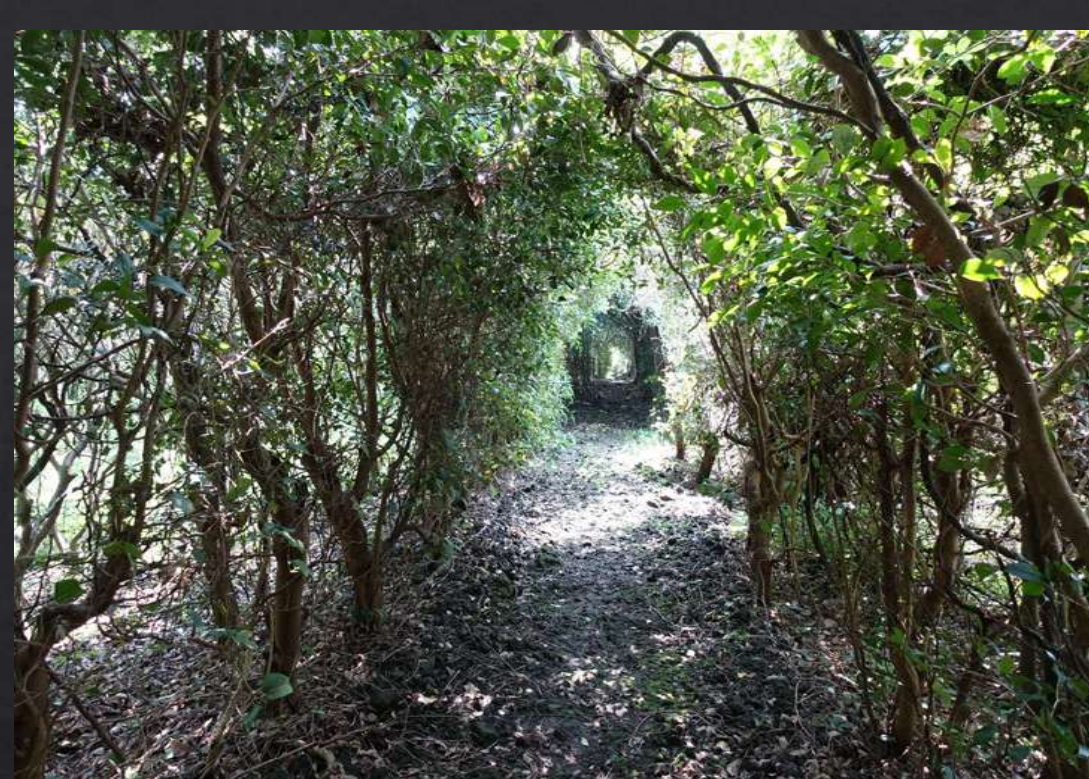


In the small castle town of Tsuwano, Japanese koi are swimming in the freshwater. Evidence of the cleanliness of the water that flows here. However, a murkier past is afoot. On this tour you will learn about the persecution of Christians in Japan.

The Hagi Okan road is 55km long. It connects the coastlines of the Sea of Japan and the Seto Inland Sea in Yamaguchi Prefecture. This cobblestone road was built in 1607. Many samurai used the road on route to Edo (Tokyo). On this tour you can hike sections of the Hagi Okan road, see tunnels of primeval camelia forests, meditate while observing Japanese gardens, take a ride on a fishing boat and see the rugged volcanic coastlines. We will also tour a sake brewery not open to the public.







What tour level is right for you?



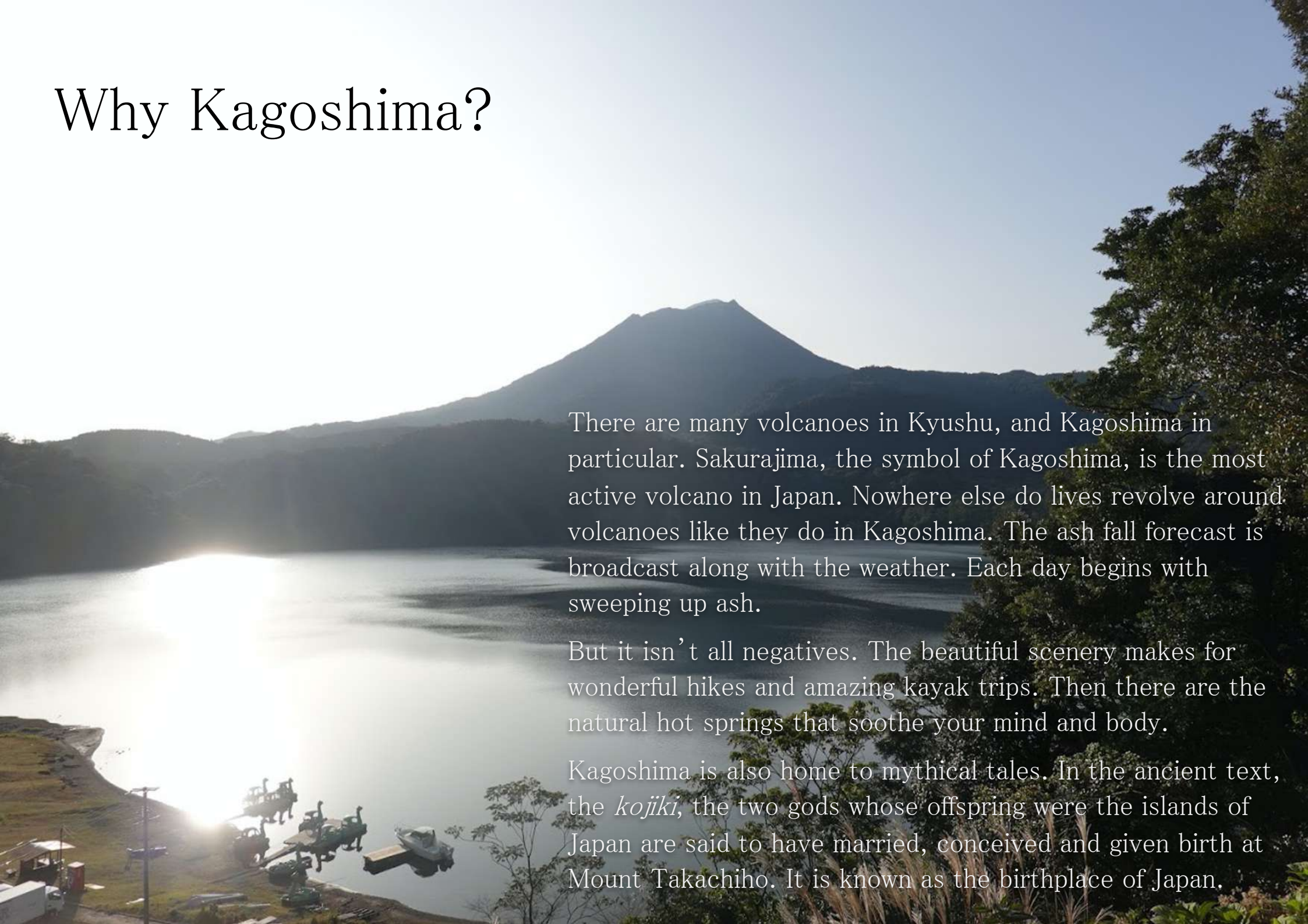
FARM STAY

We don't just run tours, we also run a farm stay business in Kagoshima prefecture. Why do we do this too? We want you to experience a traditional Japanese way of life in the countryside, not as a traveler but as a member of the family. Getting back to a rustic way of life and the primary industries of farming and fishing. Industries that are lifeblood and the symbols of the area. And yet the number of people active in these industries gets lower and lower. Falling birthrates, an aging population and a lack of successors are to blame. How can we tackle this problem?

Bring profits and not burdens to hard working farmers. And make them joyful in their work as you feel that joy too. This is our farm stay operation. Arigato!



Why Kagoshima?



There are many volcanoes in Kyushu, and Kagoshima in particular. Sakurajima, the symbol of Kagoshima, is the most active volcano in Japan. Nowhere else do lives revolve around volcanoes like they do in Kagoshima. The ash fall forecast is broadcast along with the weather. Each day begins with sweeping up ash.

But it isn't all negatives. The beautiful scenery makes for wonderful hikes and amazing kayak trips. Then there are the natural hot springs that soothe your mind and body.

Kagoshima is also home to mythical tales. In the ancient text, the *kojiki*, the two gods whose offspring were the islands of Japan are said to have married, conceived and given birth at Mount Takachiho. It is known as the birthplace of Japan.

Our received awards ...

In recognition of our community activities, we have received numerous awards from the government and related organizations. Below are just a few examples.



- 2017 Children and Family/Youth Support Team Award
2017 from the Ministry of State for Special Missions
- 2015 Kagoshima Prefecture Symbiosis / Collaborative Rural Development Campaign Award
- 2015 Peninsula Community Development Award
- 2014 12th All right! Nippon Grand Prize
- 2012 Regional Revitalization Award
- 2012 10th Green Tourism Excellence Award
- 2012 Kagoshima Prefecture Coexistence / Collaborative Community Creation Award

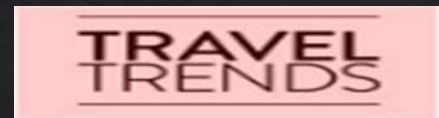
Heartland Japan Farm Stays

Combining farm stays and farm activities in Kagoshima.

We are currently creating nature tours and experiences for you to enjoy the magnificent landscape of Kagoshima.



Our unique approach and activities are featured in articles not only in Japan, but also around the world.





HEARTLAND JAPAN

FAR AWAY FROM THE cacophony of the cities, we seek a culturally immersive adventure that cannot be reached by a tour bus. The Heartland Japan tour through Iwano, Iwano Gintan and the Gintan River Trail of Shimane Prefecture emphasizes real experience over mere sightseeing.

Here, we get off the bus and walk. We begin at Iwanohama beach, the gateway to Iwano. This is the time of year when all the Gods from across Japan descend on Kami-no-miya shrine to plan the coming year's business relations, family ties and matchmaking. It's windy, and the waves are picking up. I suppose when 8,000,000 Gods are on your guest list, that's to be expected. The nearby *tsuno-tai-sha* is the highest shrine in Japan. Standing at twenty-four meters, it's the most ancient and the most important. The main deity enshrined here is Okuninushi, the creator of Japan, ruler of Iwano, and God of good relationships and marriage. Upon entrance to the grounds we clap our hands four times twice for ourselves, and twice for the partner we desire.

As the Gods convene, their stories are retold through the ancient art of Kagura that flourishes in Shimane. It is the oldest performance art in Japan. Tucked into the Yuzutsu Shrine, we watch highly charged theatricals that bring ancient folklore to life. As the tritons and pegasus mounts, the flautist and percussionists intensify their playing to a rising crescendo. Masked performers unveil their giant seventeen metres-long serpentine costumes in blinding smoke and fire. How do the performers manoeuvre on stage? How do they avoid entanglement? We're awestruck. I'm on the edge of my seat with excitement. One by one, the protagonist smites off their heads with his sword.

To best appreciate Kagura, we attend the rehearsal of the Yuki's

The sun rises over Ise and sets in Iwano. This is where the Gods roam.

Kagura Company, and again, gaze upon masterful synchronization of movement. We ask so many questions from their diet to their choice of costumes, surrounded by demons, paint our own Kagura masks. In keeping with the spirit of craftsmanship, we visit Yuki's workshop in Iwano, the largest climbing kiln in Japan, for a ceramic workshop in which we bake earthenware cups in traditional Yuzutsu-yaki style.

These workshops are remote. We walk through lush green forests to reach them, breathing in fresh clean air, and feeling invigorated with each step. Along the way we indulge in Ayu river fish, local sake and sake, weaving in and out of samurai residences and local shops, and out of samurai residences and local shops, and out of samurai residences and local shops.

In each one more charming than the last. In the heart of Iwano mining town, we pass a yatsu

the longest running silver mine in Japan. Down the dark tunnels, into the mountain, and out another side, we pass through so much history and scenery on foot. We deserve a soak in the local hot springs that await us.

Hiking through bamboo woods of daring monkeys and wild boars we reach tiny fishing villages along the shore. Inside his home, local fisherman and painter, Amano-san, shares with us his paintings of the river that he calls home. The river, he says, provides for his family and has taught him how to live. On a good day, he could catch 600 fish. Now, he prefers to paint them. Outside we admire his old fishing boat that he made from scratch. From the river to the mountains, we wind through narrow paths and up ancient steps. We hear only the sound of wind in the trees, the occasional call of a hawk, and the flow of water that sounds like a deep roll of applause.

For our last stop, we find ourselves standing in the middle of a playground with the Otsu School Kids Club in a pick-up game of soccer, as a growing number of children congregate. Am I out of breath because I'm out of shape, or because I'm laughing so hard? The infectious sweetness of these children is pure joy. Together we head to the back of their school where a fire pit has been stoked. We each wrap

potatoes that they've picked for us in tin foil, and throw them into the fire. As the potatoes cook, we attempt language exchange with hilarity. One by one, we retrieve our snacks from the fire, peel back the foil, and find a spot to sit among the group of children eating potatoes.

Deep in the mountains of Shimane, in places time forgot, the heartland of Japan beats in these communities who live with such honest simplicity and innocence that, to even observe, let alone interact, is as profoundly heartfelt as it is unforgettable. ♦

www.heartlandjapan.com
By Adam Waxman



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Visit [Heartland Japan](http://www.heartlandjapan.com) if you're interested in booking a tour.

ADAM WAXMAN

Adam Waxman is an award winning travel journalist focusing on food, wine and well being. As well as an actor in film, television and formerly, the Stratford Festival, he is the Publisher of DINE and Destinations magazine.

source: <https://dinemagazine.ca/heartland-japan-tour/>

1. We are tour ready. You can refer your clients to our package tours.

The following package tours are available and ready. They start and end in major tourist hub locations around Japan such as Hiroshima and Osaka. We utilize 600 registered guides nationwide. We cover everything from culture to the outdoors. Only with Heartland Japan can you find a side of Japan that has not been found yet. Please refer customers who are looking for a unique experience and an unexplored land to Heartland Japan.

Your Journey to Japan's Heartland starts here.



Michinoku Coastal Trail, Up
North Adventure into Iwate

From
¥448,000.00

🕒 9 Days



Saba-kaido expedition to
Northern Kyoto and Obama

From
¥330,000.00

🕒 7 Days



Journey to Iwate, the Utopia
of Japan

From
¥325,000.00

🕒 7 Days



Aso Nature Trek and Hot
Spring Tour

From
¥134,000.00

🕒 3 Days



Aso Volcano and Culture Tour

From
¥267,345.00

🕒 3 Days



Izumo, Iwami-Ginzan,
Yunotsu Mythological Trail
Tour

From
¥376,824.00

🕒 3 Days



3. Tailor-made, we will propose an original plan for your client every time.

We can also create tailor-made products for your clients. If you send us the inquiries from the clients that you received, we can propose a tailor-made itinerary for you as your own Japanese expert, with a quotation each time. Areas of concern, travel time, number of people, budget, accommodation type, dietary restrictions, activities you want to include, adventure level, guide/guideless preference, number of visits to Japan, etc. Please tell as much information as you have to help us create something special.

2. We can customize and make original tours for your business.

On request, we will happily make travel packages to match your brand. We can customize our existing package tours to meet your own company's identity. We accept requests such as increasing/decreasing the number activities, or adding something impressive and special to the existing tour. We will do this utilizing the advice of local experts. We can handle everything from planning to departure and assigning guides. Let's make a tour together!



Feel the pulse of Heartland Japan ...



KEIJIRO SAWANO

CEO & founder

Keiji Sawano is from a small fishing town in Yamaguchi prefecture. He founded Heartland Japan with strong desire to revitalize rural Japan. He hopes to create a society where rural people can thrive and be proud of their hometown.

Our team...

Our teams' hometowns are not big cities either. We are as proud of our products as we are of our hometowns. We are now ready to work with you.



Sharing our hometowns with you ...



Heartland JAPAN

From here!



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