October 15-October 29, 2023

Tentative Itinerary
Participants should be flexible to change the itinerary based on unforeseen circumstances.

Sun 15
Arrive at Tokyo Haneda Airport. Bus ride to hotel. Welcome dinner.

Mon 16
Train to Matsumoto, visit the Matsumoto Castle and lunch. 1.5 hours further to trailside alpine hiking village of Kamikochi. Overnight alpine lodge bunkroom.

Tues 17
Hike Kamikochi to Yarisawa Hut. 8.5 miles (+1,033').

Wed 18
Hike 3.1 miles (+4,460') Yarisawa Lodge to Yarigatake Hut. Optional climb to the top of Mt. Yarigatake.

Thur 19
Yarigatake Hut to Shin Hotaka Onsen. 7.6 miles, (-6,854'). Bus return to Kamikochi. Overnight Kamikochi alpine lodge.

Fri 20
6 hour bus and train transfer to Kyoto. Evening cooking class (dinner). Overnight Kyoto hotel.

Sat 21
Half-day guided tour of town of Kyoto including gardens. Free time afternoon. Overnight Kyoto hotel.

Sun 22

Mon 23
Morning monastery prayers (optional). Hike Kumano Kodo Kohechi Trail to Omata. 10.6 miles. (+2,264'/-2,756'), Ryokan stay.

Tues 24
Hike 9 miles to Miura-guchi. (+2,428'/-3576'), Ryokan stay.

Wed 25
Hike 11.3 miles to Totsukawa Onsen. (+2,674'/-3,445'), Ryokan stay.

Thurs 26
Hike 9.4 miles to Hongu Onsen/ Yunomine Onsen. (+3,527'/-3,839'). Ryokan stay.

Fri 27
Traditional boat to Shingu. Visit shrine. Overnight Shingu hotel.

Sat 28
Morning train (4.5 hours) to Osaka for overnight hotel. Afternoon to explore Osaka. Farewell dinner.

Sun 29
Short shuttle ride to airport. Flights out of Osaka airport.

Trip Overview
Who knew that Japan boasts high alpine hiking trails complete with full service hut to hut trekking?

Join our group as we immerse ourselves into a truly Japanese experience divided into two different treks—one that is a sacred pilgrimage from village to village. The other a high mountain remote backcountry experience in Japan’s “Haute Route” in the Northern Alps.

Covering a total of 43 miles on the Kumano Kodo and 19 miles on the Alps trek, this trip is a rating 6-strenuous level of activity. We anticipate the majority of our hiking days to be 8-9 hours on the trail, with maximum daily cumulative elevation changes at over 4,000'. We will hike at the highest elevation over 10,000', and with some steep ascending and descending days. There will be precipitous and rocky terrain which can make the pace slower going.

Kumano Kodo, is one of only two pilgrimage World Heritage Sites globally. The series of sacred trails’ history stretches back over a thousand years as a pilgrimage to three shrines. We will hike one of the less visited routes, the Kohechi Route that crosses three mountain passes.

You should have at least intermediate and recent trekking hut to hut experience. While trekking you will carry your personal belongings needed for the trek (toiletries, change of clothes snacks, etc) for up to three days, but some luggage transfers are provided.

We invite you to join other AMC members as we embody the AMC mission to protect, enjoy and learn about new cultures while trekking through UNESCO world heritage sites and high mountains.
Accommodations

We will be staying in a mixture of western style hotels and Japanese lodging while in towns, in family run small lodges (ryokan) while on the Kumano Kodo, and backcountry mountain huts while trekking. Accommodations are shared with at least one other person, likely more while in huts and lodges. Japanese style rooms have tatami mats and a futon mattress and blankets on the floor. Efforts will be made to provide gender-separated rooms, but at times might not be possible. In most cases you will have shared hallway or hut bathrooms. There will be electricity and running water (but no showers) at the backcountry huts.

Onsen

We will have the opportunity to experience Japanese onsen, or a naturally occurring geothermic hot water spring, while staying in many of the ryokan on the Kumano Kodo trail. The hot springs are relaxing after a day of hiking. There are a few cultural elements that you should be aware of prior to joining in the public bathing. The baths are separated by gender, but **no bathing suits are allowed**. Everyone must shower thoroughly before entering the baths and you cannot take your towel into the bath with you. Find more info and resources here.

Please note that in Japan people with tattoos are often stigmatised. If you have a tattoo, it is possible that you will not be allowed into an onsen.

Meals

On this trip we will have many meals that are prepared by our lodging hosts while on the Kumano Kodo and backcountry huts, many of which have limited options for dietary restrictions. Breakfast might consist of rice and a bowl of miso soup. Lunch will be a bento box consisting of a ball of rice, and perhaps a small piece of meat. Dinners are often more diverse with several dishes (kaiseki) including pickled vegetables, several fish/sushi/meat dishes. If your dietary restrictions don’t allow for a typical Japanese meal, this is probably not the right trip for you. Participants are encouraged to supplement their meals on their own to meet their caloric or protein needs that are likely greater than the typical Japanese diet.

We suggest you bring protein bars, jerky, etc.

Cost and Cancellation Policy

The trip fee covers the following:
- All lodging
- All breakfasts and most lunches and dinners
- Luggage transfer service on most travel days (note, luggage not available during the hut to hut in the Northern Alps)
- Kumano Kodo “passport” package (maps and a passport for stamps)
- Guided half-day tour of Kyoto
- Cooking class in Kyoto
- Entrance fees for the Matsumoto Castle
- Ground transportation on public buses and trains
- AMC Adventure Travel fee
- Evacuation Insurance

What the trip fee does **not** include:
- Airfare to/from Japan from/to your home airport
- A few lunches and any snacks to supplement meals
- Small fees charged at some huts for extra water or use of bathrooms, misc.
small personal expenses such as donation boxes at shrines or entrances to some temples.

The trip cost was estimated based upon a October 2022 estimate. The final cost of the trip depends on the final number of participants (the more people the less expensive the trip is). The estimated cost is $4,990. Non-member price is $5,090. You may join the AMC here ($50 Ind., $75 family) here. You should anticipate an additional $1,500-$2,000 for round trip airfare from east coast towns to Tokyo and returning from Osaka. Trip leaders will assist participants in reserving their plane tickets. **All flight information should be discussed with the trip leader prior to purchasing a ticket.** Once you purchase a ticket, you are the owner and the AMC will not refund your plane fare. You should be aware that in accordance with AMC policy, you are subsidizing the leaders’ costs. Beyond this, the leaders are not allowed to realize any profit from this excursion. The trip price also includes an AMC overhead fee to cover administrative expenses of offering Adventure Travel trips. AMC trips are run on a non-profit basis and any savings we achieve, as well as any cost increases we incur, will be shared by trip participants.

The AMC Adventure Travel cancellation policy is based on the fact that your cancellation may not raise the cost to the other participants or to the leaders. Once you are notified the trip is declared to run as scheduled, the minimum cancellation fee is $100. If actual costs (expenses already incurred on your behalf and any unavoidable future expenses that will be incurred as a result of your registration and cancellation) are higher, they will be assessed instead, unless they can be applied toward another acceptable participant. Should the leaders be able to replace you, you may be charged a reduced penalty. This will generally not be determined until after the trip. Failure to make trip payment(s) in a timely manner will be considered a cancellation.

**Standard AMC Adventure Travel Conditions and Cancellations apply.**
Andrea Deaton Christensen, Leader

Andrea has been leading trips for the AMC since 2001, when she was a member of the Delaware Valley Chapter and has led nearly 20 Adventure Travel trips. She enjoys customizing trip itineraries and visiting new places she’s never been before. She leads backpacking, kayaking, hiking and cycling trips and has served on various committees—chapter and clubwide—and currently serves as the chair of the Adventure Travel Trip Review Committee. After moving from Philadelphia in 2007, Andrea lived in Jackson, WY and Volcano, HI before relocating to Seattle, WA in 2020. Andrea is the Director of Donor Engagement for Washington’s National Parks Fund where she works to support special projects in Mount Rainier, North Cascades and Olympic National Parks. She also volunteers her time on the board of the Seattle Animal Shelter Foundation and sings with Choral Arts Northwest.

Jon Christensen, Co-Leader

Jon is an avid traveler and backpacker who also enjoys performing improv comedy. His international travels include a Trekking Annapurna Base Camp in Nepal, explorations of Thailand, New Zealand, Morocco, France, Belgium, Belize, The Netherlands, Patagonia, and 7 weeks in Peru and Ecuador (including the Galapagos). He enjoys fly-fishing, paddling and biking. He has lived in some of the extremes of the U.S including the culturally diverse Washington D.C., the hottest lowest driest Death Valley and one of the snowiest places Jackson Hole and the most remote land on earth, Hawaii. Jon has been an AMC member since 2010, is a graduate of Mountain Leadership School and has a wilderness first aid certification. Jon has travelled andbackpacked extensively across the United States. Jon has enjoyed more than twenty years with the National Park Service and currently serves as the Transportation Program Manager for the NPS Pacific Region. Jon is proud to be Andrea’s husband.

Emergency Evacuation Insurance

The trip fee includes emergency medical and evacuation insurance coverage, which is required by the AMC. It does not include insurance for travel delay, interruption, or cancellation, or for baggage loss. More information about included emergency medical and evacuation insurance, as well as about optional and recommended travel insurance will be provided to participants in their formal acceptance letters, which will be sent out when the trip has the required number of accepted participants. The basic policy that is included with your trip fee includes $200,000 for emergency medical evacuation and repatriation and an additional $5,000 for accident and sickness medical expense, which would supplement any personal medical insurance.
To apply, you must complete and submit the Application, Confidential Medical forms, and the signed Acknowledgement and Assumption of Risk and Release and Indemnity Agreement form, along with a $2,000 deposit. You will not actually be accepted, and your check will not be deposited, until the leaders have determined by telephone conversation with you that you and the trip seem to be a good match. You will be formally accepted, and your check will be deposited when the leaders confirm the trip has sufficient number of participants and is going as planned. The second deposit of $2,000 is due two weeks after you are accepted and the final payment of approximately $990 will be due July 1, 2023 (final amount will be confirmed prior to the deadline). Make checks payable to the Appalachian Mountain Club.

Early registration is strongly suggested, otherwise there is a risk the trip may need to cancel. Please complete the application online and mail your deposit check to Andrea Deaton Christensen, 4382 28th Ave. S, Seattle, WA 98108.

When registration is complete, we will send all participants the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all those going on the trip. We will be using email as our primary source of communication. If you have any questions, please call us so that we can discuss them. Contact Andrea at 267-738-8048 or by e-mail at andrea.deaton@gmail.com.

Weather/Season We will be visiting Japan in the shoulder season that offers moderate to cool temperatures with warmer temperatures at lower elevation on the Kumano Kodo, and cooler temperatures, with the potential of overnight frost, at the high peak elevations on the hut-to-hut trek. We should be there around peak leaf changing season. The Kii-peninsula (Kumano Kodo) is one of the wettest areas of mainland Japan. It is also typhoon season, which we will closely monitor and make alternate plans if necessary to limit our exposure on high peaks. We will be hiking at high elevations and mountain weather can be unpredictable with winds, rain and low-visibility. Participants should have adequate gear and experience with hiking in inclement weather.
Being a Team Player

We will be more than just a group; we will be a team. If you are a loner, cannot accept and enjoy being part of a group, are not a team player who is willing to help your fellow travellers, then please do not register for this excursion. Although every effort will be made for individuals to have time to take photos, or shop, depending on the itinerary and other factors, we cannot guarantee significant amounts of personal time.

We will hike together as a group and hikers should not venture off on their own.

Keeping together as a group in a foreign country provides a margin of safety. This is not only for your own safety, but also so that we can keep on track with our itinerary.

Experience and Risks

Good physical condition is required for this trip. There are many risks associated with travelling to a foreign country; you should be aware of these risks, and willing to take responsibility for your safety and enjoyment. If you have never participated in an AMC trip previously, the leader will recommend that you participate in at least one AMC trip and receive a recommendation from this AMC leader prior to being accepted on this trip. We will also request references to confirm your fitness level and suitability for participating in trip activities.

Who are the target participants?

People who are respectful of and interested in exploring new cultures, moderate to strenuous high alpine hiking and staying in remote backcountry huts, while exploring new terrain and comfortable with traveling with a group are the ideal participants. Participants must be physically capable of hiking 13 miles/day while carrying a daypack, and doing this five consecutive days; can hike at higher altitudes, significant elevation changes, and with the strong possibility of inclement weather. Travelers with an open mind and flexible temperament will most enjoy this trip.
Required
- 1 large duffel, suitcase or backpack to use as your luggage (note, only one piece of luggage per person will be included in our luggage transfer)
- Water bottles / hydration bladder
- 1 backpack (approx. 2500+ cu in. capacity)
- Broken in hiking boots
- Passport (with exp date not before Nov. 2023)
- Cash/ credit card for meals and souvenirs

Clothing
- Hiking pants/ shorts (zipoff convertible pants are ideal)
- Reliable waterproof wind and rain jacket and pants
- Warm jacket and pants (such as fleece)
- Synthetic tops (long and short sleeve)
- Hiking socks
- Underwear
- Lightweight hat, gloves
- Clothes for town/ evenings at hut

Equipment List
Below is a preliminary gear list for the trip. It is in your best interest to use as lightweight gear as possible.

Accessories/Miscellaneous
- Toiletries
- Lightweight or pack towel
- Sleep sheet (for huts)
- Sunglasses
- First aid kit (Personal)
- Sunscreen and bug repellant
- Electrolyte drink powder/ energy snacks
- Headlamp
- Ziplok bags
- Stuff sacks (incl. extra for food & group gear)

Optional Gear
- Bandana
- Trekking poles
- Camera and extra memory cards, batteries, and charger
- Playing cards or book
- Watch with alarm, GPS, cell phone, charger
- Batteries (extra)
- Journal/ pen
- Pillow (for camp/travel)

Places We’ll Visit: More Detail

Kumano Kodo
Kumano Kodo is one of the best, and possibly most overlooked treks on the planet, one that includes hot springs lodges, delicious local food and rich cultural insight into a relatively unexplored (by international travelers) part of Japan. The hiking route is made up of 7 trails that snake through the Kii Mountain Range in Wakayama prefecture, about 100 km south of Osaka. The route dates back more than 1000 years when emperors and aristocrats took journeys from as far as away as Kyoto to visit the three major Buddhist/ Shinto shrines: Kumano Hongu Taisha, Kumano Hayatama Taisha and Kumano Nachi Taisha (collectively called the Kumano Sanzan). Along the way we will encounter about oji (small shrines where pilgrims stop and offer prayers). We will embark on the Kohechi route starting at the sacred site of Koyasan where we will stay in a monastery with the option to participate in some of the monk ceremonies.

Kyoto
Kyoto served as Japan’s capital and the emperor’s residence from 794 until 1868. It is one of the country’s ten largest cities with a population of 1.5 million people and a modern face. Over the centuries, Kyoto was destroyed by many wars and fires, but due to its exceptional historic value, the city was dropped from the list of target cities for the atomic bomb and escaped destruction during World War II. Countless temples, shrines and other historically priceless structures survive in the city today. We will have one full day to explore Kyoto, with a guided half-day tour in the morning. The afternoon is yours to explore, relax or shop. Our hotel will be centrally located near the train station, which also is architecturally interesting. Also nearby are the Nishiki Market, the Railway Museum, the Imperial Palace and Pontocho (small street offering atmospheric dining). Located in southern Kyoto is the Fushimi Sake district, should you wish to tour the sake distilleries.

The Japanese Northern Alps
Home to roughly half of Japan’s summits 3,000 m. tall, the Northern Japanese Alps are a collage of deep valleys, soaring peaks and craggy ridges that shape some of Japan’s most dramatic alpine landscapes.

While there are countless fantastic trails that explore every corner of the range, we will base ourselves out of the alpine village of Kamikochi making a semi-circle route. We will spend two days climbing and one day descending with the opportunity to stay in two large backcountry huts with bunkrooms and meals. We will be in the Chubu Sangaku National Park during our hike.