



SEEING JAPAN ∴ AUTUMN / FALL ∴ NOVEMBER 2024

**COLOUR, CULTURE & CONTRASTS** ∴ 11 Nov – 23 Nov

A CREATIVE IMAGE-MAKING PHOTOGRAPHY TOUR


Robert van Koesveld & Daisuke Kondo



## WELCOME

Autumn in Japan is an enticing time to make images as this diverse country moves colourfully from summer green to winter white. We invite you to join a small group on a special photo tour to explore the forests, villages and shrines of Japan's highlands, Mount Fuji with its lakes and forests, the surprising modern and traditional cityscapes of Tokyo, a famous exquisite ancient garden, and the intimate beauty of Kyoto's serene cultural treasures.

This photo tour is carefully paced for thoughtful photographers, giving you maximum time to connect with the people, culture and landscape in focused and interesting ways, so that you can create images that reflect your experiences at a greater depth. Led by two professional photographers, who know Japan well and are generous coaches, this is a great opportunity to follow your creative ambitions while exploring this fascinating country.



*“Photography can portray something of the unseen world, mystery, presence, and reverence. We can try to invite quieter and deeper reflection as well as documenting.”*

## CALM & FOCUSED TRAVEL

We have designed this itinerary to maximise your photography opportunities. With short distances between hotels and at least two nights in most places, we can stop along the way more often and for longer.

Good photos come from taking time and thinking about your vision. There is time to review your images, and teaching is designed around the daily locations and participants' interests.



## SPACE FOR CREATIVITY & LEARNING

We can offer support and guidance to take your image-making further and deeper. Each person has their own interests. Maybe you have existing projects or maybe we can help you find a new one. Do you want to create a book or select images for printing. Working on sets, series and stories can lead to further interesting options.

We are excited about offering creative opportunities to you in a place we both love.







## **JUST FOUR TO SIX**

With just four to six participants and two photography coaches, we (Robert and Daisuke) can offer support and guidance to take your image-making further and deeper.

We can tune in to where you personally want to go with your own image-making and, if you want, be alongside you when you shoot.

A small group size is ideal for portraits and street photography as you can find your images with less risk of having to negotiate with other photographers or confuse the subject.

It also means we travel in a single comfortable van as we explore the beauty and culture of Japan. We are not limited to main roads or towns with stations. We have flexibility to respond to changing light and weather as well as new opportunities that arise.



### **A QUIETER JAPAN**

We have chosen less visited locations for this twelve day journey. Japan has become understandably popular recently, so by spending a little less time in the bigger cities we are able to include time for more relaxed experiences in rural Japan. We have also scheduled our timing to avoid the weekends in Tokyo, Mt Fuji and Kyoto as well as discovering quieter locations. You will experience the real Japan.

Those coming to Japan for their first time may choose to extend their stays at each end of our tour to further explore Tokyo or Kyoto. Others may wish to add additional destinations.





## HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ Engage with traditional and modern Japan in a journey that visits less touristed locations and invites calm image-making.
- ❖ Explore Tokyo contrasts – elegant, modern, intriguing, traditional, surprising streetscapes and autumnal gardens.
- ❖ Engage with the special beauty of Mount Fuji viewed over beautiful lakes and natural settings.
- ❖ Feel the moods in one of Japan's top three gardens: the gorgeous Kenrokuen in Kanazawa, and the nearby Samurai district.
- ❖ Discover your own images, as we cross the mountains, and visit traditional thatched villages.
- ❖ Delight in Kyoto's marvellous temples, shrines and gardens in their rich autumn colours.
- ❖ Make memorable portraits of Geiko and Maiko by working in pairs with three of these special traditional artists.
- ❖ Enjoy relaxing travel in a comfortable van as you journey between Tokyo and Kyoto.
- ❖ Just 4-6 participants and two leaders.
- ❖ Develop your skill and vision by taking time to review your images as you go. With a small group you have full access to Robert and Daisuke, your two photography coaches, whose key priority is your creativity.



# COLOUR, CULTURE & CONTRASTS

## Itinerary

**Day 1: November 11 (Mon) Arrive Tokyo**

After gathering in our centrally located hotel, we will take a late afternoon walk and do some street photography before an evening meal in Shibuya, near our hotel. After our meal you can choose to shoot some more.

**Day 2: November 12 (Tues) Tokyo**

We have a full day to explore the city for urban landscapes as well as choosing both day and evening times for creative street images. We are looking for our first portrait of the modern culture of Japan that coexists with deep traditions. We will also find autumn images in the streets and gardens. The first of our teaching sessions begins today as well. Our central location means we can use a daytime slot for the session, so as to leave time for an evening shoot.

Itinerary (continued)

Day 3-4: November 13-14 (Wed -Thurs) Tokyo Mt Fuji

We leave in our comfortable van for Mt Fuji and have the afternoon as well as full day afterwards to find views in various locations.

This special sacred mountain, while iconic, has so many moods and aspects. We look for different vantages to show both the mountain and also Japan itself.

If Mt Fuji is hidden by cloud at any time we visit a special temple or a unique forest area.



Itinerary (continued)

Day 5: November 15 (Friday) Fuji Matsumoto

Today we drive down from Fuji towards Matsumoto and it's famous and beautiful castle. On the way we are looking back towards Fujisan for views across the mountains and valleys. We also look for quiet lakeside scenes as we cross the mountains.

Matsumoto castle which dates from 15-16th Century is also known as 'crow castle' with its unique black laquered walls. We look for evening and morning views across the moat and surrounding landscapes.

Day 6: November 16 (Saturday) Matsumoto Shirikawago

After an early morning session with the castle we head to the traditional thatched villages of Shirakawago and Gokayama. We base ourselves in the village itself which gives us access when roads are closed after 4.00pm and things quieten down. It also gives us opportunities to meet the locals.





### Itinerary (continued)

#### Day 7-8: November 17-18 (Sun-Mon) Shirikawago Kanazawa

Today we explore and photograph on our way to Kanazawa in the afternoon. We will also have a presentation on garden photography, so you are ready for tomorrow. We do supply brief and focused notes on photography topics for guests as well as on some cultural dimensions, so we will provide some notes on this special garden, designed to help focus you and your camera.

First thing on Saturday we head to the fabulous Kenrokuen Garden to be there when it opens. The extensive old garden is rated as one of the Top Three Gardens in Japan. In the afternoon we will explore the historical Samurai district and other photogenic locations. In the evening we return to the garden for the night illuminations.

#### Day 9: November 19-(Tues) Kanazawa Echizen

This morning we visit the quiet and calmly beautiful Heisen Ji (Shinto shrine) before also spending time at Eihe Ji Buddhist temple.

We drive to Echizen a photogenic paper-making town where we will also visit a washi workshop.

#### Day 10: November 20 (Wed) Echizen - Kyoto

Today we head to Kyoto and arrive with time to settle into our hotel after visiting one of Kyoto's special gardens.



## Itinerary (continued)

### Day 11-12: November 21-22 (Thurs -Fri) Kyoto

Kyoto, once the capital of Japan for over a thousand years, is the cultural jewel of Japan. A place with fascinating opportunities for images of people, street scenes and temple gardens, as well as other unusual cultural experiences.

We will visit selected temples, shrines, and gardens, making our choices partly on the basis of where we hear autumn colour is at its best that week, as well as avoiding some more crowded locations.

A special treat will be meeting and photographing Geiko (Kyoto dialect for geisha) and Maiko (apprentice Geiko) in a private traditional setting. There will be a teaching session a day beforehand, so you are comfortable with portraiture in a traditional setting. After experiencing the beauty of their traditional dancing, we will work in small groups to make portraits with each of our three artists.

Robert has been working with Tea Master Takako Morita on collaborative projects. Takako is a fourth-generation tea master who is interested in the ways Tea concepts extend more broadly including into the photographic process. Photography will be organised so that you can have a quiet tea experience as well as a chance to make some images.

There will be some free time on the last afternoon for shopping or to visit a place of specific interest before we gather for our final dinner banquet.

### Day 13: November 23 (Sat) Kyoto farewell

Over breakfast we farewell each other, and for some, say sayonara to Japan too. We shall continue enjoying our memories of Japan in our hearts, minds and, of course, our images.

This itinerary is the plan. The actual tour may vary slightly due to weather, road conditions or other things beyond our control. We also have built in some flexibility and will decide some details based on the best options on the day; we adjust our plans to take advantage of weather changes or new opportunities.

Either way, we will ensure you get the best photographic tour that we can provide, and you will come away with fantastic images and memories.



## YOUR TOUR LEADERS



### **Robert van Koesveld**

Robert is a full-time photographer whose work is primarily involved with world cultures and the spirit of place. Since retiring early from his psychotherapy practice, he has concentrated on photography and travels extensively. His photo book 'Bhutan Heartland' (2010), co-authored with his wife Libby Lloyd, was well received internationally, and his photo book 'Geiko and Maiko of Kyoto' (2016) won the Australian Professional Photography Awards category of Photo Book of the year. Robert is interested in capturing 'spirit of place' and 'people's presence' in a cultural context. He has led photo tours to Bhutan, India, China and Japan, exhibited in Kyoto, Arles, Dubai and Perth, and published in 'Kyoto Journal' and 'Better Photography'.



### **Daisuke Kondo**

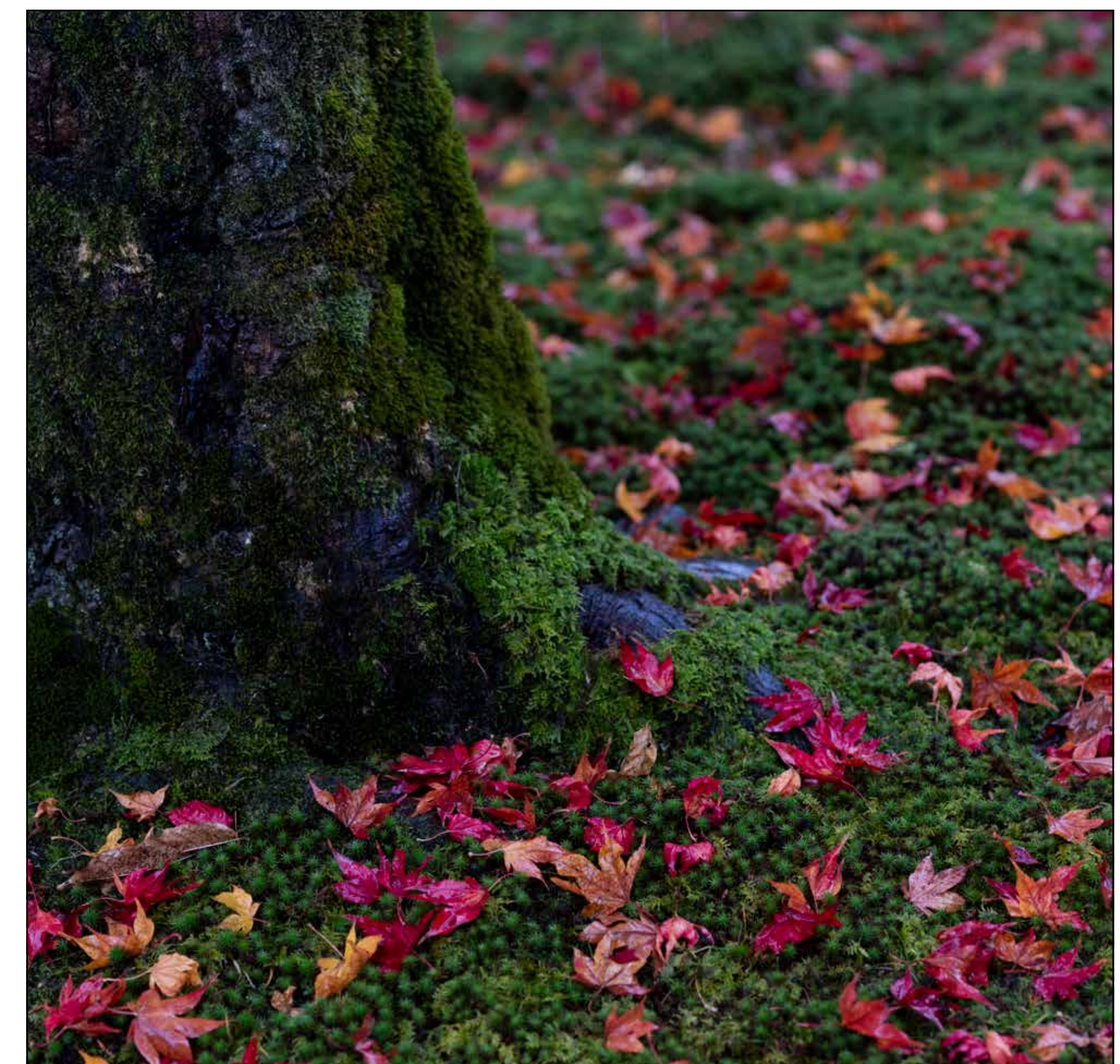
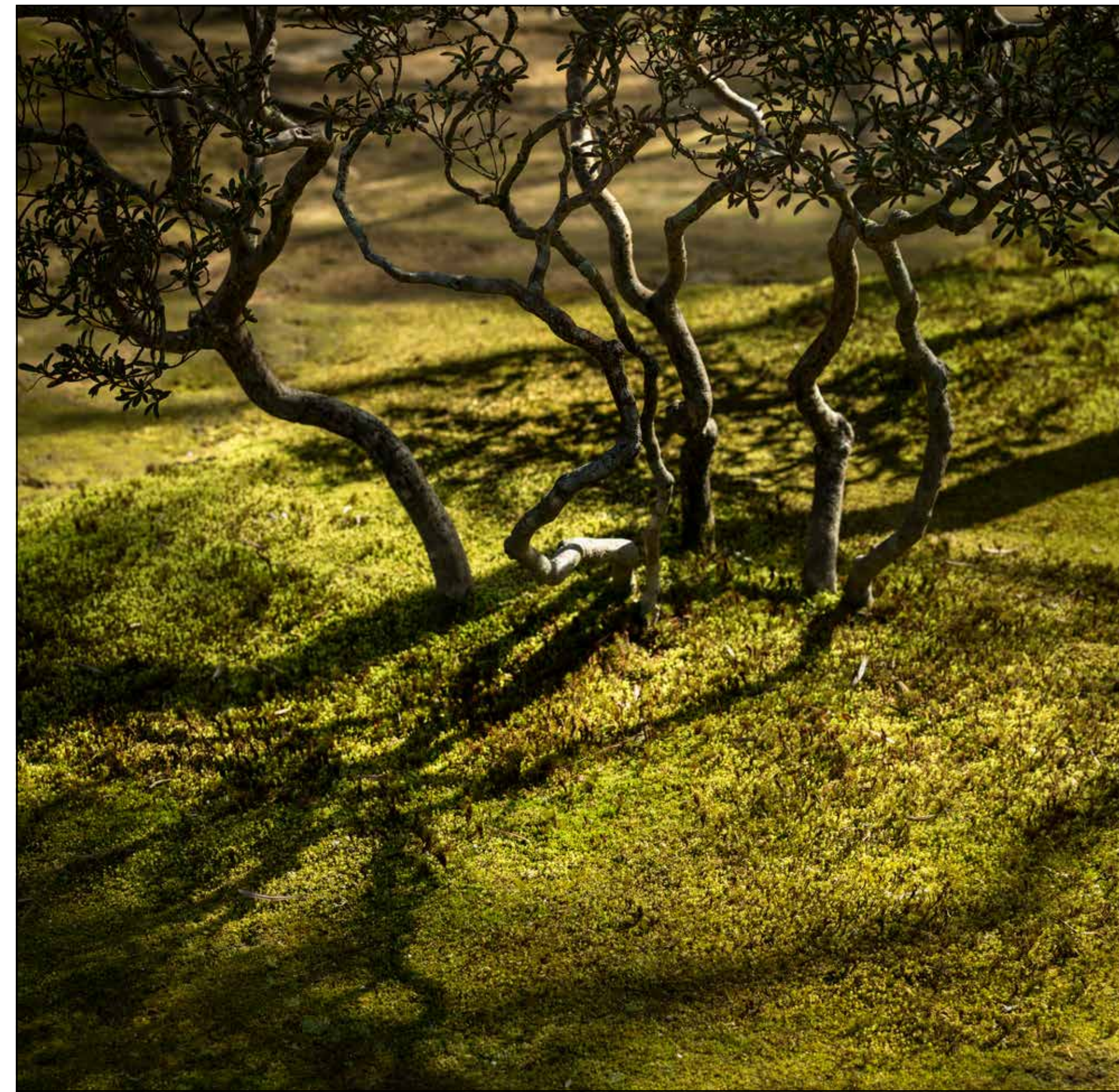
Dai has always been passionate about exploring the world's environments and cultures, even while growing up in Tokyo. His travels began in Australia and led to him guiding outdoor adventures in Japan, New Zealand and Malaysia. As well as developing his photography skills, Dai trained as an Emergency Medical Technician in North America. This useful combination of interests, knowledge and skills enabled him to conduct photography tours and teach First Aid in his travels. His extensive travels in his native Japan led to him establishing Spark Photography, specialising in leading photography tours throughout his homeland. Dai has worked with Robert on his previous photo tours and scouting trips. Dai lives in Sapporo, Hokkaido.

## TEACHING & COACHING

Developing as a photographer is not just a product of time. Experience needs reflection to be genuinely useful developmentally. Technical skills are valuable at times, but simply acquiring a bunch of techniques, or a bunch of cameras, won't really take you forward. While we can talk about technical matters if appropriate for you, we are most interested in deepening your conceptual process so that you come away with images that matter to you. If you are open to sharing your images and visual process, we can support your development.

Robert will offer some group teaching tailored to the actual participants, and with a small group we will be able to converse and coach individually along the way. Still, we won't be intruding, and if you just want to work on your own, we will leave you to it.

We (Robert and Daisuke) will photograph alongside you at times and are always happy to share our process of conceptualising images. Your images though are our absolute priority. There will be opportunities for image review as well as teaching and coaching. We are always open to chatting about image-making and Japanese culture.



## IMAGE-MAKING

Robert considers a camera is just a tool for engaging with our world and for making images. The best images are made not 'taken'. We aim to photograph what we feel, not just things or places. By engaging with the people and places we meet, we deepen our experience of them, as well as their cultural and physical environment. Then we can begin to identify 'what this photograph is about' and find ways to make an image that reflects our deeper experience, and also really moves and interests the viewer. Sometimes one image tells your story, other times it needs a sequence or series of images.





## WHO SHOULD COME?

Photographers of any level of experience will enjoy this trip. Artists and non-photographers will enjoy making written or sketched images. We do spend lots of time in most locations.

In terms of gear, there are no special requirements, other than your ability to carry it. We recommend travelling reasonably light. Anything from a good phone camera through to a mirrorless dslr or a medium format camera is fine.

If you are not a photographer, something like a sketch book or writing journal will be good too. We provide a detailed pre-departure document to help with gear and most other questions.

Curiosity and respect for the rich and complex culture that is your ultimate host is also important.

## TRANSPORT

Our first journey is on a shinkansen on a very scenic journey down to Kanazawa. We will have reserved seats and can enjoy lunch on the train.

Exploring the Noto Peninsula, we will travel in a spacious van, which allows us to set our timing according to the light and the opportunities.

Keeping the group small means just one vehicles possible and gives us freedom to stop for opportunities and take the backroads where they are most interesting. We catch the wonderfully named Thunderbird Express to Kyoto.

## ACCOMMODATION

We have an interesting mixture of hotels and onsens planned. Because Japanese hotels often do not open bookings until around 6-months before the date, we will send a final list at that time. Some of the hotels are western-style while others are more traditional with tatami rooms and futons put out on the night. Most westerners add an extra futon underneath for comfort in traditional rooms. Western-style rooms can be quite small in Japan.

Some traditional Japanese onsen-style hotels have access to a hot bath which Japanese really love; you may too.



## FOOD

Dinners in Japan are a real highlight. We will have quite a few banquet-style Japanese meals, sometimes in our hotels. Other times we will visit a range of local and speciality restaurants. Menus will include local delicacies and dishes throughout our journey including: Ramen, Sukiyaki, Shabu-shabu, Okonomiyaki, Onigiri, traditional homemade Udon and Soba, and Sushi/Sashimi. Breakfasts are usually included in the hotel arrangements. Simple 'western style' or traditional Japanese.

When on the move, there is maximum flexibility, personal choice and efficiency if guests choose ready-to-go lunches from the ubiquitous *konbini*, Japanese convenience stores. As well as being a fun cultural experience, it means we don't waste time ordering and eating there. It also allows us to sometimes eat lunch on location in the wild. Other lunches will be in local restaurants.

We will do our best to accommodate dietary preferences or restrictions. If you have specific concerns, email before booking.



## PHYSICAL FITNESS

A basic level of walking fitness is essential. This tour is not a hiking or a trekking tour, so nothing extreme will be required of you. Stairs are a feature of many temples. If you have any health issues or doubts, please let us know more and we will see how we can work around them.



## HEALTH & SAFETY

In these 'almost' post-Covid times, we will still maintain appropriate infection precautions. We clean inside the vehicle each day and avoid queues and crowds. Hand sanitising gel will be available. Please discuss any health concerns with us before signing up. Health matters are covered in more detail in the trip information you will receive after registration.

Japan is a mask-oriented culture, so masks will be a part of our wardrobe at times. Following best practice health protocols will be a requirement for guests and leaders.

# COLOUR, CULTURE & CONTRASTS

11 TO 23 NOVEMBER , 2024

## DATES & COSTS

The tour commences at 4.30 pm on the first day in our hotel's lobby before a group dinner and ends after breakfast on the morning of the final day.

## PRICE

¥ 1,150,000 per person [Japanese Yen]  
(approx. \$US 7750)

Single Supplement: ¥ 80,000 (approx. \$US 550)

We price this tour in JPY (Japanese Yen) so our price remains stable and you know the exact cost.

Single supplement: Many Japanese hotels do not have single rooms and charge us for a single person at the double room rate for a 'double' room. If you wish to share a room, you need to book together with your own nominated travel companion.



## WHAT IS INCLUDED

- Ground transport during the tour by private passenger van
- All breakfasts, and dinners (excluding drinks)
- Hotel accommodation throughout the tour (12 nights)
- Entrance fees for all included locations
- Expert photography coaching and key cultural briefings
- Review, post-processing and image composition sessions during the tour
- One-on-one sessions to develop use of light and composition, story-telling and post-processing
- Specially developed notes and materials specific to your tour.

## WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

- International and domestic airfares and visas if required
- Lunches
- Personal expenses including laundry, snacks, drinks and extras you might choose to buy along the way
- Transfers between the start and finish hotels and airports, etc. (people often have independent plans)
- Travel Insurance for cancellation, health and travel (required as a condition of booking)
- Camera and other gear insurance
- Costs arising from unforeseen circumstances or factors beyond our control.

We can accept credit card payments for the deposit (details on reservation tab).

Final payment by foreign exchange transfer is recommended.

We have to pass on card providers fees (currently 3.25%) for final payments.

To reserve your place and complete the deposit and trip application forms go to -

[www.sparkphotography.jp/seeing-japan-autumn-2024](http://www.sparkphotography.jp/seeing-japan-autumn-2024)

This tour is planned and managed by Spark Photography in collaboration with Robert van Koesveld.

Our Japan Tour operator is ::

MY Travel Consulting Inc. (ANTA3-1049) — a member of the All Nippon Travel Agents Association

Address ::

254-1, Warabi, Yotsukaido-shi, Chiba,  
Japan 284-0044

Certified General Travel Services Manager ::  
Mayumi Kawana

E-mail :: [contact@mytravelconsulting.co.jp](mailto:contact@mytravelconsulting.co.jp)

Telephone :: +81-50-3613-8975







## COLOUR CULTURE & CONTRASTS

To book your place in this tour, please use the reservation form on the SparkPhotography website:  
[www.sparkphotography.jp/seeing-japan-autumn-2024](http://www.sparkphotography.jp/seeing-japan-autumn-2024)

E-mail *Daisuke Kondo* with any questions:  
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