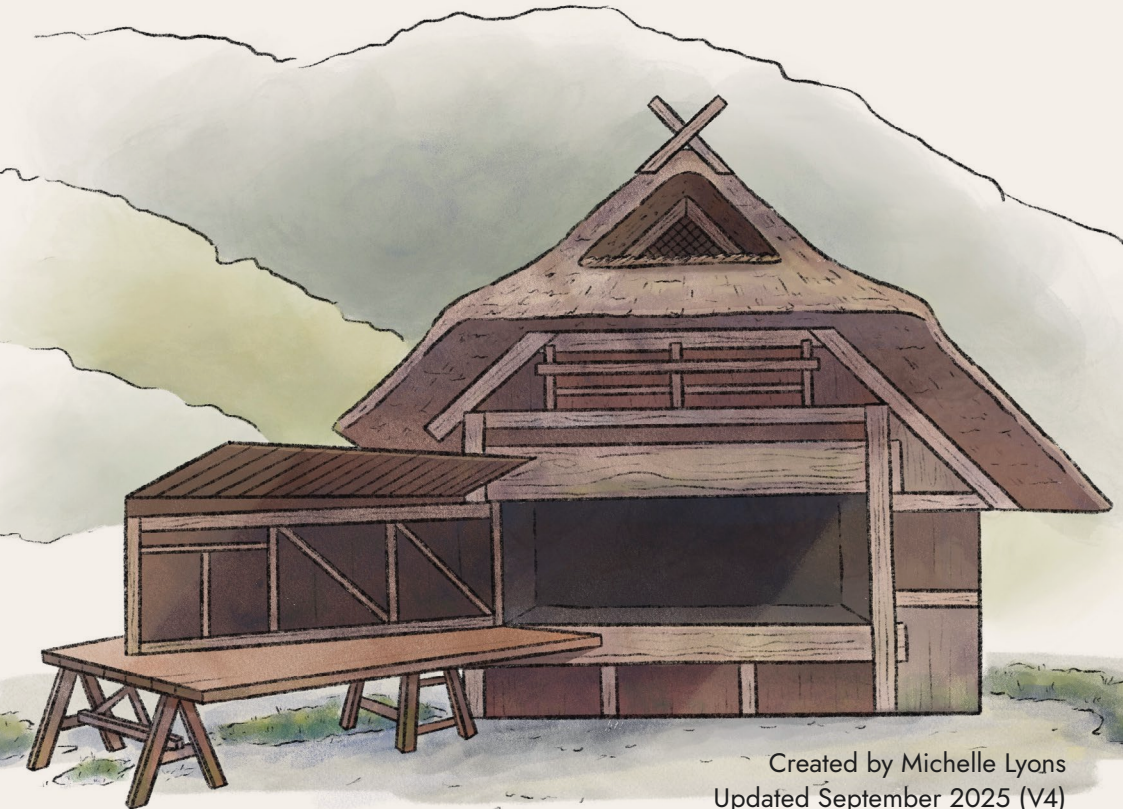


PARKS & JAPAN

Project to Promote & Support
Japan's 35 National Parks



Created by Michelle Lyons
Updated September 2025 (V4)

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What is Parks & Japan?

Parks & Japan aims to promote Japan's 35 national parks as a network of equally exciting destinations whilst supporting conservation efforts and local communities. Employing a 'house of brands' model, I'm developing a portfolio of creative initiatives designed to tackle the uneven distribution of visitors across the parks and the additional problems this has caused. The project is currently overseeing the development of two brands - Poketto and Parklander - designed to build interest in the parks through engaging product experiences. The goal is to use a percentage of the profit generated by these products to support the parks.

Who is it for?

Parks & Japan leverages three thriving niche communities: Japanophiles, collectors, and national park lovers. My project lies at the intersection of all three, where a developing and underserved community resides. Content exists for this group, but it's relatively limited.

Members of each niche community have an affinity for the others. *Pop Culture Nerds* arise from Japanophiles who love to collect (e.g. anime merchandise, Pokémon cards, and manhole covers); *Brave Explorers* are born from collectors of experiences who seek an escape to nature (e.g. adventure travellers, nomads, and culture buffs); and *Zen Masters* emerge from nature lovers with a soft spot for Japanese culture (e.g. advocates of slow living, being present, and enjoying screen-free moments). My project taps into each of these overlaps through collectible, gamified product experiences that enable and motivate independent discovery of Japan's 35 national parks.

The Problem

Overtourism

In 2019, 46% of visits across all of Japan's national parks were to Fuji-Hakone-Izu alone. Aside from this ongoing trend, uneven visitor distribution across the parks is also worsened by content that promotes peak seasons and a limited list of 'best' attractions.

Fragmented management

The parks are not organised or owned by a single entity, creating friction amongst land owners with conflicting goals. The top-down management also means local communities have little say on how the parks are utilised.

Low brand awareness

Many domestic and international tourists either struggle to name Japan's national parks, don't know most of them exist, or don't realise when they are in one.

Poor souvenir selection

The souvenirs available either brand each park in isolation, lack any sense of place, or simply aren't attractive. There are also many perishable and impractical items that aren't suitable to keep long-term or return overseas with.

Isolated promotion

The parks are often promoted as independent locations with a highlighted set of 'beauty spots', which doesn't incentivise tourists to visit multiple parks, less popular parks, or lesser known attractions within the parks.

Rural depopulation

The viability of living within the national parks relies on tourist expenditure that can benefit the whole community, along with the perceived attractiveness of rural jobs. Without consistent income streams, systems for distributing money, and vehicles for connecting younger generations to rural life, centuries-old relationships with the land may be lost.

Negative local impact

Initiatives that increase visitor numbers across the parks can negatively impact the environment and local communities if there is no plan in place to increase tourist expenditure too, as financial resources will be needed to counter the impact of tourists at each destination.

Project Objectives

Treat all parks and their respective attractions as though they are on a level playing field, leveraging the most popular locations to raise awareness of the others.

Sell the products in an online store whilst seeking wholesale deals with national park visitor centres, hotels, and other appropriate retailers.

Utilise the power of experience design to create engaging product experiences that increase interest, understanding, and awareness of the parks amongst different target groups.

Use a portion of the profits to fund conservation efforts and community projects that will have a positive impact on the environment, the livelihoods of the local people, and the visitor experience.

Current Initiatives

Field Quests

Field Quests is a 35-piece series of national park activity booklets featuring collectible enamel pins. Each tri-fold booklet will include 12 items to find, 3 side quests to complete, a viewfinder to frame your photos, and a gold-plated national park pin. With a unique theme and inventory for each national park, Field Quests will create a strong sense of place whilst incentivising visits to all 35 locations. This will be the first product range to launch under Poketto, a national park collectibles brand with an educational focus. Estimated to launch on Kickstarter throughout 2026.

See pages 10-15 for more information.

Parklander TCG

Parklander is a Shinto-inspired trading card game based on the landscapes, culture, wildlife, and legends of Japan's 35 national parks. Players will explore a mysterious realm dominated by spirits as they search for Parklander, an ancient treasure said to hold the key to freedom. In this fictional world, expect to befriend spirits, battle other explorers, and make magnificent discoveries. Estimated to launch on Kickstarter in 2026/27.

See pages 16-21 for more information.

Why this approach?

Building familiarity

There's a gap in the market for practical and aesthetically pleasing national park souvenirs that accurately depict their respective locations, and that can be associated with the national parks when seen out of context. The Field Quest series will build familiarity with the park names and their defining features whilst aligning with key motivations for purchasing souvenirs: to reminisce about a trip; to have evidence of visiting a desirable location; and to serve as a conversation piece in social settings.

People love experiences

Supporting conservation efforts and local communities will require money, and I believe the most effective way to generate these funds is to sell engaging product experiences that bring people joy and instigate long-term relationships between brand and customer.

People love incentives

With allocated budgets struggling to cover the cost of park management, the parks rely on donations and mandatory fees collected from visitors. By purchasing my products, visitors can help to fund impactful projects whilst getting something tangible in return. This is a greater incentive than donating alone, and feels more fulfilling than paying a fee.

Circumventing park politics

Being a neutral party, I'm free to influence the public's perception of the national parks without being entangled in the internal politics of the park management system. This allows me to create the perception of a park network for the sake of raising awareness of everything they have to offer.

The internet is saturated with destination promotion

With today's ever-growing mountain of online travel content, it will take an analogue approach to cut through the noise. Using physical products to engage tourists is a highly under-utilised form of experiential marketing, and one that Japan is perfectly primed to take advantage of. When done strategically, a physical product can expand and evolve to engage tourists long-term, eliminating the need to compete with the endless stream of generic travel content. I excel at designing engaging experiences that are tactile, functional, visually stimulating, interactive, bring people joy, and tell a story. It just so happens that these fundamentals perfectly align with Japan's reputation for product innovation, compelling entertainment, quality craftsmanship, and vibrant culture.

Delivery

I am personally developing the branding, strategy, and product design for all projects associated with Parks & Japan to establish a standard of highly engaging value-driven brand experiences.

To promote product launches globally, I will seek assistance with marketing from my contacts at Mantra Media as well as building online communities organically through social media.

All products will launch on Kickstarter to fund production, distribution, and to gauge initial levels of interest. Following successful Kickstarter campaigns, the products will be available to purchase online whilst wholesale deals are negotiated in relevant stores. I will also participate in trade shows and other events where my products can reach and be sold to new customers.

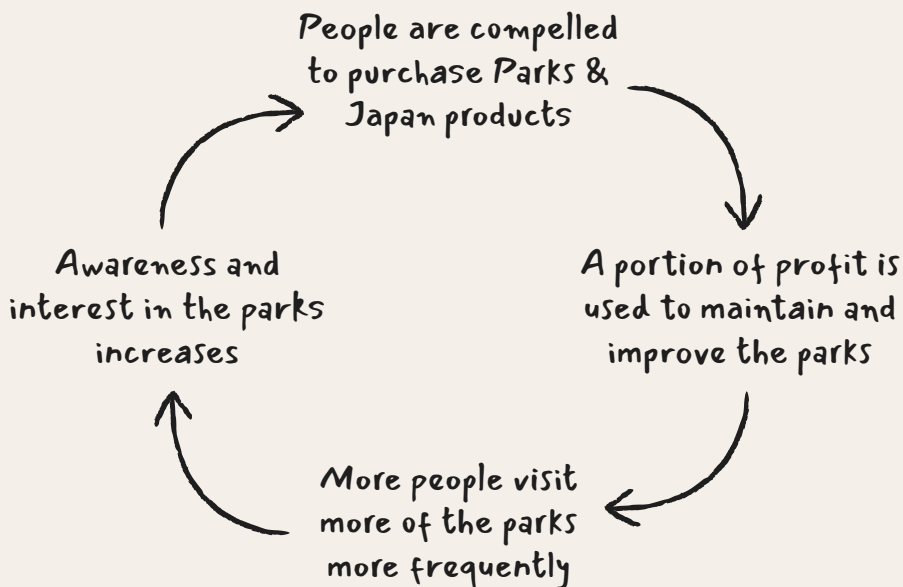
Future Possibilities

Consult with DMOs, tourism boards, government agencies, transport services, and local businesses to help develop more effective initiatives for promoting Japan's 35 national parks.

Help businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs in and around the parks to develop innovative strategies that capitalise on tourism sustainably and revitalise their rural economies.

Launch campaigns to promote career and living opportunities in and around the parks to combat rural depopulation (assuming the successful distribution of visitors across the national parks long-term, and increased spend within those regions).

Collaborate with major airlines and airports in Japan on branded in-flight experiences and creative campaigns.



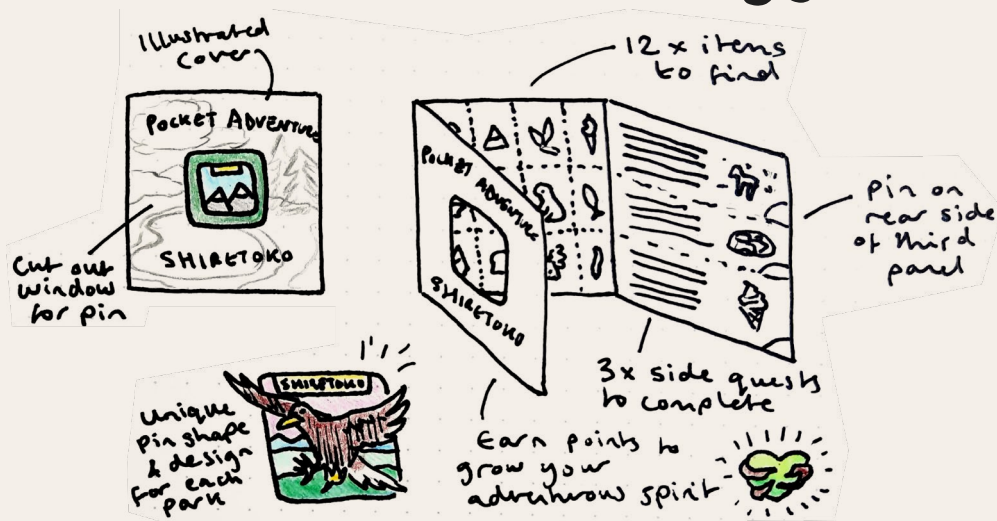
Strategy Summary

People will initially be compelled to buy Parks & Japan products for the appealing product experience, even if their interest in visiting the national parks isn't particularly high.

With profits from product sales being used to maintain the beauty of the parks, elevate the visitor experience in collaboration with the local community, and produce engaging destination marketing, more people will be inclined to visit each park.

As others begin to notice the parks increasing in popularity and hear about them more often, they will feel compelled to visit too for fear of missing out. As their interest in the parks increases, some will purchase related products in local retail stores, visitor centres, and online - particularly those that offer an appealing product experience.

Poketto Strategy



Field Quests (formerly Pocket Adventures) Concept Sketch

Poketto creates little collectibles for legendary adventures, facilitating learning and exploration through playful experiences and pocket-sized knowledge. Using gamification, narrative design, and brand characters, Poketto reimagines your national park experience with a layer of fiction, welcoming visitors of all ages to take on the role of seasoned explorers.

The upcoming activity booklet series, Field Quests, gives visitors the opportunity to grow their adventurous spirit by finding items and completing side quests in each national park, encouraging year-round visits, engagement with local culture & businesses, and appreciation of lesser known attractions. Information about the content will be available online, allowing visitors to focus on exploring and do their learning later. With major cultural exports such as anime and gaming giving rise to iconic characters and pop culture collectibles, Japan is in the perfect position to promote its national parks through storytelling and play.

Why this approach?

An underserved market

Between casual and experienced hikers is an underserved group who want the thrill of adventure without the pressure of being an expert. Through fun, practical, and user-friendly products, Poketto will lower the barrier to entry for exploration, giving short-stay visitors the chance to experience a rewarding adventure without the need for technical skills, equipment, or extreme physical exertion.

Increasing expenditure and appreciation

Research shows that the more people know about a destination, the more likely they are to spend money there and return to visit areas they missed. Poketto's products will share interesting information about the parks in a way that's fun, quick, and easy to digest, reducing the effort to learn and ultimately increasing interest and expenditure in the parks. My approach to education aims for understanding as opposed to mere awareness, as understanding forms a deeper connection that cultivates appreciation, benefiting a destination in a number of ways. That which is appreciated is more likely to be shared with others, celebrated, and treated with respect. Tourist engagement is an emotional matter, and the most important metric is resonance.

IP Creation

Gamification and storytelling enable the creation of unique IP that can be used as a powerful destination marketing tool.

Unappealing designs

Navigational and informational hiking supplies tend to focus on practicality over visual design, which can feel overly complex and daunting to casual hikers whilst lacking in aesthetic appeal to expert hikers. To create a more enjoyable experience and visually differentiate the brand, all products will be illustrated in a cute and colourful style reminiscent of adventure anime, nostalgic video games, and Ukiyo-e landscape art.

Elevating the national park brand

Poketto's products act as both a unique souvenir to reminisce about visiting the parks, and a means to experience a rewarding adventure whilst there. By developing fun product experiences that enable a sense of achievement, increase the memorability of the trip, and have a high collectibility, I believe perceptions of the parks will improve, familiarity will be strengthened, and visitors will be more inclined to return.

Field Quests Launch Plan

This staggered, 3-part launch plan starts by introducing the 10 national parks closest to the golden route, including the well-known Fuji-Hakone-Izu to boost initial interest in the product. Launch One offers a relatively gentle introduction to Japan's national parks, showcasing areas most frequented by international tourists, and establishing a foundational level of awareness and interest.

Launch Two introduces Japan's island and coastal national parks, showcasing 13 areas known for their beaches, tropical climates, and unique flora & fauna. These parks are moderately accessible, and offer plenty of easy hiking opportunities. Yakushima is particularly prolific due to its association with Princess Mononoke.

Launch Three introduces the remaining 12 national parks, exploring Japan's volcanic and snowy landscapes as well as the recently designated 35th park. These areas cover some of Japan's most challenging terrain, including all 7 of Hokkaido's national parks. This will conclude the release of Poketto's classic Field Quest range.

Launch One: Central Japan

Fuji-Hakone-Izu
Nikko
Chubu-Sangaku
Hakusan
Oze
Minami Alps
Myoko-Togakushi Renzan
Joshin'etsu Kogen
Chichibu-Tama-Kai
Yoshino-Kumano

Launch Two: Islands & Coasts

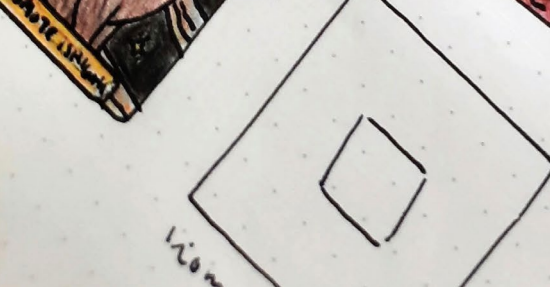
Setonaikai
Yakushima
Ogasawara
Iriomote-Ishigaki
Keramashoto
Amami Gunto
San'in Kaigan
Ashizuri-Uwakai
Saikai
Yanbaru
Unzen-Amakusa
Ise-Shima
Sanriku Fukkō

Launch Three: Fire & Ice

Hidakasanmyaku-Erimo-Tokachi
Rishiri-Rebun-Sarobetsu
Shiretoko
Akan Mashu
Towada-Hachimantai
Daisetsuzan
Kushiro-Shitsugen
Shikotsu-Toya
Daisen-Okii
Kirishima-Kinkowan
Aso Kuju
Bandai-Asahi

Right: Field Quest Cover Art & Enamel Pin Sketches

not knowing. Knowing is to be aware
 that something exists. Understanding
 is to comprehend the significance of
 its existence. That's why understanding
 is more than just knowing, and the
 does not. It promotes
 understanding.



INSIDE COVER



maybe pattern
 of little details to
 encourage focus
 on small things



USE YOUR
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 instructions



"THE W
 THROUGH
 EYES



Delivery

Having identified attractions and unique defining features for each of the 35 national parks, designs for Launch One are now in progress. The enamel pins will be manufactured by a reputable Chinese factory, and the tri-fold activity booklets will be printed in the UK. Products will be assembled and packaged by me or a suitable fulfilment partner.

I will also design rewards for Kickstarter backers, including a brand character plushie or figurine to encourage the adoption of Nuidori culture (ぬいぐるみ撮り). This is a popular trend in Japan where small toys are photographed to look as though they are on their own adventure.

Following the successful launch of Field Quests, I will explore the launch of a Japanese version, and work on expanding Poketto's product range. Future products may include maps, field guides, activity packs, and special, limited, or themed versions of Field Quests.

Future Possibilities

Use the brand character to create comic strips for local and national publications, taking inspiration from memorable moments experienced in the national parks.

Collaborate with adventure-based entertainment IPs and brands such as One Piece or Yamaha Motor Company for limited edition Field Quests.

Develop printed activities and learning materials for Japanese schools and national park visitor centres.

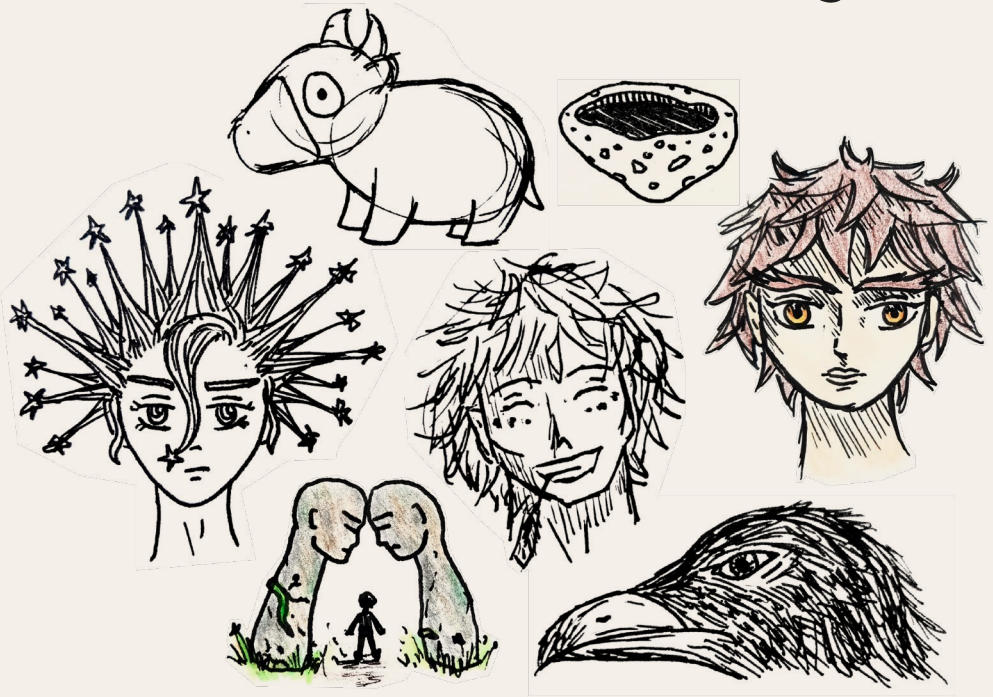
Build an online community where visitors can exchange stories, share their progress, organise meetups, and recommend their favourite routes.

Right: Poketto Brand Character Sketch

- Chibi
- Figure
- Chibi (nidorii)
- Merch (pins, stickers...)
- Recreation of character as merch or as merch on
- Brand name
- Storyline
- Dist.



Parklander Strategy



Parklander Character & Worldbuilding Sketches

Parklander will build interest in Japan's national parks through gameplay, using narrative and game mechanics to simulate a positive relationship with nature whilst eliminating TCG burnout and buy-to-invest culture. Unlike existing national park games, Parklander is a fantasy adventure with a rich and philosophical lore. This gives the product room to expand and remain interesting over time, and increases the game's repeatability.

With no prior experience in developing or playing TCG's, I don't suffer the proximity blindness that comes with being too close to a product category. By using this lack of experience strategically, I've been able to innovate on customer experience and gameplay where others have not.

Story & Gameplay

The story of Parklander

"A treacherous ocean current encircles the majority of land on {World Name}, separating humans from a vast and untouched wilderness inhabited by spirits. Although it exudes an otherworldly presence that most find unsettling, you grow ever curious, yearning to know what lies beyond the water.

Having sensed a great turmoil in your heart, a mysterious bird grants you safe passage across the tumultuous ocean, inviting you to discover the secrets of the spirit realm. Deep in the heart of nature, you must befriend spirits, battle other explorers, and embrace life in the wild as you seek to unravel the greatest mystery of all: the whereabouts of Parklander - an ancient treasure said to bring boundless freedom to those who find it."

Gameplay

A team of spirits will battle on your behalf in exchange for items from your stash. To win the game, you must "harmonise" with five spirits before your fellow explorer, summoning a mysterious bird that will help you continue your journey.

Experience Design

Cognitive load will be reduced through limited use of text, counters, and numbers. This means more time playing and less time thinking.

Power will rise and fall in the game to mirror the unpredictability of nature.

A limited number of rare card designs will ensure they still feel special.

Without the "colour pie" restriction, there will be more opportunities to express yourself through your deck.

Storytelling will be implemented via visual, linguistic, and mechanical cues.

Systems & Features

The game features two decks - one for resources, and one that combines all other card types: Spirits, Encounters, Allies, Discoveries, Combos.

Cards are drawn in a flexible fashion, similar to the consonants and vowels in the British television show, Countdown.

The unique resource system means no "colour pie" is needed, which typically limits which cards can be included in a single deck.

The game's win condition is inspired by the kinging mechanic in Checkers.



Why this approach?

Affinity with TCGs

Japan is well known as the birth place of Pokémon, including the franchise's beloved trading card game. Parklander can take advantage of Japan's strong associations with gaming and collecting to draw attention to the national parks through a medium known to cultivate passionate fan communities.

An untapped audience

Gamers and TCG collectors aren't typically associated with national parks, but we can rely on their obsession for the transmedia franchises they love. By promoting the parks indirectly, people won't experience the resistance that manifests when being sold to, and may be inclined to visit the real-life locations that their new favourite game is based on. Irregardless of this result, the parks could still benefit from product sales alone.

Attitudes towards nature

Overtourism can significantly damage the environment over time, however it's not only the number of tourists that contributes to the damage - it's their behaviour as individuals. By utilising storytelling and game mechanics that encourage respect for nature, Parklander will aim to instil an environmentally conscious attitude into players.

Unhappy TCG customers

Much of the global TCG community resents what their childhood obsession has become. With disappointing pull rates, sets oversaturated with 'rare' cards, multiple product releases to keep up with, and scalpers driving up prices, people are feeling financially and mentally drained. By undermining category norms, Parklander can offer a more joyful experience that established TCGs can't replicate, and ultimately build a profitable brand that can afford to support the parks financially.

A psychological tool

Trading card games enable stories to be told through visual, linguistic, and mechanical cues, making them a comprehensive tool for influencing tourist behaviour discreetly. Parklander will be embedded with psychological triggers that strengthen the association between connecting with nature, mental wellness, and Japanese principles for living a happier life. Beneath the fun and excitement lies the potential for a transformative personal experience that could significantly enhance the perception and attraction of Japan's national parks. Story can turn an underappreciated destination into a haven for healing, reflection, growth, and gratitude.

Delivery

Parklander will employ a pricing strategy that excludes investors and scalpers; operate on a release schedule that is more sustainable for customers to keep up with; prioritise the player and collector experience through product innovation; and enable transmedia storytelling to extend the experience beyond the game.

I am personally developing the mechanics, characters, illustrations, story, and branding for Parklander to ensure a cohesive experience. The game will also be play-tested by myself and others during the prototype phase.

With Parklander initially being released in English, marketing will primarily target travellers in the UK, Australia, and North America who have an interest in Japan, as well as existing TCG players who enjoy exploring new independent game releases. I'm currently looking to connect with high quality trading card manufacturers and reliable distribution partners.

Future Possibilities

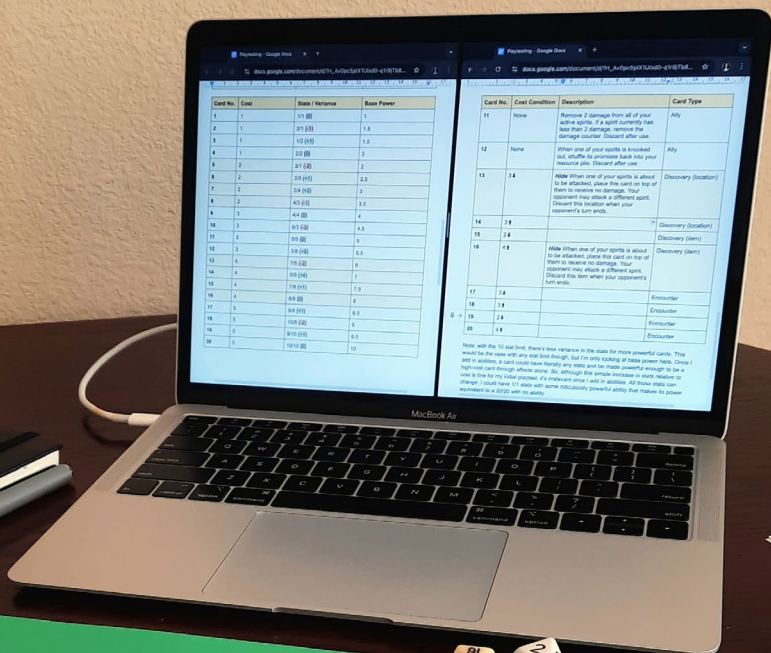
Secure wholesale deals and develop a creative merchandising strategy to have Parklander stocked amongst other popular TCGs in supermarkets and independent game stores.

Donate playable decks to orphanages, after-school clubs, and university circles in Japan so students who either can't or don't go home immediately have a chance to play the game with friends.

Develop the story into an anime series to create a new gateway into the game, and further encourage exploration of the national parks.

Extend the fantasy through character merchandise and game-inspired foods.

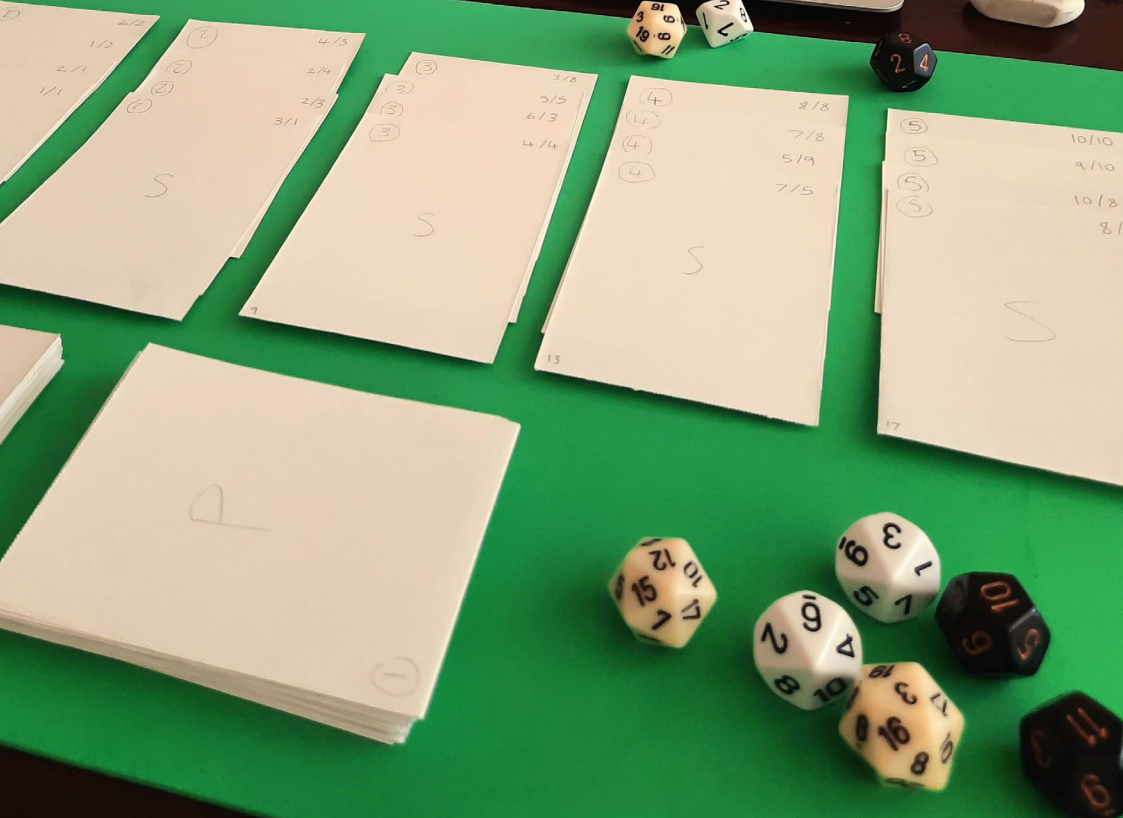
Right: Early Play-testing

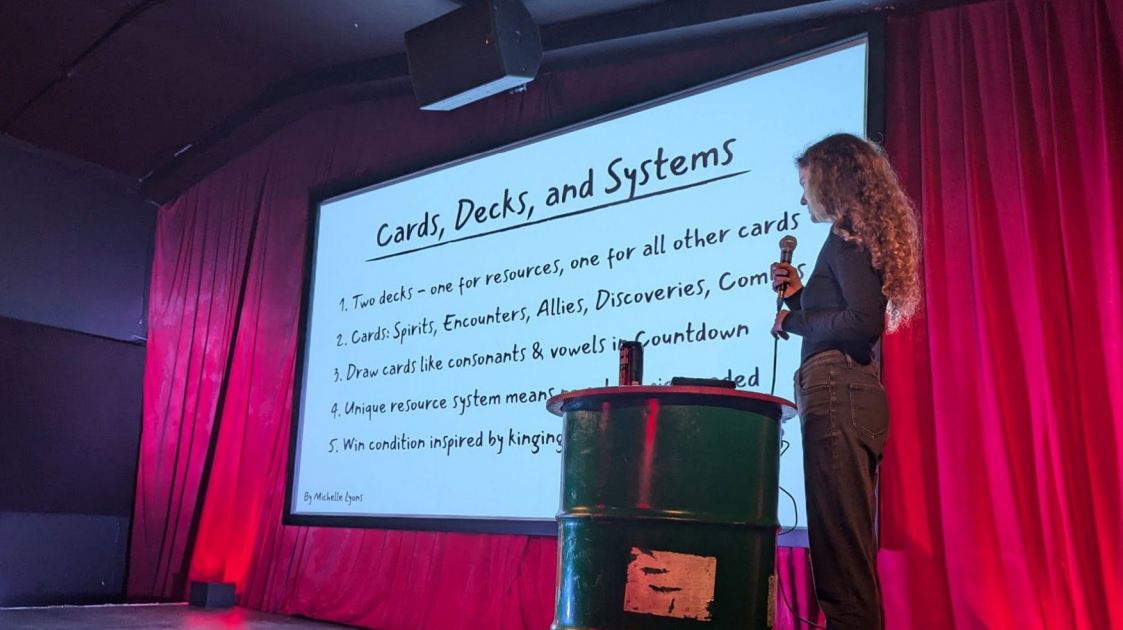


Card No.	Cost	State / Variance	Base Power
1	1	1/1 (0)	1
2	1	2/1 (0)	1.5
3	1	1/2 (0)	1.5
4	1	2/2 (0)	2
5	2	2/1 (0)	2
6	2	3/1 (0)	2.5
7	2	2/2 (0)	3
8	2	4/2 (0)	3.5
9	3	4/1 (0)	4
10	3	5/1 (0)	4.5
11	3	3/2 (0)	5
12	3	3/3 (0)	5.5
13	4	7/2 (0)	6
14	4	5/2 (0)	7
15	4	5/3 (0)	7.5
16	4	6/3 (0)	8
17	5	8/3 (0)	8.5
18	5	10/2 (0)	9
19	5	9/2 (0)	9.5
20	5	10/3 (0)	10

Card No.	Cost	Condition	Description	Card Type
11	None		Remove 2 damage from all of your active appts. If a card currently has this effect, damage, remove the damage counter. Discard after use.	Atty
12	None		When one of your appts is knocked out, shuffle to previous back into your resource pile. Discard after use.	Atty
13	18		Make three copies of your appts as about to be attacked. Place this card on top of them to receive no damage. Your opponent may attack a different appt. Discard this location when your opponent's turn ends.	Discovery (location)
14	18			Discovery (location)
15	24			Discovery (location)
16	48		Make When one of your appts is about to be attacked, place this card on top of them to receive no damage. Your opponent may attack a different appt. Discard the turn when your opponent's turn ends.	Discovery (item)
17	24			Encounter
18	24			Encounter
19	24			Encounter
20	48			Encounter

Note: with the 10 card limit, there's less variance in the costs for more powerful cards. This also explains a card cost issue: having any more cards is more powerful than having 10 cards and through where some. So, although this simple increase in state happens to be a cost to the game, it's not a cost to the player. It's a resource cost, not a state cost. All these cards mentioned in a 10 card limit, not a state.





- ## Cards, Decks, and Systems
1. Two decks - one for resources, one for all other cards
 2. Cards: Spirits, Encounters, Allies, Discoveries, Com...
 3. Draw cards like consonants & vowels in Countdown
 4. Unique resource system means...
 5. Win condition inspired by kinging...
- By Michelle Lyons

About Michelle

Michelle Lyons is a British inventor and social designer specialising in the Japanese tourism industry. As founder of branding firm, Point North, she helps brands and destinations to attract inbound and domestic tourists in Japan by uncovering their unique value, creating competitive advantage, and crafting compelling brands.

After being introduced to Japanese culture by a friend around 2020, she felt entranced by the emotionally raw anime, deep respect for nature, quality craftsmanship, and the visually stimulating city streets. At the start of 2022, Michelle began studying the language with the goal of making Japan the main focus for Point North.

Michelle has developed branding for a number of cultural engagement projects, with clients including Atelier Japan, Japan San, and Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce. In 2022, her 'In Tameside' branding helped Stalybridge to win the Town of Culture accolade.

PARKS
& JAPAN