



# Parks & Japan

## Strategic Overview

# Introduction

Parks & Japan aims to promote Japan's 34 national parks as a network of equally exciting destinations whilst supporting conservation efforts and local communities.

Employing a 'house of brands' model, Parks & Japan will develop a portfolio of creative initiatives designed to tackle the uneven distribution of visitors across the parks and the additional problems this has caused.

# Defining the problem

## 1) Overtourism

In 2019, 46% of visits across Japan's 34 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.

## 2) 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.

## 3) 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.

## 4) 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.

## 5) 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.

## 6) Negative Local Impact

Initiatives that increase visitor numbers across all 34 parks may 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 their impact.

# 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.

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

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

Use a portion of 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

## Collectible pins & patches

Featuring defining features from each national park, this series of collectible pins and patches will create a strong sense of place whilst incentivising visits to all 34 locations. These will be the first products to launch under Poketto, an educational adventure brand that encourages exploration of the national parks. Estimated to launch on Kickstarter in Q3 of 2024.

See pages 8-10 for more information

## Parklander trading card game

Inspired by Japan's national parks, Parklander will see players embark on an adventure across a land where nature can talk. In this fictional world, expect to befriend spirits, battle other explorers, and make magnificent discoveries. Estimated to launch on Kickstarter in Q4 of 2024.

See page 11-13 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. My pin & patch designs 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.

# 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 spread the word about 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. The project may also be submitted to the Ministry of the Environment's 'Official National Park Partnership Program' to increase credibility and reach.

All products are expected to launch on Kickstarter in 2024 to fund production, distribution, and to gauge initial levels of interest. Following successful Kickstarter campaigns, the products will be available to purchase online while I continue to negotiate wholesale deals in relevant stores.

# Future possibilities

Consult with DMOs, tourism boards, government agencies, transport services, and local businesses to help develop more effective initiatives for promoting Japan's 34 national parks.

Help businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs in and around the parks to create innovative strategies that capitalise on tourism in a sustainable way, 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).

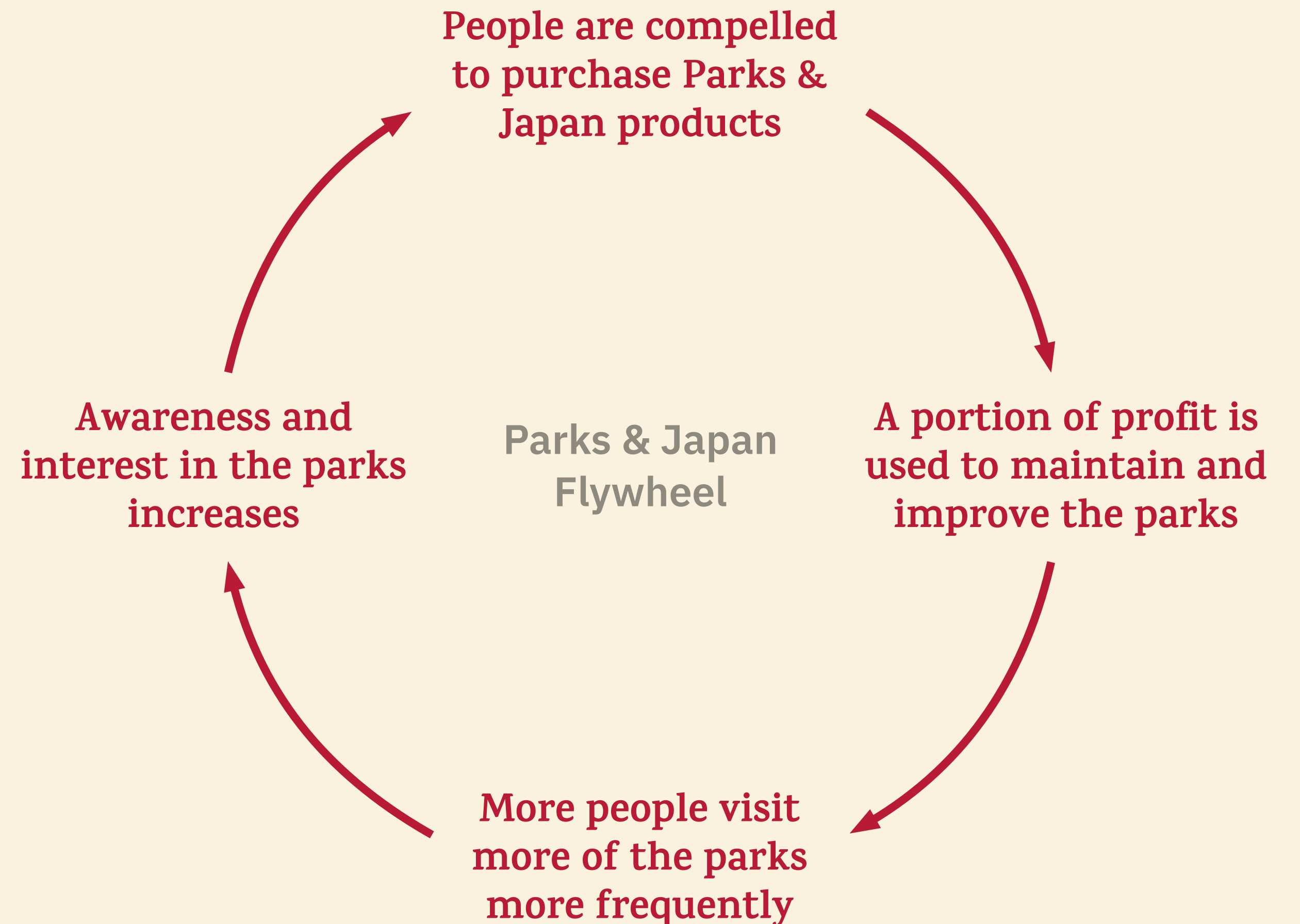
Develop a brand targeting high-income travellers interested in luxury experiences, or people seeking restful nature-based activities and retreats.

# 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 souvenir shops - particularly those that offer an appealing product experience.





## Poketto Strategy

Invite the casual hiker to experience life as an accomplished expeditionist, offering a range of vibrant backpack supplies filled with pocket-sized knowledge to facilitate learning and exploration of Japan's national parks.



# 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 of the parks, and will give short-stay visitors the chance to experience a rewarding adventure without the need for technical skills, equipment, or extreme physical exertion.

## Increasing tourist expenditure

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.

## Unappealing product 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 inspired by the design of antique Japanese maps and vintage suguroku games.

## 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.

# Delivery

Using the unique defining features I've identified for each of the 34 national parks, I will first design 34 enamel pins to be manufactured by a reputable Chinese factory, as well as sourcing a UK printing company for the backing cards.

To reduce waste and create an engaging product experience, the backing cards will offer a secondary use as a customisable certificate of visitation, plus space for notes and interesting facts on the rear side.

The 34 embroidered patches will launch as a separate Kickstarter campaign shortly after the enamel pins have been funded. I am currently looking to connect with high quality embroidered patch manufacturers.

Following successful launches of the pins & patches, I will work on expanding Poketto's product range to include maps, field guides, and activity packs.

# Future possibilities

Develop activities and learning materials for Japanese schools and national park visitor centres to educate students and visitors on the culture, heritage, wildlife, and geographical features of the national parks.

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

Create a weekly comic strip to appear in local and national newspapers inspired by the peaceful moments experienced in the national parks.

Collect stories from visitors and local people to create a podcast series of 'tales from the parks'.

# Parklander TCG Strategy

Use gameplay to build interest in Japan's national parks and simulate a positive relationship with nature whilst eliminating TCG burnout and buy-to-invest culture.



# Why this approach?

## Japan's 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.

## 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.

## Attitudes towards nature

Overtourism can significantly deteriorate 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.

## 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.



# 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 create a game premise that enables transmedia storytelling.

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

With Parklander initially being released in English, marketing will primarily target travellers in the UK and North America who have an interest in Japan, as well as existing TCG players who enjoy exploring new independent game releases. I am 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 such as Walmart, as well as in independent game stores.

Donate playable decks to after-school clubs and university 'circles' in Japan so students who either can't or don't go home immediately have the opportunity 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-based merchandise and game-inspired foods.

## Get involved

Email Michelle at [hello@pointnorthbrandco.com](mailto:hello@pointnorthbrandco.com) to discuss opportunities for investment, production, or partnerships.

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