Off the Beaten Track: Japan

**Southwest Islands**

**YONAGUNI-JIMA**
On really clear days you can see Taiwan from Yonaguni-jima, Japan’s westernmost inhabited island. Divers come here to swim with hammerhead sharks and explore the mysterious ‘Atlantis of the Pacific’ ruins.

**IRIOMOTE-JIMA**
Fringed by healthy coral reefs and covered with dense tropical jungle, the island of Iriomote-jima is one of Japan’s wildest places.

**OKI ISLANDS**
Once a place of exile, these cliff-lined islands offer some spectacular scenery and a real feeling of getting away from it all.

**IYA VALLEY**
A few hours and a world away from the big cities of Kansai, Iya Valley has been called the ‘Shangri La of Japan’. Stay in a restored thatched-roof farmhouse and get a taste of traditional village life.

**SHIMOKITA PENINSULA**
A windblown spit of land once believed to be the end of this world, with a haunting temple and a pock-marked, volcanic landscape.

**SHIRETOKO NATIONAL PARK**
With no sealed roads and a healthy population of brown bears, Shiretoko is true wilderness. The rewards for tackling the tough trails here are long soaks in hot springs.

**RISHIRI-TŌ & REBUN-TŌ**
Almost as far north as you can go in Japan, these two islands burst into riotous blooms of wildflowers each year from May to August. They’re a true delight for hikers and photographers.

**DEWA SANZAN**
Complete the three-mountain hike that makes up this trail through the wilds of Yamagata, a favourite pilgrimage for the yamabushi (mountain priests).

**OGASAWARA ARCHIPELAGO**
This is as far off the beaten track as you can get in Japan. A full 25½-hour ferry ride from Tokyo, these semitropical islands – complete with white sand beaches – feel like a different world.

**TAKACHIHO**
Sacred dances to the sun goddess are performed at an ancient shrine here deep in rural Kyūshū.

**SADO-GA-SHIMA**
An outpost of rugged mountains and coastline, each August this island rocks to the sound of the famous Kodō Drummers during the fabulous Earth Celebration.

See Southwest Islands Inset