



## **Cherry Blossom Footsteps**

Gail Holloway

### **Book Club Notes**

#### **Question for discussion**

1. What are the pros and cons of solo independent travel? Would Lauren have had the same experiences and met the same people if she'd gone with her nan, or even another travel partner?

Has the book made you any more confident about taking your own solo trip?

What's a good age to embark on solo independent travel?

2. Lauren had been inspired in several ways by her nan. Have your grandparents inspired you in your own life?

3. Travel risks:

- Lauren has a few minor scares while on her own on the trip – encounters with various people and places
- Sendai, where Lauren had visited, was devastated by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami (where they had only ten minutes to evacuate)
- The book mentions White Island (Whakaari) in New Zealand, where Riley grew up. It was White Island that erupted in early 2020, with deadly consequences

Do you prefer your travel to be very low risk, or does taking a bit more risk add to the adventure?

4. Tea is a recurring aspect of Lauren's journey. What roles does tea play throughout the book?

5. Some words for which there's no English equivalent:

Japanese:

*Wabi sabi* – a Zen term describing the beauty of imperfect and impermanent things; a bit like shabby chic, but with more substance.

*Shibui* – a way of describing how things improve with age. It acknowledges that gained wisdom can create an inner beauty and self-assurance. It applies to people – but also to buildings, artwork, etc.

And a word (not in the book) that's Chinese:

*Rena* – means 'Hot', but also Noisy: making noise, stirring up trouble (in a good way). It implies lively, festive, happy. Chinese have a greater liking for noise than westerners – hence firecrackers, cymbals, etc.

Expressions in Hong Kong, like '*Diverse green temptations*' at the wetland park.

Do terms like these reveal aspects of the respective cultures? Are there examples of the culture in the book that demonstrate these things? Do you think they're unique to those places, or more universal?

6. Lauren tries to be mindful of cultural sensitivities during her trip. Are there any she missed? Have you ever felt as though you've done the wrong thing in a foreign country?

7. Readers have said things like:

*"I'd never wanted to go to Japan, but now I do"; and*

*"There's way more to Hong Kong than I realised."*

What were the surprising aspects to you in reading about travelling in Japan and Hong Kong? – Did you learn new things, change your concept of these places? How? Why?

8. What were your favourite places or experiences in the book?

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