

JAPAN – NAKASENDO PATH & THE SHIKOKU PILGRIMAGE TRAIL

GUIDED and **SELF-GUIDED** walking tours - ancient trails, hot springs & traditional inns



Japan is a land of contrasts, where an appreciation for the modern combines with a reverence for tradition, where skyscrapers sit side-by-side with peaceful ancient shrines. Our walking holidays combine the ancient with the modern Japan to offer a truly unique insight into the Land of the Rising Sun. From Tokyo, Kyoto or Osaka, we travel back to the time of Shoguns and Samurai, when merchants and feudal lords travelled by foot or horseback through the mountains, a time when pilgrims walked from temple to temple seeking enlightenment. We get off the beaten track to less-touristed parts of Japan and experience the warm hospitality of the Japanese people as we stay in traditional travellers' inns and guesthouses.

TOKYO, KYOTO, IMPERIAL NARA & THE NAKASENDO PATH

12-days / 11-nights inn-to-inn GUIDED walk from Tokyo to Kyoto

The Nakasendo Trail linked Kyoto to Tokyo during Japan's feudal period. It was the '*road through the mountains*' travelled by feudal lords and their retinues, Samurai, merchants and travellers. Along the route were 69 'post towns', where weary travellers rested before continuing on the next leg. Our journey starts in Tokyo, known as Edo during Japan's period of rule by the Shoguns. We spend four days walking along the Nakasendo. By day we walk along the ancient route as it passes through well-preserved Edo period villages, and by evening we stay in traditional country inns, dine on exquisite regional cuisine prepared from the freshest ingredients and enjoy the warm hospitality of our hosts. There is the chance to rejuvenate our legs with a relaxing soak in a natural hot spring at an Onsen Ryokan. We also see the ultramodern, bustling streets of Tokyo, the shrines and temples of Nara, and Kyoto's atmospheric gardens, teahouses and Geisha district.

Departs: 23rd, 30th March; 5th, 7th, 16th April; 5th, 11th, 15th, 18th May; 1st, 15th June;
7th, 15th, 21st September; 6th, 9th, 18th October; 2nd, 5th, 8th November 2020

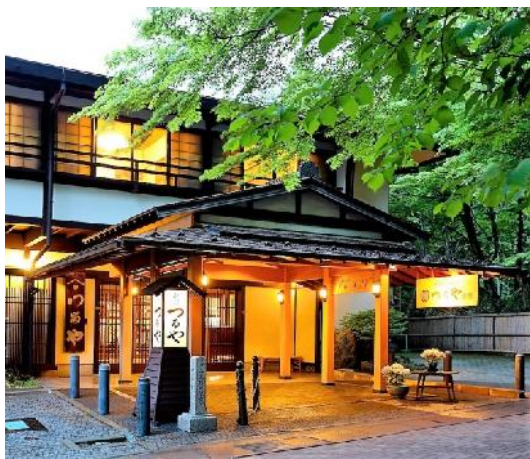
Cost from: **\$5995** per person twin share. Single room supplements are available on request.

Includes: 6 nights of comfortable 3 or 4-star hotel accommodation in en-suite rooms; 5 nights in traditional Ryokan, Minshuku or Shukubo, which usually have shared facilities; 11 breakfasts, 7 dinners; full program of guided walks led by an experienced English-speaking local leader; sightseeing and entrance fees; travel by coach/minivan, train and public transport; luggage transfer (1 piece per person) on 3 occasions.

Not Included: Flights or airport transfers, any meals not mentioned in the itinerary, drinks, entrance fees not mentioned, some luggage transfers, and personal expenses.

Grading: Easy to moderate, a combination of short walks of up to 5 hours on the Nakasendo Trail and city sightseeing walks. Walking on the Nakasendo Trail is unhurried, with plenty of time to enjoy the scenery; terrain is easy to moderate with daily walks of 3km up to 14km, with up to 430m of ascent and 725m descent. On the trail you carry a small to medium daypack with your essentials for the day.

Call OUTDOOR TRAVEL on 1800 331 582 for details or reservations



Suggested itinerary:

Day 1: Arrive in Tokyo.

Aim to arrive in the afternoon to our Western-style hotel in Tokyo, where we stay 2 nights, with free time to explore before a welcome dinner. (D)

Day 2: Sightseeing in Tokyo

On our first full day we take a walking tour of Tokyo, starting at Nihonbashi (the 'Japan Bridge') considered to be the 'centre of Japan' and the zero marker point for all Japan's main roads since the Edo period. Afterwards, we visit Ueno and the Tokyo National Museum to see exhibits illuminating Japan during the Edo era, the heyday of the Nakasendo Trail. If the Museum is closed for a national holiday, instead we visit the Kappabashi district, famous for selling kitchenware and plastic models of food used in restaurant displays. We continue on to the grand Meiji shrine and the fashionable Harajuku district. In the evening our tour guide can offer suggestions for restaurants for dinner (at own arrangements). (B)

Day 3: Nakasendo Trail from Kiso-Hirasawa to Narai

Walking distance @ 3km (1 hour)

Our travels through rural Japan begin with a journey from Tokyo to the remote Kiso valley. Over the next three days we walk from village to village, staying in small, family-run country inns (Ryokan and Minshuku). We stop for lunch in Shiojiri, where we may like to sample the soba noodles, made from buckwheat, before we begin our walk from Kiso-Hirasawa to Narai. Kiso-Hirasawa is known for its locally-produced lacquerware and there may be a chance to see the craftsmen at work. We stay in Narai, which marks the halfway point between Kyoto and Tokyo, in an atmospheric traditional Minshuku (family-run guesthouse). (B, D)

Day 4: Narai to Kiso-Fukushima

Walking distance @ 7km (3 hours)

Today we walk on the Nakasendo Trail from Narai to Yabuhara over the Torii Pass and continue by train to Kiso-Fukushima. We stay in a lovely traditional Onsen Ryokan (hot-spring travellers' inn) with a natural hot spring. Soak in the indoor baths made of cypress wood or try the outdoor baths surrounded by trees. (B, D)

Day 5: Kiso-Fukushima to Tsumago

Walking distance @ 14km (5 hours)

We transfer from Kiso-Fukushima to Nojiri by train and then by a short taxi ride to the Nenoue-Toge pass. We walk along a lovely section of the Nakasendo Trail through delightful small settlements and rice fields to Tsumago or the nearby hamlet of O-Tsumago. Only a few decades ago, Tsumago was neglected and falling into disrepair, but through concerted efforts by its residents it has been saved and restored. Now this post-town on the Nakasendo Trail is preserved by strict self-imposed rules that prohibit the sale, rental or destruction of the handsome houses. It's a living museum, but one which is still inhabited by the local residents. We arrive in the afternoon and stay overnight in a traditional Minshuku. (B, D)

Day 6: Tsumago to Magome; onwards to Nara

Walking distance @ 9km (3 hours)

From Tsumago we walk to Magome, our last stop in the Kiso Valley. The trail from Tsumago to Magome is the most scenic and best-preserved part of the Nakasendo Trail. There is time for lunch in Magome – perhaps try *gohei-mochi*, skewered sticky rice covered in a sweet paste of miso, sesame and walnuts. Magome's main street is a broad stone walkway lined with timber buildings and carefully tended greenery. Leaving Magome, we travel by regular train and then *shinkansen* (bullet train) to Kyoto, connecting onwards to Nara, where we check in to our Western-style hotel for 2 nights. (B)

Day 7: Nara

A guided walking tour in the city of Nara this morning. Many of Japan's greatest cultural treasures are concentrated in and around the city, with eight UNESCO World Heritage sites – Todai-ji Temple, Kofuku-ji Temple, Kasuga Taisha Shrine, Kasugayama Primeval Forest, Nara Palace Site, Ganko-ji Temple, Yakushi-ji Temple and Toshoda-ji Temple.

Many of these are in or near Nara Park, home to a thousand or more free-roaming deer. We visit two of these World Heritage sites, Kasuga Taisha Shrine and Todai-ji Temple – its Daibutsu-den is the largest wooden building in the world, housing a 16m image of the Rushana Buddha in bronze and gold. Prior to being rebuilt three hundred years ago, the wooden structure was even larger than today. In the afternoon there is free time to relax, to visit a Japanese garden or wander through the old town. (B)

Day 8: Yoshino

From Nara, our journey takes us to the ridge-top village of Yoshino, another UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the most famous places in all of Japan for viewing cherry blossom in the spring. We visit Yoshimizu Shrine (connected to historical figures such as the Samurai Minamoto no Yoshitsune, Emperor Godaigo, and feudal lord Toyotomi Hideyoshi), and explore the area. Tonight's stay is in a Ryokan (travellers' inn). (B, D)

Day 9: Mount Koya

We take the train to Mount Koya, situated in a bowl-shaped valley filled with stands of cedar trees high in the mountains of the Kii Peninsula. Since the 9th Century Mount Koya has been a place of religious devotion and ceremony. Today there are more than 100 monasteries, many of which have accommodation for pilgrims. We visit Kongo-buji temple and walk through the vast Okuno-in cemetery. We stay in a Shukubo (pilgrims' lodging) in one of the temples and dine on *shojin-ryori*, Buddhist vegetarian cuisine. Tomorrow morning, there is an opportunity to rise early and join the Buddhist morning service. (B, D)

Day 10: Transfer to Kyoto

After the optional early morning Buddhist service and breakfast, we take the train to Kyoto. The city was Japan's capital for many centuries and is still regarded as the country's cultural heart. In the evening, we walk in Gion, Kyoto's Geisha district and hope to see geiko (fully-fledged Geisha) or maiko (apprentice Geisha) making their way through the narrow streets. We stay 2 nights in a Western-style hotel. (B)

Day 11: Kyoto

There is a guided half-day walking tour this morning. We first visit the Sanjo-ohashi Bridge, the western end of the Nakasendo Trail. We continue to Nanzenji, a tranquil Zen Buddhist temple whose history dates back to the mid-13th Century, and stroll along the Philosopher's Path, with craft shops, cafes, shrines and temples beside the clear waters of a small canal. The path ends near Ginkakuji, the Silver Pavilion. There is free time in the afternoon to explore the area further or shop for crafts before the farewell group dinner (B, D).

Day 12: Departure from Kyoto

Our tour ends today after breakfast at the hotel in Kyoto. Your guide will be on hand to offer assistance and advice for your onward travel. (B)



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KYOTO, TOKYO & THE NAKASENDO PATH

8-days / 7-nights inn-to-inn **SELF GUIDED** walk from Kyoto to Tokyo

Experience the 'road through the mountains', the Nakasendo Trail, at your own pace on this self-guided walk. Journey from one ancient post-town to another, through forests of bamboo and Japanese cedar, staying in traditional Ryokan (travellers' inns) and Minshuku (family-run guesthouses), just like weary merchants, Samurai, feudal lords and their retinues did centuries ago. The self-guided walk includes a full briefing and most transport tickets. Start in Kyoto, with a full-day guided sightseeing tour, then walk the best-preserved and most interesting parts of the Nakasendo Trail. Then be catapulted forward into modern-day Japan ending your tour in bustling Tokyo.

Dates: Daily on demand from March to November, 2020

Cost from: \$3190 per person twin share. Single room supplement on request

Includes: 3 nights of comfortable 3 or 4-star hotel accommodation in en-suite rooms in Kyoto and Tokyo; 4 nights in traditional Ryokan and Minshuku, which usually have shared facilities; 7 breakfasts, 4 dinners; train travel (by local train, limited express train, or bullet train) from Kyoto to Nakatsugawa, Nojiri to Kiso Fukushima, Kiso Fukushima to Yabuhara, Kiso Hirasawa to Karuizawa or Komoro, Yokokawa to Tokyo; full day private tour in Kyoto with English-speaking guide.

Not Included: Flights or airport transfers, local transport on Kyoto day tour, meals not shown, drinks, entrance fees not mentioned, local Nakatsugawa-Magome bus, and personal expenses. Luggage transfers are not included but can be organised locally at extra cost.*

Grading: Easy to moderate. There are 5 days of walking on the Nakasendo Trail; daily walks are from 3km up to 19km, with up to 725m of ascent and 645m descent.

Suggested itinerary:

Day 1: Arrive in Kyoto

Make your way to the city of Kyoto, Japan's cultural and historical capital. Usually, accommodation is in a modern, Western-style hotel with private en-suite facilities. However if you prefer you can stay at an informal, Japanese-style Ryokan (travellers' inn) where you sleep on futons in tatami-mat rooms; as with the Japanese inns on the Nakasendo Trail, bathroom facilities are not attached to your room but 'along the hallway'. Dinner is not included, leaving you free to choose from the many and varied restaurants on offer in Kyoto.

Day 2: Guided sightseeing in Kyoto

An experienced professional guide will meet you at your hotel after breakfast to take you on a personal, full-day tour of Kyoto. You can opt to travel by bus and subway or by taxi – you pay for travel and entry fees on the spot. There are five different itineraries to choose from; we have included some of the most famous sights and some lesser-known spots. Your guide can either escort you back to your hotel around 5.00pm or, if you prefer, to an alternative location of your choice. Dinner is not included tonight.

Day 3: Magome to Tsumago

Walking distance @ 9km (3 hours)

Train tickets for your journey from Kyoto to Nakatsugawa are included, and you ride on the world-famous *shinkansen* (bullet train) to Nagoya. At Nakatsugawa, board a local bus for the short journey to Magome (cost not included – paid locally). Before you begin your walk you may like to have lunch in Magome – perhaps try *gohei-mochi*, skewered sticky rice covered in a sweet paste of miso, sesame and walnuts. Walk over Magome Pass to Tsumago, one of the best-preserved and most evocative of the Nakasendo post-towns. Spend the night at a Minshuku (family-run guesthouse) in Tsumago or the nearby hamlet of O-Tsumago, with a delicious home-cooked Japanese dinner included.

Day 4: Tsumago/Nagiso to Nojiri

Walking distance @ 19km (6 hours)

The longest day on the trail is a varied hike from Tsumago or Nagiso to Nojiri. Walk through small valleys and past forests of bamboo and Japanese cedar, through some of the least-developed scenery on the tour. Continue by train to Kiso-Fukushima. Stay at a lovely Onsen Ryokan (hot-spring travellers' inn) set in a peaceful valley above the town. Complimentary transfer from the station is provided by the Ryokan. The Ryokan has indoor and outdoor hot-spring baths, perfect for a soak to rest your weary legs. Dinner is included.

Day 5: Kiso-Fukushima to Narai

Walking distance @ 7km (3 hours)

Your hosts at the Ryokan transfer you to Kiso-Fukushima after breakfast. In Kiso-Fukushima there is an optional, fairly strenuous, circular walk to a local waterfall. The circular walk is 7km and takes 2-3 hours. You can take this walk in the morning, before heading onwards to Yabuhara. Train tickets are provided for the short journey from Kiso-Fukushima to Yabuhara, starting point for the hike over the Torii pass to Narai. Narai is a

well-preserved atmospheric post-town, and you stay here in a family-run Minshuku in the heart of the village. Your hosts will serve a home-cooked Japanese dinner.

Day 6: Narai to Kiso-Hirasawa

Walking distance @ 3km (1 hour)

After breakfast, walk the short distance to the small town of Kiso-Hirasawa, famous for its lacquerware. There are many small shops selling handcrafted tableware and furniture. Board a train at Kiso-Hirasawa station for your onward journey to Karuizawa or Komoro for your final overnight stay. Both locations have lovely inns with a real sense of history and fine Japanese baths. Ride first to Matsumoto where you can visit the famous castle before connecting onwards to your final stop – total travel time is around three hours, not including the optional stop in Matsumoto. Arrive at your Ryokan in time for a wonderful dinner with local produce.

Day 7: Karuizawa to Yokokawa, onward travel to Tokyo

Walking distance @ 17km (6 hours)

After breakfast, your final walk on the Nakasendo Trail is from Karuizawa to Yokokawa. Leaving Karuizawa, you walk over the Usui-toge Pass, where teahouses surround Kumano shrine, then descend along a peaceful, undeveloped section of the trail through misty green forests. There is also the option to shorten the walk by 3.3km by taking a taxi at the start of the day (paid locally). From Yokokawa, board the local train to Takasaki and change there for your ride on the *shinkansen* (bullet train) to Toyama. The train journey takes around three hours to Tokyo, where you stay in a Western-style hotel for 1 night. Dinner is not included tonight as Tokyo offers an endless choice of restaurants.

Day 8: Tour ends in Tokyo.

Tour ends after breakfast.



SHIKOKU PILGRIMAGE TRAIL

8-days / 7-nights inn-to-inn **SELF GUIDED** walk from Tokushima to Ehime – departs from/to Kyoto

Shikoku is Japan's fourth-largest island, home to some of the country's most beautiful and undeveloped scenery. The island is the setting for an ancient walking trail, the challenging **Shikoku 88 Pilgrimage Trail** which connects 88 Buddhist temples associated with the scholar and monk Kobo Daishi, who brought Buddhist teachings from China to Japan and founded the Shingon school of Buddhism.

The full *Shikoku 88* walk covers more than a thousand kilometres, with the journey following a symbolic path to enlightenment through the stages of awakening, asceticism, enlightenment and nirvana. Pilgrims, known as *O-henro*, traditionally covered the journey on foot over many weeks, staying overnight at Shukubo temple lodgings. Most modern pilgrims now travel from temple to temple by car or tour bus, but we have selected portions of the original route which can still be enjoyed on foot as a very unique walking holiday.

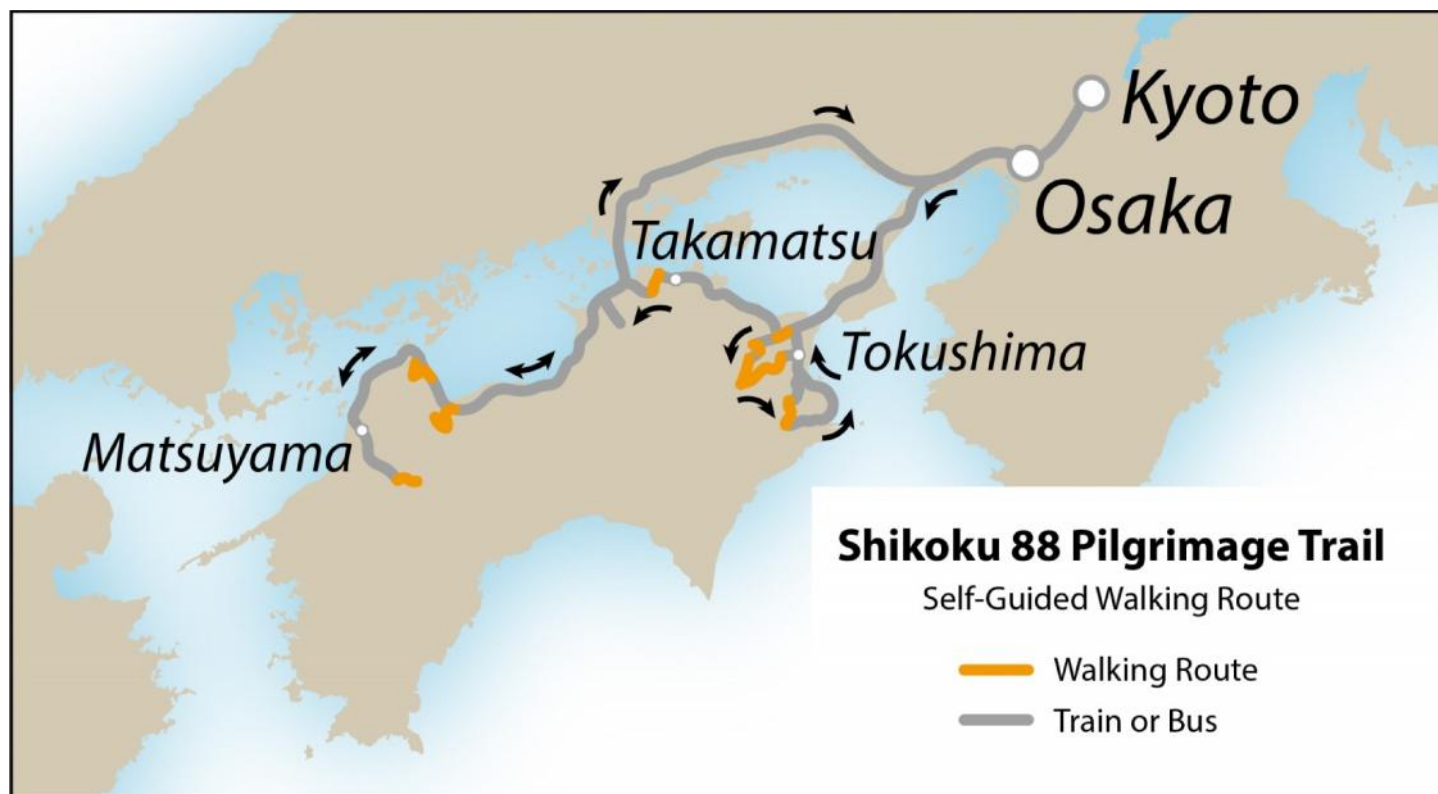
Dates: Daily on demand from March to early December, 2020

Cost from: \$2790 per person twin share. Single room supplement on request

Includes: 7 nights' accommodation in traditional Ryokan, Minshuku and Shukubo, which usually have shared facilities; 7 breakfasts, 7 dinners; JR Bus tickets and/or train tickets for travel from Kyoto/Osaka to Shikoku; train tickets for train journeys along the Shikoku 88 trail, and from Shikoku to Kyoto/Osaka; appropriate route notes and maps; Shikoku Guidebook; 5 x pre-booked and prepaid taxis.

Not Included: Flights or airport transfers, meals not mentioned, drinks, cable car on Day 3, entrance fees not shown and personal expenses. Luggage transfers are not included but can be organised locally at extra cost. *

Grading: Moderate to challenging. Daily walks are from 5km up to 17km, with average daily ascent/descent of 510m. Much of the walking is on asphalt or paved roads. Some longer walks can be shortened by extending the pre-booked taxi transfers.



Suggested itinerary:

Day 1: Depart Kyoto/Osaka for Tokushima (Temples 1 to 3) Walking distance @ 6km (2 hours)

From Kyoto travel by long-distance bus (ticket included) to Tokushima Prefecture. If you prefer you can arrange travel to start in Osaka, ask when booking. Begin your pilgrimage with a gentle introduction to the walks on Shikoku through quiet neighbourhoods of Tokushima. Visit three of the most eye-catching temples on whole trail – Temple 1 Ryozen-ji, Temple 2 Gokuraku-ji and Temple 3 Konsen-ji. Spend your first night as all pilgrims should, in a Shukubo (pilgrims' lodge). There is also the option of staying at a city-centre Ryokan (travellers' inn) for this first night.

Day 2: Tokushima (Temples 11 to 12) Walking distance @ 19km (8 hours)

A transfer by pre-paid taxi to Temple 11 Fujii-dera, a fascinating temple complex at the base of Mount Shosan-ji. From here you hike up the mountain to Temple 12 Shosan-ji (mountain and temple share the same name), then descend to the east. The walk is strenuous but rewarding. You can reduce the walk to 4-5 hours (10.4km) and avoid the first half of the strenuous ascent up Mt. Shosan-ji. Simply pay locally to extend the taxi ride on the day – no need to decide in advance. Travel by bus to Tokushima for your overnight stay in a Ryokan (travellers' inn) or a Western-style hotel.

Day 3: Tokushima (Temples 20 to 21) Walking distance @ 9km (4 hours)

Travel by pre-paid taxi to one of the more scenic and varied hikes on the entire 88 Pilgrimage route. After a short but steep uphill walk to Temple 20 Kakurin-ji, the trail descends to the hamlet of Anan, crosses the Nakagawa River and climbs again to Temple 21 Tairyu-ji. End the day with a cable car ride with wonderful views over a cedar forest and the small town below. Travel by bus to Tokushima for your overnight stay in a Ryokan (travellers' inn) or a Western-style hotel. The walk can be extended to about 5 hours for clients staying in Tokushima city - please enquire if you would like to undertake this longer option.

Day 4: Kagawa (Temples 82 to 80) Walking distance @ 14km (5 hours)

Leaving Tokushima, travel by bus and pre-paid taxi to a rewarding walk in northern Kagawa Prefecture. Walk through lovely scenery and visit a fine collection of temples – Temple 82 Negoro-ji, Temple 81 Shiromine-ji and finally Temple 80 Kokubun-ji. The walk can be shortened by 1.5 hours (5.4km) by omitting the return walk to Temple 81 Shiromine-ji. Travel onwards by train for an overnight stay in a Ryokan in the old hot-spring town of Kotohira Spa.

Day 5: Ehime (Temples 57 to 58) Walking distance @ 5km (2 hours)

Travel by train to Imabari in northern Ehime to begin your walk to Temple 57 Eifuku-ji. You gradually pass from urban townscape to rural farming communities before entering a forest with a steady climb to Temple 58

Seny -ji. Visit Eifuku-ji and Seny -ji and there is also an optional detour to Temple 56 Taisan-ji. Stay overnight in a Shukubo (pilgrims' lodging) at Seny -ji, or alternatively in a Western-style hotel in Imabari City.

Day 6: Ehime (Temple 58 onwards)

Walking distance @ 5km (1 hour)

Continue along the pilgrimage trail with a gentle walk down the mountain from Seny -ji. There is a chance to explore small village settlements on the way. Return to the town of Imabari, with an optional paved walk on to Temple 59 Iyo Kokubun-ji (an extra 4.1km which extends the walk by 1.5 hours) and continue onwards to Matsuyama by train where you stay 2 nights at a Ryokan in the Dogo Onsen area. Dogo Onsen is one of Japan's oldest hot-springs. The timber public bathhouse here, Dogo Onsen Honkan, was built in the late 19th Century and is likely to have been an inspiration for Hayao Miyazaki's film '*Spirited Away*'.

Day 7: Ehime (Temples 45 to 44)

Walking distance @ 12km (4 hours)

Take the bus southwards from Matsuyama to the atmospheric Temple 45 Iwaya-ji (*Rock Cave Temple*), which is closely linked to K b Daishi. Climb the iconic ladder to his meditation spot, with its far-reaching views over the surrounding region. From Iwaya-ji, enjoy a lovely forest hike to Temple 44 Daiho-ji before returning by bus to Matsuyama in the evening. Stay another night at Dogo Onsen.

Day 8: Ehime (Temples 60 to 62), depart for Kyoto/Osaka

Walking distance @ 14km (5 hours)

The tour ends with a rewarding walk in the east of Ehime Prefecture. Travel by bus from Matsuyama, connect with your pre-booked and pre-paid taxi, then walk from Temple 60 Yokomine-ji to Temple 61 Kouon-ji and onwards to Temple 62 Hoju-ji. You pass through a rural area of Shikoku and the temples are in lovely natural settings. You can reduce your walk to 11.3km, avoiding the first uphill section; simply pay locally to extend the taxi ride. Choose on the day – no need to decide in advance. After finishing the walk, travel by train to Osaka or Kyoto, arriving in the afternoon or early evening. Tour arrangements end and no accommodation is included on this night but it can be arranged at extra cost.



We also offer the **KUMANO KODO TRAIL**, as a 9-days / 8-nights inn-to-inn **GUIDED** walk, from \$4620 per person (twin share), including breakfasts, dinners, transport, accommodation, guide and luggage forwarding, departing from Kyoto on 12th April, 6th, 18th May, 5th, 21st October, 4th, 11th November 2020.

This tour is also available as an 11, 9, 6, 5 or 4 day **SELF GUIDED** walk – departing from / to either Osaka or Kyoto. The Kumano Kodo Trail is a strenuous, mountain trail walk with 4 or 5 days of walking from 2 to 7 hours per day, from village to village. It is best suited to fit, experienced walkers. Please ask for more details.

Outdoor Travel offers guided or self-guided walking holidays in many parts of the world including China, the USA, Southern and Eastern Africa, the Milford Track or Abel Tasman in New Zealand, the Flinders Ranges or Tasmania in Australia and also in the UK, Ireland and in Europe. Popular in Europe are England's **Coast-to-Coast** trail or Scotland's **West Highland Way**, the **Ring of Kerry** in Ireland the **Camino de Santiago** in France and Spain, Italy's **Amalfi** or **Cinque Terre** Coast or the Pilgrim's Road to Rome, the **Via Francigena**.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations:

- Call Toll free 1800 331 582 or (03) 57551743 or fax (03) 57501020
- Email: info@outdoortravel.com.au
- Web: <http://www.outdoortravel.com.au/>
- Mail: Outdoor Travel Pty Ltd, PO Box 286, Bright 3741, Australia

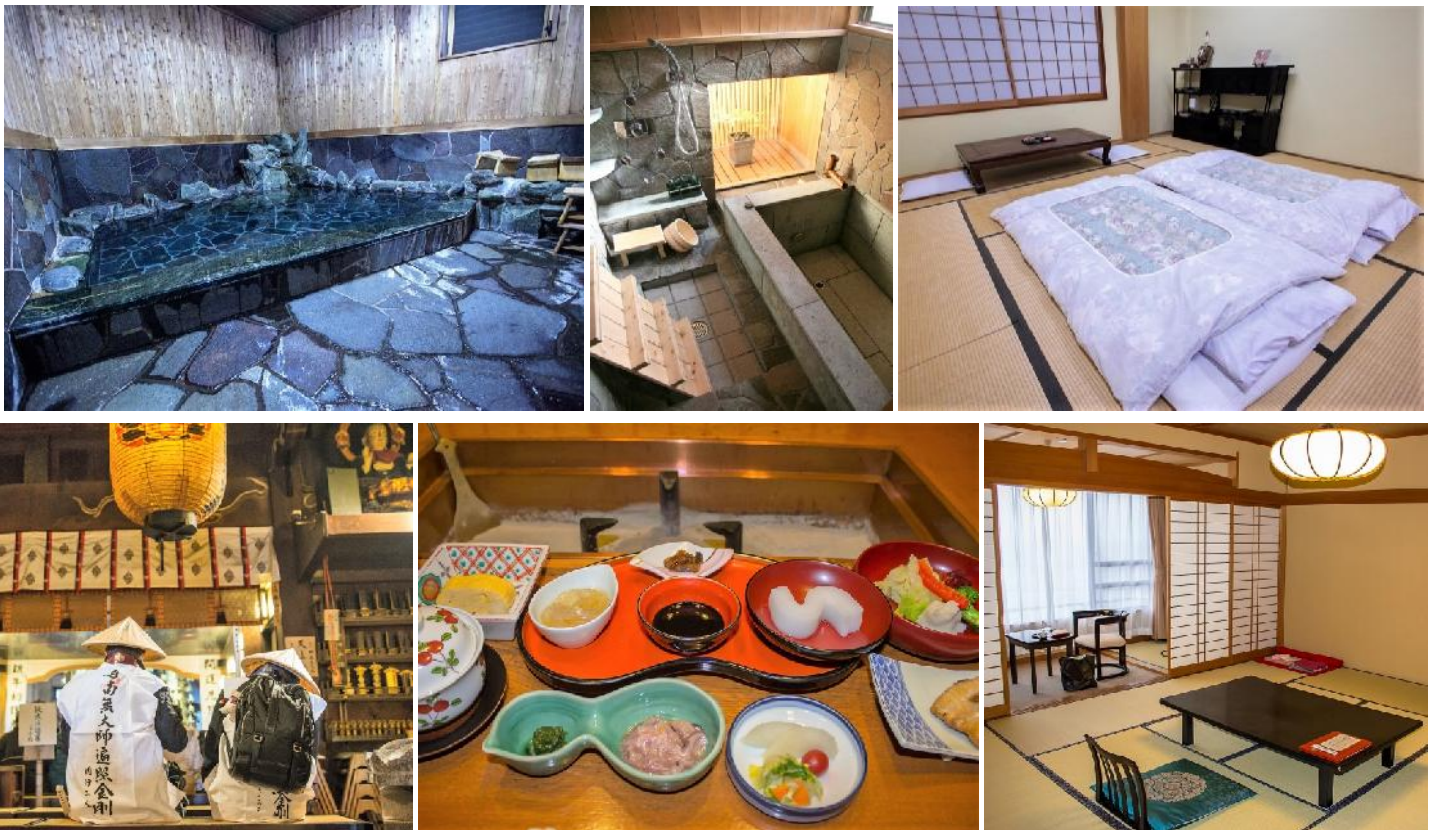
TOUR BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR JAPAN

Accommodation: Tours stay in 3- or 4-star hotels or in traditional Japanese Ryokan, Minshuku and Shukubo. Hotels are European style with ensuite bathrooms, but rooms tend to be smaller than in Europe.

Ryokan and Minshuku are traditional Japanese-style inns. They may be in modern concrete or older wooden buildings but the rooms are always in the Japanese style with tatami (straw) matting and futons laid out in the evening. Dinners are served together, usually in the dining room, and are exquisitely prepared multi-course meals. Some Ryokan have ensuite bathrooms, though older buildings generally offer shared facilities.

Minshuku are usually family-run. They have tatami-mat rooms, with futons laid out in the evening for sleeping. Most Minshuku do not have ensuite bathrooms as they are in older traditional wooden buildings. Compared with a Ryokan, they are usually (but not always) slightly less formal, but the service and food is just as good. Smaller inns offer domestic scale bathing tubs used privately in turn by guests; larger inns offer communal spa-style baths, segregated by gender. They are the classic Japanese experience.

Shukubo are lodgings in Buddhist temples originally meant for pilgrims, but now open to anyone. Rooms are similar to Ryokan or Minshuku, though without ensuite facilities. The food is excellent vegetarian Buddhist 'Shojin-Ryori' cuisine. It is a wonderful experience to stay in a Shukubo and there is the opportunity to join the early morning religious service. Service is provided by Buddhist monks, who are courteous and friendly, but please remember that Shukubo are not full-service hotels. They are attached to temples in sacred places such as Mount Koya and some temples of Shikoku.



Meals: Most meals will be Japanese cuisine. Vegetarian options are available, but limited. Strict vegetarian diets, vegan diets, or gluten free diets will be difficult to accommodate due to the pervasiveness of the fish-based stock dashi and the use of soy sauce and miso in Japanese cuisine. Tips are not required in Japan.

* **A note about luggage transfers:** For **SELF-GUIDED** tours luggage transfers are not included and we recommend you adopt the Japanese way using the reliable *Takkyubin* courier service. During the tour, you can send larger items of luggage ahead by courier so you don't carry too much and to make the long-distance transfers by bus and train more relaxed (avoiding handling larger items of luggage through stations and on trains). Larger items of luggage do not re-join you on the same day, and you will not have access to them on certain nights so bring a daypack to carry your overnight items.

The inns used provide soap, shampoo, towels, slippers and Yukata robes, which are worn inside after check-in. Wear your Yukata for dinner, in your room and when walking about, even outdoors. You do not need extra evening clothes and can travel light. Luggage lockers are often available while walking or sightseeing.

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