

JAPAN – KUMANO KODO ANCIENT PILGRIM TRAIL

9-days / 8-nights inn-to-inn **GUIDED** walk



A combination of ancient and contemporary Japan, this walking holiday offers a truly unique insight into a land of contrasts, where an appreciation for the modern combines with a reverence for tradition. This is a breathtaking experience on the Kumano Kodo Ancient Trail, a pilgrimage route through part of the mountainous Kii Peninsula. The well-maintained trail threads its way through deep valleys, mountains and small villages to offer a wonderfully varied guided walk. Many walkers who have already completed the Camino de Santiago walk in Spain undertake the Kumano Kodo and become dual pilgrims.

Originally made popular by the Imperial family and nobility in the Heian Period (794-1185), the pilgrim route to the three sacred Kumano Shrines – Kumano Hongu Taisha, Kumano Nachi Taisha, and Hayatama Taisha – offered solace for those seeking salvation in *sangaku shinko* (a belief in the supernatural power of mountains), rather than through common religious practices. Today we offer modern-day pilgrims and keen walkers the chance to walk the Nakahechi, one of the Kumano Kodo trails, and a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The many ascents and descents are well worth the spectacular views and sights along the way. The most challenging is Koguchi to Nachi, which begins with a long, steep ascent, then a gentle descent and rewards with a grand arrival at Nachi Shrine (an iconic shrine with Japan's longest single drop waterfall). Along the way, stay at traditional, comfortable family-run inns and guesthouses with excellent food. Relax in natural hot springs, experience the warm hospitality of the Japanese people and soak up the unique culture.

Departs: 23 March, 6 April, 14 May, 3 June, 28 September, 13 October, 3 November, 2027

Cost from: \$5845 per person twin share. Single supplement* from \$665 on request.

Includes: 2 nights in western-style hotels and 6 nights in traditional Onsen Ryokan or Minshuku, which usually have shared facilities; 8 breakfasts, 8 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 between locations; luggage transfer on 2 occasions**.

Not Included: Flights or airport transfers, lunches and other meals not mentioned, drinks, entrance fees not mentioned, insurance, personal expenses.

***Single Supplement:** Solo travellers pay a single supplement, which guarantees you a room to yourself on the 2 nights at the western-style hotels on the tour. For the 6 nights at the traditional Japanese inns, tatami-mat rooms are shared with another group member of the same gender.

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Grading: This is a challenging, 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. Of course, there are always opportunities to skip the most strenuous sections should you need to. The walk has up to 980m of ascent and 920m descent. On the trail you carry a daypack with your essentials for the day.

Suggested itinerary:

Day 1: Arrive in Osaka

Meet the group at a western-style hotel in Osaka, in time for a welcome dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 2: Travel to Kii Peninsula, Nakahechi from Takijiri to Takahara

Walking @ 5km (2 hours)

Travel south along the coast by train to Tanabe (about 3 hours), then transfer by local bus (about 40 minutes) to Takijiri, at the beginning of the Nakahechi and part of the network of ancient pilgrimage trails known as the Kumano Kodo, or Kumano Ancient Trail. Walk to the small hilltop village of Takahara, known as 'the village in the mist' as the valleys below are often filled with a scenic sea of clouds. Our overnight stay is in a traditional Ryokan built by local craftsmen, with rooms affording views over the surrounding mountains. Enjoy hot spring baths and the dinner tonight, made with locally sourced organic ingredients.

Day 3: Nakahechi Trail from Takahara to Chikatsuyu

Walking @ 12km (4 hours)

From Takahara, we continue eastwards along the Nakahechi pilgrim trail, passing Jizo Bodhisattva statues, placed there by locals to protect travellers. Pass the sites of old cha-ya (tea houses), which provided rest to pilgrims until the early 20th century. Descend to the village of Chikatsuyu. We stay in a Minshuku guest house run by a local couple, with natural hot-spring baths next door. Dinner tonight might include delicious *takikomi-gohan* (rice steamed with vegetables), freshly caught fish, and tempura. After dinner watch a performance by a local Shamisen music group, enjoying a rare, close-up experience of Japanese musical tradition.

Day 4: Chikatsuyu to Hongu Grand Shrine

Walking @ 10km (4 hours)

We walk two scenic sections of the Kumano Kodo, passing ridge-top villages and oji shrines. Nobles rested at these shrines to refresh themselves and compose poems. We take a local bus to Hoshinmon-oji before descending to Hongu Grand Shrine. The symbol of the shrine is the mythological three-legged raven, representing the Hongu, Nachi, and Hayatama shrines. After, we go over Mt Dainichi on the pilgrimage route Dainichi-goe, passing through atmospheric cedar forests and gaining views of the Kumano River and surrounding mountains. We continue to Yunomine Onsen where we stay in a comfortable Onsen Ryokan.



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Day 5: Boat ride on the Kumano River through Doro-kyo Gorge to Hayatama Taisha Shrine

We transfer by local bus to the Kumano River, where we board a traditional wooden flat-bottomed boat for a 1.5-hour boat ride to the Hayatama Taisha Shrine, just as Imperial pilgrims did in olden times. Afterwards, we return for another night at our Onsen Ryokan, with time to soak in the natural hot spring baths before dinner.

Day 6: Koguchi to Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine and waterfall**Walking @ 15km (6 hours)**

We transfer to Koguchi and walk the final section of the trail over the Ogumorigoe Pass, with a glimpse of the Pacific Ocean, then descend to Nachitaki waterfall and Nachi Taisha (Grand Shrine), one of the three 'Grand Shrines of Kumano'. From there it's a short bus ride to Katsuura where we stay two nights.

Day 7: Daimonzaka and Matsumoto Pass**Walking @ 5km (2 hours)**

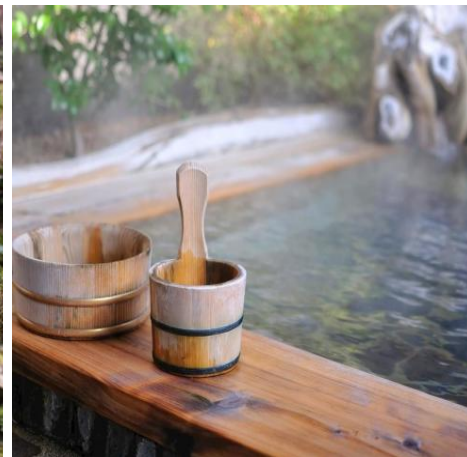
After breakfast we head to Daimonzaka, a sloping cobbled pathway lined with ancient cedar and cypress trees. Daimonzaka's moss-covered steps lead from the valley to Kumano Nachi Grand Shrine and Nachi Falls; although a short walk it is deeply atmospheric. In the afternoon we walk a part of the Iseji route. Matsumoto Pass is an important mountain pass on the Iseji route and features ancient stone pavements, bamboo forest, and sweeping views of the Pacific Ocean. We also encounter the wind- and water-sculpted rock formation Onigajo (Demon's Castle). Or, if you prefer, spend the day at leisure – relax at the hotel or explore Katsuura, with its morning seafood market, old-fashioned Japanese shopping arcade and some interesting back streets.

Day 8: Travel on coastal rail line from Kii Peninsula to Kyoto, Farewell dinner.

We take the coastal rail line to Kyoto, known for its temples, gardens, palaces and historic wooden houses and geisha district. Overnight at a western-style city hotel, with a farewell dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 9: Departure day

Tour arrangements end after breakfast.



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TOUR BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR JAPAN

Accommodation: Tours stay in 3- or 4-star hotels or in traditional Japanese Ryokan and Minshuku.

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.

Onsen (hot-springs baths) are an integral part of the fabric of Japanese culture. A stay at an Onsen Ryokan is much sought after. The bathing preparation follows a strict set of rituals which are usually explained well in advance, so embracing the opportunity to bathe is highly recommended, especially after a day on the trail. 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.

Onsen (and tattoos) When it comes to tattoos, it is important to note that attitudes can vary significantly. While many places have become more open and accepting, some properties still maintain strict policies regarding visible tattoos. Guests with tattoos may be asked to cover them or, in some instances, may be denied entry to onsen or communal bath facilities altogether. Please let us know when booking, if you have any visible tattoos, so we can check the possibility of alternatives with private ensuite facilities, if access to the onsen is restricted.



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**, on this tour we suggest you have **three pieces of luggage**:

- **Main bag: (maximum 23 kg).** This will be transferred between accommodations **twice during the tour**, so you will not have access to it every night. You will have access to this bag only on **Day 1 in Osaka, Days 4 and 5 at the Onsen Ryokan in Yunomine, and Day 8 once you arrive in Kyoto**. Please keep this in mind and pack accordingly.
- **Tote Bag: (maximum 20L)** – a small backpack or a tote bag with a secure zip. **This bag will be transferred between the smaller inns, so you have access to it every night.** It should contain the essentials you need for the nights when your main bag is not available. Please keep this bag light: the traditional inns provide soap, shampoo, towels, slippers and a Yukata robe for guests to use after check-in. Yukata are worn for dinner, in your room and when walking around the property or nearby, including outdoors where appropriate, so there is no need to pack additional evening clothes.
- **Day pack:** this is the bag you **will carry with you every day while walking**. A comfortable, lightweight daypack is ideal. It only needs to hold your daily essentials, such as a water bottle, snacks, rain jacket and any personal items you may need during the day's walk.

The **Kumano Kodo Trail** is also available as a 4, 5 or 6-day **SELF GUIDED** walk departing from / to either Osaka or Kyoto. Please ask for more details. **Outdoor Travel** offers guided or self-guided walking holidays in other iconic destinations in Japan, including the **Shikoku 88 Pilgrimage trail** and the **Nakasendo Path**.

Contact Outdoor Travel for more details and reservations:

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