

JAPAN – KUMANO KODO ANCIENT PILGRIM TRAIL

9-days / 8-nights inn-to-inn GUIDED walk – ex Kyoto



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. From Kyoto, we offer 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Originally made popular by the Imperial family and nobility in the Heian Period (794-1185), the pilgrim route to the three sacred Kumano Shrines; Kumano Hongu Taisha, Kumano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 2024: 6 June, 25 September, 16 October, 9 November 2024

Departs 2025: 26 March, 7 April, 12 May, 5 June, 5 September, 15 October, 9 November 2025

Cost from: \$5715 per person twin share. Single supplement* from \$665 on request.

Includes: 2 nights in western-style hotels and 7 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 (1 piece per person) on 2 occasions*.

Not Included: Flights or airport transfers, lunches and other meals not mentioned, drinks, entrance fees not mentioned, some luggage transfers*, and 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 7 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 Kyoto.

Meet the group at a western-style tour hotel in central Kyoto, 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, where the overnight stay is 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 Kobiro, Hoshinmon-oji to Hongu Grand Shrine **Walking @ 13km (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 walk first to Kobiro, then 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. Then we take a local bus to Yunomine Onsen or Kawayu Onsen, to stay in a comfortable Ryokan with its own hot spring bath or 'rotemburo'.



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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, travel back by bus to Yunomine Onsen or Kawayu Onsen for another night at the hot spring 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 by local bus 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: Coastal walk and Katsuura fishing port

Walking @ 7km (3 hours)

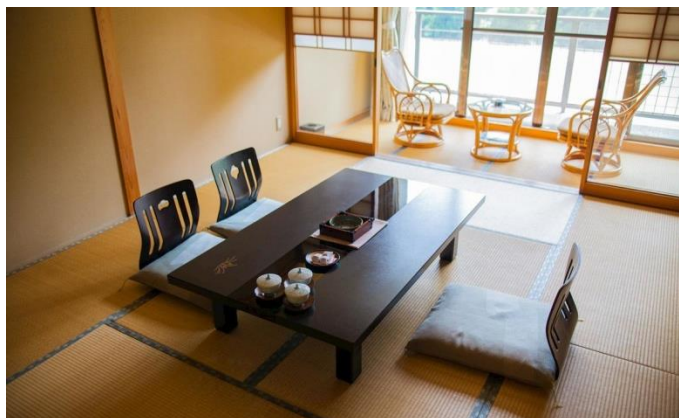
Today there is an optional walk along a coastal section of the Kumano Kodo Iseji route, with views over the Pacific Ocean, pretty villages and the oldest paved section on the entire pilgrimage network, with stone blocks dating back 800 years. Alternatively, relax in the various hot spring baths in the 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.

Depart the Kii Peninsula, travelling on 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.



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.



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 some nights, while you are on the Kumano Kodo, luggage transfers are not included. 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, you leave your main luggage when you depart Kyoto, then about halfway through the tour you will be re-united with it to change over gear. Your luggage will then go on to await you at the hotel back in Kyoto. In the interim, you adopt the Japanese way of travelling with just a daypack to carry your overnight items. This means you don't carry too much, and it makes the long-distance transfers by bus and train more relaxed (avoiding handling larger items of luggage through stations and on trains and buses).

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.

The **Kumano Kodo Trail** is also available as an 11-day **GUIDED** walk or 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**.

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