

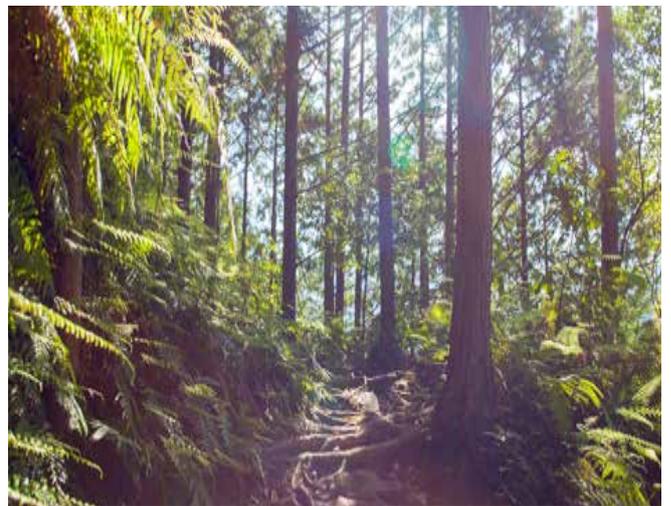


Kumano Kodo Complete Self-guided walking 11 days

Introduction

The Kii Peninsula points south away from Kyoto and Osaka and is one of the most remote and mystical areas of Japan, despite its proximity to these great cities. On the Kii Peninsula are the three Grand Shrines of Kumano, pilgrimage destinations for successive emperors and their families from Kyoto since the 11th century. There were several pilgrimage trails including

the Nakahechi-do, Kohechi-do and Ohechi-do, collectively known as the Kumano Kodo ('Old Road of Kumano'). Our walk focuses on both the Nakahechi-do and Kohechi-do, weaving through forested mountains and small villages first towards the Hongu Taisha Shrine, then to the Grand Shrine in Nachi, and finally to the mountain-top temple complex of Mount Koya.



DETAILS

TOUR LENGTH AND PRICES

11 days

Please see the website for the prices we offer in each currency.

TYPE AND LEVEL OF TRIP

Village-to-village walking on the Kumano Kodo with 11 hikes of 2-7 hours

WALKING SEASON

Tours visiting the Kohechi area see snow in the winter months, so we recommend these tours from April to November.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

10 nights at Japanese inns along the

Kumano Kodo trail; 10 breakfasts, at least 3 lunches and 10 dinners; Round-trip train tickets from Kyoto or Osaka; Detailed day-by-day itinerary and walking directions; Topographical maps; Local support by telephone and at our Kumano Kodo branch

ITINERARY

DAY 1 > Hike from Takijiri to Takahara

Our tour includes train tickets for your journey from Kyoto or Osaka to the small town of Kii-Tanabe on the mystical Kii Peninsula, gateway to the historic Kumano Kodo Trail. The railway line runs close to the ocean for the latter part of the journey and offers fine views out over the sea. The journey from Osaka to Kii-Tanabe is around two and half hours; from Kyoto it is around three hours and usually requires a change of trains at Shin-Osaka station. Board a local bus outside Kii-Tanabe station and travel forty minutes to Takijiri. This is where your walk on the Nakahechi portion of the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage route begins. From Takijiri the path climbs steadily to the ridge-top village of Takahara, and takes around two hours.

Stay tonight in a small, Japanese-style hotel in the tiny village of Takahara, or in a Japanese Minshuku in the nearby village of Kurisugawa. Both options serve good, home-cooked dinners featuring local seasonal ingredients. The small Japanese-style hotel in Takahara has both Japanese and western-style rooms, all with wonderful views over the valley and mountains.

Walking distance: 4.5km / 2.8 miles

Elevation gain: 370m / 1200 feet of ascent

Time required: About 2 hours

Accommodation: Japanese-style Hotel in Takahara, or Minshuku (Family-run Guesthouse) in Kurisugawa

DAY 2 > Hike from Takahara to Chikatsuyu

After your Japanese breakfast you leave your inn and follow the trail as it winds through small settlements and peaceful countryside. You pass several Oji shrines



before finally descending to the village of Chikatsuyu. The paths are clearly defined, and flagstones have been laid in some places to make the climbs easier. Arrive in Chikatsuyu in time to relax before dinner at a family-run Minshuku guest-house.

Walking distance: 10km / 6.5 miles

Elevation gain: 480m / 1575 feet of ascent and 520m / 1700 feet of descent

Time required: About 4-5 hours

Accommodation: Minshuku (Family-run Guesthouse)

DAY 3 > Hike from Chikatsuyu to Hongu

From Chikatsuyu, the trail continues through the mountains to Hongu. The trail passes through small villages and forest trails over the Kii Mountains to the Kumano shrine at Hongu, one of the three 'Grand Shrines of Kumano'. At the heart of these sacred mountains, Kumano was said to be the entrance to the land of Yomi, the 'other world' which spirits travelled to in Japanese mythology. From the Kumano shrine at Hongu, a short bus ride brings you to Yunomine Onsen, one of the oldest natural hot-spring villages in Japan, or to Kawayu Onsen famous for the thermal water

bubbling to the surface of the crystal clear river. Enjoy a relaxing soak in a Japanese bath before or after your delicious, multi-course dinner.

Walking distance: 24km / 14.9 miles

Elevation gain: 820m / 2700 feet of ascent and 1140m / 3740 feet of descent

Time required: About 8-9 hours, requiring an early start!

We offer two shorter alternatives of 7 hours (15km / 9 miles) or of 2 hours (7km / 4 miles), using a local bus from Chikatsuyu to shorten the walk. You can choose which option you prefer on the day - no need to decide in advance!

Accommodation: Onsen Ryokan (Hot-spring Travellers Inn)

DAY 4 > The Akagigoe and Dainichigoe trails

Spend a leisurely second night in the picturesque hot-spring village of Yunomine Onsen or Kawayu Onsen part-way along the trail. On this extra day we offer two different optional walks on new sections of the trail, which can be combined if you wish. We also offer unique cultural experiences, such as walking with a Yamabushi ascetic monk, making your own traditional Japanese Washi paper or undertaking a spiritual meditation session.

Walking distance: 8.8km / 5.4 miles (plus 7km / 4 miles from Hosshinmon-oji to Hongu)

Elevation gain: 610m / 2,015 feet of ascent and 585m / 1,920 feet of descent

Time required: 3-4 hours (plus 2 hours from Hosshinmon-oji to Hongu)

Today's shorter optional walk is 1.5 hours (2.8km / 1.7 miles) on the Dainichigoe trail between Yunomine Onsen and Hongu. You can walk both ways, or ride one way by bus. Or combine the Dainichigoe trail with the Akagigoe trail for a satisfying full-day hike.

Accommodation: Onsen Ryokan (Hot-spring Travellers Inn)

DAY 5 > Hike from Ukegawa to Koguchi

Before or after breakfast, take time to explore the atmospheric village where you spent the night. Today's journey begins with a short bus ride to Ukegawa on the banks of the Kumano River. From Ukegawa, you start on the Kogumotorigoe path, which heads up to the Kogumotorigoe Pass before descending to the

remote village of Koguchi. The trail is not difficult and today's hike should take you about 4 hours. A warm welcome and good food await you at a tiny inn run by a charming retired couple, or alternatively at the engaging lodge created from a former school building. Explore along the river and have a swim if the weather is warm.

Walking distance: 12.4km / 7.7 miles

Elevation gain: 520m / 1705 feet of ascent and 500m / 1640 feet of descent

Time required: About 4 hours

Accommodation: Minshuku (Family-run Guesthouse) or Japanese-style Lodge

DAY 6 > Hike from Koguchi to Nachi-san

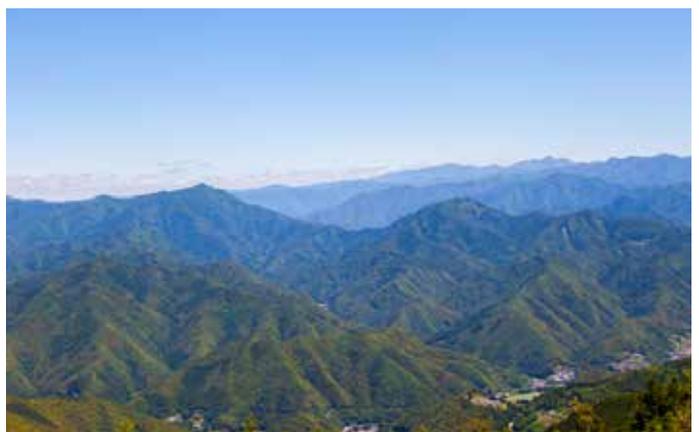
The final section of the trail takes you from Koguchi up to the Ogumotorigoe Pass with a glimpse of the Pacific Ocean. It then descends to Nachi-san, the location of Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine, one of the three Grand Shrines of Kumano and Nachi-taki waterfall. Stay overnight either in the small village of Nachi-san close to the shrine, or take a local bus for the twenty-minute ride to the port town of Kii-Katsuura with wonderful views over the island-studded bay. Enjoy dinner and breakfast served by your hosts at your accommodation.

Walking distance: 15.1km / 9.3 miles

Elevation gain: 980m / 3215 feet of ascent and 920m / 3020 feet of descent

Time required: About 6-7 hours

Accommodation: Japanese-style Onsen Hotel



DAY 7 > Hike from Yagio to Totsukawa Onsen

Kii-Katsuura is an active fishing port and has a lively early-morning fish market. Enjoy the views out over the island-studded bay. There are intriguing backstreets and a traditional covered shopping arcade to explore, too. From here, travel by bus to Hongu Taisha Grand Shrine, spiritual centre of the Kii-Peninsula and the start of the Kohechi trail.

From here, travel to the Kohechi trail. Your first walk on the ancient route begins at Yagio on a wonderful forested trail over Hatenashi-toge Pass, with excellent valley views, fascinating cultural monuments (including a miniature Kannon statue pilgrimage) and picturesque villages. A brief bus ride avoids a short final stretch on a busier road at the very end of the walk. Finish the day with a relaxing thermal bath at your inn for tonight in Totsukawa Onsen.

Walking distance: 8.8km / 5.5 miles

Elevation gain: 985m / 3,230 feet of ascent and 935m / 3,070 feet of descent

Time required: About 4-5 hours

Accommodation: Onsen Ryokan (Hot-spring Travellers Inn)

DAY 8 > Hike from Nishinaka to Miuraguchi

Heading onwards from Totsukawa Onsen to Nishinaka by local bus, the section of the Kohechi trail to Miuraguchi offers some of the best views of the Kumano valley over the Miura-toge Pass and continues to the scenic, peaceful village of Miuraguchi or 'Gateway to Miura' where you stay tonight in an intimate Minshuku family-run guesthouse on a small farm.

Walking distance: 11km / 6.8 miles from Nishinaka to Miuraguchi

Elevation gain: 855m / 2,805 feet of ascent and 755m / 2,475 feet of descent

Time required: 5 hours

Accommodation: Minshuku (Family-run Guesthouse)



DAY 9 > Hike from Miuraguchi to Nosegawa Onsen

After breakfast you leave Miuraguchi. The trail continues north along one of the most rural and challenging hikes in the Kumano region over the Obako-toge Pass to another scenic rural village called Omata. The hot-spring village of Nosegawa Onsen is your destination for tonight and is a short scenic riverside walk onwards from Omata. Your inn will pick you up from Omata if you prefer not to walk the last

section to Nosegawa Onsen.

Walking distance: 13.7km / 8.5 miles from Miuraguchi to Nosegawa Onsen

Elevation gain: 1,150m / 3,770 feet of ascent and 850m / 2,790 feet of descent

Time required: 6-7 hours

Accommodation: Onsen Ryokan (Hot-spring Travellers Inn)

DAY 10 > Hike from Nosegawa Onsen to Mount Koya

Leave Nosegawa Onsen this morning and begin today's hike from the boundary between Nosegawa and Koya - it is also possible to walk the full distance from Nosegawa Onsen if you prefer a longer hike with some strenuous paved sections. On the final leg of the Kohechi trail to Mount Koya there are magical valley views as you traverse the peak Mizu-ga-mine. Arriving at the mountain-top temple town at the end of the walk delivers a great sense of achievement. Spiritual Mount Koya is a fitting reward for completing the pilgrimage route.

Walking distance: 7.3km / 4.5 miles from Nosegawa Onsen to Mount Koya (with an optional additional paved section of 9.2km / 5.7 miles)

Elevation gain: 325m / 1,065 feet of ascent and 465m / 1,525 feet of descent

Time required: 3 hours (6-7 hours including the optional additional section)

Accommodation: Shukubo (Pilgrims Lodging)

DAY 11 > Hike on the Choishi-michi trail, then travel to Osaka or Kyoto

On your final day, you have chance to explore more of Mount Koya, visiting the atmospheric Okunoin cemetery with thousands of graves and memorials to feudal lords and other past luminaries, and other monuments. Or undertake our optional, challenging hike on the Choishi Michi trail, the atmospheric original approach to Mount Koya lined with stone markers. Finally board the scenic Nankai railway line towards Osaka and Kyoto.

Walking distance: 15.5km / 10 miles

Elevation gain: 1,225m / 4,020 feet of ascent; 650m / 2,130 feet of descent

Time required: About 5 hours of optional walking