Introduction

The Kii Peninsula points south away from the great cities of Kyoto and Osaka, and is one of the most remote and mystical areas of Japan, despite its proximity. Long a place of pilgrimage, it is the site of the three Grand Shrines of Kumano (Kumano Sanzan). From the 11th century successive emperors and their families made the long and difficult pilgrimage to Kumano from Kyoto. Several pilgrimage trails were established, amongst them the Nakahechi-do, Kohechido and Ohechi-do, collectively known as the Kumano Kodo (Old Road of Kumano).

Our walk focuses on part of the Nakahechido, which weaves its way through the forested mountains and small villages to the Grand Shrine of Hongu, before finishing near the Pacific Ocean at Nachi Grand Shrine.
TOUR LENGTH AND PRICES
4 days
Please see the website for the prices we offer in each currency.

TYPE AND LEVEL OF TRIP
Mixed village paths (paved) and unpaved forest trails. This tour offers moderate walking, but you can choose more strenuous options on Day 3 if you prefer. This is a highly rewarding route through the beautiful villages and mountains of the Kii Peninsula.

WALKING SEASON
All year (the region may occasionally experience snow from December to March)

WHAT’S INCLUDED
3 nights at Japanese inns along the Kumano Kodo trail; 3 breakfasts and 3 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.

DETAILS

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 a 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: 370 metres ascent / 1200 feet of ascent and negligible descent
Time required: About 2 hours
Accommodation: Japanese-style Hotel in Takahara, or Minshuku (Family-run Guesthouse)

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 guesthouse.

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. Board a bus in Chikatsuyu today and then walk a gentle section of the trail from Hosshinmon-oji 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: 7km / 4 miles
Elevation gain: 120m / 395 feet of ascent and 360m / 1180 feet of descent
Time required: About 2 hours

If you prefer a more challenging day, we offer two longer alternatives of 7 hours (15km / 9 miles) or of 8-9 hours (24km / 14.9 miles), both with significant ascent and descent. 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 > Hayatama Grand Shrine and Shingu
Before or after breakfast, take time to explore the atmospheric village of Yunomine Onsen or Kawayu Onsen. Travel by bus along the picturesque valley to Shingu and visit the Kumano Hayatama Taisha, one of the three Grand Shrines of Kumano, fifteen minutes on foot from Shingu railway station. The tourist office is located directly in front of Shingu railway station, where the bus arrives; they can supply maps and advice. Within the shrine precinct is a giant Nagi tree about a thousand years old. ‘Nagi dolls’ made from the seeds of this tree are believed to bring about lucky encounters with the opposite sex or a happy married life to couples. The Kamikura Shrine on Mount Gongen, further on from the Grand Shrine, is also well worth a visit. People worship a large rock as a god here and the shrine is extremely atmospheric. After visiting the sights of Shingu, use the train tickets we provide for the train journey onwards to Osaka or Kyoto. The journey takes around five hours, arriving in Osaka or Kyoto early to mid-evening.

WE ALSO OFFER 5-DAY AND 6-DAY VERSIONS OF THIS TRIP
These versions of our Kumano Kodo self-guided tour are for those wishing only to do the core days of walking.

WE ALSO OFFER A 7-DAY VERSION OF THE TRIP
which features two nights in the picturesque hot-spring village of Yunomine Onsen part-way along the trail. We offer two optional hikes for this extra day in addition to unique cultural experiences, such as walking with a Yamabushi ascetic monk, create your own traditional Japanese paper or undertaking a spiritual meditation session.