The Kumano Kodo, or Kumano Ancient Trail, is a pilgrimage route to Kumano, part of the mountainous Kii Peninsula which stretches south from the Kansai cities of Osaka, Nara and Kyoto. The well-maintained trail threads its way through deep valleys, mountains and small villages to offer a wonderfully-varied hike over four days. Stay at comfortable family-run inns with excellent food, soak in natural hot springs, and visit the shrines along the way. The pilgrimage routes to the three great Kumano Shrines – Kumano Hongu Taisha, Kumano Nachi Taisha, and Hayatama Taisha – were popularized during and after the Heian Period (794-1185), when the Imperial family and nobility began to seek salvation in sangaku shinko (a belief in the supernatural power of mountains), rather than through common religious practices.

Emperor Gotoba (1180-1239) made no fewer than thirty pilgrimages to Kumano, recording his thoughts and feelings in the Kumano poems.

Our journey begins in the modern city of Kyoto, and we travel south by train along the coast, and spend four days hiking the Nakahechi, one of the Kumano Kodo trails, and a UNESCO World Heritage site. There is a day mid-way to relax, with a gentle ride along the Kumano River to the Hayatama Taisha Shrine. We cross the Kii Peninsula on foot to its eastern coast, and the fishing town of Katsuura, with two nights at a hot-spring hotel and a further optional day of hiking. We finish by travelling on to Kyoto by train. On small-group guided tours with Oku Japan, your guide takes care of luggage arrangements for you.

**DATES & PRICES**
Please see website

**TOUR LENGTH**
9 days

**TYPE AND LEVEL OF TRIP**
Village-to-village hiking in the sacred Kii Peninsula for 9 days
Strenuous - 4 or 5 days of walking from 2 to 7 hours per day on mountain trails

**WHAT’S INCLUDED**
Transport, accommodation, English-speaking tour guide, entrance fees, luggage forwarding, daily breakfast & daily evening meals included.
Not included are international flights, drinks with meals, lunches and airport transfers.
From imperial Kyoto, head through the Kumano mountains, a UNESCO World Heritage site, to the Pacific Ocean fishing port of Kii-Katsuura - Accommodation in old hot spring villages - Boat ride through the Doro-kyo Gorge - Enjoy an exclusive Shamisen musical performance in a lovely traditional setting on the Kumano Kodo trail.
DAY 1 > Meet in Kyoto
Meet at the tour hotel in central Kyoto in the evening. There will be a Welcome Dinner at a local restaurant.

Accommodation: Hotel

DAY 2 > Travel to the Kii Peninsula
We 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, part of the network of ancient pilgrimage trails known as the Kumano Kodo, or Kumano Ancient Trail. Now a UNESCO World Heritage site, the Kumano Kodo became popular from the 11th century as a place of pilgrimage from Kyoto by Emperors. The Kii Peninsula, which extends south from Nara and Osaka, has long been considered sacred in Japan, the entrance to the land of Yomi, the mythical afterworld. It is also the site of the three sacred shrines of Kumano, the Kumano Sanzan. We continue with a 2-hour hike to the small hilltop village of Takahara, where we spend the night. Our accommodation is a delightful Japanese-style Ryokan built by local craftsmen in wood with rooms affording spectacular views over the surrounding mountains. There are hot-spring baths and the sumptuous evening meal is made with organic locally-sourced ingredients.

Walking distance: 4.5 km / 2.8 miles
Elevation gain: 370m/1,200 feet ascent, 175m/575 feet descent
Time required: about 2 hours
Accommodation: Ryokan (Travellers Inn)

DAY 3 > Hike Takahara to Chikatsuyu
Starting from Takahara, we continue eastwards along the Nakahechi pilgrimage trail. Along the path we pass small jizo bodhisattva statues, placed there by locals to protect travellers. There are also the sites of old cha-ya (tea houses), which provided rest to pilgrims right up until the early 20th century. We descend to the village of Chikatsuyu and our accommodation for tonight. We stay in the friendly guest house run by local couple Mr and Mrs Kinoshita. A former company-worker in the coastal town of Tanabe, Kinoshita-san moved to his home village to set up the popular guesthouse. Next door they have their own natural hot-spring baths. In the evening the dinner menu might include their delicious ‘takikomi-gohan’ (rice steamed with vegetables), freshly-caught fish, and tempura. After dinner, a local Shamisen music group will treat us to a private performance in the lovely setting of our Chikatsuyu Branch. Enjoy this rare opportunity for a close-up experience of Japanese musical tradition.

Walking distance: 11.3km / 7 miles
Elevation gain: 350m/1,150 feet ascent, 360m/1,180 feet descent
Time required: 4 hours
Accommodation: Minshuku (Family-run guesthouse)

DAY 4 > Hike Chikatsuyu to Hongu Grand Shrine
Today we hike two scenic sections of the Kumano Kodo trail, passing ridge-top villages and oji shrines. Nobles would rest at these sub-shrines to refresh themselves and compose poems. From Chikatsuyu we walk first to Kobiro, then take a local bus to Hoshinmon-oji. From Hoshinmon-oji we descend to Hongu Grand Shrine. The symbol of the shrine is the mythological three-legged raven, representing the Hongu, Nachi, and Hayatama shrines – the same motif as the one used by the Japan Football Association. The three-legged crow was in mythology sent to guide Emperor Jimmu on his journey from Kumano to the Yamato Plain. After visiting the shrine, we transfer by local bus to Yunomine Onsen, one of the oldest hot springs in Japan, or to Kawayu Onsen famous for the thermal water bubbling to the surface of the crystal clear river. We stay overnight in a comfortable Ryokan with its own hot spring bath or ‘rotemburo’.

Walking distance: 12.9km / 8 miles
Elevation gain: 321m/1,055 feet ascent; 360m/1,180 feet descent
feet descent  
**Time required:** 4 hours  
**Accommodation:** Onsen Ryokan (Hot-spring Travellers Inn)

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**DAY 5 > Boat ride on the Kumano River**  
We transfer by local bus to the Kumano River. We board a traditional wooden flat-bottomed boat to take us on a gentle one and a half hour ride along the Kumano River to the Hayatama Taisha Shrine, just as Imperial pilgrims did in olden times. Afterwards, we will travel back by bus to Yunomine Onsen for another night at our hot spring Ryokan. There will be time to soak in one of the natural hot spring baths before dinner.

**Accommodation:** Onsen Ryokan (Hot-spring Travellers Inn)

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**DAY 6 > Hike to Nachi Grand Shrine and waterfall**  
We transfer by local bus to Koguchi and hike the final section of the trail over the Ogumotorigoe Pass, to glimpse the Pacific Ocean and then descend to Nachi-taki waterfall and Nachi Taisha (Grand Shrine), one of the three ‘Grand Shrines of Kumano’.

From there we take a short bus ride to the fishing port of Katsuura and to our hotel.

**Walking distance:** 14.5km / 9 miles  
**Elevation gain:** 980m/3,215 feet ascent; 920m/3,020 feet descent  
**Time required:** 6 hours  
**Accommodation:** Japanese-style Hot-spring Hotel

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**DAY 7 > Optional coastal hiking or relax at the Onsen hot spring**  
Today there is an optional hike along a different section of the Kumano Kodo. This is a coastal part of the Iseji route, which has some lovely views over the Pacific ocean, pretty villages and the oldest paved section on the entire Kumano Kodo network, with stone blocks dating back eight hundred years. Alternatively, you can choose to relax and try the various hot spring baths in your hotel. You can also explore the town, with its excellent seafood, old-fashioned Japanese shopping arcade and a few interesting backstreets.

**Optional walk**  
**Walking distance:** 6.4km / 4.1 miles  
**Elevation gain:** 546m/1790 feet ascent; 539m/1768 feet descent  
**Time required:** 3 hours

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**DAY 8 > Transfer to Kyoto**  
We leave the Kii Peninsula this morning, travelling on the coastal rail line to Kyoto. Our final tour night is at a central western-style hotel in the city and we enjoy a Farewell Dinner at a local restaurant with our guide.

**Accommodation:** Hotel

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**DAY 9 > Tour ends**  
On our final day, we will say farewell in Kyoto after breakfast at the tour hotel. Your guide will be on hand to offer assistance and advice for your journey to the airport or onward travel in Japan.