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Adventures in Discovering Traditional Japan

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Kumano Kodo Highlights Self Guided



Tour Overview

Experience more of the Kumano Kodo Pilgrimage on the Kumano Kodo Highlists Self Guided tour. Kumano has long been considered the heart and soul of Japanese spirituality, and has been blessed with a rich cultural heritage. Friendly locals, soothing hot springs and delicious cuisine saturate this unique area. It is the perfect destination for those searching for an active, off-the-beaten-path, culturally immersive Japanese experience.

📍 Destinations

Kyoto, Kawayu Onsen, Nakahechi Pilgrimage Route, Hongu Taisha, Oyunohara, Yunomine Onsen, Shingu, Kii-Katsuura Onsen, Daimonzaka, Nachi Taisha, Nachi Waterfall

Tour Details

For more than 1000 years people from all levels of society have made the difficult pilgrimage along the Kumano Kodo. The walk itself was an integral part of the pilgrimage process as they undertook rigorous religious rites of worship and purification along the way. The goal of the pilgrimage was simple: to visit and pay respects at the Hongu Taisha, Hayatama Taisha and the Nachi Taisha, also known as the Kumano Sanzan. As the origins of the Kumano Pilgrimage were a

combination of Buddhism, Shinto, Shinto mythology and nature worship, the reasons for performing the pilgrimage were very complex.

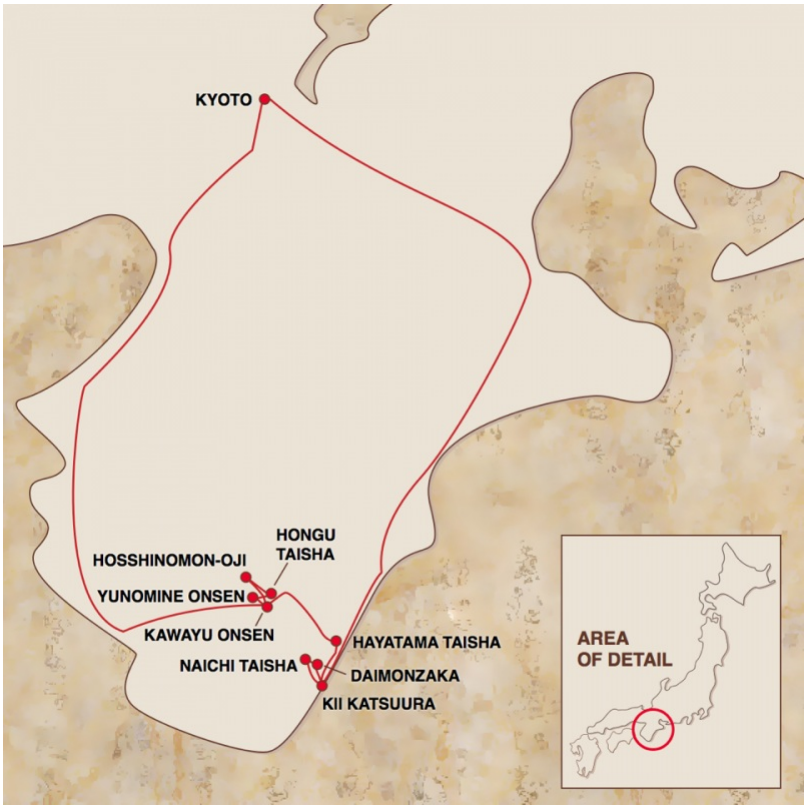
The foundations of the pilgrimage were established 1,000 years ago when retired emperors and aristocrats from Kyoto's Imperial Court started making the 600 mile (800 kilometer) journey in large numbers. Today, walking the ancient Kumano Kodo is an excellent way to experience the unique cultural landscape of Kumano's spiritual countryside. We will follow in the footsteps of those ancient pilgrims from Kyoto as we trace the history and heritage of the Kumano pilgrimage.

What This Tour Is and Is Not

This tour is not a trekking tour. Instead, it provides a high-level overview of the pilgrimage, including the most important destinations related to the pilgrimage. The tour includes three walks along the most important and famous sections of the pilgrimage. The longest of these is about 7km, or about 5 miles (mostly downhill) (½ of this walk is over pavement, and the other half is dirt trails). The second walk is about 5 km (3 miles), all paved and flat, but there is a steep stone staircase to Kamikura Shrine. The third walk is only about 3 km (about 2 miles), and on pavement, but there are numerous steps going up for the first half of the walk. The second half is downhill.

Tour Highlights	✔ Visit the Kumano Sanzan (all three of the Kumano Kodo shrines) ✔ Walk along the Nakahechi Pilgrimage Trail from Hosshinmonoji to Hongu Taisha ✔ Kawabune Boat Cruise ✔ Walk along the Daimonzaka to Nachi Taisha
Tour Inclusions	✔ Reserved Seat Tickets on the trains to and from Kyoto ✔ Meeting service at the arrival airport ✔ Baggage transfer from city to city ✔ Electronic version of Tour Handbook and Japanese History ✔ 8 Hours with a guide ✔ Detailed, easy-to-follow directions on how to travel between cities and locations ✔ Bi-lingual maps, addresses and phone numbers for all your lodging ✔ English-speaking emergency contact number in Japan
Tour Exclusions	✖ International airfare is NOT included. ✖ A printed itinerary is not included ✖ Alcoholic beverages, soft drinks and desserts are NOT included

Map



Tour Destinations

- Kyoto
- Kawayu Onsen
- Hosshinmon-oji
- Hongu Taisha
- Yunomine Onsen
- Hayatama Taisha
- Kii-Katsuura Onsen
- Daimonzaka
- Nachi Taisha and Waterfall

Itinerary

Day 1 Arrive in Kyoto

You will travel on your own to Kyoto, and check into the hotel. No meals are included.

Travel: TBD

Day 2 Tour Kyoto with the guide

After breakfast, you will meet the licensed, English-speaking guide in the lobby of the hotel. We will start the day by touring Ryoan-ji, a famous Zen temple belonging to the Myoshin-ji school of Buddhism. The garden consists of a rectangular plot of pebbles surrounded by low earthen walls, with 15 rocks laid out in small groups on patches of moss. An interesting feature of the garden's design is that from any vantage point at least one of the rocks is always hidden from the viewer. Next we will visit Kinkaku-ji. Kinkaku-ji, also known as the Golden Pavilion, is one of Kyoto's most recognizable attractions. The gleaming building covered in gold leaf seems to float on the aptly named Mirror Pond, especially on a sunny day. Following lunch, we will participate in an authentic tea ceremony. The regimented discipline of the tea ceremony has been practiced for more than 400 years, and at one time was considered mandatory for Samurai as an aid to train the mind. You will even have an opportunity to make your own tea. To finish the tour we will visit Nijo Castle. Built in 1603, it was the Kyoto home of Tokugawa Ieayasu, the first Tokugawa Shogun. The ostentatious style of construction was intended as a demonstration of Ieyasu's prestige, and to signal the demise of the emperor's power. The finest artists of the day filled the castle with delicate transom woodcarvings and paintings by the Kano School on sliding doors. One of the castle's most intriguing features is the so-called "nightingale" floors. To protect the Shogun from real or imagined enemies, these floorboards creak when stepped on. Breakfast at the hotel is included.

Travel: 1 1/2 Hours

Day 3 Travel to Kawayu Onsen

After breakfast you will begin your journey tracing the footsteps of pilgrims from Kyoto 1,000 years ago. You will be taking more modern and safer modes of transportation to Kawayu Onsen where you will be staying overnight. Kawayu Onsen is unique in that during the winter months you can enjoy an outdoor bath dug into the sand banks of the Oto River. Your ryokan, while not in the sand banks, does have outdoor baths next to the river. Breakfast at the hotel and dinner at the ryokan are included.

Travel: 5 Hours

Day 4 Walk along the Nakahechi Pilgrimage Trail

Today is the first day of your pilgrimage. In the morning you will take a bus to Hosshinmon-oji. The Hosshinmon-oji was one of the five most important Oji along the Kumano Kodo because it was considered the entry into the sacred area around the Hongu Shrine (Oji were important places of worship along the Kumano Kodo). You will walk the 7 km (5 miles) to the Hongu Taisha Shrine. The first half of the walk is through small villages, but the second half of the walk is through a secluded, forested area. At the Hongu Taisha, the first shrine of the Kumano Sanzan, you can tour the shrine and pay your respects to the Kumano deities. Before continuing, you can stop at the Kumano Hongu Heritage Center where you can rest and learn more about the fascinating history of the Kumano Kodo. Later, you can continue your pilgrimage to the nearby Oyunohara. This was

the original location of the Hongu Taisha until 1889, when the shrine was destroyed by a flood and moved to its present location on higher ground. All of the pilgrimage trails of the Kumano Kodo lead to the Oyunohara. You can then walk the short, but steep, Dainichi-goe Trail (2.6 km or 2 miles) to Yunomine Onsen, or if you would prefer you can take a bus. Here you can bathe in the Tsuboyu bath, the only bath designated as a UNESCO World Heritage. Pilgrims have performed hot water purification rituals in this bath for more than 1,000 years to prepare for their visit to the Hongu Taisha. You will return to your ryokan by bus where you can soothe away the sore muscles in the baths. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokan are included.

Travel: 1 Hours

Day 5 Kawabune Boat Cruise to Shingu; Tour Hayatama Taisha and Kamikura Shrine; Travel to Kii-Katsuura Onsen

In the morning you will take a short bus ride to the boat dock where you will take a boat cruise along the Kumano River to the city of Shingu. In the past, it was common to travel from the Hongu Taisha to the Hayatama Taisha by boat along the Kumano River. From the boat dock in Shingu you can walk to the Hayatama Shrine. While the shrine's current buildings are relatively new, the shrine has been located in its current location since at least the 12th century. Excavations in the area have unearthed religious artifacts from the 3rd century, indicating the area has been a site of worship even longer. The 800-year old tree located on the grounds highlights the area's tradition of nature worship. You can also visit the nearby Gotobiki-iwa, a gigantic rock located halfway up the slope of Gongen Mountain. Kamikura Jinja, a small shrine located at the base of this monolith is a truly unique experience. It is said that the gods descended to earth by stepping on this large stone. From there you will travel by train to the city of Kii-Katsuura where you will stay overnight in a ryokan with unique baths in seaside caves. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokans are included.

Travel: 2 1/2 Hours

Day 6 Walk along the Daimon-zaka to Nachi Taisha; Tour Nachi Taisha and Waterfall

Today you will visit Nachi Taisha, the third of the Kumano Sanzan. You will take a bus to the base of the Diamonzaka, a 2 km (1 mile) cobblestoned staircase. The Daimonzaka winds its way through huge cedar trees that are as old as 800 years from the valley bottom to the Nachi Taisha Shrine. The Nachi Taisha Shrine is perhaps the most dramatic shrine in Japan. It is located high on a hillside with impressive views of the 133 meter (about 435 feet) tall Nachi-no-Otaki waterfall, Japan's tallest waterfall. This waterfall was the original religious focus of the area, and was venerated by the earliest Japanese people. Even today it is hard not to be impressed by the power and the beauty of the falls. You will return to your ryokan in Kii-Katsuura where you can once again rest in the seaside baths. Breakfast and dinner at the ryokan are included.

Travel: 1 Hour

Day 7 Return to Kyoto

After breakfast you will return to Kyoto by express trains where you will check into your hotel for the evening. The rest of the afternoon will be free for you to explore Kyoto on your own. Breakfast at the ryokan is included.

Travel: 5 Hours

Day 8 Sayonara

It's time to say goodbye. You will find your own way to the airport or to your next destination.

Travel: TBD Hours

Dates & Pricing

Low Season-
$2,399.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)
January 6 – February 28
June 16 – August 10
August 19 – August 31
November 16 – December 24

Regular Season-
$2,669.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)

March 1 – March 16
May 7 – June 15
September 1 – October 14

Peak Season-
$2,968.00 (per person, based on double occupancy)
March 17 – May 6 (Cherry Blossom & Golden Week)
August 11 – August 18 (Obon Holiday)
October 15 – November 15 (Fall Foliage)
December 25 – January 5 (New Years)

Add-On Tours

Our tours and tour itineraries are the best, but as the saying goes, “you can’t make everyone happy all of the time”. There may a specific destination or a specific experience you may want to include in your visit to Japan that may not be included your tour. Choose from our Add On tours to include your interests and make your Japan tour even better.

Click HERE **to view all of the Add-On Tours.**

Or, use the arrows to scroll though the recommended list of Add-On Tours for this tour.
















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Inclusions

- Accommodations in 3 Star hotels including all taxes, fees and breakfast every morning (contact us about accommodation upgrades)
  - Kyoto: Western-style hotel such as Dormy Inn Kyoto
  - Kawayu Onsen: Japanese-style ryokan such as Kawayu Midoriya
  - Kii-Katsuura: Japanese-style hotel such as Hotel Urashima-Sanjokan
- Detailed, easy-to-follow directions on how to travel between cities
- Bi-lingual maps, addresses and phone numbers for all your lodging
- Reserved seat tickets on the following:
  - Express train from Kyoto to Kii-Tanabe
  - Express train from Shingu to Kii-Katsuura
  - Express train from Kii-Katsuura to Kyoto
- Suggested train schedules including train schedules for 2 hours prior and 2 hours after the suggested time to allow you to choose your own times
- Shuttle to and from Kansai Airport and the Kyoto hotel
- 8 Hours of Guiding Service from a licensed, English-speaking guide
- English-speaking emergency contact number in Japan
- Kawabune Kumano River Boat Cruise to Shingu (not available Dec 1 – Feb -28)
- Included Meals
  - Breakfast every day at hotels/ryokans
  - Lunch on day 2 with guide
  - Dinner 4 nights
- Electronic version of itinerary
- A copy of our “Gaijin on Getas” tour handbook (this is the same popular handbook our escorted tour members receive) which contains 180 pages of Japan travel tips, Japanese language tips, Japanese customs and etiquette and Japanese history to prepare you properly for your trip and allow you to enjoy Japan even more after you arrive.
- Baggage transfer forms (we will provide the necessary forms in Japanese to transfer your main baggage ahead, allowing you the freedom of traveling light. The service provided will only work overnight, so you will need to travel with an overnight bag. The actual transfer fees are not included and will be paid by you at the time of transfer. These fees normally run between 1,250 Yen and 1,750 Yen)

What’s Not Included

- All bus fares
- Local transportation (subways, buses, taxis, etc.)
- All admission fees
- Lunches and dinners (except where noted)
- Desserts at any included meals
- Drinks other than water and tea at any included meals
- A printed itinerary is not included

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