



**WILD WOMEN**  
*expeditions*

**JAPAN PILGRIMAGE TRAIL**

**10 DAYS**



# EXPERIENCE JAPAN

Japan conjures up several images in an instant: cotton candy-pink cherry blossoms, Mt. Fuji, bonsai, sushi, sumo wrestling, origami, anime. But we want to take you even deeper into the colourful and cultural pockets of Japan from Osaka to Kyoto. This is a spiritual suspension into the enlightened paths and natural connection that revolves around legend, Zen approaches, Buddhist lessons, organics and meditation.

This country is deeply steeped in tradition, ceremony and tea! The transformative experiences in this journey stem from historical precision, religious dedication, ancient healing practices and rituals like the Geisha tea ceremony.

Meditation and reflection are the foundation of Japan—and the ancient Kumano Kodo pilgrimage route is testament to this. Spend three days on this sacred and serene UNESCO-designated path walking 29km (18 miles) on peaceful sections from Takahara to the Nachi Grand Shrine.

The landscape will startle you at every turn—from the camphor and bamboo forests to the thousand year old conifers of the Kii Mountain region. It's a step back in time, following in the shadowed footsteps of monks, philosophers and female pilgrims who were once forbidden to enter the holy sites of Koyasan.

For more information please contact:  
[adventure@wildwomenexpeditions.com](mailto:adventure@wildwomenexpeditions.com) or call 1 (888) 993-1222.

**WILD WOMEN**  
*expeditions*



On this journey into Japan, you'll learn about the religious practice of Shugendō, the stories behind the elaborate shrines and temples and witness the evolution of the Women's Pilgrimage Course. You'll sleep in traditional ryokans (Japanese-style inns) on tatami mats for four nights, attend a fire ceremony and create parchment-like washi-paper. Purify in the healing waters of the Onsens and introduce your palate to some truly unexpected local flavours and surprises!

You'll meet a female yamabushi (mountain dwelling ascetic), maiko (Geisha apprentice) and Dai Ajari (a priest who has completed extreme endurance feats)-being in their distinguished, enlightened company is a true marvel.

This is the Japan you didn't know you were dreaming of and you'll be experiencing it all in the camaraderie of Wild Women who are just as curious and tempted by Japan's secrets as you are!

For more information please contact:  
[adventure@wildwomenexpeditions.com](mailto:adventure@wildwomenexpeditions.com) or call 1 (888) 993-1222.

**WILD WOMEN**  
*expeditions*



Upon arrival at Osaka Kansai International Airport (KIX), you will be transferred to Osaka a group transfer from airport to your hotel.

At the hotel, you will meet your energetic Wild Women guide and gather with your fellow Wild Women for dinner. Swap stories and laughs–this is just the beginning of your transformative pilgrimage together.

Meals Included: Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Karaksa Hotel, Osaka

How much further? One hour (train)

Roadmap: Osaka



After breakfast at the hotel, we'll board an early train from Osaka for a 2.5 hour journey to Kii-Tanabe. From JR Kii-Tanabe station, we'll take the Ryujin bus to the Takijiri-oji bus stop (45 minutes)–this is the trailhead of the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage!

We'll visit the Kumano Kodo Kan Pilgrimage Center to learn more about the Kumano Kodo's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage sacred site and pilgrimage

route. There will also be an opportunity to purchase any last-minute gear.

Across from the pilgrimage center, Takijiri-oji is one of the five major oji (subsidiary shrines) in the region–this is the main entrance to the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage route. From this point onward to Takahara, the trail is very steep as we climb into the panorama of the Hatenashi mountain range. We'll be quickly surrounded by the fragrance and shade of the camphor forest and encounter our first challenge. We can test our mettle by climbing through the narrow crack of the massive boulders that create the appropriately named Tainai-kuguri cave. Tainai means “birth canal” in Japanese and kuguri means “to pass through.”

We will arrive at Kiri-no-Sato, senses satiated, to immerse in a soak in a healing traditional onsen (hot spring) before a fun multi-course dinner together. Tonight's accommodation in Takahara revolves around organics from the wood it was constructed from to the coffee, wine and hyper local ingredients.

Today's pilgrimage: 6.7km/4mi (2.5 hrs)

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Kiri-no-Sato, Takahara

How much further? 2.5 hours (by train), 45 minutes (bus)

Roadmap: Osaka to Takahara



Leaving Takahara on foot, we'll head higher into the mountains along the forested Nakahechi trail. We'll see relics of history in the abandoned beehives, former teahouse, shrine gates and charcoal-making kilns. We will be joined on a section of our undulating walk by one of the few female yamabushi (mountain ascetics who practice the religion of Shugendo) in Japan.

Pressing on through the silence and serenity, we'll reach the Hashiori-Toge pass after a short climb. Our descent follows a cobbled path and staircase to Chikatsuyu, a small village.

Our final stretch of the day involves a climb up to Tsugizakura-Oji, famed for its giant cedar trees and glass clear springs. From here we'll transfer by vehicle to Yunomine Onsen, deep in the belly of the sacred mountains of Kumano. It is said that the waters here change colour seven times over the course of a single day. Yunomine Onsen is vitally linked to the thousand year old pilgrimage tradition and is thought to be one of the oldest hot springs in all of Japan.

After our time in the company of a yamabushi, we'll retreat to our ryokan (Japanese-style inn) where we'll drift off on tatami mats made from Japanese rush grass.

Today's pilgrimage: 12.4km/7.7mi (5 hrs)  
Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner  
Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Yunominesou, Yunomine Onsen  
How much further?  
Roadmap: Takahara to Yunomine Onsen

---



After a typical breakfast, we'll take a local bus to Hosshinmon-oji to begin today's walk. This meandering route follows a ridge through small villages and verdant forests before descending to Hongu Taisha.

In Hongu Taisha, we'll have the option to try Otonashi, a 30-minute Japanese washi paper-making experience. This paper is unique to the Hongu-sho area as it is made from local wild plants like the paper bush

(which has a parchment paper-like bark) or the Kazinoki tree. Originally created by the Shinto talisman and distributed to major shrines in Kumano there was no successor to carry on this tradition—the art was reintroduced in 2009.

After lunch we can walk the Dainichi-goe route back to Yunomine Onsen. It is a short (2km/1.2 mile) but relatively steep section over Mt. Dainichi. Expect steep and uneven steps. Near the upper ridge there is a shrine that was historically associated with the Shugendo sect in the area. Alternatively, we can take the bus from Hongu Taisha to our hotel.

Tonight is all about recharging and reflecting in the healing hot waters in Yunomine Onsen. Before bed, we'll have to repack our gear for the next two nights. Our guide will let us know what items we will need in our daypacks. The rest of our luggage will be shuttled ahead to Kyoto in the morning (of Day 5). Note: We will not have access to that luggage for two nights!

Today's pilgrimage: 7.5km/4.7mi (3 hrs) not including the optional 2km/1.2mi Dainichi-goe route  
Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner  
Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Yunominesou, Yunomine Onsen  
How much further? 30 minutes (bus)  
Roadmap: Yunomine Onsen



This morning, we'll hand over our luggage to be forwarded to Kyoto for our arrival on Day 7. After breakfast, we'll take a bus to Michinoeki Kumano-gawa (approximately 25 minutes) and travel in a traditional wooden flat-bottomed boat down the Kumano River to the Kumano Hayatama Taisha Grand Shrine. This river is an object of worship and was historically an essential travel artery for mountain communities and pilgrims alike.

This super scenic boat ride (90 minutes) offers a gorgeous glimpse of yesteryear—these waters rush from the sacred Kii Mountains and empty into the vast expanse of the Pacific. Located on the shore of the river, the Shinto Grand Shrine is a storied one with several annual celebratory events like the Oto Matsuri fire festival.

Hayatama Taisha embraces natural wonders like the 800-year-old Nagi-no-Ki conifer tree and Gotobiki-wa, a sacred rock that figures large in Shinto creation myths.

After absorbing the spiritual magnitude of the Hayatama Taisha Grand Shrine, we'll travel by private van (30 minutes) to the Kumano-Nachi Grand Shrine and walk up the Daimon-zaka Shrine Approach. Daimon-zaka ("large gate slope" in Japanese) is a 600m (1,969ft) long cobblestone staircase of 267 stairs which climbs from the base of the valley to Kumano Nachi Taisha, Seiganto-ji Temple and the Nachi waterfall. It is fringed with ancient Japanese cedars, cypress, camphor trees and bamboo groves. At the slope's base, the Meitosugi ("husband and wife cedar trees") have roots that entwine beneath the path—a reminder of the Kumano Kodo's beauty above, below and unseen.

We'll have a 3-hour ride to tonight's accommodation at Katsuragi Onsen so lean back and enjoy the pastoral landscape as it zooms past.

In keeping with this journey's theme, we will have a traditional dinner and soak again! The hot spring in Katsuragi is known for its powerful high salt concentration of "fossil seawater" (ancient seawater).

Today's pilgrimage: 2.2 km/1.4mi (3.5 hrs)

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Katsuragi Onsen Happunoyu

How much further? 25 minutes (bus), 1.5 hours (boat), 30 min. (private van), 3 hours (private van)

Roadmap: Yunomine Onsen to Katsuragi



We'll rise, shine and board an early morning train to Kii-Hosokawa station (approximately 1.5 hours). Our 5-hour pilgrimage will start at Chioshi Michi at Kii-Hosokawa station and finish at the Daimon Gate, the entrance to Koyasan.

The 24km (15 mile) route is known for its 180 stone pillars (known as chioshi) that pepper the trail—we will walk a 14km (8.7 mile) section of this mystical trail. The 3m (10ft) chioshi,

often found near the entrance of shrines and temples, are representative of a place of purification.

Our guide will share stories like that of Jison-in Temple where the mother of Kobo Daishi Kukai could not enter due to the prohibition against women entering Koyasan. She passed away here, and Kobo Daishi built the Miroku-do Hall here for her. The temple has been affectionately called Nyonin Koya (Women's Koya).

This route is colourful with peonies, cedar groves, Guardian Kings, legend and teahouses like the one at Yadate that makes yakimochi (grilled rice cakes), a specialty of the Hanasaka area. After the end of our nature and heritage-infused hike, we'll check into Eko-in Temple and enjoy a healthy body and soul-friendly menu of seasonal vegetables, seaweed, beans and edible wild plants. Eko-in Temple is a Buddhist monastery that offers morning religious services and Goma prayers, meditation and sutra copying (hand copying Buddhist sutras is said to invite supreme enlightenment) to guests. The serenity and history make for an unforgettable stay.

\*Depending on the length of our walk, we may be back in time to experience an Esoteric Buddhism meditation method called Ajikan.

Today's pilgrimage: 14km (8.7 miles)

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Eko-in Temple, Koyasan

How much further? 1.5 hours(train), 5 hours walking

Roadmap: Katsuragi to Koyasan





At 7am, we will have the option to attend a religious service and offering to the spirits in the main hall and the Goma (Homa) fire ceremony that follows. We'll have breakfast after the service and after a few cups of recalibrating green tea, join a private meditation led by one of the monks of Koyasan.

Today we will experience the Women's Pilgrimage Course that winds and loops

around the perimeter of Koyasan from the Fudozaka-guchi Nyonindo past the ruins of Nyonindo to the entrance of the enormous Okunoin cemetery. Of the 200,000 gravestones and memorials, this is where the tomb of Kobo Daishi, the founder of Shingon Buddhism is located.

The Women's Pilgrimage Course is said to be shaped like a lotus flower as it stops at seven traditional sacred precinct shrines. Women were forbidden to enter the Koyasan in the past and were only permitted glimpses of the holy sites. The entire route is 17km (10.6 miles) and a grounding journey along ribbons of streams, old-growth forest, historic shrines and time-worn deities and iconic red torii gates of the Kii mountains.

History reverberates here. In 1872, the incoming Meiji government declared that Buddhist monks were allowed to marry and have children—it's around this time that female pilgrims were finally allowed to enter the holy sites of this mountain temple complex.

We'll board an express train (approximately 3 hours) and make our way to Kyoto where we'll check into our hotel, refresh and relax.

Today's pilgrimage: 7km/4.3mi (2.5 hours)

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Hotel Vista, Kawaramachi or similar

How much further? 3 hours (train)

Roadmap: Koyasan to Kyoto



After breakfast, we'll take the local train or a shared taxi to Ginkakuji, the Silver Pavilion, a Zen temple in Kyoto's eastern mountains. Several theories surround the name of the pavilion as it's not silver in colour—is it because of the moonlight that reflected off the black lacquer exterior giving it a silvery glow? The surrounding gardens are unique—of spongy moss and dry sand known as the “Sea of Silver Sand”. There are pockets of ponds, tiny bridges, islands and intriguing plants to

photograph.

From here, we'll begin our walk along Philosopher's Path, a 2km (1.2mi) long path that runs parallel to a small canal that is popular during the cherry blossom festival at the end of March. This famed meditative path is where Nishida Kitaro, a famous philosopher who taught at Kyoto University, used to walk—he also founded the Kyoto School of Philosophy. It's easy to detour from this path—several shops, shrines and spiritual sites are found on the side streets here.

The path ends at Nanzenji, a Zen garden. One of the charms of Nanzen-ji is the ambient tea room with a waterfall view near the front of the temple complex. A regional favourite and Junsei specialty is the yodofu tofu—a hot tofu and kombu (seaweed) dish. We'll have time to absorb the serenity and enjoy green tea.

There will be free time this afternoon to simply wander and wonder about Zen or tofu! Tonight we will be privy to an elegant Geisha dance performance and seasonal dinner in Gion, the Geisha district of Kyoto. If time permits, we may have the opportunity to play simple traditional games with the Geisha, such as ozashiki asobi.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Hotel Vista, Kawaramachi or similar

How much further? 2km/1.2 mi (walking)

Roadmap: Kyoto



We have another early bird morning departure to Hieizan Sakamoto Station via train (approximately 30 minutes). At Mt. Hiei, we will be in the company of a Dai Ajari to walk the sacred Gyoja Pathway. A Dai Ajari is a priest who has completed an extreme feat of endurance and is considered a living saint or a Buddha within Japan. To achieve such status is so difficult that only 51 monks have been successful in this training in over 450 years.

We will follow in the industrious footsteps of the monks who trained on this mountain, immersed in the full rhythm of nature before visiting the Dai Ajari's temple to share our feelings and thoughts about the essence of spiritual practices and take part in his unique incantation.

After this guided tour, we'll return to Kyoto brimming with reflections. We'll gather later for our last dinner together and share some laughs, epiphanies and favourite moments of the trip.

Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: Hotel Vista, Kawaramachi or similar

How much further? 30 minutes (train)

Roadmap: Kyoto



After an early breakfast, we'll take a group transfer to Kansai International Airport (KIX) where we'll squeeze each other goodbye and share a few laughs and tears after our remarkable 10-day journey together.

It's time to exchange contact info, photos and ideas for a reunion! Where next? Another pilgrimage perhaps?

Meals Included: Breakfast

Tonight's Sweet Sleep: In the window seat of the plane

How much further? A few Hollywood movies, a cat nap and 100 pages of a book

Roadmap: Homeward bound

## **ITINERARY DISCLAIMER**

Wild Women Expeditions and our local partners intend to adhere to the described itinerary. This is only a general guide to follow on your tour of the region. Our itineraries are subject to change, as we cannot predict the weather or other environmental conditions. We are continually striving to make improvements to all our trips based on feedback from Wild Women members, guides, partners, and other research. We reserve the right to alter itineraries based on the above at any time.

\*Itinerary version as of December 4, 2023

## IS THIS TRIP RIGHT FOR ME?

This is an active hiking trip. We would like you to be comfortable with the following:

- Walking distances on this trip vary from 2.2km (1.4 miles) to 14km (8.7miles) and involve steep climbs, uneven steps, cobblestone and slippery moss-covered paths. The Kumano Kodo section will involve walking 29km (18 miles) over the course of four days.
- Some days involve long train travel of up to 5 hours and several modes of transportation. Please pack efficiently and choose sensible luggage that suits boarding trains and buses.
- Four nights will be spent in accommodations offering tatami rooms which is a traditional Japanese room with tatami flooring. These Washitsu-style accommodations have sliding doors (fusuma) versus hinged doors.
- Expect a menu and flavours that may be unfamiliar to you.
- Physical Rating: 3 - 4 of 5 > Moderate to Demanding. A good level of fitness is required and be prepared for strenuous physical activity.
- If you have tattoos, you may not be permitted to enter certain onsens.

## WHAT'S INCLUDED

- An awesome English-speaking female guide
- All ground transport including trains and buses
- Group arrival and departure airport transfers
- Traditional boat tour of the Kumano River (90 minutes)
- 9 nights of accommodation in hotels (including 4 nights in traditional tatami-style rooms)
- All meals from dinner on Day 1 to Breakfast on Day 10
- Private group meditation
- Japanese washi paper-making lesson
- Geisha dinner show
- Entry to Onsens (hot springs)
- Admission to shrines and temples
- All applicable taxes are included in the trip price