



Japan Pilgrimage Trail

10 Days



Day 1 | Osaka

歓迎 (Welcome) to Osaka

Upon arrival at Osaka Kansai International Airport (KIX), you will be transferred from the airport to our hotel by scheduled shuttles.

At the hotel, we meet our energetic Wild Women guide and gather for a trip debrief before sharing stories and laughs over dinner. This is just the beginning of our transformative pilgrimage together.

Prepare your small backpack this evening, and hand over the rest of your luggage to be sent to Yunomine or Watarase Onsen (1 night without luggage).

Included Meals

Dinner

Accommodations

Karaksa Hotel, Osaka

Travel

Train (1 hour)



Day 2 | The Sacred Kumano Kodo

Soaking it in

After breakfast at the hotel, we board an early train to Kii-Tanabe and then take a bus to the Takijiri-oji bus stop.

We visit the Kumano Kodo Kan Pilgrimage Center to learn more about the UNESCO World Heritage site and sacred pilgrimage route.

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. Surrounded by the fragrance and shade of the camphor forest, we encounter our first challenge: climbing through the narrow crack of the massive boulders that create the Tainai-kuguri cave. In Japanese, *Tainai* means “birth canal” and *kuguri* means “to pass through.”

Upon arrival in Kiri-no-Sato we can soak in a healing traditional onsen (hot spring) before a fun multi-course dinner together.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Kiri-no-Sato, Takahara or similar

Travel

Train (2.5 hours), bus (45 minutes)

The Walk

4 miles (6.7 km), or approximately 2.5 hours



Day 3 | Kumano

Relics and Ryokans

On foot, we head higher into the mountains along the forested Nakahechi trail, passing abandoned beehives, a former teahouse, shrine gates and kilns. A female *yamabushi* (a mountain ascetic who practices Shugendo religion) will join us for a section of the walk.

Note: the yamabushi may not be available during this hike specifically (i.e. she may join the group on a different day, depending on her availability).

Pressing on through the serenity, we reach the Hashiori-Toge pass after a short climb. Our descent follows a cobbled path and staircase to Chikatsuyu. Our final stretch involves an ascent up to Tsugizakura-Oji, beloved for its giant cedar trees and glass-clear springs. From here, we transfer by vehicle to our onsen, deep in the belly of the sacred mountains of Kumano.

At our *ryokan* (Japanese-style inn), it's time to drift off on tatami mats made from Japanese rush grass.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Yunominesou, Yunomine Onsen or similar

The Ride

7.7 miles (12.4 km), approximately 5 hours



Day 4 | Pilgrimage to Hongu Taisha

Walks, Washi and Calming Waters

We hop on a local bus to Hosshinmon-oji to begin today's walk. This meandering route follows a ridge through small villages and verdant forests.

After lunch, we can take a bus or walk the Dainichi-goe route back to our accommodation for the night. It's a short but relatively steep section with uneven steps over Mt. Dainichi. Near the upper ridge, there's a shrine that was historically associated with the Shugendo sect in the area.

Before bed, our guide will offer instructions on what to pack for the next two nights (your main luggage will be transferred to Kyoto).

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Yunominesou, Yunomine Onsen or similar

The Walk (optional)

1.2 miles (2 km)



Day 5 | The Kumano Kayatama Taisha Grand Shrine

The Fossil Seawaters

After breakfast, we take a bus to Michinoeki Kumano-gawa where we take a traditional wooden flat-bottomed boat down the Kumano River to the Kumano Hayatama Taisha Grand Shrine and the natural wonder of its 800-year-old *Nagi-no-Ki* conifer tree.

After absorbing the spiritual magnitude of it all, we travel by private van to the Kumano-Nachi Grand Shrine and walk the Daimon-zaka Shrine Approach. *Daimon-zaka* (“large gate slope”) is a 1,969 foot-long (600 m) cobblestone staircase of 267 stairs, connecting the base of the valley to Kumano Nachi Taisha, Seiganto-ji Temple and the Nachi waterfall. 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 have a traditional dinner and soak again this evening. The hot spring in Katsuragi is known for its powerful high salt concentration of “fossil seawater” (ancient seawater).

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Katsuragi Onsen Happunoyu or similar

Travel

Bus (25 minutes), boat (90 minutes), private shuttle (30 minutes to shrine and 3 hours to hotel)

The Walk

1.4 miles (2.2 km), approximately 3.5 hours



Day 6 | Katsuragi to Koyasan

Teahouses and Temples

We board an early morning train to Kii-Hosokawa station and begin our five hour pilgrimage in Chioshi Michi at Kii-Hosokawa station and finish at the Daimon Gate, the entrance to Koyasan.

This 15-mile (24 km) route is known for its 180 stone pillars (known as *chioshi*) that pepper the trail—we will walk a 8.7 mile (14 km) section of this mystical trail. Our guide will share stories like that of Jison-in Temple, where Kobo Daishi Kukai's mother could not enter due to the prohibition against women in 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).

At our temple stay in Koyasan, we enjoy a healthy menu of seasonal vegetables, seaweed and edible wild plants. The Buddhist monastery offers morning religious services and Goma prayers, meditation and sutra copying.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Temple stay, Koyasan

Travel

Train (1.5 hours)

The Walk

8.7 miles (14 km), approximately 5 hours



Day 7 | The Women's Pilgrimage Course

A Grounding Journey

After breakfast, a private meditation is led by one of the monks of Koyasan.

Later, we follow a section of the lotus flower-shaped Women's Pilgrimage Course around the perimeter of Koyasan, past the ruins of Nyonindo, to the entrance of the enormous Okunoin cemetery. The tomb of Kobo Daishi, the founder of Shingon Buddhism, is located among the 200,000 gravestones.

Around 1872, female pilgrims were finally allowed to enter the holy sites of this mountain temple complex.

After this incredible walk, we board an express train and make our way to Kyoto, to check into our hotel, refresh and relax.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Hotel Vista, Kawaramachi or similar

Travel

Express train (3 hours)

The Walk

Up to 4.3 miles (7 km), approximately 2.5 hours



Day 8 | Kyoto

Finding Zen

We board a train or shared taxi to the Silver Pavilion, a Zen temple in Kyoto's eastern mountains.

From here, we walk the Philosopher's Path, a 1.2-mile (2 km) canal-side trail in the footsteps of Nishida Kitaro, a famed philosopher and founder of the Kyoto School of Philosophy. It's easy to

detour from this path as 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 favorite and Junsei specialty is the *yodofu* tofu—a hot dish with *kombu* (seaweed). Take a moment here to absorb the serenity and have a calming green tea.

Tonight, we are treated to a Geiko performance and seasonal dinner in Gion, the Geiko district of Kyoto.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Hotel Vista, Kawaramachi or similar

The Walk

Short and sweet but profound! It's 1.2 miles (2 km).



Day 9 | The Sacred Gyoja Pathway

Monks and Mountains

We have another early bird morning departure to Hieizan Sakamoto Station via train. At Mt. Hiei, we accompany 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 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 return to Kyoto brimming with reflections. Later, we gather for our last dinner together to share some laughs, epiphanies and favorite trip moments.

Included Meals

Breakfast, lunch and dinner

Accommodations

Hotel Vista, Kawaramachi or similar

Travel

Train (30 minutes)



Day 10 | Departure

決別 (Goodbye) Kyoto

After an early breakfast, transfers will be coordinated as needed to Kansai International Airport (KIX), where we will squeeze each other goodbye.

After this remarkable 10-day journey together it's time to exchange contact info, photos and ideas for a reunion! Where to next? Another pilgrimage perhaps?

Included Meals

Breakfast



Trip Details

Know Before You Go

For all of the logistical details you'll need to know prior to departure—including the packing list, arrival and departure details and suggested tipping information, click [HERE](#).

Itinerary version as of May 9, 2024.