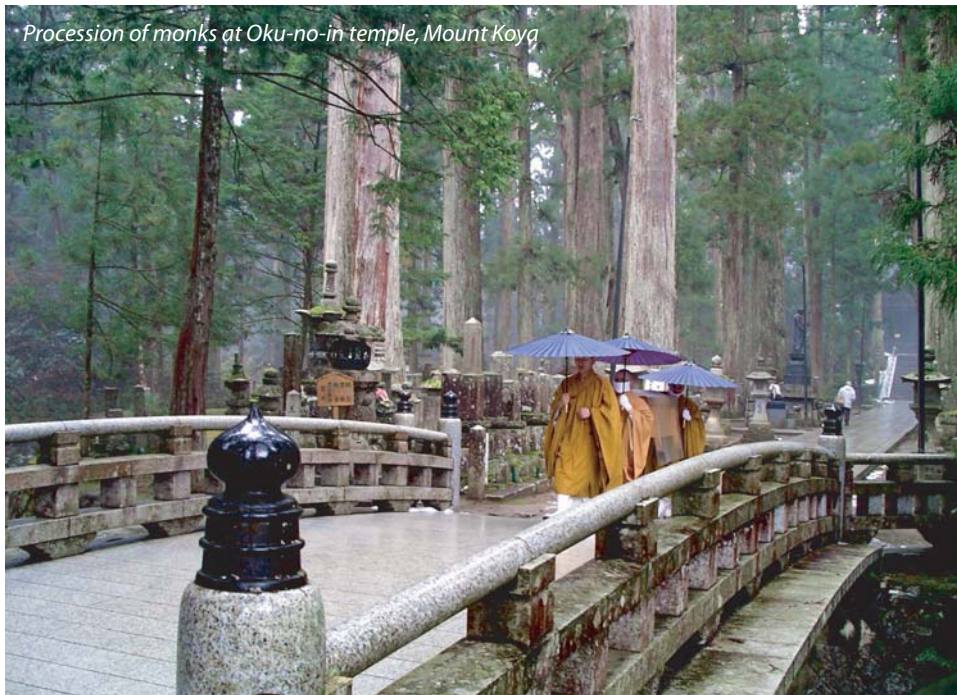


Imperial Pilgrimage

Kyoto, Nara & the Kii Peninsula

15 days guided walking tour

Adventures in
JAPAN



Procession of monks at Oku-no-in temple, Mount Koya

15 days guided walking tour visiting Kyoto, Nara, and the pilgrimage route to Kumano. Accommodation in family-run minshuku, traditional ryokan, shukubo (pilgrims lodges) and hotels.

Dates & Prices

2010 £2,875

02 May - 16 May

17 October - 31 November

Included

all transportation between destinations
accommodation
entrance fees
full-time services of tour leader
all meals

Itinerary

Day 1 Meet Osaka **2** Drive to Mount Koya **3** Sightseeing Mount Koya, drive to Ryujin **4** Walking on the Nakahechi pilgrimage route **5** Walking to & visit Kumano shrine, Yu-nomine hot spring **6** Walking in Koguchi **7** Walking to Nachi shrine & waterfalls **8** Drive to & visit Yoshino **9** Explore Yoshino & transfer to Asuka **10** Visit Asuka & walking on Yamanobe path **11** Sightseeing in Nara **12** Sightseeing in Kyoto **13** Kyoto & Miho Museum **14** Sightseeing in Kyoto **15** Tour ends

Highlights

Mount Koya – Ryujin Hot Spring – Nakahechi Pilgrimage Route to the Three Great Kumano Shrines – Yoshino – Ancient Asuka – Imperial Nara & Kyoto

Although less dramatic than the Japan Alps, the forested mountains of the Kii Peninsula, south of Nara, have for centuries been regarded as sacred. After meeting up in Osaka, your second night in Japan is at an elegant temple situated on Mount Koya, the home of Shingon (Pure Word) Buddhism. The pilgrimage routes to the three great Kumano Shrines – Kumano Hongu Taisha, Kumano Nachi Taisha, and Hayatama Taisha were popularised 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 less than thirty pilgrimages to Kumano, recording his thoughts and feelings in the Kumano poems. These precious documents are now in the Yomei Storehouse archives in Kyoto. Hot springs are abundant, and some of the oldest onsen in Japan are located in the Kii Peninsula. You will follow the southernmost part of the old Nakaheji pilgrimage route for about 65 kilometres staying at family run inns and temples along the way. The path is often paved with flagstone steps and leads through forests of Japanese cedar. Walking in the quiet solitude it is easy to imagine the days, centuries ago, when nobles followed these paths through the mountains. After a four day trek along the Nakaheji Pilgrimage route, you will travel north, through the mountains, to the mountain-top village of Yoshino. There we stay in a ryokan centred around an old temple. The inn has a classic garden designed by the tea master Sen no Rikyu. The ryokan is conveniently located for exploring Yoshino, home to the Kinpusenji Temple and its great Zaodo Hall. Kinpusenji Temple is the head temple of the shugendo sect of mountain priests. We then travel out of the mountains, via the ancient capitals of Asuka and Nara, to Kyoto. From Nara we will walk through countryside along an historic route known as the Yamanobe no michi. In Nara and Kyoto you will experience a more cosmopolitan side of Japan. Sightseeing will include Nara Park and other sites in this pleasant city and, in the Higashiyama area of Kyoto, an old merchant house near the Nijo Castle. From Kyoto you will visit the ultramodern Miho Museum in Shigaraki. There will be time for shopping in Kyoto. This is full immersion into Japanese culture and way of life. There is plenty of walking but no altitude problems and varied, attractive scenery. Loads of interaction with local people, lots of historical interest, but at a thoroughly Japanese experience.



DAY 1 MEET OSAKA

Meet in Osaka and overnight at Osaka city centre hotel.

DAY 2 - DRIVE TO MOUNT KOYA

Drive to Mount Koya Monastery. It is a pleasant drive followed by the excitement upon reaching the monasteries lining the summit. Overnight in the peaceful Yochiin temple on Mount Koya.

DAY 3 - MONDAY SIGHTSEEING MOUNT KOYA & DRIVE TO RYUJIN ONSEN

During the morning you will have a leisurely guided walk to the most interesting sites on Mount Koya, including Okunoin, where Kukai (later named Kobo Daishi) is enshrined. The walk, through tall cypress trees, passes several hundred thousand tombstones, monuments to emperors, shoguns and samurai, landlords and poets. In the afternoon you will drive south from Mount Koya, along the Koya-Ryujin Skyline, to a sumptuous old ryokan in Ryujin onsen. The Kamigoten ryokan was declared a 'Tangible cultural property' (similar to a Grade 1 listed building) in 1999. Dark polished wooden floors, large white cedar baths, and delicious seasonal delicacies will be served for dinner. Overnight ryokan.

DAY 4 WALK TO CHIKATSUYU

(10 miles walking; approximately 7 hours)

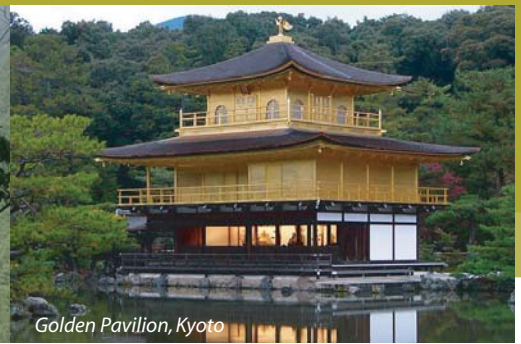
Today you will start your 4-day walk along the old Nakaheji pilgrimage path to Kumano. From the start at Takijiri Oji, the path climbs steeply up to the ridge-top village of Takahara. The Nakaheji has been established as one of Japan's National Historic Roads. The paths are clearly defined, and flagstones have been laid in some places to make the climbs easier. You will average about 10 miles a day. Although rarely seen these days, there are small bears in the Kumano mountains and, more commonly, deer and wild boar. Wayside shrines encourage regular rest stops. The small shrine at Chikatsuyu marks the end of the first day of the walk. The night is spent in a family-run ryokan in Chikatsuyu.



Geisha in Kyoto



The remote Kii Peninsula



Golden Pavilion, Kyoto

DAY 5 – WALK TO GRAND KUMANO SHRINE AT HONGU
(6 miles: Approximately 4 hours)

You pick up the path in the hills above the Kumano Hongu Shrine and walk via Hongu to Yunomine, one of the oldest natural hot spring onsen villages in Japan. There is an increasing sense of solitude and purpose as you progress towards the three great shrines of Kumano, passing small jizo statues on the way. Nobles would rest at points called ōji, to refresh themselves and compose poems. You can stamp a booklet as a souvenir of your walk at each ōji. Their poetry is engraved on stone monuments sited along the path. At the heart of these sacred mountains, Kumano was said to be the entrance to the land of Yomi, the 'other world' to where spirits travelled in Japanese mythology. The classic style of architecture of the Kumano Hongu Shrine blends perfectly with the surrounding mountains and forests. The shrine uses a mythological three-legged raven symbol, representing the Hongu, Nachi, and Hayatama shrines – the same motif as the one used by the Japan Football Association. The ryokan at Yunomine is comfortable, with an outdoor hot tub fed by local hot springs. Evening soaks under the stars are recommended for tired limbs, as are morning dips before breakfast. Your breakfast eggs might well be boiled in the boiling, sulphurous waters at the spring in the centre of the village. Overnight ryokan

DAY 6 WALK TO KOGUCHI
(9 miles: Approximately 6 hours)

Today there is a long, gentle climb over the Kogumotori Pass (470m) to Koguchi. Overnight at accommodation in hot spring town.

DAY 7 WALK TO GRAND SHRINE AT NACHI
(10 miles: Approximately 6 hours)

The final 10 miles of your walk along the Nakaheji footpath is a long morning climb over the Ogumotori Echizen Pass (870m), followed by a descent to the Nachi Shrine. The shrine and temple complex overlooks the Nachi-no-taki waterfall, the highest in Japan (133 meters). You will stay at the Sonshoin temple, an appropriate resting place after your long walk. The lodging has a pretty Japanese garden, and a beautiful view of the waterfall and surrounding forest. If you can get up at 5.30 a.m. you can even take part in morning meditation! Overnight Buddhist temple

DAY 8 DRIVE TO YOSHINO

This morning, after a look at Nachi Falls, we will drive via Kumano City, through the Omine Mountains to the ridge-top village of Yoshino. The ryokan you will stay in has a lovely garden designed by the great tea master Sen no Rikyu. A relaxing evening in a comfortable inn. Overnight ryokan

DAY 9 WALK YOSHINOYAMA & TRANSFER TO ASUKA
(About 125 km / approx. 5hours' drive)

The Zaodo Hall lies at the heart of Yoshino in Kimpusenji, the head temple of the shugendo sect of mountain priests. Yoshino has played a very important role in Japanese history – it was the base for the Southern Court when it split from the Imperial Court in Kyoto. There will be time to explore the village and then have lunch on local arrowroot noodles before driving to Asuka in the afternoon. Overnight at a family-run bed & breakfast.

DAY 10 ASUKA & YAMANOBENO-MICHI
(8 miles: Approximately 4 hours)

Asuka was the first capital of a consolidated Japanese state known as Yamato. Not much remains – mostly large imperial tumuli (one chamber has been excavated but is in danger of deteriorating so is closed). You will be able to see a replica and foundations. Asuka is a pleasant area to cycle and walk

around. We will have coffee at a craft workshop - the Asuka Aizome Senshokukan - run by an ex-NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) broadcaster who has an impressive collection of indigo-dyed fabrics and pottery bells (over 10,000!). The Yamanobe No Michi (literally 'path beside the mountains') is a designated historical route. A 4-hour, 13 km stroll through countryside with persimmon and mandarin groves, the path winding around imperial tombs. You will stop for a noodle lunch en route. At the end of the walk, drive for about one hour to Nara. Arrive Nara late afternoon. Overnight Hotel in Nara.

DAY 11 – NARA SIGHTSEEING

Today you will have a guided walk around Nara Park. Many of Japan's greatest cultural treasures are concentrated in and around Nara. Indeed, the city boasts eight UNESCO World Heritage sites. The Todaiji temple, Nigastu-do and Sangatsu-do halls, Kasuga shrine, Shinyakushi-ji temple, Kofuku-ji temple, Shosoin treasure house, Isuien garden, as well as the Nara National Museum and the Nara City Museum of Photography are all in or near Nara Park. The parkland is also home to a thousand or more free-roaming deer. Todaiji's Daibutsu-den is the largest wooden building in the world, and houses a 16-metre tall bronze image of the cosmic Dainichi buddha, containing 437 tonnes of bronze and 130kg of gold. Prior to being rebuilt three hundred years ago, the awesome structure was even bigger than it is today. There will be free time to relax and look around Nara on your own in the afternoon. Overnight city centre hotel



Matcha (powdered green tea) and sweets, Kyoto

DAY 12 KYOTO

After transferring to Kyoto, we will visit Ginkakuji, the Silver Pavilion, before strolling down Philosopher's Walk towards the Nanzenji temple. In the evening, we will be served dinner in our ryokan by gracious staff dressed in traditional kimono. Overnight ryokan.

DAY 13 KYOTO & MIHO MUSEUM in SHIGARAKI

In the morning you will visit the ultra-modern Miho Museum in Shigaraki. Designed by I.M. Pei, the museum has been sculptured into the mountains, giving you a sense that you have entered a serene world where time stands still. The museum is almost as spectacular as the Guggenheim in Bilbao. In the afternoon we return to Kyoto when there will be some time to look around the shops. Overnight hotel.

DAY 14 KYOTO

Kyoto is so special it would take years to see a fraction of its

wonders. In the morning you will visit the grand Nijo Castle. In the afternoon, after a noodle lunch, there will be free more time to sightsee or shop.

Nishikijoki market is a great place to get an idea of the incredible diversity of food in Japan, and to see related businesses, such as the Aritsugu knife shop where they sell a wide range of top quality Japanese kitchen knives and other utensils. Shopping culture in Japan has, like everything else they do, been taken to extraordinary heights. In the early evening we will look at the Gion area – one of the traditional geisha quarters. A lively night spot. Farewell dinner and the traditional haiku poetry! Overnight hotel.

DAY 15 TOUR ENDS

Our tour ends today, flying out of Kansai International Airport or perhaps staying a few to explore on your own.



Photo opportunity, Nakahechi path

General Information

Meet/Depart

Osaka (Kansai International Airport)

Group Size

5 to 8

Walking level

Moderate - 6 days of walking and hiking from 2 to 8 hours per day

Mode of travel

Trains, bus, and on foot

Tour leader

Full time services of Japanese-speaking British tour leader plus local Japanese guides at certain destinations.

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