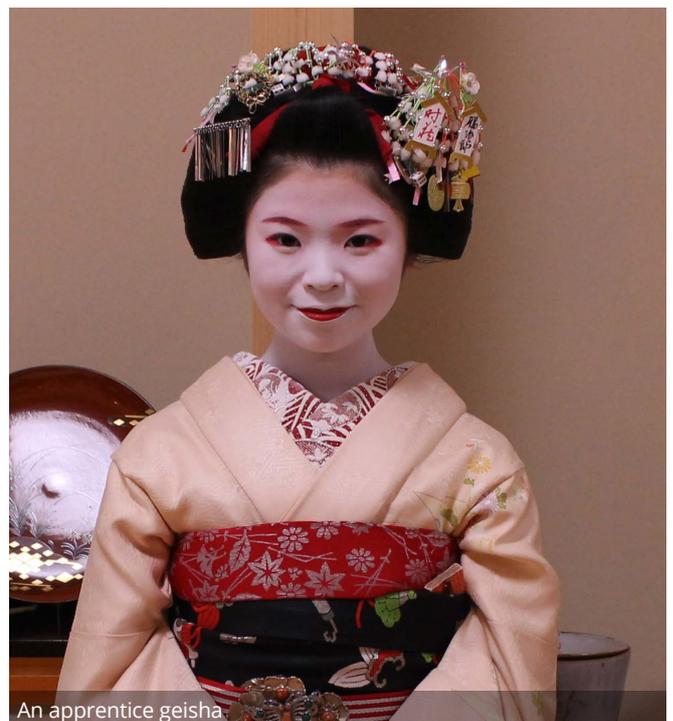


👑 Enjoy moderate hiking and cultural discovery!

## JAPAN HIKING HIGHLIGHTS: THE KUMANO KODO AND THE NAKASENDO TRAIL - GUIDED TOUR

### Introduction

It's the tour you've asked us for—a combination of the must-see cities of Kyoto and Tokyo, with highlights of Japan's best loved trails—the Kumano Kodo and the Nakasendo! Enjoy a combination of more relaxed hiking with cultural discovery, more included meals, and special experiences, as you walk the trail with one of our expert local guides. Sample the best of Japan's most famous hikes on an itinerary that combines the highlights of both routes with the must-visit cities of Kyoto and Tokyo.



An apprentice geisha

## Details: Japan Hiking Highlights

### Tour length

11 days

### Type and trip level

This tour features walks suitable for fit and active travellers, with none over 4 hours in duration, and aside from one strenuous day to sample more advanced hiking, the route is accessible with moderate ascent and descent.

### Availability

Late March through November

### Highlights

Highlights include enjoying a lunch with a *maiko* apprentice geisha, visits to each of the Three Grand Shrines of Kumano, and enjoying the Edo Period atmosphere of the Nakasendo post towns.

## Itinerary

### Day 1: Meet your fellow tour participants in Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan

 Western-style hotel

 Welcome dinner

Meet at the tour hotel in central Kyoto in the evening. There will be a welcome dinner at a local restaurant.

### Day 2: Sightseeing in Kyoto: bamboo groves, Zen gardens, temples and dine with a geisha in Kyoto

 6.6 km / 4.1 mi

 2.5 hours

 130 m / 427 ft

 130 m / 427 ft

 Western-style hotel

 Breakfast, lunch

Enjoy a day exploring one of Kyoto's most beautiful areas on foot. Today, travel with your guide to the Kiyotaki area into the northern precincts of Arashiyama, replete with temples and shrines. We visit one of these, Adashino Nenbutsu-ji Temple along our way, with its hundreds of statues of disciples of Buddha. Our walk also takes us past gorges, small local craft shops, temple precincts, and through Arashiyama's famed bamboo grove, and eventually brings us to Tenryu-ji Temple, Arashiyama's most significant Zen Buddhist temple. We enjoy time to explore the beautiful gardens of the temple as well as its prayer halls.

Don't leave it to chance to see a *maiko* apprentice geisha in Kyoto. In the afternoon, we return to Kyoto by private vehicle for a special treat—lunch with a *geiko* or *maiko* (the terms for geisha or apprentice geisha in Kyoto). You'll enjoy a dance performance and a chance to ask questions about their lives of training in tradi-



Bamboo forest in Arashiyama, Kyoto

tional Japanese arts, and the dedication demanded from a young age for those entering into this valued profession.

Following our special lunch, we enjoy a walking tour of the Gion district, home to beautiful wooden *machiya* and traditional buildings, a number of which are tea houses where *maiko* and *geisha* entertain their patrons with skilfully executed traditional Japanese dances and music. The remainder of the day is at leisure for you to make your own discoveries of Kyoto. Tonight, dinner is on your own for you to make your own choices. Your guide will be happy to assist with recommendations.

### Day 3: Begin hiking the Nakahechi route of the Kumano Kodo Pilgrimage

- 🚶 4.5 km / 2.8 mi
- 🕒 about 2 hours
- ⬆️ 370 m / 1,200 ft
- ⬇️ 175 m / 575 ft
- 🏠 Ryokan (traditional Japanese inn)
- 🍴 Breakfast, dinner

We travel south along the coast by train along the beautiful coastline and then local bus inland to the trailhead for the Nakahechi, one of the most beautiful 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. In centuries past, emperors walked this sacred route to pray for the well-

being of the country in troubled times. The Kii Peninsula, where the trail is located, has been viewed as sacred in Japan, as the spiritual place where one entered the mythical afterworld of the *Yomi*. This spiritual tradition continues and the Three Grand Shrines of Kumano are found on the Kii Peninsula. The pilgrimage that was once the preserve of emperors can now be walked by us mere mortals. The power and majesty of the route remains unchanged, with trees stretching to the heavens, and at times, an otherworldly mist across the land. Our hike today is a steep, steady ascent of 2 hours to the hilltop village of Takahara. We enjoy the views over the valleys below before our first tranquil evening on the trail.

### Day 4: Hike to the UNESCO Hongu Grand Shrine and soak in hot mineral waters

- 🚶 7 km / 4 mi
- 🕒 3 hours
- ⬆️ 120 m / 395 ft
- ⬇️ 360 m / 1,180 ft
- 🏠 Ryokan (traditional Japanese inn)
- 🍴 Breakfast, dinner

Today we will hike scenic sections of the Kumano Kodo trail, passing ridge-top villages and *oji* shrines. Nobles would rest at these subshrines to refresh themselves and compose poems. We travel to Hosshinmon-*oji* by local bus and descend to Hongu Grand Shrine. The symbol of the shrine is the mythological three-legged raven, representing Hongu, Nachi, and Hayatama Shrines—the same motif as the one used by the Japan Football Association. In mythology, the three-legged crow was sent to guide Emperor Jimmu on his journey from Kumano to the Yamato Plain.

After visiting the shrine and Hongu World Heritage Museum, we transfer by local bus (15 minutes) to Yunomine Hot Spring, one of the oldest in Japan. We stay overnight in a comfortable ryokan with its own rock-built outdoor hot spring bath called a *rotenburo*. Traditionally, the hot spring waters were considered to have miraculous healing powers. After a hike, we can certainly enjoy some of their soothing warmth.



Yunomine Onsen

## Day 5: Boat ride on the Kumano River and hike to Nachi Falls

- 🚢 4.3 km / 2.7 mi
- 🕒 2 hours
- ⬆️ 232 m / 760 ft
- ⬇️ 202 m / 660 ft
- 🏠 Onsen ryokan (hot spring inn)
- 🍴 Breakfast, dinner

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 Hayatama Grand Shrine, just as Imperial pilgrims did in olden times. Afterwards, we will travel on to walk the Daimonzaka approach to Nachi Shrine. This approach is one of the most sacred, leading to both the towering Nachi Falls, the stunning pagoda of Seiganto-ji Temple, and ultimately, the third of the Kumano shrines of Pilgrimage,



Nachi Grand Shrine. We then continue on to our accommodation, an inn near the sea. This morning, we send our luggage ahead to meet us once more in Agematsu.

## Day 6: Travel to the Japanese Alps, and then stretch your legs with a hike in an Edo-era post town

- 🏠 Onsen ryokan (hot spring inn)
- 🍴 Breakfast, bento lunch, dinner

This morning, we follow the coast by train before making our way inland to the Japanese Alps to begin our hike of the Nakasendo. En route, we dine on an *ekiben* (駅弁/train station bento box). *Ekiben* are highly prized by Japanese people as they provide an opportunity to try local specialties while on the move. We arrive at our starting point for the Nakasendo Trail. This ancient pathway in the Kiso Valley became a major transport route in the Edo period of the 17th to 19th centuries, and was travelled by lords, their retainers, and samurai. Those of high rank stayed in specially designated inns along the trail and the passage

of people on the route was tightly controlled. With the rise of modern locomotives and the development of rail travel in Japan, the world bypassed these beautiful mountain villages, and until a concerted conservation effort began, the towns were at risk of fading away into obscurity. Local residents have a fierce pride in their rich and fascinating culture and history.

Following our arrival in the post town of Nakatsugawa in the mid-afternoon, we have a chance to stretch our legs, visiting the old town, and walking along a paved portion with traditional *ishidatami* (石畳/paving stones) en route to Ochiai. We spend the evening at an inn in the Nakatsugawa area.

## Day 7: Hike through the villages, hamlets, and forests of the Nakasendo Trail

- 8.3 km / 5.2 mi
- 3 hours
- 326 m / 1,069 ft
- 430 m / 1,410 ft
- Onsen ryokan (hot spring inn)
- Breakfast, dinner

Today we spend some time in the morning to visit Magome. As we ascend through the town we can appreciate the beautiful inns, residences, and woodworkers' shops that line the stone-paved streets. This *juku* post town is known as the birthplace of Japanese author Shimazaki Toson. As we leave the village, we see the old rule board for those entering the town from Tsumago and can look out at the viewpoint at the valley below before we start our ascent from hamlet to hamlet and past shrines to reach the Magome Pass. Once we reach the pass, we enjoy a gentle descent through the trees, along rivers and waterfalls, and through stands of bamboo before arriving in the post town of Tsumago. Here we have free time to enjoy the town, and perhaps to

try the local snack, *gohei mochi*, a pounded rice cake that is covered in a sweet and savoury nutty sauce and grilled. We then walk a short distance further to Nagiso. Here we are picked up by our inn for the evening located in the post town of Kiso-Fukushima, or in Agematsu, which was once a trading centre for the prized Kiso Hinoki cypress.



## Day 8: Explore Kiso Fukushima and hike the Torii Toge pass to Narai

- 6.2 km / 3.9 mi
- 3 hours
- 344 m / 1,128 ft
- 270 m / 885 ft
- Minshuku (family-run guesthouse)
- Breakfast, dinner

This morning, we take a shuttle to the regional hub of Kiso-Fukushima. Here we have some time in Kiso-Fukushima to visit the checkpoint here in the town. In the Edo period, the Nakasendo was one of the routes travelled by lords known as *daimyo* from the new capital of Edo. Some had to leave family members in Edo as hostages, such as wives of heirs. The checkpoints played an important role in controlling the passage of people and goods through this area. We also learn about the powerful Yamamura family—local governors who ruled over this area.

Then, we travel onward by train the short distance from Kiso-Fukushima to Yabuhara, where we begin our hike of the Torii Pass to Narai. The Torii Pass takes its name from that for a Shinto shrine gate. It is said that a local *samurai* prayed for a victory in battle in the 15th century here, hoping

to seek the favour of the guides at Mount Ontake. After his success, he built a *torii* gate and Ontake Shrine with gratitude to the spirit of the mountain. We hike into the town of Narai, which was one of the most prosperous of the post towns on the trail.

## Day 9: Visit Matsumoto Castle and a local miso maker and leap forward in time to Tokyo

- 8 km / 5 mi of city walking
- 2 hours
- negligible
- negligible
- Western-style hotel
- Breakfast, lunch

Today we leave behind the Edo period. We first travel by train to Matsumoto. Here we have an opportunity to visit Matsumoto Castle, which is known as the 'crow' castle due to its dark, imposing feel. We explore the inside of the castle—its keep and *donjon*, and learn its importance in defending the area. We also visit a *miso* maker and learn about this important component of Japanese food. The *miso* producer is the 6th generation producer and creates small-batch artisanal *miso* that is made the traditional way—aged three years for a mellow smoothness. As a fermented food, *miso* is not only healthy but tasty!



Matsumoto Castle

Then, we board the train once more and head to Tokyo, crossing not just distance, but leaping from the Edo Period to this hyper-modern city. Tonight, dinner is on your own, so you can try one of the many restaurants available in the city. If you need a recommendation, your guide will be happy to help.

## Day 10: From Edo to Tokyo - the modern Capital

- 8 km / 5 mi of city walking
- negligible
- negligible
- Western-style hotel
- Breakfast, farewell dinner

Today, we discover two sides of the capital—old Edo and modern Tokyo. We begin by exploring Hama-Rikyu Gardens, traditional gardens located on Tokyo Bay that were once duck-hunting grounds for local lords. Then, we take a boat for a journey up the Sumida River to Asakusa. Here we can see that while Tokyo is a capital, it is still

very assuredly a working port. Asakusa is home to Senso-ji Temple and the traditional shops and arcades of Nakamise Dori and the surrounding shopping arcades. The shops here make a magnificent place to purchase a last-minute souvenir or snack. We then catapult forward to the modern age with a visit to Omotesando and Harajuku, source of many cutting-edge fashion trends as well as cutting-edge architecture. We finish with a walk to the bright lights of Shibuya, and see the famed Shibuya Scramble before our farewell dinner this evening.

## Day 11: Tour ends

- Breakfast

Our journey through Japan ends in Tokyo this morning. If you are departing today, your guide can advise transfer options to your departure airport, or which of the nearby subway or rail stations would best for you to continue your onward travels.