

JAPAN'S KUMANO KODO PILGRIMAGE

THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE TREK

by Kat Davis

CICERONE

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Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guide-books as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website (www.cicerone.co.uk/972/updates), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally. Even rights of way can be altered over time.

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency, although naturally we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.

We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to updates@cicerone.co.uk or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

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Front cover: Hatenashi settlement (Kohechi, Stage 4)

ROUTE 1

*Hongu loop walk (including
Dainichi-goe and Akagi-goe)*

Start/Finish	Kumano Hongu Taisha 熊野本宮大社
Distance	16.7km
Ascent/Descent	875m
Difficulty	Moderate
Duration	8hr–8hr 30min
Access	Hongu: Hongu-taisha-mae bus stop 本宮大社前 バス停 is the closest to Kumano Hongu Taisha, and Kumano Hongu bus stop 熊野本宮 バス停 is the closest to the Dainichi-goe trailhead in Hongu. Yunomine Onsen: Yunomine Onsen bus stop 湯の峰温泉 バス停 is near the Dainichi-goe and Akagi-goe trailheads. Hosshinmon-oji: Hosshinmon-oji bus stop 発心門王子 バス停.
Waymarks	The Dainichi-goe trail 大日越 from Hongu to Yunomine Onsen has three waymarks counting up from 1 to 3. The Akagi-goe trail 赤木越 from Yunomine Onsen to Funatama-jinja Shrine has 11 waymarks counting down from 11 to 1. The Nakahechi trail 中辺路 from Funatama-jinja Shrine to Kumano Hongu Taisha has 17 waymarks counting up from 59 to 75.
Note	There are limited services so carry food and water and set out early to complete the loop. Detour between Funatama-jinja Shrine (waymark 59) and Hosshinmon-oji (waymark 61). After crossing the Otonashi-gawa River at the Akagi-goe trailhead, instead of turning right towards Funatama-jinja Shrine, turn left towards Nakahechi waymark 58. Between waymarks 57 and 56, turn right onto a forestry road and follow this to Hosshinmon-oji. Due to this closure and being unable to reach Inohana-oji, the stamp for Inohana-oji is being held at the Hongu Heritage Center. Please check for updates at www.tb-kumano.jp/en/kumano-kodo/nakahech

ROUTE 1 – HONGU LOOP WALK (INCLUDING DAINICHI-GOE AND AKAGI-GOE)

steam and sulphur smells of Yunomine Onsen) and after 850m near **Akagi-goe waymark 10**, look right for mountain views through the wire fence. A few minutes later pass a small **Akagi-goe stone marker** (LHS, dated 1855, with a finger pointing to Yunomine Onsen). Continue ascending and after a further 700m pass **Akagi-goe waymark 8. 4.6km**

The trail soon starts to descend, then shortly after passing **Akagi-goe waymark 7**, pass a small cemetery just before **Kakihara-jaya teahouse remains** 柿原茶屋跡 (RHS). Turn left and pass a statue of the Buddhist monk Kobo Daishi (LHS (774–835), the founder of Koyasan's Shingon Buddhist complex among many other things) and start uphill again for 1.1km to **Nabeware Jizo** 鍋割地藏. ▶ **6.3km**

Pass more mountain views then after a brief descent climb to the highpoint of the stage (alt 450m) shortly before **Akagi-goe waymark 3**. Continue as the trail undulates, then a few minutes after passing **Akagi-goe waymark 2**, pass the stone foundations of the **Kenjou tea-house** 献上茶屋跡 (no signpost) then turn right following signs to Funatama-jinja and descend, steeply at times. After 900m cross a log bridge over the Otonashi-gawa River, then turn right. Pass a **WC** (LHS, women: 女子便所, men: 男子便所) then a wooden pavilion housing an old river boat (the nearby Funatama-jinja Shrine is associated with the legend of the first boat) before a red metal bridge at the **Akagi-goe trailhead** 赤木越登り口. **8.5km**

Turn right onto a gravel road, following signs to Hosshinmon-oji 発心門王子, now on the Nakahechi route, soon passing Nakahechi waymark 59 next to **Funatama-jinja Shrine** 船玉神社. ▶

Funatama-jinja Shrine is associated with the legend of the god Susanoo who built the first wooden boat nearby. Fishermen come here annually to celebrate on 3 May. Tamahime Inari-jinja Shrine is on the RHS, guarded by two foxes.

Nabeware Jizo means 'broken pot Jizo': legend has it a young disciple of Ippen Shonin was making rice here but ran out of water and the pot cracked as a result.

A section of the Nakahechi trail between Funatama-jinja Shrine (waymark 59) and Hosshinmon-oji (waymark 61) is closed (as of November 2019) with a detour in place. See note.



Pass the *oji* and Nakahechi waymark 14 and climb steeply for 300m then pass **Koban Jizo** 小判地藏 – established by locals in 1854 after a pilgrim was found deceased here with a *koban* (old coin) in his mouth.

► The path undulates after **Akushiro's house site** 悪四郎屋敷跡, then climbs steeply to reach the highpoint of the stage at **Uwadawa Jaya teahouse remains** 上多和茶屋跡 (alt 680m). **9.1km**

Shortly after, pass Nakahechi waymark 18 and start to descend, steeply at times for 800m before passing a side-trail for the **Three-Fold Moon viewpoint** 三体月伝説 (associated with a local legend; however, there's little to see from the viewpoint other than the sky). Take the lower left path here, descending towards Osakamoto-*oji* 大坂本王子, then after passing Nakahechi waymark 20, turn right onto a wider track and go straight across a

There is a short detour between Koban Jizo and waymark 15 due to a landslide. Information can be found at www.tb-kumano.jp/en/kumano-kodo/nakahechi/

STAGE 2

Nonaka to Kumano Hongu Taisha

Start	Tsugizakura-oji, Nonaka 継桜王子, 野中
Finish	Kumano Hongu Taisha 熊野本宮大社
Distance	20.6km
Ascent	820m
Descent	1260m
Difficulty	Moderate
Duration	8–9hr
Access	The closest bus stop to Tsugizakura-oji is +0.9km Nonaka Ipposugi 野中一方杉 バス停 (on Route 311, a 900m descent from Tsugizakura-oji). Bus stops between Tsugizakura-oji and Hongu, bound for Hongu/Tanabe, include: 2.6km +380m Kobiro-oji guchi 小広王子口 バス停 (70m after passing Nakahechi waymark 39 turn right onto a road, doubling back and downhill for 380m to Route 311), 3.2km +400m Kobiro-toge 小広峠 バス停 (200m after Nakahechi waymark 40, follow a Kobiro-toge bus stop sign for 400m to route 311), 4.7km +600m Doyugawa-bashi 道湯川橋 バス停 (400m after starting the detour, instead of crossing the log bridge, continue down the paved road for 600m to Route 311), 13.6km Hosshinmon-oji 発心門王子 バス停, 20.6km Hongu-taisha-mae 本宮大社前 バス停 (in front of Kumano Hongu Taisha).
Waymarks	Nakahechi 中辺路 wooden waymarks placed at 500m intervals from 34 (soon after Tsugizakura-oji) to 75 (just before Kumano Hongu Taisha).
Note	This is a long stage with a hefty ascent and descent; if you'd like to shorten the stage, consider taking a bus to Kobiro-toge, Doyugawa-bashi or even Hosshinmon-oji. There is a forestry road detour after waymark 56 to Hosshinmon-oji (skipping waymarks 57 to 61) due to the section of trail between Funatama-jinja Shrine (waymark 59) and Hosshinmon-oji (waymark 61) being closed (as of November 2019). Due to this closure and being unable to reach Inohana-oji, the stamp for Inohana-oji is being held at the Hongu Heritage Center. Please check for updates at www.tb-kumano.jp/en/kumano-kodo/nakahechi/

STAGE 4

*Ogumotori-goe route: Koguchi to
Kumano Nachi Taisha*

Start	Koguchi village 小口
Finish	Kumano Nachi Taisha 熊野那智大社
Distance	14.2km
Ascent	1180m
Descent	895m
Difficulty	Hard
Duration	7–8hr
Access	Koguchi is accessible by bus from Hongu or Shingu, although you need to transfer at Kanmaru 神丸. There are two bus stops in the area: Koguchi 小口 バス停 (closest to the Ogumotori-goe trailhead) and Kowase 小和瀬 バス停 next to the Kowase ferry remains and Kogumotori-goe trailhead.
Waymarks	Nakahechi Ogumotori-goe 中辺路 大雲取越 wooden and stone waymarks placed at 500m intervals count down from 29 (near the trailhead in Koguchi) to 1 (500m before Kumano Nachi Taisha).
Note	Carry food and water for the duration and allow plenty of time for this challenging stage. There is a well-marked detour between waymarks 20 and 16 along a forestry road that bypasses Ishikura-toge Pass. The detour adds a further 40 minutes so allow sufficient time for this section. Please check for updates at the tourist offices in Tanabe or Hongu.

This stage is infamous for being the most challenging of the Nakahechi as you gain 800m of elevation (Ogumotori 大雲取越 means ‘passing over large clouds’) along a steep, rocky and often moss-covered slippery trail, in addition to crossing three mountain passes. Consider this trail a lesson in concentration (watching every step)! There are four rest shelters en route; the shelter at Jizo-jaya teahouse remains makes a good lunch spot with a vending machine and WC, and the shelter at Funamichaya teahouse has the best views. The highpoint of the stage is the last mountain pass, Funami-toge (alt 883m) and the descent from there to Nachisan is dominated by rocks and flagstone paths (slippery when wet).