

## *Kumano Kodo ~Japan*

*11 - 23 October 2017*



For thousands of years the isolated Kumano route has been an experience of healing and deep connection in the lush mountains of Wakayama - the spiritual heartland of Japan. Stretching across the Kii Peninsula on the island of Honshu, the pilgrimage takes us off the beaten track into a world of stunning scenery, soothing hot springs, delicious food and authentic Ryokan accommodation.

We will be walking along the way to the Grand Shrines through tiny villages, along pristine mountain trails shrouded by 800 year old giant trees enjoying the abundance of nature in its autumn glow - truly the land of the Gods. This is only one of the two UNESCO World Heritage walks in the world.

### **DAY 1: WED 11 OCT - KYOTO**

Arriving into Kyoto.

Depending on your flight arrival time, you have much time to explore this charming and uniquely majestic ancient city.

**Hotel My Stay Kyoto for 3 nights**



## DAY 2: THURS 12 OCT - KYOTO (B, L)

We begin our day after breakfast using public transport with our local guide, to visit a serene area where you will be able to feel the traditional Kyoto. The area is rarely visited by tourists but is very famous and important for local residents. We will visit one shrine to learn about the relationship of Shintoism with the Japanese people, and a Buddhist temple to further understand Japanese Buddhism.

At the Buddhist temple we will be shown two sub-temples where we can enjoy two different types of Japanese gardens. Both of these are also deeply related to the tea ceremony. We will be introduced here to the philosophy of this special tea ceremony.

Early on in our tour, we will make a stop at a teahouse by the shrine for a cup of green tea and sweets, which are a tradition enjoyed for centuries by the locals since the era of the samurai age.

After lunch we go to an Obi (kimono sash) weaving factory and learn about how important the obi is when a kimono is worn, and the skill of obi weaving.

Your day may end at the city centre where you can explore shopping or food markets, or simply strolling the streets.



## DAY 3: FRI 13 OCT - KYOTO (B, L)

We begin our day in a Zen temple for a morning meditation. Led by a Zen monk we will experience a zazen.

After this we will move to the western side of Kyoto and visit a unique temple space within a beautiful bamboo grove. We then will explore our lunch options within walking distance of this area. Or you may choose to go shopping, go back to your hotel, or whatever you feel like doing.

Tonight we will have an amazing backstage, behind the scenes visit to the unique Noh Theatre. It originated in Kyoto and is a form of Opera using masks and costumes on small stages to create a very intimate experience of theatre. It is a lot of fun !

## DAY 4: SAT 14 OCT - KYOTO to KOYASAN (B,D)



This morning we transfer by train from Kyoto to **Koyasan**.

Koyasan a Buddhist retreat settled in a mountain plateau and one of the most sacred sites in Japan. It is the centre of the Shingon esoteric school. The village is small but blessed with hundreds of temples featuring classic architectural designs, and elegant Japanese gardens. Staying at a temple is one of the extraordinary experiences of Koyasan where you can dine on Buddhist cuisine and attend prayer sessions. You have a free afternoon to explore this exquisite little town. Dinner will be held at the Fudo-in temple.

**Overnight at Fudo-in for two nights, Koyasan.**

## **DAY 5: SUN 15 OCT - KOYASAN (B/D)**

Every morning guests are welcome to join the ceremony in the worship hall. Waking up to the smell of incense and rhythmical chanting of the monks primes the soul for a day of spiritual journeys. Koyasan is roughly divided into two areas the Danjo Garan and Okuno-in. The Danjo Garan is the symbolic center of Koyasan, the heart of a lotus flower with the surrounding mountains like pedals embracing the divine plateau. Okuno-in is the inner sanctuary where Kobo Daishi, the founder of Koyasan, is believed to be in a state of eternal meditation. Over 300,000 tombstones are densely distributed beneath giant 500 year old trees creating a spiritual atmosphere and profound religious cultural landscape. Your guided tour today will highlight the many unique aspects of Koyasan.



### **Dinner & overnight at Fudo-in Temple.**



## **DAY 6: MON 16 OCT - KAWAYA (B/D)**

After the morning rituals and meals we say goodbye to this mystical monastic centre and head south deep into the mountains.

We journey by train to Shirahama and then jumbo taxi to Kawaya Onsen.

### **Dinner & overnight at Midoriya for the next five nights**

## **DAY 7: TUES 17 OCT - KUMANO KODO & KAWAYA (B/D)**

Today is the start of our walk on the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage route. The Nakahechi route is the oldest of the ways to the sacred sites of Kumano, which were first walked over 1000 years ago by the imperial family that resided in Kyoto. The faith of Kumano is a syncretic mix of indigenous nature worship and Buddhism. The small Takijiri-oji shrine is the starting point of the walk. It is here that the passage into the sacred mountains begins – the entrance to the abode of the gods and Buddhist paradises of rebirth. The walk is short, but steep through the forest to the ridge top village of Takahara. Lunch can be taken at a local cafe with panoramic views across the lush, green mountains. Return to Kawaya for dinner at the hotel.

Walking distance today: 4kms

## DAY 8: WED 18 OCT - KUMANO KODO & KAWAYU ONSEN (B/D)

The walk today continues from Takahara to the east deeper into the mountains. During the golden era of the imperial pilgrimages, processions of up to 800 people at a time wove their way along these trails. Remnants of their passing, and legends line the way, sometimes in stories such as the one of the worship of the three-fold moon. The next village along the trail is Chikatsuyu, a sleepy hamlet with a clear river running through it.



Home to Kawayu Onsen, a natural wonder, where hot spring water bubbles to the surface of the river.

Walking today: 9kms

Dinner & overnight at Fujiya Ryokan

## DAY 9: THURS 19 OCT - KUMANO KODO & KAWAYU ONSEN (B/D)



We return to restart our pilgrimage to Kumano by bus to Hosshinmon-oji. "Hosshin" means spiritual awakening or aspiration to enlightenment and "mon" means gate. Passage through this gate was a transformational rite marking initiatory death and rebirth in the Pure Land paradise. It is not a physical gate, but one of devotion.

This day is a combination of passes, rising up and down, over a series of forested passes. Walking the way to Kumano is an integral part of the pilgrimage process as pilgrims, the physical demands helping the pilgrims reach their sought after enlightened state. After the descent from Hosshinmon-oji to Futatama Jinja shrine, we take the side trail of Akagi-goe to Yunomine Onsen, one of the oldest hot spring areas in Japan, and directly connected to the Kumano pilgrimage as site of hot water purification rituals. From Yunomine Onsen we transfer back to Kawayu for the night.

Walking distance today: 7.5kms

## DAY 10: FRI 20 OCT - KUMANO KODO & KUMANO HONGU TAISHA (B/D)

Today's walk takes us 7 kilometers to the Kumano Hongu Taisha, one of the three grand shrines of Kumano. We begin from the lookout point at Fushiogami-oji, pilgrims finally get their first glimpse of their goal, the Kumano Hongu Taisha. Pilgrims traditionally fell on their knees and prayed, which is what the word "Fushiogami" means. At the lowest point in the valley lies Oyunohara, the holy sandbank where the Kumano Hongu Taisha was originally located until a flood



destroyed it in 1886. The salvaged remains were used to rebuild the shrine on higher ground. The austere construction of the shrine pavilions of Kumano Hongu Taisha seem to have grown organically from the forest; indeed much of the material to make it comes from the surrounding sacred woods. Take a moment to take in the symbols of this sacred site, and watch the people as they worship for hints into the depths of meaning of the Kumano faith. We visit the information rich Kumano Hongu Heritage Center before returning to your inn and hot spring baths.

Walking distance today: 7kms

#### **DAY 11: SAT 21 OCT - KUMANO KODO & KUMANO HAYATAMA TAISHA SHRINE (B)**



On this day, after checking out from the Sansuikan Midoriya, you will move to the small family owned lodge by the coast of Nachi-Katsuura area. Your vehicle will drop you off at Takanosaka-origuchi and you will begin the walk on the coastline to Kumano Hayatama Taisha shrine, another of the three important shrines in Kumanokodo. We will have lunch in this area and return by a train departing from Shingu station in

the afternoon to Kii-katsuura Station.

Walking distance today: 7kms

**Dinner at a local restaurant in Kii-Katsuura & overnight at Kosakaya, for two nights.**

#### **DAY 12: SUN 22 OCT - KUMANO KODO & OGUMOTORI-GOE (B)**

After breakfast we transfer by van back into the mountains to the Irokawa-tsuji, the final leg of our spiritual journey awaits us. Through the Moja-no-Deai, Mt Myoho is considered the "Mount Koya for women", the historic headquarters for the Kumano Bikuni nuns. The vastness of the Pacific Ocean spreads out before us on a clear day at Funami-toge pass, where you can see the rugged coastline. The trail sharply descends here into the valley where the tallest waterfall in Japan greets pilgrims with its majestic cascade, connecting earth and heaven.

Walking distance today: 7 kms



## Day 13 MON 23 OCT - KUMANO KODO - HOME (B)

After a leisurely breakfast it is time to say arigato gozaimasu for our enchanting experience together....and journey onward or home.

For most it will be a train journey from Kii-Katsuura station (5 minute walk from our lodge) to Osaka. And then onward to explore more of Japan or fly home.



### Important Note:

Whilst every effort is made to adhere to this itinerary, please keep in mind that this is adventure travel in a remote part of Japan. There may be changes to this itinerary - from the hotels we use, to the places we visit & due to circumstances outside our control like weather, road conditions and last minute changes to government policy.

Journeys of the Spirit will do everything possible to ensure a memorable and exciting trip for you whatever situation presents itself, however it is highly recommended to take your lead from the locals and let go and let the magic of the Kumano Kodo take over...

We thank you in advance for your flexibility and your open mind.

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