

Overview

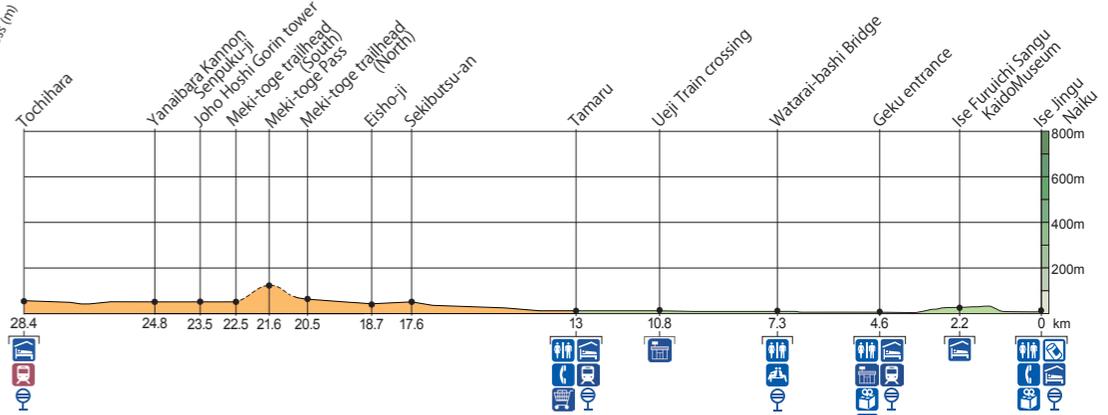


Legend	
	Toilet
	Public phone
	Convenience store
	Grocery store
	Shop/Store
	Vending machine
	Drinking water
	Covered shelter
	Accommodation
	Station
	Station nearby
	Bus stop

Tochihara~Tamaru

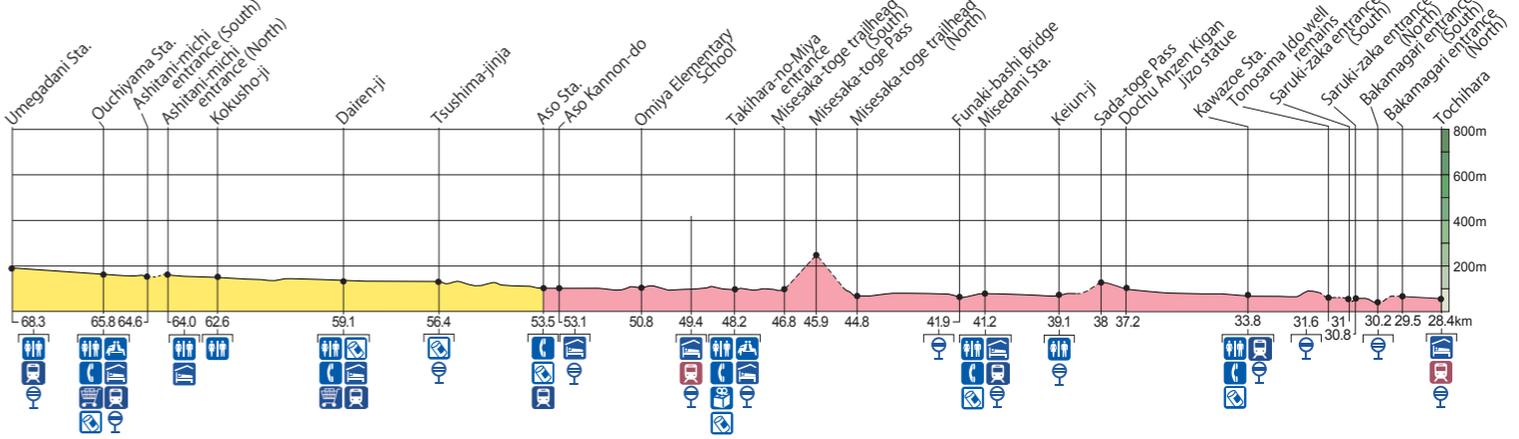
Tamaru~Ise Jingu Naiku

	Distance (km)	Time (hr)	Total Elevation Gain (m)	Total Elevation Loss (m)
Geku entrance ~ Ise Jingu Naiku	~5	1.5~2	~50	~70
Tochihara ~ Misedani Sta.	~13	3.5~4.5	~230	~200
Misedani Sta. ~ Aso Sta.	~13	4~5	~290	~280
Misedani Sta. ~ Dairen-ji	~19	5.5~7	~360	~320
Aso Sta. ~ Furusato Onsen	~31	8.5~11	~460	~610
Dairen-ji ~ Ochiyama Sta.	~7	1.5~2	~70	~50
Ochiyama Sta. ~ Furusato Onsen	~18	5.5~7	~320	~510

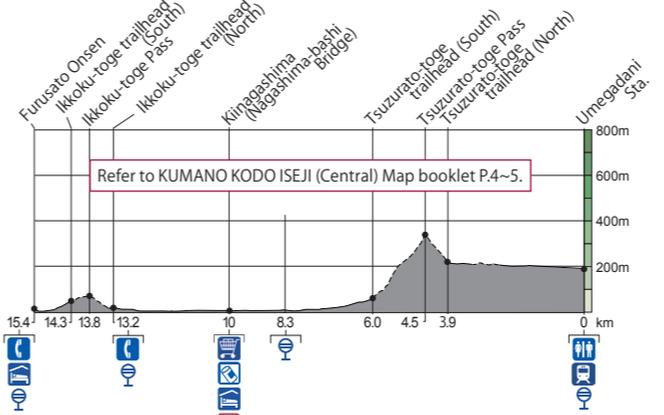


Umegadani~Aso

Aso~Tochihara



Furusato Onsen~Umegadani



	Distance (km)	Time (hr)	Total Elevation Gain (m)	Total Elevation Loss (m)	
Tamaru ~ Ise Jingu Naiku	~13	3~4	~130	~120	P.6~7
Tochihara ~ Tamaru	~16	4~5	~210	~180	P.8~11
Aso ~ Tochihara	~26	5.5~7	~510	~480	P.10~13
Umegadani ~ Aso	~21	5~7	~250	~170	P.14~15
Furusato Onsen ~ Umegadani	~16	4.5~6	~290	~510	Central P.4~5

-----	Unpaved trail
—————	Paved trail

Ise Gateway to Iseji

Ise Jingu

Ise Jingu is an expansive shrine complex just inland from the protected southern shore of Ise Bay in the central part of the main island of Japan.



It is composed of 125 shrines, centered around two main ones located ~5 km apart are: Kotaingyu (Naiku "Inner Shrine"), dedicated to Amaterasu-Omikami, and Toyo'uke-daijingu (Geku "Outer Shrine") dedicated to Toyo'uke-no-Omikami, the guardian deity of clothing, food and shelter. Amaterasu is the Sun Goddess and legendary ancestor of the imperial family.

HINT: It is recommended to spend a day before or after your walk to fully enjoy the sacred sites.

Naiku

Naiku's shrine grounds are expansive and includes many buildings and subsidiary shrines with the formal access for worshipers being across the Uji-bashi bridge. The main sanctuary is near the rear of the complex ~1 km from the entrance.

The main pavilion housing Amaterasu and the divine mirror are in the innermost courtyard enclosed within four rows of wooden fences.



Worshippers pay homage in front of the third-row gate. In this area it is strictly forbidden to take pictures or videos. Special ceremonies take place in the next level courtyard, but beyond that only the emperor and high-ranking priests are allowed.



Geku

Geku is the other major shrine dedicated to Toyo'uke-no-Omikami, the guardian deity of clothing, food and shelter. It is a short walk southwest from the Iseishi station through a shopping district, although

not as pronounced as Oharai-machi, there is a diversity of shops and restaurants.

Unlike Naiku there are two entrances to the grounds. Like Naiku the atmosphere is solemn with the shrine approach on gravel amongst a mature, old-growth forest. Buildings that offer similar functions to Naiku are scattered over the grounds.

Near the main entrance is the Sengukan museum, which has exhibitions on the unique rebuilding ceremony that takes place every 20 years when all of the shrines in Ise are taking down and rebuilt from scratch.



Legend			
Toilet	Public Wi-fi	Parking	Temple
Public phone	Michi-no-Eki rest area	Gas Station	Unpaved trail
Convenience store	Stamp	Post Office	Paved road
Grocery store	Lodging	Police Station	Other Unpaved trail
Bakery	Coin Laundry	Fire Station	Other Paved road
Bento Lunch Box	Bank	School	
Japanese Sweets	Station	Hospital	
Information	Bus stop	Shrine	

Oharai-machi

Oharai-machi or "purifying town" is a district replicating Edo era streets near the entrance to the Naiku shrine. There is a plethora of traditional sweet shops, restaurants serving local food and snacks, souvenir shops, etc. along the 800-meter-long street.

In the middle is Okage-yokocho or "blessing alley", a collection of around 60 stalls selling foods, crafts, and nostalgic souvenirs. Oharai-machi is one of the most visited tourist sites in the area, bustling with visitors year-round.



Iseishi Station

The Iseishi station serves two companies: JR Central and Kintetsu. The platforms of both companies are joined by a connected overhead crossing. The JR entrance opens onto the access street to the Geku shrine, ~10-minute walk from the station. There is an information center (hours 9:00-17:30, year-round) and luggage delivery/storage service nearby.

HINT: If you drop your bags off by 13:10 they can deliver it to your accommodation in Ise city. This is very convenient to see the sites on the day that you arrive without worrying about your bags.

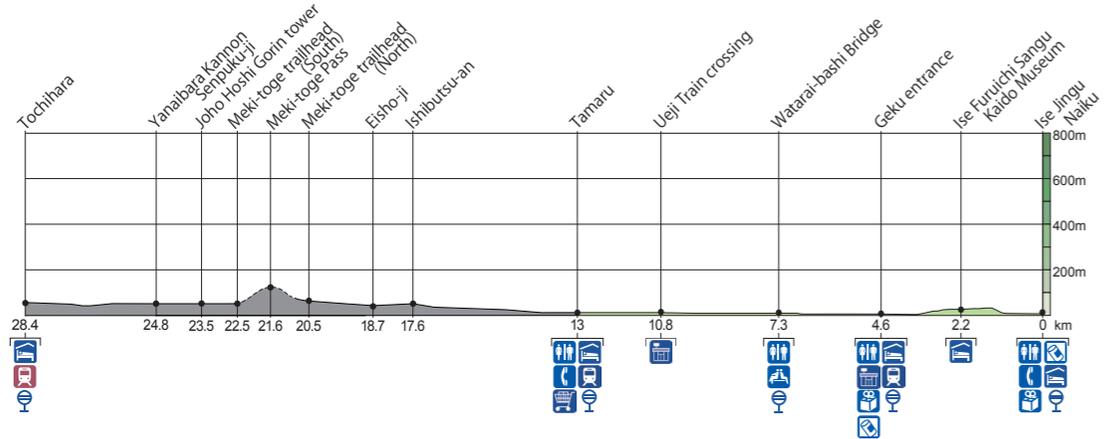
NOTE: If you are taking the train to join a trailhead further south on the Iseji, it is usually easiest to take JR to Taki to connect to a southbound train.



Ise

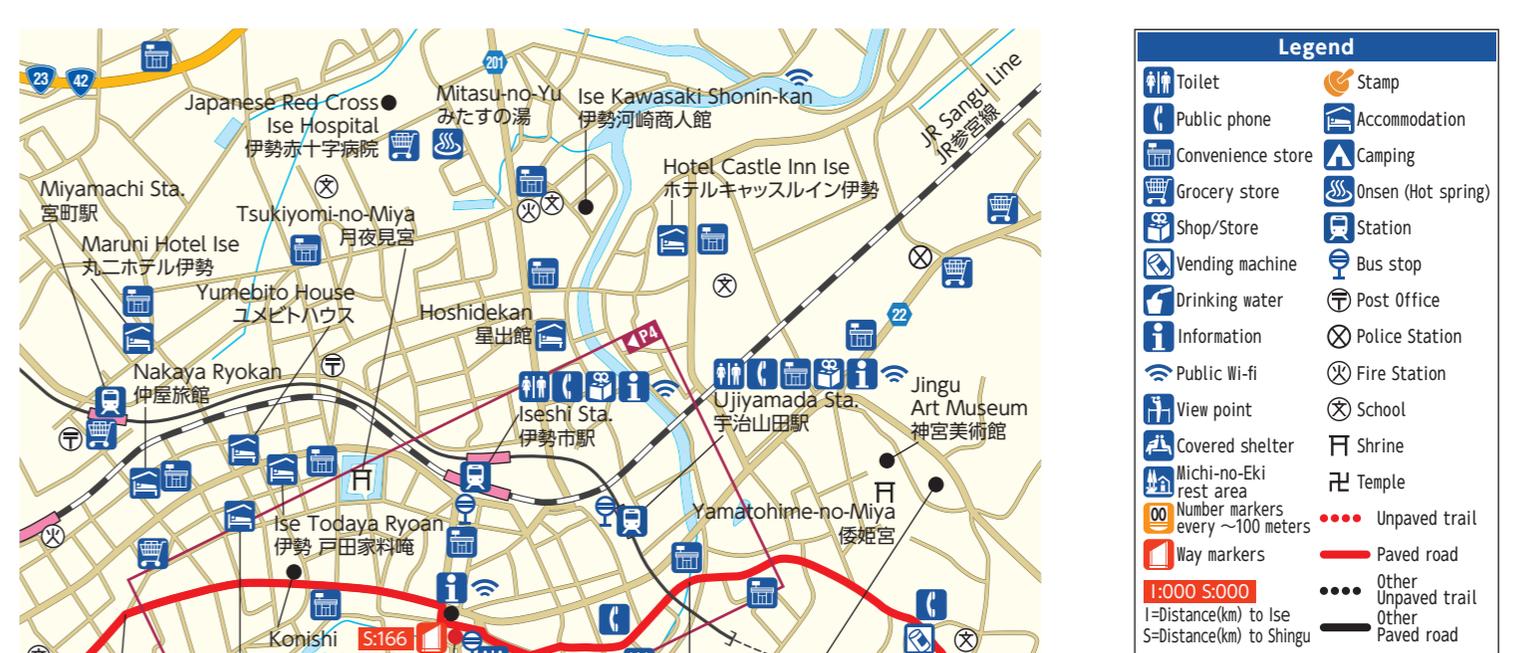
Tamaru~Ise Jingu Naiku

田丸~伊勢神宮内宮



Distance (km) : ~13
 Time (hr) : 3~4
 Total Elevation Gain (m) : ~130
 Total Elevation Loss (m) : ~120

----- Unpaved trail
 ——— Paved trail

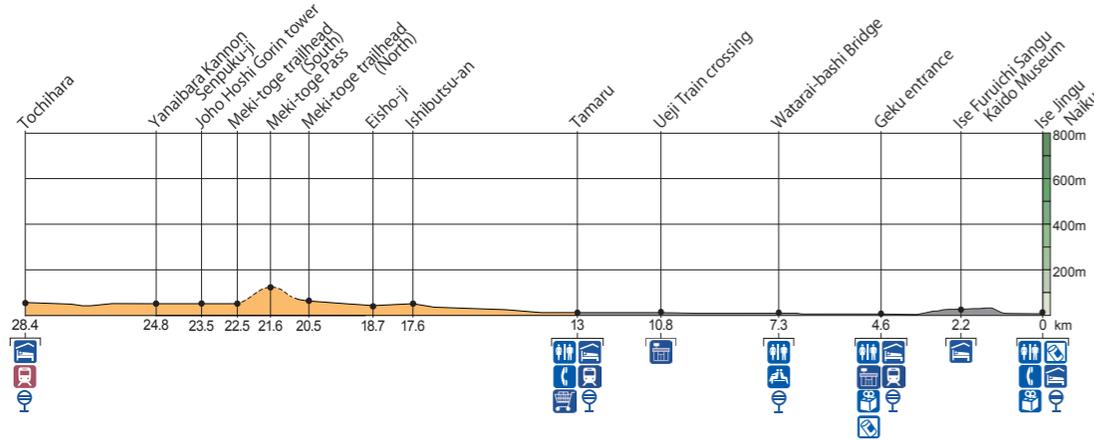


Legend	
1:000 S:000	
I=Distance(km) to Ise	
S=Distance(km) to Shingu	



Yanaibara~Tamaru

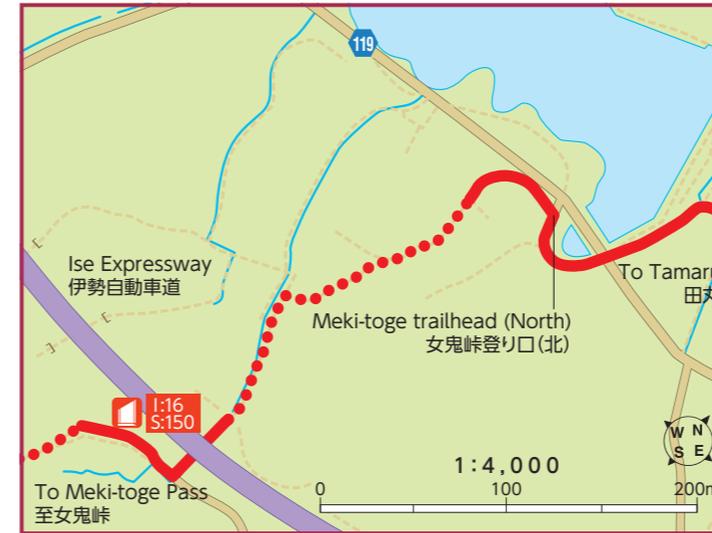
柳原~田丸



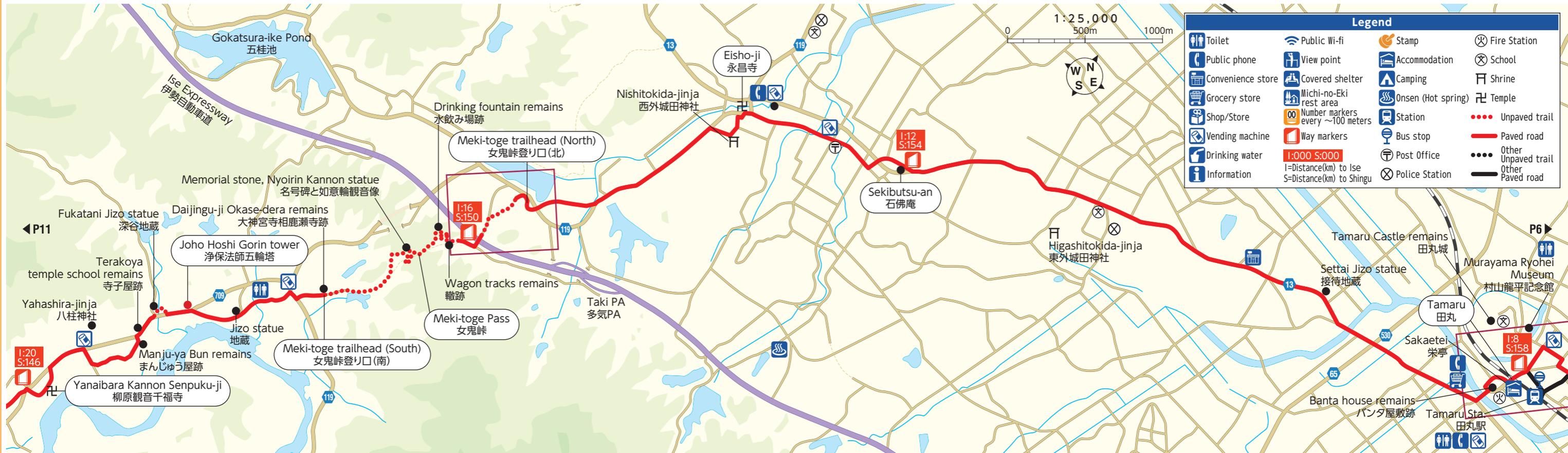
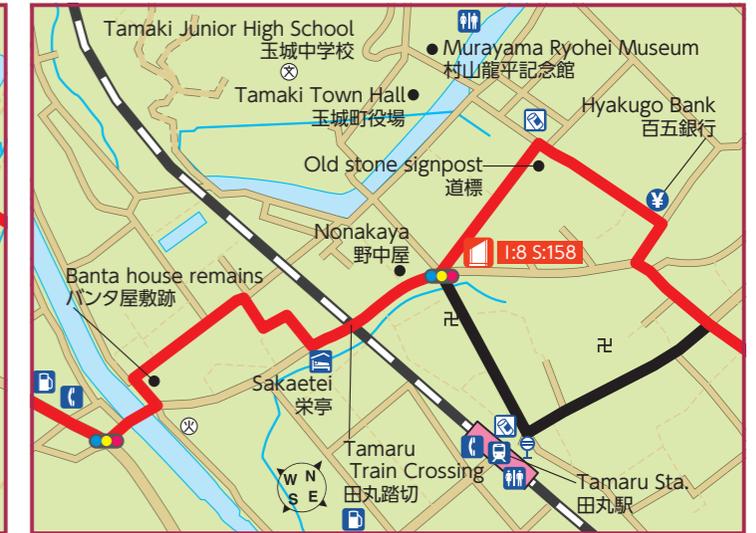
Tochiara~Tamaru
 Distance (km) : ~16
 Time (hr) : 4~5
 Total Elevation Gain (m) : ~210
 Total Elevation Loss (m) : ~180

----- Unpaved trail
 ——— Paved trail

Meki-toge trailhead (North)



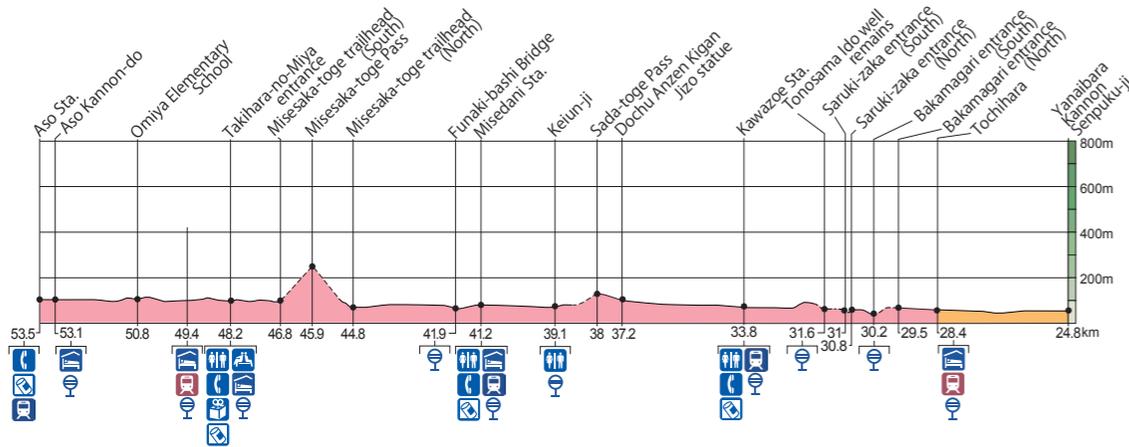
Tamaru



Legend			

Takana~Yanaibara

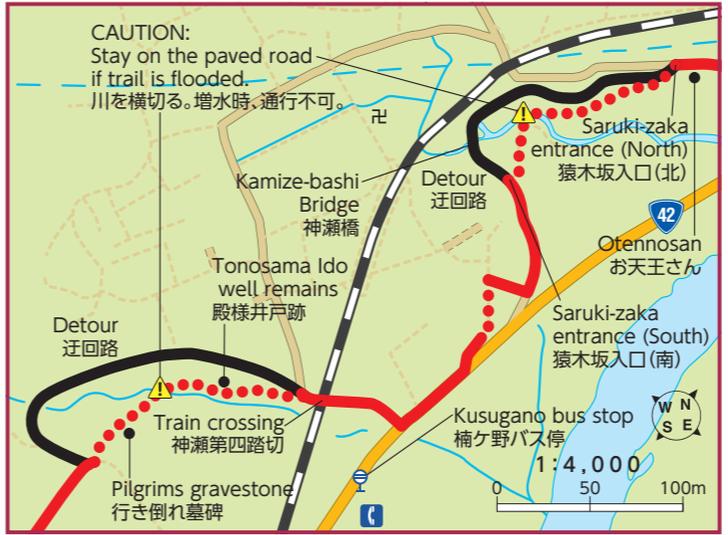
高奈~柳原



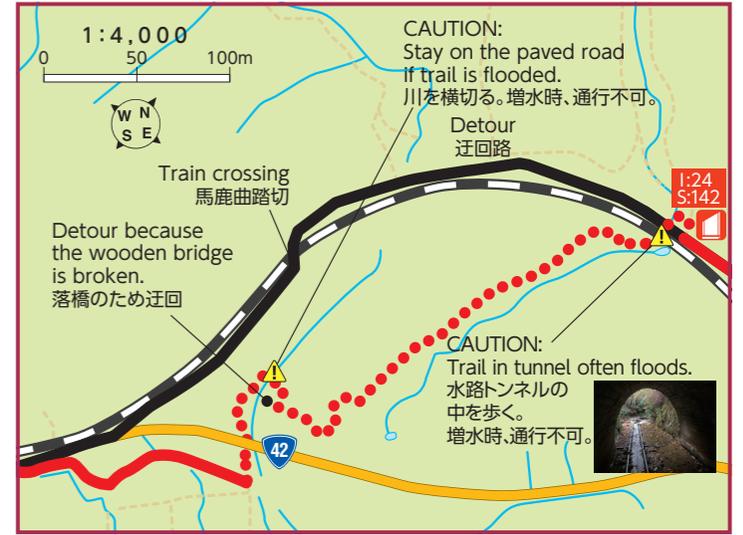
Aso~Tochiyama
 Distance (km) : ~26
 Time (hr) : 5.5~7
 Total Elevation Gain (m) : ~510
 Total Elevation Loss (m) : ~480

- - - - - Unpaved trail
 ——— Paved trail

Kamize



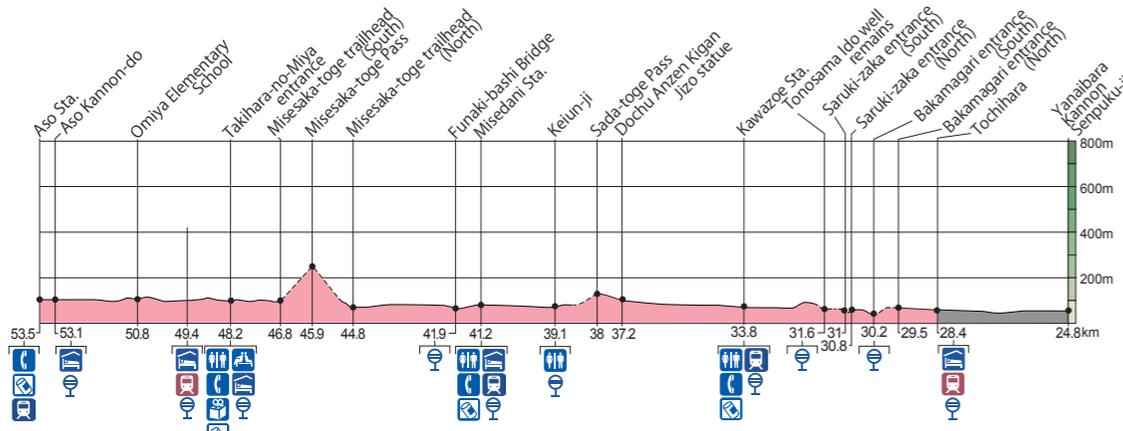
Bakamagari



Legend			

Aso~Takana

阿曾~高奈



Aso~Tochihara
 Distance (km) : ~26
 Time (hr) : 5.5~7
 Total Elevation Gain (m) : ~510
 Total Elevation Loss (m) : ~480

----- Unpaved trail
 ——— Paved trail

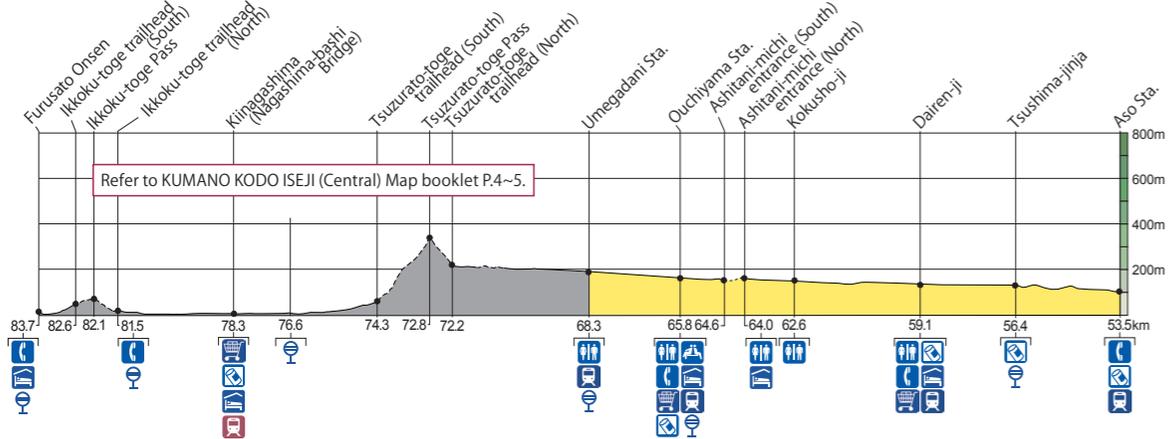


Legend		
	I:000 S:000	
	I=Distance(km) to Ise	
	S=Distance(km) to Shingu	

Mise-no-Watashi Ferry
IMPORTANT: Reservations are needed at least 5 days or more in advance.
TEL: 0598-84-1050 (Japanese Only)
E-MAIL: info@web-odai.info
PRICE: Basic price 2,500 yen (1~5 people). If the group has more than 5 people then the price for each additional person is 500 yen each.

Umegadani~Aso

梅ヶ谷~阿曾



Umegadani~Aso
 Distance (km) : ~15
 Time (hr) : 5~7
 Total Elevation Gain (m) : ~250
 Total Elevation Loss (m) : ~170

Furusato Onsen~Umegadani
 Distance (km) : ~16
 Time (hr) : 4.5~6
 Total Elevation Gain (m) : ~290
 Total Elevation Loss (m) : ~510

----- Unpaved trail
 ——— Paved trail



Furusato Onsen~Umegadani

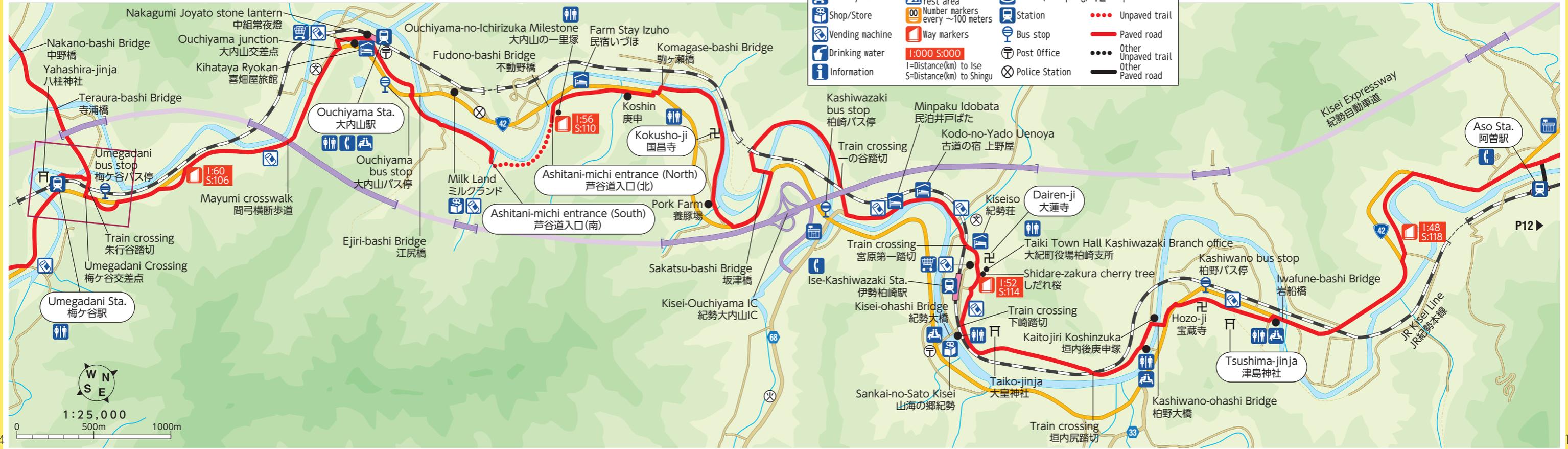
NOTE: This map is included in the KUMANO KODO ISEJI (Central) booklet P.4~5.



Legend

Toilet	Public Wi-fi	Stamp	Fire Station
Public phone	View point	Accommodation	School
Convenience store	Covered shelter	Camping	Shrine
Grocery store	Michi-no-Eki rest area	Onsen (Hot spring)	Temple
Shop/Store	Number markers every ~100 meters	Station	Unpaved trail
Vending machine	Way markers	Bus stop	Paved road
Drinking water	1:000 S:000	Post Office	Other Unpaved trail
Information	1=Distance(km) to Ise S=Distance(km) to Shingu	Police Station	Other Paved road

Umegadani Sta.



Kumano Kodo Tips

The Kumano Kodo is a diverse mountain route with a mixture of unpaved, uneven trails, ancient cobblestones and stairs, and paved roads through villages. There are some steep climbs and ascents, but the route is not technically difficult. The amount of preparation that is needed will depend greatly on which sections you will walk, the season you visit, and your personal level of experience and fitness. Please plan accordingly to fully, and safely, enjoy your pilgrimage walk. Proper preparation is the essential.

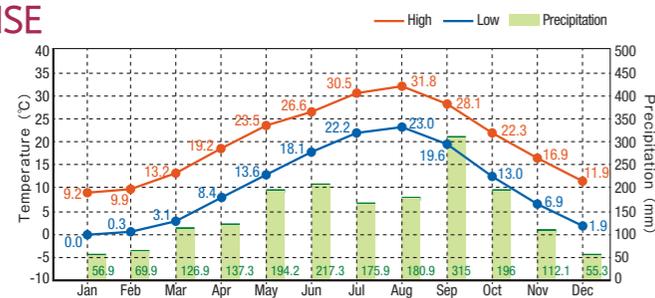
Weather

The Iseji route is open year-round. The weather in the southern portion of the Kii peninsula is generally mild. The winters can see some freezing temperatures but on the coastal Iseji route snow is very rare. Summers can be hot, humid and wet. Be prepared for rain year-round.

LINK

Japan Meteorological Agency: www.jma.go.jp/jma/indexe.html
 Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau:
www.tb-kumano.jp/en/kumano-kodo/weather/

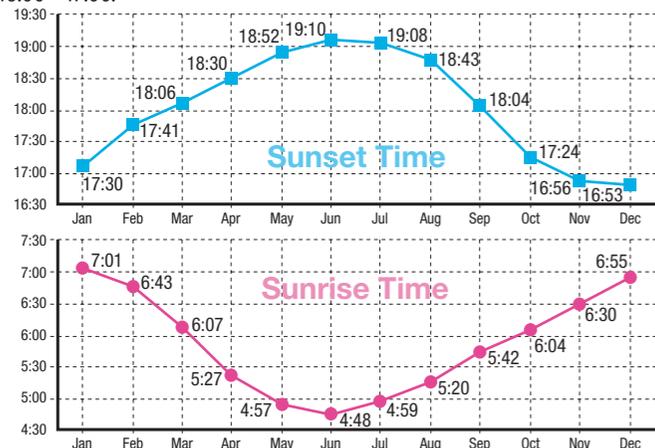
ISE



Daylight

Daylight times vary greatly with winter having the shortest days. It is always best to leave early to arrive early, and be aware when sunset is so as not to get stuck in the dark while still on the trail.

NOTE: It gets darker earlier in the valleys where most of the villages are located. The best time to check-in to accommodations is 16:00~17:00.



Clothing & Footwear

Proper clothing and footwear are essential, especially if you are planning for a longer, multi-day trek.

Review the average temperatures for the time of your walk and be prepared for seasonal variability.

Dressing in layers in clothes that dry easily is recommended: avoid cotton. Sturdy, worn-in, walking footwear is essential.



Gear

The type of gear that you will need varies with the duration and extent of your walk. The following is a general list of recommended items.

- Day pack
- Rain gear (a foldable umbrella is convenient)
- Hat, sunglasses, sunscreen
- Collapsible walking poles
- Water bottle
- Camera
- Small first aid kit, with Band-Aids, etc.
- Small flashlight
- Maps

Water & Liquids

It is important to carry water or liquids during your trek or walk. Natural water sources along the trail have not been tested. In the villages and settlements are small shops or vending machines where drinks can be purchased. Especially during the hotter season, it is important to keep well hydrated.

HINT: Fill up your water bottles at the accommodations before departure.

Luggage Shuttle

Let us take a load off your back! There are a few local service providers who offer daily luggage shuttle service, perfect for walkers on the Kumano Kodo. ※Some restrictions apply.

LINK

www.tb-kumano.jp/en/kumano-kodo/luggage-shuttle/

Money/ATM

Carry enough Japanese yen in cash, as many facilities and service providers do not accept credit cards, and places to exchange money are limited. If you do need to withdraw money, the ATMs at the post offices are the best option. Hours are limited especially on weekends.

HINT: Check with your credit card company before your visit to confirm if your credit card is OK to use for withdrawals at Japan Post Bank ATMs.

LINK

www.jp-bank-japanpost.jp/en/ias/en_ias_index.html

Electricity

The voltage in Japan is 100 Volt. Electrical plugs have two, parallel flat pins: Type A.

HINT: Bring an adapter if needed, as most accommodations do not have them.

Safety

Earthquake & Tsunami

Japan is prone to frequent natural disasters, such as earthquakes. Tsunamis are large waves caused by earthquakes. If you are near the coast and a large earthquake hits, head to higher ground immediately.

NOTE: Tsunami warning sign shown at right.



Extreme Weather & Typhoons

The Kii peninsula is one of the wettest areas in Japan. It juts out into the Pacific Ocean in the path of storms. Heavy rains and winds, especially from typhoons, can cause flash flooding, landslides, and damage from flying debris. Keep up to date with the weather forecast and avoid walking during extreme weather conditions.

Slippery Stones

Most injuries on the Kumano Kodo are from slips and falls on the stone lined trails. The old cobble steps are particularly slippery when wet. Please take your time and be careful where you step.

Mamushi Snake

There is one main species of snake that is venomous in the area, the Japanese Mamushi (*Gloydius blomhoffii*). It has the broader triangle shaped head of a pit viper. It is patterned with pale gray, reddish-brown, or yellow-brown background covered with an irregularly shaped lateral blotches. Its mature length is about 45-80 cm long. They can sun themselves in or around the trail. Use a flash light when walking round in the evening so as not to step on one mistake. If bitten seek medical attention immediately, while keeping the affected area as immobile as possible.



Mukade Centipede

The Mukade is a giant centipede, and its bite can be painful. They are black with yellow-orange legs. They like to hide in] hiking shoes, so check your boots in the morning before putting your feet in. They are active in the hot and humid months.



Suzumebachi Hornet

The Suzumebachi is a giant hornet which can have a painful sting. If you see a nest avoid the area. They can be the most aggressive into the fall season.



In Case of Emergency

Seek the assistance of someone nearby. Even if they do not speak English they will try to understand and help. 119 is the emergency help line and a translation service in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, and Korean is available in most areas.

Shrines

The themes of purification and offerings repeat themselves during a visit to the shrine. The general flow of worship is to:

- Wash hands and rinse mouth at the purification basin (often near the entrance to the shrine).
- Make the bell ring by shaking the rope.
- Offer some coins in the offering box, if you wish.
- Bow twice deeply.
- Clap your hands twice.
- Then bow once deeply.



Omamori

An Omamori is an amulet used for many reasons including warding off evil, for traffic safety, health, etc. The word mamori (お守) means protection, with omamori meaning honorable protector. They often describe on one side the specific area of luck or protection they are intended for and have the name of the shrine or temple they were bought at on the other.



Ema

Ema (絵馬) are votive plaques used to make requests or wishes to the deities. This practice dates back hundreds of years to the 8th century. Ema directly translated means horse picture. Originally horses were given as offerings to shrines and over time this turned into offering images of horses. These days there are many motifs used including zodiac signs.



Goohoin (Goshimpu)

The Kumano Goohoin or Goshimpu (ご奉印) is a powerful amulet distinctive to the Kumano Sanzan Grand Shrines. Its main purpose is to ward off evils, avert calamities and bring good fortune. It is often displayed on house door and in rice fields. Originally the amulet was composed of a red tear drop-shaped stamp, but to distinguish it from others, a background wood-block print with an intricate design of stylized crows and double lined good-fortune jewels was added. Each Kumano Sanzan Grand Shrine has a different version based on the same theme.



Pilgrimage Etiquette

Please abide by the following guidelines while enjoying the Kumano Kodo.

- Preserve the area as "heritage of all humankind".
- Respect the faith of past and present worshippers.
- Keep the routes clean - carry out all waste.
- Protect the local flora and fauna - do not remove or introduce animals or vegetation.
- Stay on the routes.
- Be careful with fire - prevent forest fires.
- Be prepared - plan your trip and equip yourself properly.
- Greet others with a smile and warm heart.

Accommodations

Accommodations along the trail are mostly Japanese style with tatami mat flooring in the guest rooms and dining area. These rooms are versatile with a low table moved to the side to lay down futon mattress to sleep. In the hot spring areas, there is a larger range of standards, from small family run minshuku guesthouses to larger traditional inns. Accommodations are limited in the smaller areas.

Reservations are highly recommended as walking up to lodgings is not custom.

NOTE: Reservations can be made online at the Kumano Travel community reservation system.

LINK
www.kumano-travel.com

Meals

A trek along the Kumano Kodo is a culinary journey. Meals at the guesthouse and inns are Japanese style. Ingredients vary from the coastline to mountain side often featuring fresh, local ingredients. Rice is a staple and eaten at most meals. Open your mind (and mouths!) to try these new and delicious foods.

HINT: Practice with chopsticks before you come.



Bedding (Futons)



Bedding in the Japanese style guesthouses are futon mattresses laid onto the tatami mat flooring.

HINT: Japanese pillows can sometimes be hard, so if you need a soft pillow consider bringing along an inflatable pillow to make your sleep more comfortable.

Yukata

Yukata are cotton gowns to wear in and around a Japanese style accommodation. They are also used as pajamas.

Fold the left side over the right and tie the belt around your waist.

HINT: Wearing something underneath can save yourself from an embarrassing moment if you are not used to sitting down with a gown on!



Tatami

Tatami are straw mats used as flooring in traditional Japanese rooms.

There are a few general rules to follow in a tatami room.

- Do not wear slippers on the tatami.
- Keep the tatami dry, for example do not leave a wet towel or rain soaked gear on the floor.
- Avoid dragging tables or heavy luggage over the tatami, as this may tear the surface.



Slippers

Staying at traditional Japanese accommodations keeps you busy with your footwear.

Basically there are three sets of footwear:

- ① Your outdoor shoes, which are left at the door;
- ② your indoor slippers, which you wear around the facility (not on the tatami through!);
- ③ and toilet slippers, which are only for use in the toilet area.

Baths (Onsen)

Japanese baths are the ultimate place to relax and wind down after a day's walk.

Hot springs are common in the area and baths featuring these mineral waters are called onsen.



How to Bathe

The very essence of the bathing routine is as below for both hot spring and communal baths.

- ① Take off clothes in change room
- ② Rinse or wash body
- ③ Soak in bath
- ④ Relax and enjoy!

Be observant. Watch (But don't stare!) the people around you so that you know what is going on.

Most places follow these general guidelines but some do differ slightly. The main thing is to remember to keep the bath water separate from the washing water, and be polite and courteous to other bathers.

NOTE: For a full guide to the Japanese bath visit the following page online.

LINK
www.tb-kumano.jp/en/onsen/how-to-take-a-japanese-bath/

Model Itineraries

Below are basic overviews of ways to walk the Kumano Kodo Iseji route from a shorter highlight trip to a multi-day trek.

Highlight Walks



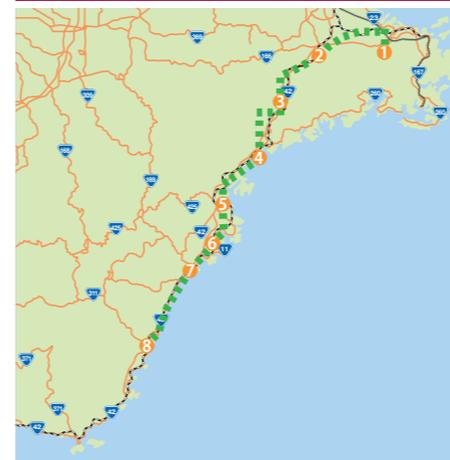
Ise City Highlight Walk

- Transfer to Ise Jingu Geku
- Walk to Ise Jingu Naiku (p.6~7, ~5km) ☒

Misesaka-toge Highlight Walk

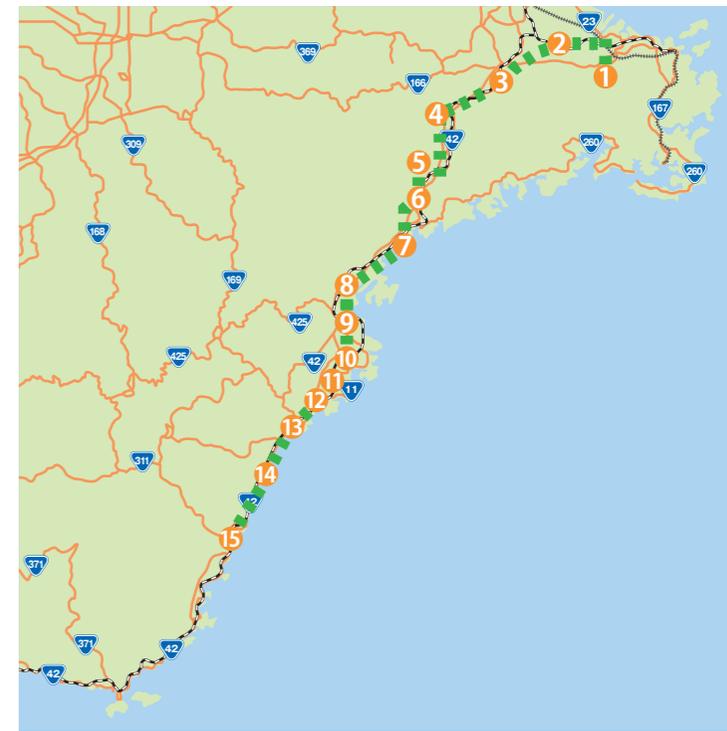
- Train to Misedani Sta.
- Walk to Takihara Sta. (p.12~13, ~9km) ☒

Iseji Advanced Complete Trek



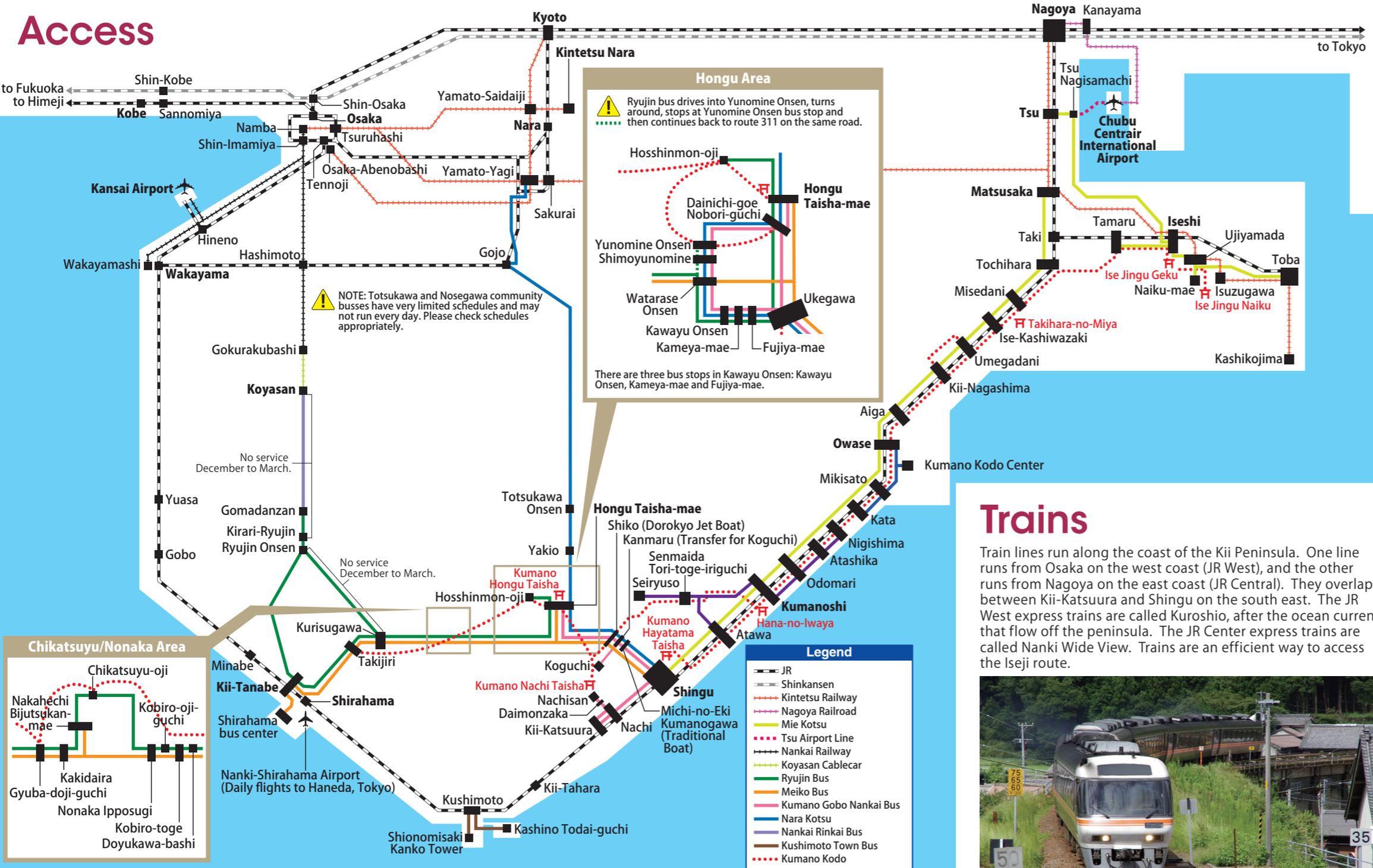
- Day 1:** ● Transfer to Ise Jingu Naiku, overnight ①
- Day 2:** ● Walk to Tochiyama (p.6~11, ~27km), overnight ②
- Day 3:** ● Walk to Aso (p.10~13, ~25km), overnight ③
- Day 4:** ● Walk to Furusato Onsen (p.12~15 and Central p.4~5, ~29km), overnight ④
- Day 5:** ● Walk to Owase (~20km), overnight ⑤
- Day 6:** ● Walk to Kata (~17km), overnight ⑥
- Day 7:** ● Walk to Central Kumano (~18km), overnight ⑦
- Day 8:** ● Walk to Shingu (~23km), overnight ⑧
- Day 9:** ● Transfer to next destination

Iseji Intermediate Complete Trek



- Day 1:** ● Transfer to Ise City, overnight ①
- Day 2:** ● Walk to Tamaru (p.6~7, ~12km), overnight ②
- Day 3:** ● Walk to Tochiyama (p.8~11, ~15km), overnight ③
- Day 4:** ● Walk to Misedani (p.10~13, ~13km), overnight ④
- Day 5:** ● Walk to Kashiwazaki (p.12~15, ~18km), overnight ⑤
- Day 6:** ● Walk to Ouchiyama (p.14~15, ~7km), overnight ⑥
- Day 7:** ● Walk to Furusato Onsen (p.14~15 and Central p.4~5, ~17km), overnight ⑦
- Day 8:** ● Walk to Aiga (~14km), overnight ⑧
- Day 9:** ● Walk to Owase (~6km), overnight ⑨
- Day 10:** ● Walk to Mikisato (~12km), overnight ⑩
- Day 11:** ● Walk to Kata (~5km), overnight ⑪
- Day 12:** ● Walk to Atashika (~10km), overnight ⑫
- Day 13:** ● Walk to Central Kumano (~8km), overnight ⑬
- Day 14:** ● Walk to Atawa (~12km), overnight ⑭
- Day 15:** ● Walk to Shingu (~11km), overnight ⑮
- Day 16:** ● Transfer to next destination

Access



Tickets

Tickets can be purchased at the Midori-no-Madoguchi counter at all major stations. An express train is the fastest way to travel to the area. For express trains two tickets are issued, a basic Fare Ticket and a Limited Express Ticket. Keep both tickets for the duration of the trip, as you will need them to exit the station on arrival.



JR Passes

Using transportation passes can be a convenient and reasonable way to get around the area. There are two regional JR passes that cover the Kii Peninsula: Kansai WIDE Area Pass, and Ise-Kumano-Wakayama Area Tourist Pass

NOTE: Not all bus lines are covered by these passes.

LINK: www.tb-kumano.jp/en/transport/#passes

Stations

Train stations serve as access to trailheads on the Iseji. Some are smaller with no permanent staff servicing only local trains, while others are larger where both local and express trains stop. It is best to check train times in advance and it is not a busy train line.

LINK: Train timetable search engines.

<http://www.tb-kumano.jp/en/transport/train/#search>

● Umegadani (Local) ● Kii-Nagashima (Local, Express)



Trains

Train lines run along the coast of the Kii Peninsula. One line runs from Osaka on the west coast (JR West), and the other runs from Nagoya on the east coast (JR Central). They overlap between Kii-Katsuura and Shingu on the south east. The JR West express trains are called Kuroshio, after the ocean current that flow off the peninsula. The JR Center express trains are called Nanki Wide View. Trains are an efficient way to access the Iseji route.



Local Trains

At unstaffed stations serviced by local trains, tickets can be paid for on the train with the driver who is stationed at the front of the first carriage near the entrance and exit. These smaller local trains are called "wan-man ワンマン" or "one-man train" as the only staff onboard is the driver.



Bus

Local Buses are the main form of public transport once you leave the coast and head into the mountains. Busses are limited (especially along the Kohechi), so it is best to plan ahead and check the timetables.

NOTE: Downloadable timetables are available online.

LINK: www.tb-kumano.jp/en/transport/bus/

How to Ride a Local Bus

Riding a local bus is easy once you learn the basic system as outlined below.



- ① Enter through rear door (or front door if only one)
- ② Take number ticket
- ③ Push button to inform driver that stop is wanted (it is also good practice to tell the driver where you want to get off when you board)
- ④ Match number ticket to the electronic fare chart at the front of the bus to determine fare (prices change according to distance travelled)
- ⑤ Change money if needed
- ⑥ Put money and ticket in fare box (exact fare)
- ⑦ Exit through front door

NOTE: Only 1000 yen bills can be changed for coins. So make sure that you have enough smaller bills before you get on the bus.

Useful Words & Phrases

- I would like to buy a one way express train ticket to Ise-shi station. (伊勢市駅までの特急切符を買いたいです)
- Reserved Seat (指定席)
- Platform (プラットフォーム)
- Station (駅)
- I would like to go to the Naiku-mae bus stop. (内宮前バス停までお願いします。)
- Where is the Kumano Kodo trailhead? (熊野古道登山口はどこですか?)
- Bus stop (バス停)
- Change money (両替)
- Bus fare (バス代)
- Non-Reserved Seat (自由席)
- Transfer (のりかえ)
- Transfer busses (バス乗り換え)
- Number ticket (整理券)

Car Rental

Travelling by car is an option to see and visit the sites with more freedom, as public transportation can be limited in the countryside.

There are Rent-a-Car companies conveniently located at major train stations with a variety of vehicles types and price plans to meet almost everybody's needs. It is also possible to rent the car at one station and return it at another to avoid backtracking to where you started.

	TOYOTA Rent a Car	ORIX Rent a Car	Nippon Rent-a-Car	JR Rent-A-Car	NISSAN Rent a Car	Times CAR RENTAL
①	○	○	○		○	○
②	○	○	○		○	○
③	○	○	○		○	○
④	○	○	○		○	○
⑤	○	○	○		○	○
⑥	○	○	○		○	○
⑦	○	○	○		○	○
⑧	○	○	○		○	○
⑨	○	○	○		○	○
⑩	○	○	○		○	○
⑪	○	○	○		○	○
⑫	○	○	○		○	○
⑬	○	○	○		○	○

- ① Chubu Airport ② Nagoya Sta. ③ Tsu Sta. ④ Matsusaka Sta.
 ⑤ Ise-shi Sta. ⑥ Shingu Sta. ⑦ Kii-Katsuura Sta. ⑧ Kii-Tanabe Sta.
 ⑨ Wakayama Sta. ⑩ Kansai Airport ⑪ Shin-Osaka Sta. ⑫ JR Nara Sta.
 ⑬ Kyoto Sta.

NOTE: If you plan to rent a car in Japan, make sure to have a valid Japanese or International Driver's License. Confirm that a Japanese translation is needed or not before you come.

Drive Guide



Route Guide

一生に一度はお伊勢さん
Head to Ise once in your life.

伊勢へ七度熊野へ三度
Seven times to Ise, three times to Kumano.

The Iseji is ~170 km long trail on the east coast of the Kii peninsula connecting Ise Jingu with the Kumano Sanzan and consists generally of north, central and south sections. To trek the full length can take one to two weeks, but many of the shorter passes can be enjoyed as shorter day hikes because trailheads are often located near train stations.

North | River Plains & Valleys

The ~70 km northern section begins at the Ise shrines and heads west through the fertile Miya-gawa River plain. This section is mostly flat on paved roads through habituated areas. As the mountains approach Meki-toge (a short pass) reconnects the route with the mighty Miya-gawa River. The trail follows the main road network upstream via the Uchiyama-gawa river valley (a tributary of the Miya-gawa) to its headwaters and the first major mountain passes: Nisaka-toge and Tsuzurato-toge.

Central | Inlets & Passes

Nisaka-toge and Tsuzurato-toge passes mark the beginning of the ~75 km central section, a series of passes (many lined with cobblestones) connecting small coastal fishing villages. It is the core area of Iseji's UNESCO World Heritage property and the most popular section for hikers. The mountainous, rocky coastline features dramatic inlets, sometimes with long finger like bays lined with scenic beaches. Small islands dot the coastline, like they are floating on the ocean waves.

South | Beaches & Rice Paddies

Near Kumano City the coastal mountains give way to the southern section consisting of two trails: the main coastal route (Hama Kaido) and a mountain route (Hongudo). The Hama Kaido is a ~25 km length of gravel beach called Shichirimihama to Kumano Hayatama Taisha, and the inland mountain trail Hongudo leads to Kumano Hongu Taisha via the impressive terraced rice paddies of Maruyama Senmaida.

Iseji North

Main Sanctuaries

Ise Jingu is one of the main Shinto shrines in Japan. The main sanctuaries are Naiku, the inner shrine, and Geku, the outer shrine. They are ~5 km from each other and traditionally connect via the Furuichi road.

HINT: Most people choose to stay a day before or after their walk to visit these sacred sites.

Rebuilding Ceremony

Shikinen Sengu is a fascinating ritual of renewal and rebirth. Every 20 years exact copies of the shrines are rebuilt on an adjacent plot of land and the holy mirror is solemnly moved in the quiet of the night.

It is a massive undertaking with a history of over 1,300 years—the first sengu being held in 690. The most recent was the 62nd reiteration completed in 2013.

The entire process is ritualized with 30 ceremonies taking place over eight years. Shrine pavilions, bridges, torii gateways—everything is remade including around 2,500 associated treasures and objects such as clothing, silk fabric, swords, saddles, and ritual implements.

Near entrance to Geku is the Sengu-kan Museum which included exhibitions about the Shikinen Sengu and a life-size reconstruction of the outer shrine's pavilion gable providing a closer look at the architecture techniques and size.



Furuichi

The pilgrimage road between the outer and inner shrines is called Furuichi and was well known as a pleasure quarter—the third largest in Japan at the time. The road was lined with “tea houses” and “tea pourers” a discreet euphemism for brothels and their mistresses. During the peak of Furuichi's history there were said to be 71 establishments with around 1000 women.

These parlors were not just for sexual pleasures, but also featured theaters for the traditional arts with singing, dancing, and kabuki. Specifically, the kabuki theaters were ranked as some of the best in the land. Pilgrimage and pleasures were an integral set of experiences for a journey to Ise. This area was destroyed during WWII and is now a residential neighborhood.

4 km Waymarkers

Between Ise Jingu to Kumano Hayatama Taisha there are wooden waymarkers every four kilometers which indicate the distance to either destination from that point. The starting post is in front of Geku on the sidewalk. These signs were erected by the Mie Prefecture government in 2009.



River Crossing

Two kilometers west of Geku the trail intersects with the sacred Miya-gawa River, an historical site for purification rites before worshipping at Geku and river crossing point. A free ferry service shuttled travelers back and forth until the railway (1897) and first bridge (1911) were built. Many teahouses and accommodations lined the banks. Because of the numerous willow trees, it was called Yanagi-no-Watashi. Further downstream was another crossing called Sakura-no-Watashi, after cherry trees. There are now over 1000 cherry trees and it is one of Japan's 100 famous cherry viewing sites.

The Miya-gawa is a large river, 91 km long with a watershed of 920 km². Its source is the upper reaches of the Odaigahara mountain range, some of the highest peaks on the Kii peninsula, which receive an enormous amount of rain—over 4800mm annually—making it one of the wettest places in Japan. It empties into Ise Bay.

Because of the high rainfall it is prone to flooding and subsequently it became one of the first rivers to have a flood bank built hundreds of years ago.



Cross-roads

The road passes through a semi-agricultural plain to Tamaru, an historic crossroads where the road to Kumano and the road to Ise meet. Here pilgrims would change into their white pilgrimage clothes to continue their journey south. Tamaru can therefore be considered the original starting point of the Kumano Kodo Iseji route.

Tamaru Castle remains

Tamaru castle was built in 1336 during the warring years of the Northern and Southern courts. Because of its proximity to the Ise shrines, it was the focus of many battles of forces looking to control the area, being burnt many times in the process.

During the Edo period Tamaru was a lively city. The castle was dismantled during the Meiji era at the end of the 19th century with a school now occupying the grounds. The foundation stones are still in good condition and because of its original hill-top style architecture it is designated as a historical asset.

Ishibutsu-an

The road passes by persimmon orchards before an intersection with Ishibutsu-an 石佛庵, a prayer site for pilgrims dating from 1805. The small shelter houses 33 Kannon (Buddhist goddess of mercy) images, the same as those of the Pilgrimage to the 33 Kannon of Western Japan 西国三十三所.

The statues were donated by people from across the country. An old poem recited by pilgrims past is written on the wall asking for safe guidance on the road to Kumano from Kannon.

Meki-toge Pass

Ancient stone signposts sporadically lead the way to Meki-toge—the first pass of Iseji. It is not a difficult walk, but it offers a total change of atmosphere from the more populated areas near Ise Jingu.

The paved road turns to gravel, and the gravel road to dirt trail. Ruts from old wagons are scarred into the bed rock. The pass is a narrow passage dug through the ridge line to the other side. Like all the other passes to the south, there once stood a teahouse at its peak. The trail on the other side opens into the bucolic Miya-gawa River valley lined with forested low mountains. This was the main road until a modern one was built in 1934.



Odai-cho

The name of village after Meki-toge is Odai-cho and the trail follows main or side roads for most of the ~20 km up the Miya-gawa River valley.

Tochihara

The road straightens and passes by a row of tea producers and well-trimmed rows of tea bushes. The fans are for keeping the air moving during the coldest time of the year, so frost does not form on the tea leaves. Tea is a famous product of the area.

Historically there were many lodges for pilgrims in and around the present day Tochihara train station, including Ryokan Okajimaya which is one of the only remaining establishments.

Bakamagari

As the terrain gets steeper and more rugged often the trail needs to twist and turn to follow the topography which is the case of Bakamagari 馬鹿曲 or "foolish turns". The construction of the railway disrupted the access so now the trail goes through a conduit under the road.

CAUTION: During high water times do not attempt to follow this part of the trail, stay on the paved road to detour around.

Once you are safely through the passage follow the Fudo-tani valley to pass by the remains of a teahouse. You will need to walk through the creek bed if the old wooden suspension bridge is out of order. Walk under the highway bridge to rejoin route 42.

Tennosan

Another side-road leads to a lovingly maintained wooden shelter with a collection of statues locally referred to as Tennosan. On the left is Koshinto and the right Yama-no-Kami.

Koshinsan

A Koshinto 庚申塔 is a monument or pillar often erected at the village entrance to protect it from epidemics and calamities. Koshin is a folk belief with Taoist origins dating back to the Heian period (794-1185). According to the ancient sexagenary calendar, every 60th day was Koshin day. It was believed that on the night of this day while sleeping, the Sanshi (three worms or entities) in the body would escape and ascend to report the sins of the person to the Celestial God, which would result in a shorter lifespan. To prevent this, believers would stay up all night, which developed into an important event of the faith.

Yama-no-Kami

Yama-no-Kami 山の神 or spirit of the mountain, is often considered a female deity and associated with fertility, fecundity, and life-giving forces. It is an ancient animistic belief and often phallic symbols are given as offerings or worshipped to appease this sometimes-impetuous force.

The Yama-no-Kami has a strong relationship with agriculture descending from the mountains to the fields in the spring and then returning to them in the fall after the harvest. There are many sites of veneration for Yama-no-Kami along the Kumano Kodo.

Brick Bridge

After Tenno-sama the trail descends sharply through a bamboo grove on a dirt trail to the creek bed below.

CAUTION: This section also passes through the riverbed, so during high water periods use the road to detour around this section.

From the base of the valley look up stream to see the ~17m long Kamize-bashi bridge. A rare example of an arched bridge built of brick constructed in 1871.

The Lord's Well

There is a short trail through the forest after crossing the train tracks named after a well that was frequented by the regional Feudal Lord on his falconry outings, therefore becoming known as Tonosama-ido, or the "Lord's Well".

Sada-toge Pass

The Iseji continues following the river on the main road or side roads passing through small settlements of homes. There is a brief inland section over the paved Sada-toge pass before reaching the Yabashira-jinja and junction to the Mise-no-Watashi crossing.

Sada-toge is considered the second pass after Meki-toge. There were two tea houses here that sold simple snacks for pilgrims.

Mise-no-Watashi Crossing

Historically pilgrims would head to the riverbank at the Yabashira-jinja shrine to cross the Miya-gawa river by boat. Present-day a local group of volunteers offers this service in more modern boats. Reservations are required. A specific time is needed to be set.

Odaicho Tourist Association

IMPORTANT: Boat reservations are needed at least 5 days or more in advance by telephone (Japanese Only).

TEL: 0598-84-1050

E-MAIL: info@web-odai.info

PRICE: Lowest price 2,500 yen (1~5 people) plus 500 yen/price



Funaki-bashi Bridge

For those that walk to the Misesaka-toge trailhead it is ~6 km loop upstream to cross the historic Funaki-bashi bridge, a 90 m span built in 1905, which offers dramatic views of the valley. It is registered as National Tangible Cultural Property.

Misesaka-toge

This 2 km trail passes over a small ridge line leading into the Ouchiyama-gawa River valley, a tributary of Miya-gawa. The forest is a plantation of cedar and cypress. At the peak is small stone statue of Jizo is tucked into a stone shelter from 1756.

Takihara-no-Miya

Takihara-no-Miya 瀧原宮 is the furthest of the main associated shrines of Ise Jingu. The layout resembles Naiku with a long shrine approach on a gravel path lined with trees. The purification site is also in a nearby creek and the buildings are reconstructed in accordance with the Sengu rite. It is easy to see the two grounds side-by-side that are alternatively used. Some historians hypothesize that Takihara-no-Miya could be the prototype of Naiku and its sanctuary.

Takihara-no-Miya to Umegadani Train Station

It is ~20 km from Takihara-no-Miya to Umegadani train station following main and sub-roads through a series of small settlements switching back and forth on either side of the river. There are no major passes on this section. Lovely traditional houses and small, picturesque local temples/shrines and sacred sites dot the way.

The train stations passed are Takihara 瀧原, Aso 阿曾, Ise-Kashiwazaki 伊勢柏崎, Ouchiyama 大内山, and Umegadani 梅ヶ谷. Only local trains stop at these unstaffed stations.

Ouchiyama Dairy

A curious yet favorite site for casual photographers is the Ouchiyama dairy 大内山牛乳 giant milk bottle statue with a smiling cow perilously perked on top. This local dairy makes milk, yogurt, etc. Their ice cream is a popular treat.



Umegadani Train Station

The Umegadani 梅ヶ谷 train station is near the junction of the Nisaka-toge and Tsuzurato-toge passes, the beginning of the UNESCO World Heritage registered sections of the Iseji and mark the divide between the historic Ise and Kishu (Kumano) domain. The station is a popular starting point for these walks.

KUMANO KODO



ISEJI (North)



ISEJI (Central)



ISEJI (South)



NAKAHECHI



KOHECHI



OHECHI

Download Maps
www.tb-kumano.jp/

