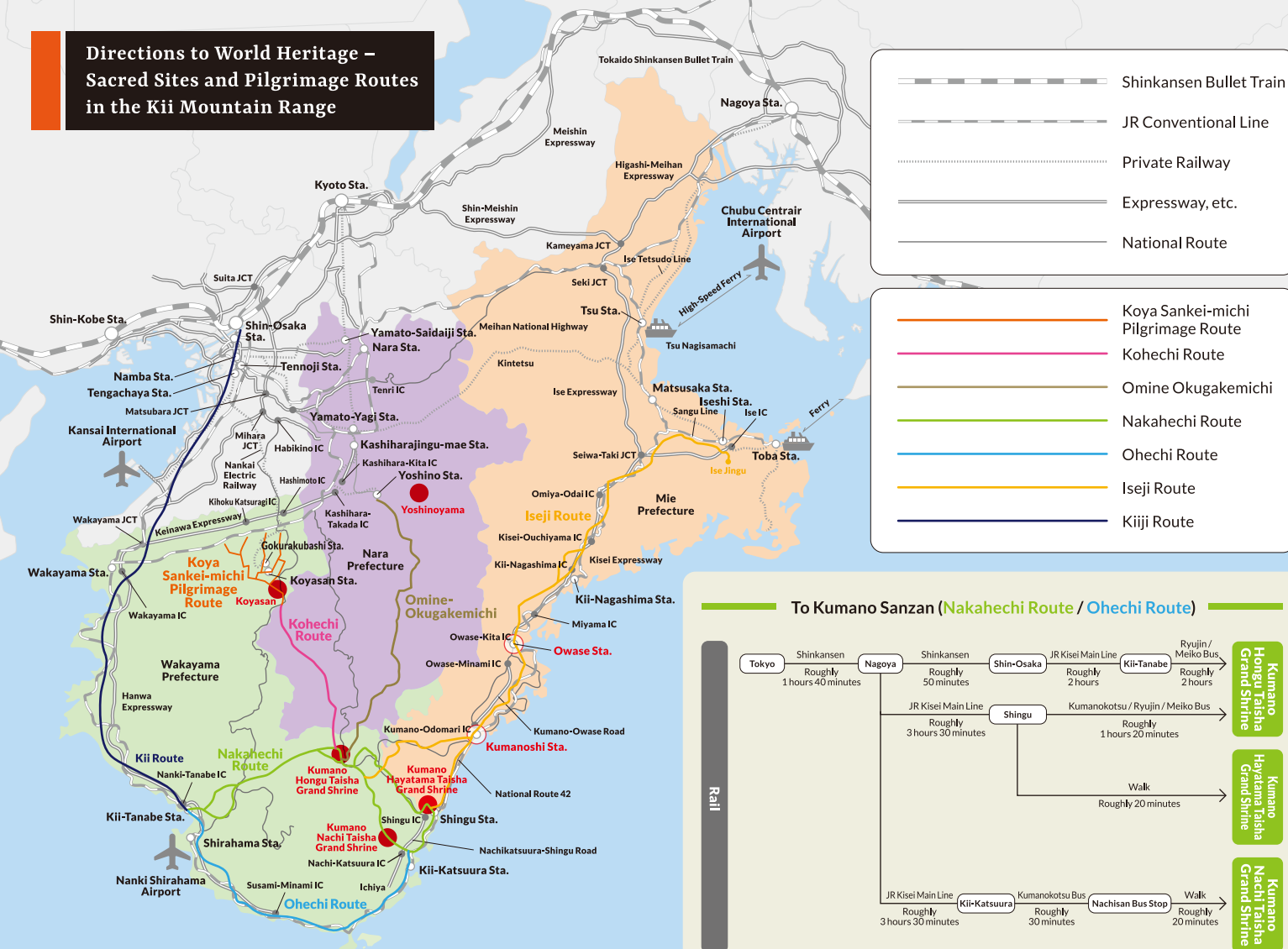
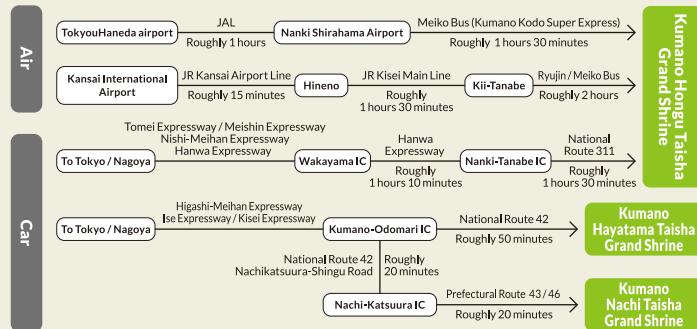
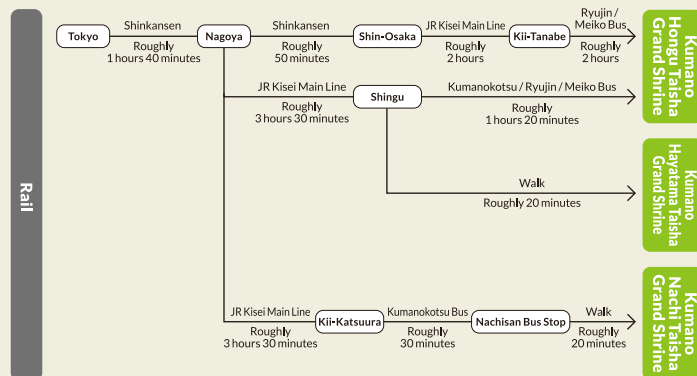


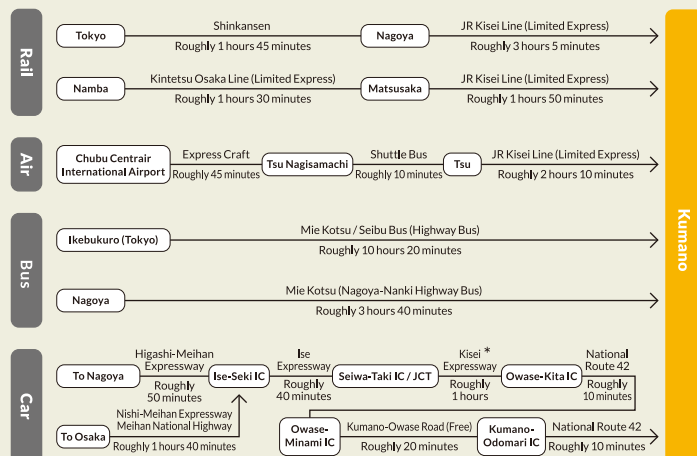
Directions to World Heritage –
Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes
in the Kii Mountain Range



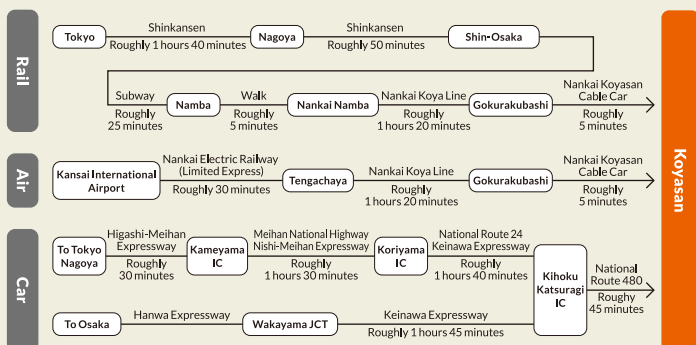
To Kumano Sanzan (Nakahechi Route / Ohechi Route)



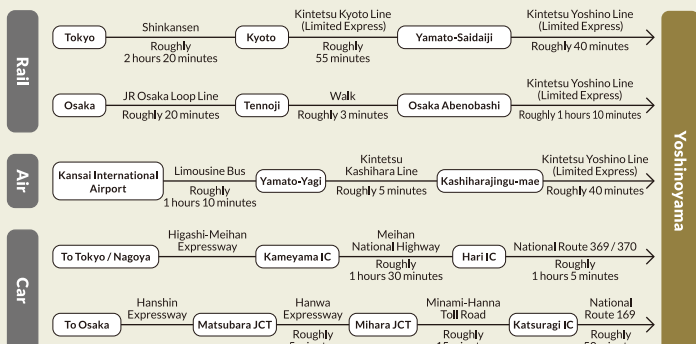
To Owase / Kumano (Iseji Route)



To Koyasan (Kohechi Route / Koya Sankei-michi Pilgrimage Route)



To Mt. Yoshino (Omine Okugakemichi)



To the sanctuary where
the magnificent stories are still alive.

World Heritage
Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes
in the Kii Mountain Range

Magose-toge Pass (Kumano Kodo Iseji Route)



Yoshinoyama



Nachi Waterfall



Shishi-iwa (Lion Rock) and
the Kumano Fireworks Festival

*This brochure details the World Heritage "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range" and attractive tourist destinations in the surrounding area.

*Kisei Expressway free from Kii-Nagashima IC through Owase-Kita IC

Contact



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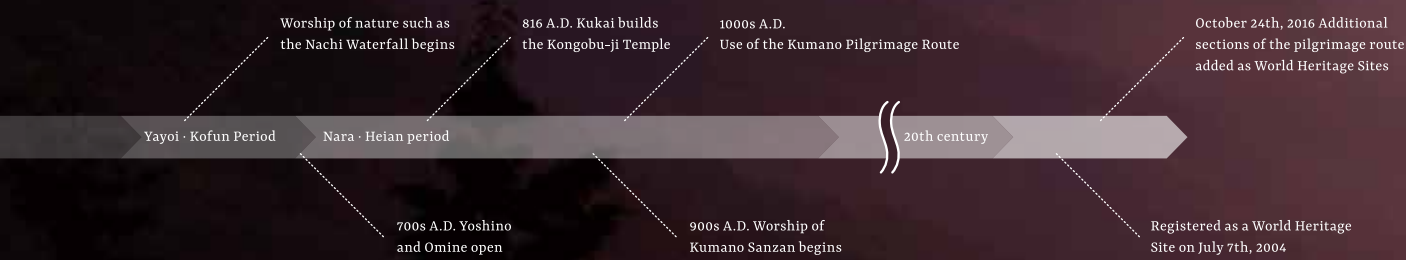
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Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range, a land woven from nature and time. These mountains are a tapestry of threads drawn from ancient times, forming an expansive heritage common to all humankind.

Thought to be a sacred area where Gods reside, the Kii Mountain Range spanning Japan's Mie, Nara, and Wakayama prefectures has been the site of mountain ascetic practices since ancient times. In the past, drawn in by its divine power, former emperors and empresses, aristocrats, and common people have visited the shrine alike. Standing in a mysterious landscape and filled with the spirit of life from deep within the forests, the destinations "Yoshino and Omine" "Kumano Sanzan" and "Koyasan" were common among all pilgrims on their "Pilgrimage Routes." To this day, the pilgrimage attracts people who wish to become closer to the gods and Buddha, to whatever degree they may achieve. A product of human life working on nature over time to form a unique history that endures to the present day, the "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range" seemingly transcend time and space.



The Kii Mountain Range was the birthplace of pantheistic nature worship in ancient Japan, and its mountain peaks have long been home to Japanese mountain asceticism. Many believe the region was deified in this manner due to its unique geography in which towering mountains meet the sea, or due to the awe-inspiring, forbidding vistas of its recurring mountains. These three sacred places, each formed against a background of nature worship deeply rooted in the unique landscape, climate, and natural world, and this pilgrimage route^{*1} which ties them together were labeled as a "Cultural Landscape"^{*2} World Heritage Site in 2004.

^{*1} Sections of the pilgrimage route have been included for world heritage site nomination, but not the full length of their expanses.
^{*2} Cultural Landscapes, as defined by "The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention," are places illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal.



^{*} Kumano Pilgrimage Route (Kumano Kodo) is a generic term for pilgrimage roads leading to Kumano Sanzan (Kumano Hongu Taisha Grand Shrine, Kumano Hayatama Taisha Grand Shrine, Kumano Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine, Nachisan Seiganto-ji Temple, Fudarakusan-ji Temple)



Everything Is Sacred: Spiritual Power Spot Experiences

Within the Kii Mountain Range, mountains spread in all directions and soar to heights between 1000 and 2000 meters, while plentiful rainfall exceeding 3000 mm each year nurtures forests with pristine rivers and luxuriant greenery. Such landscapes certainly provide an ideal domain for coming face to face with the gods, nature, and one's self. Even in the present day, one can still sense why the former practitioners of mountain asceticism chose this place as a sacred site. Yoshinoyama, Omimesan, Kumano Sanzan, Koyasan all have many places of note. Yoshino and Omime is located in the Nara's Yoshino District, with the space between Mt. Sanjogatake and Yoshinoyama generally referred to as "Kimpusen." To this day, Yoshino and Omime is worshipped as a holy mountain for mountain asceticism. Located in northeastern Wakayama Prefecture, Koyasan is surrounded by the ridges of the inner and outer Hachiyo range, making it a genuine holy land in the clouds. Selected as a meditation site by the Buddhist monk and scholar Kukai, it is the holy site of the Koyasan sect of Shingon Buddhism. Even now, the mountaintop is a veritable religious settlement, with more than 100 temples in close concentration. Kumano

Hyakken-gura



This is the only point with a perfect view from the Kogumotori-goe Pass on the Kumano Kodo Nakahechi Route. Climb the steep stone stairway past gentle ridges and through a cedar grove. You'll know you've arrived when you can see the statue of the Bodhisattva Jizo. The location gives you a panoramic view of the staggering mountain behind Jizo. You won't want to miss the opportunity to capture the morning fog and evening light in a photograph.

Koya-zaka Slope



This slop is a section of gentle mountain pass road that remains on the Kodo route between Kumano Hayatama Taisha Grand Shrine and Kumano Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine. It has a view of the sea, a rarity on the Kumano Kodo Nakahechi Route. Take in the staggering breadth of the Ojigahama Coast from afar as you listen to the roar of the Kumano-nada Sea.

Niutuhime-jinja Shrine



Located in a small basin surrounded by mountains on all sides, this shrine holds Niutuhime-no-Mikoto as its primary deity. Granted by the great monk Kukai during the opening of Koyasan, this located is also connected with Koyasan and has been known as its tutelary shrine since ancient days. The main hall of worship's Toro-mon Gate is designated an Important Cultural Property.

Nagai-zaka Slope



This stretch of mountain road belongs to Susami Town, and still retains its looks from ancient times more vividly than most parts of even the Kumano Kodo Ohechi Route. The road itself is dotted with sections enclosed by ubame oaks like a tunnel and overlooks points with views of the distant coast.

Chu-mon Gate



For many years after being burned in the late Edo period, the only remnant of this gate was its foundation. However, it was restored in 2015 to commemorate the 1200th year since its founding, bringing the Danjo Garan Sacred Temple Complex back to its appearance in olden days. The statues of the Shitenno Four Heavenly Kings greet visitors in aggressive form. Two – Bishamon-ten and Jikoku-ten – are restorations, while two – Zojo-ten and Komoku-ten – are new additions.

Tenkawa Daibenzaiten-sha Shrine



One of Japan's three greatest holy sites dedicated to Benzaiten (a syncretic Buddhist and Shinto goddess of concepts that flow) after Itsukushima and Chikubu Island. Renowned for its tutelary deity's connection to the arts, it is also popular as a spiritual power spot. The statues of Benzaiten in the main hall of worship are not normally viewable by the public; the central statue is only unveiled during festivals and rituals, while the statue on the right is unveiled only once every 60 years.

Yoshimizu-jinja Shrine



This shrine began as the priests' temple quarters of Kimpusan-ji Temple, but that changed with the legal division between Shinto and Buddhist worship implemented at the start of the Meiji era. Afterwards, it became a shrine dedicated to Japan's ancient emperor, Go-Daigo, 14th century samurai, Kusunoki Masashige, and the Bodhisattva Soshin Hoin. The location has historical ties to Toyotomi Hideyoshi and other significant figures, and holds numerous cultural properties in its collection.

Doro-kyo Gorge



The massive ravine that is known as Doro-kyo Gorge runs through Nara, Wakayama, and Mie Prefectures, as well as Yoshino-Kumano National Park, and is itself a National Special Place of Scenic Beauty. It has been known for its beautiful scenery for hundreds of

Sanzan is home to the three shrines of "Kumano Hongu Taisha Grand Shrine," "Kumano Hayatama Taisha Grand Shrine," and "Kumano Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine," as well as the two temples "Nachisan Seiganto-ji Temple" and "Fudarakusan-ji Temple." Even now, it still shows shades of the syncretism of Shinto and Buddhism practiced in the olden days. The "Kumano Sankei-michi Pilgrimage Route" and "Koya Sankei-michi Pilgrimage Route" are among the roads that lead to these holy sites, and the "Omine Okugake-michi Pilgrimage Route" is an example of the "Shugendo" paths traveled by mountain ascetics. The Kumano Sankei-michi Pilgrimage Route is commonly known as the "Kumano Kodo," and its sub-routes – the "Nakahechi Route," "Ohechi Route," "Kohechi Route," and "Iseji Route" connect their origin points to Kumano Sanzan. These routes have long been used as holy sites themselves: they are a product of nature, faith, and human effort that brought pilgrims to Kumano from all across Japan. "Holy Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range," a place where humans, Gods, and nature meet. We hope you enjoy this selection of Japan's best spiritual power spots.

Mitarai Valley



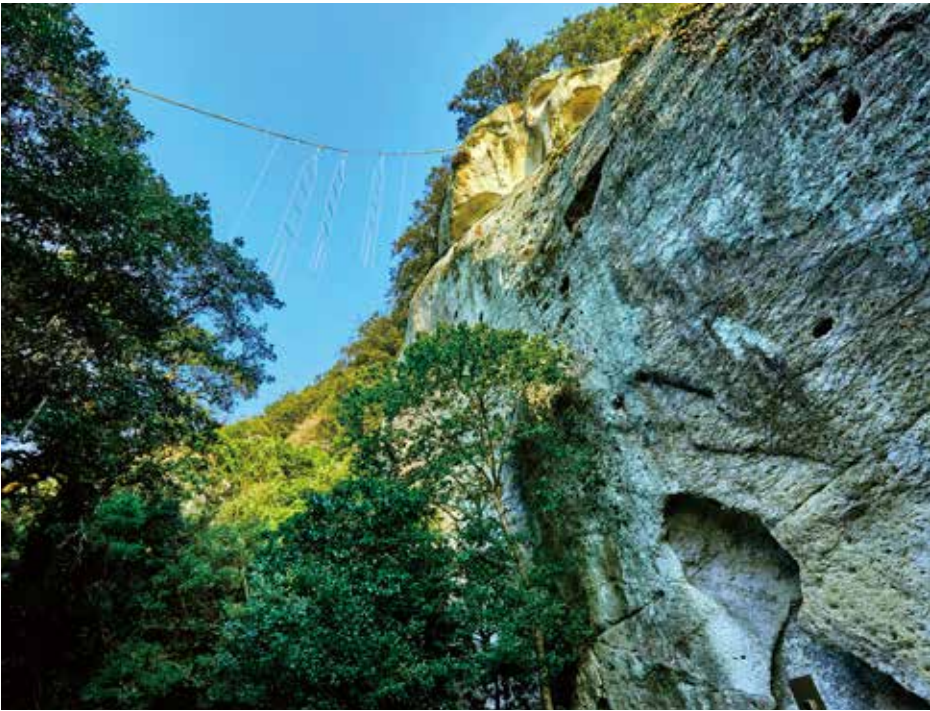
With its sparkling, emerald-green waters and waterfalls of all sizes, the Mitarai Valley is a scenic spot in Nara Prefecture's Tenkawa Village. Enjoy the seasonal scenery while taking a stroll on the footpath along the waters and its suspension bridges.

Yoshinoyama



Nara Prefecture's Yoshinoyama has been known as a great sight for cherry blossom viewing for ages, and the area is divided into Shimo-sembon, Naka-sembon, Kami-sembon, and Oku-sembon cherry blossom tree areas. It currently has 30,000 cherry trees and draws numerous patrons to view their blossoms in the spring.

Hana-no-Iwaya Shrine



Hana-no-Iwaya Shrine is located in Kumano City, and is the oldest shrine in Japan, even appearing in the "Nihon Shoki" ancient historical record. It primarily enshrines the deities Izanami-no-Mikoto and Kagutsuchi-no-Mikoto. It lacks the worship hall (building) that typical shrines feature, and venerates a 45-meter-tall massive rock (iwaya) as its object of worship. The shrine holds an "Otsunakake-shinji" ritual twice annually as its Rei-taisai Grand Festival. In this festival, the roughly 170-meter-long rope that marks the object of worship is transferred to a sacred tree on the shrine grounds. This ancient ritual has continued from time immemorial and still draws numerous visitors.

Kumano Fireworks Festival



Held annually on August 17th on the Shichiri-mihama Beach coastline, this event paints the sky with about 10,000 colorful explosions from self-detonating fireworks on the water and fireworks setups from Oniga-jo Rock. It has a long history, with its origins said to go back to "Hatsubon" first obon following the death of a family member summer festival rituals.

Tsuzurato-toge Pass



This pass takes its name from the length of its sharp, zig-zag (or "tsuzura") slope. This is also the first point at which pilgrims traveling from Ise to Kumano would lay eyes on Kumano' s sea. It is popular both for the beauty of the stone paths and of the view it provides.

Magose-toge Pass



Although Owase boasts one of the heaviest annual rainfall levels even within rainy Japan, the natural stone paths have protected this path against erosion and continue onward into gorgeous Owase hinoki wooded areas. This site lets you enjoy the characteristic Kumano Kodo beauty and atmosphere.

Mt. Binshiyama



When traveling from Magose-toge Pass to Mt. Binshiyama, you will come upon a point on the way known as "the elephant's back." With an appearance similar to its namesake, unusual rock formations drop off at an angle on each side and present a remarkable view for thrilling photographs.

A Oyunohara

The massive, cut-and-placed stone altar previously used in a massive temple complex is still visible from when the 12 sites of Kumano Gongen Shrine were so closely clustered as to take damage from floods in 1889. Legends say the deity of Kumano took the form of three crescents and descended to an earthy Japanese yew tree here.

B Kamikura-jinja Shrine

This shrine is located atop the sheer precipices of Mt. Kamikurayama, where the God of Kumano is said to have descended to earth. The main object of worship enshrined here is a massive boulder known as Gotobiki-iwa Rock. Accounts hold that this shrine is the "Ame-no-Iwate" mentioned in the ancient "Nihon Shoki" historical record of Japan, and that the stairway from the foothills to Gotobiki-iwa Rock was donated by historical leader Minamoto-no-Yoritomo.

C Nachi Waterfall

Mt. Nachisan is home to four mountain streams and a plethora of waterfalls known as the "Nachi 48 Falls." The Nachi Waterfall is one of these falls. It is the tallest waterfall in Japan at 133 meters in height, and the basin is a full 10 meters in depth. The massive, near-vertical falls are an awe-inspiring sight.

1 Kumano Hongu Taisha Grand Shrine



The general shrine for Kumano-jinja Shrines across Japan, it was relocated to its current position after flooding in 1889. The three worship hall towers that now stand over the shrine were the ones that could be saved from being washed away. A stone altar now stands at Oyunohara, revering the two towers that were lost. The three worship hall towers are designated Important Cultural Properties.

2 Kumano Hayatama Taisha Grand Shrine



Its beginnings lie in the year 128 CE, when a vivacious temple was first constructed to welcome the gods. It houses sacred national treasures over 1200 years old, some of them on display in the hall of sacred treasures. They say that ancient leader Taira-no-Shigemori planted the sacred tree, a Nagi conifer, on the grounds to celebrate the shrine's completion around the 12th century.

4 Nachisan Seiganto-ji Temple



This temple primarily reveres an image of the Bodhisattva of mercy, Kannon, that appeared in Nachi Waterfall, and was originally called "Nachi Nyorin-do Hall" as a Kannon temple. The current main temple hall was built by historical counselor Toyotomi Hidenaga on orders from Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Visitors to the shrine grounds gain a view of both Nachi Waterfall and Nachi Primeval Forest, the site where Kumagusu Minakata conducted significant research on slime molds.

3 Kumano Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine



This shrine is located on the slopes of Mt. Nachisan and reveres 13 sites, including the 12 sites of Kumano Gongen Shrine and Takinomiya. Climb the steep stone stairway to the temple, and the vermilion shrine hall will rise to greet you. Also known as "Isamiya" or "connecting palace," it is revered for its influence over ties between people and all sorts of wishes. The stunning view over Nachi Bay from the overlook point is a must-see.

Nara Prefecture

Mie Prefecture

Yoshino / Omine

Omine Okugakemichi

What is the Koya Sankei-michi Pilgrimage Route?

There are seven entrances into Koyasan, and all roads to Koyasan meet around those seven entrances. The "Koya Sankei-michi Choishi-michi Pilgrimage Route" was registered as World Heritage in 2004, with "Mitani-zaka Slope," "Kyo Osaka-michi Fudo-zaka Slope," the "Kuroko-michi Pilgrimage Route," and the "Nyonin-michi Pilgrimage Route" all additionally registered as World Heritage in 2016. The Choishi-michi Pilgrimage Route is a path said to have been forged by the revered monk Kukai and was the most heavily used route into the mountains during the ancient and medieval eras. Mitani-zaka Slope is a path that goes by Mitani in Katsuragi Town, Niusakadono-jinja Shrine, and Nutsuhime-jinja Shrine before joining with the Choishi-michi Pilgrimage Route. It is shorter than the Choishi-michi route, and has been in use since ancient times. The Kyo Osaka-michi Fudo-zaka Slope is a road toward Koyasan formed when three routes from Kyoto and Osaka converge at Kawachi-Nagano and pass through Hashimoto City. The Kuroko-michi Pilgrimage Route is believed to have been used by a large number of pilgrims from across Japan, and even historical ruler Hideyoshi himself. Meanwhile, the Nyonin-michi Pilgrimage Route connects the women's guest halls that stood at each entry to Koyasan in the era when entry was prohibited to women. The route encircles the city. The Koya Sankei-michi Pilgrimage Route is a path that has connected pilgrims arriving from every direction as they sought out holy sites. Each route has its own legend, as does each pilgrim who traveled it.

5 Jison-in Temple



This temple was built at the foot of Koyasan during the Heian era, within a government office built to oversee Koyasan's construction and administration. Jison-in Temple was also the site of Kukai's mother's residence, and a personal mausoleum was constructed in her honor after her passing. The temple also enshrined Miroku-bosatsu or the Maitreya Buddha at the same time, drawing a large number of female pilgrims and earning it the nickname "NyoninKoya" or "Women's Koya."

6 Niukanshobu-jinja Shrine



Formerly the traditional shrine to the regional tutelary deity within the temple grounds for Kongobu-ji Head Temple's manorholding, Niukanshobu-so Shrine. In time, it adopted the same tutelary deity as Nutsuhime-jinja Shrine and is said to be the shrine established by Kukai himself. Enshrined at the entryway to the Koyasan Pilgrimage Route Choishi-michi at the plateau atop the 119 stone steps from Jison-in Temple, Koyasan can be worshipped from afar from within the temple grounds.

D Konpon Daito Pagoda

Completed during the lifetime of revered historical monk Shinzen Daitoku, said to be the nephew of the monk Kukai. Located in the center of Hachiha-mine Cliff, most hold that the building's name "Konpon Daito" (fundamental grand tower) comes from its status as the symbol of esoteric Shingon Buddhism. The temple hall forms a mandala, in which the center depicts the Dainichinyorai or Mahavairocana Buddha in the heavenly Diamond Realm, while the four sides depict the four Buddhas of the earthly Womb Realm.

E Okuno-in

A Koyasan holy site that stands as an equal to the Danjo Garan Sacred Temple Complex. At the temple's heart lies a mausoleum, in which the revered monk Kukai continues his meditations even now. Over the roughly two kilometers of trail between Ichino-hashi Bridge and the mausoleum, visitors will observe about 300,000 gravestones crowding the landscape. These mark the resting places of future generations that modeled their lives on Kukai's wisdom. Mixed in among the cedars, they are a profoundly impactful sight.

7 Dai-mon Gate



The general gate to the entirety of the mountain, located at the southwestern edge of Koyasan. At the time, it was said to begin from a torii shrine gate located a distance of about 500-600 meters or 5-6 Choishi stones down Tsuzuraori-dani Valley from its current location. It is said to have been converted to a gate like the present one in the mid-12th century, when two fierce Kongorikishi warrior statues were enshrined on each side.

8 Kongobu-ji Head Temple

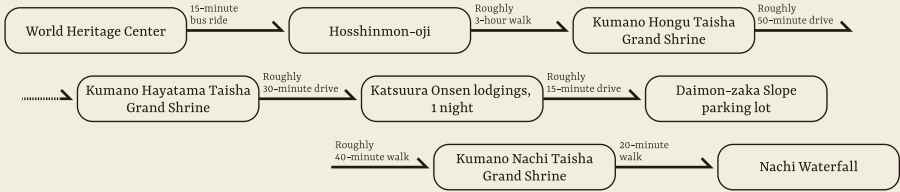


The head temple for the Koyasan sect of Shingon Buddhism. It is home to numerous stunning sights, including one of the largest rock gardens in Japan, the "Banryu-tei Garden" . The name Kongobu-ji was originally bestowed by Kukai, and was originally intended to refer to all of Koyasan.

Recommended Route

Kumano Kodo Nakahechi Route

This route takes you past popular destinations on the Sankei-michi and Nakahechi Routes. While offering a wide variety of scenery, it is a relatively gentle path from Hosshinmon-oji to Kumano Hongu Taisha Grand Shrine. It also takes you past Kumano Hayatama Taisha Grand Shrine, and to a night of rest at Katsuura Onsen. Finally, stroll through the cedar groves and stone stairways of the popular Daimon-zaka Slope, then make your way to Nachi Waterfall.



Local Cuisines



Shojin-ryori Buddhist Vegetarian Cuisine

Shojin-ryori is a type of vegetarian cuisine based on Buddhist dietary strictures. There are also restaurants available that serve classic Koyasan dishes like Koya-dofu dried tofu, kinzanji wasabi, and fresh, seasonal vegetables in casual and affordable settings.



Mehari-zushi

A traditional comfort food in the Kumano and Yoshino regions, mehari-zushi is made by wrapping a ball of barley and rice or plain rice in a takana leaf (a variety of mustard green). Some say the dish gets its name from the way you go wide-eyed ("mehari") from deliciousness when eating it.

Local Specialties



Goma-dofu Sesame Tofu

A shojin-ryori vegetarian dish made by peeling and pulping sesame seeds before solidifying the mixture with a combination of water and kudzu starch. Savor the flavor at its most authentic at Koyasan.



Usukawa-manju Buns

The town of Kushimoto, Wakayama produces its signature usukawa-manju buns with a thin layer of white dough around refined, perfectly semi-sweet "an" red bean paste. They make the perfect souvenir item to bring back from your Kumano pilgrimage.

Recommended Onsen



Kumano Hongu Onsen-kyo/ Katsuura Onsen / Shirahama Onsen

The Kii Peninsula is a geographical rarity – despite its lack of volcanos, it has numerous onsen. It offers a plenitude of renowned hot spring baths, from the "Kumano Hongu Onsen-kyo" that soothed weary pilgrims in ancient times, to Katsuura Onsen, bubbling by the sea near Nachisan. That list even includes Shirahama Onsen, one of Japan's three oldest.

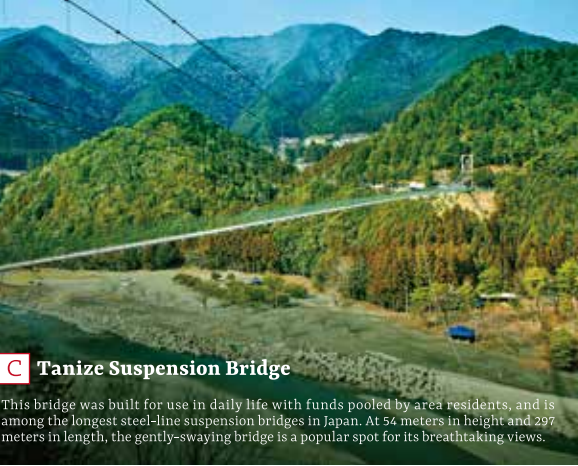
A **Hatenashi Settlement**

Hatenashi Settlement retains the ambience of its ancient days and commands a stunningly beautiful view of the Haténashi mountain range that has earned it the nickname “village in the sky.” It has even been selected as one of Japan’s 100 most outstanding small towns. Haténashi-toge Pass is located beyond the settlement. At 1,114 meters in elevation, it is the greatest challenge to pilgrims on the Kohechi route.



B **Tenguki-toge Pass Sea of Clouds**

Located in Nosegawa Village, Yoshino District, the Tenguki-toge Pass region is home to an absolutely stunning sea of clouds. It is particularly striking from March through April and from October through November, producing an otherworldly vista.



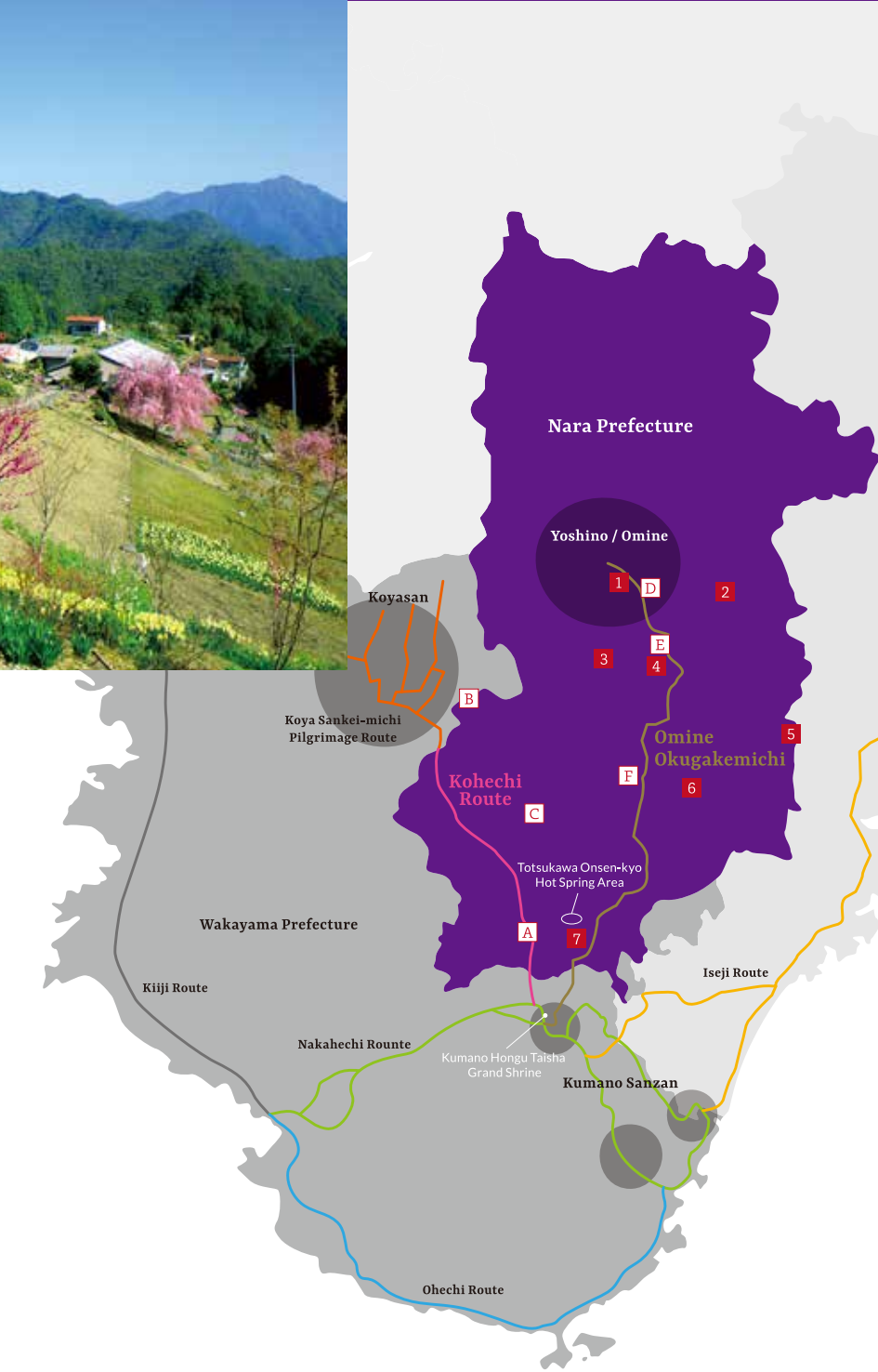
C **Tanize Suspension Bridge**

This bridge was built for use in daily life with funds pooled by area residents, and is among the longest steel-line suspension bridges in Japan. At 54 meters in height and 297 meters in length, the gently-swaying bridge is a popular spot for its breathtaking views.



What is the Kumano Kodo Kohechi Route?

Kohechi: one of a few pilgrimage routes to Kumano Sanzan. The route runs north to south through the Kii Mountain Range, dividing it in two and providing the shortest path between Koyasan and Kumano Hongu Taisha Grand Shrine. However, it is also a rugged path and raw, unadulterated mountain road, crossing 1,000-meter high passes like Obako-toge Pass and Haténashi-toge Pass. In the past, it was such a difficult route that it qualified as a trial along the pilgrimage. Pass through Nosegawa and Totsukawa Villages after leaving Koyasan, then make it over Haténashi-toge Pass and you will arrive in the historical Kii Province. By the time the path joins Nakahechi, the pilgrims of old would breathe a sigh of relief at completing the difficult journey. The common folk also adored the Kohechi route for its brevity, as it could be traversed over about three nights. Even now, the path reminds us that the beauty and cruelty of nature are two sides of the same coin.



What is the Omine Okugakemichi?

Shugendo is a uniquely Japanese, syncretic religion based in ancient mountaintop worship. It incorporates elements of Buddhism, Taoism, Onmyodo mysticism, and other exotic faiths into its fusion with Shinto. Shugendo’s tenets are believed to have been intended to inculcate “the tolerance to accept others harmoniously, to hold gratitude toward all things, and to love peace unwaveringly.” The Omine Okugakemichi served to carry practitioners of Shugendo the roughly 86.6 kilometers from Yoshino (Yanagi no Watashi crossing) to Kumano (Hongu Taisha Grand Shrine Shoselden Hall). It passes by 75 holy sites known as Nabiki, which were worshipped at the time.

Mie Prefecture



1 Kimpusen-ji Temple Zao-do Hall
Founded by En-no-Gyoja (the founder of Japanese mountain asceticism). Kimpusen-ji Temple’s main Zao-do hall is the second-largest ancient wooden Buddhist temple hall in the world after Todai-ji Temple’s grand hall in Nara. The principal objects of worship enshrined here are three statues of the deity Zao Gongen, each seven meters tall. Held behind one of the largest structures of its sort in Japan, these statues are not normally open to the public.



2 Mifune Falls
Located in Kawakami Village in Nara Prefecture, Mifune Falls has two faces. A two-tiered waterfall roughly 50 meters in height, it is a beautiful, lively sight in the summer, and a stunning plume of ice in the winter.



3 Dorogawa Onsen-kyo
Located on a plateau roughly 820 meters in elevation, this onsen resort village has a strangely nostalgic atmosphere. The streets are lined with historic ryokan inns and minshuku pensions alongside souvenir shops, and the town is lively with mountain ascetics and pilgrims.



4 Ohminesan-ji Temple
A principal dojo training hall for Shugendo mountain ascetics, located atop the Sanjogatake peak of Ohminesan. Each year, the temple holds a gate opening ceremony on May 3rd and a closing ceremony on September 23rd. Note that this is a traditional facility, and women are still not allowed to this day.



5 Odaigahara Daijagura ridge
Designated as Yoshino-Kumano National Park, Odaigahara is one of the few places in Japan to boast an annual precipitation level of 3,500 mm. The area welcomes visitors with a wealth of natural features born from this environment, beginning with the Daijagura ridge hill itself and including numerous beautiful ravines, waterfalls, and forested groves.

D **Yoshino Mikumari-jinja Shrine Komorinomiya**

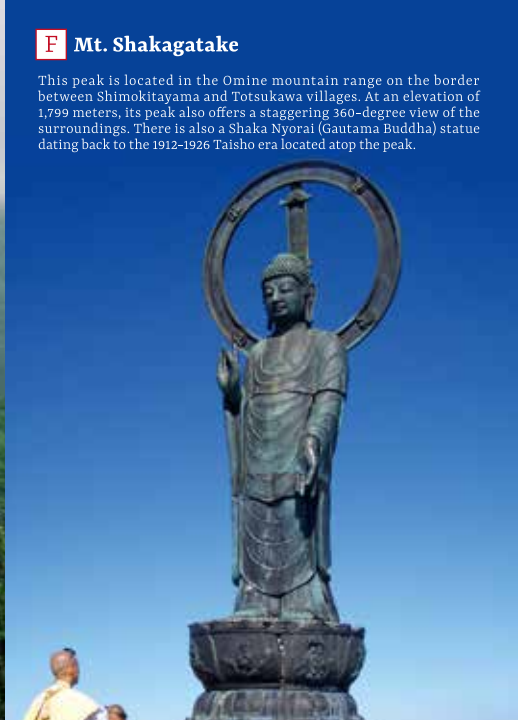
Although the shrine primarily deifies the deity of water, Amenomikumari-no-Okami, it is also known as Komorinomiya. Under that name, it also enshrines the goddesses Tamayorihime-no-Mikoto and six subordinate deities. Worshipers come to the shrine to pray for fertility, safe births, and divine protection for children. In spring, beautiful shidare-zakura cherry blossoms flower on the shrine grounds.



E **Nishi-no-Nozoki**

This site, perched at a dizzying height atop a sheer precipice, is where practitioners of Shugendo used to peer into the Buddha’s world. Regular visitors may also take the chance to strap both shoulders in and lean out into the abyss.

Photo: Terufusa Namoto



F **Mt. Shakagatake**

This peak is located in the Omine mountain range on the border between Shimokitayama and Totsukawa villages. At an elevation of 1,799 meters, its peak also offers a staggering 360-degree view of the surroundings. There is also a Shaka Nyorai (Gautama Buddha) statue dating back to the 1912–1926 Taisho era located atop the peak.



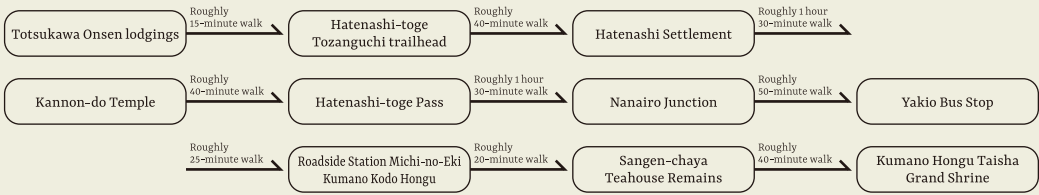
G **Tamakijinja Shrine**

Located near the peak of Mt. Takakisan, this shrine’s elevation is 1,076 meters at its position on the southern edge of the Omine mountain range. Used as a training hall for Shugendo asceticism in the Kumano and Omine area since ancient times, the shrine office has been designated a National Tangible Cultural Heritage. It brims with sacred energy and refined culture, and is a renowned power spot.

Recommended 1-day pilgrimage

Kumano Kodo Kohechi Route Haténashi-goe path

Its starting point is easily accessible, making this a popular route. With a rough pass at an elevation of over 1000 meters, it’s best for intermediate-level travelers. There’s no turning back once you’ve set out on the course, either, so be sure to prepare fully and plan on a pace that won’t strain you.



Local Cuisines



Kaki-no-Ha-Zushi (sushi wrapped in persimmon leaves)
This variety of sushi is made by placing slices of fish like mackerel or salmon atop vinegared sushi rice and wrapping it in persimmon leaves. It is a comfort food in Wakayama and Nara prefectures. The persimmon leaves are said to have antibacterial properties.



Jibie (Botan Nabe Hot Pot)

Japan’s jibie (“gibier” in French or “game”) cuisine most typically includes botan nabe dishes made with wild boar and seasoned with miso. The flavor of the wild boar, arranged into the shape of a flower, shines in this dish.



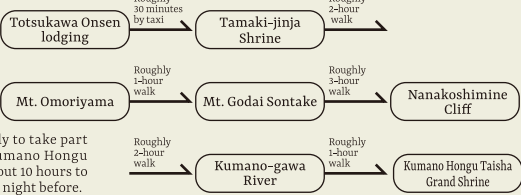
Amago Salmon

The region’s beautiful rivers – such as the Yoshino-gawa River – are a treasure trove of freshwater fish. Amago salmon is a delicious dish and said to be the queen of all river fish. They’re even better when you catch and cook one yourself.

Recommended 1-day pilgrimage

Omine Okugakemichi First-stage Hike Course

The Omine Okugakemichi is famously known as the most difficult route, and the full course generally takes 5 – 6 days to complete. It is comparatively beginner-friendly to take part of the course from Tamaki-jinja Shrine to Kumano Hongu Taisha Grand Shrine. Even this course takes about 10 hours to complete, so we recommend staying nearby the night before.



Local Specialties



Yoshino Hon-Kudzu Starch

Only 100%-refined, good-quality starch that resists mixing even within the plant is labelled as hon-kudzu. It is used for porridges and gruels, Japanese confectionary, and adding creamy texture to Japanese dishes.



Yubeshi Candies

These candies have a simple, rustic flavor produced by removing the flesh from yuzu citrus, loading the skin with sesame, miso, buckwheat flour, and other ingredients, then steaming and drying. It’s a type of preserved food with a long history in Totsukawa.



Daranisukegan Remedies

Daranisuke is a beloved Japanese folk stomach remedy used since ancient times and said to be the forefather of traditional medicine. Whether used as a go-to-home remedy or as a souvenir, daranisuke is produced in the Yoshinoyama and Dorogawa Onsen area.



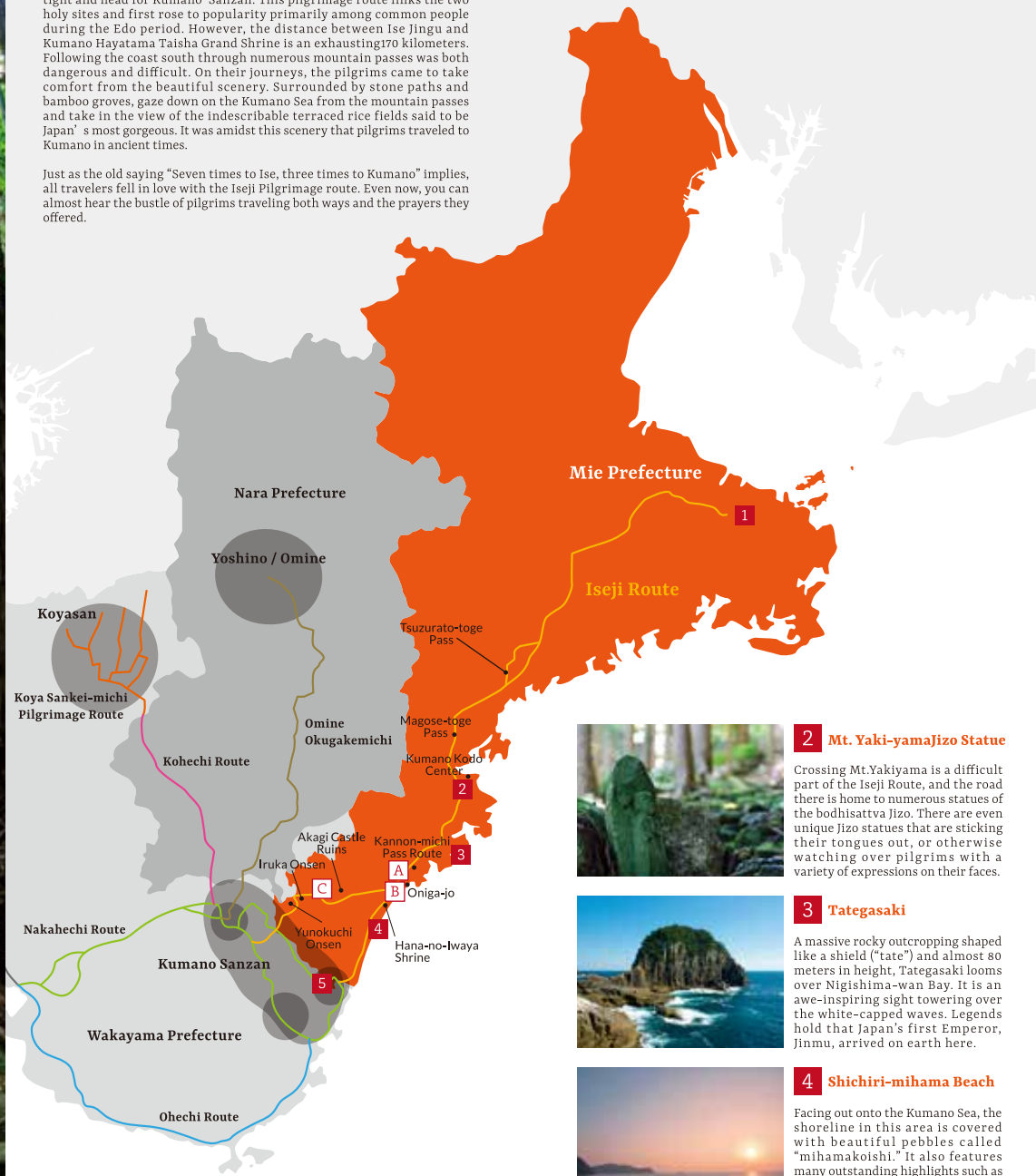
A Matsumoto-toge Pass

Connecting Odomari in Kumano City with Kinomoto, this pass soothes travelers with its magnificent bamboo groves and stone paths. There is a gazebo with a view of the surroundings located along the way, providing a view of Shichiri-mihama Beach, Japan's longest gravel beach.

What is the Iseji Route?

After finishing worship at Ise, travelers in the past would pull their cloaks tight and head for Kumano Sanzan. This pilgrimage route links the two holy sites and first rose to popularity primarily among common people during the Edo period. However, the distance between Ise Jingu and Kumano Hayatama Taisha Grand Shrine is an exhausting 170 kilometers. Following the coast south through numerous mountain passes was both dangerous and difficult. On their journeys, the pilgrims came to take comfort from the beautiful scenery. Surrounded by stone paths and bamboo groves, gaze down on the Kumano Sea from the mountain passes and take in the view of the indescribable terraced rice fields said to be Japan's most gorgeous. It was amidst this scenery that pilgrims traveled to Kumano in ancient times.

Just as the old saying "Seven times to Ise, three times to Kumano" implies, all travelers fell in love with the Iseji Pilgrimage route. Even now, you can almost hear the bustle of pilgrims traveling both ways and the prayers they offered.



1 Ise Jingu

Commonly called "O-Ise-san," this shrine is properly titled "Jingu" as an imperial-linked shrine. Broadly divided into an inner and outer shrine, Ise includes 125 auxiliary shrines. It has seen countless pilgrims from all across Japan since ancient times.



2 Mt. Yaki-yama Jizo Statue

Crossing Mt. Yakiyama is a difficult part of the Iseji Route, and the road there is home to numerous statues of the bodhisattva Jizo. There are even unique Jizo statues that are sticking their tongues out, or otherwise watching over pilgrims with a variety of expressions on their faces.



3 Tategasaki

A massive rocky outcropping shaped like a shield ("tate") and almost 80 meters in height, Tategasaki looms over Nigishima-wan Bay. It is an awe-inspiring sight towering over the white-capped waves. Legends hold that Japan's first Emperor, Jinmu, arrived on earth here.



4 Shichiri-mihama Beach

Facing out onto the Kumano Sea, the shoreline in this area is covered with beautiful pebbles called "mihamakoishi." It also features many outstanding highlights such as the Oniga-jo and Shishi-iwa (Lion Rock). It is renowned as a site where loggerhead sea turtles come ashore.



5 Sandanbo Riverboat

A past method of transit on the Kumano-gawa River that was also known as the "River Pilgrimage Route," it has been registered as World Heritage. The Sandanbo allows you to experience river ferries as they existed in ancient times when they were a critical part of life, and carried pilgrims to their destinations.



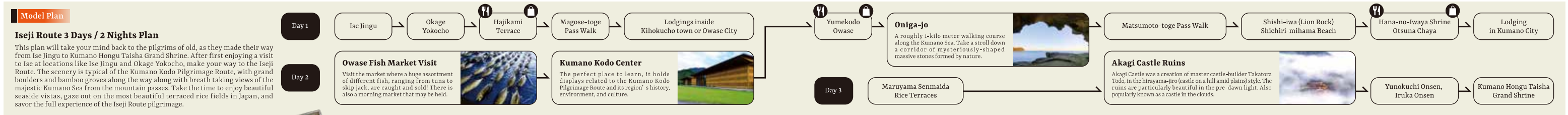
B Shishi-iwa (Lion Rock)

Located on Shichiri-mihama Beach, this rocky outcropping was shaped into a natural work of art by eroding waves. It is fondly regarded as the koma-inu symbolic guard dog of Oma-jinja Shrine.



C Maruyama Senmaida Rice Terraces

The Maruyama Senmaida Rice Terraces are said to be the most beautiful in Japan, with endless rows of layered rice paddies built into the mountain's face. The local residents continuously maintain and preserve the 1,340 paddies.



Local Cuisines

Shrimp and Prawn Assortment

With its recurring, intricate rias coastline and waters fed by the Kuroshio (Japan) Current, the Kumano Sea is a perfect fishing area. Travelers bring freshly-caught spiny lobster, fan lobster, squat lobster, and more from the coastal waters for you to enjoy.

Kumano Kodo Yakuso Herbal Bento Lunch / Sanma Sushi

We recommend local cuisine for your lunches while hiking on the Kumano Kodo, such as herbal bento lunches packed with nutrition from the mountains and the sea, or sanma (Pacific saury) sushi.

Watari-kaki Oysters

Raised in brackish lake water, watari-kaki oysters are distinct in their sweet flavor and lack of unpleasant aftertaste. They're delicious both raw and cooked, although we do recommend them with olive oil.

Local Specialties

Owase Wappa Bento Boxes

Owase Wappa boxes are hand-made using excellent Owase cypress. You can feel the warmth and affection in this traditionally-crafted masterpiece.

Nachi Guroishi Stones

Nachi Guroishi Stones can only be found in Kumano City, and they are popular in accessories like earrings, pendants, and similar items. They also make great inkstones, or board game pieces for the game Go.

Ichigi Cotton

Ichigi cotton is so soft and readily breathable that it can easily be woven into threads so fine they break when pulled. Popular as a material for cushions, azuma-bukuro folded tote bags, book covers, charms, and more.