KUMANO KODO
Japan’s sacred pilgrimage walk
DESTINATION GUIDE
Kumano Kodo Trail Description
(Note: Hours of walking are approximate).

**Stage 1**: Takijiri-oji to Tsugizakura-oji
18km, 7–9 hours walking
Starts with a 4km upward climb through the forest, then you head further into the mountains. Some descents and short climbs, including a cobbled path and stone staircase.

**Stage 2**: Tsugizakura-oji to Kumano Hongu
21–24km, 7–9 hours walking
Many forest paths and some mountain top villages. A number of passes to be climbed.

**Stage 3**: Hongu Area to Koguchi
13km, 5–7 hours walking
Starts with a fairly gentle trek, mostly in the forested mountains with some ridge-walking sections. The forest track continues to rise and fall, sometimes gradual, sometimes steep.

**Stage 4**: Koguchi to Kumano Nachi Taisha
14.5km, 6–8 hours walking
One of the toughest sections, starting with a 2½-hour (5km) climb to 868m, the highest point of the walk. The path continues through forest and along ridges, ascending and descending. The last 1km is a steep descent into Nachisan.

Japan’s ancient Kumano Kodo trails are nestled in the verdant mountains of the southern part of the beautiful Kii Peninsula, just south of Osaka. This lush and rugged area has been considered the abode of the gods and worshipped for centuries.

The sacred Nakashechi pilgrimage route is the most popular and accessible of the Kumano Kodo routes and the most sacred walk in Japan, worshipped as a place of rebirth.

The 68km trail offers splendid self-guided walking through a mountainous and sparsely populated part of the Japanese mainland. It starts from Takijiri on the western coast of the Kii Peninsula and works its way east across the mountains towards the Kumano grand shrines at Hongu and then Nachisan.

This demanding trek offers a rewarding physical challenge. The rugged, forested mountains, quiet rural valleys, rivers and waterfalls provide a spectacular backdrop for walkers. The seasonal contrasts of cherry blossom in the spring and rich autumn foliage inject wonderful colour. The walk offers a chance to take a break from your everyday routine and transition to a spiritual area of Japan, reflected by the historic torii gates along the trail.

The views and little stops along the way make the Kumano Kodo one of the best treks on the planet. It is a glorious march that includes hot spring retreats, delicious local food, traditional Japanese-style guesthouse lodgings in small remote villages, and rich cultural insight into a relatively unexplored part of Japan.

We love sharing our Kumano Kodo experiences with our clients. Whether it’s finding the best ramen in Kyoto or a beautiful onsen along the trail, our knowledge of the trek will help you create a wonderful, memorable experience.

On this ancient spiritual trail you can’t help but feel the mystical energy and will return rejuvenated and reinvigorated.

Some of our clients even combine the Kumano Kodo with the delightful Nakasendo Way, an easier route through the mountains of central Japan.

Call us today to find out more.

Chris & Mark
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www.kumanokodo.com.au

See the website for a full list of trips and itineraries rawtravel.com/destinations/kumano-kodo/
KUMANO KODO: QUICK LOOK

Getting there
Train from Kyoto or Osaka (~3 hours) or from Tokyo (~5 hours) to Kii-Tanabe station then a short bus ride (~40 minutes) on your first trekking day to Takijiri-oji, the traditional gateway to the remote Kumano mountains.

Difficulty
Challenging to strenuous hiking, best suited to active walkers.

Length
Allow 7 days in total: 4 to 5 days of walking (for the full route), a rest day and arrival/departure days. Our team can adapt some of the walking days to suit your timeframe and ability so that the trip matches your desired length.

The route
From Takijiri-oji on the western coast of the Kii Peninsula, the trail works its way east across the mountains towards the Kumano grand shrines at Hongu and then Nachisan.

Total distance
68km

Daily distances
From 13km to 24km depending on overnight options chosen and number of days walked. Expect 6 to 8 hours of daily walking on the longer trekking days.

Signs/waymarkers
The Kumano Kodo trail is extremely well marked with wooden signs. There are waymarkers every 500m as well as regular signs indicating directions and distances.

High point
868m on the Ogumatori-goe section (Koguchi to Kumano Nachi Taisha).

Maps
Nakahechi Route

www.kumanokodo.com.au

Disclaimer:
The information in this Destination Guide has been compiled with care and is provided in good faith. However, it is subject to change and does not form part of the contract between the client and RAW Travel.
WE LOVED OUR TIME ON THE TRAILS AND IN THE GUESTHOUSES. THIS WAS ONE OF THE MOST AMAZING WALKS WE HAVE DONE AND A HIGHLIGHT OF OUR WORLD TOUR!

– Jill & Zachary Stafford, USA
WHY YOU’LL LOVE THIS WALK

✓ **History**: The Kumano Kodo is one of only two UNESCO World Heritage pilgrimage routes globally. Its history stretches back over 1000 years when the emperors would undertake a strict and challenging journey to purify the mind, body and soul.

✓ **Ryokan & Minshuku**: Stay in traditional, family-run guesthouses: character, charm and friendly hosts.

✓ **Food**: A highlight of walking the Kumano Kodo! Japanese food is refined, elegant, pure and delicate: raw fish, cooked local fish, tempura, miso, rice (of course), pickled vegetables, delicious hotpots, soups and the local speciality, the alkalisising umeboshi plum.

✓ **Quirky**: Experience a unique, respectful and delightfully unusual culture. Yukatas, multi-function toilets, bento boxes, green tea KitKats and more.

✓ **Onsen**: A cherished Japanese ritual; after a day of trekking through bamboo groves and mossy Japanese forests, soothe your muscles (and spirit) in a hot spring.

✓ **Tranquility and serenity**: Innumerable shrines can be found along this pilgrimage route and are wonderful places for rest, reflection, purification rites and prayers. The peacefulness of the trail is the main reason people love it so much. Switch off from life’s routines and switch on to the peace and tranquility of the forest.

✓ **Nachi-no-Otaki**: The tallest waterfall in Japan (133m): a fitting climax to a journey first undertaken by emperors and aristocrats seeking spiritual purification.

✓ **Physical challenge**: Completing the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage trail is an immensely rewarding achievement.

trip go smoothly – everything from where to catch your train to cultural tips and pointers. You deal with a reputable and experienced Australian operator who has the contacts to book those remote guesthouses in the forest.

**Why people choose us…**

RAW is a boutique Australian tour operator with expert first-hand knowledge of the Kumano Kodo and a local contact in Japan to provide assistance:

• We pre-book your accommodation, transport, meals and luggage transfers; all you carry is your daypack.

• You stay in great local accommodation in traditional ryokans and atmospheric minshukus, with friendly hosts and soothing onsens.

• Most meals are included in your trip costs and feature locally authentic Japanese cuisine.

• Flights and pre/post-travel arrangements are booked by our in-house travel agent.

• Our exclusive Kumano Kodo guidebook is the best English-language guide available, and produced by RAW Travel experts.

• We also give you a Japanese phrasebook, luggage tags, detailed itinerary, maps, track notes and orientation pack.

• Our Kumano Kodo experts and our dedicated information website are bursting with insider information and tips:

  www.kumanokodo.com.au

ORIGIN OF THE WALK

For millennia, the mountainous region of Kumano has been thought to be the mythical ‘holy ground where gods dwell’. Pilgrimages to the shrines became popular for the imperial families and aristocracy between the 9th and 12th centuries who came here in search of heaven on earth.

During this time, Kumano was worshipped as a place of rebirth where spirits going to the afterworld would gather and pray for their happiness in the next world. By the 14th century, samurai warriors and commoners started to do the pilgrimage, and by the 17th century it had widely spread to all. Posthumous remains of various deities are still held at each of the shrines.

Over the past 10 centuries, people from all levels of society have journeyed to the tranquil Ki Mountains, following many pilgrimage routes to the revered Kumano Sanzan Shrines. The various paths are known collectively as the Kumano Kodo.

**There are four main routes:**

- **Nakayama - The Imperial Route**
- **Kohechi - The Mountainous Route**
- **Iseki - The Eastern Route**
- **Ohechi - The Coastal Route**

The Yoshino & Omine route is an isolated treacherous mountain trail reserved for ascetic practices by the Shugendo sect, and one recommended only for expert hikers. In 2004, the majority of these routes – excluding a modern route called the Kijii – were designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The Nakayama pilgrimage route is becoming increasingly popular. Along the way there are traditional accommodations in isolated villages making multi-day walks possible. Some portions of the trail have been paved with cobbles to prevent erosion from heavy rains, as it weaves through a variety of mountain passes, quaint villages, bamboo groves, mossy Japanese cypress forests and terraced rice fields.

The Kumano Kodo has embodied a unique mix of both Shinto and Buddhism religions with frequent symbolic references to be noted and enjoyed along the trail.
“SOLITUDE AND ACCOMPLISHMENT; THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE CLEANSED MY SOUL.”
– Genevieve Loving, Craigie (WA)

Kumano Kodo and The Way of St. James are the only two World Heritage UNESCO-listed pilgrimage routes. As sister pilgrimages, Wakayama Prefecture (Japan) and Galicia Province (Spain) have officially twinned to develop friendly relations between regions and countries, and contribute to world peace and development. Though Kumano Kodo is located in the East, while the Way of St. James that leads to Galicia’s Santiago de Compostela Cathedral – one of the three holiest sites of Catholicism – is located in the West, both ancient roads testify to a parallel history of faith, originating in the early 10th century.

IS THIS TRIP RIGHT FOR ME?
When considering booking a trip it is important that you look at the descriptions in this Destination Guide about accommodation, food and level of physical difficulty to ensure that the trip matches your expectations. Particularly with the physical difficulty rating, it's vital to select a trip that is realistic for your ability. Read through this Destination Guide and the specific trip itineraries on our website before booking. See also p50 (Trip Gradients).

Physical grading
This is a demanding trek offering a rewarding physical challenge. It has a RAW Travel grading of 6–7 (Challenging to Strenuous). We have used several criteria to assess the difficulty of our walks, including the number of hours walking required each day, terrain and conditions underfoot, weather, gradient, altitude, signage and facilities along the trail. To prepare for walks of this grading, we recommend completing 2 to 3 walks per week, increasing distances while carrying an 8kg pack, with some hill walking or heavy sand walking included. Please note these gradings are a guide and will depend on your individual experience, fitness level and mental attitude.

On most days on the Kumano Kodo you will walk between 13km and 24km (6 to 9 hours), with ascents and descents. The walk will be more enjoyable if you have a good level of fitness and are participating in regular exercise in the lead up to your trip. You will need to practice hiking in a hill or mountain environment with your equipment (boots especially) that you’ll be taking to the Kumano Kodo. Regular stair climbing will also help you prepare for this walk.

Although the trail is well defined and well signed, the majority of the trail is on rugged mountain terrain with exposed tree roots, steep up and down sections, loose rocks and stone steps, which can be slippery underfoot. The more training you do and the better prepared you are, the more you will enjoy this beautiful World Heritage listed walk.

Regular training
While we often see amazing improvements in people's fitness with a program of regular training before a trip, you have to be realistic about whether you can commit to regular training with your current lifestyle. If you feel you are unable to commit to doing the training needed to achieve the level of fitness required then you should consider another trip that is less demanding. This is the only way to accurately judge whether you can cope with the demands of any given trip.

WHAT’S IT LIKE UNDERFOOT?
The Kumano Kodo is a mountain trek with waterfalls and shrines.

Set mostly in the deep forest, there are a number of steep ascents and descents along the trail. Distances can be deceptive on the Kumano Kodo. Although the route does not go to great heights like some mountain walks, it is easy to underestimate the difficulty and effort required due to the regular ups and downs.

The Kii-Peninsula is an exceptionally mountainous region. Paths vary from beautiful stone flagged sections to gnarly tree-root covered sections of bare earth and loose rocks. It can easily take 7 or 8 hours to walk as little as 14km a day (with breaks), especially if it has been raining and the path is slippery.

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There are also a few short sections of country lanes and gravel roads, and coming into town you follow regular footpaths.

The highest point is 868m on the Ogumatori-goe section (Koguchi to Kumano Nachi Taisha).

We highly recommend walking poles.

The Kumano Kodo trail (especially the Nakahechi section that you will be trekking) is extremely well marked with wooden ‘Kumano Kodo’ signs. There are even ‘Not Kumano Kodo’ signs on some crossroads! In addition to the Kumano Kodo signs there are waymarkers every 500m as well as regular signs indicating directions and distances.

Walking Japan’s Kumano Kodo trail feels like stepping into an enchanted kingdom. The whimsical forests and meandering rivers are home to an interesting variety of creatures that you may spot along the trail. Keep your eyes peeled for weird, wonderful, friendly and perhaps not-so-friendly creatures, including beautiful butterflies, lizards, bright-orange crabs and snakes.

If you’ve completed the Camino (or a section of it) across northern Spain there’s a good chance you will want to walk the Kumano Kodo on Japan’s Kii Peninsula, or vice versa. We often get asked about the similarities and differences of these two iconic walks.

• Find out more: Creatures along the Kumano Kodo

WHAT WE OFFER

RAW Travel offers a range of self-guided options on the Kumano Kodo Trail:

- Kumano Kodo Trail (7 days)
- Kumano Highlights (6 days)
- Kumano in Spring (8 days)
- Kumano in Autumn (8 days)
- Kumano Kodo & Koyasan (9 days)
- Kumano Kodo Women’s Trek (8 days)
- Kumano Kodo Extended Walk (10 days)

Is the Kumano Kodo Trail suitable for children?

We don’t recommend it for young children, but physically active teenagers with multi-day hiking experience should cope well.

• Find out more: Can children hike the Kumano Kodo?

SELF-GUIDED WALKING EXPLAINED

All of our Kumano Kodo trips are self-guided. Travelling self-guided allows you to walk from place to place progressing from one accommodation to the next in your own time. You walk without a guide, following our trail notes and area maps.

Luggage transfers are included on all trekking days, meaning you will only trek with a daypack.

The great part about self-guided travel is that you can choose your own travel dates (dependent on the availability of accommodation of course) and itineraries can be custom made to suit your particular travel wishes and needs.

The Kumano Kodo trail is extremely well signed and a well-defined trail so you won’t need advanced orienteering skills but you should be comfortable reading a map, referring to route notes and independently navigating your way along this rural trail.

Keep in mind that when travelling in Japan and along the Kumano Kodo, you are required to independently use public transportation.

Sometimes route finding, losing your way, finding it again and asking the locals for help is all part of the adventure. The freedom of a self-guided trip is something that, once experienced, is sought time and time again.

Why don’t we offer guided trips on the Kumano Kodo?

- The Kumano Kodo is very well suited to self-guided walking. There is a very clear path through the forest, excellent signage and markers every 500m.
- Private guides are very expensive in Japan. Each member of a group is likely to pay up to double the trip cost when a guide is included.
- There are only a small number of Kumano Kodo guides in Japan who hold the licence to walk the full length of the trail. These guides only do a limited number of walks per year.
- We provide our clients with extensive documents including the best English-language guidebook and detailed maps, making self-navigation easy.
- Japan is an extremely safe country in which to travel, and its punctual and efficient rail system makes travel between destinations relatively easy.

KUMANO KODO INFORMATION WEBSITE

On our dedicated Kumano Kodo website you’ll find all you need to know about Japan’s sacred pilgrimage walk, including a photo gallery, videos, and detailed information about the shrines, routes, history and lots more.

www.kumanokodo.com.au

RAW TRAVEL INSIGHTS (BLOG)

Written by our Kumano Kodo Destination Experts, our RAW Insights about the Kumano Kodo are great background reading.

- When to trek the Kumano Kodo
- Hiking in Japan: Kumano Kodo or Nakasendo Way?
- The wonderful health benefits of Japanese food
- The mystique of Koyasan
- Creatures along the Kumano Kodo
- Can children hike the Kumano Kodo trail?
- Meet Ryoji, our man in Kyoto
- Ippudo Nishiki-koji: Restaurant in Kyoto
- You say Camino, I say Kumano
- Kumano accommodation
- How difficult is the Kumano Kodo?
- What to take on the Kumano Kodo
- Wonderful onsens
**SECTION 1: INSPIRATION**

**BACKGROUND READING**

Kumano Kodo: Hiking Ancient Trails in Traditional Japan  
by RAW Travel  
(3rd edition, 2018)

Produced by RAW Travel experts, this Kumano Kodo guidebook is the best English-language guide available and provided exclusively to RAW Travel clients.

Lost Japan  
by Alex Kerr  

Originally written in Japanese, this passionate, vividly personal book draws on the author's experiences in Japan over 30 years.

Hokkaido Highway Blues  
by Will Ferguson  
(Allen & Unwin, 2003)

Heady on sakura and sake, Will Ferguson followed the Cherry Blossom Front from one end of the country to the other. One of the funniest and most illuminating books ever written about Japan.

The Lady & The Monk: Four Seasons in Kyoto  
by Pico Iyer  
(Penguin Random House, 2011)

This heartfelt book is a portrait of cross-cultural infatuation — and misunderstanding — and a delightfully fresh way of seeing both the old Japan and the very new.

The Tale of Genji  
by Murasaki Shikibu  
(Penguin Random House, 2002)

Written in the 11th-century by a noblewoman, this exquisite portrait of courtly life in medieval Japan is widely celebrated as the world's first novel, and runs to an epic 1200 pages.

**RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL**

At RAW Travel we believe in responsible travel, which means a lot more that staying safe and respecting the local culture and customs in the country you are visiting. You are responsible for making this trip the best it can be — read all your notes we send you, use the guidebook, learn some Japanese phrases, make sure you are comfortable with self-guided walking, research Japanese customs, do the right pre-trip training, read our blog posts, buy the right gear, wear in your boots, practise walking with poles – and make sure you are prepared to enjoy this beautiful unique destination. The more prepared you are, the more you will enjoy this special and stunning trek.

**EXTEND YOUR HOLIDAY**

Japan is a wonderful and exciting place to visit, so make the most of your visit here and combine your walk with some extra sightseeing and exploring. Kyoto, Koyasan, Toyo and Hiroshima are well worth a look before or after your walk along the Kumano Kodo, and you could easily spend a day or two (or more) at each.

The differences between the cities mean that a trip to Japan is not complete without seeing all four! We can book your extra accommodation and travel arrangements, making these little extras stress-free.

We suggest looking at our city break packages for Kyoto and Tokyo as we’ve already done the work of selecting some of the best accommodation and activities from the vast choices on offer. You can also add in trips with local guides to really get under the skin of these remarkable but sometimes bewildering cities.

We can tailor make a city break to your requirements (minimum 3-night’s accommodation booking required).

**KUMANO KODO**

Kyoto

Once the capital of Japan, Kyoto is a beautiful, lively and sophisticated city featuring thousands of Buddhist temples, imperial palaces, gardens and traditional wooden houses. While Tokyo is all high-speed trains, flashes of neon and skyscrapers, Kyoto moves to an altogether different rhythm. The city centre is surprisingly easy to navigate, thanks to a simple public transport network (three subway lines and an extensive bus network) and its grid system, inspired by ancient feng shui.

Read more: Why I love Kyoto

Hiroshima

Less than 2 hours by bullet train from Kyoto, Hiroshima is the most interesting city in western Japan. When you arrive you will discover a very lively city with a great entertainment scene and lots of culture. Nearby Miyajima Island is a natural and spiritual sanctuary, home to lovely shrines and temples, and exceptionally friendly wild deer. Because they’re only 16km apart, Hiroshima and Miyajima are usually paired together in most people’s itineraries.

Read more: Miyajima Island - Japan’s sacred shrine island

Tokyo

Despite its mammoth size and futuristic reputation, Tokyo is not as intimidating as it might sound. It may be forever reaching into the future but you can still see traces of the shogun’s capital on the kabuki stage, at a sumo tournament or under the cherry blossoms. An additional helping hand in the form of a local guide can go a long way if you are on a tight schedule.

Koyasan

Many travellers combine walking the Kumano Kodo with a visit to mystical Koyasan, an active monastic centre established 12 centuries ago by the renowned monk Priest Kukai, the founder of Esoteric Buddhism. It is still the headquarters of the Koyasan sect of Shingon Buddhism, which is practised widely throughout Japan, and has a university dedicated to religious studies.

Read more: The mystique of Koyasan

www.kumanokodo.com.au
THE MAPS, ITINERARY, AND INFORMATION WAS CLEAR AND EASY TO FOLLOW, WHICH WAS IMPORTANT AS I WAS DOING THE PILGRIMAGE ON MY OWN. AN EXCELLENT WELL-ORGANISED SELF-GUIDED TOUR.

– Jane Ainslie, Sydney (NSW)
SECTION 2: TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

WHEN TO WALK

Weather will vary according to the month you choose to walk the Kumano Kodo. The Kii Peninsula is a wet region, so you should be prepared for some rain year-round and bring adequate rain gear. August–September is the peak of the typhoon season in Japan. There is a potential risk of disruption to travel plans during these events. See also page 40 – Typhoons.

• Find out more:
  When to trek the Kumano Kodo

Spring (March, April & May)

March and April are extremely popular times to go because it is cherry blossom season in Japan. You can expect daytime temperatures of around 10–15°C. May is a lovely and popular month to visit. The days are warmer (18–24°C) and there is more daylight.

Autumn (October & November)

Also a popular time to visit as the colours throughout the forest are stunning. In autumn, expect daytime temperatures of around 10–15°C.

September

This is a popular month to visit with warm weather (20–26°C) and long daylight hours. It is humid with the chance of rain. August–September is the peak of the typhoon season in Japan. There is a potential risk of disruption to travel plans during these events.

Summer (June to August)

During summer in Japan you can expect longer daylight hours, humidity and higher rainfall, but the scenery is beautifully green and verdant. Daytime temperatures are around 25–30°C.

Winter (December to February)

Winter brings a small chance of snow on the Nakahechi route. Trails are open year-round but due to the cool weather and reduced hours of daylight we recommend this time of year for experienced mountain trekkers only. Most accommodations close between Christmas and mid-January.

ELEVATION

The Kumano Kodo trek reaches a maximum elevation of only 868m, and is very serene and peaceful. There are detailed maps for each day, showing elevation.

GETTING FIT FOR THIS WALK

Walking is one of the most natural things to do, so you may feel that you are already in good enough shape. However, you will be walking for many hours over successive days carrying a daypack, which is likely very different to your current walking schedule.

We recommend that you undertake a training program according to your level of fitness for at least 3 months leading up to your departure. Regular exercise prior to the trip will allow you to build your fitness steadily so that you will enjoy and complete the trip with a smile and energy left over.

Moderate activities such as walking pose little health risk but before starting any new exercise program we recommend that you see your doctor for a check-up, particularly if you have a medical condition, are aged over 40 years, are overweight or haven’t exercised in a long time.

• Find out more:
  Getting Walking Fit for the Kumano Kodo

ACCOMMODATION STYLE

On the Kumano Kodo we use a variety of accommodation from centrally located hotels in cities to traditional guesthouses with great character in the smaller places. Staying in traditional style accommodations will be without a doubt one of the highlights of your Kumano Kodo experience. With larger groups we may have to split some people over two nearby accommodations as guesthouses are small with a limited number of rooms.

The majority of accommodation along the trail are ryokans and minshukus (traditional Japanese style inns) that offer a great chance to meet local people and enjoy a truly authentic Japanese atmosphere. Ryokans and minshukus are basic in style with shared toilet and bathroom facilities but have great character and friendly hosts. Most rooms are Japanese style, with straw tatami mats used for flooring. Guests sleep on futons (thin mattresses that are spread on tatami mats at night and stored folded in a closet during the day).

Heating/air-conditioning is still coin-operated in some of the traditional inns.

Most accommodation along the trail offer an onsen (hot spring bath), which is part of your Japanese experience. Bathing is communal though segregated by sex and people undress and bathe before entering the onsen bath. Bathing in an onsen is a great way to rejuvenate tired muscles after a long day of trekking and leaves you feeling refreshed and clean.

In cities, we use centrally located hotels with ensuite bathrooms. Please note that hotel rooms in Japan are often smaller than what you may have found in other countries. In more remote places, hotel standards may not be quite as high as in major centres but RAW Travel always endeavours to use the most suitable accommodation available in each destination. It is also worth noting that smoking in city hotel rooms is not unusual or culturally frowned upon in Japan. We always aim to book non-smoking rooms but even then previous clients may have chosen to smoke in the room and thus on occasion there may be a slight aroma of smoke in your room or other areas of the accommodation.

All accommodation details will be sent to you separately with your pre-departure pack, as the properties used will depend on your preferred dates and availability. RAW Travel reserves the right to use alternative overnight locations/accommodation of a similar standard where needed. When you book, you will be advised what itinerary we can secure.

HOW TO USE AN ONSEN IN JAPAN

Enjoying a Japanese bath is a unique cultural experience. For first timers, it may be a little intimidating, but once you get used to it, the Japanese bath often becomes an addiction; relaxing, healing, and regenerating its followers. Learning a few pointers will help you navigate the watery world of the Japanese bath smoothly.

www.kumanokodo.com.au
A REAL PRIVILEGE TO BE EXPOSED TO BOTH CONTEMPORARY JAPAN AND TRADITIONAL JAPANESE CULTURE. THE RAW ITINERARY WAS PERFECTLY PACED. THE TREKKING WAS BREATHTAKING, CHALLENGING AND VERY SATISFYING.

– Annette Tsindos, Hawthorn (VIC)

Some important rules

• Photography is not permitted inside bathing areas.
• Tattoos are not technically allowed; some people choose to cover these with band-aids or a waterproof bandage.
• Swimsuits are not permitted inside onsens; they are, however, permitted in public outdoor onsens (eg. Kawayu onsen).
• Modesty towels are not permitted inside the bath itself.
• Do not bring phones, books or newspapers into the bathing area.
• Do not put your head under water in the bath.

When you’re in the onsen...

• Leave your footwear on the shelf at the entry to the onsen.
• Remove your clothing or yukata and store it in the baskets provided.
• Remove all jewellery and watches before soaking as these can be discoloured by the mineral-rich waters.
• If you have long hair, tie it up before soaking.
• If you are feeling embarrassed, use your small modesty towel to cover yourself while entering the bathing area.
• Walk slowly – the floors are often wet and slippery.
• Wash carefully before you enter the onsen bath. This is very important. Most baths have small stools to sit on away from the bathing area. Many onsens also provide soap, shampoo and conditioner otherwise you can bring your own if you prefer.
• Enter the water slowly to allow your body to adjust to the water temperature.
• If your modesty towel accidently falls into the bath, wring it out away from the bath.
• Drink plenty of water before and after your bath to prevent dehydration.

Find out more:
• Oh, wonderful onsens
• Japanese baths

FOOD & DRINKS

We include most meals in our trip itineraries because the Kumano Kodo is a remote area with limited alternatives to purchase food along the trail. If you are served an evening meal in a guesthouse that you decide may not suit you, there is no local store down the road to go and purchase an alternative. Packaging is also written all in Japanese so it can be difficult to determine ingredients in packaged foods and whether certain items (eg, gluten) are present.

Along the trail, guests are served dinner in the evening and breakfast the next morning. Meals are served at the guesthouses. You will also be provided with a lunch pack, which is a fairly simple fare – we recommended you supplement it with your favourite snacks.

Dinners and breakfasts on the other hand are elaborate multi-course affairs and very filling. There is an emphasis on using fresh, locally grown produce and enjoying some of the beautiful hand-made dishes will surely be one of your Kumano highlights.
Along the trail, the majority of food is Japanese style only. There are no options for Western food as all guests are cooked the same meals in guesthouses. Guesthouses along the trail cannot cater for specific dietary requirements so this trek is not suitable for those with severe allergies or strict dietary requirements. The food at the monastery stay is all vegetarian cuisine and a great culinary experience.

Both sake and beer are available to enjoy with your meal in guesthouses for an additional charge. Tap water is safe to drink in Japan. Both sake and beer are available to enjoy with your meal in guesthouses for an additional charge. Tap water is safe to drink in Japan.

**Foods to try**
- Umeboshi – pickled salt plums
- Gyoza – Japanese dumpling
- Ramen – Japanese noodle dish
- Okonomiyaki – savoury pancake
- Sashimi – fresh fish sliced into thin pieces.
- Soba (hot and cold) – thin noodles made from buckwheat flour
- Gyoza – Japanese dumpling
- Yakitori – Japanese-style skewered chicken

Find out more: [The wonderful health benefits of Japanese food](#)

**TRANSPORT**

**International airports**

Japan has two major international gateways: Tokyo's Narita airport and Osaka's Kansai airport. Osaka (Kansai) is the closest airport to Kyoto and the Kii Peninsula. Some people choose to fly in and out of Osaka, some fly in and out of Tokyo, and some fly into Osaka and out of Tokyo or visa versa. The Kii Peninsula is easily accessible by train from both cities or airports.

**Public transport**

When travelling in Japan and along the Kumano Kodo, you are required to independently use public transport. Public transport in Japan is known for being efficient, reliable and punctual. This combined with the friendly, helpful locals does make travelling around very manageable but you should be comfortable in reading timetables and independently navigating your way around stations and platforms as many train journeys do require transfers of trains. RAW Travel is more than happy to assist with any transportation questions and you will also receive detailed notes in your pre-departure pack.

**Bus travel**

There are a few short sections along the Kumano Kodo where bus travel is necessary and/or recommended. Bus tickets cannot be purchased in advance and are not included in the trip cost. Fares are paid in cash once inside the bus. Detailed instructions will be given in your pre-departure pack and during your tour orientation in Kii-Tanabe. Bus travel in the area is very straightforward – buses run regularly and are known to be punctual and reliable.

**Train travel**

Individual train tickets cannot be purchased outside of Japan and are not included in the trip cost. Costs will depend on where you are coming from and where you are going to after the trail.

For the most up to date information on train timetables and fares in Japan, visit [www.hyperdia.com](http://www.hyperdia.com)

Hint: when doing a search, write KiiTanabe and KiiKatsuura all together, no dashes or spaces.

**Access to Kyoto**

You will make your own way to your centrally located hotel in Kyoto. Joining point hotel details will be sent to you separately as they will depend on your preferred dates and availability.

Kyoto is easily accessible from Japan's two major international gateways – Osaka and Tokyo. There are two airports in Osaka – Kansai International and Itami. There are frequent direct trains from Kansai International Airport to Kyoto and the train ride will take approx. 1½ hours. If you are arriving into Itami airport we recommend catching the direct airport shuttle, which will stop in front of the Kyoto station. The train ride from Osaka to Kyoto will take approx. 15 minutes by bullet train or 30 minutes by local train.

You can also travel via train from Tokyo to Kyoto, which can be as fast as 2½ hours from central Tokyo via bullet train. Travel times will be longer if travelling from Narita/Haneda airports.

For the most up to date information on train timetables and fares in Japan, visit [www.hyperdia.com](http://www.hyperdia.com)

**Access to Koyasan**

Koyasan is best accessed by catching the Nankai Koya Line from Osaka’s Shin-Imamiya station. Take the Nankai Koya Line from Shin-Imamiya to Gokurakubashi station. There are a few limited express trains that run directly to Gokurakubashi (~1h 20min) or alternatively you can catch one of the express or rapid express trains (~1h 45min) that are more frequent but do generally require a transfer at the Hashimoto Station along the way.

At Gokurakubashi station, transfer to the cable car that will take you up the mountain to Koyasan. The ride will only take you 5 minutes.

From Koyasan station, it is a 15-minute bus ride into the town centre. If you are arriving from Kyoto, you will first need to catch a train from Kyoto to Shin-Imamiya station with a transfer at Osaka station (please note this is different to Shin-Osaka station). The journey from Kyoto to Shin-Imamiya station will take you approx. 1 hour.

If you are arriving from Tokyo, first catch the bullet train to Shin-Osaka station. From Shin-Osaka station, you will take a train to Shin-Imamiya station with a transfer at Osaka station. The journey from Tokyo to Shin-Imamiya station will take you approx. 3½ hours.

For the most up to date information on train timetables and fares in Japan, visit [www.hyperdia.com](http://www.hyperdia.com)

See Section 3: On The Trail (p36) for more information about getting to the trailhead.
RAW TRAVEL PROVIDED EXACTLY THE RIGHT LEVEL OF SUPPORT FOR AN AMAZING TRIP. THE RECOMMENDED ITINERARY THAT INCLUDED KYOTO, KOYASAN AND KUMANO KODO WAS PERFECT!

– Wayne Forrest, Oatlands (NSW)

MAPS
Detailed route maps are provided to clients at their tour orientation in Kii-Tanabe. The maps clearly show the route you will follow along the Nakasendo trail, plus options for additional day walks.

RECOMMENDED APPS
As technology has improved, the number of options for staying connected while travelling has increased. While this means more choice, it can also be confusing. Here at RAW we are strong advocates of detoxing and tech-free adventures, but it’s still worth knowing what’s reliable and economical. We asked our Destination Experts for their favourite ways to stay in touch, as well as recommendations for travel apps that you will actually use!

• Find out more: How to stay connected, plus travel apps you will actually use

HEALTH
To participate fully in an active travel experience you need to be in good physical health. Read the trip itineraries on the website thoroughly and then realistically self-assess your physical ability to complete the trip as described. Our Destination Experts are available to answer any questions you have to help you choose the most suitable trip for you.

Although there are no specific health requirements for Japan, please be aware you need to be in good health to undertake this trip due to the sometimes demanding days. You should consult your doctor if you have any medical conditions to assess your suitability before departure. You also need to declare, for assessment, any pre-existing medical conditions to your travel insurance provider.

There is no reciprocal health agreement between Japan and Australia so you will be responsible for any hospital and other medical charges you incur.

In the event of an incident or medical emergency on the walk, the default mode of evacuation is by helicopter. It is essential that all guests have comprehensive travel insurance, medical insurance or ambulance insurance that will cover the cost of helicopter evacuation.

Medical care in Japan is of a great standard but is very expensive. Payment in full or a guarantee that costs will be met is usually required at the time of treatment.

• Find out more: Medical facilities in Japan
**First aid supplies**

We recommend that you carry first aid supplies for common ailments as well as any personal medical requirements as you will be travelling in remote areas and away from medical facilities.

Your first aid supplies should include (but not be limited to):

- Band-aids, bandages and dressings
- Blister pads for your feet and zinc tape
- Antiseptic for cuts and scrapes
- High factor sunscreen
- Headache tablets
- Diarrhoea treatment

We recommend using zinc oxide tape/moleskin to cover ‘hot spots’ on your feet to stop potential blisters developing.

**Preventing blisters**

The key to preventing blisters and avoiding unnecessary pain is to eliminate friction. Different things work for different people, but one thing’s for sure: blisters can be prevented with a little bit of effort.

Here’s a range of blister prevention strategies for you to test on your training walks.

1. **Buy comfortable, well-fitting walking boots.**
2. **Toughen up.** Condition your feet by walking, gradually building intensity, pace and distance. Remember to moisturise your feet with a good quality foot cream after showering.
3. **Adjust your laces during your walk so that your shoes fit perfectly.** Foot swelling and different temperatures and terrain will affect the fit of your boots.
4. **Slather your feet thickly with a lubricant like Vaseline.** You’ll need to reapply it, and it doesn’t wash easily out of socks.
5. **Put cornflour or talcum powder in your socks to keep your feet dry.**
6. **Keep your toenails short.**
7. **Invest in good socks.** Use moisture-wicking socks and consider double-layers. Experiment with the thickness of your socks, and change them whenever your feet get wet.
8. **Apply tape (such as Fixomul) or dressings to reduce friction.** It can be difficult to perfect the technique and can be time consuming, so you’ll need to practise.
9. **Always carry blister pads in your daypack.** The cushioned gel pad immediately reduces pain and promotes fast healing. You can even use them to prevent blisters.
10. **See a podiatrist if you think the way you walk might predispose you to blisters.** You might need orthotics.

**Blister treatment**

Broken blisters that are leaking fluid should be disinfected and bandaged. Unbroken blisters that are painful should be pricked with a sterile needle and drained. Small blisters that are not painful should be left alone because the best protection against infection is the blister’s own skin. These will heal by themselves and will be reabsorbed in a few days. If you do have blisters, shower in the evening to allow your feet to be fully dry when you dress them and set off in the morning.

**VISAS**

At the time of writing, Australians and New Zealanders only needed a valid passport and a return ticket to enter Japan as a tourist for stays of no more than 90 days. Visitors are stamped in on arrival at the airport. All travellers must have a minimum of 6 months validity (after their date of return into Australia) on their passport. Please confirm these requirements with your chosen airline.

**SMART TRAVELLER**

Be informed. Be prepared. Stay smart while you are travelling. Smartraveller is provided by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It provides up-to-date travel advice for Australians travelling overseas. You can subscribe to receive free updates, including about widespread health or security issues.

Please research and purchase a policy best suited to your needs and circumstances.

See also p.40 for information on typhoons.

**TRAVEL INSURANCE**

If you are travelling on any trip with RAW Travel you will require comprehensive travel insurance. We sell Cover-More travel insurance and you can easily get a quote over the phone. No one plans for anything to go wrong, but if it does we want to make sure that you have adequate cover.

We highly recommend you purchase cover as soon as you start booking your travel arrangements, and include cancellation cover. Your travel insurance also must include emergency evacuation and medical cover. There is no reciprocal health agreement between Japan and Australia so you will be responsible for all hospital and other medical charges you incur.

We recommend using zinc oxide tape/moleskin to cover ‘hot spots’ on your feet to stop potential blisters developing.
WHAT TO PACK

Walking the Kumano Kodo is similar to preparing for any multi-day walk, with the exception that your wet weather gear may be needed more frequently.

Your main luggage is transported for you on all trekking days, so you carry only a daypack. Your trip includes one piece of luggage person. Additional pieces will need to be arranged in advance and will incur a fee. You should pack as lightly as possible and we recommend keeping the weight of your luggage case under 15kg as you will need to carry your bag in and out of trains and buses as well as sometimes up the stairs at accommodations.

You will need to bring a good daypack when out walking to carry a few clothing layers and personal effects. We recommend carrying at least 2 litres of water, on hot days even more.

SPECIALIST GEAR RECOMMENDED FOR THIS WALK

Waterproof walking boots

Waterproof walking boots with full ankle support are recommended for this walk. Make sure your footwear is well worn in and comfortable. We also recommend hiking socks with at least one spare pair, as you will find these minimise the chance of getting blisters (see p28).

• Find out more: What boots should I buy and how do I look after them?

Trekking poles

On this trail there are many steep ascents and descents, sometimes on stone staircases and over tree roots. Trekking poles will give you extra stability, especially when it is wet. We definitely recommend them if you have – or have had – any issues at all with sore knees, ankles or hips.

• Find out more: Do I need trekking poles and which ones should I buy?

Good wet-weather gear

This is a wet part of Japan and you can expect rain at any time of year, so bring:

• waterproof boots (no trainers)
• waterproof, breathable jacket and overtrousers
• waterproof cover for your daypack
• internal lightweight drybags (no cover will ever be able to keep your belongings dry in a real downpour, or a consistent day’s rain)
Snacks
This part of Japan is rural and remote; shops are scarce along the trail and sell only Japanese snacks, which may not be to your liking, so bring from home in sealed unopened packets what you would normally eat on a hike, eg: trail mix, muesli bars, coconut oil sachets, vital greens, protein bars, quinoa and brown rice tubs, or any other snacks you know work for you.

Some of our favourite Japanese snacks to look out for include Japanese rice crackers, Pocky sticks, wasabi peas and roasted seaweed snacks.

Japanese phrasebook
Little English is spoken along the trail but this is not usually a problem due to the warm helpful nature of your friendly Japanese hosts. RAW Travel provides all its walkers with a phrasebook and a briefing in English at the beginning of their walk.

Mobile phone
On self-guided trips you should carry a mobile phone. Mobile coverage can be anything from fairly good to non-existent along the trail but you should have fairly consistent coverage in most of the towns where you will overnight. Many clients organise travel SIM cards prior to departure or rent phones and/or wifi packages from companies like Japan Wireless, which offers fantastic coverage along the trail. We recommend that at least one member of your group is connected to the local Japanese phone network service.

OTHER ITEMS TO PACK
Travel documents
• Passport (with photocopies or scanned back-up copy)
• Copy of travel insurance policy and 24-hour contact number
• Airline and other ticket(s)
• Credit card and spending money in cash (YEN)

Personal Items
• Blister kit, rehydration salts, mosquito repellant, sunscreen and first-aid kit including any personal medication you use
• Toiletries
• Water bottle(s) or hydration pack (2+ litres recommended)
• Hat and high UV sunglasses
• Comfortable daypack
• Waterproof bags for rain protection while walking

Clothing
• Several pairs of walking socks
• T-shirts (lightweight quick drying fabric)
• Long-sleeved trekking shirts
• Shorts/lightweight trousers
• Warm fleece, sweater, thermals, hat, gloves (during winter, spring and autumn)
• Waterproof and breathable jacket and over trousers (essential; this is the wettest part of Japan)
• Spare pair of trainers
• Swimwear (permitted in certain public hot spring baths)

HOW TO BOOK YOUR RAW TRAVEL TRIP
Before making a booking, please read this Destination Guide thoroughly to make sure that the Kumano Kodo is right for you. We have compiled lots of important information about accommodation, food, fitness required, weather and what to expect so that you can make an informed decision. On our website, you’ll also find detailed itineraries and other important information.

A deposit of AUD$500 per person is due at the time of booking and balance of payment is required 8 weeks prior to travel. All quotes are subject to availability at the time of booking and valid for 7 days. Please contact your Destination Expert for your personalised booking link.

When you submit your booking form, you are committing to an itinerary and travel dates. When arrangements are confirmed, non-refundable deposits are paid to suppliers to secure these bookings. Any changes to the itinerary and/or travel dates after arrangements have been confirmed will incur additional charges.

PARTICIPATION CONDITIONS
To travel with RAW Travel you must accept the booking conditions (online at the time of booking), which include the following ‘participation conditions’:

When booking on one of our trips the applicant understands that RAW Travel operates adventure holidays worldwide. In developing countries, the standards of accommodation, transport, safety, hygiene, telecommunication facilities, level of infrastructure development and medical facilities are not equivalent to those familiar to the applicant’s usual living arrangements, or would find on a conventional holiday. This type of trip inherently involves a higher level of personal risk, which the applicant agrees to fully assume. The applicant acknowledges that travel on a RAW Travel trip requires a degree of flexibility, and understands that the trip’s route, accommodation and modes of transport are subject to change without prior notice due to local circumstances. Should RAW Travel deem it advisable to amend an itinerary for any reason, it may do so by shortening, varying or re-routing any trip. These changes are binding and additional expenses will be charged to the applicant if the reason for any major alteration is outside RAW Travel’s control.

RAW TRAVELLER’S CODE
By paying your deposit and completing your booking forms with us, you signal your agreement to the following RAW Traveller’s Code:
✔ I have chosen a trip that suits my abilities, level of fitness, and state of health.
✔ I do not have any physical conditions or disabilities that are a hazard to me or other RAW travellers
✔ I have a valid passport and all necessary visas and vaccinations required for travel.
✔ I will read the RAW travel pre-trip materials about clothing, medical requirements, and culture-specific etiquette.
✔ I will respect the laws and customs of countries visited.
✔ I will follow environmental guidelines and regulations while on the trip in accordance with the RAW Travel leader’s direction.
✔ I will respect the rights and privacy of other trip members.
✔ I understand that travel within a group invariably involves compromise to accommodate diverse desires, travel goals, personalities, and physical abilities of all group members.
✔ RAW Travel leaders may be required to improvise and exercise good faith, use discretion and/or make decisions based upon group consensus. These decisions may not always please each individual, but are intended to satisfy the larger desires of the group.
✔ I understand that RAW Travel reserves the right to refuse participation during a tour to anyone whose health or behaviour could impede the welfare or enjoyment of fellow guests. An individual may be asked to leave a trip if the leader feels that the person’s continuing participation may prove detrimental to the individual or the group.
✔ I understand travelling off the beaten track means access to medical facilities and evacuation services may be limited.
✔ I understand the weather is out of RAW Travel’s control.
✔ I will drink alcohol responsibly.

SECTION 2: TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

KUMANO KODO

✔ I understand that the Kumano Kodo is right for you. We have compiled lots of important information about accommodation, food, fitness required, weather and what to expect so that you can make an informed decision. On our website, we have detailed itineraries and other important information.

RAW TRAVELLER’S CODE
By paying your deposit and completing your booking forms with us, you signal your agreement to the following RAW Traveller’s Code:
✔ I have chosen a trip that suits my abilities, level of fitness, and state of health.
✔ I do not have any physical conditions or disabilities that are a hazard to me or other RAW travellers
✔ I have a valid passport and all necessary visas and vaccinations required for travel.
✔ I will read the RAW travel pre-trip materials about clothing, medical requirements, and culture-specific etiquette.
✔ I will respect the laws and customs of countries visited.
✔ I will follow environmental guidelines and regulations while on the trip in accordance with the RAW Travel leader’s direction.
✔ I will respect the rights and privacy of other trip members.
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✔ I understand travelling off the beaten track means access to medical facilities and evacuation services may be limited.
✔ I understand the weather is out of RAW Travel’s control.
✔ I will drink alcohol responsibly.
The immersion in Japanese culture was authentic and rewarding; our hosts, accommodation and food were simply superb. Raw’s support gave us confidence to do what we did but still with a sense of independent adventure.

– Kathy & Dimitrie Vicol (ACT)
SECTION 3: ON THE TRAIL

GETTING TO THE TRAILHEAD

Access to Kii-Tanabe
This is the overnight destination where you stay the night before your trek begins and where you will have your pre-trek briefing. A train from Osaka to Kii-Tanabe takes roughly 2½ to 3 hours depending on connections. Kyoto to Kii-Tanabe trains are also frequent (either direct or via Shin-Osaka) and will take 2½ to 3 hours. To reach the trailhead, you will catch a 40-minute bus from Kii-Tanabe to Takijiri-oji on your first trekking day.

Onward travels from end of the trek
Your trek ends in Nachisan, a small village located 25-minutes by bus inland from Kii-Katsuura. Your accommodation that night will either be in Nachisan or Kii-Katsuura. Buses run frequently from Nachisan to Kii-Katsuura station.

From Kii-Katsuura, you will continue via train to your onwards destination. Tickets are not included in the trip cost and can be purchased locally at the Kii-Katsuura train station.

Approximate train travel times to main hubs in Japan: Kansai Airport (4 hours), Osaka (4 hours), Kyoto (4½ hours), Tokyo (6 hours). Note that some days there are only a few trains running and connections may not be ideal – this may affect travel times outlined above, so please plan ahead. For the most up-to-date information on train timetables in Japan, visit www.hyperdia.com

LUGGAGE TRANSFERS

Your main luggage will be transferred by private van on all trekking days. It will be picked up from your accommodation each morning, so you must have your main luggage packed and downstairs in time for the pick-up. After that, it is up to you when you start walking each day but be mindful that you need to arrive at your next accommodation by 6pm because dinner is at a set time. In the evening your luggage will be waiting for you at your next accommodation.

The luggage shuttle pick-up location on the first trekking day is either from your hotel in Kii-Tanabe or the bus stop in Kii-Tanabe. Your trip notes will confirm which option has been organised for you. Luggage shuttle is one piece per passenger – additional pieces will need to be arranged in advance and will incur a fee. Additional luggage can be stored in Kii-Tanabe for a daily fee of JPY500, so long as you plan to travel via Kii-Tanabe after your trek to your onward destination.

BUYING SUPPLIES

There are very few places to stop and buy supplies when you are on the Kumano Kodo so you will need to ensure that you are adequately prepared with snacks. There is a convenience store in Kii-Tanabe next to the train station where you can buy tasty Japanese snacks. We also recommend you bring your favourite energy rich snacks in sealed openunpacked packets that you would normally enjoy on a hike.

See also Food & Drinks, p23.

LANGUAGE

Most Japanese people you will encounter in the accommodations may not speak fluent English but they can generally understand at least a few basic words of English and, usually, communication is not a problem due to the willingness of the friendly locals to help.

Japanese people are very helpful and good at anticipating guests’ needs, so they can usually understand most basic requirements even if they don’t speak English themselves.

Useful phrases
• Ohayo Gozaimasu / おはようございます | Good morning
• Konnichiwa / 今日は | Good day / hello
• Konbanwa / こんばんは | Good evening
• Sumimasen / すみません | Excuse me
• Arigatou gozaimasu / ありがとうございます | Thank you very much

KUMANO KODO

Japanese bath etiquette
Enjoying a Japanese bath is a unique cultural experience. For first timers, it may be a little intimidating. See p21 for some important tips on bathing.

Be polite
Foreigners have a reputation for being noisy in Japan, especially on public transport, so be respectful; it’s impolite to answer your phone while on a train or bus. If you’re listening to music, turn the volume down low. It’s ruder in Japan to blow your nose in public than sniff, and avoid eating on the go. Japanese people often wear paper face masks, and while this might look odd to you, it’s perfectly logical. It’s to keep them, and you, healthy. During cherry blossom season they’re also worn to keep allergies away.

Footwear
Always remove your shoes when entering someone’s home/guesthouse and leave them in the baskets or shelves provided at the entrance. It’s customary to change into the slippers provided when entering a Japanese home or a guesthouse, and not uncommon in traditional restaurants, temples and, occasionally, in museums and art galleries.

If you come across a slightly raised floor and a row of slippers, then use them; leave your shoes either on the lower floor (the genkan) or on the shelves (sometimes lockers) provided. Also, try not to step on the genkan with bare or stockinged feet. Once inside, remove your slippers before stepping onto tatami, the rice-straw flooring, and remember to change your footwear in Kii-Tanabe next to the convenience store.

Footwear
You will need to bring your own slippers. These will be picked up from your accommodation each morning and stored in the luggage shuttle van. There are storage lockers in Kii-Tanabe for a daily fee of JPY500 so long as you plan to travel via Kii-Tanabe after your trek to your onward destination.

CULTURE AND ETIQUETTE

Japan’s fascinating culture is a highlight of this beautiful country but sometimes the culture can seem a little impenetrable to outsiders and it is easy to make some cultural blunders on your first visit. Japanese people do not expect outsiders to be aware of all the complex cultural rules they abide by and fortunately allowances are made. However, some basics are expected to be followed, especially concerning footwear and bathing. Get them wrong and you will cause great offence, so do your research before you go.

Footwear
Always remove your shoes when entering someone’s home/guesthouse and leave them in the baskets or shelves provided at the entrance. It’s customary to change into the slippers provided when entering a Japanese home or a guesthouse, and not uncommon in traditional restaurants, temples and, occasionally, in museums and art galleries.

If you come across a slightly raised floor and a row of slippers, then use them; leave your shoes either on the lower floor (the genkan) or on the shelves (sometimes lockers) provided. Also, try not to step on the genkan with bare or stockinged feet. Once inside, remove your slippers before stepping onto tatami, the rice-straw flooring, and remember to change into the special toilet slippers if provided when entering the toilet/bathroom.
MOBILE, WIFI AND INTERNET COVERAGE

Mobile coverage can be anything from fairly good to non-existent along the Kumano Kodo trail but you will have fairly consistent coverage in most of the towns where you will overnight. Global roaming charges are generally very expensive and pre-paid cards such as a Travel Sim card are a good idea. Alternatively, phone/wifi rental is very common in Japan and available at all major airports. For safety reasons, we do recommend at least one member of your travelling party has access to the local phone network.

Some phone operators such as Optus offer low-cost travel packs – check with your operator for deals and coverage.

If you decide you would like an additional option in the event of an emergency, you may wish to consider renting or purchasing a satellite phone. Information on how these phones works and how to rent them can be found here:


Please note: it is your responsibility to check with the embassy or consulate of the country you are visiting to ensure that you are permitted to bring satellite phones into the country; laws do change around the world. See Epirbhire (listed above) for further details about an appropriate product for you.

Wi-fi is available in most accommodations but in smaller guesthouses is generally only available in the lobby and can sometimes be intermittent.

ELECTRICITY

In Japan, 2-flat-pin plugs are used. The voltage throughout Japan is uniformly 100 volts, A.C. There are two kinds of frequencies: 50 Hertz in eastern Japan and 60 Hertz in western Japan (including Nagoya, Kyoto and Osaka).

MONEY

Currency
The Japanese Yen (¥) is the local currency and abbreviated to JPY/YEN. General prices are more or less comparable to Australia.

Tipping
Tipping is not expected in Japan and it is not a common practice. In fact, tipping can actually be slightly insulting and in most cases will be politely refused.

Spending money
Every traveller is different and therefore spending money requirements will vary. Some travellers may drink more than others while other travellers like to purchase more souvenirs than most. Please consider your own spending habits when it comes to allowing for drinks, shopping, souvenirs and other personal expenses.
SECTION 3: ON THE TRAIL

Cash & ATMs
It is very common in Japan to pay for purchases in cash rather than by card so please be adequately prepared with cash. Some areas of Japan have none or almost no ATMs and the rural Kumano Kodo region is no exception; few ATMs are available along the route.

Some ATMs in Japan do not accept credit, debit and ATM cards issued outside of Japan. The main exceptions are ATMs found at local post offices and 7-Eleven convenience stores located across the country. These ATMs allow you to withdraw cash by credit and debit cards issued outside of Japan. Post office opening hours differ by location but the majority close by 5pm (even earlier in smaller rural locations) and are closed on Sundays and public holidays. 7-Eleven stores are accessible 24 hours a day, year round.

Let your bank know well in advance that you are travelling overseas and will be making cash withdrawals so that your account is not locked due to suspicious activity. Also confirm your daily withdrawal limit, and applicable fees.

Emergency funds
Ensure you have access to additional funds to be used if unforeseen incidents or circumstances outside our control (e.g. a natural disaster) necessitate a change to your planned route. This is a rare occurrence but we recommend being prepared. Some comprehensive travel insurance companies will make payments on your behalf in an emergency. Some more basic covers require you to pre-pay yourself then make a claims. Do your research before you travel.

SAFETY IN JAPAN

Health
We recommend that you carry a basic first aid kit along with any medications or epi-pens if you have specific allergies. Also make sure you have emergency contact numbers in your phone or in an easy to reach place when you go out walking each day. In the event of any medical emergency, please ensure you make immediate contact with your travel insurance provider on their 24-hour assistance number.

Earthquakes and tsunamis
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.

Extreme weather
The Kii Peninsula is one of the wettest areas of 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.

Typhoons
We arrange trips throughout the year in Japan, including from May to October, which is known as the typhoon season. Typically, typhoons are most prevalent in August and September. If you choose to travel during this period there is a possibility your travel plans may be disrupted by a typhoon weather system landing on the main Island of Honshu.

When typhoons land they can cause significant and widespread disruption and damage. As they are an annual occurrence in Japan, the damage is usually quickly repaired and things return to normal within a day or two (depending upon the nature of any damage). During the actual typhoon event, things come to a standstill in the affected areas. Nobody ventures outside and the transportation network ceases operating until the typhoon has passed.

RAW Travel follows the same advisory as everyone else in Japan: stay indoors until the typhoon has passed and you have been advised it is safe to go out again. This will often necessitate changes and disruption to your travel plans. For example: missing out on a section of your hike, not being able to get to your next night’s accommodation, or a delayed commencement of your trip with us. One of our staff will contact you before the event to check in on you and ensure you are following the government advice to stay put.

Our priority is your safety. While we will do our best to advise and help you change any arrangements that are needed, an extreme weather event is beyond ours and everyone else’s control.

We book and pay for all your arrangements in advance and we cannot issue refunds for any unused accommodation and services, or additional arrangements that may be required in these circumstances. This is an event that needs to be covered by your travel insurance policy. As stated in our Booking Conditions, you need to ensure that your provider covers this eventuality.

Our service covers much more than just the hotel and transfer costs, and we incur a large part of our costs prior to your trip departing. As such it is not possible for us or other travel suppliers to offer refunds for events that are beyond our control. We will of course assist you by providing supporting documentation for your valid insurance claims.

Slippery stones
Most injuries on the Kumano Kodo are from slipping on the stone lined trails. The odd 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. It has a broader triangle shaped head of a pit viper, and is patterned with pale grey, reddish-brown or yellow-brown background covered with irregularly shaped lateral blotches. Its mature length is 45-80cm long. They can sun themselves in or around the trail. Use a torch when walking around in the evening so as not to step on one by 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-organe 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 in autumn.

Crime
Japan has one of the lowest crime rates in the world and is generally a safe place to carry cash and other valuables. People are very honest and you should feel completely at ease in towns and cities. As with anywhere be careful if you are venturing into late night venues in big cities.

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 helpline; a translation service in English is available in most areas.

HOW MUCH WATER TO CARRY
You will need to carry at least 2 litres of drinking water with you most days, more if the weather is warm and you are above average body weight. There are water taps along the trail to refill your water bottle (less on the second half of the trail, so plan accordingly) plus the occasional vending machine.

Dehydration is the biggest risk when undertaking a physical activity. It is vital to be aware of your fluid intake and to constantly drink water throughout the day, even when you do not feel thirsty.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Japan
Police 110 / Ambulance 119

RAW Travel Office (Victoria, Australia)
Monday to Friday, 9am to 5.30pm:
+61 3 5976 3763
If there is a genuine emergency outside of these hours, call +61 (0) 478 649 848

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OUR COMMITMENT
We won't cut corners or ever intentionally compromise the quality of your trip. We don't want to run thousands of trips every year – because the quality of your experience is much more important than quantity to us. We're still small enough to care about our travellers as individuals and we want to stay that way!

We know that people desire a certain level of comfort along with their adventure, so great accommodation and discovering delicious local food is a hallmark of our trips. RAW owns and operates its own adventures, with our own staff on the ground in many destinations so we are able to keep control over the quality of our trips at the same time as we offer you reassurance and support. We take notice of the feedback you give us and your opinions do matter.

As a primarily ‘direct to customer’ company we avoid the commissions and overheads associated with the traditional travel distribution network. We charge fair prices but still provide great advice before you go, experienced leaders who love their groups, good quality accommodation and solid value for your money.

Why book your trip with RAW Travel?
Our trips are flexible and tailored to you!

- We listen to our walkers; we'll plan an itinerary to suit your needs and ability.
- We operate our own trips, self-guided.
- We have staff dedicated to each destination: you get first-hand advice from people who know the walks.
- We have our own staff in-country, so help is never far away should you need it.
- We offer authentic travel with 17 years' experience.

OUR PEOPLE
We have an experienced, dedicated passionate team in our Mornington Head Office, as well as expert guides and support staff on the ground in Europe, Japan and Australia. Our staff have many things in common, including a passion for walking, a love of adventure travel in beautiful and historic locations, and the ability to go above and beyond to make our clients' travel dreams become a reality.

KUMANO KODO
SECTION 4: RAW TRAVEL

ABOUT RAW TRAVEL
RAW Travel specialises in iconic walks worldwide. We are a small family owned operator on Victoria’s Mornington Peninsula that is highly regarded for great value, outstanding customer service and reviews, experienced tour guides, and excellent accommodation and food.

We provide a friendly, personal and trusted service. We pride ourselves on the intimate knowledge we have of our chosen walking destinations, which allows us to create exciting journeys for our clients while taking meticulous care of all the details.

We offer walks for complete beginners through to demanding treks that will satisfy and thrill even veteran adventurers.

Over the years, we have organised countless trips to far flung corners of the globe and introduced many thousands of happy travellers to their first long distance walk or ride. The spirit of RAW Travel remains the same – creating inspiring active journeys that offer genuine interaction with the people and cultures we visit, backed by a personal but expert service.

Come and visit us at our beachside location in the coastal town of Mornington. Make an appointment with one of our Destination Experts and afterwards browse the many shops, cafes, beaches or nearby vineyards of the Mornington Peninsula.

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EXPERT, FRIENDLY SERVICE
We’re a specialist company and we enjoy providing a friendly, personal service where you’re treated as an individual – no call centres here!

At RAW Travel we don't just plan your travel, we take our clients on a journey. From your research and ideas we work with you to plan your dream travel experience. We consider your fitness levels, your achievements, your motivations and then together we map out every step of the journey.
Our Destination Experts deliver a level of advice and experience that comes from being 100% focused on our chosen walks, rather than hundreds of different trips, as is often the case with bigger companies. We pride ourselves on our intimate knowledge of our chosen walking destinations and we really do “know because we go”.

Our staff take these walks each year and share their insider insights with you to help create exciting journeys where you can experience the best of your chosen destination, while being reassured that all the details are taken care of and help is never far away should you need it from our locally based staff and suppliers.

GIVING BACK AND TREADING LIGHTLY

Our trips have helped raise over $A18 million in funds for 40+ charities in Australia and overseas through our charity challenges. We are proud to have been part of so many great fundraising initiatives that have substantially impacted and improved people’s lives.

In today’s world travelling lightly is no longer just an admirable sentiment but a necessity. We always look for ways to improve our impact on the ground by monitoring our group’s environmental and cultural impacts. At RAW, we have achieved advanced eco-certification on our Great Ocean Walk and have always been committed to ‘grass roots’ tourism.

In particular we favour small local suppliers to ensure the benefits of travel are distributed equally and to the people who need it the most. We also donate to KIVA micro-lending throughout the world and encourage you to also look at this commendable scheme.

So, rest assured, your travel with us will leave a positive, lasting impact on you and the places you visit.
‘WALK AND TALK’ DAYS
We love to walk and we love to talk! During the year, we regularly offer opportunities (in Victoria) to walk with our Destination Experts and ask questions about your chosen destination, pre-departure preparation and gear. We limit these walks to around 25 people (depending on the location). The pace is generally relaxed so there is plenty of time to chat.

Find out more: RAW Travel events

BOOK YOUR FLIGHTS WITH US
RAW Travel is a Business Class and Premium Economy Flights Specialist. We will find you the best deals and make sure you arrive well-rested to start your walk. Our in-house travel agents take the stress out of planning all the travel arrangements around your walk. They can book your international flights, give you advice about land transfers to the start of your walk, organise the perfect city break, and more! For a personalised service that you won’t find on online booking sites, along with specific destination knowledge you won’t necessarily find with your own travel agent, contact our Flights Department today at the RAW Travel office on (03) 5976 3763 or email flights@rawtravel.com

Find out more: RAW Travel flights

TRAVEL INSURANCE
If you are travelling on any trip with RAW Travel you will require comprehensive travel insurance. We sell Cover-More travel insurance and you can easily get a quote over the phone. No one plans for anything to go wrong, but if it does we want to make sure that you have adequate cover.

We highly recommend you purchase cover as soon as you start booking your travel arrangements, and include cancellation cover. Your travel insurance also must include emergency evacuation and medical cover.

Any advice given here is a general guide only. Please research and purchase a policy best suited to your needs and circumstances.

Find out more: 10 things you need to know about travel insurance

CITY BREAKS
Get the most from your time in Japan with one of our city breaks in Kyoto, Tokyo or Hiroshima. Our city breaks offer the chance to explore and get an insider view with locals, try cultural activities and stay in unique and well located hotels and inns. They take the guesswork out of the bewildering range of hotels and activities on offer in the big cities and ensure that you can make the most of your limited time. Connect with locals, find the best places to eat and not spend your time getting lost or feeling overwhelmed about where to start!

Find out more: RAW Travel City Breaks
RAW TRAVEL TRIP GRADINGS

RAW Travel offers a range of multi-day walks for complete beginners through to demanding treks that will satisfy and thrill even veteran adventurers. We have graded each RAW Travel trip from 1 (introductory) to 10 (tough).

Our grading system is intended to differentiate only the walks that RAW Travel offers, so they won’t necessarily match another travel company’s assessment of their trips.

We have used several criteria to assess the difficulty of each walk we offer, including the number of hours walking required each day, terrain and conditions footed, weather, gradient, altitude, signage and facilities – basic accommodation and food in remote areas will contribute to a walk being graded more difficult. Keep in mind that if a walk is graded moderate, it doesn’t mean you will never feel tired.

Our multi-day walks require a suitable level of physical preparation. More detail is provided in our essential free guides to getting walking fit, which are available for each of our destinations.

WALKING & HIKING

Walking and hiking are mainly leisure activities that involve well-made trails and roads, often on purpose made paths, such as pilgrimage trails and low mountain trails.

TREKKING

Treking refers to long continuous point-to-point journeys on foot in areas where there is usually no other transport. Treking is not mountaineering; it is walking for a number of days on often rudimentary trails in challenging environments, which are likely hilly or mountainous. Nepal, the Himalayas, Pakistan and South America are good examples of treking countries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRIP GRADINGS</th>
<th>Introductory Grade 1-2</th>
<th>Moderate Grade 3-4</th>
<th>Challenging Grade 5-6</th>
<th>Strenuous Grade 7-8</th>
<th>Tough Grade 9-10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fitness/ experience required</strong></td>
<td>Basic fitness level required.</td>
<td>Good health and a reasonable standard of fitness.</td>
<td>Good base level of fitness; experience walking in remote areas.</td>
<td>Good aerobic conditioning recommended, along with experience walking in mountains and on longer duration walks.</td>
<td>High level of fitness and experience trekking in high mountains and remote areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overview</strong></td>
<td>Relatively easy walking on well-formed paths with no difficult terrain. Generally flat or undulating with no long uphill sections.</td>
<td>Walking that is generally moderate but with some more strenuous sections. Regular ascending and descending may be required.</td>
<td>Longer duration walks where conditions underfoot will be fair to uneven with potential for slippery or rocky surfaces.</td>
<td>More demanding walking with a fairly consistent level of effort required.</td>
<td>Long days; continually demanding; long ascents and descents; steep gradients. Potential for extreme variation in weather at higher altitudes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Daily hours/ km</strong></td>
<td>Short hikes; 2 to 6 hours walking up to 15km per day.</td>
<td>4 to 7 hours hiking / up to 20km per day.</td>
<td>5 to 8 hours hiking / 25km per day.</td>
<td>6 to 8+ hours / up to 30km per day.</td>
<td>7 to 10 hours / up to 30km per day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Terrain and path quality</strong></td>
<td>Compacted trail. Fairly even surfaces. Well signposted, well-maintained trail.</td>
<td>Fairly even surfaces.</td>
<td>Variable terrain.</td>
<td>Usually mountainous terrain. May include high pass crossings in remote areas.</td>
<td>High pass crossings in remote areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Max altitude</strong></td>
<td>Below 1000m</td>
<td>1500m</td>
<td>2500m</td>
<td>4000m</td>
<td>5500m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facilities</strong></td>
<td>Comfortable accommodation and good food.</td>
<td>Comfortable accommodation and good food.</td>
<td>Generally comfortable accommodation and good food; occasionally more basic conditions.</td>
<td>Generally comfortable accommodation/ mountain refugios. Food choices limited and often more basic.</td>
<td>Basic accommodation, limited variety of food, limited recourse to medical facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation required</strong></td>
<td>1 to 2 walks per week (10km each)</td>
<td>1 to 2 walks per week (15km each)</td>
<td>2 to 3 walks per week, increasing distances while carrying an 8kg pack; some hill walking stairs, or heavy sand walking recommended.</td>
<td>2 to 3 walks per week at a reasonable pace and longer distances with an 8kg pack; regular hill / mountain walking or stairs, heavy sand walking is necessary.</td>
<td>2 to 4 walks per week at a reasonable pace, and longer distances with an 8kg pack; must include long duration hikes on steep hills and in mountains.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TRIP GRADINGS**

**Australia**

- Great Ocean Walk | 3-4 Moderate

**Japan**

- Nakasendo Way | 4-6 Moderate to Challenging
- Kumano Kodo | 6-7 Challenging to Strenuous

**European Alps**

- Swiss Alps | 6-7 Challenging to Strenuous
- Tour Du Mont Blanc | 7 Strenuous
- Italian Dolomites | 7 Strenuous

**Nepal**

- Annapurna Trails | 6-7 Challenging to Strenuous
- Everest Monasteries Trek | 6-7 Challenging to Strenuous
- Upper Mustang | 7-8 Strenuous
- Everest Base Camp | 8 Strenuous

**Camino Routes**

- Portuguese Coastal Camino | 4-5 Moderate to Challenging
- Spanish Route | 4-6 Moderate to Challenging
- Le Puy Route (France) | 5-6 Challenging

**Italy**

- Via Francigena | 4-5 Moderate to Challenging

**England**

- Coast to Coast Path | 6-7 Challenging to Strenuous
PORTUGUESE COASTAL CAMINO
A stunning walk from Porto to Santiago de Compostela

EUROPEAN ALPS
The breathtaking Tour Du Mont Blanc, Italian Dolomites & Swiss Alps

GREAT OCEAN WALK
A walk of wild and wonderful discovery

COAST TO COAST
Wild England – Moors, Fells, Dales and Tarns

YOGA & HIKING TRIPS
Renew your spirit

NEPAL
Himalayan trekking with a difference

NAKASENDO WAY
Walking in the heart of old Japan

LE PUY CAMINO
Walk through the most beautiful medieval villages of France