

GETTING WALKING FIT FOR HIKING IN JAPAN

How to prepare for your multi-day trek

RAW TRAVEL
ICONIC WALKS WORLDWIDE





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京都市

有クレセール 御船 貴美夫

北九州市小倉北区須賀町

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技研トレーニング株式会社



INTRODUCTION

The ancient trails of the Kumano Kodo and Nakasendo Way will give you an authentic, off-the-beaten-path experience of the 'real' Japan. Both trails are very well suited for self-guided trekking and provide breathtaking adventures!

Our Kumano Kodo trek is demanding and physically challenging. It follows the sacred Nakahechi pilgrimage route, the most popular of the Kumano Kodo routes. The 68km trail offers splendid 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.

Daily walking distances on the Kumano Kodo range from 13km to 21.5km (6 to 9 hours, depending on your speed), with ascents and descents.

The trail offers traditional Japanese style guesthouse lodgings in small remote villages along the route.

The Nakasendo Way is (for most people) an easier hike than the more rugged Kumano Kodo. It offers picturesque walking on the original *ishidatami* (stone paving) dating back over 400 years, and provides a unique and authentic experience of traditional Japan.

Charming and wonderfully preserved 'post towns' are strung out along the route, giving you an enticing glimpse into Japan's past. The 8km trail between Tsumago and Magome is particularly impressive, and also offers delightful teahouses and waterfalls.

The average daily walking distance on the Nakasendo Way is a moderate 12–25km. There are gentle inclines that can be taken at a comfortable pace. Some sections are steep, particularly the walk up to the Torii Pass on the way to Narai.

On the Nakasendo Way, charming, traditional inns offer friendly and atmospheric overnight accommodation.

Whichever hike in Japan has piqued your interest, we strongly recommend starting a training program at least 3 months prior to your departure. Your walk will be more enjoyable if you have tested all your equipment and clothing and conditioned your feet and body to walking the same distances and terrain as your daily stages on the trail.

Common injuries from lack of preparation include blisters, shin splints, tendonitis, joint and muscle pain.

Also make sure that you and your equipment can cope with changing weather conditions. Depending on the time of year you will likely encounter days that are hot, windy, wet or cold. Be prepared and bring appropriate gear. Always plan for some rainfall along the trail.

This guide is jam-packed with expert advice and tips, along with basic training concepts, which you can integrate into your daily life and modify to suit your preferences, current fitness level and trip length.

Happy training!
RAW Travel



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ESSENTIAL EQUIPMENT

- **Hiking poles** – on the Kumano Kodo there are many steep ascents and descents, sometimes on stone staircases and over tree roots; hiking poles will give you extra stability, especially when it is wet. They are also useful on the Nakasendo Way. We definitely recommend them if you have – or have had – any issues at all with sore knees, ankles or hips.
- **Good wet-weather gear** – if you are walking the Kumano Kodo, you'll be in a wet part of Japan, so expect rain at any time of year and bring: waterproof boots (no trainers); waterproof, breathable jacket and overtrousers; waterproof cover for your daypack; and internal lightweight drybags (no cover will ever be able to keep your belongings dry in a real downpour, or a consistent day's rain). It is also quite wet on the Nakasendo Way from June to September.
- **Snacks** – the Kumano Kodo is in a rural and remote part of Japan; shops are scarce along the trail and sell only Japanese snacks, which may not be to your liking, so bring from Australia/New Zealand in sealed unopened packets what you would normally eat on a hike, eg: trail mix, muesli bars. Some of our favourite Japanese snacks to look out for include Japanese rice crackers, Pocky sticks, wasabi peas and roasted seaweed snacks. Along the Nakasendo Way it is also a good

idea to ensure you have some snacks on hand. Bring supplies from home and/or stock up from the local stores in different towns along the way. When walking through Magome, Tsumago and Narai in particular, part of the fun is sampling some of the food items from the local vendors.

- **Japanese phrasebook** – little English is spoken along the trail. RAW Travel provides all its walkers with a phrasebook and a briefing in English at the beginning of their walk.
- **Mobile phone** – if you are on a self-guided trip 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.

So that you can access WiFi while you're on the trail, we suggest you contact your service provider about international data plans. Alternatively, look at a company like Ninja Wifi and pre-book a WiFi router to collect on arrival at the airport, or have it delivered to your first night's accommodation.

See the *Destination Guides* on our website for a full packing list.

KUMANO KODO

RAW Trip Grade:

6-7 Challenging to Strenuous 

The Kumano Kodo is a mountain trek with waterfalls and shrines and physically more demanding than say the Camino trail in Spain. 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.

WHAT'S IT LIKE UNDERFOOT?

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.

There are also a few short sections of country lanes and gravel roads, and coming into towns 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.

The rugged forested mountains, quiet rural valleys, rivers and waterfalls provide a spectacular backdrop, and the seasonal contrasts of cherry blossom in the spring and rich autumn foliage inject wonderful colour along the hiking route. The tranquility and peacefulness of the trail is the main reason people love it so much.

Along the trail keep an eye out for the many different types of creatures, including beautiful butterflies, lizards and bright-orange crabs (in the forest) and snakes.





TRAIL DESCRIPTION

For the full route, allow 7 days in total: 4 or 5 days of walking, plus a rest day and arrival and departure days. RAW Travel can adapt some of the walking days to suit your timeframe and ability so that the trip matches your desired length.

Note: Hours of walking are approximate.

Stage 1: Takijiri-oji to Tsugizakura-oji (18km, 9 hours walking)

Starts with an 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 Taisha (21km, 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, 6 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, 7 hours walking)

One of the toughest sections, starting with a 2½ hour (5km) climb to 886m, the highest point of the walk. The path continues through forest and along ridges, ascending and descending.

See the website for a full list of trips and itineraries.

<https://rawtravel.com/destinations/kumano-kodo/>

NAKASENDO WAY

RAW Trip Grade:

4-6 Moderate to Challenging  

At the start of the Edo period the shogun created the Nakasendo Way for the feudal lords to travel between Kyoto in central Japan and the new capital of Edo, modern-day Tokyo. It contrasted with the other principal transportation route of the time, the Tokaido, which ran along the sea shore. While longer, the Nakasendo Way offered a safer route with less river crossings.

The walk through the picturesque Kiso Valley is an ideal introduction to walking off-the-beaten-path in Japan. You will step into a world of forest inns, remote shrines and delightful old post towns, and enjoy the stone paths and wooden buildings of a bygone era.

WHAT'S IT LIKE UNDERFOOT?

From mountains and waterfalls to tiny villages and bamboo forests, the picturesque Kiso Valley shows off the natural beauty of Japan. If you visit around mid-April, the valley is likely to be filled with cherry blossom trees of all

different varieties and colours. There's also plenty of wildlife too with birds, monkeys and even wild bears – although sightings are rare.

There are times on the Nakasendo Way that you will be walking alongside a sealed road or on a sealed road. Other times you will be walking in the forest on a single track for walkers that can be wet or uneven underfoot.

Temperatures are high in summer, with some areas of the trail offering little shade. In addition, there are few drinking water fountains along the trail, so you'll need to carry enough drinking water with you (a minimum of 2 litres per day).

The majority of the Nakasendo Way is signed in both English and Japanese. (There are only a few places where it is signed in Japanese only.) The route is variously indicated by finger-post signs in blue or on timber, in white or with the letters painted on rocks.

Daily distances vary from 12km to 25km, so you can expect from 6 to 8 hours of daily walking on the longer trekking days.





TRAIL DESCRIPTION

For the full route, allow 8 days in total (including arrival and departure days). We can adapt some of the walking days to suit your timeframe and ability so that the trip matches your desired length.

Note: Hours of walking are approximate.

Stage 1: Mitake to Hosokute **12km, 3–4 hours walking**

A lovely walk through forest, woodland and lush green countryside on some of the original stoned paving known as ishيداتami, finishing with an easy, steady climb.

Stage 2: Hosokute to Ena **21 km, 6–8 hours walking**

Includes a very old section known as the 13 passes and 13 peaks. There has been no public access through here, which keeps the area completely undeveloped. Continue through the mountains to the well-preserved post town of Okute, then walk along the ridgetops before descending into Ena.

Stage 3: Ena to Nakatsugawa **12km, 3–4 hours walking**

A short day with gentle, undulating walking through towns and villages, rice paddies and fields.

Stage 4: Nakatsugawa to Tsumago **16km, 5–6 hours walking**

Expect some steep slopes today and walking on old cobblestones. After visiting the post town of Magome – one of the highlights of the Nakasendo Way – you'll continue over the Magome Pass (800m) and descend slowly through peaceful woodland, with waterfalls, streams, rice paddies and villages.

Stage 5: Tsumago to Suhara **25km, 7–9 hours walking**

The trail ascends steeply up the valley from Tsumago, then continues through the Yokawa Forest Route on the way to Suhara, passing through cedar forests and farmland.

Stage 6: Suhara to Kiso–Fukushima **22km, 6–8 hours walking**

A lovely walk along the Kiso River on the valley floor, passing through small villages.

Stage 7: Kiso–Fukushima to Narai **22km, 7–9 hours walking**

Mostly flat walking before climbing up to the Torii Pas (1197m). Descend along narrow mountain paths until you emerge at the wealthiest of the post towns along the trail.

See the website for a list of trips and full itineraries.

<https://rawtravel.com/destinations/nakasendo-way/>

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 underfoot, 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

Trekking refers to long continuous point-to-point journeys on foot in areas where there is usually no other transport. Trekking 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 trekking countries.

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

Dolomites | 7 Strenuous

Nepal

Annapurna Trails |
6–7 Challenging to Strenuous

Everest Lower Trail |
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

England

Coast to Coast Path |
6–7 Challenging to Strenuous



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

HEALTH BENEFITS OF WALKING

Walking makes life better. Walking is good for your health, good for the environment and good for your soul.

Regular walking can have a powerful effect on your health, and it might even help you live longer. Walking can boost your immune system and keep your heart strong, reducing your risk of heart disease in the long-term by lowering blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar levels. Walking also aids digestion and helps maintain bone density, flexibility, balance and a healthy weight.

Walking improves energy levels and sleep quality, and reduces stress and anxiety. It's good for your brain, too. It can improve

memory, concentration and creativity. It gives you a chance to think, and can be a kind of meditation.

BENEFITS OF EXERCISING IN NATURE

- Fresh air has more oxygen
- Greenscapes raise serotonin levels
- Primal regions of our brain and psyche are triggered
- More sensory stimulation
- Increased feelings of wellbeing
- Increased vitamin D levels from sun exposure helps optimise hormone balance





GETTING STARTED

Getting physically prepared for your trip is all part of the experience and one that you'll benefit from long after you're back home.

Walking is one of the most natural things to do, so you may feel that you are already in good enough shape. However, our longer treks involve walking for many hours over successive days carrying a backpack, 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.

You might find it hard to get going at first but after a few weeks you will notice a big improvement, which can be very motivating.

Here are some tips to get you started.

- Plan a schedule and stick to it as closely as possible.
- Track your progress. Download a recommended walking app, wear a pedometer or keep a journal.
- Involve your family and friends on your longer walks or join a walking club.
- Mix up your training activities so that you don't get injured or bored.
- Include other forms of exercise, such as swimming, bike riding, or the step machine at the gym.
- Be mindful of what you eat (see p28)

As well as your training walks, try to build extra walking into each week. For example:

- walk instead of driving to the local shops.
- walk the dog, or your neighbour's dog.
- find a steep set of stairs and climb them several times.
- if you catch a bus or train somewhere, get off one stop earlier and walk.





TRAINING ESSENTIALS

Regular 5km walks around your local park plus some gym sessions will not adequately prepare you physically or mentally for 13–17km a day, up and down hills. Whenever possible, walk on trails or grass rather than concrete to help absorb the impact. Walk for time, not kilometres.

FIND SIMILAR TERRAIN

It is important to train on terrain that is similar to what you will encounter on your trip. For example, if your trip involves 5 to 7 hours a day of walking on rugged trails, you need to complete walks of a similar distance on comparable terrain.

MIX IT UP

Don't limit your walking to prepared or cleared trails. Practise walking on uneven ground (rocky, muddy, tree roots etc), as well as uphill (ascents) and downhill (descents).

There is a significant mental toughness required for long days of trekking, so make sure you include full days (and preferably multi-days) in your training.

RAIN, HAIL OR SHINE

Practise training in different weather conditions, too, and at different times of the day. Accept that at some stage during your

training you might feel tired, sore or cranky, but it will pass. Acknowledge it, but don't overthink it.

TEST ALL YOUR EQUIPMENT

During your training walks it's vital that you test all the equipment and clothing that you'll be using on your actual walk, not just your boots, as you may find some things uncomfortable over long distances such as velcro and zips. Get used to carrying your daypack on long walks and try a walking pole. Remember to carry adequate water, nutritious snacks, a basic first aid kit and anything else you might need to keep you comfortable and happy, such as a hat, sunscreen, insect repellent or a jacket.

DRINK LITTLE AND OFTEN

If you feel thirsty while out walking your body is already in the early stages of dehydration. Drink little and often. For longer walks, add powdered electrolytes to your water to help replace lost body salts and help aid your recovery. Backpacks with built-in water bladders make it easy to stay hydrated and are a good alternative to carrying water bottles. They cut out the need to stop every time you need a drink. Being able to drink smaller amounts of water more frequently also eliminates that feeling you get when you drink too much water all at once.



HOW TO TRAIN

In order to build stamina and strength you need to divide your training program into different phases. To start, you will need to build a good foundation (base) so that you can safely go a bit harder later on. Our bodies get used to physical activity, so as your fitness levels improve you can increase the intensity and duration of your walking.

These are the common phases of most good training programs:

- Build a good base (foundation)
- Increase your distance
- Reach your peak
- Reduce your training
- Rest

Start by taking short (1 hour) walks 2 or 3 times a week, wearing the boots and clothes that that you will be using for the trek. This will improve your aerobic fitness. If you have not been walking on a regular basis you will benefit much more from taking several 1 hour walks as opposed to one really long walk.

After a couple of weeks, increase the pace during your walks so that you are breathing



hard and able to speak only in short sentences. This is good for fat burning and improving lung capacity.

Build up to regular longer walks (2 hours) at least twice a week. When you are comfortable completing a number of shorter walks each week, test yourself with a 3–5 hour walk over hilly terrain through bushland. Remember to carry water and take a few rest breaks.

If you are an inexperienced walker, you will benefit from including plenty of full-day (and preferably several multi-day) training walks in your schedule.

When you can comfortably complete a training walk of 6–7 hours, including rest breaks, start completing some long-weekend hikes of 15–20km both days across the most difficult terrain you can find.

A week before your departure, recover. Let your body and muscles rest in anticipation of the challenge.

HOW TO RECOVER MORE QUICKLY

A key to multi-day hiking is the ability for your body to recover quickly. Having good flexibility assists hugely in speeding recovery. Find a set of stretching exercises (see p21) and start to incorporate them into your training regime. You will find that not only do you feel stronger, and recover more quickly, but the habit will extend to maintaining the stretching routine during your walk, which will make all the difference to tiredness and muscle recovery day after day. Stretching *after* exercise is the best time to stretch, not before.

DISCLAIMER

RAW Travel does not accept any responsibility for death or injuries caused by any information contained within this guide. All information is provided in good faith. You should consult your doctor before embarking on any program of physical activity.



SAMPLE TRAINING PROGRAM

The table below shows the bare minimum that you should be training. You will need to add full-day and multi-day walks to this training schedule. The more training you do and the better prepared you are, the more you will enjoy your walk. Some people find their walk harder than expected, so please make sure you read and follow the specific fitness advice provided by RAW Travel in relation to your specific trip.

Aim to do three walks per week plus a few cross-training sessions, eg, swimming, gym workout/group fitness class or bike riding. Cross training, along with regular stretching, will reduce your risk of injury and keep the training interesting. It's particularly important

for beginners who are just starting to build their strength and endurance.

Although walking is mainly a cardiovascular activity, to keep going for long periods requires total body strength, so you should also consider a weights program that will strengthen your leg, neck and shoulder muscles, as well as your core.

Plan a systematic approach to your fitness and, if available, use a gym. The step machine is great for preparation. Ask a fitness trainer to design an exercise program for you. This can make a big difference and you can achieve amazing results.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Weeks 1 to 4	1 hour walk	Rest	1 hour walk	Cross train	Rest	2 hour walk	Rest
Weeks 5 to 8	1-2 hour walk	Cross train	1-2 hour walk	Rest	Rest	2-3 hour walk	Rest
Weeks 9 to 12	Rest	1-2 hour walk	Cross train	1-2 hour walk	Rest	3-5 hour walk	Rest



WARMING UP & COOLING DOWN AFTER WALKING

The best way to warm up is to walk slowly. Start off each walk at a leisurely pace to give your muscles time to warm up, and then pick up the speed. Afterwards, gently stretch your leg muscles – particularly your calves and front and back thighs. Stretches should be held for at least 20 seconds. If you feel any pain, ease off the stretch. Don't bounce or jolt, or you could overstretch muscle tissue and cause microscopic tears, which lead to muscle stiffness and tenderness.

BASIC STRETCH ROUTINE

Hamstring (back of thigh)

- Cross your right foot over your left.
- Bend forward from your hips and keep your back straight and your hands pointing down towards your toes.
- Lean forward until you feel the stretch down the back of your left leg. Do not bounce.
- Hold for 20 seconds.
- Repeat with the other leg.

Quad (front of thigh)

- Standing on your left leg hold your right foot in your right hand behind your backside.
- Hold your stomach in and gently push your hips forward until you feel the stretch down your right thigh.
- Hold for 20 seconds
- Repeat with the other leg.

Calf

- Put your hands on a wall at shoulder height.
- Stand with your right leg forward, foot flat on the floor.

- Extend your left leg straight back, placing your heel flat on the floor. Don't bend your back knee.
- Bend the front knee and lean into the wall until you feel a stretch in the straight leg.
- Hold for 20 seconds.
- Repeat with the other leg.

Hips

- Stand with your feet at shoulder width apart and put your hands on hips.
- Keeping your head still, rotate your hips clockwise 10 times and anti-clockwise 10 times.
- Repeat 3 times.

Standing stretch

- Stand with your feet together.
- Place your hands together and reach as high as you can.
- Hold for 10 seconds, relax.
- Repeat 3 times.

MASSAGE

Self-massage and a foot soak is a great way to loosen tight muscles and get rid of lactic acid after a long training walk. If you Google 'self-massage techniques' you'll find lots of useful instructions, tips and videos online.

If hiking soreness is a routine problem, invest in a deep tissue or sports massage. A therapist can tailor the massage to your needs and comfort level. Always drink a lot of water after your massage.

If you don't like the way you feel post-walk, invest time in working out what the cause is and fixing it. Listen to your body and adjust your stretching, technique or equipment.

BUYING THE RIGHT BOOTS

There are many good makes of hiking boots. Finding the right make and model comes down to the fit on your foot. For comfort and safety, boots must be waterproof, have a good sole with good grip (look for Vibram or a similar recognised mark such as Contagrip), provide ankle support and be lightweight.

Remember that your feet can swell as much as half a size as the day progresses, so buy your boots in the afternoon.

1. Buy the right style of boots for you

Whether to go for full leather boots or lighter-weight fabric and Goretex is up to you – it's personal choice. Think about the weather and what it will be like underfoot when you are trekking – technical routes with snow, slippery forest trails or flat, paved paths?

2. Choose boots that are the right length for your feet

Boots should give you about 1cm or one thumb-width (whichever is greater) between your toes and the front of the boot, and fit perfectly everywhere else – the heel, width, and so on. This rarely happens. The golden rule is to never accommodate another part of your

foot (narrow heels, slim ankles) by choosing a smaller size and pushing your toes too close to the front of the boot. Your toes will be in agony squeezed up against the boot.

3. Prioritise toe room when buying boots

Many boots have too much volume around the heel and/or ball of the foot, so experiment with heel gel pads and/or insoles to take up the volume. You can also do this if you have already bought a pair of boots and are finding they have a little too much room around the ankle or ball of the foot.

4. Try the boots going uphill and downhill

If possible, test the boots outdoors, or at least on a proper boot-trying ramp with an uneven surface/stones etc. Good outdoor retailers usually provide one of these.

5. Wear the same socks you prefer to wear for hiking

There are all sorts of opinions on socks so you need to decide what works for you. Take your own socks with you. Don't rely on the testing socks in the shop: they usually bear no resemblance to the socks you'd wear on a trek.



6. Ask the shop assistant to explain the lacing system

This is really important. If they don't have a clue, either take a friend who is a regular hiker with you, or shop elsewhere.

7. Look after your boots

Fabric boots usually need gentle scrubbing. Never use detergent, only tepid water or very mild soap flakes; detergent can ruin your waterproofing and is very difficult to rinse off. Then they will need respraying or recoating with Gore-tex-suitable waterproofing, at least once a year.

Leather boots need slightly more work – continual applications of a suitable leather/nubuck cream or wax after every few hikes. They also need treating after you get them out of the cupboard if you haven't used them in a while (and ideally before you put them in the cupboard, too).

8. If you get soaked, dry your boots slowly and carefully

Never apply too much direct heat – don't put boots on radiators, or too close to roaring fires. Be very careful with the hot-air blowers

designed for ski-boots – don't have them on too high a setting and don't leave your boots on them for more than a couple of hours. It is better both for the longevity of your boot and the state of your feet to dry them slowly, even if it means they aren't 100% dry the next day, than to blast them and end up with hard crinkly boots which no longer fit your feet as well.

9. Store your boots properly if you aren't using them regularly

Storage itself can age and damage boots. Don't just assume you can take your old favourites out of the cupboard and wear them on a trek without checking them over. In the case of leather boots, they will need a pre-use treatment with suitable wax or cream. For all boots (especially if you live in a hot humid zone) check that the sole isn't becoming detached from the upper.

10. Check the grip on the soles of your boots

Regardless of the state of the uppers, if you have worn the soles down to the point where there is little grip, you either need them re-soling (proper Vibram or similar soles, no compromises) or you need new boots.



RELAX YOUR MIND, BODY AND SOUL

You can hit the Kumano Kodo trail each day knowing that it is likely to lead to an onsen (hot spring bath) that has soothed countless generations of tired wanderers. 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. Bathing is communal though segregated by sex and people undress and bathe before entering the onsen bath.





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 (see p22).
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.



TREKKING POLES



Trekking poles lessen the pounding on your precious joints and can help reduce muscle soreness. They will give you a feeling of security and balance on narrow or rocky trails and can help prevent ankle and knee injury on steep ascents and descents. This allows you to more fully appreciate the views around you. They are also helpful if you get tired or injured.

Trekking poles can be beneficial if you have had issues with sore knees, ankles or hips, or are not used to walking with a backpack.

Trekking poles are not needed on all RAW Travel trips, especially if the terrain is fairly flat. They really come into their own on steep terrain. If in doubt, ask one of our Destination Specialists whether you will need them for your particular walk.

Used correctly, trekking poles take between 10 and 15% of the load from your lower body and redirect that load to your shoulders and upper arms, meaning there is a more even load distribution over your frame. This will significantly help your joints, especially over an extended walk of several days.

If you suffer from arm or shoulder joint issues you may find that trekking poles exacerbate these. It's still worth trying poles, however, as you are likely to find the benefits outweigh the disadvantages.

Trekking poles are good for burning extra calories as they make you exert yourself more than usual and they do a fantastic job of taking the strain off your lower body, but they will not make you fitter. There are no short-cuts to getting walk-fit, so don't use them as a way to skimp on your training.

WHAT TYPE OF TREKKING POLES SHOULD I BUY?

You can spend a small fortune on trekking poles but it's not necessary. Cheaper poles will probably be more robust, and if you

accidentally leave them behind on the trail, you won't be so upset.

There are three main decisions to make when buying poles:

1. Do I want spring-loaded for shock absorption?

Spring-loaded shock-absorbing poles (such as the original Leki poles) are heavier than the 'normal' ones and are a little trickier to re-thread if they come undone. They are, however, very useful for people with particularly troublesome knee or ankle issues.

2. What type of locking mechanism do I want to hold my poles in place once I have extended them for use on a hill?

You will need to adjust the size of your poles when going from uphill to downhill and vice versa, so you need to be able to adjust your poles quickly and efficiently.

Generally, poles consist of three separate sections which slide down and fit together for ease of carrying, but can be extended for walking. Overall, we favour a simple metal or plastic lever at the two pole extension points because they are easier to use with cold/wet/gloved hands and often simpler to adjust if they start to get a bit loose.

However, trekking poles with the original twist-lock system are absolutely fine when you get used to the mechanism.

We are not huge fans of the pop-up metal stud fastenings. They can be problematic in very cold weather and are a bit fiddly to use.

3. How tall am I and how long do I need my poles to extend to?

If you are tall be aware that some lightweight/compact poles only extend to 125cm (or sometimes even less!). Look for poles that extend to 130 or 135cm.

FUELLING YOUR BODY WITH PROPER NUTRITION

What you eat and drink is just as important as your physical training. When you are training, a good diet can help you get the best fitness results.

HOW TO SUSTAIN ENERGY THROUGHOUT THE DAY

Blood sugar (aka glucose) provides the energy that keeps your brain buzzing and your heart ticking, and all your other muscles and organs functioning nicely.

If you eat a varied diet and regularly throughout the day, you'll be able to keep your blood sugar within the normal range, giving you sustained energy during and after training. Good nutrition will also allow your body to recover and repair each day.

When you don't fuel your body properly, your blood sugar can plummet and you can experience a range of unpleasant symptoms, from a mid-morning/afternoon slump, to headaches, agitation and crankiness.

Preventing a sugar crash is fairly easy if you take greater care with your carb intake and change a few other habits, too. Focus on including a mix of complex carbohydrates, good fats and some protein.

Remember also that exercise can drag your blood sugar down, so you need to compensate for some of the calories your body is using up.

Here's some good tips to help you sustain your energy levels while you are training.

- **Start with breakfast.** Include protein and a little fat at breakfast, both of which delay the absorption of sugar into the blood, take longer to digest and make you feel fuller than eating carbohydrates alone. Try pairing orange juice with eggs, muesli or a dense wholegrain bread with peanut butter.

- **Take the same mix-and-match approach to lunch, dinner, and snacks.** Meals with a combination of foods will create a slow, steady release of sugar into the bloodstream, keeping you on an even keel. Choose lean protein sources like turkey breast, fish, chicken, cottage cheese and legumes.
- **Don't let yourself get too hungry.** Going hours without food sets you up for a sugar-heavy snackfest. Try and eat every 2 to 3 hours. Snacks like nuts with dried fruit are easy to carry and will boost and sustain your energy levels.
- **Stay well hydrated.** Dehydration can have a major effect on mood and exercise performance, so be sure to drink water before, during and after you exercise to stay well hydrated. People require different amounts of fluids during exercise and the best gauge is the color of your urine. If this is concentrated – you are not drinking enough!

DIETARY REQUIREMENTS

In the guesthouses along the Kumano Kodo trail the majority of food will be Japanese-style only. There are no options for Western food to be served as all guests are cooked the same meals. A request for a different meal from a guest would be considered offensive and culturally insensitive. 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.

On the Nakasendo Way most of the accommodations can cater for dietary restrictions and some food intolerances. Discuss your specific requirements with us in advance.





CARBS, FATS AND SUPPLEMENTS

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are the key to sustained energy when you are walking on a trail. Carbs will give you fast fuel, so eat wholegrains before your walk and snack on boiled eggs, bananas, protein balls, or trail mix. Your body only stores limited amounts of carbohydrates, so it's essential to replace them. Plan when you'll eat. It's often hard to replenish carbohydrates once you've 'hit the wall'.

Good fats

You only need a small amount of dietary fat, so you don't need to increase it during training. Not all fats are created equal. Avocado, nuts and seeds are a great source of good fats.

Green powder supplements

In an ideal world we would all eat organic food, drink purified water and breath clean air, but because we don't there is a place for green supplements in a healthy diet. Green

powder supplements offer all the vitamins and minerals of a multi but with added nutrients such as probiotics, prebiotics and disease-protective antioxidants. Green powders were once the domain of health-food stores, but you can now buy them in supermarkets and chemists. You need to take the recommended dose consistently to get any health benefits.

MORE USEFUL TIPS

- **Practise drinking water and snacking while walking.** During training it's a good idea to drink water and snack so that you know how your body responds to food and fluid during activity.
- **Always carry food (and of course, water) with you, just in case.** Find out what's available to eat when you are on your trip. If you need advice, ask our Destination Specialists for more information.

Overall the main aim is for you to enjoy the destination you are visiting and also experience some of the many culinary highlights our destinations offer.



