

## Kansai Walking Trails

*2-week guided walking and sightseeing tour in the heart of Japan*



### Day 1 – Arrive Osaka

Arrive Osaka and make your own way to your hotel in the city centre, where you will be met by your guide this evening. The rest of the group will be arriving throughout the day.

This evening, after introductions and a short briefing on the itinerary ahead from your guide, head out for a group dinner in Dotonbori, Osaka's lively restaurant mecca.

### Day 2 – Train to Mount Koya

Transfer by train to Mount Koya. On arrival, settle into your temple lodgings and enjoy a lunch of Shojin ryori (vegetarian cuisine).

In the afternoon, trek the Nyonin-no-Michi, or "Women's Path". This gentle 5km walking trail follows the rim of low hills surrounding the many temples of Koyasan. In the Edo era, it served as a pilgrimage route for women, who were not allowed to approach the main temple sites. The route passes seven Nyonin-do, or Women's Halls, former places of worship of which only one remains fully intact.

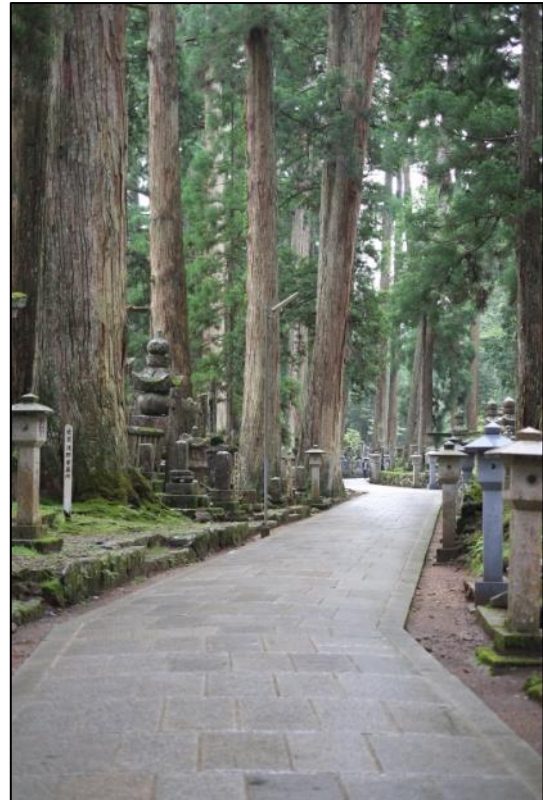
In the evening, return to your temple lodgings for dinner. At the temple, you sleep on tatami mats in private (twin/double) rooms.

### Day 3 – Explore Koyasan

Spend the morning exploring Koyasan and several of its temple sites in the company of your walking guide. The tour will focus on Okunoin, the mausoleum where Kobo Daishi, the late 8<sup>th</sup> century Japanese monk and founder of the Shingon Buddhist sect, is enshrined. The 2km approach to Okunoin temple is through a forest of tall cedar trees, lined with over 200,000 tombstones, among them memorials to emperors, shoguns, samurai and poets.

After lunch in town, we'll depart Koyasan and drive south along the Koya-Ryujin Skyline to Ryujin Onsen, where we stay this evening at a sumptuous old ryokan (family inn).

Originally built in 1657, the Kamigoten Ryokan was designated a 'tangible cultural asset' in 1999, and is famous for its fabulous white cedar hot spring baths. This evening, enjoy a delicious kaiseki (multi-course) supper made with local ingredients, followed, perhaps, by a dip in the hot springs!



### Day 4 – Kodo Pilgrimage Route; hike to Chikatsuyu (10 miles; 7 hours)

Today will see us hike a section of the old Nakahechi trail, one of Japan's National Historic Roads, and part of the famous Kumano Kodo pilgrimage route.

Starting at Takijiri Oji, the route climbs steeply for approx. 2 and a half miles until reaching the ridge-top village of Takahara, where we stop to rest. Also known as the "Village in the Mist", or "Kiri-no-Sato", Takahara enjoys beautiful views of the surrounding Haténashi mountains and valleys.





After our break in Takahara, we continue to the top of the ridge, then along a more level path before descending to Chikatsuyu, a charming village where we end the first day of our walk.

From Chikatsuyu, we transfer by vehicle to Yunomine Onsen, one of the oldest hot spring towns in Japan, and our home for the next two nights.

Overnight at a ryokan in Yunomine Onsen.



**Day 5 – Hike to Kumano Hongu and Yunomine Hot spring (6 miles; 5 hours)**

We will pick up the trail again this morning as we continue our journey to Kumano Hongu Grand Shrine, the primary destination point for walkers and pilgrims on the Kumano Kodo.

There is an increasing sense of solitude and purpose as you progress towards the Grand Shrine, passing small *jizo* statues along the way. In the past, nobles making the pilgrimage would stop at points called *oji*, small shrines intended for rest and worship, to refresh themselves and compose poetry. Their writings are now engraved on the stone monuments that line the path to the shrine.

After paying our respects at Kumano Hongu, we return on foot to Yunomine Onsen. End the day with a delicious dinner of local cuisine, and a well-earned soak in the sulphurous hot spring waters of Yunomine.

**Day 6 – Kumano Nachi (4 miles; 4 hours)**

Today will see us explore the region surrounding Kumano Nachi Taisha, one of the three main shrines of Kumano. We'll hike around Mt Nachi, with views of the shrine and the sea beyond, to the Nachi Falls, the highest single-drop waterfall in Japan, at 133m. We end with a short detour to a pretty forest above Nachi.

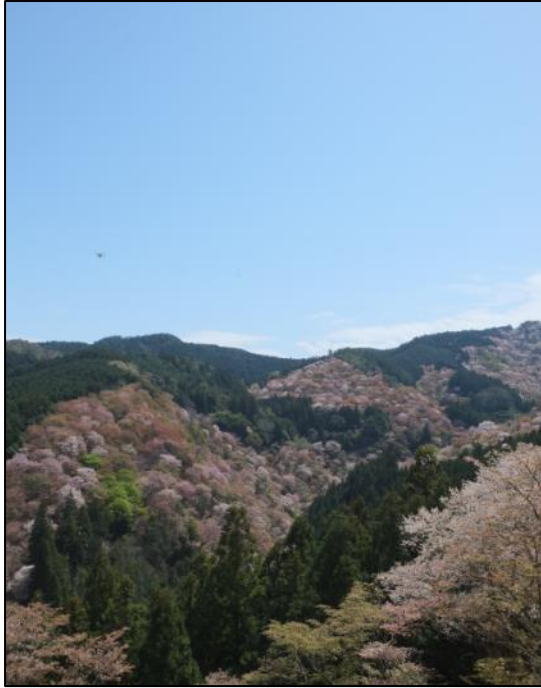
Late afternoon, transfer to the fishing town of Katsuura, where we stay tonight in a Japanese-style hotel.

**Day 7 – Yoshino**

This morning we embark on a tour of the third and final of the Kumano Shrines, Hayatama, located in the coastal city of Shingu, where it overlooks the Kumano River. At the heart of the shrine is the Nagi-no-ki, an 800-year old conifer tree that is considered to be sacred.

We then depart the Kumano region and drive north through the hills to the village of Yoshino.

Overnight at Kato Ryokan, a comfortable family-run guesthouse in Yoshino.



### Day 8 – Yoshino-yama

Today is free for us to explore Yoshino village and its many temples. Starting with Kinpusenji, one of Yoshino's most prominent temples and the headquarters of the Shugendo religious sect (an amalgamation of Buddhist and Shinto traditions which emphasises closeness to nature and rigorous physical training), we'll then continue up the slopes of Mt Yoshino to Mikumari Jinja, a beautiful shrine located on the high slopes of Yoshino and dedicated to the water goddess Ameno Mikumari.

After a lunch of kuzu noodles at a local restaurant, you might like to further explore Yoshino's temples and shrines. These include Chikurin-in Temple, which is notable for its fabulous Japanese garden; Sakuramotobo, a prominent Shugendo shrine; and Yoshimizu, a wonderfully sited shrine that is most famous for its view of the surrounding hills,

particularly beautiful during the spring cherry blossom viewing season.

Late afternoon, return to your ryokan for dinner and overnight.

### Day 9 – Hike to Dorogawa Onsen (11 miles; 5 hours)

Today we embark on a challenging 11 mile walk to Dorogawa Onsen. We'll be following a route used by the Shugendo mountain priests as part of their rigorous training, a gruelling physical regime that in the past could involve venturing into the mountains in isolation for weeks or even months at a time. Of course, we'll be conducting our walk at a rather more leisurely pace than the Shugendo priests are perhaps used to, and we'll have the luxury of a cosy ryokan and hot spring baths awaiting us at the end of the trail!



We can expect to reach Dorogawa Onsen mid-afternoon after a walk of approx. 5 hours. Overnight at a comfortable ryokan in Dorogawa.



### Day 10 – Asuka

After breakfast we depart Dorogawa and drive the short distance to Asuka.

Though it is now a small, rural settlement, Asuka played a pivotal role in the early history of Japan. Often referred to as the cradle of Japanese civilisation, Asuka once served as the capital of the Japanese state of Yamato, which unified much of Japan under an Imperial court and a model of centralised government along Chinese lines. It was from Asuka that Japan's first emperor governed, and it was in Asuka that Buddhism, imported into Japan from the Korean peninsula, first flourished.

You'll learn more of this history today as you explore Asuka's various historical monuments and relics. These include several imperial burial mounds, as well as the oldest Buddhist statue in Japan, housed in Asukadera Temple. As the sites are well spread out and the roads quiet, we'll hire bicycles to get around, stopping for lunch along the way.

Overnight at a family-run guesthouse in Asuka.



### Day 11 – Yamanobe-no-Michi Trail (8 miles; 5 hours)

The Yamanobe-no-Michi is a gentle walking trail that runs from Sakurai to Tenri, in the Nara basin. It forms part of the Shinkaido, sometimes referred to as Japan's oldest road, and takes us through a region of Japan rich in history. The 13km trail runs parallel to a range of mountains, of which Mt Miwa is the most prominent summit, but the path we'll follow is almost entirely flat, making for a very relaxed walk.

Along the way we'll pass rural cottages, farms and persimmon groves. We'll also stop at a number of peaceful shrines and temples, including the stunning Miwa Shrine and Chogakuji Temple, the latter notable for its Japanese garden and water features.

We can expect to arrive into Tenri mid-afternoon, from where it is a short drive to Nara.



Overnight in Nara at a comfortable hotel.

### **Day 12 – Explore Nara**

In Nara, we continue our tour of classical Japanese history begun in Asuka.

Nara became the capital of Japan in 710, when the Imperial court was moved from Asuka to Heijō-kyō, or what is now modern-day Nara. This period saw a flourishing of Japanese culture, much of it originally inspired by Chinese tradition but soon taking on its own unique characteristics, as well as the earliest surviving Japanese writings.

We'll learn more about this Classical era of Japanese history today, as we explore the city in the company of an experienced local guide. The morning will be spent exploring Nara Park and the surrounding temples and gardens. We'll find time to visit Nara's oldest Shinto shrine, Kasuga Taisha, and its many auxiliary shrines, which are spread across a forested hillside on the outskirts of Nara Park, and accessed via a long walkway lined with stone lanterns. We'll also visit Todaiji Temple, a staggering 17<sup>th</sup>-century wooden temple hall – it is said to be the largest wooden building in the world – housing Japan's tallest bronze Buddha. Time-allowing, we can also visit other sites of interest such as Isuien Garden and Kofuku-ji Temple.



In the afternoon, there will be time for you to further explore Nara at your own leisure.

### **Day 13 – Kyoto**

From Nara we travel north by train to Kyoto.





The capital of Japan for over 1,000 years, Kyoto is very much the spiritual heart of the country. It is a city of over 2,000 temples and shrines, whose religious architecture seems to be woven into the very fabric of the city.

Though a much smaller city, Kyoto, with its weight of historical treasures, can feel as overwhelming as Tokyo's urban sprawl for first-time visitors. Exploring the city and its many attractions is well beyond the scope of a short stay, so today we'll instead focus on a small section on the city, the Higashiyama temple district.

From Kyoto Station, we'll travel to the north-west of the city to visit the stunning Silver Pavilion and its surrounding garden. We'll then enjoy a relaxed walk along the Philosopher's Path, a long canal path lined with cherry blossoming trees that bloom beautifully in spring, to Nanzenji Zen Temple. From Nanzenji, we'll return to our hotel in the city centre.

NB. Depending on the time of year, we may re-arrange your Kyoto itinerary to take advantage of any seasonal events occurring at the time of your visit.

### **Day 14 – Kyoto**

Today we'll continue our explorations of Kyoto.

The final day in Kyoto is flexible, and the places visited will depend on the interests of the group and your appetite for more walking.

One possibility is to visit southern Higashiyama where there are walking trails in and around the famous hillside temple of Kiyomizu. In the centre of the city, Nijo Castle, its palace and gardens, is another possibility, and can be combined with a tour of Nishiki Market. Alternatively, the group may like to have a full-day tour of the western temple district of Arashiyama, with its famous bamboo grove and gardens.

In the evening, we'll enjoy a celebratory dinner at a good Kyoto restaurant to mark the final night of our tour.

Overnight in Kyoto.

### **Day 15 – Departure**

Your tour ends in Kyoto this morning. We can arrange your airport transfer (not included in itinerary cost), or onward transfers and travel arrangements if extending your stay in Japan.

### Booking Information

*Our Kansai Walking Trails itinerary is intended to be booked as a private group departure. The rates are variable according to group size, time of travel, and the choice of accommodation. For a quotation for your group, please [contact us](#).*

*Please note that this itinerary as presented is best suited to small groups of up to 8 walkers. Due to the ryokan and small guesthouse accommodation used, the itinerary may have to be re-routed to accommodate groups of more than 8.*

#### Includes:

- Twin accommodation (for *ryokan*, *minshuku*, and other traditional accommodation, rooms are Japanese-style with *futon*)
- All meals, except lunches during day 1 (Osaka) and day 15 (Kyoto)
- All entrance fees
- Dedicated walking guide throughout, with local sightseeing guide in Nara

#### Excludes:

- International flights – please us to quote
- Airport transfers
- Visas
- Personal travel insurance
- Single supplement

