

Koyasan Temple Retreat

Enjoy a break from Japan's hectic city life on this overnight escape to the Buddhist mountain refuge and UNESCO world heritage site of Koyasan.



Day 1 – Koyasan

Leave Osaka/Kyoto this morning on the local train bound for Koyasan. The 3-4 hour rail journey by local express train is considered one of the most scenic in Japan, taking you on a winding course through the valleys and mountainous foothills of Wakayama Prefecture, before dropping you off at the base of the Koya Mountains. The final, most dramatic leg of the journey is via cable car to the temple complex, which sits on top of a small plateau ringed by the eight Koya Peaks.

Japan's holiest mountain chain, Koyasan is the centre of the Shingon sect of Esoteric Buddhism, introduced to the country in the early ninth century by the monk Kobo Daishi. A small, isolated community, Koya houses close to one hundred temples and monasteries, some of them truly magnificent. Equally stunning is the surrounding scenery of thick cedar woods, sheltered valleys and misty mountain peaks. Perhaps more than any other area in Japan, Koyasan represents the traditional Japan of popular imagery—of wooden temples and crumbling tombs hidden among the trees, the smell of incense and the sound of religious chanting filling the air.

Your guide will be waiting to greet you on arrival at the cable car station in Koyasan. Upon meeting, you'll embark on a guided tour of Koyasan's standout attractions, during which your guide will explain more about the history of the region and the unique form of Buddhism that originated here.



Your tour will take in Kongobu-ji Temple, the headquarters of Shingon and the setting for Japan's largest rock garden; the magnificent Daigaran complex, housing Koya's oldest temple and a spectacular vermilion pagoda; and Reihokan, the Treasure House Museum, a cornucopia of statues, antiques and paintings detailing Koya's past.



End the tour with a visit to the Okunoin cemetery, a necropolis of over 200,000 tombs in the cedar forests east of Koya. The centrepiece here is the mausoleum of Kobo Daishi, which is accessed via a long cedar-lined approach through the cemetery, lit by stone lanterns and lined with elaborately decorated tombs.

After your tour, your guide will escort you to your lodgings in Koya. You will be staying in a *shukubo*—authentic Japanese temple lodgings—where you'll be provided with a private tatami-mat room and a dinner of *shojin ryori*, traditional vegetarian Buddhist cuisine! After dinner, relax in the *onsen* hot spring baths.



Day 2 – Departure

Wake early to watch the monks chant their morning prayers. Almost all of the temples in Koyasan conduct their own morning service, and guests are generally invited to attend.

The rest of the morning is free for you to explore Koyasan, taking in some of the sights you may have missed during yesterday's guided tour. You might like to visit the Daimon, a towering shrine gate situated just outside of town on the edge of the plateau, from where you have a marvellous view of the mountains, forests, and, on exceptionally clear days, distant Shikoku Island.

This morning, you can also attend a Buddhist initiation ceremony in one of Koyasan's temples (included with your Koyasan pass). The half hour ceremony is conducted by a head monk, and takes place in the darkened main hall of one of the temples. It's a mock ritual (the formal Kechien Kanjō initiation ceremony takes place twice yearly), but the chanting, incense and dramatic lighting combine to create a wonderfully atmospheric performance.

In the afternoon, catch the train back to Osaka/Kyoto.

Koyasan travel tips

- We recommend leaving your main luggage behind when travelling to Koyasan and just carrying what you need for a night's stay (you can leave your luggage with your hotel in Osaka/Kyoto if returning there or have it couriered to your next destination). The cable car to the top of the tableland isn't designed to accommodate heavy luggage (nor are the local trains).
- The weather in Koyasan can be chilly, even in summer time, so bring warm clothes with you!
- The Koyasan World Heritage ticket covers the entrance fee for most of Koyasan's temples, as well as the treasure house museum and the initiation ceremony. This is covered in your tour cost. Note that most of the temples won't have anyone at the entrance – rather you drop the coupon from your heritage ticket, or the correct donation, into a donation box.
- Most of the Koyasan temples won't allow you to take pictures inside, but it's generally fine to take photos of the exterior.
- Several annual festivals take place in Koyasan. Kyusho Mieku occurs on March 21st and celebrates the arrival of Kobo Daishi to Mount Koya, while Aoba-san takes place on June 15th and commemorates Kobo Daishi's birthday. Perhaps the most visually striking, however, is the Mando-e Candle Festival (Aug 13th), which sees thousands of candles of placed on the pathways to Okunoin cemetery. Accommodation is always in short supply during the festivals and early booking essential!



Price Guide:

The cost of this itinerary is **£295 per person**, based on twin/double accommodation. For more information, or if you would like to enquire about a tailor-made holiday combining part or all of the above itinerary, please [contact us](#).

Includes:

- Twin accommodation with breakfast and shojin ryori dinner
- English-speaking guide on day 1 of tour
- All entrance and public transportation fees during guided tour on day 1

Excludes:

- International flights – please ask us for a quote
- Visas
- Personal travel insurance
- Personal expenses
- Travel expenses and entrance fees during day 2 (self-guided)
- Train fare to and from Koyasan (to Osaka or Kyoto)