

Kumano Kodo Tips

The Kumano Kodo (Kohechi) is a mountain trail with 4 passes of over 1000 meters elevation. There are many steep climbs and ascents, and near the tops of Obako-toge Pass and Miura-toge Pass sections with steep drops beside the trail. Near the village areas there are sections on paved roads. To attempt the full trek good preparation and a high level of experience and fitness is necessary. Please plan accordingly to fully, and safely, enjoy your pilgrimage walk.

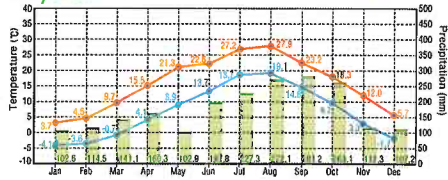
Weather

Weather on the Kohechi is variable because of the large elevation difference. Passes receive much rain and wind from ocean storms being blown over the peaks, and are often covered in fog. The weather in the southern portion of the Kii peninsula is generally mild. The winters can see some freezing temperatures, and high snow accumulation on the northern passes especially Obako-toge Pass. Summers can be hot, humid and wet, with cooler temperatures at the higher elevations. Be prepared for precipitation year round.

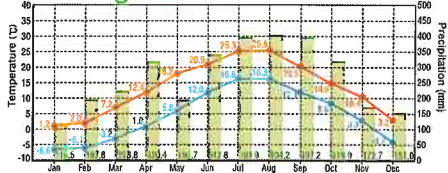
LINK

Japan Meteorological Agency: www.jma.go.jp/jma/indexe.html
Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau:
www.tb-kumano.jp/en/kumano-kodo/weather/

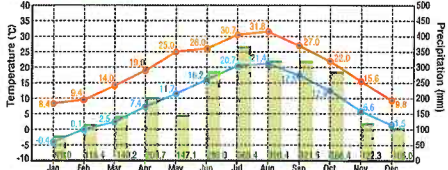
Koyasan



Obako-toge Pass



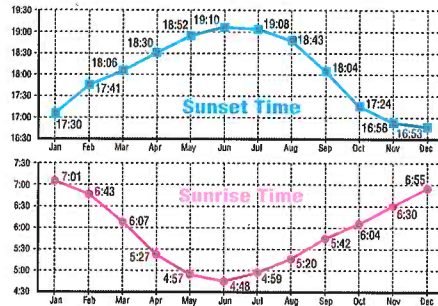
Totsukawa Onsen



Daylight

Daylight times vary greatly with winter having the shortest days. It is always best to leave early to arrive early, and be aware when sunset is so as not to get stuck in the dark while still on the trail.

NOTE: It gets darker earlier in the valleys where most of the villages are located. The best time to check-in to accommodations is 16:00~17:00.



Route Closures During Winter

IMPORTANT NOTE: The northern passes are essentially snowed in during the winter months making these sections technically closed from late December to mid-March. But the Hatenashi-toge Pass in the south is open year-round.

Clothing & Footwear

Proper clothing and footwear are essential, especially if you are planning for a longer, multi-day trek.

Review the average temperatures for the time of your walk and be prepared for seasonal variability.

Dressing in layers in clothes that dry easily is recommended; avoid cotton. Sturdy, worn-in, walking footwear is essential.

Gear

The type of gear that you will need varies with the duration and extent of your walk. The following is a general list of recommended items.

- Well-fitting backpack
- Rain gear (a foldable umbrella is convenient)
- Hat, sunglasses, sunscreen
- Collapsible walking poles
- Water bottle
- Camera
- Small first aid kit, with Band-Aids, etc.
- Small flashlight, headlamps are a good option
- Maps



Water & Liquids

It is important to carry water or liquids during your trek or walk. Natural water sources along the trail have not been tested. In the villages and settlements are small shops or vending machines where drinks can be purchased. Especially during the hotter season, it is important to keep well hydrated.

HINT: Fill up your water bottles at the accommodations before departure.

Luggage Shuttle

Daily luggage shuttle is only available between Totsukawa Onsen and Kumano Hongu Taisha for the Hatenashi-toge section. For the other passes it is necessary to send luggage ahead with a transport company such as Yamato Transport. For example send luggage from a convenience store in Koyasan to an accommodation in Totsukawa Onsen. Then use the daily luggage shuttle for the last leg. ※ Some restrictions apply.

LINK

www.tb-kumano.jp/en/kumano-kodo/luggage-shuttle/

Money/ATM

Carry enough Japanese yen in cash, as many facilities and service providers do not accept credit cards, and places to exchange money are limited. If you do need to withdraw money, the ATMs at the post offices are the best option. Hours are limited especially on weekends.

HINT: Check with your credit card company before your visit to confirm if your credit card is OK to use for withdrawals at Japan Post Bank ATMs.

LINK

www.jp-bankjapanpost.jp/en/las/en_ias_index.html

Wifi & Cell Phone Reception

Free Wifi is available at most accommodations. Cell phone reception can be limited on the trail.

Electricity

The voltage in Japan is 100 Volt. Electrical plugs have two, parallel flat pins: Type A.

HINT: bring an adapter if needed, as most accommodations do not have them.

Safety

Earthquake & Tsunami

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.

NOTE: Tsunami warning sign shown at right.



Extreme Weather & Typhoons

The Kii peninsula is one of the wettest areas in 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.

Slippery Stones

Most injuries on the Kumano Kodo are from slips and falls on the stone lined trails. The old 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 (*Gloydius blomhoffii*). It has the broad, triangular-shaped head of a pit viper. It is patterned with pale gray, reddish-brown, or yellow-brown background covered with irregularly shaped lateral blotches. Its mature length is about 45 to 80 cm. They can sun themselves in or around the trail. Use a flash light when walking round 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-orange 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 into the fall season.



Asiatic Bear

There are two species of bears in Japan, the Higuma or brown bear found in Hokkaido and the Tsukinowaguma or Asiatic bear (*Ursus thibetanus japonicus*) found on the other three main islands of Japan: Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu. Tsukinowaguma means "moon circle bear" because of the distinctive white crescent marking on their chest. There are not many left in the Kii Peninsula and they are hardly even seen.

The risk of a bear encounter is very small. Encounters are almost always with people who are foraging in dense forest for mushrooms and other wild vegetables.

But it is always best to be aware of your surroundings when walking. Look and listen to the nature around you to avoid any possible issues.

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 help line and a translation service in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, and Korean is available in most areas.

Accommodations

Accommodations along the trail are mostly Japanese style with tatami mat flooring in the guest rooms and dining area. These rooms are versatile with a low table moved to the side to lay down futon mattress to sleep. In the hot spring areas, there is a larger range of standards, from small family run minshuku guesthouses to larger traditional inns. Accommodations are limited in the smaller areas.

Reservations are highly recommended as walking up to lodgings is not custom.

NOTE: Reservations can be made online at the Kumano Travel community reservation system.

LINK: www.kumano-travel.com

Meals

A trek along the Kumano Kodo is a culinary journey. Meals at the guesthouses and inns are Japanese style. Ingredients vary from the coastline to mountain side often featuring fresh, local ingredients. Rice is a staple and eaten at most meals. Open your mind (and mouths!) to try these new and delicious foods.

HINT: Practice with chopsticks before you come.



Bedding (Futons)



Bedding in the Japanese style guesthouses are futon mattresses laid onto the tatami mat flooring.

HINT: Japanese pillows can sometimes be hard, so if you need a soft pillow consider bringing along an inflatable pillow to make your sleep more comfortable.

Yukata

Yukata are cotton gowns to wear in and around a Japanese style accommodation. They are also used as pajamas.

Fold the left side over the right and tie the belt around your waist.

HINT: Wearing something underneath can save yourself from an embarrassing moment if you are not used to sitting down with a gown on!



Tatami

Tatami are straw mats used as flooring in traditional Japanese rooms.

There are a few general rules to follow in a tatami room.

- Do not wear slippers on the tatami.
- Keep the tatami dry, for example do not leave a wet towel or rain soaked gear on the floor.
- Avoid dragging tables or heavy luggage over the tatami, as this may tear the surface.



Slippers

Staying at a traditional Japanese accommodation keeps you busy with your footwear.

Basically there are three sets of footwear:

- ① Your outdoor shoes, which are left at the door;
- ② your indoor slippers, which you wear around the facility (not on the tatami though!);
- ③ and toilet slippers, which are only for use in the toilet area.

Baths (Onsen)

Japanese baths are the ultimate place to relax and wind down after a day's walk.

Hot springs are common in the area and baths featuring these mineral waters are called onsen.



How to Bathe

The very essence of the bathing routine is as below for both hot spring and communal baths.

- ① Take off clothes in change room
- ② Rinse or wash body
- ③ Soak in bath
- ④ Relax and enjoy!

Be observant. Watch (But don't stare!) the people around you so that you know what is going on.

Most places follow these general guidelines but some do differ slightly. The main thing is to remember to keep the bath water separate from the washing water, and be polite and courteous to other bathers.

NOTE: For a full guide to the Japanese bath visit the following page online.

LINK: www.tb-kumano.jp/en/onsen/how-to-take-a-japanese-bath/

Shrines

The themes of purification and offerings repeat themselves during a visit to the shrine. The general flow of worship is to:

- Wash hands and rinse mouth at the purification basin (often near the entrance to the shrine).
- Make the bell ring by shaking the rope.
- Offer some coins in the offering box, if you wish.
- Bow twice deeply.
- Clap your hands twice.
- Then bow once deeply.



Omamori

An Omamori is an amulet used for many reasons including warding off evil, for traffic safety, health, etc. The word mamori (お守) means protection, with omamori meaning honorable protector. They often describe on one side the specific area of luck or protection they are intended for and have the name of the shrine or temple they were bought at on the other.



Ema

Ema (絵馬) are votive plaques used to make requests or wishes to the deities. This practice dates back hundreds of years to the 8th century. Ema directly translated means horse picture. Originally horses were given as offerings to shrines and over time this turned into offering images of horses. These days there are many motifs used including zodiac signs.

Goohein (Goshimpu)

The Kumano Goohein or Goshimpu (ご守印) is a powerful amulet distinctive to the Kumano Sanzan Grand Shrines. Its main purpose is to ward off evils, avert calamities and bring good fortune. It is often displayed on house doors and in rice fields. Originally the amulet was composed of a red tear drop-shaped stamp, but to distinguish it from others, a background wood-block print with an intricate design of stylized crows and double lined good-fortune jewels was added. Each Kumano Sanzan Grand Shrine has a different version based on the same theme.



Pilgrimage Etiquette

Please abide by the following guidelines while enjoying the Kumano Kodo.

- Preserve the area as "heritage of all humankind".
- Respect the faith of past and present worshippers.
- Keep the routes clean - carry out all waste.
- Protect the local flora and fauna - do not remove or introduce animals or vegetation.
- Stay on the routes.
- Be careful with fire - prevent forest fires.
- Be prepared - plan your trip and equip yourself properly.
- Greet others with a smile and warm heart.

Model Itineraries

Below are two basic walking overviews of the Kohechi. One is a full traverse and the other is a one day hike on the southern Hatenashi-toge Pass section. Both of these itineraries can be done in either direction or linked up with the Nakahechi route from Hongu.

Koyasan to Kumano Hongu Taisha Trek

5 nights, 6 days

Day 1:
● Transfer to Koyasan, overnight ①

Day 2:
● Walk Koyasan to Omata (p.6~7), overnight ②

Day 3:
● Walk Omata to Miura-guchi (p.8~9), overnight ③

Day 4:
● Walk Miura-guchi to Totsukawa Onsen (p.10~11), overnight ④

Day 5:
● Walk Totsukawa Onsen to Kumano Hongu Taisha (p.14~15), overnight ⑤

Day 6:
● Transfer to next destination

Option: Stay an extra night in the Hongu area to enjoy the hot springs then continue walking on the Nakahechi for two more days to Kumano Nachi Taisha.

Hatenashi-toge Pass Day Hike

2 nights, 3 days

Day 1:
● Transfer to Totsukawa Onsen, overnight ①

Day 2:
● Walk Totsukawa Onsen to Kumano Hongu Taisha (p.14~15), overnight ②

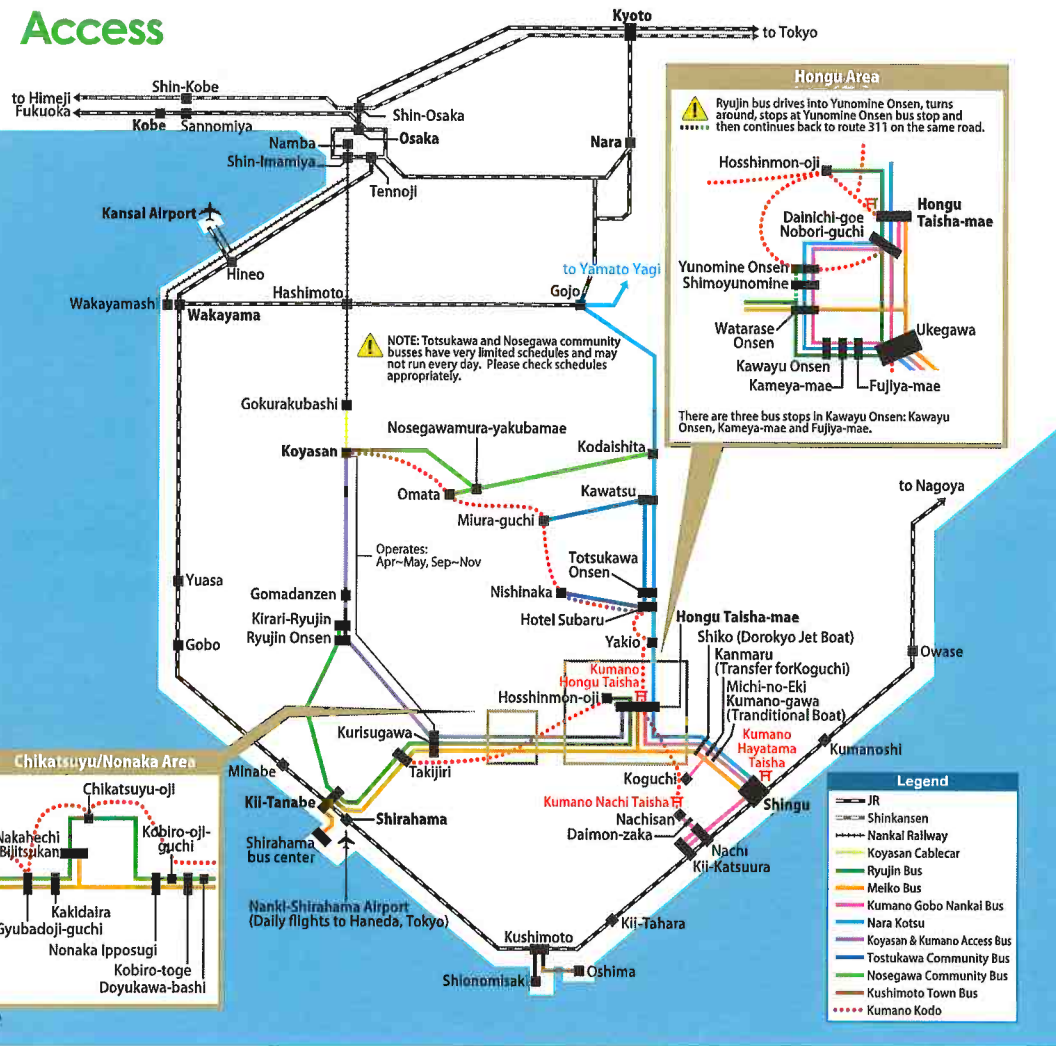
Day 3:
● Transfer to next destination

Option: This hike can be done on a trip from the Hongu area. If you are walking the Nakahechi, spend a few days in Hongu and do this walk to experience a little bit of the Kohechi route.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The northern passes are essentially snowed in during the winter months making these sections technically closed from late December to mid-March. But the Hatenashi-toge Pass in the south is open year-round. Please plan and prepare carefully for these advanced treks.

See more itineraries and details online.
LINK: www.tb-kumano.jp/en/itineraries/list/

Access



Trains

Trains are an efficient way to access the trailheads for the Kumano Kodo.

The Nankai Railway line to Koyasan leaves from Nankai Namba train station in Osaka. Depending on which train you take a transfer in Hashimoto may be necessary. Gokurakubashi is the last station. From here a short, steep cable car ride leads to Koyasan station. The trains and cable cars are timed to easily connect between the two. From Koyasan station it is a short public bus ride into Koyasan village.



JR train lines between Wakayama city and Gojo via Hashimoto where they connect with the Nankai line. Train lines also run along the coast of the Kii Peninsula. One line runs from Osaka on the west coast (JR West), and the other runs from Nagoya on the east coast (JR Central). They overlap between Kii-Katsuura and Shingu on the south east. The JR West express trains are called Kuroshio, after the ocean current that flow off of the peninsula. The JR Center express trains are called Nanki Wide View.

From Hongu take a local bus to either Shingu or Kii-Tanabe to connect with the coastal train services.

Tickets

Tickets can be purchased on site at all major stations. An express train is the fastest way to travel to the area. For JR express trains two tickets are issued, a basic Fare Ticket and a Limited Express Ticket. Keep both tickets for the duration of the trip, as you will need them to exit the station on arrival.



Useful Words & Phrases

- I would like to buy a one way express train ticket to Koyasan station. (高野山駅までの特急切符を買いたいです)
- Reserved Seat (指定席)
- Platform (プラットフォーム)
- Station (駅)
- Non-Reserved Seat (自由席)
- Transfer (のりかえ)

Bus

Local Buses are the main form of public transport once you leave the coast and head into the mountains. Buses are limited (especially along the Kohechi) so it is best to plan ahead and check the timetables.

NOTE: Downloadable timetables are available online.

LINK: www.tb-kumano.jp/erv/transport/bus/

How to Ride a Local Bus

Riding a local bus is easy once you learn the basic system as outlined below.



- ① Enter through rear door (or front door if only one)
- ② Take number ticket
- ③ Push button to inform driver that stop is wanted (It is also good practice to tell the driver where you want to get off when you board)
- ④ Match number ticket to the electronic fare chart at the front of the bus to determine fare (prices change according to distance travelled)
- ⑤ Change money if needed
- ⑥ Put money and ticket in fare box (exact fare)
- ⑦ Exit through front door

NOTE: Only 1000 yen bills can be changed for coins. So make sure that you have enough smaller bills before you get on the bus.

Kii-Tanabe Station Bus Stop

Buses for the Kumano Kodo depart from bus stop number 2 in front of the Tanabe Tourist Information Center next to the Kii-Tanabe station.

HINT: Tell the bus driver where you want to get off when you board the bus.



Useful Words & Phrases

- I would like to go to the Yakuo bus stop. (八木尾バス停までお願いします。)
- Where is the Kumano Kodo trailhead? (熊野古道登山口はどこですか?)
- Bus stop (バス停)
- Change money (両替)
- Bus fare (バス代)
- Transfer buses (バス乗りかえ)
- Number ticket (整理券)