

Signs

There are a diversity of signs on the Kohechi route depending on the municipality the trail is running through. For the most part they are wooden, brown with white lettering in both Japanese and English. In the Totsukawa village area there are also stone signposts. Please pay attention to signage to follow the Kohechi safely.



Route Guide

Overview

The Kohechi route is a mountainous trail not suitable for beginners, but for those with experience multi-day trekking in an isolated mountain environment. It is a four day walk covering ~65 km, traversing a high mountain pass over 1000 m in elevation every day.



Weather

The passes are high and subsequently weather is variable with much rain, wind, and fog. The northern passes are essentially snowed in during the winter months making these sections technically closed from late December to mid-March. (The Hatenashi-toge Pass in the south is open year-round.)

Lodging

Accommodations are available in Koyasan, Omata, Miura-guchi, Totsukawa Onsen, and the Hongu area. Miura-guchi has limited options. Reservations are highly recommended and essential so as not to get stuck in the mountains without a place to stay.

Transportation

Public transportation is limited especially between Omata and Miura-guchi which are located on different sides of a major mountain range and only serviced by community busses focused on children getting to and from school. Please check and enquire locally to get the most up-to-date information on bus options.

Preparation

Good preparation and excellent fitness is essential to make the full four day trek between Koyasan and Kumano Hongu Taisha on the Kohechi. Please be prepared and travel safely.

Mizugamine Peak (Koyasan~Omata)



Overview

This section starts in Koyasan and finishes at the Omata bus stop. There are longer sections on paved roads: near Otaki, on the Koyasan-Ryujin Skyline road, and a forestry road after Mizugamine Peak. The trail is generally wide and easy to walk, with some steep sections into river valleys near Otaki (Odo-gawa River) and the Omata bus stop (Kawarabi-gawa River).

Trailhead

The trail starts in the center of the spiritual sanctuary of Koyasan, heading south to the west of Kongosanma-in along a gravel road ascending until the Susuki-toge pass.

Sacred Koyasan

Koyasan has many sites to see including the mystical Okunoin cemetery, so it is recommended to stay a night or two here in a temple.

Nyonin Michi

At the ~1 km point along the road the trail joins the Nyonin-michi Women's Pilgrimage Route for ~500 m. There was a ban on women in Koyasan until 1872. Around the perimeter of the precinct were Nyonin-do, or women's temples, where females could pray from a distance. The Nyonin-michi was the circuit route connecting these temples.

Otaki

Otaki is a small settlement built onto the mountainside. There are toilets, covered shelter, stamp, and a small shrine located here. Watch for plantations of Koyamaki trees (Japanese Umbrella-pine). These evergreen conifers have thick green leaf-like needles and are endemic to Japan—a living fossil with no close relatives.

Koya-Ryujin Skyline

After Otaki the trail climbs to the scenic Koya-Ryujin Skyline road which runs along the ridgetop between Koyasan and Gomadanzan, before descending to Ryujin Onsen. The Kohechi follows this road for about 1.5 km. Be careful of vehicles.

Mizugamine Village Remains

Mizugamine was a settlement that flourished during the middle of the Meiji period until 1952 when the village was abandoned because of new transportation routes and lack of agricultural land.

Forestry Road

The trail joins a forestry road soon after Mizugamine Peak which winds along the ridgeline of the mountains offering panoramic views.



Omata Bus Stop

The trail runs along the road in sections before descending swiftly to the Kawarabi-gawa River. At the base of the slope is the Omata bus stop, toilet, pay phone, and stamp.

Obako-toge Pass (Omata~Miura-guchi)

Overview

This is often considered the most challenging and "wildest" day of the trek. The trail is entirely in the mountains with much of it at high elevation. It is one of the highest peaks in the region taking the brunt of storms that rise up the mountain range from the ocean. Weather can be fierce and change quickly, often with foggy conditions. The valleys below can be fine weather with heavy rain at the peak.

The trail has a very different feel on the either side of the Obako-toge pass. The north side has wider trails with easier gradients. The south side is more of a wilderness trail with some spots that are narrow with steep slopes.

Trailhead

The trailhead starts at the Omata bus stop. Cross the road and head up the narrow alley between the houses to the top of the small settlement where the trail changes from paved road to dirt trail.

Kaya-goya-ato Remains

Historically there used to be several teahouses at Kayagoya. Local seniors speak of five houses in the past, but three were burned down due to a fire. The area was inhabited until the mid-1980s. At that time, there were the main buildings, barns, woodsheds, 4000 square meters of rice fields, and surrounding fields.



Obako-dake Junction

At the Obako-dake junction there are three trails. To the right the trail leads west along a ridge line to the Mt. Gomadanzan area. The trail straight ahead continues up the ridge line to Obako-dake Peak. The trail to the left is the main Kohechi route which traverses the northern slope until the Obako-dake pass, where there is a non-serviced shelter and toilet.

Narrow Trail

The atmosphere of the trail changes quickly after the pass, turning into a smaller

mountain trail through mature beach forest. Before reaching the Uenishi residence remains there is a short narrow part with a steep slope, prone to slides. If the trail looks to be in very poor condition, it is often recommended to scramble up and over the affected section to the other side.

Uenishi Residence Remains

The Uenishi residence has a recorded history from the 17th century. The 1682 Kumano Annal-iki guide, states that there was a house here. During the early Edo period, there was an inn and was inhabited until 1934. Cows and extensive vegetables fields were kept.

Stories told by the nearby villagers speak of the old road used both as a transportation route for goods and pilgrimage trail. The packhorse drivers would take a short break and drink tea at Uenishi before heading down the mountain. Spring and summer brought energetic pilgrims who would stay at the inns overnight—singing and enjoying themselves until late into the night.

Heading South

The trail south of Uenishi residence remains climbs up the ridge line. There is an old trail that heads down, don't take it. Remember that you need to climb the ridge immediately after the clearing. If there is heavy fog sometimes it is difficult to locate the trail on the south side of the remains.



Mizugamoto Teahouse Remains

"Mizugamoto" means water source and it is believed that Kobo Daishi founded this holy spring. A sign once venerated its dramatic healing properties.

There is a tale of an eccentric old woman who lived here, with eerie resemblance to a "Yamamba" mountain witch from Japanese folklore. She had a strange appearance with disheveled hair that was a mix of red and white: a pale face with big wrinkles, large gleaming eyes, and shiny white teeth—people feared her discomfiting presence.

Machidaira

The name Machidaira comes from an episode of history, when Prince Otonomiya (1308-1335) escaped to Kumano to flee from warring rivals. He was said to have waited here for one of his retainers: "Machi" wait and "Taira" broad or flat.



There are records of a temple, tea house, and "Sekisho" checkpoint from the Edo era.

Miura-guchi

The trail meets the road at the valley bottom following it through the small settlement of Miura-guchi. Nearby is Mitadani bus stop with a toilet and pay phone.

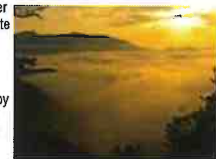
Miura-toge Pass (Miura-guchi~Totsukawa Onsen)

Overview

The first 10 km is a mountain trail up and over the Miura-toge pass. The last 8 km is on route 425 parallel to the Nishi-gawa River to Totsukawa Onsen.

Trailhead

From Miura-guchi bus stop the trail threads by some buildings to a metal suspension bridge across the river. From here it is a steady and constant climb to the pass.





Yoshimura House Remains & Windbreak Cedar Trees

This site was an important waystation between Obako-toge pass and Miura-toge pass with a travelers inn. It was occupied until 1948.

The large cedar trees served as a windbreak and are estimated to be 500 years old with a circumference of 4-8 m.

Miura-toge Pass

The trail finishes climbing at Miura-toge pass where there is a toilet and covered shelter. A forestry road runs along the ridge. Cross straight across the road to find the trail.

Furuyagura Remains

Documents describe Furuyagura as the site of two tea houses. The last inhabitants left in 1935. Nearby is a Jizo statue and Namu Amida Butsu monument.

A legend of treachery and murder haunts the remains. In the early 17th century a monk surprised and attacked travelers, murdering them to collect money to join the Siege of Osaka, a series of battles between warring feudal lords.

Demise Teahouse Remains

This area had teahouses and accommodations until 1910 with many rice paddies cultivated by nearby residents.

Yagura Kannon-do

This small structure was rebuilt in 1955 and houses three stone sculptures: Nyoirin-Kannon Bosatsu (center),

Jizo Bosatsu (left), and Kannon Bosatsu (right). The Nyoirin-Kannon Bosatsu is from the Edo period. The Jizo Bosatsu has an inscription from 1725 and is believed to help people recover from ear disorders by rubbing its head while praying.

Nishinaka Bus Stop

The trail crisscrosses a forestry road before reaching the valley bottom and Nishinaka bus stop. From here it is a gentle walk along route 425 through small settlements often with nice views of the river.

Hotel Subaru & Totsukawa Onsen

Hotel Subaru is an accommodation along the trail with hot spring baths available for day use. It is ~2 km further to the central part of the Totsukawa Onsen. Totsukawa village spreads along the coast of a man-made lake.

Hatenashi-toge Pass (Totsukawa Onsen-Kumano Hongu Taisha)

Overview

The Hatেনashi-toge pass is a steep climb and descent. From Yakio bus stop the trail follows route 168 before joining the Nakahachi route at Sangenjaya until Kumano Hongu Taisha. This pass makes for a good day walk without traversing the entire Kohechi trail and is open year-round. Busses travel daily between Totsukawa Onsen, Yakio, and Hongu.

Trailhead

From Hotel Subaru the trail runs through an old tunnel to a pedestrian suspension bridge. A dirt path leads through a set of houses before beginning the ascent. After crossing a road the trail climbs swiftly up the ridge-line with sections of ancient cobblestone staircases.



Thirty-Three Kannon Statues of Hatেনashi-toge Pass

Thirty-three statues of Kannon line this mountain trail beginning at Ichizako in Totsukawa Village (No.33), Hatেনashi Settlement (No.30), Hatেনashi-toge Pass (No.17), and Yakio Settlement in Hongu Village (No.1).

Kannon is a Buddhist deity often referred to as the Bodhisatva of mercy, and is represented as both male and female. A Bodhisatva is a being that compassionately refrains from entering Nirvana in order to save others. Kannon is the most widely revered of all Bodhisatvas and temples in Japan have more images of Kannon than of all the other deities combined.

Kannon is capable of assuming thirty-three manifestations suited to the time, the place, and the individual. In Japan, it is common to travel to each site that houses these diverse forms of Kannon to complete a pilgrimage circuit. These statues were contributed and erected by the citizens of Totsukawa Village, Shingu City, and Hongu Village between 1922 and 1923.

Hatenashi Settlement

Hatenashi settlement is a scenic ridge-top hamlet with a panoramic backdrop of mountains, a key site in the registration of the area as one of "The Most Beautiful Villages in Japan".



The trail climbs through the settlement, often next to people's homes, so please offer respect to the local residents.

Tensuida

These fields are rare examples of ridge-top rain-fed rice paddies. Rice production requires large quantities of water for irrigation to be successful. They were managed by the owner of the nearby Yamaguchi Teahouse and display the efficient and innovative use of the abundant rainfall in the region.

Yamaguchi Teahouse Remains

The Yamaguchi Teahouse was an important stop along the Kohechi pilgrimage route and was mentioned in various historical documents. A stone wall running east-west remains where the structure once stood. On the east side, a grove of Japanese cedars served as a windbreak. Nearby, stone statues of Jizo and the Eleven-faced Kannon watch over passing travelers.

Hatenashi Kannon-do Temple

There are three stone statues enshrined in the Hatেনashi Kannon-do Temple: Shokannon, Juichimen Kannon, and Fudo Myo-o.

Although Kannon Bodhisatva appears in many manifestations, the basic and unchanging one is called Shokannon, which is seated in the middle.

The Juichimen Kannon (Eleven-faced Kannon), standing on the left, represents the ten sacred vows of the Buddha to protect worshippers from disaster and harm.

Fudo Myo-o, the Immovable Mantra King, is on the right, seated in front of an aureole of flames. This wrathful deity has the power to crush all obstacles to enlightenment and convert anger into salvation. He is a patron deity of the Yamabushi mountain ascetics. Since ancient times, this site has been a place to pray for safe passage in the area.

Hatenashi-toge Pass

The Hatেনashi-toge pass is small and abrupt with the trail quickly descending the south face of the mountain. It is the eastern end of the Hatেনashi mountain range, a

dominant feature of the region.

Hongu Viewpoint

Between Kannon number 11 and 12 is a scenic lookout viewpoint of the Kumano-gawa river twisting through the mountains and Hongu village.

Yakio Bus Stop

At the base of the mountain is the Yakio bus stop. From here the Kohechi follows route 168 south. It is a popular trailhead for those planning to walk only the Hatেনashi-toge pass mountain trail.

Michi-no-Eki OkuKumano Kodo Hongu Rest Area

This rest area serves as the local grocery store. There is also a small restaurant serving simple meals. From here continue on 168 to the Hiraiva-guchi bus stop where the route follows a forestry road up the mountainside to Sangen-jaya.

Sangen-jaya

Sangen-jaya is the junction of the Nakahechi and Kohechi routes marked with an historic stone sign post. Here once stood three tea houses alluding to its importance.

A replica of a Sekisho checkpoint stands on the site. Sekisho were systemized in the Edo period (1600-1868) and found on all of the major routes in Japan. Their main purpose was to control the movement of people and collect tolls.

NOTE: Halfway between Sangen-jaya and Kumano Hongu Taisha (near number sign post 73) is a short side trail to a lookout point that is not to be missed!



Kumano Hongu Taisha

Kumano Hongu Taisha is one of the three grand shrines of Kumano. The trail enters the grounds from the north. The pavilions have gone through periodic rebuilding after damage from fires and floods but the architectural style has remained consistent for over 800 years. Notice the graceful cypress bark roof and distinctive bronze ornaments on the roof top.



Yatagarasu Three-legged Crow

An interesting motif that can be found in the Kumano Sanzan is the Yatagarasu three-legged crow. It is believed to be a divine messenger and supernatural guide, who helped the first emperor of Japan navigate the impenetrable Kumano mountains in the Japanese creation myth. The three legs represent heaven, earth and mankind. A modern day use of the Yatagarasu is in the logo of the Japanese Football association.

Oyuhohara

Oyuhohara is the original site of the Kumano Hongu Taisha. In 1889 a flood destroyed the shrine and it was moved to its current location. In the clearing the expansive, raised earthen platform still exists.

A massive Torii gate marks the entrance at almost 34 meters tall and 42 meters wide. It is built of steel and erected in the year 2000.

Hongu & Onsen

South of the Kumano Hongu Taisha stairs lined with offering flags lead to route 168. Across the street is the Kumano Hongu Heritage Center and Hongu Taisha-mae bus stop. From here local busses link to three hot spring areas with accommodations: Yunomine Onsen, Kawayu Onsen, and Watarase Onsen.

DUAL PILGRIM



ARE YOU A "DUAL PILGRIM"?

If you have completed both the Kumano Kodo and Way of St. James then you are a "Dual Pilgrim".

To receive the Dual Pilgrim status, pilgrims must complete one of each of the following:

WAY OF ST. JAMES

- at least the last 100 km on foot or by horse, or
- at least the last 200 km by bicycle

KUMANO KODO

- Takijiri-oji to Kumano Hongu Taisha on foot (~38 km) or
- Kumano Nachi Taisha to / from Kumano Hongu Taisha on foot (~30 km) or
- Hoshinmon-oji to Kumano Hongu Taisha on foot (~7 km) plus a visit to Kumano Hayatama Taisha and Kumano Nachi Taisha or
- Koyasan to Kumano Hongu Taisha on foot (~65 km)

CREDENTIAL

Credentials are available at the information center next to the Kii-Tanabe station.



STAMPS

Stamp are mostly located in small wooden stands or accommodations. Watch for the icon on the maps.



REGISTRATION SITES IN JAPAN

Kumano Hongu Heritage Center
世界遺産熊野本宮館
100-1 Hongu-cho Hongu,
Tanabe City, Wakayama Prefecture,
647-1731

Tanabe Tourist Information Center
田辺市観光センター
1-20 Minato, Tanabe City,
Wakayama Prefecture, 646-0031

NOTE: Registration takes ~15 min and cannot be mailed out.

MORE INFORMATION

www.tb-kumano.jp/en/world-heritage/dual-pilgrim/