



Kumano Nachi-taisha, one of the three sacred Kumano Sanzan shrines, and the revered Nachi no taki falls



The Eighty-eight Holy Sites of Shikoku are eighty-eight temples built on sites chosen by Kukai (774–835), one of the great founders of Japanese Buddhism, when he visited Shikoku. Originally, Buddhist monks made a pilgrimage to all of these temples, a practice that spread among the laity as well during the Edo period (1603–1867). Traversing the entire course is a trip of more than 1,200 km. It is now possible to make this pilgrimage by bus or car, as well as on foot.

## Kumano Kodo

The Kii Peninsula protrudes from central Honshu into the Pacific Ocean. The Kii Highlands, comprising the southern part of the Kii Peninsula, is a range of mountains rising between 1,000 and 2,000 meters above sea level. Forests grow in profusion in this region, which receives large amounts of rainfall.

There are three holy sites in the region: Kumano, Yoshino/Omine and Koya-san. Since ancient times,

pilgrims have visited these sites in great numbers. Known as Kumano Sanzan, these sites had a particular heyday in the middle centuries of the Heian period (794–1192), when pilgrims traveled the road in such endless numbers that they were referred to as “the Kumano Pilgrimage of the Ants.” The Kumano Kodo was the road traveled by these pilgrims to reach Kumano Sanzan.

Even now, many people walk the Kumano Kodo. Travelers have a number of courses to choose from, including the mountain course, more than 1,000 meters above sea level (recommended for advanced mountain trekkers), the road paved with stones said to have been laid down more than 700 years ago, and the course that affords a view of the Pacific Ocean as one walks along. These walks afford the opportunity to experience nearly a millennium of history and culture in beautiful natural surroundings.