

Japan National Tourist Organization Press Release
For immediate release - 2nd July 2004
Japanese Pilgrimage Trail added to World Heritage List



On 2 July 2004, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre inscribed three sacred sites in Wakayama Prefecture, Japan onto the UNESCO World Heritage List of cultural assets. The three inscribed sites of Yoshino and Omine, Kumano Sanzan, and Koyasan are linked by pilgrimage routes to the ancient capital cities of Nara and Kyoto.

Yoshino and Omine - the mountains in these areas were major objects of worship as they were thought to control the water supply. Japan's indigenous nature worship is based on the belief that natural objects and places are revered as sacred entities where the gods descend.

Kumano Sanzan - the three grand shrines of Hongu-taisha, Hayatama-taisha and Nachi-taisha were founded at different times and enshrine different gods. These three shrines were popularized in the middle of the Heian Period (794-1192) when the imperial family and nobility began making pilgrimages to Kumano seeking salvation in *sangaku shinko* (a belief in the supernatural power of mountains), rather than through common religious practices. All people regardless of social rank, sex and belief were allowed to make the pilgrimage to Kumano Sanzan.

On the peak of Mt. **Koya-san**, surrounded by mountains, is Kongobu-ji Temple, founded by Kobo Taishi, the Head Temple of Esoteric Buddhism, which has a 1200-year-long history. More than 120 temples are scattered throughout the area, thus forming a great religious city. Over 50 of these historic temples open their doors to overnight visitors. The temple lodgings are in traditional Japanese style rooms and the food served is vegetarian Buddhist cooking without any use of meat, fish, onions or garlic.

The Imperial Pilgrimage Route Tour

Still today it is possible to hike along the pilgrimage route in the Kii Mountain Range. Small group adventure and trekking tour operator Himalayan Kingdoms offers a 15 day tour to Japan that includes six days trekking in the Kii Mountain Range.

The Imperial Pilgrimage Route tour dates:

24 October 2004 to 07 November 2004

Price: £2895.00 - including flights and accommodation in a mixture of hotels and whilst on the trek in ryokan and *minshuku* (family-run inns).

Ends

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UNESCO World Heritage Official Website

<http://whc.unesco.org/>