

The Kumano Pilgrimage Trail

A journey of a thousand years

tour highlights

The historic beauty of Kyoto with its many world heritage sites.
The UNESCO recognised Kii Peninsula and the Kumano Kodo Pilgrims Trail.
Visits to the three most sacred shrines on the Kumano Kodo Trail- Hongu Taisha, Hayatama Taisha and Nachi Taisha.
Thermal hot springs bathing.
Japanese hospitality in traditional local inns and guest houses, sleeping on futon mattresses and dining on local cuisine.

tour date

Please enquire for 2021

tour cost

TBA

activities

Walking

trip duration

7 Days 6 Nights

grade

Moderate
Includes steps and climbs

accommodation

Western Style Hotels, Japanese minshuku (B&B) and Ryokan (Inns)

your guide

Join Tuatara Tours on a fully guided walking tour of Japan and let Nicky, our Tour Manager (and fluent speaker of Japanese) take care of the details for you. Nicky spent 3 years living in Japan and looks forward to sharing her love of this fascinating country with you.



the tour

Join Nicky, our Tour Manager and fluent speaker of Japanese, on a journey that spans a thousand years of history, religion and culture.

The Kumano Region is an area of outstanding natural beauty at the southern end of the Kii Peninsula. Still relatively unknown to international visitors, Kumano has been travelled for centuries by people from all levels of Japanese society, including emperors and aristocrats, in their journey to fulfil religious rites and gain spiritual enlightenment.

The pilgrims used a network of routes, called the Kumano Kodo, which link the major religious sites and numerous smaller shrines on the pilgrimage. This network was officially registered by UNESCO in 2004 as one of only 2 recognised pilgrimage routes in the world, the other being the Camino de Santiago in Spain.

Following in the footsteps of the early pilgrims, our journey will take us from Kyoto, the cultural heartland of Japan to the three grand shrines of the Kumano Region, with overnight stays in peaceful rural towns and villages enroute. Delight in a walking experience that combines lush natural beauty and a rich cultural history.

This tour can be paired with our Nakasendo Trail to maximise your walking experience, or ask Nicky for other suggestions on how to extend your stay in Japan.

at a glance

- DAY 1: KYOTO
- DAY 2: KYOTO HIGHLIGHTS
- DAY 3: KYOTO - TANABE - TAKAHARA
- DAY 4: TAKAHARA - TSUGIZAKURA - YUNOMINE ONSEN
- DAY 5: YUNOMINE ONSEN - HONGU TAISHA - YUNOMINE ONSEN
- DAY 6: YUNOMINE - NACHI TAISHA - KII KATSUURA
- DAY 7: KII KATSUURA - SHINGU - KYOTO OR TOKYO

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what's included

General

All transport ex Kyoto - all accommodation in hotels or Japanese style Inns on a double / twin share basis- daily breakfast, 4 dinners and 1 lunch- admission to all temples and sightseeing spots in your itinerary- portage of 1 piece of luggage per person while on the Kumano trail- services of Nicky as guide and interpreter throughout.

Accommodation

Kyoto: We stay in a Western Style Hotel close to Kyoto Station, and shops and restaurants. Rooms are double/ twin with ensuite facilities and the hotel also has both European and Japanese restaurants, in house bar and room service.

Hotels in Japan are quite small compared to Western equivalents, an average double room is only 20-30sqm. The room typically contains a small private ensuite bathroom, known as a "unit bath", with shower over Japanese bathtub, toilet and hand basin. The room will usually have a television, an electric pot for boiling water for a hot drink, phone and internet access, hairdryer, air conditioning and a fridge.

The Kumano: We stay in traditional Ryokan (Inns) and Onsen hot springs hotels. These usually offer traditional rooms with tatami mat floors, futon bedding and yukata robes for wearing in the evenings and to dinner.

On our tours some of the inns are more rustic and atmospheric, while others more modern and luxurious. Most of the smaller inns are family run and have been in the same family for several generations. As is traditional, in some inns bathing and toilet facilities are shared but others have en-suite facilities.

Food

Japan is a food lovers paradise, as well as all the traditional local favourites, Japan offers an amazing choice of international restaurants, coffee shops, bars and food outlets.

On your tour we provide a hearty breakfast each day to set you up for the day and you also have the opportunity to experience traditional home cooked dishes during your stay at the inns. The tour includes a daily breakfast, 4 dinners and 1 lunch.

Clothes & Luggage

We provide a comprehensive list of gear for you in the tour trip notes (sent to you on completion of the booking process.) Because the tours are planned for the warmer months of spring and early summer in Japan you will not need a large amount of heavy clothing however we do suggest a good rainproof jacket and a fleece, merino top or similar for the cooler evenings.

During your stay at the ryokans you will be provided with a yukata, or cotton kimono, which is your evening wear and can be worn around the inn and for dining.

We travel between the major cities using public transport and you need to carry your belongings with you on these trips (bullet trains and local trains) so luggage needs to be kept to one suitcase and one day pack for ease of handling. A medium size suitcase should be sufficient for all your clothing requirements, and ideally on wheels so that it can be pulled along.

Travel Insurance

Medical services in Japan are good but the cost of treatment is high and you can expect to pay the full cost of any treatment you receive. For this reason we require all tour participants to have a comprehensive medical insurance in place.

When should I arrive and how do I get to the hotel?

If you are travelling to Kyoto on the day of the tour, Nicky can advise on transport and directions to the hotel.

If you are arriving in Japan for an extended stay prior to the tour, Nicky will advise how to get to Kyoto and where to meet us for the start of the tour as well as tips on what to see and do to maximise your time in Japan.

Tipping

There is no tradition of tipping in Japan and it is not a requirement at restaurants or hotels that you tip for services provided. However if you feel you have been provided with excellent service and you would like to reward that, please feel free to offer a tip.



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Day 1 - Kyoto

For those arriving in Japan today, please make your way to our hotel for an evening tour briefing and opportunity to meet with Nicky and the others in your group. For those that wish to spend time pre-tour in other parts of Japan, Nicky is happy to provide suggestions on how best to maximise your holiday.

Day 2 - Kyoto Highlights

We head out after breakfast for a full day exploring Kyoto. Highlights today include Arashiyama's famous bamboo forest in Western Kyoto.

At Arashiyama there will be time to visit Tenryuji Temple with its famous landscaped garden, or simply relax beside the beautiful Hozu River and watch the river boats glide past. You can also explore the number of small local shops selling snacks and icecreams and grab a bite to eat or a coffee before we head back to the centre of town.

This evening, we will regroup at the hotel and head out for an optional dinner at a local restaurant for an opportunity to sample some traditional fare, and a few local beverages.

Meals included: B



Day 3 - Kyoto - Tanabe - Takahara

Total walking: Approx. 4km over 2-3 hours, Elevation: Start at 100m (328ft) and end at 310m (1,017ft) , Highest elevation: 361m (1,184ft), Total ascent: 357m (1,171ft)

This morning we meet with our local walk guide and transfer together from Kyoto to Tanabe by train. We then journey to the start of our walk and the Kumano Kodo proper. Our climb from Takajiri-Oji to Takahara is short in terms of distance, but relatively steep, and we will allow at least two hours to reach the open ridge line from where remarkable views of the mountainous peninsula can be enjoyed. Reminders of the old highway, including Buddhist statues, line our route.

Our accommodation tonight is Takahara, a rural hamlet, noted for its ancient shrine surrounded by giant kusu-no-ki, or camphor, trees.

Meals included: B D

Day 4 - Takahara - Tsugizakura - Yunomine Onsen

Total walking: Approx. 13km, 5 - 6 hours, Elevation: Start at 310m (1,017ft) and end at 502m (1,647ft) Highest elevation: 711m (2,333ft) Total ascent: 1047m (3,435ft)

After breakfast, we leave Takahara on foot heading further into the mountains along the old trail. We continue to pass by reminders of the old highway, including an ichirizuka distance marker, before arriving at our lunch spot, which serves local delicacies.

Continuing on, we crest the Hashiori-Toge pass after a short climb. At the top of the pass is an unusual statue of an emperor sitting astride both a horse and cow. Our descent takes us along a cobbled path and staircase to Chikatsuyu, a small village. Our final stretch of the day takes us on a climb to Tsugizakura-Oji, famed for giant cedar trees and a thirst-quenching spring. From here we transfer by vehicle to Yunomine Onsen, where we stay for two nights. The onsen thermal hot spring baths are an important part of the tradition in Yunomine with pilgrims performing hot water purification rituals in preparation for visiting the Grand shrine of Hongu Taisha itself. For us, the onsen provide us with a fabulous way to slake off the day's exertions before enjoying our sumptuous evening meal, created from local ingredients

Meals included: B,D

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Day 5 - Yunomine Onsen - Hongu Taisha - Yunomine Onsen

Total walking: Approx. 14.2km, Elevation: Start at 502m (1,647ft) and end at 65m (213ft) Highest elevation: 662m (2,172ft) Total ascent: 1078m (3,537ft)

Following breakfast at our inn, we set out from our accommodation and quickly find ourselves deep in forest following the trail across mountain ridges and through isolated village communities. Panoramic views are afforded us at many points on our walk and at Fushigami we gain our first view below of the giant torii gate of Hongu Taisha shrine.

Our path descends to the Taisha. In contrast to its torii, which is an imposing structure towering 33.9 metres high above us, the Taisha is composed of simple, elegant buildings that are seemingly at one with the surrounding, verdant forests. From Hongu a vehicle transfers us the short distance back to our accommodation at Yunomine Onsen.

Meals included: B,L,D



Day 6 - Yunomine - Nachi Taisha - Kii Katsuura

Total walking: Approx. 8km Elevation: Start at 800m (2,625ft) and end at 321m (1,053ft)

A short road transfer takes us to the start of our walk this morning. The trail takes us through forests and along ridges, the path ascending and descending, until we reach the top, from where we can see over mountains to the Pacific Ocean. We then descend to Nachi Taisha shrine, Seiganto-ji temple and the spectacular Nachi-no Otaki waterfalls, which have an uninterrupted drop of 133 metres.

We transfer by vehicle to Kii-Katsuura on the Pacific Ocean coast. Here we stay the night in a modern hotel complex with onsen hot springs baths for us to luxuriate yet again.

Meals included: B,D

Day 7 - Kii Katsuura - Shingu - Kyoto or Tokyo

Total walking: Approx. 5km over 3- 4 hrs. Elevation: Start at 15m (49ft) and end at 11m (36ft). Highest elevation: 510m (1,673ft). Total ascent: 130m (427ft).

A relaxed day compared to yesterday's exertions. Nevertheless, an early start for those who wish to visit the local fish market, if it is open, to observe the largest tuna auction in Japan. (The auction is dependent on the weather, which can preclude fishing boats leaving harbour, and also holidays).

We return to our hotel for breakfast, before taking a local train to nearby Shingu, where the last of the three Kumano Shrines, Hayatama Taisha, is found. The final climb of our tour is a short but very steep ascent of Mt. Gongen to Gotobiki Iwa, a giant rock that is revered as a natural deity.

We say goodbye to our local guide at Shingu Station. Express trains connect Shingu to Nagoya where onward Shinkansen Bullet Trains will speed you to either Kyoto or Tokyo where our tour ends. If you wish to stay on and explore Japan further, Nicky will be happy to help with suggestions on how to extend your time in Japan.

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Some useful information on Japan

Overview: Japan is situated in northeastern Asia between the North Pacific and the Sea of Japan. The area of Japan is 377,873 square kilometers, nearly equivalent to Germany and Switzerland combined or slightly smaller than California. In comparison New Zealand is 268,021 square kilometres. Japan consists of four major islands, surrounded by more than 4,000 smaller islands. Japan's population is over 126 million. Most Japanese reside in densely populated urban areas. Japan's capital city is Tokyo. The population of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area including the city, some of its suburbs and the surrounding area is approximately 12 million.

Currency: The unit of Japanese currency is yen. Coins are available in denominations of 1, 5, 10, 50, 100 and 500 yen and bank notes in denominations of 1,000, 2,000, 5,000 and 10,000 yen. Currently Japanese consumption tax (equivalent of GST) is 8%, and is already included in the cost of most goods and services. Tipping is not customary in Japan.



Electricity: The voltage used throughout Japan is uniformly 100 volts, A.C. There are two kinds of frequencies in use; 50 Hertz in eastern Japan and 60 Hertz in western Japan (including Nagoya, Kyoto and Osaka). A convertible type of electrical appliance such as a travel hair dryer, travel iron and shaver will therefore be handy; otherwise a step-down transformer is required to convert the voltage. There are no columnar-shaped plugs or 3-pin plugs used in Japan but 2-flat-pin plugs are used instead. It is therefore advisable to purchase a plug adapter beforehand.

Drinking water: Tap water is safe to drink anywhere in Japan. Mineral water including major imported brands can be easily obtained from super markets, convenience stores and other similar places.

Vaccinations There are no vaccinations required for entering Japan from anywhere around the world.

Visas Visas are not required for visitors from New Zealand, for other countries please check with your local Japanese embassy or Consulate. Visitors on a current New Zealand passport valid for 6 months or more can enter Japan as tourists for a period of up to 90 days.

Dining out: One of the highlights of any visit to Japan is the opportunity to sample an amazing array of delicious food, from a simple noodle snack served at a street stall or a full Japanese banquet, a feast for the eye as well as the palate.

Japanese cuisine is traditionally based on rice and fish, vegetables and soup with an emphasis on seasonal produce. It is considered a healthy, low calorie diet and is often touted as the secret behind Japans longevity statistics. Each region in Japan has its own food culture and promotes its own regional specialities whether they be pickles, noodles or sweets. Japan has also adopted a number of dishes from the western world and other parts of Asia such as curries and these are popular alternatives to the more traditional way of eating.

Japan also produces excellent local beers and its indigenous rice wine, sake.

A brief historical overview: Japan was first mentioned in historical documents around the 5th century when the Emperor Jimmu became the first in a long imperial line which still continues today. Japans first permanent imperial court was established at Nara in 710.

In 794 the capital city moved from Nara to Heiankyo (the present day Kyoto) and a period of peace and prosperity continued until around 1185 with the ascendancy of the warrior class known as samurai. The Military clans pushed Japan into a series of civil wars, with the regional warlords becoming more and more powerful and toppling the aristocracy from power. Of these the most powerful was Tokugawa Ieyasu who established his shogunate government in Edo (present day Tokyo) and to secure his supremacy forced Japan in to a period of isolation from the outside world until the mid-19th Century.

In 1853 Commodore Perry of the US Navy sailed his "black ships" into Japan, and with the arrival of the West and its more advanced technology, the Shogunate was forced to give in to the rising tide of modernisation. Emperor Meiji was restored to power and embracing western culture, dress, food and architecture he set Japan on the path to the modern industrialised nation we see today.

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- latest trips
- travel advice
- events & attractions
- and more!

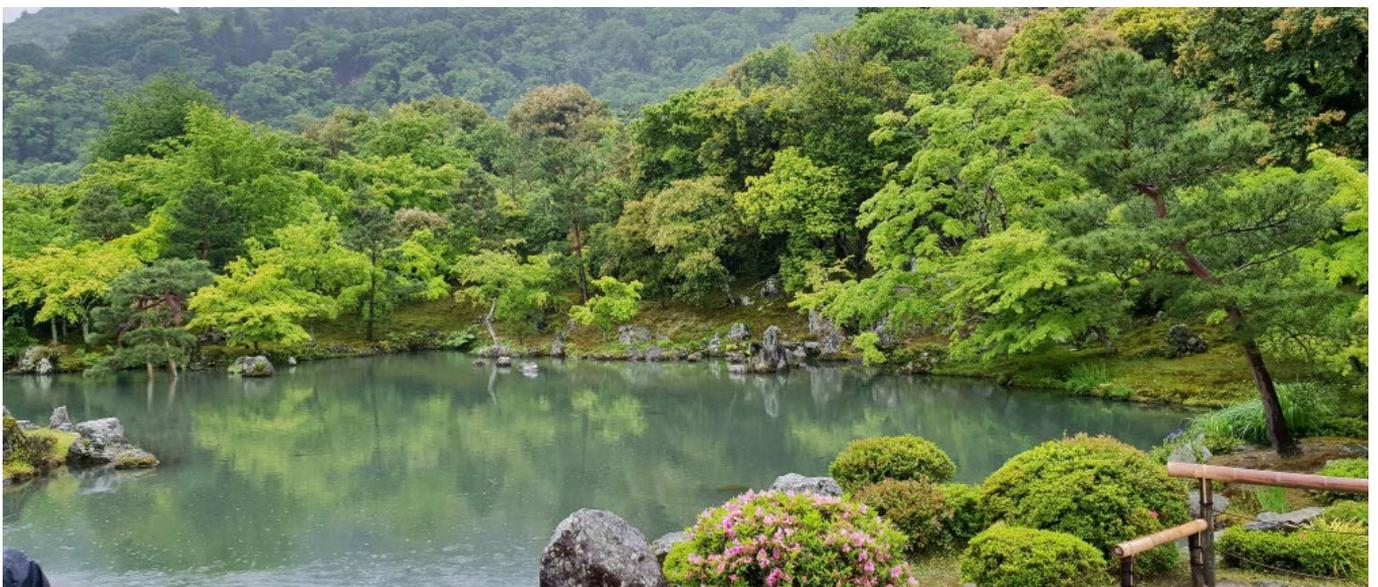
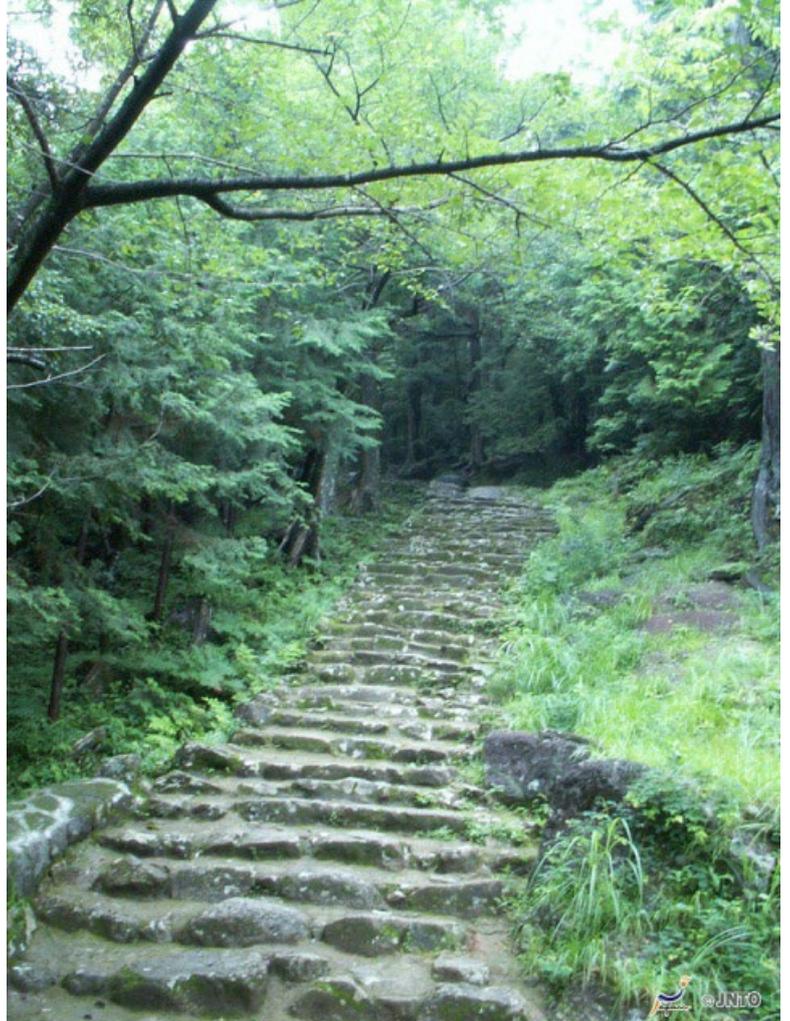
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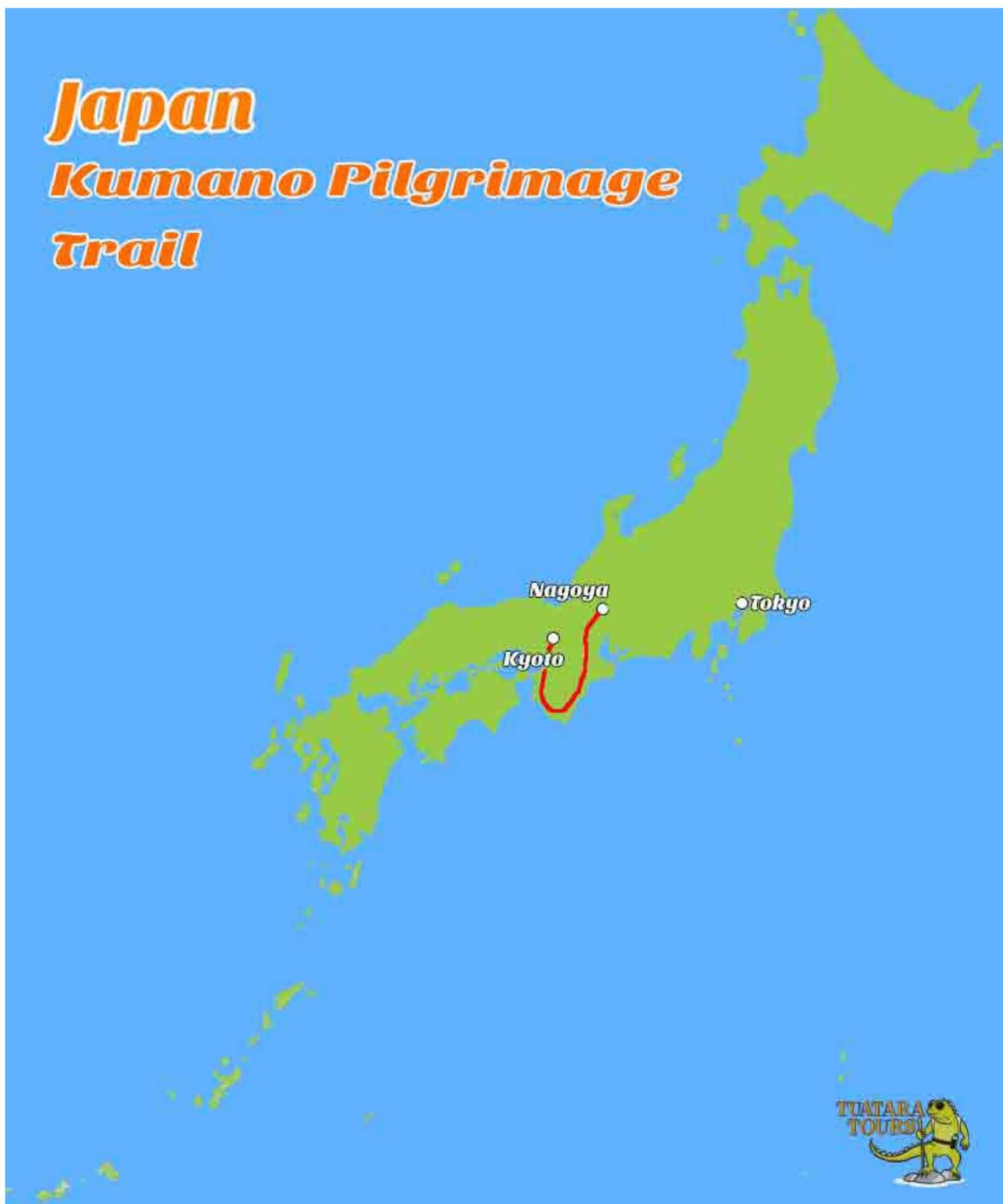
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The map shows the main islands of Japan in light green against a blue background. A red line traces a path between two cities in the central region. The cities are labeled with white dots and text: Nagoya, Kyoto, and Tokyo. Tokyo is located further east on the main island. The red line starts at a dot labeled 'Kyoto' and ends at a dot labeled 'Nagoya'.

Nagoya
Kyoto
Tokyo

