A Basic Guide to the Shikoku Pilgrimage

Japan Heritage “Shikoku Henro”
——Circular pilgrimage route and unique pilgrimage culture

The Shikoku Henro is a pilgrimage route of 88 temples that was established by the great Buddhist priest, Kukai (Kobo Daishi), over 1200 years ago on Shikoku Island. It is one of the world’s largest circular pilgrimage routes, extending some 1460 kilometers through the four prefectures of Shikoku. Pilgrims still make the journey on steep mountain routes, up long stone stairways, through pastoral countryside, along calm waterfronts and around remote promontories. Walking the paths, visitors can easily find other pilgrims journeying around Shikoku. This circular type of pilgrimage is different from those practiced under Christianity or Islam which focus on the voyage to and return from a holy place.

In Japan, anyone can be a pilgrim regardless of nationality or religion, and all are most likely to receive a warm welcome from the locals. Walking the “Henro Route” and retracing the footsteps of Kukai (Kobo Daishi)—whether in remembrance of someone who has passed away, for personal discipline, for redemption, or for health—is a spiritual journey and a rare opportunity to experience the culture of pilgrimage and of Shinkoku Island.

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What is Japanese Heritage?
The Agency for Cultural Affairs designates a group of tangible and intangible cultural properties under the “story” which tells Japanese culture and tradition through regional history and characteristics as a “Japan Heritage”. The aim is to utilize local areas, “To achieve this, local communities need to improve and utilize such various, attractive tangible and intangible cultural properties, which are essential for such a narrative “story”. Also, these cultural properties need to be advertised strategically to Japan and the rest of the world.

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The Shikoku pilgrimage route consists of eighty-eight sacred sites related to the Buddhist priest Kukai/Kobo Daishi (774-835) and because pilgrims leave their fuda (votive slips) when worshipping at each place they are called fudosho (place of fuda). This pilgrimage route, which extends through the four prefectures of Shikoku, is approximately 1,400 kilometers long and pilgrims, regardless of religion and age, continue to travel along it today. This guide contains scenes of this pilgrimage route, which the local people have maintained for more than 1,000 years, and the various articles related to this pilgrimage demonstrate how the Shikoku pilgrimage has developed to become the representative pilgrimage route of Japan. One can clearly understand the history of this religious journey by focusing on the concept of salvation and faith toward Kukai/Kobo Daishi, who is the central figure of the Shikoku pilgrimage.
Kukai/Kobo Daishi

Legends about Kukai

There are more than 3,000 tales about the Buddhist priest, Kukai/Kobo Daishi, around Japan with more than half of them being about him and water. Stories about him in Shikoku have the following characteristics: 1. Many are about fudasho along the pilgrimage route, 2. There is a lot more variety to the stories when compared to those in another areas, 3. There are many stories that describe miracles by him, which strengthen the faith of the people, and 4. In other areas there are many legends not related to Kobo Daishi, but in Shikoku most are about him. Also, numerous stories focus on pilgrims, and there are many instances of miracles occurring while on the pilgrimage.

Clarton: Takada, Akira, 1969, Juroku to Mizunomi (Pilgrimage and Folklore)

Kukai/Kobo Daishi (774—835) was born in Byobugaura, Tado county in present-day Kagawa prefecture as a son of the aristocratic Saeiki family. He went to Kyoto to work as a bureaucrat at the age of fifteen. However, after meeting a monk at the age of eighteen, he chose the path of Buddhism and dedicated himself to ascetic training in Shikoku and other places. Details of his life were recorded in Sango Shiki, which he wrote. From 804-806, he was in China and learned the esoteric Buddhism tradition from Master Huiguo at Qinglong Temple in Changan and was given the Buddhist name, Henjo-Kongo. After he returned to Japan, he founded the Shingon sect. Then, in 921, Emperor Daigo bestowed upon him the name of Kobo Daishi because of his great achievements.

Zentsuiji, Miedo
Location: Zentsuiji city, Kagawa prefecture

Legend of inedible potatoes
Location: Site entrance to Temple no. 24, Hotsumisaki-ji, Muroto misaki town, Muroto city, Kochi prefecture

Legend of water springing up (Mizunomi Daishi)
Location: Katsura town, Katsuru county, Tokushima prefecture

In Shikoku Kobo Daishi, written by Shoren in 1690, there are two legends about water suddenly springing up from the ground. One is the "Yanagi no muro" (the water of the willow tree) based on a story when a person who was so thirsty while traveling through the forest that he collapsed at the spot. Kobo Daishi, who was walking the same trail, saw this man and prayed to his long toothpick. As a result, water came gushing up. The place where he put his toothpick became a "yanagi" (willow) tree, and from its roots water came up in order to help other pilgrims passing this way. Thirteen tales about "Aysumu" (pure water) have been confirmed in Tokushima prefecture. One of them is the "Mizunomi Daishi" (Daishi who drank water spot), which is along the national historical pilgrimage path to Temple No. 20, Katsurayama.

Sango Shiki (woodblock printing book)
Kanze era (1624-1644)
Owned by Temple no. 6, Anraku-ji

In 1797 when Kukai was twenty-four, he wrote this manuscript in three rolls. In it he concludes that Buddhism is superior among Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism and mentions such places for ascetic training as Mt. Tanyu in Tokushima prefecture and Cape Muroto in Kochi prefecture. This is a valuable historical document that demonstrates the achievement of young Kukai.

Legend of the standing chopsticks
Location: Kasa town, Kasa county, Tokushima prefecture

There are two very old, huge cedar trees near the back of the temple grounds beside a statue of Fudo. On the farthest one there is a statue of Namiki Fudo. These two huge cedar trees are said to have grown from the sprouts from two cedar chopsticks that Kobo Daishi stuck in the ground to stop large rocks that were about to fall down the mountain.
The Forefather of the Shikoku Pilgrimage

Legend about Emon Saburo

Emon Saburo is said to be the forefather of the Shikoku pilgrimage. He was a cruel, rich man and lived in Ehime prefecture. One day, he broke a priest’s begging bowl into eight pieces by knocking it down with a bamboo broom. For the next eight days, each of Emon’s eight children passed away, and he realized that the priest must have been Kobo Daishi. So, in order to obtain forgiveness, Emon set out on the Shikoku pilgrimage in search of Kobo Daishi, but on his twenty-first trip he collapsed from fatigue just before reaching Temple no. 12, Shosan-ji. Kobo Daishi appeared and Emon pleaded to be reborn in the Kono family of Ehime prefecture. Kobo Daishi wrote “Emon Saburo Reborn” on a rock and placed it in Emon’s hand and buried him. Several years later a baby was born in the Kono family, the lord of the Iyo domain (present-day Ehime prefecture). In the baby’s left hand was a rock that had “Emon Saburo Reborn” on it.

Kobo Daishi Yurai (Origin of Kobo Daishi)

Edo period (1854). Owned by an individual in Kagawa prefecture

This copied book, which was created at the Tosa Ichinomiya shrine in Kochi prefecture, contains the same information regarding the legends of Kobo Daishi as seen in the “MI. Koya roshi” in Settoyuki Karakusa published in 1688. It also has a description of the origin of the eighty-eight sacred sites by Kukai/Kobo Daishi and legends on the pilgrimage, such as the one about Emon Saburo in Ehime prefecture.

Joshin-an
(cedar staff hut)

Location: Kaminara town, Myozai county, Tokushima prefecture

This is the spot where Emon Saburo met Kobo Daishi during his 21st journey around Shikoku, but passed away soon afterward. Kobo Daishi placed Emon’s staff into the ground as his gravestone, but eventually the staff grew into a large cedar tree giving this place its name.

Ishite-ji

Location: Ishite, Matsuyama city, Ehime prefecture

Temple no. 51, Ishite-ji, is the prayer temple for the Kono family who ruled the Iyo domain (Ehime prefecture). In the past the temple was called Ano-ji and is one of the places related to Emon Saburo’s rebirth. The Kono family presented the temple with the rock with the inscription, “Emon Saburo Reborn” and the name of the temple was changed to Ishite-ji (rock, hand, temple). This legendary small rock is on display at the temple. The oldest material written regarding the legend about Emon Saburo related to the establishment of the Shikoku pilgrimage route is owned by the temple.

Frederick Starr (1868-1933)

Frederick Starr, who worked as an anthropology professor at the University of Chicago, is said to be the first Westerner to make the Shikoku pilgrimage. He visited Japan for the first time in 1904 to study the Ainu and to take some of them to the St. Louis Exhibition. Over the next thirty years, Starr came back to Japan fourteen more times and was truly interested in many aspects of Japanese society and culture. In 1917, he completed half of the pilgrimage route, but he returned in 1921 to visit all of the eighty-eight sacred sites. He was so impressed with the hospitality received by the local people that he wrote in a letter after his completed the journey that it was one of the most interesting experiences in his life. When he visited Kompin shrine in Kagawa prefecture he received a warm welcome and wrote a banner with the words, “Courteous and Hospitality”, expressing his feelings about actions of the local people.
Hijiri along the Shikoku Pilgrimage

After Kobo Daishi passed away wandering priests (hijiri) came to Shikoku from around Japan to follow in his footsteps and to participate in ascetic training along the pilgrimage route. The earliest references to hijiri in Shikoku can be found in the Konjaku Monogatari and Ryōjin Hisho, both written during the 12th century. Around this time the Shikoku pilgrimage route was called “Shikoku hachi” – hachi meaning a land far from Kyoto – and was most likely considered to be a place that only those wishing to escape society and practice ascetic training would visit. Much later, during the late Edo period (1787-1868), the word “hachi” was replaced with “hence” and the common person came to participate on this pilgrimage.

Revised Konjaku Monogatari
Edo period (1770)
Owned by Tokushima Prefectural Museum

Kanjogataki
Location: Kamikatsu town,
Kurashiki city, Tokushima prefecture

This is a waterfall called Kanjogataki, which is located near Ittan-ji, the inner sanctuary temple of Temple no. 20, Kakurin-ji. Kanjo means “receiving spiritual water on your head”, so this is a place for “sakigofu” (waterfall training). It is said that this name was given to this waterfall as Kobo Daishi trained here. The waterfall is seventy meters high and also called “Asahi no taki” (Waterfall of Morning Sun). On a clear day you can see a five-colored rainbow, and it is believed that the deity Fudo Myoo will appear in the mist of this rainbow. This phenomenon is called “Fudo no Rojyo” (the appearance of Fudo). In a book written in 1658, it states: “There is a waterfall about eight kilometers from the inner sanctuary. Every day around noon the water seems to go upward at this waterfall, and a Fudo Myoo appears in the mist.”

Temple no. 45,
Iwaya-ji
Location: Kamakogen town,
Kamimuka city, Ehime prefecture

In the illustrated book of Tippan Shinnosai, there is a description of the priest Tippan (1239-1289) doing ascetic training at this temple during the Kamakura period (1185-1333). The temple began with a hut built in a rock cave that was surrounded by large rocks on the mountain with an elevation of 700 meters. For a long time this area has been known as a place of training for Shugendo. Kobo Daishi visited here in 815 and met a woman called Hakke hermit who did ascetic training in the caves. It is believed that the woman followed the ascetic practices of Kobo Daishi and presented this entire mountain to him. Today, hermit huts and many places of training remain on the rock peaks.

Taiyuu-ji, Shashin ga take
Location: Temple no. 21, Taiyu-ji, Kamo town, Anan city, Tokushima prefecture

In the Sango shi that Kukai/Kobo Daishi wrote, it mentions that he trained at “the mountain of Taiyu (Taiyu-ji) in Awa (Tokushima) and Cape Momo of Tsu (Kii)” (The photograph to the left is of a statue of Kobo Daishi where he sat on a cliff near Taiyu-ji facing east and recited the Morning Star sutra one million times).

The travels of Saigyo

Saigyo (1118-1190), who was originally called Sato Nonkiyo, was a poet and a samurai who served under Emperor Toba (1103-1156). However, at twenty-three he left home to become a Buddhist priest. He traveled around Japan and built a hut on Mt. Koya. He traveled to the grave of Emperor Sutoku in Kagawa—where the Emperor was exiled after the defeat by his brother, Emperor Go-Shirakawa (1125-1129), in the Hogen Rebellion in 1156—and then passed away. Saigyo then composed a poem to revere Sutoku’s soul there. After this he went to pray at Temple no. 73, Zentsu-ji, where Kukai was born. He had strong faith in Kobo Daishi, so he built a hut close by and spent some time there.

Saigyo-an
Location: Zentsuji city, Kagawa prefecture

In Zentsuji city there are two huts that Saigyo stayed at; One is Gyokusendo, which is a place that monks stay at near Zentsuji, and the other is between Temple no. 72, Mandara-ji, and Temple no. 73, Shushinko-ji. The latter one is a two-meter-wide small hut located on a hill (Sukkot no oka) overlooking the Seto Inland sea and plains of Kagawa prefecture.
During the Edo period (1603–1867) not only priests came for ascetic training but also common people came to Shikoku to embark on the Shikoku pilgrimage for various reasons such as faith and sightseeing. In Osaka during the seventeenth century various practical books were published on the Shikoku Pilgrimage. For example, the Shikoku Henro Michishinubue was the first guidebook, the Shikoku Henro Reijoki described the origins and buildings of each fususho, and the Shikoku Henro Kudokuki contained numerous miraculous and spiritual tales. Also, businesses that arranged for travel by boat to Shikoku emerged. As its popularity grew among the general public, it no longer became a journey just for priests.

With the change of the pilgrimage being made by the general public, the tradition of giving aims to the priests who traveled along the pilgrimage route in the past was passed down, but was given a new name—őssetai (offering support and hospitality)—and it became a unique characteristic of the Shikoku pilgrimage. There have been those with severe illnesses or those in destitution, and Shikoku became the last place for them to survive, so they came to make the pilgrimage. In the Tokushima domain, eight temples (Chikoku-ji, Zulun-ji, Fukusho-ji, Chozu-ji, Seishoku-ji, Baikoku-ji, Uchikoshiji and Endo-ji) were designated as Ekiroji, where pilgrims and travelers could stay the night and officials could watch those who travelled by. Miraculous tales about Kukai/Kobo Daishi were told; path markers were constructed; graves were built for those who died; and memorial monuments were built. As a result, the Shikoku pilgrimage route developed into a place of salvation through faith in Kobo Daishi.

**Map of the Shikoku Pilgrimage Route**

**Path marker of Shinnen (photograph)**

This document was issued by Hachikou Imaasa (1568–1638), the lord of the Tokushima domain, to Temple no. 6, Anraiji (previously known as Zulun-ji), when it was designated as an Ekiroji (a place for pilgrims to stay).

The first edition of this seven-volume set called Shikoku Henro Reijoki was published in 1669. It was written by a priest called Jakubon (1601–1700) who lived on Mt. Koya, but to create this book he received the cooperation of another priest from Mt. Koya called Kusak and used information collected by Shinnen. This item contains such information as The History of the Eighty-Eight Fususho and Kannon Shrine in Kagawa Prefecture as well as maps of the grounds of each site.

Maroairo Sokuriko from Hakata in Kyushu wrote Shikoku Reigen Kikok, and it contains many spiritual and miraculous stories related to the entire Shikoku pilgrimage route. At first Maroairo sent a letter to each of the fususho asking for interesting stories to put into the book, but only a few temples responded, so he went to Shikoku and gathered stories on his own. This book was published in Hakata, Kyoto and Osaka.
During the late Edo period (1787–1868), the number of people making the Shikoku pilgrimage greatly increased. Among them were not only those hoping that a prayer would come true or those traveling in memorial of someone who had passed away, but there were many who came in order to escape famine and sickness in their hometown. When a pilgrim fell ill in a village, the local people would do such things as construct a small hut to offer protection from rain and dew, offer food, send a doctor, give medicine, etc. If the pilgrim died the people in the village would bury the pilgrim in the local cemetery, raise any child that had lost his/her parents and contact the place where the pilgrim came from.

In _Gotoke Monja_ (owned by the Naruto University of Education Library) there is a story of a father and child pilgrim who received assistance from the local people. When the father and child arrived from present-day Fukuoka prefecture to Tokushima castle, the father fell ill due to some internal illness and passed away two weeks later despite the villagers trying their best to help him. The villagers then looked after the child, but unfortunately two and a half months later the child died due to measles. This example shows that the villagers willingly provided support to people from outside their land for nearly three months.

**Shikoku Henro Kakocho (Shikoku pilgrim register)**

_Edo period. Owned by Temple no. 8, Jizo-ji_. Location: Ito town, Itozaki county, Tokushima prefecture

This is a register book of Shikoku pilgrims who were buried at Temple no. 8, Jizo-ji, during the Edo period (1603–1868). From it we can understand how pilgrims who came from around the country were treated when they passed away.

**Receipt (Fujikura family collection)**

_Edo period (1834). Owned by Tokushima Prefectural Archives_.

If a pilgrim fell ill while traveling through the Tokushima domain, the closest village was obligated to offer assistance to that pilgrim. However, if the period of care lasted for more than ten days, the domain provided a support allowance to the village. This document is a receipt from Awata village in the Itano county (present-day Naruto city) for money received from the Tokushima domain for a pilgrim.

**A group of pilgrim graves on the route to Shosan-ji**

Location: Kikuyama town, Myojin county, Tokushima prefecture

These are graves of pilgrims that have been discovered on the slopes along the path heading toward Temple no. 12, Shosan-ji. Eleven of them are from between 1804 and 1830, and by looking at the etchings on the graves it can be confirmed that the pilgrim who came the farthest away from Shikoku was from Yamanaichi prefecture in 1808.

**Osettai (offering support/hospitality)**

One characteristic of the Shikoku pilgrimage is the custom of support called “osettai”, which is believed to have its origins when people gave to beggars or priests who were traveling along the pilgrimage route. In the modern age there have been many who have sought spiritual stories in order to escape from poverty, severe illnesses or disabilities. Villages would provide food to those who had fallen ill, and if that pilgrim died, the village would bestow upon that pilgrim a Buddhist name and give a proper burial service. This action was a form of osettai. Until recently Daitoku groups in the villages were in charge of providing osettai. However, nowadays, individual and groups perform this action, and thus this traditional culture has been preserved and passed on. Support (osettai) is offered by individuals and local groups as well as from groups from other areas, such as those from in Wakayama (Kishu Daitoku and Anri Daitoku) who have maintained a long custom of managing a “support center” (osettai-cho) at different temples. The main forms of support include providing tea, snacks and other food, but in the past it also included providing lodging, giving haircuts and massages. Osettai has been passed on through the generations and connects people’s hearts. It attracts not only Japanese but also pilgrims from overseas and is the culture of which Japanese can proudly show to the world.

**Ruins of Tsuyado, Kakurin-ji**

_Osaka Prefecture (1869–1899). Location: Katsura town, Katsura county, Tokushima prefecture_.

Just beyond a path marker pointing the way to Temple ro. 20, Kakurin-ji are the ruins of a tsuyado - a hut that pilgrims could stay at. It is believed that this building was constructed in a square shape above the curbstones and inside was a fireplace. A well and a toilet were also made close by. There is a photograph of the tsuyado in the book, Shikoku Henro (Iwanami Shobosha) 1765 published in 1956.

**Stone lantern by a support group**

_Edo period (1829). Location: Temple no. 23, Yakuo-ji, Minami town, Kaifu county, Tokushima prefecture_.

The stone lantern (settsudo) now at Temple no. 23, Yakuo-ji, is said to have started more than two hundred years ago. For example, the group from Wakayama started their activities in a way to express their gratitude after a fishing boat from Higasa landed a fishing boat from Wakayama when it became shipwrecked on its way to Shikoku. At first, settsudo were offered to a hut on the left side of the main gate (Iwamoto) during the late Edo period, but later, the "Wakayama (Kishu) Settsudo" building was constructed. A lantern in front of the temple was donated by this support group from Wakayama and the names of many supporters are engraved on it. The members of the settsudo in Wakayama still come every spring and fall to distribute such items as drinks and fruit to pilgrims.
How to visit temples

1. Stand to the left of the main gate, put your palms together, bow once, and enter the temple grounds.

2. In order to purify your mouth and body, wash your hands and rinse your mouth at the water basin near the entrance.

3. If there is a bell, strike it once, but it is considered bad luck to ring it when you leave.

4. Go to the main hall (Hondo/Kondo), offer a lit candle, incense, fuda, and a small donation.
   Then show respect by putting your palms together and either chant the sutras and/or offer a handwritten or copied sutra. Pagoda, osamefuda or copied sutras should be put in the designated boxes by the building.

5. Go to the Daishi hall (Daishido) and do the same as at the main hall except do not recite the Gohonzon Shingon mantra because Kobo Daishi is the principal Buddhist image here.

6. Go to the temple office (nokyocho) and receive the stamps and seals of the temple called goshuin in the pilgrimage book (nokyocho).
   The office is usually open between 7am and 6pm all year round.

7. At the main gate turn around, face the main hall, put your palms together and bow once.

How to dress for Henro

- Kesa (stole)
  The item here is a wagsa, worn around the neck when visiting temples, is a simplified version of monk's full robes.

- Hakue (white garment)
  When you wear this during the pilgrimage it is believed that you are walking in the sacred world.

- Tekko (hand covering)

- Nenju (mala)

- Rei (bell)

- Zutabukuro
  This bag, also called Sansya-bukuro, is used during the pilgrimage and holds such items as the nokyo-cho, candles, and incense.

- Fudabasami
  This is a cloth or wooden box to hold osamefuda.

- Osamefuda
  These are made from paper or cloth and are placed in boxes at the Main hall and Daishi hall at each temple as proof that you are participating on the Shikoku pilgrimage. They are also given to people as a sign of gratitude for any support (osaitai) that you have received. The color of the fuda will vary according to the number of times you have completed the entire pilgrimage.

- K_yahan (leg coverings)

- Nokyo-cho
  As proof of worshipping at a sacred site, a pilgrim will take this book to the temple office to receive an inscription in black ink and various stamps in red ink. However, from the second pilgrimage onward, only the red stamps called kasan-e are put in the book.

- Other recommended items
  - Rainwear
  - Things to block the sun (e.g., hat)
  - Water bottle
  - Headlamp, reflector, etc.

This is one example of what to wear and what to use when making the Shikoku pilgrimage. While manners and taboos differ according to religious perspectives, and routines and beliefs vary from person to person, the most significant thing to do is visit each sacred site with common sense, sincere respect and gratitude.
(Reference: Shikoku Eighty-Eight Sites Association)