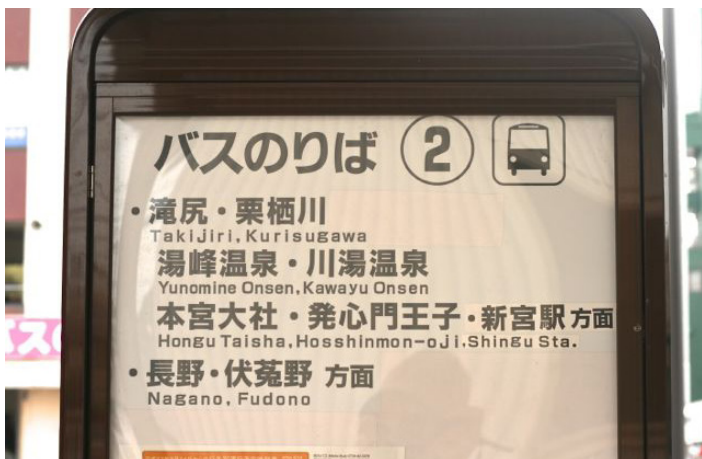


# DAY 1 Kii Tanabe → Takijiri → Takahara →

01 / Photo: Tanabe Tourist Information Center



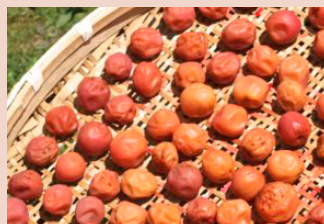
02 / Photo: Bus Stop #2



03 / More on Tanabe City

## More on Tanabe City

Tanabe City lies on the southwestern coast of the Kii Peninsula, about 150km (90 miles) south of Osaka. Once a mid-sized fishing town, post-war economic expansion and merges of a number of local districts lead to the “founding” of Tanabe City in 1942. With a population of approximately 80,000 people, it is the second largest city in Wakayama Prefecture (the first being Wakayama City), and subsequent merges with a number of surrounding villages have lead it to cover an area of roughly 1000km<sup>2</sup> (386 square miles). Much if this is mountainous, including the Nakahechi and Hongu areas, and as such, you will officially be travelling through Tanabe City for much of your trip. The area is known for its primary industries of fishing and citrus, as well as “umeboshi” pickled plums, a traditional preserved food renowned throughout Wakayama Prefecture. Recent coastal developments have made Tanabe’s Ogigahama and nearby Shirahama beaches popular destinations for seaside getaways. Tanabe is also know as the home and birthplace of author and naturalist Minakata Kumagusu, as well as the founder of aikido, Ueshiba Morihei. Possibly the most well-known character in Japanese history with a connection to Tanabe is Musashibo Benkei, a famed 12th Century warrior monk.



## 04 / More on Benkei

*More on Benkei*

Benkei, also known as Musashibo, was a warrior monk who lived between 1155-1189 during a period of social and political upheaval. He was known for his “ogre-like” demeanor, complemented by a hulking 2m stature, and is often depicted holding a naginata sword attached to a wooden pole. Benkei features in a number of folktales, Kabuki and Noh plays, and the most well-known stand out as clear examples of his filial loyalty and courage in the face of adversity.

One of Benkei’s “origin” stories depicts him moving from Tanabe to the Kyoto capital, where he meets his future master, a young boy named Ushiwakamaru, on Go-jo (“5th street”) Bridge in Kyoto. Benkei had travelled to Kyoto to commission a new set of armor from a blacksmith and was told he would need 1000 swords to get the job done. As such, he positioned himself on the bridge and challenged any armed individual attempting to cross to a duel. After defeating 999 men and collecting their swords, he met Ushiwakamaru, who proceeded to beat Benkei and, in so doing, gained his eternal loyalty. Benkei would follow the youth, later called Minamoto no Yoshitsune, in his great exploits around Japan to defeat the Taira clan. Later, when Minamoto no Yoshitsune fell out with his brother, Yoritomo (the first Kamakura shogun) and retreated to sanctuary in the north, Benkei would rescue his master at a border checkpoint by pretending he was a subservient monk...and beating him to prove the point. This conflict of respect towards one’s master vs. the “true” loyalty of aiding in his escape would have been a hot topic for samurai of the day.

Benkei’s final story takes place again positioned on a bridge and outnumbered. Fighting valiantly to allow time for his master to escape and commit ritual suicide, he is said to have cut down 300 men. Riddled with arrows, no one dared to approach the “ogre” of a man as he remained standing on the bridge throughout the night, and many wondered if he truly was some supernatural beast. The next morning, having noticed that Benkei was not moving, the enemy cautiously approached...only to find that he had died standing. The legend of Benkei’s loyalty, protecting his master even into death, exemplified the moral code of the soon-to-rise samurai class under the Kamakura shogunate.

## 05 / More on Kumano Kodo Routes

*The various routes of the Kumano Kodo*

The Kumano Kodo was once a vast network of paths around the coast and throughout the mountains of the Kii Peninsula, the largest peninsula of Japan, leading to the spiritual nexus of Kumano in the south. Many of these routes are still walked by pilgrims, but the five principal ones are:

## 05 / More on Kumano Kodo Routes (continued)

**Kii-ji 紀伊路:** The Kii-ji, or “Kii road”, was the initial route traditionally taken by emperors and aristocratic elites from Kyoto, the country’s capital, to the start of the Kumano range. Extending via way of Osaka (which itself took on the role of the nation’s capital twice in the 7th and 8th centuries), south through Wakayama to the Tanabe area, the Kii-ji included a number of stops at subsidiary “oji” shrines, before splitting at the Nakahechi and Ohechi routes that lead to the heart of Kumano and its three main shrines.

**Nakahechi 中辺路:** The Nakahechi, or “middle” route. This was the most popular route to the famed Kumano Sanzan shrines of Hongu Taisha, Nachi Taisha and Hayatama Taisha. Leading from modern-day Tanabe city to the geographical epicenter of Kumano at Oyunohara (site of the original Hongu Taisha), it was walked extensively by emperors, monks and pilgrims alike between the 10th-15th centuries and is ostensibly the most well-preserved of the many Kumano routes.

**Ōhechi 大辺路:** The Ōhechi, or “large” route, follows the coastline from Tanabe city around the southern tip of the Kii peninsula to Nachi Taisha shrine. Modern road and town developments have virtually erased the original route, but sections of it still remain. Although less travelled by foot now, the Ōhechi was once one of the three main “veins” of the Kumano and would have significantly contributed to the estimated annual 30,000 visitors to the area between the 10th-15th Centuries.

**Kohechi 小辺路:** The Kohechi, or “small” route, extends between Kumano Hongu Shrine and the Shingon Buddhist headquarters of Koyasan, approximately 70km to the North. Requiring approximately three days to walk, its name may not reflect the full challenge of steep and long days, which was traditionally undertaken primarily by monks with a connection to Koyasan. However, the route has become more popular in recent times with experienced hikers who seek a more remote alternative to the main Kumano routes.

**Iseji 伊勢路:** Ise-ji, or the “route to Ise”, leads from the famed Ise Grand Shrine south along the eastern coast of the Kii Peninsula to both Kumano Hongu and Hayatama shrines. Founded at least as far back as the 3rd Century and dedicated to Amaterasu, the sun goddess (from whom the current Japanese emperor is said to be a direct descendant), the unique architecture of the inner and outer shrines as well as the festive atmosphere of the surrounding town and its 123 subsidiary shrines gave Ise quite the reputation as a center of Shinto adherence and purification rites. Visited extensively by imperial processions from ancient times, it rose in popularity among pilgrims in the 17th Century when designated as part of the Saigoku Kannon (33 Western temple) pilgrimage, which, incidentally, begins at Seiganto-ji temple next to Kumano’s Nachi Taisha shrine. Though only short sections of the original route from Ise to Kumano remain, one may still occasionally glimpse the white frocks of the devout tracing its primarily asphalt-covered path.

**\*Ōmine-okugakemichi 大峯奥駈道:** The Ōmine-okugakemichi, though not officially part of the Kumano Kodo network per se, is another important route connecting the Kumano area with the holy Yoshino mountains in the north. Supposedly developed by Shugendō’s founder En no Gyoja in the 7th Century, it is used primarily for the strict, ascetic training of monks in this esoteric tradition. As a training ground, it is not well suited to the inexperienced hiker, and the route itself is not on many tourist agendas...cases of injury, and occasionally worse, are often reported here. Interestingly, the traditional restriction on allowing women to hike sections of the Ōmine mountains (for fear that their presence might divert monks away from their training pursuits) almost lead to the sinking of the Kii Peninsula’s bid for UNESCO World Heritage status in 2004.