

## Day 3 Sendai → Kokufu-tagajo → Shiogama → Matsushima

### Distance and elevation

Total walking distance approximately 9 km/5.6 miles

#### Kokufu-tagajo → Shiogama (Marine Gate):

Distance: 6.4 km/4 miles  
 Elevation: + 121 / - 119 m  
 Max Grade: 27 %  
 Avg. Grade: 0.5 %

#### OPTIONAL: Matsushima Century Hotel → Fukuura Island (loop)

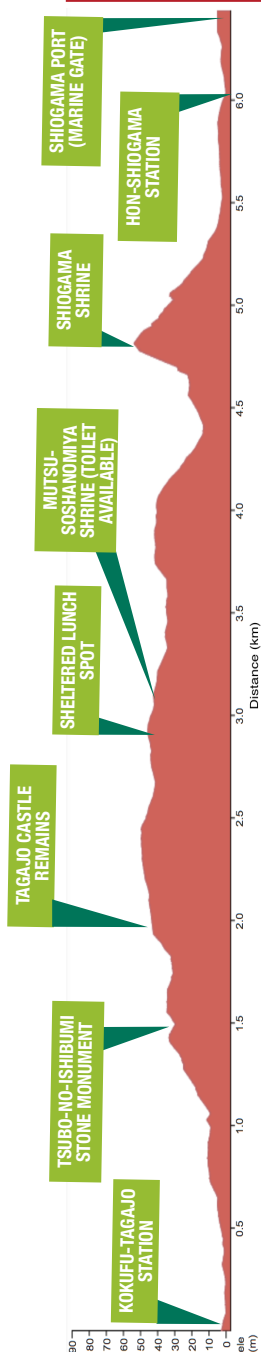
Distance: 2.6 km/1.3 miles  
 Elevation: + 27 / - 27 m  
 Max Grade: 6.1 %  
 Avg. Grade: -0.3 %

## Overview

### Walking course options

#### RECOMMENDED WALKING COURSE:

Take an early morning train from Sendai and arrive Kokufu-Tagajo station. Along the way, buy a picnic lunch to eat later in the day. From Kokufu-Tagajo, an optional visit to nearby Tohoku History Museum is followed by your main walk of the day: a 6.4 km stroll from the station to Shiogama Port (Marine Gate). The route is primarily along asphalt road and sections of grass/gravel path, as well as up a steeper stone staircase. Along the way, visit the Tusbo-no-ishibumi, one of Japan's three oldest stone memorials that, in fact, brought Basho to tears. The site of Tagajo Castle's remains and the impressive Shiogama Shrine grounds are highlights of the day. Your goal is Shiogama Port, aiming to catch a boat leaving for Matsushima (last departure 3:00pm). Following Basho's own boat course through the bay, pass the iconic pine-tree covered islands that give Matsushima its name. On arrival, walk to your nearby hotel, choose a dinner time and either head straight to the inviting *onsen* baths, or back out to tour nearby Fukuura Island. Known for its biodiversity and scenic harbor views, the circuit trail is not to be missed for those with some extra energy at the end of the day. Return to a sumptuous dinner at the hotel.



## Day 3 Recommended course: Walking directions from Kokufu-Tagajo Station

*Good Morning! "Ohayo Gozaimasu!"*



**WHEN CHECKING OUT OF YOUR HOTEL, PLEASE BE SURE TO PAY FOR ANY MEALS/DRINKS AND RETURN YOUR ROOM KEY!!**

• From Kokufu-Tagajo you have the choice of visiting the Tohoku History Museum next door, or prioritizing your walk to Shiogama Port.

• At Kokufu-Tagajo, climb the platform stairs up to the ticket gates. **If no one is on hand, you may just walk through the open ticket gate to the right.** ★ If foregoing the museum visit and walking directly from the station, we recommend using the toilets directly outside the ticket gates.

30m



3-1/ A tour of  
Tohoku History  
Museum



**OPTIONAL MUSEUM visit:** To visit the Tohoku History Museum, exit ticket gates, go **LEFT** (South exit) down the corridor and take the stairs down. The museum will be immediately to your left, but the main entrance is a further 150m down the path here and to the right. ★ For details on the museum, please see your supplementary notes for this day.

50m

150m

50m

**To START YOUR WALK:** Exit the ticket gates, and use the elevator opposite or go **RIGHT** (North exit) and follow the stairs down to street level.



## Walking directions: Kokufu-Tagajo to Shiogama Port

3-2 / Photo:  
View from the  
station

•Start your walk along Basho's course at the station's North exit street level. There will be a cul-de-sac and map of the surrounding area to your right.

3-3 / Photo

•At the bottom of the stairs, continue STRAIGHT (or if facing the map, turn left) and walk to where a small path begins, running parallel to the train tracks. (If you have taken the elevator down, follow straight behind it.) ★ You may also pass a trailer run by the local tourist association here, with occasional English information available.

30m



3-4 / More  
info on the  
remains

•Walk along this path and follow the wooden steps up a small grassy hill. This is, in fact, a remnant of Tagajo Castle's administrative settlement. Blue signs (in Japanese) mark the way to Tagajo Castle

60m



Follow the pipe barrier-lined path left over the hill and continue down to the right.



50m

•On the gravel path, passing a number of *ume* (Japanese apricot or “plum”) trees on your left, soon reach a road. Crossing straight over, the road, continue on gravel path. ★If there is a chain in place here, simply walk around it.

85m



•Continue on, passing a dirt soccer field and turn RIGHT after the bicycle barriers.

150m



3-5/Basho,  
Sendai and  
irises

•Follow STRAIGHT across the street and you will be passing the site of Tagajo’s *Ayame Matsuri* iris festival. Made to commemorate Basho’s visit to the area, if lucky, you will be here in the blooming season.



150m



★*Vegetation note:* *Shobu* “sweet flag” and *ayame* “Japanese iris” would have been blooming as Basho arrived in Tagajo, though the *suge* “sedge” fields he mentions as famous in the area would have been another variety of similar-looking grass. Regardless, a local *Ayame Matsuri* (“Iris Festival”) is held here every June to commemorate Basho’s passing through. The iris is also important in Japan as a seasonal symbol used to mark *Tango-no-sekku* (traditionally “Boy’s Day” or “Feast of the Banners”, and now Children’s Day, a national holiday celebrated on May 5th). Often placed in the entranceway or on the roof of a home in late April and early May, the iris’s long leaves are said to resemble a samurai sword’s scabbard, keeping evil spirits away and helping raise strong children.



• Just after a small, wooden building and before the iris fields/beds, turn LEFT at a small path leading straight on and up the nearby hill.



• Ascending some (somewhat uneven) stone steps, come to a split in the path at the top of the hill.

115m



• Go RIGHT here along the stone-lined path. Just ahead you will see the sheltered covering of the **Tsubo-no-ishibumi** stone monument. Erected in 762 CE and engraved with 141 characters, it is one of the oldest stone memorials in Japan and, as a testament to the ages, is a site that brought Basho to tears.

3-6/More on Basho and the monument

50m



*Tagajo: Tsubo-no-ishibumi (Basho, 24 June 1689)*

Following a map provided by Kaemon we took the narrow road to the North alongside a mountain and were able to see the sedge field used to make the well-known ten stranded mats. Apparently locals still make ten stranded mats and present them to the regional Governor.

The Tsubo stone monument is within the grounds of Taga Fortress in the village of Ichikawa. The height of this stone monument is over 1.8 metres and its width I would guess is about 0.9 metres. Scraping away the moss, faint characters can be read on the stone's surface. They include the distances to neighbouring national borders in all directions. And the inscription: "This Castle was built [Basho misspelt this: the place and distance (sic)] in the first year of Jinki (724) by the travelling inspector, courtier and General Ono-no-asomi-no-Azumabito. It was repaired in the sixth year of Tempyo-hoji (762) by Councillor, courtier, Governor of the Eastern Sea and Eastern Mountain districts, General Emi-no-asomi[-no- Asakari]. 1 December".

The first year of Jinki was during the reign of Emperor Shomu. Many are the places that have been made famous in poetry of the past. But mountains erode, rivers change their course, roads are improved, and famous stone monuments are buried and hidden under the soil. Famous trees grow old and die and are replaced by new growth. Generations go by and most famous monuments of old are lost to the passing years. However, here I stand before a monument which without a doubt represents a thousand years. I feel a strong affinity with the people of ancient times. This emotion is the pilgrim's reward. This is the reward life can bring. I forget the hardships of the road and am moved to tears.

·Continue down the dirt path to the road next to the Tsubo-noishibumi monument's shelter. Turn LEFT at the road and then soon RIGHT to cross it.

33m



The stone marker here in Japanese says 史跡多賀城跡 ("Historic Site of Tagajo Castle Remains") and you can see the excavated staircase of the site ahead.



·Continue straight and follow RIGHT (off the asphalt) at the T-junction, then soon left to head up the excavated stone steps of the Tagajo Castle site.



150m

3-7/ More on protective deity stones



Before the excavated stairs, which date back to at least the 10th Century, you will pass a number of protective stone tablets here. They are engraved with Bonji (variations on Sanskrit lettering), Buddhist sutras and homages to Amida Buddha and Batou-Kannon (the "Horse-headed"

Goddess of Compassion), among others. These would have likely been placed here in the Edo period to protect travellers, and as current site excavations only began in the 1970s, it might have been all that Basho saw here beyond a flattened hill.



**TAKE YOUR TIME HEADING UP THE APPROXIMATELY 40 STEPS HERE, AS THEY ARE MEANT TO DECEIVE! WIDELY-SPACED, UNEVEN STEPS LEADING UP CASTLES/FORT HILLS WERE A COMMON DEFENSIVE MEASURE, AIMING TO TIRE OUT AND SLOW ENEMY ATTACKS.**

## Tagajo Castle remains:



The stone stairs here would have lead up to the main South gate of Tagajo Castle (and rightly, as this was a fortuitous direction: i.e. toward the sun goddess and away from the demons and barbarians that originate in the North). Excavation began in 1985 and a layer of ash from Mount Towada in Aomori Prefecture dates them to at least before the 10th Century. At the top, you will see the foundation stones of the gate and, further on, the main administrative buildings of the complex, as well as the foundations of the earthen wall that surrounded it.



Tagajo Castle was a *josaku* 城柵 (literally “fortress”, but more so a fortified governmental office) that prospered through the early Heian period (late 7th century up to mid 9th century) when the central government ruled from Nara and imposed the ‘Ritsuryousei’ or codified penal and local administration laws. The local Emishi resisted this centralisation and deprivation of their land. Tagajo was the most important regional office in the country of Mutsu and as such was burnt down by the Emishi in 780 in a 20 year war. Tagajo was rebuilt over four times.



At one time there were over 1200 people living around Tagajo in a township at the bottom of the hill around the marshy lands. The town had developed some sophisticated drainage methods and wooden drain pipes have been unearthed. The axis of the town was a road pointed westwards towards Nara, the capital. Indeed the monument stone itself is faced west towards Nara. About 500 of the townspeople were soldiers gathered from Fukushima. About

20 people were administrators from the capital Nara. The rest were artisans, farmers and Emishi who had surrendered. More recently in 1972 burnt tiles were excavated. Around the early 9th century the central government begins to collapse and the local prosperous families gained economic and political influence. In the case of Tagajo, this was the Fujiwara Family of Ooshu who ruled the area from Hiraizumi for over 100 years and were later defeated by Minamoto Yoritomo.



**FROM HERE, YOUR PICNIC LUNCH SHELTER IS NEARBY (650M ON). IT IS 3KM TO SHIOGAMA SHRINE, FOLLOWED BY ANOTHER 1.6KM TO SHIOGAMA PORT (MARINE GATE).**



•Walk straight through the Tagajo Castle site grounds and reach an asphalt lane on the other side. Turn **RIGHT** here, following the lane down.

150m



•Follow the curve of the lane **LEFT**. \*Note the blue signs with white lettering and arrows. You will pass a building and sign (in English) marking the former site of a temple connected to Tagajo Castle. \*There is also a **public toilet** here in the parking lot opposite.



70m



•Follow the blue signs and concrete (i.e. not gravel) path as it curves **RIGHT** and then again **LEFT**, narrowing to a concrete footpath.



50m

\*You should now be heading up through a small *sugi* (Japanese cedar) tree glen. The path continues past some homes and opens to small gardens often planted with *negi* (*Allium fistulosum*) spring onion, potatoes, cabbage, corn and *daikon* (*Raphanus sativus*) winter radish.

250m



•Reach another larger road. Cross it and turn **RIGHT**. Walk along the road until you reach a path soon opening to the **LEFT**.



120m



**PLEASE TAKE CARE AS YOU WALK ALONG THE SIDE OF THE ROAD AS THERE IS MORE TRAFFIC HERE!**

•Follow the path left off the road and then immediately **RIGHT**, up into forest cover. You should be able to see your **PICNIC LUNCH** shelter soon ahead.

50m





40m

• After lunch, walk back to and continue along the main asphalt road. ★ You may walk straight through the field here from the picnic shelter.



• Continue on the road to nearby toilets and **Mutsu-shoshanomiya Shrine**.

120m



## Mutsu-shoshanomiya Shrine 陸奥総社宮

The old province of *Mutsu* 陸奥 once encompassed sections of current Miyagi, Iwate, Fukushima, Aomori and Akita prefectures. Also known as *Oshu* 奥州 or *Michinoku* 道奥 (i.e. “back-country road”), the primary character *oku* “奥” is the same one Basho uses to entitle his book, and it describes the “deepness” or the

“far back” nature of his venture into the North. As Mutsu encompassed such a broad swath of land, it also had its fair share of gods, and in order to provide a sense of identity and unity to the region, they would often be consolidated into site-specific, spiritual “hot spots”. As such, Mutsu-shoshanomiya Shrine is said to house 100 deities from local shrines all over Mutsu. It is a pivotal stop for pilgrims on their way to visit the province’s *ichinomiya* (“primary shrine”) of Shiogama Jinja, which you will see later today. As a smaller shrine, Mutsu-soshanmoiya is more subdued in nature, and you may enjoy walking around the grounds and communing with the natural landscape here before encountering the (often more lively) scene at Shiogama. There is a 600-year old Japanese cedar, as well as a 200-year old white magnolia tree on the grounds.



**LEAVING THE SHRINE, YOU ARE NOW OFFICIALLY EXITING TAGAJO CITY (POPULATION APPROXIMATELY 60,000) AND ENTERING SHIOGAMA CITY (APPROXIMATELY 55,000). AGAIN, BE WARY OF TRAFFIC HERE! YOU WILL BE ON THIS ASPHALT ROAD FOR THE NEXT 2KM UNTIL REACHING THE BASE OF SHIOGAMA SHRINE.**

780m

• Continuing past the shrine, eventually reach a split in the road. Remain straight on the flat/narrower road (i.e. DO NOT head down right).



250m

• Reach a traffic light and larger/busier road. Waiting for the light, cross the street at the crosswalk. Pass the shop with a yellow “Beetle” sign (on your left) and continue STRAIGHT (i.e. up the more narrow road).



·Up and over the road's hill (passing a community vegetable garden), head down the other side. ★The sidewalk on the left-hand side of the road is safer. Soon reach a tunnel going under the train tracks.

750m



·Head straight through the tunnel and across the larger road at the traffic light.



·You will soon see reach the *torii* gate and famous 202 step staircase leading up to **Shiogama Shrine** on your left.

250m



★Head up the steps to visit Shioigama Shrine and tour the grounds. **If following our recommended route, you will NOT be coming back down the same way.** Though the shrine site is well worth the climb to the top, if knees and backs are not willing, you may also continue walking along the current road and follow directions from the next *torii* gate on your left (i.e. the exit of the shrine visit).



### A Visit to Shioigama Shrine 塩釜神社の参り

Shiogama jinja ("salt furnace shrine"), founded in the 9th Century and designated as an *ichinomiya* (the highest ranking for shrines in the Shinto hierarchy) was renovated extensively by the ruling Date clan from the start of the Edo period. On arrival, Basho states: "*The Shrine was once [in 1607] restored by Date Masamune himself, feudal lord of the province. For this reason its main*

*pillars stood thick, the painted rafters were dazzling, and the stone approach steps rose to a great height. Its vermilion fencing shone in the morning sunlight. The fact that the virtue of the Gods and Buddha are remarkable even in this back region is an invaluable expression of our Nation's culture.*" Basho would have passed under the same large *torii* gate here (built in 1663) and climbed the steep, and granted, somewhat intimidating 202 stair boulevard up to the shrine. The staircase itself may be viewed as a protective measure, providing a last resort for defense/retreat against enemy attack, as well as a path to sanctuary in the event of natural disasters. The height of Shioigama Shrine itself was particularly fortuitous, as records show it was built at least fifty years before a massive earthquake and subsequent tsunami hit the area in 869. (On par with the 2011 tsunami, sediment was washed 4km inland and even Tagajo Castle suffered extensive damage). →



## → A Visit to Shioigama Shrine 塩釜神社の参り (Continued)

Climbing the stairs, you will pass a unique pair of *komainu* lion-dogs dating back to the Edo period (1775). Meant to ward away evil spirits, these statues typically have one mouth open and one mouth closed. Signifying the start of the Japanese alphabet “ah” and the end “un”, they symbolize entry into a spiritual domain encompassing everything in the universe (from “ah” to “un”, A to Z, the Alpha and the Omega, the first and last breath...one can also draw comparisons to the mantric “Aum” sound representing “The Absolute” in Sanskrit and Buddhist traditions).



Arriving at the top of the shrine, you will pass through the vermilion-lacquered *Zuishin-mon* gate. This is guarded by the *zuishin kami* (warrior spirit-gods in the Shinto tradition, as opposed to the more muscular Nio Kings that guard Buddhist temples) and is one of fourteen Important Cultural Properties on the site. Before entering the main shrine grounds, you may choose to purify yourself at the spring basin to your left. It is protocol to use one ladleful and to wash first one hand, then the other, followed by putting some water in your hand and rinsing out your mouth (if inclined), before tipping up the ladle and using the last of the water to rinse off its handle. \*To note: all of this is done outside the basin.



Just before the final entry at the *Sakura-mon* “cherry tree” gate, you will pass two of the possibly most famous *komainu* lion-dogs in Tohoku. Dating back to 1747 and considered a good example of Sendai-style stonework, they have a unique stature and facial features, including protruding teeth and large, bulbous eyes (some comparisons have been made to the *haniwa* clay dolls discovered in Tohoku centuries before...and sometimes connected to alien conspiracy theories). The tree to your right, giving the opposing gate its name, is one of 31 “Shioigama cherries” on the shrine grounds, a unique variety cultivated here and designated as a natural monument.



Within the main shrine grounds, you will see an iron and copper lantern to your immediate left, donated by the ninth generation of the Date family in 1809, as well as a stone sundial (built 1792) ahead at the main hall of the shrine. This *honden* hall houses two of the shrine's three main deities: Takemikazuchi (or the “Thunder God”) and Futsunushi (a god associated with swords and lightning). To your right is a separate



sanctuary housing the deity Shioisuchi-Oji-no-Kami, or the “old man of the sea”, who taught villagers here how to make salt from ocean water, thus giving the town its namesake: “Shioigama” (denoting the “salt furnace” processing technique). Salt in particular is an important purifying element in the Shinto tradition, placed outside doorways to keep away evil spirits (as well as thrown in heaps by sumo wrestlers to purify their holy wrestling ring). Combined with its ability to preserve food and, by default sustain armies, a town with a knack for salt production would truly be blessed, and its protective shrine an important one. The three dieties here are said to provide protection to fisherman and seafaring folk, as well as to pregnant women. You may see a number of families here with newborns and young children, giving thanks to the gods for a safe birth. To pay your own respects, put a coin (preferably a five-yen for luck) into the donation box, ring the bell at the sanctuary, bow twice to show respect, clap twice to make your prayer, and bow once in final respect.

SELF-GUIDED

---

# WALKJAPAN

Walk Japan is the pioneer of off-the-beaten-track walking tours in Japan. Authentic and enjoyable tours to discover Japan, its people, society and culture. Beginning in 1992 with our innovative and best-selling Nakasendo Way tour, we were the first to successfully introduce the real Japan, geographically and culturally, that often remains inaccessible for most visitors to the country. Since then, Walk Japan has created more original tours throughout Japan and been widely recognised for its work, including selection by National Geographic as one of the 200 Best Adventure Travel Companies on Earth.

---

**[www.walkjapan.com](http://www.walkjapan.com)**

This tour has been researched and created by Walk Japan Limited  
Map Data © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap