



Shikoku

In the footsteps of pilgrims...

DETAILED DOSSIER

15 day itinerary *Kyoto – Koya San – Tokushima – Shishikui – Muroto Cape – Kochi – Uwajima – Matsuyama – Dogo Onsen – Kotohira – Iyadani Valley – Osaka*

Travel dates **Saturday 12 May 12 – Saturday 26 May 12**

INTRODUCTION

***Do not just walk in the footsteps of the men of old,
seek what they sought.*** Kobo Daishi (AD774–835)

Shikoku – smallest of Japan's four main islands – has throughout history maintained its isolation well. Even today, with the construction of bridges that connect it to the rest of Japan, so few travellers make it this far that it remains one of the last essentially undiscovered places in Asia. Those who do make the effort to leave the bustle of city life behind soon find themselves rewarded by an island of immense natural beauty, steeped everywhere in colourful legend and history. Not least, deep in the centre of the island are the stunning valleys of Iyadani, the 'Tibet of Japan', to where, 800 years ago, the remnants of the Heike clan fled after their defeat at the hands of the Genji. Everywhere are ancient broad-leaved forests, idyllic hot springs (including, at Dogo, the country's oldest spa resort dating from the 8th century) and timeless rustic hamlets all framed by some of the finest coastal scenery in all Japan.

For the Japanese people, Shikoku is perhaps most famous for its pilgrimage of the 88 Sacred Temples, and it is the dearly held ambition of almost all to complete a circuit of the island at some point in their lives, following in the footsteps of the country's greatest saint, the revered Kobo Daishi.

It is from this pilgrimage that The Oriental Caravan has taken inspiration and direction for its latest exclusive offering and, in keeping with pilgrim tradition, we intend to complete the circuit of the island, albeit by train and bus, in a clockwise manner. This pioneering journey will reward participants with a rare glimpse into the last vestiges of a mysterious, rural Japan where the pace of life slows to the rhythm of the seasons, and where natural and spiritual treasures unfold at every step.



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ITINERARY

Day 1 Kyoto Depending on your arrival time you will be met at Osaka's futuristic Kansai airport and escorted to our hotel in Kyoto. For those group members who have arrived early there are plenty of opportunities to explore the various temples nearby to our hotel, including Toji Temple – home, in AD823, to Kobo Daishi, an important figure in Japanese history whose legacy we will regularly encounter on this trip. Not far away, a walk in the wooded hills of Inari Mountain, famous for its 'fox temple' and tunnels of red *torii* gates, serves as a perfect way to ward off jetlag. In the evening we all meet up and we have our first chance to experience some of Kyoto's legendary cuisine. *Overnight – hotel*

Day 2 Kyoto Flanked on all sides by lush, forested hills, and with the shallow waters of the cherry tree-lined Kamagawa river flowing gently down its length, Kyoto lies in a delightful setting. Originally modelled on Xian in China, the city's long and rich history reaches back to a time well before its choice as imperial capital in the 8th century. Since then generations of artisans and benefactors have helped build a legacy of almost 2,000 Buddhist temples, Shinto shrines and Zen gardens. The ensuing centuries have seen the city become a paradise not just for the pilgrim but also for the pleasure-seeker, and in the cobbled streets of the Gion quarter it is still possible to steal a glimpse into the enigmatic and often misunderstood world of the *geisha*. With such a limitless wealth of treasures and traditions the city of today stands proudly at the country's cultural heart, still managing to effortlessly encapsulate all that is magical and refined about Japan. Kyoto remains, for many a visitor, the finest city in Asia.

This morning an orientation tour takes us to some of Kyoto's more important sites, including: the imposing and opulent Nijo Castle – formerly home of the Tokugawa shoguns and, nestling at the foot of Kyoto's north-western hills, the extravagantly decorated Kinkakuji temple, which was immortalised in Yukio Mishima's novel "The Golden Pavilion". From here it is also possible to walk or drive the short distance to Ryoan-ji, perhaps Japan's most famous Zen garden. The rest of the afternoon is free, or offers the possibility of walking in the eastern hills at Daimonji Yama for fine views over Kyoto and beyond. Then, in the early evening, there will be an introductory briefing followed by dinner at one of the city's many delightful restaurants, situated near the new and architecturally astounding railway station. Later, for the more 'energetic' members of the group, there will be a night tour – carefully researched – of Kyoto's entertainment district with its street musicians, canalside bars and youthful neon verve! *Overnight – hotel*

Day 3 Kyoto Today is a free day. There is of course a great many things to see and do in Kyoto; in particular this is a city that lends itself to walking, and there are many differing routes that can be taken during this day at leisure. Recommended is a gentle stroll through the eastern hills along the 'Path of Philosophy' that links Ginkaku-ji, the Temple of the Silver Pavilion, with Nanzen-ji Temple. This walk can be extended south via the Heian shrine and on through well-preserved old town areas to Kiyamizu-dera (lit. the Temple of Clear Water). From here there is a justifiably famous view across a wooded gorge toward Kyoto. Closer to our hotel the architecturally impressive Higashi Honganji temple and the almost surreal Sanjusangendo, home to 1001 statues of Kannon the bodhisattva of compassion – whose name, incidentally, was later taken up by the camera company Canon. Both make for an interesting visit. In the late afternoon, for those who wish, there will be a short walking tour of Gion – the *geisha* district – with its many old teahouses, some of them mentioned in the widely acclaimed novel "Memoirs of a Geisha". Later a traditional dinner will be served in one of the many restaurants of the Pontocho area. *Overnight – hotel*

Day 4 Mount Koya Koya-san is the traditional starting point of the 88 Sacred Temple *Henro* pilgrimage of Shikoku and today we travel there from Kyoto on a journey which, at least in its latter stages, is considered to be one of the finest rail journeys in all Japan. En route we will break our journey at Uji and visit Byodo-in temple, home to the architecturally astounding Phoenix Hall, a building that was originally built to represent Amida Buddha's celestial palace in the Pure Land. Incredibly the building has survived intact from the eleventh century when it was home to members of the dominant Fujiwara clan – its image is famous throughout Japan as it adorns the back of all 10 yen coins. Uji is also famous for its green tea and we will no doubt have time to sample a cup before resuming our journey. In Nara we change trains and begin our climb into the mountains, where emerging from each tunnel the scenery becomes ever more spectacular. The train terminates at the foot of Koya-san and for the last leg of the journey we transfer to a funicular railway which will hoist us almost to the heavens and certainly to a world very different from the one we have left behind.

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ITINERARY *continued*

Day 4 Mount Koya *continued...* 3000 feet above sea-level Mount Koya, in similarity with Mt Athos in Greece, is home to scores of monasteries, the first of which was founded by Kobo Daishi in AD816. On arrival at the top of the mountain we make our way to the comfortable *shukubo* temple lodgings that will be our home for the next two nights. *Overnight – shukubo*

Day 5 Mount Koya Early risers are welcome to join the monks for morning prayers after which we have a full day to explore Mount Koya, enjoy the fresh clean air and relax amidst the cedar forests that surround this isolated mountain-top community. Of all the temples here the most important is Kongobu-ji, headquarters of the Shingon sect that was founded by Kobo Daishi after his return from studying esoteric Buddhism in China. The temple is certainly well worth visiting if only to see its impressive, sixteenth century screen paintings by Kyoto's famous Kano school of artists. The Willow Room, home to some of the finest screens, was also the site of the infamous forced suicide of warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi's adopted son. The most impressive sight on Mount Koya is without doubt the massive and mysterious Okunoin cemetery, resting place of many of Japanese history's most famous personages. Some 200,000 stone statues, wooden totems and other, sometimes bizarre, memorials (including a rocket that marks the site of a mausoleum interring the workers of an aerospace company!) lie throughout this moss-laden forest. At the centre of it all, and the reason that this is such a popular resting place for those who could afford the privilege of proximity, is the mausoleum of Kobo Daishi. According to popular belief Kobo Daishi never actually died but instead, in AD835, went into a state of catatonic meditation within the mausoleum. One day, upon the advent of the future Buddha Maitreya (Jap. Miroku), it is believed Kobo Daishi will reawaken to lead all humanity to salvation. The cemetery is particularly atmospheric around dawn or dusk. *Overnight – shukubo*

Day 6 Tokushima Fortified by one last temple breakfast we return by cable railway to Gokurabashi and make our way to Wakayama port where we board our ferry for the crossing of the Kii Channel. After a couple of hours at sea our first glimpse of the sacred island of Shikoku is followed by landfall at the ancient port of Tokushima. We have the afternoon to explore Tokushima and perhaps the best way to start is by travelling a couple of train stops north to the sleepy village of Bando, home of Ryozen-ji Temple. This temple, a ten minute walk from Bando station, is deemed to be Number 1 on the pilgrim's circuit and although it is acceptable to start anywhere along the route most people begin and end their pilgrimage here. Adjacent to the temple is a small shop with all the equipment the budding pilgrim needs for his or her journey, including the straw hat, white smock and the all-important staff which is considered to be a symbol of Kobo Daishi himself. Having returned to Tokushima, also of interest are the gardens around Zuiganji Temple and the park and ruins of Tokushima castle. Back at our hotel a sunset drink in the eighteenth floor bar provides panoramic views over the city and a fine lead in to dinner at one of the city's many restaurants. *Overnight – hotel*

Day 7 Shishikui In keeping with the circuit of the 88 Sacred Temples we will travel round the island in a clockwise manner beginning today by travelling south to the seaside village of Shishikui. The coastal scenery along this stretch is spectacular, particularly around the dramatic Semba Sea cliffs. We travel slowly by train through pristine fishing villages, where the seafood is as fresh as the ocean air, before briefly breaking our journey in the delightful hamlet of Hiwasa. Here we can visit the fascinating Yakuo-ji (temple 23), from where there are great views of the harbour and, deep within the temple's bowels, view a gallery with almost Boschian depictions of the terrors of Hell! The temple is valued for its ability to ward off ill luck in what are considered to be unlucky years – for men, incidentally, the unluckiest age is 42, whereas for women it is 33. In the afternoon we arrive at Shishikui, a sleepy village slowly becoming popular with surfers and scuba divers in the summer months. For those interested in fishlife a nearby glass-bottom boat allows a fascinating insight into the coral world that lies within the brine. Despite its size Shishikui has a lovely beachfront hotel and we will have time to relax here, enjoy a stroll along the pleasant Shirahama beach, and the chance to swim in the sea. *Overnight – hotel*

Day 8 Kochi Kannoura is the end of the line for the railway so this morning we continue by local bus to the ruggedly romantic Cape Muroto. On a windy day when the peninsula is lashed by the Pacific's fury it is not hard to see why the peninsula is popularly believed to be the gateway to the underworld. This is where, at the age of 19, Kobo Daishi is believed to have attained enlightenment whilst meditating in a cave, and nearby amidst the rockpools lies the great saint's bathing hole. We continue by bus to Nahari where we join the private Tosa Kuroshio railway line which will bring us to Kochi. Today, being Sunday, we will have the chance to visit Kochi's colourful, 300-year-old market held on a street leading to the castle. Though among the stalls there are antiques and bric-a-brac most of the market's wares are provided by farmers who come from all over the prefecture, and the whole affair provides a rare insight into the area's thriving rural way of life. *Overnight – hotel*

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ITINERARY *continued*

Day 9 Kochi Today we have the full day to explore the city with its palm-lined streets and easy-going atmosphere. A highlight of any visit is Kochi castle, rare in Japan for being in its original form. The castle has beautiful grounds and also a museum devoted to the city's most famous son Sakamoto Ryoma, a hero of the Meiji Restoration. Other sights of interest in Kochi include the fine Botanical Gardens and the Chikurin-ji Temple. *Overnight – hotel*

Day 10 Uwajima We begin our slow but delightfully scenic rail journey to Uwajima through a remote area of Japan rarely reached by foreigners. Our tiny train passes through valleys speckled with ancient villages and cuts through fields of rice and vegetables so intimately that it is almost possible for those with long arms to harvest a cabbage as we pass! For some of the way the train skirts the beautiful Shimanto-gawa, probably the last free-flowing river in Japan. On arrival in Uwajima there will be time to visit one of the town's chief attractions the notorious Taga Jinja fertility shrine. The attached museum, with its exhaustive three floors of exhibits pertaining to every conceivable aspect of human fertility, is a veritable monument to the boundlessness of mankind's erotic imagination and has to be seen to be believed! Uwajima itself is a lovely, tranquil place to wander through with its old wooden houses, temples and a refreshing, down-to-earth feel. Overlooking the town is a small but original castle which affords fine views of the area. Uwajima is also known for its *sumo* bullfights and although it is unlikely there will be a bout whilst we are here it is possible, for those who are really interested, to see a film of the fighting at the municipal bullring. *Overnight – hotel*

Day 11 Dogo Onsen We have a fairly short journey this morning as we make our way north to Matsuyama, Shikoku's largest town. The town itself has an impressive castle but the object of our visit here is the Dogo Onsen spa resort, situated just on the edge of town. Dogo Onsen's Honkan building houses the oldest spa in Japan and is mentioned in one of the country's earliest historical records over 1300 years ago. Though the current building itself dates back only as far as 1894 it is nevertheless an impressive if rambling structure which provides for one of Japan's most authentic bathing experiences. The place is also famous as the setting for "Botchan", one of modern Japanese literature's most popular novels by the acclaimed author Natsume Soseki (his portrait can be found on the front of the 1,000 yen note). Soseki was a regular visitor to Dogo and on each of his stays he would reside at the Funaya *ryokan*. It is not hard to see why. The establishment is quite luxurious and provides a very special Japanese travel experience. The rooms are immaculately appointed, the food simply excellent and the classic garden a joy to explore. The *ryokan* was also, incidentally, site of the little-known, 1932 'Matsuyama Incident'. Also worth a visit, and a mere 15 minutes walk from the hotel, is the surreal Ishite-ji Number 51 on the circuit, noted for its labyrinthine tunnels and bizarre statuary. *Overnight – ryokan*

Day 12 Kotohira After a leisurely breakfast at our *ryokan* we take the tram back to Matsuyama station. The journey to Kotohira takes a couple of hours or so and at times provides some great views of the island-studded Inland Sea. En route, we pass through Zentsu-ji, a small town famous not just as the birthplace of Kobo Daishi but also as home to the world's only square melon, which is grown in square, glass boxes to combat the fruit's inconvenient shape. Kotohira is a pleasant laid-back town and we will spend the next two nights here in our charming *ryokan* situated en route to the shrine. The town is dominated by Kompira-san shrine, which is dedicated to seafarers and is one of the highlights of any visit to Shikoku. The temple is famed throughout Japan for the number of steps one has to climb to reach it, though in reality the ascent is not that difficult and is worth it if nothing else for the great views. Other sights in town include Kanamaru-za, Japan's oldest *kabuki* theatre, the attractive Takadoro lantern tower, on the way from the station, and the covered, wooden Saya Bridge. *Overnight – ryokan*

Day 13 Kotohira This morning we leave our base in Kotohira and venture deep into Shikoku's mountainous heart. We will spend the day exploring the island's definite scenic highlights, Iya Valley and Oboke Gorge. The area was once one of the remotest in all Japan and famously provided sanctuary for the Heike clan after their 12th century defeat at the hands of the Genji - their descendents still inhabit and farm the area. Life here is beautifully described by Alex Kerr in his book "Lost Japan", part of which recounts his attempt to preserve one of Iya's last remaining thatched farmhouses. As well as taking a boat ride down the Yoshino River we will also have a chance to cross one of the area's unique Kazura Bashi vine bridges. *Overnight – ryokan*

Day 14 Osaka We have the whole day to make our way to Osaka. En route we will make a detour to visit Ritsurin Koen, popularly considered to be one of Japan's top three gardens. Eventually we cross over the impressively long Seto Ohashi bridge back to the main island of Honshu. Then on to Osaka, Japan's second largest city. Our hotel is centrally located close to the exciting Dotonbori district, the perfect place to bid Japan and friends farewell. *Overnight – hotel*

Day 15 Caravan concludes...

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Tour price (excluding international flights) – £2325 per person on a twin share basis

Group size & Leader The group will comprise between 6 and 12 members, and be escorted throughout by an experienced bi-lingual tour leader from The Oriental Caravan assisted by a local guide in Kyoto.

Transport We make good use of Japan's well-developed and highly efficient train system, whether it be the quaint, sometimes bizarre, local trains of Shikoku or the futuristic bullet trains in Honshu. It is felt that use of the public transport system allows for a more in-depth and personal experience of Japanese life – and is also invariably a lot of fun. Other forms of transport used include ferry, tram, public bus and private taxis. Much of the sightseeing is done by foot, and it should be noted that use of the train system necessarily entails a certain amount of walking.

Accommodation We stay in a variety of styles of accommodation, both Western and Japanese. In Dogo Onsen we stay at the elegant, modern Funaya *ryokan*, an exclusive establishment of some history, and once favoured by author Soseki Natsume. On Koya San we stay in comfortable *shukubo* temple accommodation, sleeping on *tatami* mats and enjoying excellent *shojin ryori* vegetarian meals. While in Kyoto we stay at The Oriental Caravan's longstanding base, the New Miyako Hotel. In Kotohira we stay in a traditional canalside, family-run *ryokan*. Elsewhere we stay in comfortable hotels, some of them in the Japanese style. The tour is sold on a twin share basis. If required a single supplement is available at a cost of £384. All rooms have en suite facilities, except the *shukubo* on Koya-san and the *ryokan* at Kotohira where facilities are shared. For the nights spent at a *ryokan* and *shukubo* we will be sleeping on the floor on Japanese-style *futons*, which most people find to be very comfortable.

Food Meals are included in the cost of the tour except in Kyoto, Tokushima, Kochi and Uwajima and Osaka. Where we eat at our lodgings, for example on Mount Koya and at Dogo Onsen, food is something of a highlight of the trip and expected to be of an excellent quality. As always the tour leader will be on hand to suggest restaurants and, where necessary, assist with ordering meals. On the days when meals are not included, depending upon your appetite and choice you can expect to spend, on average, between £15-25 per day on food and drink. It is possible to eat more cheaply than this or to spend considerably more. It is worth mentioning that Japanese cuisine is generally of a very high quality and extremely varied. For many visitors it is a distinct highlight of any visit. For those with more conservative tastes Western food is generally available at all the places that we visit. There is the option of some great vegetarian food – both Asian and Western – along the way but at certain places en route the choice of meat/fish-free meals may be limited.

Weather Japan has a temperate climate with four distinct seasons. Our visit is in May which is arguably the most comfortable season for travelling in this part of Japan when we can expect, though not of course be guaranteed, warm weather and clear skies.

Insurance It is a condition of travelling with The Oriental Caravan that each group member be insured against medical and personal accident risks (including the cost of emergency repatriation) and have adequate baggage cover. In addition, it is strongly recommended that at the time of booking all participants take out cancellation insurance so that should they need to cancel prior to departure and do so within the terms of their policy their costs at least in part will be recoverable from their insurer. (For your convenience, The Oriental Caravan is able to provide details of a suitable insurance policy, on request).

Health Formalities There are currently no statutory vaccination requirements for visiting Japan.

Passports & Visas All nationalities require a passport valid for at least 6 months beyond the date of departure from Japan. For most, including British passport-holders, a single-entry (Temporary Visitor) tourist visa is issued on arrival in Japan. Prospective group members of other visa status (e.g. business or student) should include details of their visa on their booking form.

Luggage Requirements Detailed information on what to pack, and other practicalities, is included in the PDI (Pre-departure Information) that will be sent to group members nearer to the date of departure.

This dossier, and the itinerary it describes, have been carefully compiled and are provided in good faith. As with any such journey to a remote destination unusual and unexpected conditions can occur at any time, and this kind of holiday can be subject to unforeseen changes; to fully enjoy this kind of travel it is, on occasion, necessary for participants to be prepared to adopt a certain amount of flexibility.

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