



**Oliver Dunskus**

# **The 88 Temples of Shikoku**

## **A Veteran's Guide to the Pilgrimage**

**3rd Edition**

**Archtop Publications**

The 88 Temples of Shikoku — 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition  
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by  
Oliver Dunskus

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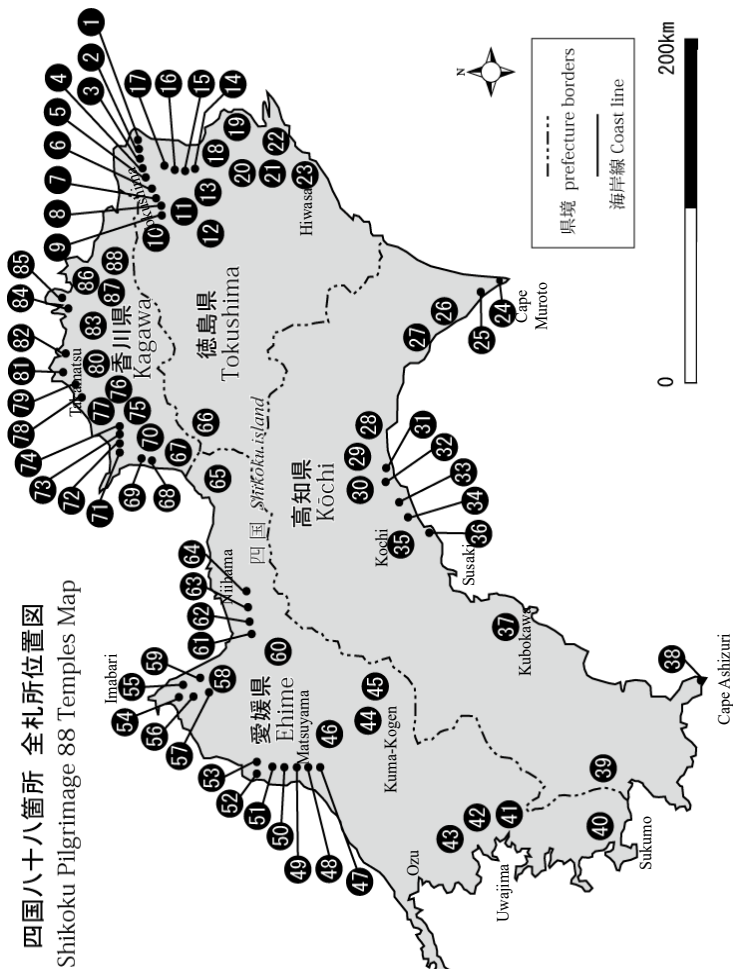
Die automatisierte Analyse des Werkes, um daraus Informationen insbesondere über Muster, Trends und Korrelationen gemäß § 44b UrhG („Text und Data Mining“) zu gewinnen, ist untersagt.

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四国八十八箇所 全札所位置図  
Shikoku Pilgrimage 88 Temples Map



# Foreword

My first English guidebook about the Shikoku Pilgrimage was published in 2021. Since then, much has changed. The COVID-19 pandemic brought a profound shift in attitudes toward the pilgrimage—most notably, camping outdoors has become uncommon. Many of the traditional free *Tsuyado* (overnight huts) have closed, and numerous family-run guesthouses did not survive the crisis. Often managed by elderly hosts before the pandemic, many of them chose not to reopen for various reasons.

When Japan reopened to international visitors in the fall of 2022, a wave of pilgrims returned to Shikoku, only to find it more difficult to secure accommodations. The closure of many huts, together with a growing reluctance toward wild camping, created new challenges. The good news is that several new lodging options have begun to appear. Today, most local pilgrims visit the temples by car. In 2024 and 2025, Japan inbound tourism flourished due to the weak Yen and tourism increased to a level which became almost unbearable for the locals in Kyoto and tourism increased also in more remote places, with hotels often booked out.

Another important change to keep in mind when planning your journey is that temple opening hours have become shorter. Most temples are now open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., some even close earlier. Opening times are no longer uniform across all temples.

The Shikoku Pilgrimage is often described as one of the oldest pilgrimage routes in the world. Located on Japan's fourth-largest island, its history stretches back more than 1,200 years, to the time when the monk Kūkai traveled through Shikoku in search of enlightenment, meditating in remote areas along the way. The organized pilgrimage movement itself began much later—around 300 years ago—when it became popular to visit a series of 88 temples around the island in his honor.

The Shikoku Pilgrimage is frequently compared to the Camino de Santiago. (Strictly speaking, “the Camino” is a broad term, as there are several routes leading to Santiago; most people mean the Camino Francés, which starts in Saint-Jean-Pied-de-Port.) Yet Shikoku differs in many ways. It forms a complete loop, with no fixed beginning or end, and can be completed in one journey or in several stages. There are no official pilgrimage hostels; instead, accommodations must be arranged

individually. Unlike the Camino routes, there are no rules about the mode of travel, and pilgrims are easily recognized by their traditional white attire.

The purpose of this guide is to offer practical advice for planning your pilgrimage, along with information on the cultural background of the temples. As this is not a map book, I often refer readers to *The Shikoku 88 Route Guide*, an English map book that includes detailed maps of the 1,200-kilometer route connecting the 88 main temples and 20 additional Bekkaku temples. This guide focuses less on spiritual or religious aspects and does not cover every popular legend associated with the pilgrimage.

One of the great joys of walking the Shikoku Pilgrimage is meeting the local people—warm, kind, and always willing to help. Because Shikoku faces challenges from an aging and declining population, I strongly encourage pilgrims to support the local economy by staying in local accommodations whenever possible. For this reason, this guide does not focus on how to complete the pilgrimage at the lowest possible cost, such as by sleeping outdoors or relying on free shelters. If your budget is limited, I recommend doing as much as you can now and returning another time to continue.

In the past, pilgrims could stay free of charge in temple lodgings or roadside shelters called *Tsuyados*. These places were originally intended for those in genuine need—people caught between being a pilgrim and being homeless. As most readers of this guidebook are not in that situation, these options are not discussed in detail.

Most visitors to Shikoku are deeply moved by the island's gentle spirit and the kindness of its people. I hope you, too, will find joy and inspiration on your journey.

This guidebook was written with my own brain and hands after 9 trips to the pilgrimage, during which I have completed the pilgrimage 3 times and my 4<sup>th</sup> pilgrimage has already started. AI has been used to streamline some parts of the text and to countercheck some translations, but not to write the guidebook itself.

## Symbols

|                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Camping Site                                                                                                                        |
|  | Train or train station followed by the station number                                                                               |
|  | Bus or bus station                                                                                                                  |
|  | Convenience store or supermarket (outside cities)                                                                                   |
|  | Restaurant                                                                                                                          |
|  | Toilet                                                                                                                              |
|  | Warning                                                                                                                             |
|  | Recommendation                                                                                                                      |
| X                                                                                 | Crossing / Intersection                                                                                                             |
| T1                                                                                | Official Temple (One of the 88 Main Temples) with Number                                                                            |
| B1                                                                                | Bekkaku Temple (The 20 Separate Temples) with Number                                                                                |
|  | Shinto shrine                                                                                                                       |
| KM                                                                                | Location along the full kilometer count, according to the Shikoku 88 Japan Route Guide, 2023 Edition (White numbers in blue square) |
| O1                                                                                | Inner sanctuary or sacred place related to a numbered temple                                                                        |
| Δ                                                                                 | Peak, pass, highest point of a limb                                                                                                 |
| ↗                                                                                 | Moderate climb, up to 10% or 100 m per km                                                                                           |
| ↗↗                                                                                | Challenging Climb, above 10% or 100 m gain per km                                                                                   |
| ↘                                                                                 | Moderate Gradient, below 10% or 100 m per km                                                                                        |
| ↘↘                                                                                | Steep Gradient, above 10% or 100 m per km                                                                                           |

# History

It is not entirely clear whether the Shikoku Pilgrimage was founded by the Buddhist monk Kūkai, later known as Kōbō Daishi (we will refer to him as Kūkai in this book). In ancient times, people already journeyed to sacred and spiritual sites, even before Buddhism reached Japan in the 6th century AD. There is, however, some evidence of Kūkai's stays at three of the pilgrimage temples. The oldest documentation of a pilgrimage trail in Shikoku, however, only dates back to the 17th century, during the Edo era, when a monk named Shinnen described a journey to 88 temples on the island. Today, Kūkai remains an omnipresent figure at the temples and along the pilgrimage route.

As Buddhism was an “imported” religion from India via Korea and China, preaching outside temples and monasteries was once forbidden in order to preserve the authority of Shintō, of which the emperor is the highest priest. In the 7th century, however, a mystic named En-no-Gyōja (634–701) traveled across Japan, teaching a blend of nature worship and early Buddhism with elements of Taoism, later known as Shugendō. Slightly later, the ascetic monk Gyōki (649–749) became the first person to teach Buddhism publicly in Japan, supported by Emperor Shōmu. Well-educated in civil engineering, Gyōki made significant contributions, though his achievements are often underrated. He passed away about 25 years before Kūkai was born.

So, who was this Kūkai, the ever-present companion we see represented in every temple and at many places along the pilgrimage route—depicted with his backpack, sleeping mat, walking stick, and hat? He was born in 774 near Zentsū-ji (Temple 75) as a descendant of the noble Saeki family and was given the name Mao. The family had fallen into poverty and disgrace after earlier political turmoil, but young Mao was nevertheless able to study religion and philosophy in Kyoto, which was soon to become Japan's new capital. He was drawn more to Buddhist teachings and ascetic practices than to the prevailing Confucian doctrine.

Mao Saeki spent much of his youth meditating in remote parts of Shikoku—first on a mountain near Temple 21, and later in a cave near Temple 24, close to Cape Muroto, where he is said to have attained enlightenment. From then on, he called himself Kūkai, after the two elements he saw upon emerging from the cave: the sky (Ku) and the sea (kai). He was in his mid-twenties at the time. At

age 30, Kūkai traveled to China with a group of monks. After a perilous voyage—during which some companions were lost in a storm—he, being able to speak Chinese, was allowed to continue to the capital, Chang ‘an (modern Xi’an), where he studied esoteric Buddhism for two years. Upon his return to Kyoto, he spent some time at Jingo-ji Temple and, in 810, was appointed head priest of Tōdai-ji, the great temple of Nara.

In 816, Emperor Saga granted Kūkai permission to establish a mountain retreat on Mount Kōya, which was completed only in 835 after many years of fundraising difficulties. Later, in 823, when Kyoto had become the imperial capital, Kūkai was appointed head priest of Tō-ji, one of the city’s most prominent temples. He passed away in 835, and his remains are enshrined in his mausoleum on Mount Kōya.



Kūkai founded the Shingon school of Buddhism, one of Japan’s largest Buddhist sects today. A central teaching of Shingon is that enlightenment can be attained in one’s present lifetime through esoteric practice. After his death, Kūkai was posthumously given the title Kōbō Daishi, meaning “The Grand Master Who Propagated the Dharma.” “At that time, however, the 88-temple Shikoku Pilgrimage as we know it today did not yet exist, despite later claims to the contrary.

*A statue of Kūkai at Temple 59*

It would take roughly another 900 years before Shinnen described the pilgrimage route across 88 temples in his 1687 book *Shikoku Henro Michishirube*. At that time, the temples were not yet visited in a particular order. Shinnen erected some of the first signposts and rest huts, measured the distances between temples, and created a basic infrastructure for pilgrims—some of his markers still exist today. This laid the foundation for a pilgrimage movement that also attracted common people, for whom the journey was often the only trip of their lifetime. Sometimes, an entire village would collect funds to send one pilgrim on the journey to pray on behalf of those who remained at home or for those who had passed away.

Why did it take so long for such a pilgrimage to emerge? Quite simply, until the Edo period (1600–1868), travel between regions of Japan was generally forbidden or very difficult, as many areas were in conflict with each other. Only under the Tokugawa shogunate, when Japan was unified and at peace, did travel become possible. The new centralized government introduced laws that permitted movement between prefectures, allowing pilgrims to cross regional borders more freely.

Looking at the history of the temples, we can see that many shared similar fates. In addition to accidental fires caused by lightning, forest blazes, or mishaps, two major waves of destruction left their mark. The first came under the armies of Motochika Chōsokabe, a daimyo from Nagaoka in central Shikoku, who conquered the entire island between 1573 and 1583, destroying many temples in the process. These events are often referred to more broadly as the “unrest of the Tenshō era.”

The second wave occurred during the Meiji Restoration, when Shintō, newly empowered under the restored emperor, regained political dominance. Across Japan, between 1868 and 1872 between 40,000 and 50,000 Buddhist temples were destroyed, and Buddhism came close to extinction. The destruction eventually ceased, as powerful Shintō shrines reclaimed their former grounds. Traces of these events are all over the pilgrimage, with many temples being rebuilt in new locations or shrines and temples being located next to each other but separated by walls. T13, .

Until the 20th century, undertaking the pilgrimage was a difficult and dangerous endeavor. Pilgrims walked in straw sandals through rugged terrain with minimal infrastructure—often muddy roads and river crossings. Diseases such as malaria and leprosy were common, and pilgrims, who typically carried cash, were easy targets for criminals. In remote and undeveloped southern Shikoku, pilgrims were often unwelcome.

In fact, one reason for defining a specific pilgrimage route was that local authorities required pilgrims to pass through certain areas quickly and along fixed paths. They were viewed as vagrants or contagious wanderers and were not permitted to stay long. Between 1844 and 1866, pilgrims were even banned from passing through the cities of Tosa (modern Kōchi) and Uwajima.

# The Pilgrimage Today

The meaning of Shi-koku is “Four Countries”, which refers to the four prefectures of the island: Tokushima, Kochi, Ehime and Kagawa. Today, the route leads along the 88 main temples across the four prefectures. Shikoku has four major cities, one in each prefecture: Tokushima in the east, Kochi in the south, Matsuyama in the northwest and Takamatsu in the northeast. Each of these cities is interesting to visit and offers excellent choices for shopping in case you might need some gear. Each of the prefectures has its own character which also reflects in spiritual stages, that pilgrims might experience as they walk.

It is not mandatory to begin with Temple No. 1, nor is it mandatory to visit all temples in one trip. Anything is possible and left to the individual to organize according to his or her own means. Pilgrimage in organized bus tours or by car is now the common way to do it for most Japanese. Apart from some etiquette and general guidelines for behavior, there are no rules on how the pilgrimage must be done. The four prefectures are often called by their former names when pilgrimage is discussed.

Tokushima Prefecture, formerly Awa (T1-T23, 189 km): Probably because it is nearest to Kyoto and Koyasan, Tokushima is the first prefecture and this is where the temple count begins. The prefecture stands for “spiritual awakening”, and the pilgrim has an easy start: After a 20-minute train ride from Tokushima Station, T1 is just a 15-minute walk from Bando Station. The route begins flat, temples coming every few kilometers as the challenge gradually increases with longer distances and more climbs. After 153 km, the prefecture’s last temple (T23) is reached and the route finally reaches the seaside.

Kochi Prefecture, formerly Tosa (T24-T39, 390 km): The route across Kochi Prefecture mostly goes along the southern coast of the island from Cape Muroto to Cape Ashizuri. The pilgrim is challenged by the sun and by long stretches with minimal infrastructure; the 16 temples being spread over a distance of 455 km. Consequently, this prefecture stands for ascetic training.

Ehime Prefecture, formerly Iyo (T40-65, 365 km): The route becomes more colorful and the landscape more diverse in Ehime, the prefecture of

enlightenment. In Matsuyama, after passing the Kuma-Kogen mountain range, pilgrims can enjoy the hot springs of Dogo Onsen and look forward to a couple of easier days walking along the beautiful rock coast on the west side of the island.

Kagawa Prefecture, formerly Sanuki (T66-T88, 150 km): After 945 kilometers, the pilgrims enter Kagawa Prefecture, which represents Nirvana. They will visit 22 beautiful temples over a distance of only 150 km, enjoy local Udon noodles, the bustling city of Takamatsu and receive their certificate of completion before visiting T88 and closing their loop by returning to T1.

There is no “official route” to the pilgrimage as the pilgrimage is to visit the temples, without following a given route. Over time, the route has often changed when more convenient roads or new bridges had been completed, or even temples had changed their location. However, there is a common understanding of a sort of main route, shown in the Shikoku 88 Japan Route Guide.

In the 20th century, it became common practice to visit Koyasan after finishing the pilgrimage, Koya-san is the center of Shingon Buddhism, a city of temples which is not located in Shikoku, but two hours by south of Osaka in Wakayama prefecture.

There are over 1800 sacred places in Shikoku. Apart from the 88 Fudasho main temples (named T1 to T88 in this book), we find other categories of temples:

There are 20 **Bekkaku Temples** named B1 to B20, the term Bekkaku meaning “counted separately”, and they are also considered a pilgrimage of their own. Many of these temples are just as splendid as the main 88. The numbering of the Bekkaku-temples was only introduced in 1966. The 88 main temples and 20 Bekkaku temples add up to 108 temples, 108 being a holy number in Buddhist numerology.

Most of the main temples have remote temples or inner sanctuaries allocated to them, these locations are called **Okunoin**. They could be the original sacred places which started the temple, places of particular spirituality, or remote locations for ascetic training. When they are connected to any of the main temples, this guidebook uses the letter O- followed by the temple number. For

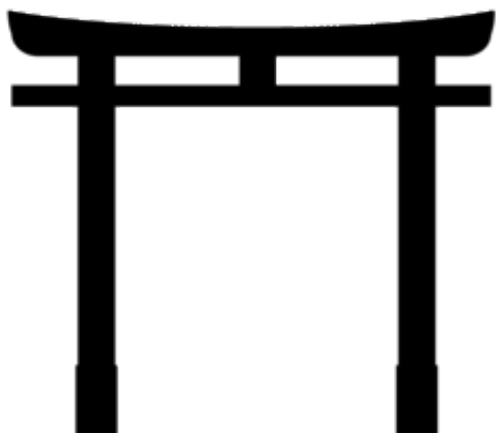
simplification, I have called all associated sacred spots Okunoin although strictly speaking, it may not be correct.

Another group of temples is called **Bangai**, which means “unnumbered” meaning they are not related to any of the main temples, but they, too, are worshipping Kukai and may be impressive in size or appearance, just as some of the 88 main temples may be rather small and modest. There are several hundred in Shikoku.

Apart from the different types of Buddhist temples, Shikoku also has over 1,000 **Shinto-shrines** named Jinja or -gu, often on the same property as the Buddhist temples. They can be large and majestic, or very tiny, often sharing grounds with Buddhist temples.

Temples and shrines can easily be distinguished by their gates: While Buddhist temple gates are often built like small buildings with walls and roofs, Shinto shrines have the typical Torii gates made of two vertical and two horizontal pillars, the upper one bent.

In many cases, temples and shrines can be found on the same area, sharing common history. Historically, Shintoism, was the original nature religion of Japan, the Emperor being the head priest. Buddhism was considered something foreign, imported, un-Japanese to some. The emperor was without political power for most of the times (the period between the Meiji era from 1868 and the end of WWII 1945 being one of the few exceptions) as the country was ruled by Samurai clans. Throughout the Edo era (1603-1868), Temples often shared their grounds with Shinto shrines, while the Meiji reformation 1868, in which the emperor took power, brought a phase of strong confrontation between the two religions, during which many Buddhist temples were destroyed and the grounds later divided. The phase of destruction ended suddenly in 1872 and temples were rebuilt. Some prominent examples are T1, T9, T13, T37, T41, T64, T68, T79 and T83.



*A typical Shinto Torii gate*



*A typical gate of a Buddhist temple, shaped like a building. Some of the gates have two stories, contain the bell and can be entered.*

# Preparations

## When to Go

If you do not live in Japan, it is a good idea to start the project with the flight booking. This will set the time for your trip and avoid further postponement. 3-6 months before the trip is a good time for preparation.

The most popular seasons for the walking pilgrimage are March and April before April 23rd (which marks the beginning of the Golden Week, a major holiday in Japan where traffic is heavy and many places are booked out). The summer months are not recommended – too much rain, too humid, typhoons, but October is another good month, and later, the winter months in Japan are also good as the weather is usually bright and dry with few days of rain. Avoid the period of New Year's Eve and the first week of January. This is a time when the entire country comes to a standstill and accommodation might be difficult. The walking pilgrimage takes about 8 weeks depending on detours and rest days. A part of the trip will fall into a difficult month. The temperatures are the same across the island between the north and the south, but the south has more rain.

Let us look at the weather you might expect every month:

|          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| January  | 0 - 10°C, month with little rain, dry air and bright days. First week is new year's holiday period, many places are closed. Mountain areas might be cold and snowy                                                    |
| February | Between 5 and 15°C, good month to go but not warm. Mountain areas might be cold and snowy, not much rain                                                                                                              |
| March    | 5-20°C, good month to go, be prepared for occasional cold and hot moments, occasional rain.                                                                                                                           |
| April    | Good month to go. Between 10 and 20°C, Golden Week starts April 23, so be sure to be done or at least to have a confirmed stay early enough in that period. Expect some days of rain. Very popular, might be crowded. |
| May      | More occasional rain, weather becomes warmer with 15-25°C and higher humidity                                                                                                                                         |
| June     | Rainy season, rain approx. every second day, very humid, temps up to 30°C, not recommended for walking. August is hottest month. September is typhoon season                                                          |
| July     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| August   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

|           |                                                                                    |
|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| September |                                                                                    |
| October   | Good month to go. Less rainy, with lower humidity. Very popular, might be crowded. |
| November  | Good month to go but might occasionally be cold, jacket needed.                    |
| December  | Clear skies and dry weather, good month to go but jacket needed.                   |

## Costs

The costs of the trip can be calculated by adding one-time costs for the trip to Shikoku plus an estimation of costs per day depending on your requested level of comfort and length of stay.

| One-Time Costs              | Yen   | € (= 180 Yen)          |
|-----------------------------|-------|------------------------|
| Flight to Kansai            |       | €1,000.00              |
| Bus to Tokushima and back   | 9,000 | €50,00                 |
| Hotel 1st night             | 8,000 | €45,00                 |
| Dinner 1st night            | 3,000 | €15,00                 |
| Shikoku 88 Route Guide      | 1,800 | €10,00                 |
| Walking staff               | 1,800 | €10,00                 |
| Vest                        | 3,600 | €20,00                 |
| Hat                         | 3,200 | €18,00                 |
| Stamp book                  | 3,600 | €20,00                 |
| <b>Total one-time costs</b> |       | <b>Appr. €1,200.00</b> |

+

| Costs per day              | Yen           | € (= 180 Yen)  |
|----------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Hostel per night           | 5,000         |                |
| Food & beverages           | 4,500         |                |
| Average 3 temple stamps    | 1,500         |                |
| Spending money             | 1,000         |                |
| <b>Total costs per day</b> | <b>12,000</b> | <b>€ 67,00</b> |

These estimations are based on a reasonable level of comfort. That would include a nightly hostel or guesthouse stay in shared rooms, eating meals in basic restaurants, and collecting stamps at the temples.

A 2-week pilgrimage to Shikoku will allow you to visit the temples of one of the four prefectures on foot:

|                         |            |
|-------------------------|------------|
| One-time costs          | € 1,200.00 |
| 13 days @ € 67.00       | € 871.00   |
| Total costs for 2 weeks | € 2,071.00 |

It takes 8-10 weeks to walk the entire route. An 8-week pilgrimage visiting the 88 temples on foot will cost about

|                                     |               |
|-------------------------------------|---------------|
| One-time costs                      | €1,200.00     |
| 56 days @ € 67.00                   | €<br>3,752.00 |
| Total costs for entire trip on foot | €<br>4,896.00 |

Hostels are usually paid in cash. Supermarkets accept credit cards, but I recommend carrying money for the trip in case card payment does not work. Japan is a very safe country and the risk of the money being stolen is close to zero.

Cash can be withdrawn at ATMs in post offices and many convenience stores. However, some of the ATMs do not accept foreign credit cards, even if they carry the Visa- or Mastercard logo. The ones at the post offices, 7-Elevens and Family Marts usually work.

## What to Take Along

You do not need much. Every hostel or guesthouse offers laundry. I have been on the Shikoku pilgrimage many times and managed to reduce the weight of my backpack down to 6 kg, including the backpack itself and a jacket. Everyone is different, but you might take this adventure to find out how light you can really travel.

To start with, here is a list of what you DO NOT really need. Remember, no one cares if you look stylish:

- Too many toiletries. Toiletries are always provided free of charge
- A third pair of shoes
- Hair spray or gel

- Shaving kit
- A large towel (a tiny one will do)
- Cologne or perfume
- Detergent (It is usually provided when you do the laundry)

Here is what I recommend to take along:

- Trekking poles (a good alternative to the wooden staff)
- A soft hat that can easily be squeezed into your luggage. (I prefer this solution over the traditional sedge hat.)
- Walking shoes (Sneakers or trail runners are good enough, 85% is on pavement, the rest is on trails)
- A lighter second pair of shoes to wear after the hikes.
- 3-4 pairs of socks
- A sweater (think of cold airplane cabins)
- A small towel
- A nail trimmer (your nails, at times, will suffer)
- 2-3 of your oldest T-shirts to maybe throw away during the trip
- Hiking pants (not shorts)
- 2-3 zipper pouches to keep your mobile phone and passport dry during heavy rainfall.
- A waterproof jacket
- Sports tape to protect your feet from blisters, blister-kit
- Sunscreen lotion if you go between April and October
- A mini flashlight (it gets very dark very early)
- A red clip light to be visible in the dark or in tunnels
- The “Shikoku 88 Route Guide” map-book
- Charge cable and adapter
- Battery pack for your mobile phone
- Some tiny souvenirs from home (Key chain, postcards, candy) to give to people who do you favors
- Earplugs to sleep better in case anyone snores.
- Copies of your passport
- A very light bag to take along in case you go on a day trip without your backpack

Should you intend to walk the entire pilgrimage, you should make sure to keep your backpack as light as possible. Check the weight of every item you intend to take along, make a list, including the weight of the backpack itself, check the total weight of your luggage and set yourself a maximum weight limit. It should be possible to get below 8kg and that may also allow you to take it as cabin baggage.

## How to Do the Pilgrimage

The basic idea is to visit the 88 temples but there are no rules, and everyone may choose the mode of transportation, length of trip starting point and direction they wish, according to their abilities. Many locals go in organized tours or by car, many overseas visitors walk or do a mix of walking and public transportation for some of the longer or more difficult stretches. Your daily distance should be in line with your endurance, but remember you are in an interesting place and there will be many reasons to take a break, so do not plan your distances with too much ambition.

Some people manage to walk 40 km a day and do the entire pilgrimage in one month, but I recommend planning 20–25 km per day which is approximately 5–6 hours of pure walking with time to rest and to enjoy the most beautiful moments or discover unusual places. Remember this is not a race, on the contrary, one intention might be to let go of the daily pressures of your life and to find your personal flow. Even if at some stage it might become clear that you will not be able to finish (due to lack of time or injury). Take that as a good reason to come back. Some pilgrims also do it by bicycle. I once did it myself, on a women's shopping bike, which I had purchased locally, but some of the climbs are really tough and some parts cannot be done on the main route. It was a great experience which allowed me to take along more luggage, but my average speed was only 12–14 km/h and many roads were so steep that I had to push.

The stages between the Temples can be anything between a few 100 meters and 84 km. At the temple you take a rest, follow the ritual as you wish, receive a stamp and calligraphy for a donation of 500 Yen, enjoy the marvelous architecture and gardening (more about the temple rituals later), maybe chat

with other pilgrims. Slowly, you will make your way around the island, finally making it to T88, the last temple. From there, you may close the loop by returning to T1 and later continue to Koyasan if you want. Stay in one of the many temples and include 2 extra days for this.

There are separate supplements available to use with this guidebook suggesting daily routes for walking or cycling.

## Pilgrimage by Public Transportation

Not everyone is strong enough to do the pilgrimage on foot. And even then, you might find yourself in a situation where you might prefer getting a ride, due to pain, frustration, schedule or bad weather. Nothing wrong with that, there are no rules. Trains and busses will take you to most parts of Shikoku, but you should be aware of the schedules, as many connections are not even covered on an hourly basis and due to constant depopulation, the lines and schedules are reduced with every new season.

To make travelling convenient for foreigners, the JR stations are numbered so that station names need not be remembered.

Most of the 88 Temples can be accessed by public transportation but some walking will still be necessary as many of the temples are located on hills.

When taking the train, on major lines you proceed as follows:

1. Find your destination station on the maps near the ticket machines
2. Check the price listed at your destination name
3. Press "English" on the ticket machine if necessary
4. Insert enough money (The machines take bills and give change)
5. Press the button with the ticket price shown on the big map
6. Collect the ticket and your change
7. Go to the platform, show your ticket to the station employee
8. Keep your ticket during the ride (you will need it to leave the station)
9. Upon arrival your ticket will be checked and collected
10. In case you did not pay enough fare, you will be kindly asked to correct your payment, there will be no penalties.

Smaller train lines and busses operate by the “one man” principle:

1. Enter through the back door
2. Take a ticket from the little machine at the back door, it will show the station number where you entered. On the first station of the connection, no ticket will be given
3. During the ride, the price of your ride will be shown on a display in front, increasing as the ride gets longer
4. When leaving, leave your ticket, and the right amount of change into the little plastic box at the driver.
5. If you do not have correct change, there is a change machine next to the driver, but make sure you have at least something as small as a 1000-yen bill. Changing your bill into coins and paying your ride are two separate processes.

In case you are not sure about where to get off to visit your temple, tell the bus driver the name of the temple adding “Onegai shimasu” which means “please do me the favor”. Bus drivers are familiar with foreign pilgrims in this situation and will tell you where to get off.

There is some etiquette in local short-distance public transportation:

- Do not speak loudly
- Do not use your mobile phone to make calls
- Do not eat or drink, not even on the platform
- Stay in the back of the bus if you can until your station is coming up
- Queue in the marked spots on the platforms
- Take off your backpack

## Pilgrimage by Bicycle

Cycling the 88 temples of Shikoku has become more popular in recent years especially among younger Japanese. This option allows to be in the “here and now” like a walking pilgrim, at the same time longer distances can be covered by day. While the distances when walking should not exceed 25 km per day, one can plan for distances of 60 to 70 km when cycling. This may seem short to an experienced road cyclist, but some of the climbs are so steep that the bike with its luggage might have to be pushed. Also, the cycling flow is often interrupted by photo opportunities, temple visits or orientation stops.

In several cases, the popular pilgrimage route follows a trail and cycling to the temples might require a different route or at least a detour, notably at

- T11 to T12,
- T20-T21,
- T43 to T44,
- T65-T66-T67 or
- T80 to T81.

## Pilgrimage Gear

Traditionally, there was no particular attire the pilgrims were wearing. People were on the pilgrimage in their regular traditional clothes, as you can see in old pictures. Their head was protected by a sedge or bamboo hat, because that was the way hats were made at the time, and pilgrims were walking with a staff because that is helpful when walking or in case protection is needed.

**White attire** was worn occasionally, but it became more popular in the 20th century with the industrialization of the textile industry as clothes became more affordable and temples recognized there was money to be made selling pilgrimage wear. Again, there are no rules but you might enjoy wearing this “uniform” to trigger your mindset.

Today, some temples and shops offer a wide range of pilgrimage clothing gear. The **sedge hat** is a protection against sun and rain. It may also be worn at an angle so as to avoid eye contact which might improve internal focus during walking meditation. It comes in an inexpensive version (starting from appr. 3000 yen) which needs an additional plastic cover against rain, but also in beautiful hand-made lacquered versions (from 25.000 yen). You will also need a small towel and a sort of crate inside to wear on your head for it to sit tightly and comfortably. (Personally, I prefer wearing a soft hat instead, which I can squeeze into my backpack and a “bandana” which I can dip into cold water, and use to cool my head when the sun burns too hot.)

**The staff** (walking stick) also symbolizes the presence of Kukai walking along with you. It is made of wood and has a brocade top for the hands and to make it recognizable. Carry it with respect, and clean its bottom end first thing when

you arrive at your destination, before taking care of yourself. In traditional places, your staff will be treated with a lot of respect. Also, do not tap it on the ground as you walk over a bridge. As your pilgrimage comes to an end, the staff can be left at Temple 88 and burned in a ritual fire, but if you decide to take it home, you can check it in on your flight. Many pilgrims reported the airline staff taking good care of it and not charging any extra fee. Many pilgrims attach a small bell to it. Its ringing makes the pilgrims heard as they approach, the noise could chase away animals in the forest and the ringing in the rhythm of the steps creates a particular mindset when walking. Personally, I prefer a pair of trekking poles, two of them, they will make steep climbs and descents a lot easier and safer to walk, but I do have bells attached to them.

Formerly, pilgrims used to leave handwritten copies of the heart sutra at the temples, that was before the introduction of printing machines, when copies were not easy to get. This is why the name of the stamp office in the temples is called Nokyo-sho, which means the "Place of Sutra-Presenting". Stamps were given to confirm the reception of the sutra copy. Today, the tradition of sutra copying is still occasionally practiced, but temples hand out their stamps against a small fee.

The **stamp book** (Nokyo-sho) is a book with white pages or dedicated pages for each temple visit. After every temple visit, you visit the temple office (Nokyo-cho) and collect a calligraphy (when visiting for the first time) and 3 large stamps (each time you visit) as a documentation of your visit. As you continue your pilgrimages, the book is gradually filled with more and more stamps and calligraphies, documenting your journey, until it is completed and contains stamps of all 88 temples. This should not be missed.



To many pilgrims the stamp book is one of the most cherished things they own. Keep it in a separate plastic bag and protect it from moisture e.g., when hiking in heavy rain. These books come in various sizes and versions, make sure you get one large enough to fit more stamps in case you return to Shikoku some other time, and with enough pages to fit stamps for all 88 temples and some additional white pages for Bekkaku temples. Some stamp books only have white pages, some have 1 or 2 pages dedicated to every temple. A neutral stamp book not exclusively designed for the 88 temples can

also be used to collect stamps in other temples.

The **white shirt** (Hakui) is worn by many pilgrims. There are many good reasons to wear it. It can change your mindset once you put it on, you can be recognized by others as being a pilgrim, it makes you more visible in situations where you might be walking in the dark. In the past it was also considered to be the pilgrim's death shroud, showing that the pilgrim was prepared to pass away. The Hakui has sleeves and usually a convenient zipper pocket on the front. There is also a version as a vest without sleeves called Oizuru which can be worn on top of regular clothes. In my opinion the sleeve version has the benefit that it is convenient to wear on very sunny stages as it covers your arms, and you may wear nothing or very little underneath, and still be properly dressed, as it is very airy and provides a bit of ventilation. Some people have stamps put on the vests. In that case, it should be considered that the vests can no longer be worn and washed as the stamp ink is not waterproof. The ink will also dilute in rain or by sweat, so in that case it should not be worn anymore and only be stamped, which means you need another one to wear. The Hakui is usually made of light cotton fabric, the sort used for men's shirts. There are also versions made of breathable technical fabric.

Pilgrims usually carry name-slips called **Osamefuda**. The slips are left at the temples when visiting and they are appreciated by people who have done you

a favor (Osettai), or by other pilgrims you meet. You might see them inside free accommodation places as well.

Again, there is no rule, but a common format. They are sold in blank at the pilgrimage shops in blocks of 100 and you will have to complete them one by one by pen, adding your name, address and age. People who go on the pilgrimage regularly have them printed before. They come in different colors, indicating how often the pilgrim has already completed the tour: From the 5th time, they are green, from the 8th time they are red, from the 25th time silver and gold from the 50th time the pilgrimage is done. Sometimes you see colorful brocade ones, these are used by pilgrims who have completed the pilgrimage over 100 times and sometimes handed to others to bring good luck. It is hard to imagine anyone doing the pilgrimage so often, but these pilgrims are usually going by car. At the museum of the pilgrim salon between T87 and T88, there are some osamefuda on display including the stamp books from henro who have spent their life walking the pilgrimage 200-300 times before there was public transportation

I recommend keeping your Osamefuda in a suitable pouch or box to keep the dry and avoid wrinkles. It is practical to carry along an additional smaller bag to keep the pilgrimage gear which you use at the temples – the candles, incense, stamp book, lighter and name slips. It will make your life easier to have these things separately when arriving at the temple. There are special bags available for this.

You may complete your pilgrimage items with a **bell** to ring after reciting the sutra, a stole (Wagesa) and a Mala (Juzu) to keep in your hands when praying.

Many temples sell some of these items in larger or smaller choices. If you start in Tokushima, you can acquire some of the items before you start, in the souvenir shop in the ground floor of the Awa Odori Hall, next to the ropeway station at Mount Bizan. The first temples also have shops for pilgrimage items. A particularly nice shop named Sumotoriya is just before Temple 10, located below the highway bridge at the end of the village road. The owner speaks English very well and offers a large choice of quality items. You will probably pass this shop on your second day, so all you might need until then is a stamp book.

Here is a – probably incomplete - list of temples and shops offering a larger choice pilgrimage gear, almost all temples carry stocks of basic gear (candles, incense sticks, stamp books, souvenirs)

|           |                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Osaka     | Ippo-Ippodo: <a href="https://www.ippoippodo.com/">https://www.ippoippodo.com/</a><br>Located in Takarazuka north of Osaka                                                    |
| Tokushima | In the ground floor of Awa Odori Kaikan, at the ropeway station for Mt. Bizan                                                                                                 |
| T1        | Shop in front of the gate, but the stamp office on the right side of the temple also has plenty of gear for sale.                                                             |
| T10       | Sumotoriya, the last shop in the village just when passing underneath the expressway 1 km before T10<br><a href="https://www.sumotoriya.com/">https://www.sumotoriya.com/</a> |
| T12       | Next to the stamp office                                                                                                                                                      |
| T17-T18   | Inoue Shoten on Route 55 at KM 94, 400 m before crossing Katsuura river                                                                                                       |
| T28       | Shop on the right side when reaching the temple                                                                                                                               |
| T29       | Shop opposite the gate                                                                                                                                                        |
| T32       | Stamp office                                                                                                                                                                  |
| T34       | Shop on the parking lot                                                                                                                                                       |
| T46       | In the hostel opposite the temple                                                                                                                                             |
| T51       | In the arcade when entering the temple                                                                                                                                        |
| T51-T52   | Matsuchikka Pilgrimage shop near Matsuyama City Station                                                                                                                       |
| T54       | Stamp office                                                                                                                                                                  |
| T60       | Stamp office                                                                                                                                                                  |
| T68 & 69  | Stamp office                                                                                                                                                                  |
| T75       | Several shops on the temple grounds                                                                                                                                           |
| T77       | Shop on the parking lot                                                                                                                                                       |
| T80       | In the Daishido, combined with the stamp office                                                                                                                               |
| T85-T86   | Eichikai, 200 east of Hara station (Shido Line)                                                                                                                               |
| T86       | Stamp office                                                                                                                                                                  |
| T88       | Shops next to the bus stop                                                                                                                                                    |

## At the Temples

How to fill in the „Osame-Fuda“ slips:

The diagram shows a vertical slip of paper with a small illustration of a seated figure at the top. The slip is divided into sections for text entry. Arrows point from labels to the corresponding sections:

- Name**: Points to the section labeled '奉納人' (Person offering).
- Address**: Points to the section labeled '住所' (Residence).
- Year**: Points to the '年' (Year) character.
- Month**: Points to the '月' (Month) character.
- Day**: Points to the '日' (Day) character.
- Backside**: Points to the bottom section labeled '奉納の意' (Meaning of offering).

(Current Date)

The blank ones are sold at the temple shops. Prepare them to have them ready, 2 for each temple and also as an appreciation to anyone who helps you e. g. with a food gift, a place to sleep, a lift by car

Every temple is different, some are over 1000 years old, or recently built, small or large, plain or beautiful, stuck between houses or on mountain peaks, and built with minimalistic architecture or impress with an abundance of decorations. And all 88 temples have their own particular aura. They all have several names: Their official name, the number, an additional name of a mountain and sometimes a sort of nickname. Each of them is devoted to a deity or Buddha and many of them are committed to a particular topic for which people come to pray.

Also, the 88 temples all share a number of key elements: The gate, the handwashing basin, the bell, the main temple building, a statue of Kukai, the Daishi-do temple building devoted to Kukai, the temple office, public toilets and a spot where pilgrims can sit and rest. Arriving at a temple (they open at 8 a.m. and most close at 5 p.m.) is always an exciting moment, especially after a long walk. You may stop your walking meditation as you approach the first gate, in which two wooden guards (Un-Gyo and A-Gyo) keep a sharp eye on the ones entering. As mentioned, there are no strict rules, but you will make no mistake following the most common temple rituals: