



Oliver Dunskus

The 88 Temples of Shikoku

Part 1: Tokushima Prefecture (T1 to T23)

Archtop Editions

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Part 1 Tokushima (Temple 1 to Temple 23)

by
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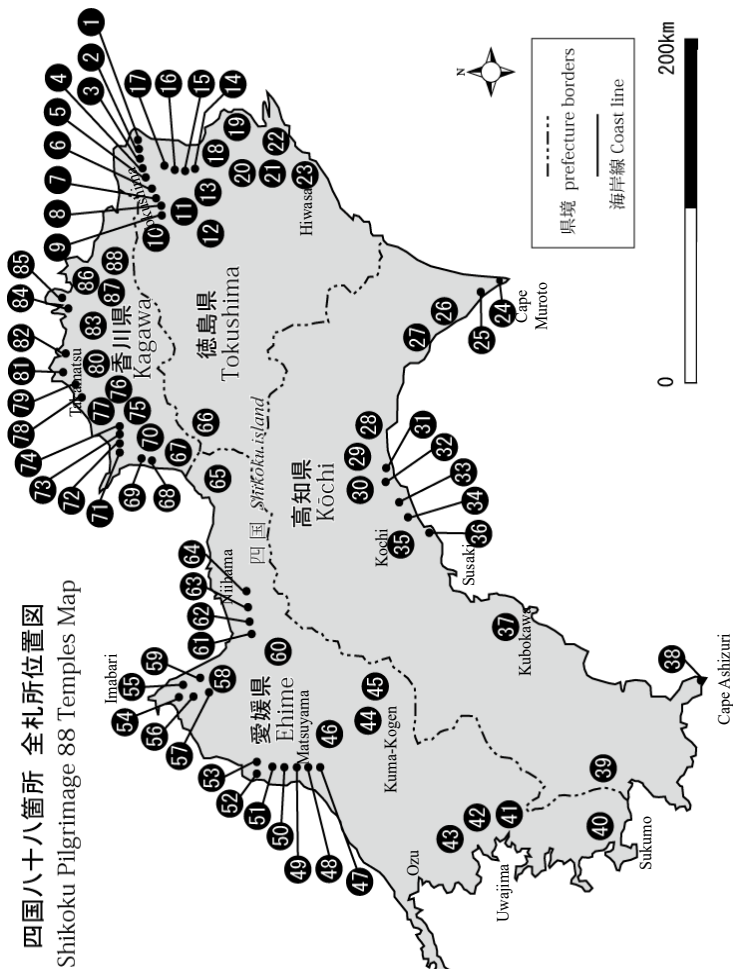
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Shikoku Pilgrimage 88 Temples Map



Foreword

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.

This 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 4th 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 (On 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 placed related to a numbered temple
△	Peak, pass, highest point of ca 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.

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.

*An early-morning
glimpse of Kū kai at*
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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