



Cycling

JAPAN
NAKASENDO

GIFU & NAGANO
Tours Guide Book



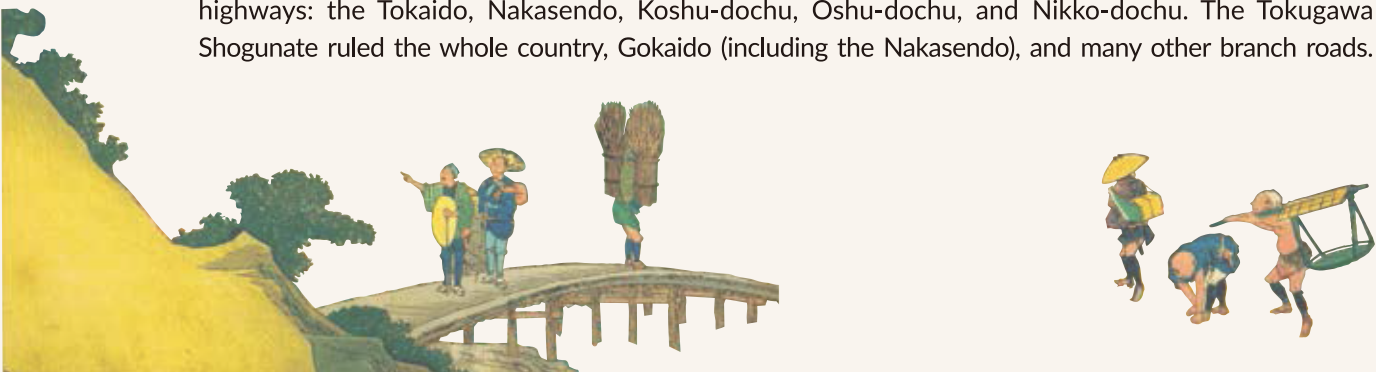
Walking



中山道 The Background of the NAKASENDO

What is the modern image of Japan among people who are visiting for the first time? Is it one of big cities: an endless forest of buildings with crowded streets full of busy people rushing around? Those sights are a common representation of Japan, a country where miraculous economic growth was achieved after the Second World War. What about the images we think of regarding transportation in Japan? Do we think of cars speeding down highways, subway networks intertwined like blood vessels, and bullet trains racing between cities at high speed? An elaborate system of freeways, roads, railways and many different types of transportation connecting local cities can be imagined.

Yet among all of these modern advents of high-technology, high-speed transportation in Japan, there still remains a unique system of ancient roads where people have been walking for hundreds of years. Originally completed about 1,400 years ago, these roads are called "kyukaido" and stretched all over the country as they were used for religious, political and economic purposes. At the beginning of the Edo period (1603-1868), the governing body resided Edo (current-day Tokyo) and was called the "Tokugawa Shogunate". They established the Gokaido Highway System, which served as the main paths that connected the capital to various parts of the country. The Gokaido consisted of five separate highways: the Tokaido, Nakasendo, Koshu-dochu, Oshu-dochu, and Nikko-dochu. The Tokugawa Shogunate ruled the whole country, Gokaido (including the Nakasendo), and many other branch roads.



Former Japanese Highway

NAKASENDO

中山道を巡る

During the Edo period, Japan was made up of more than 260 feudal domains, or small countries, called "han". Each han had a ruler called a "daimyo" that independently ruled their respective han. However, it was the Tokugawa Shogunate that ruled over Japan as a whole with a unique, integrated style in order to leverage control over the daimyo. Specifically, the Tokugawa Shogunate forced daimyo to send key family members to Edo to serve as hostages. Then, every year or couple of years, each daimyo was forced to travel from their respective han to Edo in order to change the hostage with another member of his family. This system was called "Sankin Kotai" and in those days it was tremendously expensive to make such a journey. As a result, many daimyo lost economic power and the financial ability to revolt against the central Edo government. This Sankin Kotai system helped the Tokugawa Shogunate maintain peace throughout the lands, leading to an era more peaceful compared to that of previous eras.

Hundreds of years later in the Meiji era (1868-1912), Japan opened up to international trade and experienced an impressive advancement in technology and industry. An extensive network of railways and other infrastructural systems were developed and brought about the beginning to the end of the dominance of the Gokaido Highway System. As time progressed, the evolution of civil engineering technology led to the creation of straight, uniform roads and the Gokaido fell into obscurity. However, many sections of these ancient highways still remain today as places to experience past Japan. We would like to focus especially on the Nakasendo, a particularly well-preserved section of highway spanning Nagano and Gifu Prefectures and featuring many unique scenes of ancient Japan.

The Nakasendo is an ancient road that has existed for about 450 years and winds through Nagano and Gifu's magnificent mountainous terrain. It remains to be a natural road with lots of character; not a uniform road that was constructed with heavy machinery like the modern roads of today. This area of Japan boasts many majestic mountain views with abundant greenery, and in the towering mountains one can even see snow until late spring. Clear streams flow along the path and beautiful terraced rice fields are planted like vineyards in narrow valleys. One might wonder where the spring water was drawn from in such high places. Even Japanese people, especially those who visit from the city, are impressed by the beautiful scenery here.

NAKASENDO

Cycling & Walking Course



Gifu-Nagano Nakasendo Course Overview

Gifu Prefecture

Nagano Prefecture



Post Station Towns



At the height of the Edo period, the Tokugawa Shogunate enacted various measures and policies regarding the Gokaido, the most famous one being the construction of settlements of accommodation facilities called post towns (also known as post stations). At the time, all travelers had to stay in these post towns for political and military reasons. All travelers, even daimyo (the lords of the time), had to follow the rules of the central government and each post town. These rules which were posted for everyone to see on large wooden signboards near a post town's gates called "kosatsuba". At dusk, the gates were closed and gatekeepers stood watch. By that hour, travelers had to be in the post town, inside their respective lodging. For that reason, various lodging facilities were built within the borders of the post town. Travelers stayed at traditional Japanese inns, called ryokan or hatago, where they ate dinner, took a bath, and slept. The Nakasendo had 69 post towns within a total distance of 530 kilometers. Each post town has various features which are unique to each location, such as exotic souvenirs and food, and travelers enjoyed making the journey to buy them. The Nakasendo still has its original post-town landscapes that allow you to experience what it felt like to travel back in the day. For hundreds of years, these post towns have continued to attract guests and allow them to experience the exotic culture of ancient Japan.

Ichirizuka Milestone Markers and Kosatsuba Notice Boards

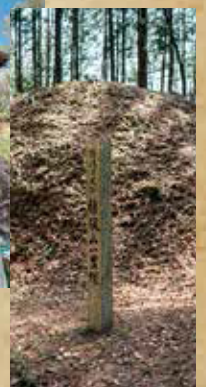
There are many other highlights of the Nakasendo, such as the ichirizuka, which informs travelers of distances traveled, and the aforementioned kosatsuba, notice boards that present central government and post town laws. The real life of local people can be felt by traveling along the Nakasendo. The pronunciation of words that change as you journey further along the road, the small Buddha statues and stone signs that you can see at every turn, the people who live a modern life while protecting the Nakasendo tradition... the Nakasendo is a unique experience of ancient Japan in a modern world.

When traveling along the Nakasendo in spring or autumn, one can see farmers planting and harvesting rice in the fields. Festivals are also an important part of Japanese culture and are held at every turn of the season at many of the Nakasendo's old shrines and temples.

An authentic, ancient, and beautiful Japan remains here along the Nakasendo. There are no trendy theme parks and no animated characters, like those that fill the streets of Tokyo; the treasures of ancient Japan can be found here.



Kosatsuba



Ichirizuka

NAKASENDO

The ancient road in Japan Cycling & Walking







We recommend walking or cycling to travel the Nakasendo. In areas where you see the original scenery of Japan, you can't feel good by simply visiting local areas. It is important to experience the feeling of getting to the next post town, by feeling what is on the road or while walking between the post towns on foot or by bicycle. Naturally, walking is the best way to travel the cobblestones and steep mountain paths. Retracing the steps of people who have been walking along for 450 years is the best part of traveling on the Nakasendo. Nagano Prefecture is particularly suited to walking, given the closer location of some of the Nakasendo's most popular post towns, Tsumago and Magome-juku. On the other hand, it is fun to ride a bicycle in areas that have been developed and on unpaved roads that remain as they were. In ancient times, people journeyed along not only on foot, but on horseback as well. Nowadays, it's more enjoyable to experience the Nakasendo riding on a "modern" horse, made of aluminum or carbon fiber with rubber tires. In particular, the Gifu area is far from the traffic of main roads, so cycling is recommended.

Rediscover yourself and experience Nagano's and Gifu's unique treasures along the Nakasendo. Become an old traveler and travel through the original landscapes of Japan. Feel the real Japan that most travelers never get a chance to discover.

Discover the Nakasendo.
The Nakasendo awaits.

Traverse the Historical Nakasendo Trail at Your Own Pace

CYCLING			
WALKING  <ul style="list-style-type: none">● For leisurely walkers● Have general hiking equipment and experience● Interested in old Japan and want to experience it● Casual adventures at a relaxing pace	Beginner LEVEL ★☆☆  <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Leisurely bike rides● Shorter distances at manageable speeds● Focused primarily on the sights and tastes of Japan● Casual adventures at a relaxing pace	Intermediate rider LEVEL ★★☆☆  <ul style="list-style-type: none">● For general training and improving overall fitness● Focus on longer distances and elevation gain● Enjoy sightseeing and local cuisine after the ride● Ride with cyclists of a similar ability	Advanced rider LEVEL ★★★☆☆  <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Geared for cyclists who ride often and track their performance● Prioritize the ride and sense of accomplishment● Ride with cyclists who will challenge and motivate you

Necessary Equipment

WALKING

Apparel and gear suitable for hiking
Hydration (water, electrolytes, etc.)
Nutrition (food, snacks, etc.)

CYCLING

Bicycle – one suited for active cycling, such as a cyclo-cross, hybrid, or road bike, helmet, gloves, water bottle, equipments for safe riding

Important

Both walking and cycling the Nakasendo involve travel through mountainous areas, and at times, unpaved roads. Please participate at your own risk and be aware of your own physical capacity.



Gifu

Visit the Battlefield of Sekigahara



CYCLING

Intermediate rider

LEVEL ★★☆☆

Distance
about 38.0km
Riding time
6hour



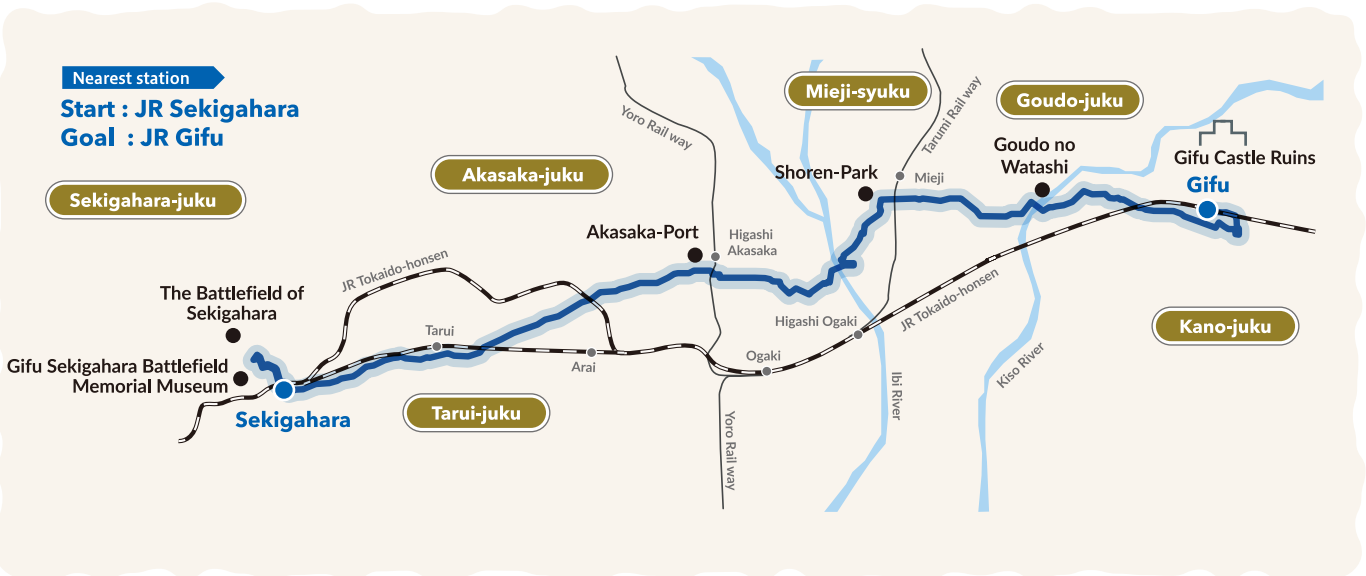
Tour Highlights

A must-see is the Gifu Sekigahara Battlefield Memorial Museum opened in 2020. Everything about the Battle of Sekigahara is displayed here. The Battle of Sekigahara ended a long age of civil wars and strife. Immerse yourself at the Memorial in the largest civil conflict in Japan's history where 200,000 soldiers battled.



Gifu Sekigahara Battlefield Memorial Museum

This course is a path that is easy to ride, as it continues to be flat in comparison to other paths in Nakasendo. Visit historic sites of the Battle of Sekigahara that broke out in 1600, and learn about the event which was a turning point in Japan's history. After seeing the site of battlefield, the course continues to Tarui-juku and Akasaka-juku. The goal is Kano-juku (current Gifu City), capital of Gifu Prefecture. Enjoy the atmosphere of post station town where the culture of the Mino Region blossomed.



Nearest station

Start : JR Sekigahara
Goal : JR Gifu

Sekigahara-juku

Akasaka-juku

Mieji-syuku

Goudo-juku

The Battlefield of Sekigahara
Gifu Sekigahara Battlefield Memorial Museum

Tarui-juku

Akasaka-Port

Shoren-Park

Goudo no Watashi

Gifu Castle Ruins
Gifu

Kano-juku

Nearest station

Start : JR Sekigahara
Goal : JR Sekigahara

Imasu-juku

Ne-monogatari

The Battlefield of Sekigahara

Gifu Sekigahara Battlefield Memorial Museum

Sekigahara

Sekigahara-juku

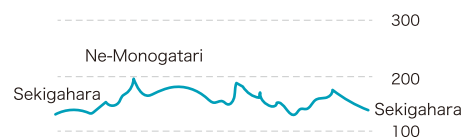


CYCLING

Beginner

LEVEL ★☆☆☆

Distance
about 14.3km
Riding time
3hour



Tour Highlights

Gifu Sekigahara Battlefield Memorial Museum, The Battlefield of Sekigahara, Ushi-kaeshi no saka, Ne-monogatari no sato.



Gifu Cycling Tour of Kiso River

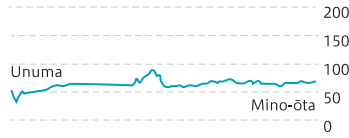


CYCLING

Beginner

LEVEL ★★☆☆

Distance
about 11.8km
Riding time
3 hours



The Coast of Kiso River

Tour See a waki-honjin, where traveling daimyo and their retainers stayed.
Highlights Walk along the majestic scenery of the Kiso River.



Gifu Walking Tour of Uto Pass

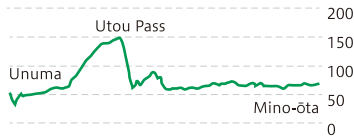


WALKING

Distance
about 11.46km
Walking time
3 hours



Unuma Post-Town



Nearest station
Start : JR Mino-ōta
Goal : JR Unuma
Nearest station
Start : JR Mino-ōta
Goal : JR Unuma

Tour See a waki-honjin, where traveling daimyo and their retainers stayed.
Highlights Walk along the majestic scenery of the Kiso River. Explore the unconventional entrance of Uto pass.

Visit Ota-juku's waki-honjin and watch the flow of the Kiso River while making your way to Uto Pass, which was famous in the past for its narrow, steep road.

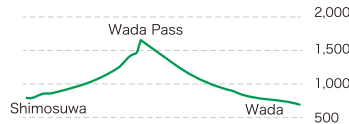


Nagano The Rural Landscape of Nakasendo



WALKING

Distance
about 26.4km
Walking time
7hour

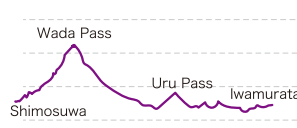


CYCLING

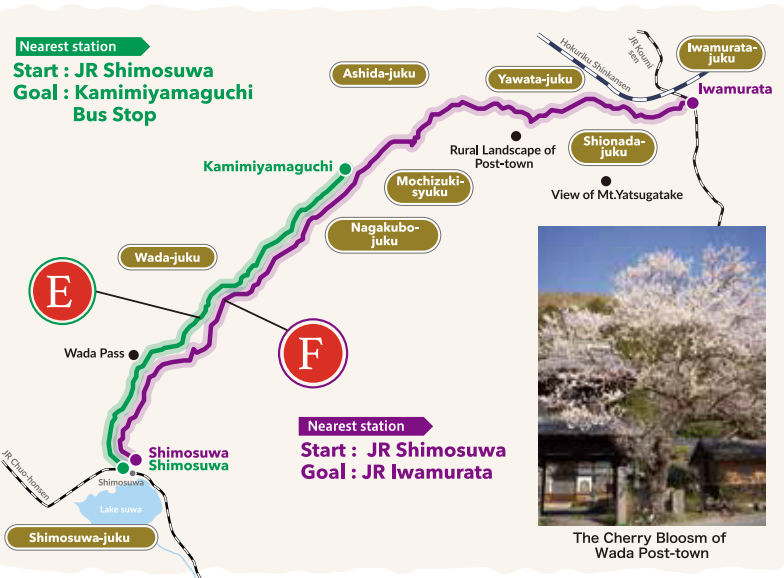
Advanced rider

LEVEL ★★★★★

Distance
about 54.0km
Riding time
6hour



The Tea House of Wada Pass



Nearest station
Start : JR Shimosuwa
Goal : Kamimiyamaguchi
Bus Stop

Nearest station
Start : JR Shimosuwa
Goal : JR Iwamura



The Cherry Blossom of Wada Post-town

Tour Highlights

A must-see is the Honjin Iwanami House in Shimosuwa-shuku. It's a precious building which still presents the atmosphere of the Honjin as it was in the old times, and the beautiful garden was designed by Kobori Enshu, a master gardener. Moving ahead, the harsh path of Wadatoge awaits, as well as the white walls of Motai (an "in-between inn" between post stations) sake brewer, and the splendid view of the Chikumagawa by Shionada-shuku.

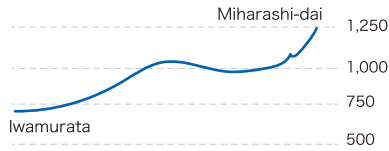
The Nakasendo from Shimosuwa-shuku to Wadatoke, and passing Wada-shuku to arrive at Shionada-shuku, continually reveals a scenery reflecting just what Japanese people envision as village forests. It's like the hometown of the mind. Wadatoge is a pretty harsh mountain pass, but after that a winding, narrow path continues through a relaxing rural landscape. The post station town in the middle shows a community road in itself, and you'll get a taste of the Nakasendo as it is alive today.



Nagano The Magnificent View of Karuizawa



Distance
about 25.7km
Riding time
3hour

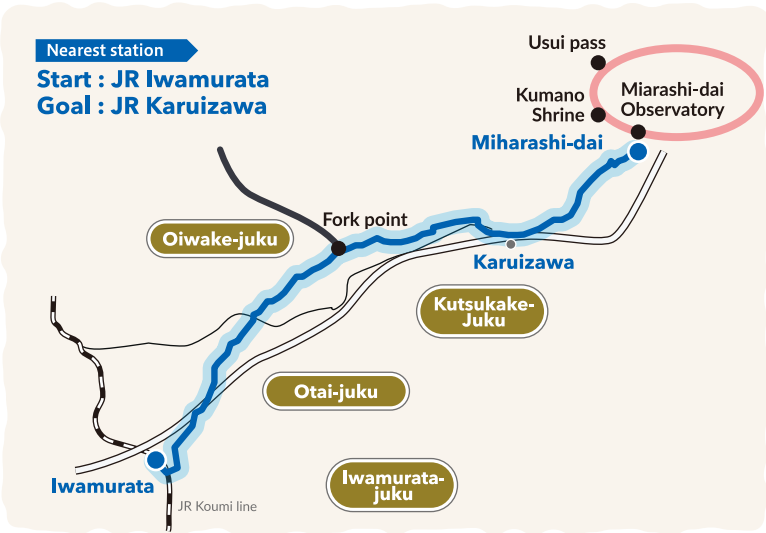


A must-see is Oiwake post-station. It is a fork with Hokkoku Kaido, and was once a very lively post-town. After enjoying the cottage area and restaurants in Karuizawa-shuku, visit the Kumano Shrine, a highlight spot at the entrance of the Usuitoge. There is a prefectural border inside the shrine. The view from a nearby observation point is magnificent.



Miharashi-dai Observatory

Tour Highlights
This route lets you enjoy the views of post station towns still retaining a taste of Oiwake-shuku, look at the beautiful crest of Yatsugatake, and arrive at Karuizawa-shuku, a tourist area. After enjoying the main street in Karuizawa, enjoy the true Nakasendo unique to cycling. Typical tourists will be rarely seen at Usuitoge, where a prefectural border is located. Take in



Access

By Public Transport

A&B Course start point

To Sekigahara

- From JR Nagoya station, take the local train to JR Sekigahara station (about 30 min.).

C&D Course start point

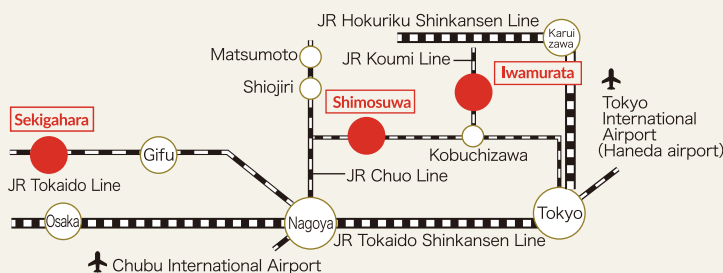
To Shimosuwa

- From JR Nagoya station, take the Shinano Limited Express to JR Shiojiri station (about 2 hours), then take the Chuo Line local train to Shimo-Suwa station (about 15 min.).
- From Shinjuku take the JR Chuo Line Limited Express (Azusa) to Chino station (about 2 hours), then take the Chuo Line local train to Shimo-Suwa station (about 10 min.).

E Course start point

To Iwamura

- From JR Nagoya station, take the Shinano Limited Express to JR Shiojiri station (about 2 hours), then take the Chuo Line local train to Kobuchizawa station (about 50 min.), then take the JR Koumi line then local train to Iwamura station (about 2 hours).
- From JR Tokyo station, take the Hakutaka Limited Express to JR Sakudaira station (about 1.5 hours), then take the JR Koumi Line local train to Iwamura station (about 1 min.).



By Car or Bus

A&B Course start point

To Sekigahara

Meishin Expressway: about 10 min. from Sekigahara IC

C&D Course start point

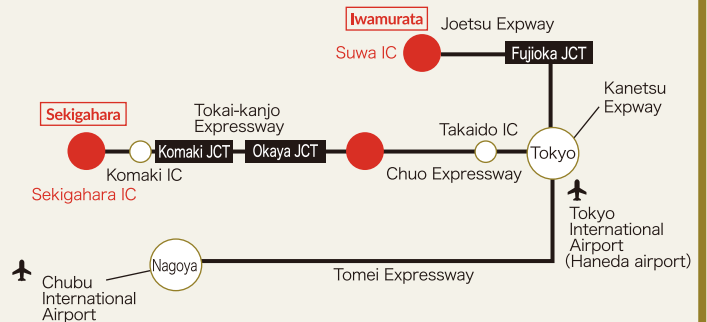
To Shimosuwa

Chuo Expressway: about 20 min. from Suwa IC or about 10 min. from Okaya IC

E Course start point

To Iwamura

Joetsu Expressway: about 10 min. from Saku IC



Information

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