

About the Katsuragi Shugen



Shugendo practitioners heading from the Johon-kutsu Cave on Torajima in the Tomogashima Islands, the site of the first of the 28 sutra mounds

Shugendo is a unique Japanese religion in which practitioners following an ascetic lifestyle in the mountains. Its founder En no Ozunu, better known as En no Gyoja, was born at the foot of Mt. Katsuragi in present-day Chihara district in the city of Gose, Nara Prefecture. This was long ago in the 7th century, during the Asuka period.

The Omine Okugakemichi, the pilgrimage route that traverses the Kii Peninsula, is known as a sacred site of Shugendo. Before its pioneering by En no Gyoja, it is said that he buried the 28 chapters of the eight volumes of the Lotus Sutra throughout the mountains near where he was born, though there multiple theories as to the exact locations.

The grand route begins on Wakayama Prefecture's Tomogashima Islands, traverses west to east through the Izumi Range, and then south to north through the Kongo Range, before finally arriving at the Yamato-gawa River. Ascetic training sites sprang up throughout the mountain range and became a part of the lives of the region's people. The Shugendo practiced in this mountain range is called Katsuragi Shugen.

There are many interesting places in the area, such as the places where En no Gyoja practiced asceticism and the temple he founded.

These ancient traditions are no mere relic of the past, but are still carried on today. Shugendo practitioners, known as gyoja or yamabushi, still offer prayers and practice asceticism in the peaks of Katsuragi. These mountains are the spiritual home of the Japanese people, who have lived together with nature and have diverse religious views.



Left: Statue of En no Gyoja at Inunakisan Shipporyu-ji Temple

Top: Many inscribed wooden plaques (*hide*) have been placed here at the Nishino Gyoja. The plaques are proof that an ascetic practiced here.

Readiness when Walking Katsuragi Shugen

Visit with reverence!

The sutra mounds, ascetic training sites, and other sacred sites are places where practitioners of Shugendo have prayed for over a millennia. Please visit with a sense of reverence.

Make a point to meet and greet the locals!

Katsuragi Shugen is practiced in the mountains near villages where the religion is still deeply-rooted the lives and beliefs of the people who live there. They are the ones who have protected and preserved the many temples, shrines, Jizo statues, and other sites associated with the ascetic religion over the many centuries. With this in mind, exchange greetings with the local people you meet.

Choose an appropriate course for your skill

While the mountains of Kongo, Katsuragi, and Kisen are popular hiking and climbing destinations, some of the trails featured in this Map & Guide are quite demanding and not necessarily well-maintained. Tackle them at your own risk. Review the details of each course carefully and choose according to your skill. We strongly recommend that you go in a group of people, as there may be situations that solo travelers cannot handle alone, including unforeseen accidents.

Plan carefully!

Some of the courses have poor accessibility, and bus service may also be limited. There are also many places where cell phone reception is poor. As such, do your research and plan your trip carefully in advance, making sure to allow plenty of time. Course times listed are walking times only and do not include breaks. Plan for an additional hour to hour and a half. If you are tackling one of the climbing courses, submit a climbing notification to the authorities.

Bring the proper equipment!

Most of the courses in this Map & Guide will require climbing. Please bring proper hiking footwear, rain wear, and other hiking equipment, and make sure to carry enough food and water.

Behave yourselves!

The places you will visit are not all on widely-recognized hiking and climbing courses. Many of them are on private property. Please pick up your trash and put out your fires. Please also refrain from being noisy and from straying into areas that are off the course. Follow the instructions on any signage along the course.



You will often be hiking the Diamond Trail, a nature trail along the Osaka-Nara border.



There are also places where you will need to hang onto ropes and follow red tape on your hike.