

TITLE: About the Nyonin Michi (Women's Pilgrimage Route)

The Nyonin Michi, or Women's Pilgrimage Route, is the route female pilgrims once used to circumnavigate Koyasan, which follows a 16-km course through the mountains encircling the sacred plateau. The Nyonin Michi connects a number of historical routes once used to access Koyasan. Of these routes, the Nyonindo Halls Course, the Koya Sanzan Course, and the Fudozaka Course can still be walked, together or separately, by visitors wanting to experience Koyasan's history more closely.

During the Edo period (1603–1867), the Nyonin Michi served as both an access and a pilgrimage route to Koyasan, as well as an important travel route for the Kii Peninsular region. Small buildings, known as *nyonindo* halls or women's halls, served as meeting points and lodgings at eight different locations along the Nyonin Michi. Today, only the restored Fudozaka Guchi Nyonindo Hall remains. At the other locations, markers contain unique information about the Nyonin Michi and Koyasan.

The Nyonin Michi remained the primary access route to Koyasan until after the start of the Meiji period (1868–1912). While portions of the route now follow paved roads inside Koyasan, many parts remain forested walking trails.

Men and women of all ages used the Nyonin Michi, primarily for purposes of religious pilgrimage, but also for travel and transporting goods. The route is called the Nyonin Michi (lit., Women's Road) because religious restrictions prohibited women from entering the sacred precincts of Koyasan until the Meiji period. Before that time, many women walked the route to worship and to "visit" relatives living and studying at Koyasan by looking down on the plateau from viewpoints along the Nyonin Michi. Today, the route still offers glimpses of Koyasan's temples and views of the sacred peaks of Mt. Tenjiku, Mt. Yoryu, and Mt. Mani.

In addition to offering walks through protected forests and important historical sites, the Nyonin Michi gives visitors a rare opportunity to walk in the footsteps of centuries of Japanese pilgrims, travelers, and priests.