

The Long Trail: In the Steps of Ascetics

The footprints of the monks who have done their ascetic training here over the past millennium have left a legacy of outstanding trails that lace the mountains of the peninsula. Their training was called *mineiri*, “walking the ridges,” and the practitioners would dress in simple white clothing, leggings, and sandals for the strenuous journey to the various temples. Now called the “Minemichi Long Trail,” what remains today is 135 kilometers of connected mountain paths and ancient roads, traversing broad valleys and almost vertical volcanic rock peaks.

A Choice of Hiking Routes

The Long Trail consists of ten courses in all. The four courses in Bungo Takada give visitors a chance to enjoy hiking through some iconic scenery while experiencing some of the spiritual connections that infuse every corner of this region. The routes pass through all the important sites. The southernmost, for example, begins at the Buddhist cliff carvings of Kumano Magaibutsu and passes by the Maki Odo, with its spectacular statuary, and the lush valley of Tashibu no Sho; other routes pass by the ancient structures of Fukiji and Tennenji temples. The distances range from 10 to 15 kilometers, but the difficulty can be deceptive—some places are not much more than a stroll, while in other sections climbers must rely on chains embedded in the vertical rock face to make their ascent.