

The Choishi Michi Trail

The Choishi Michi (Stone Marker Trail) is a pilgrimage route that connects Jisonin Temple, at the foot of the mountain, to Okunoin Temple in the monastic complex of Koyasan. According to legend, the priest Kukai (known posthumously as Kobo Daishi; 774–835), the founder of Koyasan and Shingon Buddhism, often took this route to visit his mother, who was spending the final years of her life at Jisonin Temple. People from all walks of life have been making the pilgrimage from the time of Koyasan's foundation.

The route stretches over approximately 24 kilometers, marked at 109-meter intervals by the *choishi* stone markers from which it takes its name. It is well tended, so hikers and pilgrims alike can easily follow the 217 ancient stone pillars that mark the route. The weathering of the stone markers is a reminder of the Buddhist concept of impermanence and the inevitability of change, and the importance of taking each journey one step at a time.

This trail is about the journey itself as much as the destination, presented in hopes that visitors will enjoy tracing the footsteps of Koyasan's founder. The path is considered a walkable mandala, a symbol of the realm of the five buddhas of compassion. As the area past the 55th marker is sacred ground, please be considerate of the spiritual nature of the environment. Visitors may want to contemplate the words of Kukai: "Even the trees and blades of grass may become buddhas."

Those planning on undertaking the full route should bring enough food and water for the trek, which usually takes around seven to eight hours for hikers in good physical condition. A tea house at Yatate (near the 60th stone marker, about two-thirds of the way) is one of very few places where refreshments are available for purchase.

Koyasan was registered as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004, as part of the Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range.