

### **Nagai-zaka Section: Ohechi Route, Kumano Kodo**

The Kumano Kodo is a network of ancient pilgrimage trails across the Kii Peninsula, part of which is included in the “Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range,” a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Ohechi route is one of the most popular because of its environmental diversity and ease of access from several nearby train stations. The steep Nagai-zaka trail quickly climbs 350 meters, providing views over the Kushimoto coast and of Kuroshima Island. The path leads through a black ridge oak (*ubamegashi*; *Quercus phillyraeoides*) forest. Wild cherry (*yamazakura*; *Prunus serrulata*), red bayberry (*yamamomo*; *Myrica rubra*), and azalea all grow along the route. Most of it is a natural forest trail, but a short section is a simple path made from shaped, compacted mud in a style known as *danchiku*. It is rare for a path like this to be in such good condition after so many years.

Pilgrims of the Kumano faith, a fusion of Buddhist and Shinto beliefs, have walked these forested routes since the Heian period (794–1185). The Kumano region was thought to be a sacred place where gods inhabit the earth. The routes traverse the Kii Peninsula and connect to the Three Grand Shrines of Kumano, known as the Kumano Sanzan.

The Nagai-zaka is a 4.5-kilometer section of the Ohechi route. The Ohechi route is a 92-kilometer long coastal route from Tanabe in west Wakayama to Hamanomiya Nachikatsuura in southeastern Wakayama.