

Goshikidai Three-Temple Pilgrimage

The 1,200-kilometer Shikoku Pilgrimage requires pilgrims to travel to 88 temples in places said to have been visited by the legendary Buddhist priest Kukai, and can take more than a month to complete. There are, however, several less demanding options for visitors who are short on time but would still like to experience the pilgrimage. One such alternative is the Goshikidai Three-Temple Pilgrimage, in a mountainous area that is accessible from Takamatsu. The Three-Temple option can be accomplished in a single day either on foot (about 8 hours) or by car (4–6 hours).

The three temples on this mini-pilgrimage, rich in both natural and historic sights, are Sanuki Kokubunji (#80 of 88), Shiromineji (#81), and Negoroji (#82). Pilgrims seeking to visit all three on foot in one day are encouraged to pack food and drinks and start out around 9 a.m. at JR Kokubu Station. It is a 5-minute walk to Sanuki Kokubunji, where day pilgrims can purchase a guide map and a three-page temple stamp pamphlet for ¥100. This pamphlet is to be presented at the reception counter of each temple, where it will be stamped with the temple's seal and inscribed with calligraphy for a ¥300 fee.

From Sanuki Kokubunji, it takes 2 and a half hours to hike up to Shiromineji, the second temple. This mountainside sanctuary is beautiful year-round, with snow in winter, flowers in spring and summer, and fiery foliage in autumn. The last temple, Negoroji on Mt. Aomine, is about 2 hours away. Visitors are encouraged to take a lunch break along the way before the ascent to Negoroji. After receiving their third and final temple stamp and the special badge awarded to those who visit all three temples, pilgrims head to JR Kinashi Station, about 90 minutes away, where they can expect to board a train early in the evening.

Visitors who prefer to go by car can look forward to a smooth tour, since all three temples along the Goshikidai Three-Temple Pilgrimage route offer parking close to the temple entrance. Pilgrims with time to spare may want to visit local sights, such as the Seto Inland Sea Folk History Museum, a honey shop run by a local apiary, and a popular udon noodle restaurant.