

Daimon-zaka Slope

With its mossy paths lined by Japanese cedars and its weathered stone steps rising into the mist, Daimon-zaka Slope may be the most beautiful section of the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage route. The slope runs from the Nachi River valley area to Kumano Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine, Seiganto-ji Temple, and Nachi Waterfall. It rises more than 100 meters over a 600-meter run, with 267 stairs to climb.

Getting There

To reach the entrance to Daimon-zaka Slope from the Daimon-zaka Parking Lot, follow Prefectural Road 46 north until you see a street branching off to the left, marked by a large stone monument and several wooden signs just off the prefectural road. Follow this street to the stone staircase at the end, then follow the paved path at the top until you arrive at a stone torii gate. Beyond the torii is the bright vermilion Furigasebashi Bridge.

Furigasebashi Bridge

Furigasebashi Bridge was the boundary between the mundane world and the sacred realm. Before the bridge to the left and right are stone signposts that read “Dismount” (*geba*). From the bridge onward, all pilgrims had to proceed on foot.

Ritually impure foods like meat were also banned beyond the bridge. At the lower left of the Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala, two pilgrims can be seen seated just in front of the bridge, eating their provisions before they cross.

Daimonzaka-jaya Teahouse

Beyond the bridge, on the left, stands the Daimonzaka-jaya teahouse. This teahouse lends Heian-style costumes to visitors who wish to make the final part of the pilgrimage in traditional dress. On the last Sunday in October each year, more than a hundred people dress up in period costumes to climb the slope together. This event, called “Again: Kumano Pilgrimage,” recreates the bustling route as it was in the late Heian period (794–1185).

Husband-and-Wife Cedars

The entrance to Daimon-zaka Slope proper is marked by a pair of massive *meoto sugi* (husband-and-wife cedars). According to local tradition, these were donated by Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147–1199), founder of the Kamakura shogunate.

Tafuke-oji Shrine and the 11-Mon Tollgate

In past centuries, Tafuke-oji Shrine stood next to a camphor tree not far from the *meoto sugi*. It was one of nearly a hundred subsidiary shrines called *oji* that lined the pilgrimage route in its heyday. Tafuke-oji was the last one pilgrims encountered before arriving at Nachisan (the location of Kumano Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine and Seiganto-ji Temple). Its former site is marked by a stone monument.

Farther up the slope is a small wooden sign marking the former location of a tollgate. The toll was 11 *mon*—more expensive than a visit to a public bathhouse, but cheaper than a bowl of noodles. Today, the site is notable for its clear view of Nachi Waterfall.