

Kumano Kodo Teahouses

Pilgrims stopped for rest and refreshments along the Kumano Kodo route at teahouses called *chaya* (sometimes *jaya*). Some of the teahouses also offered overnight accommodation. The subsidiary shrines known as *oji* often had similar facilities, but teahouses were of an entirely secular character.

The golden age of the Kumano teahouses was during the Edo period (1603–1867), and guidebooks often featured full-page illustrations of pilgrims relaxing at the best-known *chaya*. After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, religious and social change across Japan caused a dramatic decrease in the number of pilgrims arriving at Kumano, and all but the most conveniently located teahouses eventually closed their doors. Some have been rebuilt as rest facilities for tourists, but all that is left of most *chaya* sites are half-buried foundations.

The Ogumotori-goe Route

The Ogumotori-goe route is part of the Kumotori-goe overland passage connecting the Kumano Nachi Taisha and Kumano Hongu Taisha grand shrines. *Kumotori* (cloud-catching) refers to the great elevation of the route over the mountains compared to the coastal route that was taken by boats. Some of the teahouses along the Ogumotori-goe are listed below.

Noboritate-jaya Teahouse

Noboritate-jaya was the last teahouse pilgrims would encounter on the trail before reaching Nachi, or the first after leaving it. It also served as a marketplace, where people from the fishing village of Nachi and merchants from inland Tanabe met to trade their respective wares. Noboritate-jaya was so integrated into the daily life of local residents that they simply called it *uma-tsunagi* (hitching post).

Funami-jaya Teahouse

Funami-jaya was located at the top of Funami-toge Pass, with superb views of Nachi-Katsuura and the Pacific Ocean to the south. (The word *funami* means “ship-watching.”) For pilgrims taking the Ogumotori-goe route from the Hongu area to

Kumano Nachi Taisha Grand Shrine, this site offered the first glimpse of their destination. For those returning to Hongu, it was where they looked back to say their final farewell to Nachi. In either case, the teahouse let them rest their feet and enjoy the panorama from 800 meters above sea level. Today, an *azumaya* (gazebo) stands on the foundation stones of the former teahouse.

Jizo-jaya Teahouse and Jizo-do Hall

Jizo-jaya stood right at the midpoint of the Ogumotori-goe route. The original teahouse closed down in 1921 and fell into disrepair, but a new building was built on the site in 2004 as a rest area for pilgrims drawn to the Kumano Kodo as a World Heritage site. The interior takes its inspiration from the original teahouses along the route, with wooden furnishings and a traditional *irori*-style hearth.

The name of the teahouse refers to the nearby Jizo-do (Jizo Hall), which was established in 1707 by a fishmonger from the city of Sakai, in Osaka. It contains 32 statues of Jizo, a bodhisattva who watches over travelers. The hall was rebuilt in 2015, but the statues are original. There were originally 33, but one went missing over the centuries. Some say it roams the Kumano Kodo, secretly helping pilgrims in need.