

Moja-no-Deai: The Abode of the Dead

This part of the Ogumotori-goe route is called Moja-no-Deai—the Abode of the Dead. Tradition holds that those who walk this path may meet a deceased friend or relative coming from the opposite direction.

Yomi, the Land of the Dead

Kumano has been associated with the afterlife since ancient times. In the eighth-century chronicle *Nihon shoki*, Kumano is where the deity Izanami was laid to rest, and where her husband, Izanagi, followed her into the Land of Yomi, where departed souls resided.

Mountains, too, have long been seen as places where the boundary between this world and the next is blurred. With the arrival of Buddhism and its mountaintop cemeteries, this connection was reinforced. In Kumano, Amida-ji Temple on Mt. Myohozan is particularly closely associated with passage to the afterlife. All those who die in Japan are said to visit the temple before moving on to the next plane.

Meeting the Departed

Tales of encounters in the Abode of the Dead tend to follow a pattern. As the pilgrim safely descends from Funami-toge Pass to more level ground—where you are now—they start to relax. The wind changes, or perhaps a mist rises, and they see a figure coming toward them on the path far ahead. As the figure approaches, the pilgrim realizes it is a deceased friend or relative. But when they acknowledge the figure, or speak to it, it vanishes.

In some accounts, the pilgrim meets a person they believe to be alive. When they return home, however, they discover the person had already passed away at the time of their encounter. The pilgrim had, in fact, met a soul on its way to Amida-ji to ring the temple bell before moving on to the next world.