

Shugendo Training Workshops

The Dewa Sanzan area, encompassing Mt. Haguro (414 m), Mt. Gassan (1,984 m), and Mt. Yudono (1,500 m), is one of Japan's most important centers of Shugendo, an ancient tradition of mountain asceticism incorporating elements of Buddhism and Shinto. Visitors can experience the training undertaken by Shugendo mountain ascetics, or *yamabushi*, by participating in a workshop organized by the Haguro Tourist Association. The workshop involves walking the multiday Sankan Sando ("three gates, three passages") pilgrimage to the three mountains and immersion in the ascetic lifestyle.

This cultural experience is an opportunity to understand Shugendo on a deeper level. Throughout the tour, participants stay in *shukubo* pilgrim lodgings at night. Ascetics have favored this simple accommodation for centuries. *Shukubo* serve *shojin ryori*, which can be translated as "food for devotees." The main ingredients are local wild plants and vegetables, including nuts, mushrooms, roots, bamboo shoots, flowers, rice, and plant-based ingredients such as tofu and miso.

Participants walk the Sankan Sando pilgrimage wearing traditional all-white outfits that are similar to funerary attire worn by the dead (*shiroshozoku*). This attire symbolizes the death of the pilgrim's past, which begins the spiritual rebirth undergone during the journey. The Sankan Sando assumed this symbolic meaning during the Edo period (1603–1867), when the concept of spiritual rebirth through pilgrimages gained prevalence.

The *yamabushi* training workshop is offered in three lengths: (1) one day, (2) two days and one night or (3) three days and two nights. Training dates are between August and October. For more information, contact the Haguro Tourist Association.