

## **Gokasho Mairi (Tour of Five Temples)**

There are 88 temples along the Shikoku Pilgrimage route, and the first 23 are located in Tokushima Prefecture. The city of Tokushima is home to temples 13 to 17. Visitors who would like to experience the pilgrimage can complete a tour of these five sanctuaries, an undertaking called the *gokasho mairi*. The route is less than eight kilometers long and has no steep hills, so it is easily walkable within a day.

The five temples are thought to have been established between 673 and 816. Over the centuries, however, their buildings were destroyed in battles or fires and rebuilt a number of times. As a result, the Buddhist statues and sacred objects held by each temple represent a mixture of historical periods.

The temples belong to different sects of Buddhism and honor different main deities, but they all have links to the monk Kukai (774–835; posthumously known as Kobo Daishi), the central figure of the Shikoku Pilgrimage.

Kukai was born in the neighboring prefecture of Kagawa, and there are many stories about him associated with the Shikoku Pilgrimage. After his death, priests made visits to Shikoku to follow in his footsteps. Ordinary citizens began doing the pilgrimage during the Edo period (1603–1868), to seek cures from illnesses, to express their faith, or simply to embark on a sightseeing trip.

If you visit any of the temples of the *gokasho mairi*, you are likely to see people dressed in what has become the standard pilgrim's uniform. This includes white clothing to show sincerity and purity of mind, a traditional sedge hat that protects the wearer from the elements, and a walking staff. Dressing up this way, however, is not mandatory and some visitors wear regular street or hiking clothes.