

Pilgrimage Manners

There are very few absolute rules to follow along the Shikoku Pilgrimage, but it is recommended that pilgrims familiarize themselves with the basic manners of the road. One specific custom is to carry one's staff aloft when crossing bridges so as not to make noise. This is done to acknowledge the travails of Kobo Daishi, the priest considered the founder of the pilgrimage, who is believed to have slept under bridges on his journeys around Shikoku. More broadly, pilgrims should understand that many of the temples and trails on the pilgrimage are located in the midst of local communities. Residents appreciate pilgrims who avoid littering, intruding on private property, and making noise, especially during early morning or late night hours. In exchange, local people may offer pilgrims food, drink, small gifts, or accommodation for the night. This custom, called *osettai*, has roots that go back centuries. In medieval times, villagers gave alms to mendicant priests undertaking the pilgrimage. When ordinary people began treading the route in the Edo period (1603–1867), local residents would feed them, provide for those who fell ill, and bury those who died far from home. While no longer as widespread as it once was, the *osettai* tradition is still maintained by the people of Shikoku.