

## **Nokyo Stamps and Calligraphy**

The nokyocho notebook is an essential item for all who undertake the Shikoku Pilgrimage. Pilgrims present it at the office of each temple after praying at the temple's main and Daishi halls. For a fee of 300 yen, the temple clerk will stamp one page of the book with three red seals and write calligraphy over them (or vice versa—the order varies by temple). From right to left, the stamps indicate the number of the temple, its principal deity (expressed with a bonji, or Sanskrit letter), and the temple's name. The calligraphy, again from right to left, stands for the word nokyo (in this case, "has dedicated sutras"), the name of the principal deity, and the name of the temple. Note that stamps and calligraphy are provided only during a temple's opening hours, which are from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The signing and stamping of the nokyocho is done to prove its owner has dedicated sutras at the temple in question, thereby establishing a connection with its deities, who can now be counted on to watch over the pilgrim. This proof can also be received on a hakue jacket (for 200 yen) and on a kakejiku hanging scroll (500 yen). Each pilgrim is allowed to present a maximum of three items—one of each type—to be stamped and signed. The jacket here is a type of garment used only for this purpose, not the regular white one worn by pilgrims. It can be purchased at some of the larger temples, which also sell nokyocho and kakejiku. While the nokyocho can be reused—a practice common among veteran pilgrims—and the kakejiku serves as a memento, the jacket has a deeper religious meaning. Some pilgrims intend to wear it in their casket after death, believing they can use it to prove their devotion and pious lifestyle to the deities of the afterlife.