

Participating

Though it involves visiting Buddhist temples, the Shikoku Pilgrimage is open to everyone, regardless of religious beliefs or affiliation. Likewise, there are no absolute rules regarding participation. The entire circular pilgrimage does not need to be completed in one trip, nor is it necessary to visit the 88 temples in order from 1 to 88 (or 88 to 1, as some prefer). Moreover, driving or taking a bus, train, or taxi from one temple to the next is just as acceptable as walking. Each temple is considered a destination in itself, rather than a mere part of the larger pilgrimage.

Nevertheless, there are a few basic guidelines that those who undertake the pilgrimage are expected to be aware of. First, pilgrims should consider wearing a white vest or jacket, a sedge hat, and a few other distinguishing items. These can be procured at most of the larger temples, some of which also stock guidebooks and maps in English. Second, pilgrims should be willing to interact with others participating in the pilgrimage, as well as with local residents, if only by exchanging greetings along the route. Such communication often leads to unexpected discoveries and memorable encounters. Lastly, it is recommended that pilgrims reserve accommodation in advance. In addition to hotels and inns, options include staying the night at a temple. Most of the larger temples offer lodging that includes meals and the opportunity to participate in the morning (or evening) service.