

Doro-kyo Gorge

(看板)

This section of the Kitayama River straddles the border of three prefectures (Nara, Mie, and Wakayama) and is part of the 31-kilometer-long Doro-kyo Gorge. The precipitous 50-meter cliffs were formed from layers of sedimentary rock thrust up from the sea about 70 million years ago. Magma later heated and solidified the rocks, making them resistant to erosion. Over many millennia, the hardness of the rock forced river waters to cut deep rather than wide, gradually carving out the canyon walls.

From Transport to Tourism

For over six centuries, the Kitayama River served as a vital transportation conduit through these rugged mountains, particularly for the log drivers who transported loads of timber downriver from the dense forests where they were harvested. (A part of “Raftsman’s Path,” a route the men would use to walk back home after delivering their logs, is now maintained as a hiking trail.) Until just a few decades ago this area was roadless and isolated, accessible only by river transport. However, as news of the sheer cliffs, fantastic rock formations, and emerald waters of the gorge spread in the late nineteenth century, tourists began making their way here, and in 1936 the area was designated part of Yoshino-Kumano National Park. Today a variety of modes of river transport, from traditional rafts to motorboats, carry passengers through the gorge. The road was completed in 1965, further easing access.

Riding the River

Boat tours of this downriver section of the gorge can be arranged on the river shore at the bottom of the stairs. The calm waters are also ideal for stand-up paddleboarding, kayaking, or just a quick dip.