

Tateyama Kannon Pilgrimage

Thirty-three statues housed in temples or small Buddhist halls or placed on roadsides across the modern-day municipality of Tateyama make up the Tateyama Kannon Pilgrimage, a spiritual and scenic journey along the path used by devotees who ascended Mt. Tate during the Edo period (1603–1867). Pilgrims from throughout the country traveled to the sacred peak to cleanse themselves from sin and achieve a symbolic rebirth, which was believed to facilitate entry into the afterlife.

A journey to remote Mt. Tate was time-consuming, and pilgrims made frequent stops along the way to rest and resupply. During these breaks, they would often pray at local sites of worship, occasionally leaving behind or dedicating religious objects such as statues of deities including Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion. In time, these statues collectively came to constitute a secondary pilgrimage route akin to a miniature version of the well-known 33-temple Saigoku Kannon Pilgrimage in the Kansai region. Subsequent pilgrims on their way to Mt. Tate were thus able to complete two religious undertakings in one journey. The 33 stone likenesses of Kannon also served to mark the route to the mountain.

The 42-kilometer route of the Tateyama Kannon Pilgrimage starts at Oyama Shrine in the village of Iwakuraji, at the edge of the Toyama Plain, and follows the Joganji River uphill to Tateyama Station. From there, it follows the Tateyama Kurobe Alpine Route and ascends to the Murodo Plateau, which is situated more than 2,400 meters above sea level and serves as the base for climbers heading to Mt. Tate. Along the way, the landscape changes dramatically from lowland to mountainous terrain. The pilgrimage route between Iwakuraji and Tateyama Station is most conveniently covered by electric-assist mountain bike (E-bike), available to rent at the station, whereas the part along the Alpine Route can only be completed on foot.