

# Take a Trip to the Past along Nagano's Ancient Roads

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During the Edo Period, many travelers passed through Nagano, such as feudal lords, peasants, mountain ascetics, monks and even ukiyo-e artists looking for inspiration. On this trip, you'll walk along one of the major trails that connected Kyoto and Edo, the Nakasendo, as well as the spiritual trails of Mt. Ontake and Togakushi, while staying in ancient post towns and temple lodges. As you enjoy this beautiful natural setting, you'll find yourself slipping back in time to the Edo Period.

- Trek along the historical Nakasendo
- Cleanse your body and mind with waterfall meditation at Mt. Ontake
- Kayak on Lake Suwa—famously depicted in the works of Hiroshige and Hokusai
- Taste sake at a several-hundred-year-old local brewery
- Listen to a special performance of kiyari, a chant performed during the Onbashira Festival
- Walk the Togakushi Kodo Trail—a haunt of mountain ascetics and ninja
- Seek enlightenment at 1,400-year-old Zenkoji Temple

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### **Location:**

Host of the 1998 Winter Olympics, Nagano is an outdoor sports mecca particularly famous for skiing and snowboarding. Often called the "roof of Japan," it boasts the highest mountain ranges in the country. It's a landlocked prefecture in the center of Honshu, main island, and it borders more prefectures than any other in Japan,

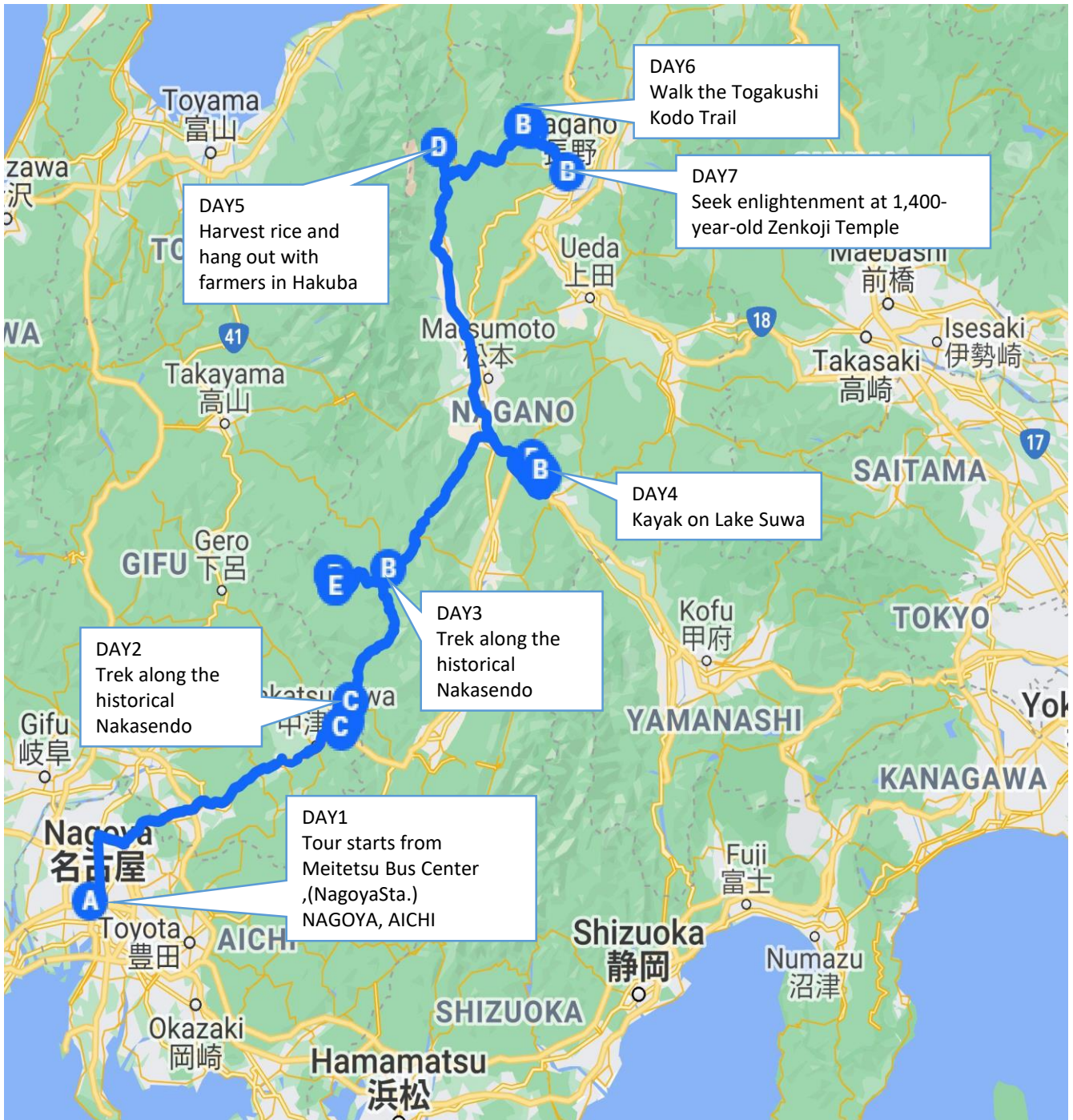
Despite being such a mountainous prefecture, access to Nagano is remarkably easy especially thanks to the shinkansen bullet train and series of automobile expressways. It is a countryside near the city center, which can be reached in about an hour half from Tokyo by shinkansen bullet train.

Actually, several hundred years ago, Nagano also had highway connecting to the capital of Japan, Edo. Stretching from Sanjo Ohashi in Kyoto to Nihonbashi in Edo, it covered a distance of around 534 kilometers and had 69 post-towns along its route—26 of which are located in Nagano prefecture. The best-preserved portion of the Nakasendo Highway is a picturesque trail through the mountains that runs through the Kiso Valley in southwestern Nagano Prefecture.

This tour will start from Nagoya, where developed as the castle town of the Owari, one of the three branches of the ruling Tokugawa family during the Edo Period. Then, you'll find yourself slipping back in time to Edo period, going around Kiso, Suwa, Hakuba, Togakushi, and Nagano City in this journey.

**Main Activity:**            trekking

## Route map

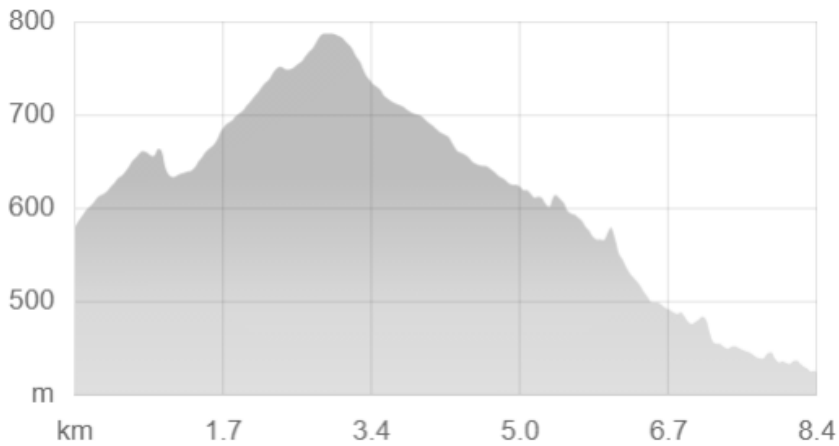


## Elevation Profile

Source:YAMAP

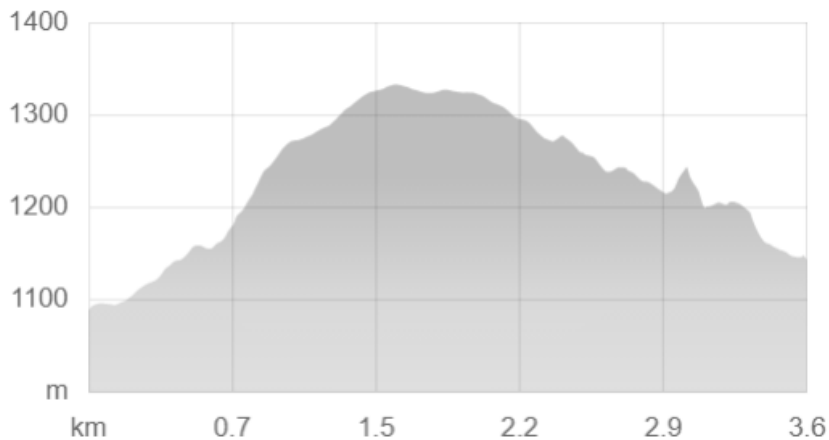
### Day 2 - Trek along the historical Nakasendo

Distance—9km | Time—3 hours | Elevation—approx. 250m



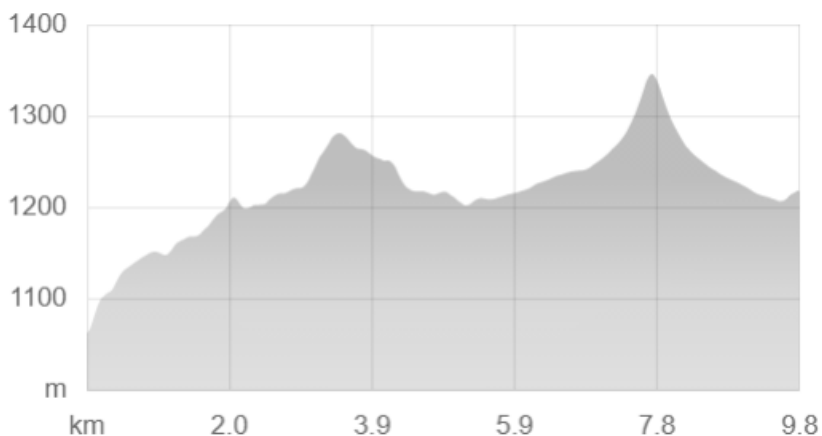
### Day 3 – Cleanse your body and mind with waterfall meditation at Mt. Ontake

Distance—4km | Time—3 hours | Elevation—280m



### Day 6 –Walk the Togakushi Kodo Trail—a haunt of mountain ascetics and ninja

Distance—10km | Time—5 hours | Elevation—300 m



## Day-by-day Itinerary

### Day 1 – Nagoya

All of the clients for this tour will check-in at the hotel in Nagoya themselves. You will meet the other members together.

### Day 2 - Trek along the historical Nakasendo

After checking out of your hotel in Nagoya, you'll meet with your group and your guide will go over the schedule and details of the tour.

Next, you'll hop on a highway bus and head towards the start of the trekking course at Magome (approx. 80 minutes).

The trail stretching between Magome and Tsumago post-towns is one of the most popular sections of the Nakasendo, a historical Edo Period (1603-1868) highway. Along the trail, you'll see wooden townscapes, stone statues and wayside shrines, tranquil waterfalls and streams—all largely unchanged since the road's heyday. A local English-speaking guide will join you and tell you about the area as you walk. In addition, traditional equipment used by travelers, like kasa hats and walking sticks made of hinoki cypress, are available for rent. Halfway to Tsumago.

After arriving at your destination of Tsumago, you'll take a short break to enjoy a local snack, goheimochi, and tea. Then, you'll have time to stroll around town.

In the late afternoon, you'll depart Tsumago for your accommodation in Kiso Fukushima (around 50 minutes).

Kiso Fukushima was another post-town along the Nakasendo. Enjoy a traditional Japanese hot spring lodge that faces the trail. For dinner, you'll have a Japanese kaiseki-style meal.



Activity: Trekking | Distance—9km | Time—3 hours | Elevation—approx. 250m

Accommodation : Kiso Fukushima | Ryokan | Private en-suite room | Onsen Spa

**ACTIVITY:** Trekking

**Difficulty:** 2

### Day 3 –

#### Cleanse your body and mind with waterfall meditation at Mt. Ontake

On your third day, you'll take a detour from the Nakasendo and visit an important spiritual destination that has attracted mountain ascetics for over a thousand years: Mt. Ontake. You'll walk along the Ontake Kodo trail with an English-speaking guide.

After checking out of your hotel in the morning, your guide will go over the day's schedule, and then, you'll take a bus (approx. 60 minutes) to Tanohara, the 7th station of the Ontake Kodo (2,180m), where you can see fabulous scenery of 3,067m-high Mt. Ontake. (If weather doesn't cooperate, you'll skip Tanohara and visit Ontake Satomiya Shrine instead.)

From there, you'll travel by bus to Omata Sansha Shrine (approx. 15 minutes) and begin trekking. You'll wear the traditional clothing of mountain ascetics and walk along the forest trail, visiting two waterfalls and a number of small shrines.

At the end of the trail is Kiyotaki Falls, where you'll be instructed in takigyō (waterfall meditation) and try it for yourself. This was one of the rituals that ascetic monks would perform in order to purify their bodies and minds before entering Mt. Ontake.

Next, you'll head to a nearby lodge for lunch. You'll eat a meal not unlike what Mountain ascetics would have eaten. They ate a strict plant-based diet, but the lodge makes their meals more accessible to the non-ascetic palate. Your instructor in waterfall meditation is the owner of the lodge, and he'll go over the various ingredients and dishes that make up your meal.

After lunch, you'll take a bus to your accommodation in Kamisuwa Onsen (approx. 120 minutes).

You'll stay in a Japanese style hot spring hotel on the shore of Lake Suwa, where you'll have a welcome dinner featuring an abundance of local and seasonal products.



Activity: Trekking | Distance—4km | Time—3 hours | Elevation—280m

Accommodation : Kamisuwa Onsen | Hotel |  
Private en-suite room (TWN, DBL, SGL) | Onsen Spa

**ACTIVITY:** Trekking

**Difficulty:** 2

### Day 4 –

### Kayak on Lake Suwa—famously depicted in the works of Hiroshige and Hokusai

The area of Lake Suwa has been known as an important crossroads since the Edo Period, and it prospered due to the heavy traffic here. On this day, you'll go on adventure and explore its history and culture.

After check-out in the morning, your guide will go over the day's schedule. Then, you'll start off with a kayaking tour, where you'll gaze upon the beautiful scenery of Lake Suwa and Mt. Fuji that once inspired the artists Hokusai and Hiroshige.

Next, you'll take a tour bus (approx. 20 minutes) to a restaurant for lunch. It is a local favorite and serves what many consider to be one of Japan's soul foods—unagi (grilled eel).

You'll take another bus ride (approx. 20 minutes) to Shimosuwa, a post-town where two historical roads once met. First, you'll visit Suwa Taisha, one of the oldest shrines in Japan, and listen to a Kiyari performance.

Your last activity will be at neighboring Kamisuwa post-town, a 15-minute bus ride away, where you'll visit Miyasaka Brewery. Established during the Edo Period, it has produced sake for hundreds of years and is known throughout Japan for its Masumi brand. At the brewery, you will have a sake-tasting while listening to a talk from the head brewer.

Finally, you'll take a bus from Suwa to your next accommodation in Hakuba (approx. 100 minutes).

At your accommodation, you'll enjoy a barbecue dinner outdoors on the hotel grounds while taking in Hakuba's fresh mountain air.



Activity: Kayaking | Time—2 hours | on lake or gentle river

Accommodation : Hakuba | Hotel | Private en-suite room (TWN, DBL) | Onsen spa

**ACTIVITY: Kayaking**

**Difficulty: 2**

### Day 5 – Harvest rice and hang out with farmers in Hakuba (only in autumn)

After having breakfast at your accommodation, you'll head to the rice paddies with your guides for the day. They will tell you about the area's yukigata (snow shape) tradition and the importance they held to local farmers, as well as the basics of rice cultivation in Japan (approx. 30 minutes). For your rice-harvesting experience, you'll use a traditional kama scythe to cut the stalks and hang them out to dry (approx. 60 minutes).

For lunch, you'll make your own hotpot meal outdoors using local rice and vegetables under the farmers' supervision (approx. 60 minutes). In the event of rain, the rice-harvesting will be replaced with a visit to a local museum and you'll make your hotpot indoors instead.

In the afternoon, you'll have some free time to relax. Your guide will introduce some activities that you can in Hakuba for those interested.

For dinner, enjoy a robatayaki-style meal of local produce and fresh seafood from the Sea of Japan at a renovated storage house. A storyteller will regale you with local folktales (30 minutes). Here, you can take in the atmosphere of a former post-town along the Chikuni Kaido, which served as a trade route connecting Japan's mountainous regions to the Sea of Japan.



Activity: Farming Experience | Time—3 hours |

Accommodation : Hakuba | Hotel | Private en-suite room (TWN, DBL) | Onsen spa

**ACTIVITY: Farming Experience**

**Difficulty: 1**



### Day 6 –

### Walk the Togakushi Kodo Trail—a haunt of mountain ascetics and ninja

After eating breakfast at your accommodation and listening to a short briefing from your guide, you'll take a bus to spiritual Mt. Togakushi. At the foot of Mt. Togakushi are five shrines that combine to form Togakushi Shrine: the Okusha, Chūsha, Hōkōsha, Kuzuryūsha, and Hinomikosha. They are connected by the Togakushi trail, which was frequented by mountain ascetics and pilgrims. You'll walk along this historical and spiritual trail and take in Togakushi's tranquil atmosphere with all of your senses (approx. 5 hours).

Togakushi soba is one of Japan's Three Famous soba varieties, so a trip here wouldn't be complete without trying it for yourself. For lunch, enjoy the delicate flavor of soba noodles made with local buckwheat flour and Togakushi spring water.

After trekking and lunch, you'll experience a display of Togakure Ninpo, a form of ninja martial arts, developed over 800 years ago in Togakushi, and visit the Togakushi Ninja Museum and Ninja Trick House.

Next, take a tour bus to your next accommodation in Nagano City.

The last accommodation on this tour is a temple lodge beside national treasure Zenkoji Temple. For dinner, you'll have vegetarian shōjin cuisine made with plentiful local ingredients. The traditional flavors and colorful arrangement of these many small dishes are a big hit even with first-time visitors.



Activity: Trekking | Distance—10km | Time—5 hours | Elevation—approx. 300m

Accommodation : Zenkoji area | Temple lodge | Shared toilet |

**ACTIVITY: Trekking**

**Difficulty: 3**

### **Day 7 (Last Day) – Seek enlightenment at 1,400-year-old Zenkoji Temple**

After breakfast on your last day, you'll have another daily briefing.

For those willing to wake up a little early (5:20 a.m.), you can watch Zenkoji Temple's morning service and then participate in zazen meditation (approx. 100 minutes). Your guide will first take you to the temple to watch the service, which has been held daily without fail for hundreds of years. And after that, you'll enter Daikanjin Temple and perform zazen meditation with the instruction of one of the temple's monks. During meditation, you'll have the opportunity to recenter yourself after a long and fruitful tour of central Japan.

Then you'll return to the temple lodge and have a filling shōjin breakfast. Your guide will brief you on the day's travel schedule before you checkout. Finally, you'll ride the Hokuriku bullet train towards Tokyo.

Activity: Cultural Experience | Time—2 hours |

### **Accommodations :**

#### **Example of Accommodation**

Meitetsu Grand Hotel, Nagoya

Hotel Western style room with en suite bath and toilet

On'yado Tsutaya or Iwaya Inn, Kisoji

Ryokan Japanese style room with futon bedding on tatami, en suite bath and toilet

Hotel Beni Ya, Suwa

Hotel Western style room with en suite bath and toilet

Hakuba Mominoki Hotel

Hotel Western style room with en suite bath and toilet

Shuku-bo Fuchinobo

Shukubo Japanese style room or Japanese/Western hybrid room type using futon. Shared bath and toilet