



THE
NAKASENDŌ
KISO VALLEY

A Complete 5-Day Walking Guide
Through Japan's Historic Mountain Road

By David Lowe



From Nakatsugawa to Hideshio



~100 km



5 days



4 nights



Moderate–Strenuous

Contents

About the Nakasendō

Trip Snapshot	6
The 13 Post Towns	7
About This Guide	8

Pre-Trip Logistics

Why Walk South to North?	9
Getting to Nakatsugawa Station	9
Where to Stay in Nakatsugawa	10
Getting to the Trail from Nakatsugawa	12
Getting Back from the Trail	12

Practical Information

Weather & Seasonal Conditions	13
Footwear & Gear	14
Hiking Etiquette	14
Money	15
Using the JR Chūō Line	15
Luggage Forwarding (<i>takkyūbin</i>)	17
Lunches & Trail Snacks	18
Mobile Data & Navigation	19
Toilets & Rubbish	19
Bears	20
Camping Options	20

Route Overview

Summary Distance Table	23
Elevation Profile	24
How to Read This Guide	25
Day 1 – Nakatsugawa Station to Tsumago-juku	26
Day 2 – Tsumago-juku to Nojiri-juku	34
Day 3 – Nojiri-juku to Kiso-Fukushima	41
Day 4 – Kiso-Fukushima to Narai-juku	49
Day 5 – Narai-juku to Hideshio Station	57
Quick Reference Accommodation Guide	62
Appendix: GPX Files & Navigation Data	67
Emergency Contacts & Useful Numbers	70

About the Nakasendō

The Nakasendō (中山道) – the ‘Central Mountain Route’ – was one of the five great highways of feudal Japan, linking Edo (modern-day Tokyo) and Kyoto through the mountains of central Honshū. The Kiso Valley section was particularly tightly controlled: its hinoki cypress forests were reserved for the Owari domain, and the Fukushima sekisho midway along the valley was one of only four major checkpoints on the entire route.

Travellers, merchants, and *daimyō* processions once walked its 534 kilometres through forests, river valleys, and a chain of 69 post towns. Many of these towns survive today, either intact or carefully restored, preserving the atmosphere of the old highway.

This guide covers approximately 100 kilometres through the heart of the Kiso Valley – widely considered the most scenic and historically preserved section of the route. The five-day, four-night itinerary takes you from Nakatsugawa Station (Gifu Prefecture), following the historic Nakasendō alignment through the old town and out to Ochiai-juku, then north through a chain of thirteen beautifully preserved post towns to Hideshio Station in Shiojiri, Nagano Prefecture. Along the way, you’ll walk forested mountain passes, wind through traditional farming countryside, and stay in *ryokan* and *minshuku* where elements of daily life still echo the Edo period.

Optional use of the local JR Chūō Line allows you to bypass less rewarding highway sections (some involving roadside walking alongside heavy truck traffic) and save your energy for the best of the trail.

Trip Snapshot

Distance	~100 km
Duration	5 days, 4 nights
Pace	~13–30 km per day
Difficulty	Moderate–Strenuous
Start	Nakatsugawa Station (Gifu Prefecture)
Finish	Hideshio Station (Nagano Prefecture)
Highest point	Torii Pass (1,197 m)
Terrain	Forest trails, stone paths, road sections
Accommodation	<i>Ryokan, minshuku, camping</i>
Navigation	GPX and KML tracks included



The 13 Post Towns

The Nakasendō passes through 69 post towns (*shukuba-machi*) in total. This guide covers 13 of them, running south to north through the Kiso Valley across two prefectures.

Gifu Prefecture

No.	Post Town	Day	Location
45	Nakatsugawa-juku	1	Nakatsugawa
44	Ochiai-juku	1	Nakatsugawa
43	Magome-juku	1	Nakatsugawa

Nagano Prefecture

No.	Post Town	Day	Location
42	Tsumago-juku	1	Nagiso
41	Midono-juku	2	Nagiso
40	Nojiri-juku	2	Ōkuwa
39	Suhara-juku	3	Ōkuwa
38	Agematsu-juku	3	Agematsu
37	Fukushima-juku	3	Kiso
36	Miyanakoshi-juku	4	Kiso
35	Yabuhara-juku	4	Kiso
34	Narai-juku	4	Shiojiri
33	Niekawa-juku	5	Shiojiri

About This Guide

This guide exists because reliable, joined-up information for walking the full Kiso Valley section of the Nakasendō is surprisingly hard to find. While there's plenty of material online, much of it is scattered across different sources or focuses on only the most visited post towns – leaving the quieter and equally rewarding stretches of the route largely undocumented.

What follows is a complete five-day itinerary covering the well-known post towns and the corners of the route that most visitors never reach. Each day includes detailed route notes, key waypoints, photos, and elevation profiles, along with accommodation suggestions and downloadable GPX and KML files compatible with AllTrails, Komoot, Ride with GPS, and GPS devices such as a Garmin or Apple Watch.

Written for independent walkers with moderate hiking experience, the guide is best suited to those comfortable managing their own logistics – whether carrying their pack or forwarding luggage between stops – and walking consecutive days of 13–30 km. No specialist skills are required, but a reasonable level of fitness and a willingness to adapt when conditions or timetables require it will make for a far more enjoyable experience.



I walked this route in early April 2026, timing the trip to catch the start of the cherry blossoms in the lower valley and the first green of spring. The field notes, photographs, distances, and timings in this guide are all from that walk. Conditions change – trails are rerouted and guesthouses close – so treat any time-sensitive details as a starting point and verify locally before you go.

A Japan Rail Pass covers the route in full. If you are not using a rail pass, fares between adjacent stations are modest – typically ¥190–¥240 for a single journey. IC cards (Suica, Pasma, ICOCA) are not consistently supported along this stretch. While they work at larger stations such as Nagoya and Matsumoto, they are not accepted at smaller local stations between Nakatsugawa and Shiojiri. Buy individual tickets from station vending machines or onboard from train conductors.

Key stations and their relevance to the walk

Nagiso – Access point for Tsumago-juku (20-minute walk, or short bus or taxi ride). The most useful station on Day 1.

Nojiri – Serves Nojiri-juku directly; typical Night 2 arrival point.

Ōkuwa / Suhara / Kuramoto – Day 3 rail assist options, allowing walkers to bypass the least pleasant sections of Route 19 between Nojiri and Kiso-Fukushima. A common approach is to walk to Suhara, then take the train one stop to Kuramoto.

Agematsu – Alternative Day 3 option for those wishing to visit Nezame-no-toko Gorge before continuing to Kiso-Fukushima.

Kiso-Fukushima – The largest town on the route; typical Night 3 base and Day 4 starting point.

Harano / Miyanokoshi – Intermediate Day 4 options for walkers needing relief from the Route 19 section north of Kiso-Fukushima.

Yabuhara – Common Day 4 rail assist arrival point; the trail to Torii Pass begins here.

Narai – Day 4/Night 4 station; also a convenient exit point, with trains to Shiojiri for those ending the walk early.

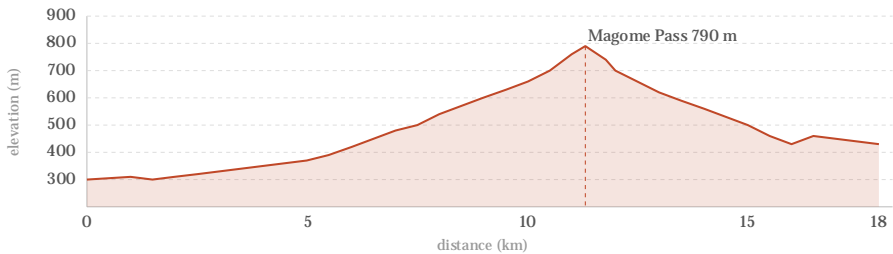
Niekawa – Day 5 shortcut option, cutting approximately 5 km from the final day.

Hideshio – End of the walk. From here, the local train to Shiojiri connects with the Azusa Limited Express to Tokyo.



Day 1 – Nakatsugawa Station to Tsumago-juku

DISTANCE	ELEVATION	TERRAIN	TIME
18 km	+656 m / -485 m	Forest trails, stone paths, road sections	5–7 hrs
DIFFICULTY ■■■■ Moderate			



Distances are approximate and measured from Nakatsugawa Station. Allow extra time for photography, the Odaki and Medaki Falls detour, and exploring Magome and Tsumago.

The Route

Leave Nakatsugawa Station early and follow the historic Nakasendō alignment through the old town before joining the trail proper at Ochiai-juku. Along the way, the trail passes beneath a national highway and crosses the Ochiai River. From here begins one of the finest surviving stretches of Edo-period stone paving on the entire route – the *ishidatami*, worn smooth by centuries of use. At the top of the climb into Magome, a stone monument inscribed with 是より北木曾路 (*kore yori kita Kisoji*, ‘From here north, the Kiso Road’) marks your arrival into the Kiso Valley.

Magome is a beautifully preserved hilltop post town. Its cobbled main street climbs steeply through traditional wooden buildings before joining the Nakasendō toward Tsumago. As the southern gateway to the Kisoji, it remains one of the trail’s most characterful stops. While many walkers catch a bus to this point, there is much to be gained from getting here under your own steam. At the far end of the Edo-period streetscape, the **Magome Observatory** offers a panoramic view across the Central Alps – a good place to pause before the trail continues.

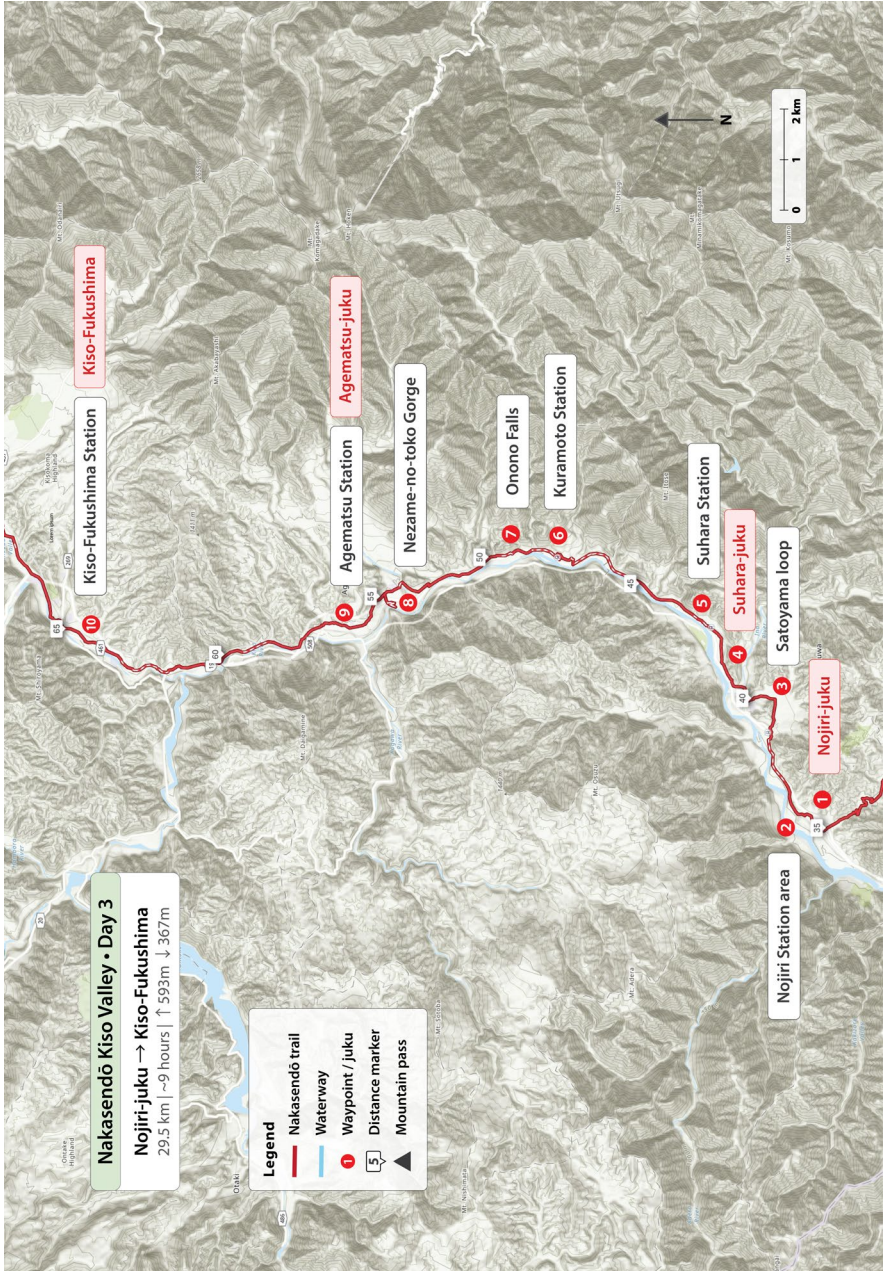


Surviving stretches of Edo-period
ishidatami stone paving

From Magome the path winds through woodland and rural villages, climbing to **Magome Pass** (馬籠峠 790 m) before descending into

Day 3 – Key Waypoints

Km	Waypoint	Notes
0.0	Nojiri-juku	Depart. Limited morning supplies.
0.3	Nojiri Station area	JR Chūō Line. Vending machines at Roadside Station (Michi-no-Eki) Ōkuwa.
3.2	Satoyama loop	Brief detour off Route 19 near Ōkuwa Station. Delightful in spring.
7.4	Suhara-juku	Post town lined with <i>mizubune</i> (wooden basins).
7.7	Suhara Station	Rail assist point → Kuramoto (6 min, ¥190).
13.0	Kuramoto Station	Arrive by train. A wooden suspension bridge lies just beyond the station.
15.5	Onono Falls	Waterfall beneath a railway viaduct.
19.1	Nezame-no-toko Gorge	Striking river gorge – 15-minute detour off the trail; allow 30 minutes to explore. Around 1 hour round trip from Agematsu Station.
21.6	Agematsu Station	Arrive by train (two stops from Suhara) or on foot.
29.5	Kiso-Fukushima	Arrive. Largest town in the Kiso Valley.



All ryokan and minshuku prices include dinner and breakfast unless noted. Hotels and hostels typically do not. Prices are approximate per person, per night, in 2025–26 rates and vary by season and room type.

Night 0 – Nakatsugawa

Machi Yard · Guesthouse · ¥5,100
30-min walk from station; book early.
Booking: Direct only

Onn Nakatsugawa · Hotel · ¥10,000+ (inc. breakfast)
Near station; onsen; buffet breakfast.
Booking: Direct or major platforms

Plaza Hotel Sakae · Hotel · ¥7,000+
5-min walk from station; simple breakfast ¥440.
Booking: Direct or major platforms

Night 1 – Tsumago / Nagiso

Matsushiroya Ryokan · Ryokan · ¥12,100
Tsumago. Centrally located; communal bath.
Booking: Direct only

Onyado Daikichi · Minshuku · ¥13,100
Tsumago. 4 tatami rooms; English-speaking owners.
Booking: Direct only

MOUNTAinn Nagiso · Hostel · ¥28,000 (total, 4 people)
Nagiso. Fallback if Tsumago full.
Booking: Major platforms

Kashiwaya Inn · Minshuku · ¥20,000
Nagiso. Well-maintained historical inn.
Booking: Major platforms