

Route Descriptions

This book contains 69 route descriptions ranging from day trips to mega-walks, plus suggestions for other walks, side trips and alternative routes. Each walk description has a brief introduction outlining the natural and cultural features you may encounter, plus information to help you plan your walk – transport options, level of difficulty, time-frame and any permits required.

Day walks are often circular and are located in areas of uncommon beauty. Multi-day walks include information on campsites, mountain huts, hostels or other accommodation, and places where you can obtain water and supplies.

TIMES & DISTANCES

These are provided only as a guide. Times are based on actual walking time and do not include stops for snacks, taking photographs, rests or side trips. Be sure to factor these in when planning your walk. Distances are provided but should be read in conjunction with altitudes. Significant elevation changes can make a greater difference to your walking time than lateral distance.

In most cases, the daily stages are flexible and can be varied. It is important to recognise that short stages are sometimes recommended in order to acclimatise in mountain areas or because there are interesting features to explore en route.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Grading systems are always arbitrary. However, having an indication of the grade may help you choose between walks. Our authors use the following grading guidelines:

Easy – a walk on flat terrain or with minor elevation changes usually over short distances on well-travelled routes with no navigational difficulties.

Moderate – a walk with challenging terrain, often involving longer distances and steep climbs.

Demanding – a walk with long daily distances and difficult terrain with significant elevation changes; may involve challenging route-finding and high-altitude travel.

TRUE LEFT & TRUE RIGHT

The terms ‘true left’ and ‘true right’, used to describe the bank of a stream or river, sometimes throw readers. The ‘true left bank’ simply means the left bank as you look downstream.

Planning

Being a predominantly mountainous country, hiking has to be the best way to get to know the real Japan. It allows you to explore vestiges of the old Japan that have not been ‘tourist-ified’ and meet some of the locals in circumstances conducive to communication and interaction. Even readers that have been ‘in the country’ for a while will discover a new way to enrich their time and reassess their temporary home.

Although the young do go trekking, the average age of the hiking fraternity in Japan is probably close to 60. The feats of endurance that these young-at-heart grandparents complete are a source of constant amazement. Compared to their Western peers they really are fit and have incredible stamina. With the wide range of ages of hikers it follows there is an equally rich variety of types of walks on offer to cater for all levels, ranging from nature walks with interpretation panels to multi-day ridgeline roller-coaster traverses. Many of the walks are close to major tourist attractions that are described in detail in Lonely Planet’s *Japan*, allowing you to combine into one journey the bustle of general sightseeing and the solitude of mountain escapes.

With its roots in the ancient paths that pilgrims followed, the continued popularity of hiking means that hikers are well catered for nowadays. The transport network is geared up for getting walkers to and from their walks with generally walker-friendly timetables. Good access from various points means that walk lengths can be adapted to your schedule and the conditions; there are usually escape routes that will not leave you stranded. Accommodation ranges from comfortable lodges, to basic self-catering huts, to emergency shelters. On the trail excessively dangerous places are circumnavigated or completed with the aid of fixed ropes and ladders. And lastly the trails are, for the most part, well trodden and easy to follow – guides and porters are not needed, just a smidgen of common sense.

Having said that, it is best to build up to some of the more challenging multi-day walks described in this book. After a few day-walks you will get a feel for the Japanese terrain, truly appreciate the vagaries of the climate and how to prepare for it, and know how light you can travel. Camping is usually possible, but the extensive supply of places to stay means that generally you can go without your tent and kitchen sink if you are willing to give up some privacy by joining in the communal living that a hut offers.

Hiking is not an expensive activity (see p25). Probably the biggest cost factor is getting to/from the hike, but even that is money well spent for the efficient and prompt service that is the norm. Driving to the trail head is usually catered for too, although some mountain access roads have restrictions on their use by private vehicles. If you don’t want to spend your money on hut meals, ‘bed only’ options are always available. If you don’t want to spend money at all on accommodation, then camp or just make it a day excursion: it’s all possible.

*another year is gone –
a traveler’s hat on my head,
straw sandals on my feet*
Bashō