



4 Day Ohenro Tour

Ohenro: Day 1

Your journey will begin in the Ehime Prefecture. Stretching westward along the Seto Inland Sea and eventually terminating to the blue green waters of the southwest, this sunny prefecture is well regarded for the richness of its land and for the well preserved towns that dot the country side.

In the morning you will visit the towns of Ozu and Uchiko. In Ozu, you will visit the manor house of the former lord of the town in addition the castle. The manor's mossy verdant garden attracts the breeze from the river below, and the well preserved interior transports the viewer back in time.

The towering castle too is well preserved, and the community itself has taken great lengths to maintain the classic atmosphere of this town.

Before arriving in Uchiko, you will also visit Eitokuji. This temple marks the spot where Kūkai, founder of Shingon Buddhism in Japan, was forced to spend a hellishly cold night underneath a bridge. This gave rise to the belief that pilgrims should raise their walking sticks when crossing bridges so as not to wake him.

In Uchiko you will be able to explore the white walls and classic townhomes that still stand. Uchiko was once an incredibly wealthy and well known town due to the production and export of wax and candles. Here you will actually be able to see the old production facility that once belonged to a wealthy merchant family.

You will spend the night in this microcosm of the past in a renovated town home, an excellent chance to experience the past first hand.



Ohenro: Day 2

After breakfast you will leave the white walls of Uchiko and begin your pilgrimage in earnest.

First you will visit Daihoji and Iwayaji. Of particular note is Iwayaji: surrounded by dense cedar forest that are perpetually shady and cool, the temple itself is seemingly carved out of the mountain side. Dramatic stone walls, caves, and mossy statues enhance the mysterious atmosphere of this temple.

The last temple of this day is Ishiteji. Located in the heart of Matsuyama City and possessing an important position in the pilgrimage narrative.

According to legend Emon Saburo was the wealthiest man on Shikoku. One day, he chased away a monk begging at his home and broke his begging bowl. This monk turned out to be Kūkai. After this, Emon experienced a variety of misfortunes that change depending on the legend but they all agree that he began walking the pilgrimage path in search of Kūkai to ask for forgiveness.

Before dying, the two men finally met and Emon was forgiven and asked to be reborn in Matsuyama City in a wealthy family so he could contribute to Buddhism. Kūkai gave him a stone with the inscription “Emon Saburo is reborn” and put it in his hand. According to the story, a child was born in the city clutching the stone and eventually the temple was founded. Indeed the name Ishiteji itself means something like “hand with stone temple.”

After exploring the temple grounds of this fascinating temple, you will have time to explore and enjoy the streets of Matsuyama City.



Ohenro: Day 3

In the morning you will cross the border into Kagawa and visit Konpira Shrine.

The path to the shrine is lined with shops selling everything from pilgrimage gear to udon flavored ice cream and creates a festive atmosphere at anytime of day. The shrine itself is the main shrine of all other Konpira shrines in Japan and in the past was an important place of pilgrimage as well.

After visiting this shrine you will then visit three hillside temples that loom over the rustic countryside before ending the day in Zentsuji.

Zentsuji is the town where Kūkai is said to have been born and is home to an impressive temple complex as well.

It is in this temple that you will have the opportunity to spend the night in traditional style and have the option to attend a Buddhist ceremony.



Ohenro:

Day 4

The final day of this journey will involve participation in one of the hallmark rituals of Shingon Buddhism, the Goma fire ritual.

After breakfast, you will visit both Motoyamaji and Iyadaniji.

Motyamaji is well known as having a unique main deity, the fierce Bato Kannon (Horse Head Kannon in English). This fierce deity wears a crown with a horse head on it, has three scowling heads, and carries a wide variety of weapons and objects. It is under the watchful eye of this deity that you will take part in the Goma ritual.

In this ritual, the priest will create a roaring flame on an altar that grows higher and higher as he continues his prayers and chants. The intensity of this ritual creates an atmosphere thick with spiritual tension and mystery.

After is the mountain side temple of Iyadaniji. Here you can view statues carved into the mountain itself in addition to the sweeping views of the countryside the slopes of the temple provides.

Finally, in Takamatsu City you will have the option to visit Takamatsu Castle, one of the few “water” castles in Japan or simply relax in this quirky Showa Era city.

