

The 88-Temple Pilgrimage in the Yashima Area

Shikoku is famous for the 88-temple Shikoku Pilgrimage, a circular route around the island that takes pilgrims to temples associated with the Buddhist priest Kukai (774–835). There are five Shikoku Pilgrimage temples in the city of Takamatsu, three of which are on or near Yashima: Ichinomiya Temple, Yashimaji Temple and Yakuriji Temple.

Ichinomiya Temple in central Takamatsu is the 83rd temple on the pilgrimage route. It was established during the Taiho era (701–704), and Kukai himself is said to have carved the temple's main object of worship. Near the main hall (*hondo*) is a small stone shrine with an image of Yakushi Nyorai, the Buddha of medicine and healing. According to legend, if a person with a history of bad deeds puts their head inside the shrine, the stone doors will close and their head will be stuck.

The next temple, Yashimaji, is the 84th stop on the Shikoku Pilgrimage. It is located at the top of Yashima and can be reached by taking the paved *henromichi* pilgrimage route that begins near Katamoto Station. Along the way there is a well that is fed by a natural spring. Known as Kajisui (“incantation water”), the spring is said to have gushed forth when Kukai became thirsty and prayed for water, and it has not stopped flowing since. A stone monument beside the well features the Sanskrit characters *a* and *un*, together signifying the sum of all things, and is believed to have been carved by Kukai himself. Further up the path are statues of Jizo, a Buddhist deity who protects travelers. At the entrance to Yashimaji Temple is a guestbook for pilgrims to record their visits.

Yakuriji Temple is the 85th temple on the pilgrimage and is about 5.4 kilometers from Yashimaji Temple—around a two-and-a-half-hour walk. It is located just across the Aibiki River from Yashima, halfway up Mt. Goken, and can be reached on foot or via cable car from the base of the mountain. The temple gets its name from eight chestnut trees (“*ya*” for eight, “*kuri*” for chestnut) that are believed to have been planted on the grounds by Kukai. Yakuriji Temple offers a clear view of Yashima.