

NIC Walking Guides

④ Hiking on the Nakasendo



NAGOYA INTERNATIONAL CENTER VOLUNTEERS

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Tsumago-shuku and Magome-shuku are situated at the border of Gifu and Nagano Prefectures. Both were shukuba villages (stages) in the mountains on the Nakasendo Highway which was constructed from Edo (Tokyo) to Kyoto during the Edo Period. Both stages are very popular examples of well preserved townscapes of the Edo period.

Our group left Nagoya Station for Nagiso Station at 08:05 by express train and arrived at Nagiso Station at 09:20.



From Nagiso Station we walked along the old Nakasendo Highway towards Tsumago-shuku. We passed by Kabuto Kannon temple and came to a mountain pass.



We found an old stone guidepost at the side of the path that indicated the there were ruins of Tsumago Castle about 800m away on top of the mountain. There was another wooden signboard in English near by the stone guide post. There are many other English guide posts along the route.



The mountain pass soon became a concrete pavement and we soon arrived at the entrance of Tsumago-shuku.



Tsumago-shuku

Tsumago-shuku was the 42nd shukuba village (stage) from Edo. There were 69 shukuba villages (stages) on the Nakasendo Highway which ran through between Edo and Kyoto during the Edo period. The Nakasendo Highway was also called the “Kisoji” Highway or “Kiso-kaido” around that area because it passed through the Kiso Area - a mountainous region in central Japan.

The following print picture is an ukiyoe picture that a famous artist, Hiroshige Utagawa, drew of the landscape of the Tsumago-shuku area along the Kiso-kaido at end of Edo period.



Kousatsuba

A kousatsuba - contemporary public bulletin-board - was set up in each shukuba (stage) and each village by the Tokugawa shogunate for travelers and villagers.



Tsumago-shuku Honjin

(The official inn of the Tsumago-shuku area)

Accommodation facilities - known as honjin and waki-honjin - were required to be built in each shukuba village. These allowed officials to have an overnight stay or a break. Only court nobles, federal lords, and hatamoto (direct retainers of the Shogun) were allowed to stay overnight stay at honjin (officially appointed inns). Of course ordinary people were not allowed to use them. It was therefore required that whoever managed the honjin needed to have strong financial power, and the inns were passed down through the family.

The waki-honjin assisted the honjin when honjin could not afford to accommodate everyone. The honjin of Tsumago-village had been managed by the family of Shimazaki Toson - a famous author and poet during Meiji period.



Ruins of Masukata

The shukuba village was also constructed with the aim of defending the Tokugawa Government. In order to prevent infiltration by enemy troops, the Tokugawa Government made a main road curved at right angle in each shukuba village and constructed stonewalls along the steep edges of the main road – much like castle fortifications.



The Landscape of Tsumago-shuku

A variety of shops such as old fashioned inns, Japanese-style restaurants, and souvenir shops, line both sides of the main road through Tsumago-shuku – giving the impression that you are in the Edo Period. There were two kinds of inns during the Edo Period, hatagoya and kichinyado, which ordinary people made use of for their overnight stay. Hatagoya was accommodation that came with meals. Kichinyado was accommodation in which travelers and salesmen brought their own food and paid only a firewood expense in stead of a room charge.

(Old fashion Hatagoya)



(Ruin of Kichinyado)



After a little we came to Route 256, signifying the end of Tsumago-shuku. Almost all

visitors turned back or turned right upon reaching this point.

Otsumago Village

We walked across Route 256. There was a big guide board showing a map of Otsumago Village at the side of the road. There were not any visitors around us besides our party. We found an old stone pillar guidepost near by the guide board.

We were approaching Otsumago Village. Otsumago village was situated between Tsumago-shuku and Magome-shuku and was called “Ai-no-shuku” Village during the Edo Period; *ai-no-shuku* means a village situated halfway between two shukuba-villages. “Ai-no-shuku” villages naturally developed as a rest village between two shukuba villages that were located far apart or had a dangerous pass to between them.



During the Edo Period “ai-no-shuku” villages were prohibited from having any accommodation facilities. While we continued walking uphill, we found several inns along a mountain pass.



After walking a little further uphill we found two waterfalls at the right side of the mountain pass. One is called a male waterfall and another is a female waterfall.



(Male fall)



(Female fall)

We passed by the two waterfalls and went on walking up the stone-paved mountain pass. Even though the cherry blossom season had already finished in Nagoya, blossoms were in full bloom here.



We arrived at the Magome Pass. There was a rest house at the mountain pass, and we took a break there for a while. There was a stone pillar-post showing the Magome Pass (in Japanese) on the other side of the road from the rest house.



Leaving the rest house behind, we walked downhill, not before long we arrived at Magome-shuku.

Magome-shuku Stage

The Magome-shuku Stage was 43rd stage (69 in total) on the Nakasendo and was also one of the 11 stages on Kisokaido Highway.

The Kisokaido Highway ran through an area of steep-sided hills during the Edo Period. The Magome-shuku stage was developed along the Kisokaido Highway – at this point the highway was constructed with stone wall on both sides. The following is a Ukiyoe picture that a famous artist, Hiroshige Utagawa, drew of the Magome-shuku area.



Landscape of the Magome-shuku Stage

The Magome-shuku stage has been preserved along with its honjin, kosatsuba, masukata, old fashion inns, and souvenir shops. Like Tsumago-shuku, the stage retained the feel and atmosphere of the Edo Period and is a popular sightseeing spot.



Former Honjin in Magome-shuku stage (Currently the Toson Museum)

The honjin in the Magome-shuku stage had been in the Shimazaki Family for generations. Toson Shimazaki – a famous author-had lived in this Honjin during his childhood.



The soba served in the soba-noodle shop (below) in the village serves a darker coloured soba noodle than what you may be used to. The darker colour comes from the use of more buckwheat chaff in the buckwheat flour.



At the bottom of the hill, a main road marks the end of the Magome-shuku stage.



Our group crossed over the main road and continued along down a slope on the mountain pass. A stone guidepost at a side of path states that Kisoji lies to the North.



After walking down a wet, slippery path, we came to another main road. The “Kisojikuchi” bus stop was located here. We took the 16:20 bus to JR Nakatsugawa Station and got a connecting train back to Nagoya.



Overall, our party had walked about 20 km taking approximately 7 hours (including some rest time).