

Cycling Etiquette

Five Rules for Safe Cycling in Japan

- Ride on the left side of the road, rarely on sidewalks** Always yield to pedestrians
Bicycles are allowed on sidewalks only in designated areas with a sign on the right, or for persons under 13, over 70, or individuals with disabilities on bicycles.
- Stop at intersections for safety**
Cyclists, too, must stop at motor vehicle stop signs.
- Use lights when dark**
Make sure others can see you. And keep good visibility by lighting your path. Flashing light is prohibited.
- No biking after drinking**
Carrying a passenger and parallel riding are also prohibited.
- Wear a helmet**
Adults and children must wear helmets when riding.

Shinobi-no-Sato Ninja Villages Cycling Map

Issued by: Shinobi-no-Sato Iga Koka Ninja Council February 2023

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Koka Ninja Villages – Tokaido & Soma Kaido Historical Trail Course

Zone Distance: **37.5 km**
Approx. Duration: **3hr.**
Elevation Gain: **242 m**
Activity Level: **Entry**

A flat course with highlights of Koka including Tokaido post station towns and ninja historical sites. Explore sites of the Koka ninja along the historical Tokaido and Soma Kaido trails starting from JR Koka Station. Early course highlights include a museum of medicines once used tactically by local ninja, as well as Aburahi-jinja Shrine. After a ride through the countryside, you'll reach the post station town of Minakuchi, with a lovely historic townscape where you can grab food or drink. Between the Tokaido and Soma Kaido Trails, streets are tricky, so be careful to stay on route. Take the Soma River path for pedestrians and cycling only, while watching out for rough spots. The final highlight is Yagawa-jinja Shrine. Head east after Rokkakudo temple hall and you'll finish back at JR Koka Station.



Koka City Pharmaceutical Museum

Koka is also historically known for pharmaceuticals. Local yamabushi (mountain priests) were said to have carried medicines as souvenirs while traveling the country. The ninjas' knowledge of gunpowder production and medicines was greatly informed by the yamabushi.

Aburahi-jinja Shrine

This main shrine of Koka, revered by the local ninjas, enshrines a fire deity. The main hall and adjacent facilities are designated as national important cultural properties. It's also known as a popular filming spot for historical movie and TV dramas.

Rakuyaji Temple

Known as a treasure house of medieval Heian era Buddhist statues, including one of Japan's largest seated eleven-faced Kannon statues, a seated Yakushi Nyorai (medicine Buddha), and the Holy Kannon. Referred to as a "hidden village" by renowned essayist, Masako Shirasu.

Otori-jinja Shrine

This shrine was once a meeting place for the ninja. The bonds of ninja clans were generally very strong as they gathered and debated to reach communal decisions. Otori-jinja Shrine served this purpose for the Ohara clan of Koka ninja.

Tokaido Minakuchi Post Town & Karakuri Dokei

A once-thriving stop on the Tokaido trail. The town developed around three parallel streets, and was a castle town for Minakuchi Okayama Castle. Check out the Karakuri Dokei (mechanical clock), a local symbol also depicted on the Minakuchi Festival float.

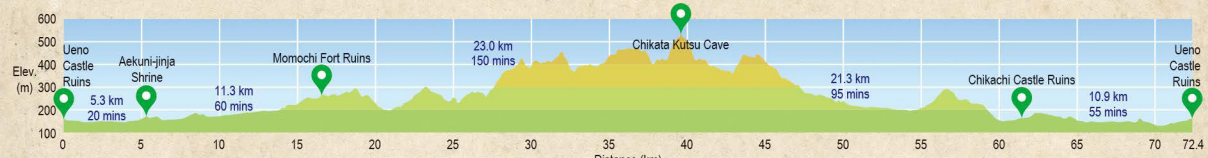
Grand Gate at Yagawa-jinja Shrine

In 1570, a dispute was settled in front of the shrine's gate among an autonomous faction of Koka ninja, called Koka-gun-chuso. The shrine also served as a meeting place for Koka ninjas.

Full Iga Ninja Advanced Course

Zone Distance: **71.8 km**
Approx. Duration: **6 hr. 20 mins**
Elevation Gain: **1147 m**
Activity Level: **Advanced**

An advanced course with steep terrain through Iga, the home of Iga ninja. Extended course through the Iga ninja villages, covering over 70km with an elevation gain of over 1100 m. Starting from Ueno Castle Ruins, head east through the city. After Aekuni-jinja Shrine, go along the Iga Kaido Road, then south on Corridor Road. The route suddenly shifts into a terrain course with a roller coaster of steep ups and downs. A short but steep slope leads to Chikata Kutsu Cave, the highlight of the course. A bit further up after passing a Sonic statue, you'll find a scenic viewpoint. Take care toward the end as the road becomes busier. After the Kagiya-no-Tsuji crossroad, you will be greeted by ninja paintings and monuments as you get closer to Ueno Castle Ruins.



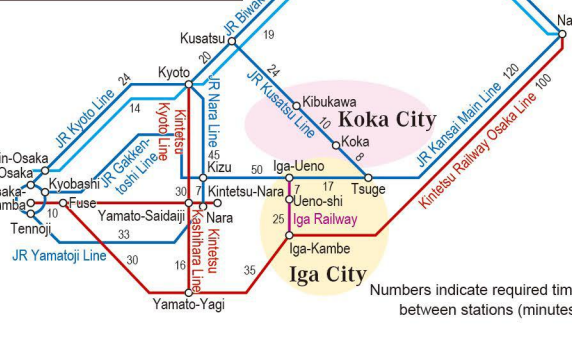
Iga and Koka — “Shinobi-no-Sato”, Home of the Ninja

— In Search of the True Ninja

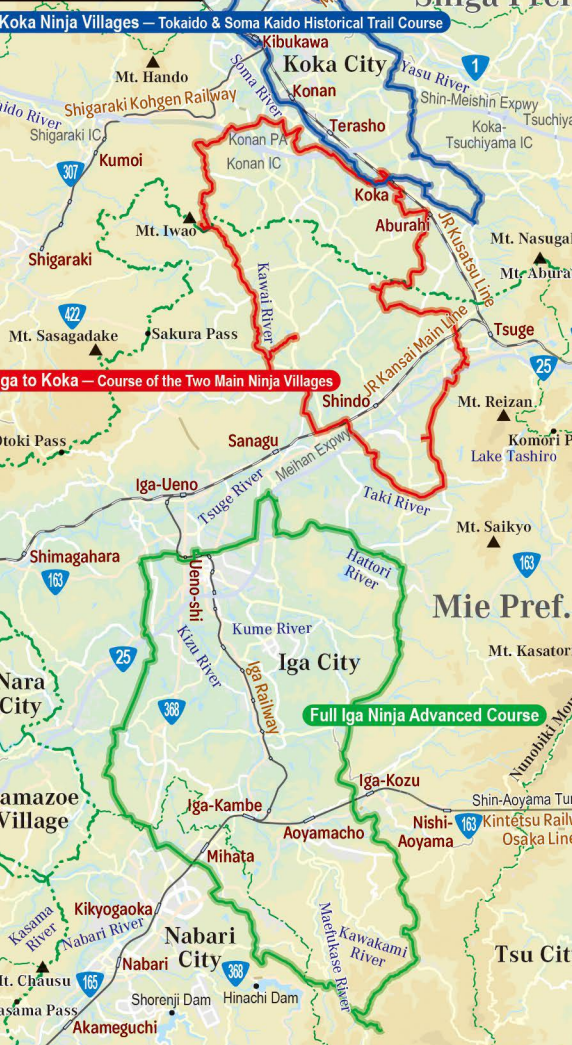
The Iga and Koka areas are rich with fascinating rural culture and traditions, from which “true ninja” emerged. Ninja legends have spread worldwide, but the true forms of ninja are not widely known. Cycling through the region, discover who they really were by visiting remaining ninja fortress and castle ruins from the Warring States period in the rural landscape, ascetic mountain training grounds where they trained, and village shrines that served as ninja gathering spaces. Let’s explore the cultural assets of ninja villages and landscapes, uncovering the traces of the ninja that still remain today.



Traffic map around the area



Overall view



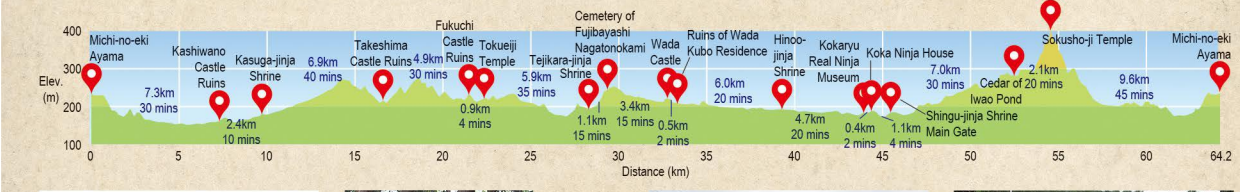
Iga to Koka — Course of the Two Main Ninja Villages

Enjoy cherry blossoms or autumn foliage. A pleasant course covering the two ninja villages of Iga and Koka

This course covers 64 km with an elevation gain of about 700 m, featuring sights of the two major ninja school villages. Start and finish at the Michi-no-eki Ayama. Pass through quiet villages to reach Kashiwano Castle Ruins. Then, continue on the riverside cherry blossom path toward Mibuno, where Kasuga-jinja Shrine is located. This area had many medieval castles. The mountainous Corridor Road is hardest part of the course. A long climb awaits after Tokueiji Temple, where Tokugawa Ieyasu once visited. The slope down into Koka City includes many interesting ninja spots, like Wada Castle, ninja residences, and cherry trees in front of Shingu-jinja Shrine. The Konan area has nice places to enjoy the autumn leaves, such as the pond by Sokushoji Temple. Climb up the hill to finish at the roadside rest.



Zone Distance: 64.2 km
Approx. Duration: 5hr. 10 mins
Elevation Gain: 728 m
Activity Level: Intermediate



Michi-no-Eki (Roadside Rest) Ayama

The roof is designed to resemble a natural mountain slope, and the green color blends into the surroundings. Head inside for local specialties such as fresh foods, Iga ware, and Iga kumihimo (braided cord), etc. Soba-making workshops are also held here.



Kashiwano Castle Ruins

The ruins of Kashiwano Castle cover an area of about 100m by 70m, surrounded by earthen mounds at three corners. The fortress has a moat to protect the ridge on the west, and fortifications on the east. The castle ruins are now designated by the city as a historical site.



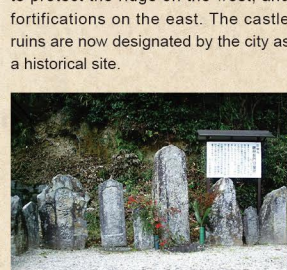
Tokueiji Temple

The use of the Tokugawa crest was restricted by the Shogunate family. It's seen here on roof tiles because Tokugawa Ieyasu granted permission when visiting after the Honnoji Incident, on his way back to Mikawa.



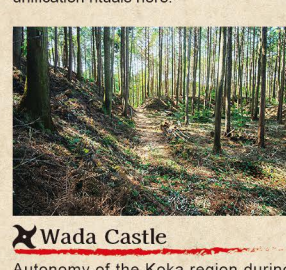
Tejikara-jinja Shrine

Gunpowder, the most advanced weapon of the Iga and Koka ninjas, has historical ties to the fireworks of Tejikara-jinja Shrine, the family shrine of Iga's Fujibayashi clan.



Cemetery of Fujibayashi Nagatonokami

A graveyard with 25 tombstones of the Fujibayashi Nagatonokami family, a great Iga ninja master.



Wada Castle

Autonomy of the Koka region during the Warring States period was achieved through strong cooperation of local ninja warriors. This castle was one of their fortresses, surrounded by 50-meter earthen mounds and an empty outer moat.



Tourist Information Center Kokaryu Real Ninja Museum

This facility introduces the history and culture of the ninja villages, where you explore the secrets of Koka ninja. Learn more through videos and hands-on exhibits. This also serves as a local area tourist information center.



Koka Ninja House

Former ninja residence of the Mochizuki clan built in the mid-Edo period, featuring various tricks such as secret passages, hidden staircases, revolving wall, etc. The building was used for a period as a pharmacy as well.



Shingu-jinja Shrine Main Gate

The thatched octagonal gate of the Shingu-jinja Shrine was built in the late 15th century. In spring, visitors can enjoy the cherry blossoms that line the street in front of the gate.



The Cedar of Iwao Pond

A lone cedar over 1,000 years old in the Sugitani area. The beloved local landmark is a designated natural monument by Shiga Prefecture and a popular TV and movie filming spot. In autumn, enjoy the fall foliage around Iwao Pond.

