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### KOICHI TANAKA's Travel Journal – Undertaking the journey of the SHIKOKU HENRO

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There are many goals one can pursue in undertaking the SHIKOKU HENRO. In the past, many did it to conduct memorial services for their ancestors and those they had lost, but now, many set off on the HENRO to reexamine themselves, or to challenge themselves at a milestone in their lives, or to get closer to nature or culture, or to connect with other people—for many different reasons!



At first, I myself began with the goal of just walking, but after walking around for several days, before I knew it, I began to think about myself, my family, and my friends and so on. I had plenty of time to do so! Walking the HENRO while taking in the sky, the sea, the mountains, and the rivers was an exhilarating experience, and it was really a rich and meaningful time for me.

The SHIKOKU HENRO itself also has many charms. For one, the pilgrimage paths that tour SHIKOKU are well-built and well-equipped. In particular, the path connecting the 88 FUDASHO is well-marked, so even beginners can walk without fear of being lost. You can pay your respects at the temples while walking through abundant natural landscapes and a refreshing atmosphere. You have many opportunities to get in touch with the locals—not just through OSETTAI. And there's a real sense of accomplishment when you finally reach a temple in the mountains after a difficult trek. Those undertaking the pilgrimage all share the same goal, so there's an instant connection with your fellow travelers—you can speak freely and openly with them. The pilgrimage road also shows different sides of itself as the seasons change, so there are many people who want to go several times.

There's a word, OSHIKOKUBYO or SHIKOKU fever, that refers to how once you undertake the SHIKOKU HENRO, it grabs hold of you, and you want to do it again and again. This was only my first SHIKOKU HENRO, but most of the OHENRO SAN I met at the HENRO inns along my way had undertaken the journey twice or more. Many said they were on their ninth time around. Some even said that they went every autumn or spring. The people who say that they're a regular at this or that HENRO inn, that there's an inn at which they'd like to try staying—and who finally come down with OSHIKOKUBYO themselves, seem to be the type of people who greatly value connections with others. I haven't caught the fever yet, but maybe it takes a while to incubate before it finally manifests.

In the end, the appeal of the journey of the SHIKOKU HENRO comes down to meeting people. The locals who help you out along your journey, greeting you with a smile and offering you OSETTAI; your fellow travelers, with whom you exchange news and information, and who help each other out along the way. Therefore, if you have the opportunity to visit SHIKOKU and have some time in your schedule to do some walking, even if it's just for a short distance, try to experience the SHIKOKU HENRO.

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