



## Travel

# Slow journeys to savour for busy folks

Kumano Kodo Torii Gate on the left of Daimon Gate on Mount Koya.  
ST PHOTO: MAVIS TEO

Travellers seek out journeys that have them moving at a different pace

### MAVIS TEO

For The Straits Times

THE CONCEPT OF “SLOW TRAVEL” IS IN DEMAND. It is a movement that answers the modern malaise of having to be efficient, to rush and to hurry.

Slow travel has its roots in the same philosophies as the slow food trend.

Mr Carlo Petrini, Italian activist and founder of the Slow Food Movement, said in 2008 that “we have lost our sense of time.”

His observation: “We have an idea that life is short – and we must go faster to fit everything in. But life is long. The problem is we don’t know how to spend our time wisely.”

The slow traveller enjoys the experience of the journey unfurling, rather than the actual destination.

He may travel by foot, train or boat. He is not out to “maximise” leave and pack tonnes into one itinerary. The idea is to breathe, relax and take it all in.

Many “slow travel” trips require one to unplug completely. There is no or extremely limited access to Wi-Fi and phone calls.

One might choose to sail along the Mekong Delta or hike through the wilderness.

Stone Horse Expeditions and Travel ([www.stonehorsemongolia.com](http://www.stonehorsemongolia.com)) offers horse-riding expeditions into national parks and tours in the Gobi Desert, providing stays with nomadic families.

The company's set departure expeditions are between eight and 14 days, with travel by horseback. This means that participants might see just part of a national park, but the fact that they are travelling mostly at a trot means they get to truly experience their surroundings – and their steeds.

Dr Sabine Schmidt, co-owner of the Mongolian company, says interest in its trips has risen 20 per cent year on year since it started in 2010. Bookings from Singaporeans tripled last year compared with 2012.

Many clients are professionals in demanding jobs, she says. What they want is not the “highlights” of Mongolia. Instead, they seek out journeys that deliberately have them moving at a different pace.

This, says Mr Joni Herison, marketing director of Druk Asia ([www.drukasia.com](http://www.drukasia.com)), a Bhutan travel specialist, helps those in demanding jobs reconnect with themselves.

Druk Asia has seen a sharp increase in bookings in its treks, which last between three and six nights, from 2017 to last year. Of such bookings, 30 per cent came from Singaporeans. Two-thirds of the participants were high-flying career women in their 30s to 40s.

“Most of the time, they tell me they return to Singapore with a fresher mind,” says Mr Herison. “They say they feel more in the present.”

Ms Wu Ye-Her, executive director at an institute of higher learning, has been making a yearly slow travel trip to hike or dive since 2012. One of her most recent sojourns saw her spending a week discovering the coffee plantations in Medellin in Colombia on foot.

The focus on her trips is to relax and to get deeper into herself.

The result: She returns home calm and with a fresh perspective on work and life. “I would find a breakthrough in a problem that has been plaguing me for a few months or even the year,” says Ms Wu, 42.

Ready to jump on the slow travel trend? Here are two ways to do so.



The view on the way to Chikatsuyu. ST PHOTO: MAVIS TEO



Japanese cypress trees.  
ST PHOTO: MAVIS TEO

## KUMANO KODO

### *Ancient Japanese retreat from urban life*

The 900-year-old Kumano Kodo refers to a pilgrimage that stretches through the mountainous Kii Peninsula on Honshu island. In 2004, it was listed as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation World Heritage site.

You can choose to do just a day walk or one that spans over 11 days.

I asked travel company Oku Japan ([okujapan.com](http://okujapan.com)) to customise a seven-day solo itinerary that would include part of the touristy and better marked Nakahechi route as well as the more remote and challenging Kohechi trail.

I would start my trip in Osaka, passing through Wakayama and Nara prefectures, and end in the legendary Mount Koya where I would check into a shukubo, a Buddhist temple with accommodation for tourists and pilgrims.

Kumano Kodo, especially the Kohechi, is not a walk in the park. Although some parts had me passing through sleepy towns, a large part of my trip involved trekking across forested mountain ranges thick with cedar, cypress and bamboo trees.

I climbed – sometimes vertically – for hours a day, scrambling over thick, knotty tree roots and steep boulders. I trudged along narrow paths where a misstep could mean falling 10 floors down into a ravine.