A man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a dark kimono over a white turtleneck, is focused on working on a wooden instrument. He is using a small tool to adjust a component of the instrument, which is mounted on a wooden block. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be a workshop or a traditional Japanese interior.

The Alternative Guide to

# Nara

Amazing | Spiritual | Gastronomic

43 lesser-known places to discover in the city and beyond

| FOOD & DRINK | ART & CULTURE | NATURE & OUTDOORS |  
| SHOPPING | ACCOMMODATION |



## Welcome to Nara



As Japan's first capital city established more than 1,300 years ago, Nara is a spiritual and cultural center. It boasts many of the nation's oldest temples and shrines as well as an array of beautiful natural sceneries. Some of the most famous sights here welcome hordes of visitors every year, and while the attention is well deserved, it's easy to forget the unsung heroes of the region. In this guide book we introduce an often hidden side of Nara and its charms so that you can discover something new about the prefecture – and perhaps about yourself, too.

We hope you'll come to love Nara as much as we do.

### **Welcome to your Nara.**

Shogo Arai  
Head of Prefectural Government.

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## Nara, the Birthplace of Japan

Situated in the center of the Kansai region, Nara is often referred to as the heartland of Japan. It was the nation's first capital and became a political powerhouse as early as the Kofun period (mid-3rd century to late 7th century). The aptly named Nara period (710-794) followed once Nara became a permanent capital. This further secured the region as an important religious, economic and creative hub as influences from Europe, Korea and China via the Silk Road increased.

Buddhism took root here, giving rise to astonishing architectural and artistic feats – many of which still stand today. Horyuji temple's [p114-115] many important structures, 55 are National Treasures and Important Cultural Properties of Japan. Though they were built centuries ago, they remain in exceptional condition.

The region's illustrious history and culture gave rise to innovations such as refined sake [p14-15] and sumo, as well as numerous traditional crafts including bamboo tea whisks [p40-41 and 70-71], high quality calligraphy brushes and more. These works of art live on today thanks to the dedication and skill of local craftsmen [p68-69].

Nara Prefecture also boasts three separate World Heritage sites – more than any other prefecture in Japan – including the aforementioned Horyuji. The Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara encompasses eight areas that represent the region's Nara period: the former site of the Imperial Palace at Heijokyo, Todaiji temple, Kohfukuji temple, Yakushiji temple, Toshodaiji temple and Gangoji temple, as well as the Mt Kasuga primeval forest and Kasugataisha Shrine [p120]. The final site spans across the mountains of southern Nara: the Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range goes through the Yoshino area [p84-85] among other stunning nature-laden areas.

Modern-day Nara celebrates these ancient traditions, crafts and reverence for nature, while still possessing an innovative heart and a cosmopolitan mindset, making it a fascinating place to explore no matter where your interests lie. Because of Nara's convenient location – it takes less than 40 minutes from either Kyoto or Osaka by train – many visitors don't venture outside the main city hub. Though the capital has an abundance of charms, it's outside of the city that you'll meet the real Nara and the people who build their lives here.

Take this alternative guide with you to discover all the wonders of Nara you may have missed otherwise and set off on your adventure into the heart of Japan.





*Food &  
Drink*



## AWA NARAMACHI

### A Cornucopia of Organic Vegetables



### Enjoy Homegrown Yamato Fare in a Cozy Traditional House

For a unique take on Nara's traditional cuisine, head to Awa Naramachi in the heart of the city's traditional townscape. Located inside a 140-year-old machiya house, keen observers will note the antique wooden sign to the right of the restaurant's entrance, indicating the shop's former role as a local shoe shop. Awa Naramachi prides itself on preserving the old where it can and replacing with new things only where needed – and it shows. The charming clay walls are lit with the warm light seeping in from the mini Japanese garden in the center of the building and there are antique items repurposed and given new life in each of the cozy dining rooms. The restaurant limits the number of daily reservations and only offers multi-course meals to avoid creating any waste. Each dish is a work of art, delicately presented with the utmost care. All produce used is organic, with the majority being locally sourced Yamato heirloom vegetables from a farm just 20 minutes outside the city. All meat is also sourced locally and there is no fish served at all (aside from bonito in some soup stocks).

**Note:** Reservations are generally required two to three weeks in advance, ideally via a hotel concierge or interpreter. Some dietary adjustments can be accommodated for – be sure to inform of these when booking.

#### Top Tip:

For a more casual dining experience but with the same high quality local fare, head to their sister shop

**Coto Coto** just a block away.

 [coto.nara.jp](http://coto.nara.jp)

#### Essential Info:

##### How Much:

Lunch from ¥2,900  
Dinner from ¥3,900

##### Awa Naramachi

1 Shonami-cho, Nara City

##### Opening Hours:

11:30am-3pm & 5:30-10pm

Closed Tue

##### Tel:

0742-24-5699

##### Website:

[kiyosumi.jp/naramachiten](http://kiyosumi.jp/naramachiten)

### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Mini bottles (300ml)  
from ¥605

**Momotaro Jr Nara  
Vierra Store**  
JR Nara Station 2F,  
Vierra Nara,  
1-1 Sanjo-hommachi,  
Nara City

**Opening Hours:**  
10am-9pm

**Website:**  
[nara-momo.com/tenpo.html](http://nara-momo.com/tenpo.html)

### Top Tip:

Keep an eye out for the Nara specialty **mikasa**, a soft pancake-like treat with an adzuki bean paste filling sold in several souvenir shops nearby.

### Try Locally Brewed Sake for a Taste of Ancient Nara Tradition

As Nara is the birthplace of refined sake, it would be remiss not to sample some of the region's finest wares while here. Sake Momotaro inside JR Nara Station's Vierra shopping center is conveniently located and offers the best sake selection in the city. They carry about 300 to 400 bottles from all brewers in the prefecture – about 30 in total – including some of their own original products. Many of the sake producers featured don't sell directly to individuals (only to restaurants and other businesses) so making a stop here is an absolute must for sake aficionados. For a unique option, try Momotaro's original recreation of a 500-year-old sake, made through referring to old texts located in nearby Kohfukuji temple. It's only available at this store, making it a truly rare find. Local craft gin such as Kikka Gin, as well as Yoshino tea liqueur, a variety of plum wines and other locally made spirits are also available. For those looking for a non-alcoholic treat, the Daibutsu-purin (Big Buddha pudding) is one of the most famous souvenirs in Nara city, made popular due to its cute design and creamy texture. Though there is little information in English available, staff are happy to help customers find whatever they need and make recommendations based on specifications.

## MOMOTARO JR NARA VIERRA STORE The Best Local Sake Selection in Nara





## BOLIK COFFEE

### Home Roasted Coffee and Russian Dolls



### Take a Break in a Cozy Coffee Shop with a Russian Touch

Newly renovated in April 2020, Bolik Coffee is an intriguing mix of new and old. Situated in Naramachi, Nara's old town district, this café and gallery is the perfect place to take a break and plan the rest of the day's activities. Here you'll find an extensive selection of homemade cookies and sweets – including a carrot cake with an exceptionally generous amount of frosting – as well as the café's own original blend of home-roasted, hand-dripped coffee. While at first glance it may seem like a mix of Japanese new and old, it will only take a minute to see that the theme here is based on an entirely different country altogether: Russia. The owner travels there regularly and brings back cute animal Matryoshka stacking dolls as well as a variety of vintage Soviet toys. Find 1980 Moscow Olympic characters, hand-painted angels as well as Russian-inspired design items made by Japanese artists. Bolik Coffee has a small exhibition space where it gives local and young artists a place to display their craft. Artists are often on-site, so guests can talk to them directly about their work.

**Note:** Children under the age of seven are not permitted inside the shop.



#### Top Tip:

Bolik Coffee's sister shop **Kanakana** lies just five minutes away for those interested in having a more substantial meal.

#### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Drinks from ¥500

**Bolik Coffee**  
40-1 Nishino-shinyacho  
Nara City

Closed Mon & Tue

**Website:**  
[kanakana.info/bolik-coffee](http://kanakana.info/bolik-coffee)

### Essential Info:

#### How Much:

Drinks from ¥1,000  
Cover charge ¥500  
Tax not included

#### Lamp Bar

1F Iseya Bldg.,  
26 Tsunofuri-cho,  
Nara City

#### Opening Hours:

Weekdays: 5pm-1am  
Sundays and holidays:  
5pm-11pm

#### Website:

[hyperurl.co/lampbar](http://hyperurl.co/lampbar)

### Top Tip:

Visit the lively **Higashimuki Shopping Street** [p66-67] before heading here to appreciate the contrast of the outdoor clamor and the bar's cultivated calm.

### A World Class Cocktail Experience Tucked Away on a Nara Sidestreet

Possibly one of Nara's worst kept secrets, Lamp Bar is an elegant establishment run by Michito Kaneko, a Nara native and winner of the prestigious 2015 World Class Bartender of the Year Award. For those seeking the most creative cocktails in Nara – or anywhere else – a visit here is a must. Slightly hidden away, it takes some effort to find, but once inside visitors are treated to a magical world separate from the outside. There are many secrets hidden in plain sight and one evening here won't be enough to take in the intricate design details throughout the bar. Kaneko has found ways to weave his own personal story into the bar, including through the ceramic cups and plates (they were made by his parents, who are seasoned potters.) Lamp Bar has no menu but instead relies on the expertise of its bartenders to find a cocktail that suits their guests' tastes. Simply state a preferred ingredient or a flavor element and they will make suggestions accordingly. The bar makes its own syrups, infusions and spice mixes, so there is almost always a unique twist to even the most traditional cocktails.

**Note:** Lamp Bar does not serve wine, sake or shochu. Imported beer is available, but there is nothing on tap. The bar is best enjoyed alone or in small groups of maximum three to four people. Please pay for your group together.



## LAMP BAR Unique Drinks in a Sophisticated Setting







### Dine on Yoshino Specialty Kuzukiri While Enjoying a Panoramic Mountain View

One of Yoshino's biggest claims to fame – apart from washi [p44-45] and beautiful cherry blossoms [p84-85] – is its kuzu (Japanese arrowroot) sweets kuzukiri and kuzumochi. Yoshino kuzu roots are harvested in the middle of winter when they are most nutritious, then ground to make a powdered starch. This is used either as a thickener in Japanese sweets and savory dishes or to make kuzukiri noodles – one of Yoshino Kuzu Yasokichi's specialties. Kuzukiri is a translucent jelly-like noodle dish usually paired with kuromitsu (a dark sugar syrup) and served with black tea, coffee or matcha. The noodles themselves are mostly flavorless but have an appealing texture and numerous reported health benefits. Visitors can buy kuzu products to take home as souvenirs but it would be a waste not to try this specialty on site. Every dish is made to order to ensure the kuzu's consistency is at its best. Take a seat at the store's stylish café space to enjoy a panoramic view of the mountains from the wooden terrace – especially recommended in Yoshino's colorful spring and fall seasons.

#### Top Tip:

If you're looking for a more substantial meal, nearby **Hanayama Yamamoto** offers casual lunch sets for a reasonable price.  
[87yama.sakura.ne.jp](http://87yama.sakura.ne.jp)

#### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Kuzukiri sets from ¥850

**Yoshino Kuzu Yasokichi**  
561-1 Yoshinoyama,  
Yoshino-cho, Yoshino-gun

**Opening Hours:**  
10am-5pm  
Closed Wed

**Website:**  
[www.yoshinokuzu.co.jp](http://www.yoshinokuzu.co.jp)

### Essential Info:

#### How Much:

Light meals from ¥800

#### Tofu Chaya Hayashi

551 Yoshinoyama,  
Yoshino-cho, Yoshino-gun

#### Opening Hours:

9am-4pm  
Closed Tue-Wed  
Open everyday Apr & Nov

#### Website:

[yoshinoyama-tofu.jp](http://yoshinoyama-tofu.jp)

### Top Tip:

Fancy a hot spring dip with an amazing view? **Yumoto Hounoya** opens its baths to non-staying guests for ¥1,000 in the afternoons. [hounoya.gr.jp/eng/index.php](http://hounoya.gr.jp/eng/index.php)

### Taste One-of-a-Kind Tofu in the Yoshino Mountains

Run by third generation tofu makers at Hayashi Tofu Shop, Tofu Chaya Hayashi is a chic restaurant serving a selection of modern and traditional tofu-related dishes. Every day, employees at the shop down the road get up early to make tofu from scratch, using only the finest domestic ingredients. These ingredients include ice-cold water from the Yoshino mountains, high quality soybeans and salt from a variety of domestic sources. They also insist on a high percentage of soymilk in their tofu, making it extra creamy and rich. For those looking to convince themselves – or others – that good tofu is in a league of its own, Tofu Chaya Hayashi is the place to do it. Try anything from smooth tofu ramen and succulent tofu burgers to soy milk soft-serve ice cream and tofu donuts. Though many dishes are generally vegetarian-friendly, vegetarian and vegan diners should be aware that they may be prepared with a fish-based stock. English menus are available. Note that the restaurant closes at 4pm. Those interested in taking a tour to see how tofu is made can do so at the Hayashi Tofu Shop located up the hill from the restaurant, however, reservations are required at least one week in advance.



## TOFU CHAYA HAYASHI A Healthy Treat Made Every Day





## CAFE KOTODAMA

### Seasonal Delicacies on a Plate



### A former sake brewery transformed into a postmodern café

Sourcing local ingredients from farms and stores around Nara, Cafe Kotodama has become one of the most popular cafés in the city. Although it has only one dish on the menu – the lunch plate – the meal is a perfect example of kaiseki (traditional Japanese multicourse cuisine) and includes seven seasonal items, tea or coffee, and dessert, with the ingredients changing every two weeks. Constantly adapting to the changing seasons and paying attention to the importance of balance in a kaiseki meal, the owners take time to plan and create beautiful dishes for visitors. For those wanting to try the famous lunch plate, a reservation is advised to avoid waiting times. Teatime is a more relaxed affair offering freshly made desserts with interesting seasonal coffees such as the chestnut latte for autumn. If any of the dishes or condiments take your fancy, be sure to browse the souvenir store where you can buy some of the items served during lunch.

#### Top Tip:

Be sure to take a stroll down the street in which the café sits. It's a wonderful jump back in time with some buildings dating back over 200 years and retaining their original façades.

#### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Lunch Plate ¥1,650

**Cafe Kotodama**  
1223 Oka, Asuka-mura,  
Takaichi-gun

**Opening Hours:**  
Weekdays: 10am-5pm  
Sat, Sun & holidays: 10am-6pm  
Closed Tue & the 3rd Wed of the month

**Website:**  
[cafe-kotodama.com](http://cafe-kotodama.com)

### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Meals from ¥1,380

**Natural Café Kururu**  
2F A-B Inoue Bldg,  
5-1 Higashimuki-minami-  
machi, Nara City

**Opening Hours:**  
9am-9:30pm

**Website:**  
[nl-kururu.com](http://nl-kururu.com)

### Top Tip:

All menu items are available for takeout. If weather permits, order your meal to-go to enjoy it in the great outdoors.

### Experience a Holistic Approach to Food and Life

Natural Café Kururu's owner has devoted almost 20 years to studying the science of holistic healthy living. With a focus on a total therapy experience by creating harmony between the trinity of mind, body and spirit, this café and studio space serves up more than "just" food. Kururu works closely with local farms and owns a plot of land in nearby Katsuragi city for growing seasonal vegetables. Each item on the menu was created through extensive research to make sure it is vegan, vegetarian, allergy-free and follows food therapy guidelines. Those with allergies – food and otherwise – can have peace of mind when dining here. Not only can Natural Café Kururu cater to a variety of dietary requirements, they can also offer counseling on how to deal with sensitivities in daily life. One of the café's unique offerings is a made-to-order herbal tea that takes individual customers' needs into account. One of the Kururu's most recent additions is the foot bath, made with Shigaraki-ware – enjoy a light meal while soothing tired and aching feet. The studio space offers yoga classes and health-oriented workshops. (See the website for more info on select classes.)

## NATURAL CAFE KURURU

Vegan- and Vegetarian-friendly Fare





## SHAMOJI AT OUDA ONSEN AKINONOYU A Local Haunt Worth the Trip



### Farmhouse Restaurant in a Secluded Japanese Cultural Hub

Shamoji is located within a hot spring resort called Ouda Onsen Akinonoyu in the middle of the Uda countryside. Here you'll find a cultural community hub complete with hot spring baths, open green spaces for picnics and games, a barbecue zone and the farmhouse restaurant Shamoji. Take a dip before tucking into farm-to-table meals with lavish servings of seasonal vegetables from Yamato Highland farms. The menu features a selection of homemade fare including chicken nanban, a delicious fried chicken dish smothered in a sweet viscous sauce using kuzu and topped with a tangy tartar sauce. During summer, tables at Akinonoyu's barbecue zone are available for rent and offer all the essential components including meal sets featuring various cuts of meat and vegetables. All you need to bring is yourself and a few refreshments to enjoy a taste of Nara's peaceful countryside. This is a slice of authentic Japanese countryside living and the perfect chance for learners of Japanese to flex their language skills with the locals.

#### Top Tip:

A four-minute drive or a 20-minute walk away from the resort is **Matabeezakura**, a giant weeping cherry tree estimated to be 300 years old. There is a local cherry blossom festival in early to mid-April when it blooms.

#### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Prices vary

**Ouda Onsen Akinonoyu**  
250-2 Oudahirou, Uda City,  
Uda-gun

**Website:**  
[akinonoyu.com](http://akinonoyu.com)

### Essential Info:

#### How Much:

Lunch courses from ¥3,500  
Dinner courses from ¥6,000

#### Gojo Genbei

2-5-17 Honmachi,  
Gojo City

#### Opening Hours:

Lunch  
1st seating 11am-12:30pm  
2nd seating 12:30-2pm  
Dinner  
5:30-8:30pm

Closed Tue

#### Website:

[genbei.info/english](http://genbei.info/english)

### Top Tip:

Stay the night at **Yanaseya**, which lies just across the road from Gojo Genbei. Guests rent a whole house for the night and can choose between a restored machiya house and a converted traditional storehouse. More info at [yanaseya.info/en](http://yanaseya.info/en)

### Dine in a 250-year-old Traditional House in Gojo's Old Town District

Gojo's Shinmachi area is lined with traditional houses and buildings, some dating as far back as the Edo period (1603-1868). The district covers a long stretch between Gojo and Yamato-Futami stations, making it the perfect place for a leisurely stroll. Several shops and cafés in preserved old houses line the street, including Gojo Genbei, a restaurant that creates delectable traditional Japanese dishes using local ingredients and served on lovingly crafted lacquerware. Genbei only offers course meals, and depending on the season, some menus can include as many as 50 kinds of vegetables. There is a completely vegetarian course menu and most dietary restrictions can be accommodated. Notify the restaurant in advance when booking to confirm whether they can adjust meals according to specific requirements. Dinner courses offer a decadent selection of locally sourced meat, including wild game and Yamato wagyu beef. Add a sake pairing menu to your meal to enjoy five specially selected sake types to perfectly match each dish and season.

**Note:** As seating is limited, reservations are recommended at least one day in advance. Booking earlier is even better.



## GOJO GENBEI Traditional Japanese Fare





## LE BENKEI

### Local Pride Combined with International Flair



### Dine on Luxurious French Cuisine in the Heart of a Samurai City

Named after a fearsome warrior monk, Musashi Benkei, who lived in the early 1100s in the Nara and Kyoto regions, restaurant Le Benkei takes inspiration from the legendary figure's most famous characteristics: being strong and fiercely loyal. Rather than physical strength, the restaurant boasts strong culinary skills, well-trained sommeliers and servers – all vital elements to create exceptional food. Le Benkei is also loyal to the region by cooperating with local farmers to grow succulent Yamato vegetables and fruits to provide the best seasonal offerings for each meal. The restaurant's wine cellar boasts more than 150 wines from around the world and their experienced sommeliers are certain to find the best fit for the occasion. For those looking for a more casual dining experience, there is a café on the premises that serves coffee and light meals. The on-site patisserie is the perfect spot for sweets to take away and enjoy later at your hotel.

**Note:** Dress code is smart casual. Please refrain from wearing casual attire such as tank tops, shorts and sandals. Men should wear jackets or suit coats for dinner. Reservations should be made at least one week in advance. Please notify of any dietary restrictions when booking.



#### Top Tip:

Nearby **Koriyama Castle** boasts a unique wall-building style and traces of footprints that are said to be those of Musashi Benkei himself.  
[yk-kankou.jp](http://yk-kankou.jp).

#### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Lunch from ¥4,500  
Dinner from ¥12,000  
*Consumption tax and 10% service charge not included.*

**Le Benkei**  
276-1 Kitakoriyama-cho  
Yamato Koriyama City

**Website:**  
[benkei.ne.jp](http://benkei.ne.jp)



*Culture*



### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Free admission

**Nigatsudo Temple**  
406-1 Zoshi-cho,  
Nara City

**Shunie Ritual**  
Mar 1-11 & 13, from 7pm  
Mar 12 from 7:30pm  
Mar 14 from 6:30pm

**Website:**  
[todayji.or.jp/contents/guidance/guidance6.html](http://todayji.or.jp/contents/guidance/guidance6.html)

### Top Tip:

Visit nearby **Hokke-do** (also known as **Sangatsudo**) to find awe-inspiring Buddhist statues typical of the Nara period. Entry fee ¥600

### Take in One of Nara's Most Spectacular Panoramic Views at Nigatsudo Hall

For a break from the crowds, head east from Nara's famed Great Buddha Hall up a winding path to reach Nigatsudo, one of the many amazing wooden structures on Todaiji's temple complex. The original structure was built in the 700s, but after a fire in 1667 it was rebuilt in 1669. Literally named "second month hall," Nigatsudo's name comes from the second lunar month, when its famous fire and water ceremony called Shunie takes place. The religious rite has run annually since 752, making it one of Japan's oldest recurring Buddhist events. The Otaimatsu ceremony is held at dusk every evening for two weeks from March 1 to 14. Nigatsudo comes to life as torchbearers carry huge flames around its grand balcony and light up the night sky. For those visiting in other seasons, fear not: the temple hall offers a breathtaking panoramic view of Nara city year-round. Stop by in the early morning or just before sunset for the best experience. The hall itself is an architectural marvel with fine details waiting to be discovered. Before returning to the real world, walk down the covered steps on Nigatsudo's opposite side and stroll down the backstreets of traditional houses.

## NIGATSUDO A Spiritual Place Away from the Crowds





### Experience a Tea Ceremony in a 200-year-old Teahouse

Opened in 2013 with a desire to share traditional Japanese culture, owner Kiyoko Gamo welcomes guests from all over the world to Taiseian, a more than 200-year-old teahouse located on her property. A Buddhist priest known as Dai-sozu Kakken originally constructed the teahouse in 1812 on the grounds of nearby Horyuji temple, but it was moved to its current location years later. Now it serves as a serendipitous experience for some travelers who discover it on their way to Horyuji, offering respite and a break from their quest. Others prefer to make a reservation – recommended for some of the more involved experiences due to the preparation involved – to ensure their teatime is uninterrupted. There are various courses available, ranging from a simple matcha tea and sweet set that can be enjoyed with ease to full kimono-clad experiences where guests learn everything from how to drink tea correctly to opening and closing fusuma sliding doors with ease. Most importantly, Gamo explains in great detail not only how things are done but also why – something essential to understanding Japan's historic tradition of tea ceremony. Chairs are available for those who find sitting on tatami floors difficult.

#### Top Tip:

Taiseian's tea instructor is also a lauded fortuneteller so those interested can get a reading done (extra fee required).

#### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Tea sets from ¥1,200  
Experiences from ¥2,200

**Taiseian Tea Ceremony**  
2-1-6 Horyuji, Ikaruga-cho,  
Ikoma-gun

**Opening hours:**  
10am-5pm

**Website:**  
[web1.kcn.jp/taiseian/  
english.html](http://web1.kcn.jp/taiseian/english.html)



### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Experiences start at ¥3,500

**Suikaen Tanimura Yasaburo**  
5725 Takayamacho,  
Ikoma City

**Website:**  
[yasaburo.com](http://yasaburo.com)

### Top Tip:

Nearby **Takayama Bamboo Garden** boasts about 50 different types of bamboo and offers matcha tea experiences on weekends.  
[tikurinen.jp](http://tikurinen.jp)

### Immerse Yourself in Japan's Ancient Tea Culture in the Heart of Takayama

The Takayama area produces 90 percent of Japan's domestic tea whisks making it an indispensable location for green tea lovers. Suikaen Tanimura Yasaburo is one of approximately 20 places that makes these whisks by hand. Here, guests can immerse themselves in traditional tea culture through a variety of experiences for both young and old. Make a bamboo tea whisk or tea scoop to take home as a souvenir, or join a session to watch the professionals demonstrate their work. A popular experience for families is the parent and child whisk-making experience where some teamwork is required (these generally take place during summer and winter school holidays). Suikaen also holds chaji events – a traditional form of tea ceremony that involves a multi-course meal with matcha tea as the culmination of the experience – with full explanations of correct procedure throughout the process. Other options include light meals and more basic tea ceremonies. While here, be sure to explore the two-story gallery filled with unique tea bowls and other tea-related implements for sale. Reserve via the website. Most experiences are open to groups of five people or more, with some exceptions.



## SUIKAEN TANIMURA YASABURO An In-depth Tea Experience



## TAIMADERA A Temple Steeped in Legend



### Ancient Artworks and Architecture from 1,300 Years Ago

One of Japan's oldest Buddhist temples, Taimadera's history dates back more than 1,400 years and is home to some of Japan's most significant national treasures. It is the only temple in the nation that has its two original pagodas intact, both of which were constructed in the mid-700s. It also houses Japan's oldest clay Buddhist statue, the Miroku Bosatsu, which has remained intact for more than 1,300 years. The Taima mandala is an elaborately embroidered mandala made in 763 using lotus thread. It is mentioned in the legend of Princess Chujo, a tale about a woman who sought refuge at Taimadera in the late 700s. It is said she wove the four-meter-squared mandala in one night. While that part of story may be exaggerated, Princess Chujo's role as an important figure for Buddhist women is not. She became a nun at age 17 and found enlightenment before her death at 29. Taimadera holds the Nerikuyo festival on April 14 every year to celebrate the anniversary of her death. Outside of remarkable architectural structures and national treasures, the temple's Pure Land garden offers a stunning display of natural beauty throughout the year.



#### Top Tip:

**Sekkoji temple** on the north side of Taimadera temple grounds has a spectacular garden with over 400 different peony varieties.

#### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
¥500

**Taimadera temple**  
1263 Taima, Katsuragi City

**Website:**  
[taimadera.or.jp/en/](http://taimadera.or.jp/en/)



### Essential Info:

#### How Much:

Experiences from ¥3,500  
Paper from ¥300 per sheet

**Fukunishi Washi Honpo**  
218-1 Kubogaito,  
Yoshino-cho, Yoshino-gun

#### Website:

[fukunishiwashihonpo.com](http://fukunishiwashihonpo.com)

### Top Tip:

While in the area, take time to visit the many temples and shrines dotted along the road.

### Make Your Own Washi Paper Using a Thousand-Year-Old Method

Deep in the Yoshino mountains, the 1,300-year-old tradition of hand-making washi paper continues to this day. By using a combination of fresh mountain water and white clay and paper mulberry, the washi in this region is both elastic and strong. Some even say it is strong enough to last 1,000 years! Fukunishi Washi Honpo, now its sixth generation, handcrafts paper using the same ancient techniques as its forefathers. It is a painstakingly long process that means the craftsmen can only produce 200 sheets in one day. However, the washi paper's high quality has made Fukunishi Washi Honpo the official supplier to the Imperial Household Agency as well as the British Library and the Smithsonian. Visitors who make a reservation in advance can create their own set of eight washi paper postcards by hand under the guidance of one of the company's skilled craftspeople. Design unique cards using natural dyes and dried flowers to add a personal touch. Children aged six and up are permitted to join this experience. Reservations required, ideally at least a week in advance via email: [fukutora@kcn.jp](mailto:fukutora@kcn.jp)



## FUKUNISHI WASHI HONPO Purveyor of Paper to World-renowned Museums



## DOROGAWA ONSEN VILLAGE

### Trek the Hills and Soak in Hot Springs



### Hike the Trails and Search for Hidden Secrets in this Mountain Escape

Tucked away in the folds of a massive mountain range, Dorogawa Onsen Village has served as a safe passage and rest spot for traveling mountain ascetics and travelers for generations. Secluded and traditional, the culture and practices of this mountain town remain untouched by modern advances and sensibilities. There are numerous hiking trails to try, some of them leading to awe-inspiring natural phenomena including the Menfudo Limestone Cave [p80-81], the peaks of Mt Inamuragadake, and Mitarai Valley [p88-89]. The village is also surrounded by several shrines and temples buried deep within the hills including Hahakodo and the Omnesanji, both of which can be seen on the approximately three-hour trail up to the peak of Mt Sanjogatake (Mt Omine). For those who prefer a more leisurely nature walk, head for Ryusenji temple, which is popular thanks to its easy access, rich history and stunning views from the temple grounds. Literally translated as Dragon Shrine, it is awash with dragon and snake statues as well as a sacred waterfall.

#### Top Tip:

This is a true off-the-beaten-path experience and requires some effort to reach by public transportation, so renting a car may be your best bet. Booking a hotel before arrival is also recommended.

#### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Hotel prices and temple admission fees vary

**Dorogawa Hot Spring**  
13-1 Dorogawa, Tenkawamura, Yoshino-gun

**Website:**  
[visitnara.jp/destinations/area/dorogawa](http://visitnara.jp/destinations/area/dorogawa)



### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Free

**Kitora Tumulus Mural  
Experiential Museum  
Shijin no Yakata**  
67 Abeyama, Asuka-mura,  
Takaichi-gun

**Website:**  
[asuka-park.go.jp/en/  
area/kitora/midokoro/  
#midokoro01](https://asuka-park.go.jp/en/area/kitora/midokoro/#midokoro01)

### Top Tip:

Rent a bicycle at one of several locations near **Asuka Station** to get here and to other sights in the city with ease.

For ¥500 you can also rent an interactive map and translator gadget at tourist information center **Asukabito-no-Yakata** near the station.

### Jump Back in Time and Learn About Mysterious Burial Mounds

The Kitora Tumulus is an ancient burial mound dating from sometime between the 7th and 8th centuries. Situated in what used to be a necropolis for Nara's imperial family and nobles, the tomb is thought to have interred an aristocratic male in his fifties or sixties. The Kitora Tumulus was lavishly decorated with Chinese zodiac signs, a culture brought over from China. Detailed depictions of the Four Divine Creatures (Black Tortoise of the North, Vermilion Bird of the South, Azure Dragon of the East, White Tiger of the West) who rule the four directions of heaven are painted on the four walls of the tomb, each indicating its respective cardinal direction. A fusion of zodiac reading, star charts and ancient history, the Center for Preservation of Kitora Tumulus Mural Paintings is a dream destination for stargazers and history buffs alike. Guidebooks are available in English, Italian, Chinese, French and Korean, and the center has free wi-fi that's used in tandem with the QR system which visitors can use to receive explanations of the exhibition pieces in English and other languages.







Art



# NARA NATIONAL MUSEUM

## A Leading Buddhist Art Museum



### Expansive complex filled with Buddhist artifacts and knowledge

Nara National Museum houses Japan's largest collection of Buddhist statues as well as an extensive selection of historic artifacts, texts and artworks. The complex consists of four museum buildings as well as an Edo period (1603-1868) teahouse. The Hassoan Teahouse is one of Nara's three most famous teahouses and was relocated here from Kohfukuji temple in 1892.

Buddhist art on display includes works from as far back as the Asuka period (538-710) and includes several national treasures, such as a Heian period (794-1185) copy of the *Nihon Shoki* (Chronicles of Japan), Japan's second oldest classical history book. Visitors will also find writings by famous Buddhist priests Saicho (766-822) and Kukai (774-835), as well as rare mandalas, sutras, calligraphy and more from temples across Nara.

The Buddhist Art Library is open to the public on Wednesdays and Fridays and holds over 81,240 Buddhism-related books as well as thousands of journals, catalogs and photographs for perusal. Those in need of a break can take a seat at the museum's restaurant and café Half Time, which serves a variety of light meals, pancakes and beverages.



### Top Tip:

Nara National Museum is open until 8pm on Fridays and Saturdays. On the 22nd of every month, married couples get a 50 percent discount on the entry fee, and on November 22 they can enter for free.

### Essential Info:

#### How Much:

Adults ¥700,  
College students ¥350,  
Children free

#### Nara National Museum

50 Noborioji-cho  
Nara City

#### Opening Hours:

9:30am-5pm  
Closed on Mondays

#### Website:

[narahaku.go.jp/english](http://narahaku.go.jp/english)

### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
¥500

**Irie Taikichi Memorial  
Museum of Photography**  
Nara City  
600-1 Takabatake-cho,  
Nara City

**Website:**  
[irietaikichi.jp](http://irietaikichi.jp)

### Top Tip:

Visit **Irie's former residence** off Todaiji's main approach where he formed his ideas and did most of his photo processing. [kyukyo.irietaikichi.jp/about.html](http://kyukyo.irietaikichi.jp/about.html)

### Museum Devoted to One of Nara's Most Important Photographers

Nara-born photographer Taikichi Irie (1905-1992) spent half a century photographing Nara's scenery and Buddhist treasures. He first picked up a camera as a teenager and set up his own photography business in Osaka, predominantly taking product and advertising images for corporate clients. After the war, he returned to his native home of Nara and spent most of his time taking photos of the prefecture's treasures – both natural and manmade. Irie's work preserves a traditional Japan that in many cases no longer exists except through his fascinating and sometimes haunting photographs. His images express the essence of Nara and the significance the Silk Road had to the region's development and culture. Before his death he donated his entire collection of over 80,000 photographs to the city of Nara.

The museum, designed by Kisho Kurokawa, is a work of art in itself. Its simple structure is in harmony with its traditional surroundings and features some surprising natural elements. Exhibitions featuring Irie's work change regularly, usually following a theme of his work – landscapes of Nara-Yamatoji, Buddhist statues, traditional events, Bunraku theater, and more. The museum has close ties to its local community and strives to promote young promising photographers. It also offers workshops and conducts research on Nara's history through photographs.



## IRIE TAIKICHI MEMORIAL MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY NARA CITY





## NETWORK GALLERY NAWRAP Locally Made Souvenirs and Coffee



### Traditional Techniques Infused with a Modern Touch

For gifts with a local touch, Network Gallery Nawrap has an extensive collection of carefully crafted stationery and colorful household accessories that are sure to delight friends and family back home – and as a bonus, take up limited space in your suitcase. This shop and café displays one of Nara city's most famous exports – woven cloth in a variety of traditional and modern designs, inspired by Nara Prefecture's distinctive culture and traditions. Originally famed for its mosquito net production, Nara's weaving industry saw another use for its traditional techniques and now manufactures dishcloths and towels using natural fibers that are highly absorbent, durable and exceedingly soft. Many products are eco-friendly, using infusion of persimmon or binchotan (Japanese oak charcoal), which have natural antibacterial and anti-odor properties and use no chemicals or chemical dyes. Stationery lovers will appreciate the impressive selection of high quality cloth-covered notebooks and adjustable book jackets that are inspired by traditional fusuma sliding doors. The shop's café space at the back serves coffee, tea and seasonal juices, perfect for a short break from sightseeing.



#### Top Tip:

Take time to stroll around the **Naramachi** area and admire the traditional lattice doors and windows of the historic houses clustered here.

#### Essential Info:

**Network Gallery Nawrap**  
5 Komyoin-cho,  
Nara City

**Opening Hours:**  
10am-7pm

**Website:**  
[naramachi.nawrap.com](http://naramachi.nawrap.com)

*Essential Info:*

**How Much:**  
Lunch sets start at ¥1,000

**Opening Hours:**  
11:30am-5pm  
Closed Mon

**Shinryoku Cafe / Fuji Gallery**  
1-9-33 Horyuji, Ikaruga-cho,  
Ikoma-gun

**Website:**  
[horyuji-gallery.com](http://horyuji-gallery.com)

*Top Tip:*

For an immersive cultural experience, drop by **Taiseian** [p38-39] for a traditional matcha tea ceremony experience either before or after your visit.

**Enjoy Art and Coffee with a Picturesque Garden Backdrop**

One of famed poet Masaoka Shiki's (1867-1902) most well-known haiku poems – one every elementary school child in Japan learns by heart – features Horyuji temple. The temple complex was founded in 607 and houses some of the oldest wooden buildings in the world. Perhaps its history, even more than a hundred years ago, inspired the verse "Kaki kueba, kane ga narunari, Horyuji" ("As I eat a persimmon, the bell starts ringing, at Horyuji temple").

While Shinryoku Cafe / Fuji Gallery is not where Shiki penned those words, its surroundings may inspire similar creative efforts. This gallery and café is tucked away on a street parallel to Horyuji temple's main approach and boasts a beautiful garden with a small deck to sit on when the weather allows. The gallery is situated behind the café and exhibits both local and international artists regularly. In autumn, the trees on the property turn a brilliant red, creating a striking contrast between nature's brilliant art outside and the manmade creations inside. For those who are peckish, the café offers reasonable lunch sets and freshly ground coffee.





## MUROU ART FOREST

### Modern Art in Open Spaces



### Open-air Art Museum in the Heart of the Nara Countryside

Take a 20-minute walk uphill from Murouji temple [p92-93] through the deep forests of Murou village to find an extraordinary art project unlike any other in Japan. This unique art space began with local sculptor Bukichi Inoue promoting the idea of an art project to promote community development. In 1998, Israeli sculptor Dani Karavan visited Murou for the first time and after more than a dozen visits spanning more than a decade, a project connecting him with a tiny countryside village in Nara forever was solidified. Karavan is best known for his massive outdoor sculptures that integrate with the nature surrounding them. Starting with just one sculpture ("Tower of the Sun, the Gate"), he continued creating until the Murou Art Forest was dotted with more than 10 design elements, which you can experience through all the senses. One of the most famous artworks is the Spiral Watercourse, a spiraling waterway that reminds us of a coiled snake, with an olive tree at the end. Visitors are welcome to bring their own lunchboxes and enjoy a picnic in the open air; there are several stair-like benches that offer a view of the lake for this purpose.



#### Top Tip:

Keen photographers may want to explore the nearby 1,740m-long **Murou Tunnel**, which is accessible to pedestrians. A 10m-high waterfall named **Nisha** flows out from the rock on the north side.

#### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Adults ¥410,  
Teenagers ¥200,  
Children free

**Murou Art Forest**  
181 Murou, Uda City,  
Uda-gun

Open Mon, Wed-Sun,  
closed Tue  
10am-5pm (Apr-Oct)  
10am-4pm (Nov-Dec, Mar)  
Closed Dec 29 to end of Feb

**Website:**  
[www.city.uda.nara.jp/  
sanzyoukouen/concept](http://www.city.uda.nara.jp/sanzyoukouen/concept)



*Essential Info:*

**How Much:**

Free admission  
Separate admission fee for special exhibitions

**Nara Prefecture Complex of Man'yo Culture**

10 Asuka, Asuka-mura, Takaichi-gun

Closed on Mon except public holidays (closed Tue if Mon is a public holiday), year-end & New Year holidays

**Website:**

[manyo.jp](http://manyo.jp)

*Top Tip:*

Not too far from here is **Kameishi**, a mysterious rock shaped like a turtle. The rock currently faces southwest, but legend says that if the rock turns to face the west, the Yamato Basin (in northwest Nara prefecture) will turn to mud.

**A Museum Dedicated to the Arts and Culture Surrounding the Oldest Collection of Japanese Poetry**

For those interested in the famous 8th-century anthology of Japanese waka poetry titled *Man'yōshū* (which translates literally to Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves), the Nara Prefecture Complex of Man'yo Culture will make you feel like you've stepped into the pages. This multi-purpose event space includes a museum, concert halls and a library and provides an in-depth look at the history and culture of the Asuka period, an era that is frequently referenced in the anthology. A life-size diorama depicts the people and the everyday life during that time, and visitors can freely walk around and photograph this atmospheric area of the museum. The timeslip area is informative and fun for all ages with interactive installations, a short anime that's entertaining enough to keep the attention of adults and children alike, and various other attractions. The museum seeks to present historical information in simple, accessible ways and offers English guides and explanations. Present a foreign passport at the reception desk to enter the museum for free.





# Shopping





## HIGASHIMUKI SHOPPING MALL A Historic Shopping Arcade



### A One-Stop Shop for Almost Anything

A mix of chain stores and long-established local shops, Higashimuki Shopping Mall is one of Nara city's most famous locations. It is packed to the brim with souvenir shops, restaurants, pharmacies and antiquaries. Its convenient position between Kintetsu Nara Station and two of Nara's most famous sights – Nara Park and Kohfukuji temple – makes it an excellent stopping point to regroup and refresh. The mall's proximity to the temple is no coincidence – Kohfukuji once wielded a lot of power. Legend has it that, out of respect for the temple, traders built their shops to the west of it, facing east, so that their backs were not turned on the building. This is where the name Higashimuki comes from: it literally means "eastward facing."

This isn't the mall's only surprising historic connection. Visitors to its north side will find a fountain with a statue depicting Gyoki Bosatsu, a monk from the Nara period (710-794). At that time, preaching Buddhist teachings was forbidden but Gyoki persisted and not only preached but also built several temples. Eventually times changed and Emperor Shomu gave him the title Daisojo (Buddhist priest of the highest order) and put him in charge of constructing the great Buddha statue at Todaiji temple, which draws millions of visitors even today.



#### Top Tip:

See if you can find the kindergarten on the street's east side – the school is inside a stunning traditional structure. It was started 1930 by American missionary Miss Margaret Hester and belongs to the Nara Episcopal Church.

#### Essential Info:

**Higashimuki Shopping Mall**  
15 Higashimuki-nakamachi  
Nara City

**Website:**  
[higashimuki.jp/  
index\\_en.html](http://higashimuki.jp/index_en.html)



### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Free

**Nara Craft Museum**  
1-1 Azemame-cho  
Nara City

Open daily 10am-6pm

**Website:**  
[azemame.web.fc2.com](http://azemame.web.fc2.com)

### Top Tip:

**The annual craft festival** is held in late October to early November and gives visitors an opportunity to meet craftspeople and artists and learn about their craft firsthand through experiences.  
[azemame.web.fc2.com/festival.html](http://azemame.web.fc2.com/festival.html)

### Discover Ancient Crafts Kept Alive by Modern Artists

For an introduction to Nara's many ancient crafts, head to the Nara Craft Museum. This small but informative facility has detailed explanations on the significance of the Silk Road on Nara's handicrafts and the skills that were later disseminated across Japan. The first floor showcases some of the region's many crafts including calligraphy brushes, ink, lacquerware, tea whisks, wooden Buddhist sculptures and masks, hand-woven hemp cloth and glass art. The museum has a strong community presence and cooperates with artists, designers and craftspeople. They also display items for sale by local artists in the gallery area, offering visitors a unique chance to discover quality Nara craftsmanship and to purchase some in the same location. A gift shop towards the back of the building also has many unique handcrafted souvenirs for sale. The second floor has a small gallery space and three rooms used for workshops and research projects. Visitors can book experiences to try a variety of traditional crafts. These are offered year-round and can accommodate about five to 30 people. However, having an accompanying interpreter is advised, as some of the craftspeople may not speak English well enough to instruct.



## NARA CRAFT MUSEUM Ancient Traditional Crafts



## TANGO TANIMURA

Buy Directly from a Craftsman



### Witness the 500-year-old Secret Art of Tea Whisk Crafting

Craftsmen have been making bamboo tea whisks – known as chasen – for over 500 years in Nara's Takayama area. For centuries it was a secretive task. Craftsmen ensured their process would not be copied by working late into the night when prying eyes could not easily see them at work. Out of 13 original tea whisk-making families, only three remain. Tango Tanimura, the 20th generation head of the Tanimura family, inherited the skills from his father and continues this ancient tradition to this day. As a chasen master, he not only dedicates his time to working on the whisks, but also to the art of tea.

Each whisk is finely crafted by hand, and carved from a single piece of bamboo. It is a painstakingly intricate process that creates unrivaled whisks that are supple yet strong. Tanimura is open about his craft and visitors are welcome to his studio to witness him at work and to purchase wares directly from him. However, reservations are recommended as he often travels for work. Send an email ideally 10 days in advance of arrival to make sure he is available. Tanimura understands some English, but those seeking detailed explanations should bring an interpreter.



#### Top Tip:

Tango Tanimura also offers experience tours, where participants can make a bamboo tea whisk with his guidance, as well as learn how to make matcha tea. The price varies depending on the number of participants, which can range from three to 20 members. Children aged 10 and under are not permitted.

#### Essential Info:

**Tango Tanimura**  
5964 Takayama-cho  
Ikoma City

**Email:**  
[tango.tanimura@gmail.com](mailto:tango.tanimura@gmail.com)

**Website:**  
[tango-tanimura.com/en](http://tango-tanimura.com/en)



### Essential Info:

**Opening Hours:**  
9am-4:30pm  
Closed Tuesdays

**Gallery Hasekura**  
880 Hase  
Sakurai City

**Website:**  
[web1.kcn.jp/hasekura/hasekura.business.site](http://web1.kcn.jp/hasekura/hasekura.business.site)

### Top Tip:

**Hasedera temple** is a massive temple complex on the side of a mountain overlooking the Hase river and is one of the stops on the **Nara-Yamato Four Temple Pilgrimage** (see Junrei p92-93).  
[hasedera.or.jp/free/?id=345](http://hasedera.or.jp/free/?id=345)

### Eco-minded Art in Hase

Walk down the well-trodden main approach to Hasedera [p92-93] to find a unique space among all the souvenir shops and cafés. Here you'll find one-of-a-kind wooden crafts that are not only beautiful and practical but also eco-friendly. The owner and sole artist at work is Tadao Odate, who quit a high-powered career as an award-winning TV commercial director after a life-changing experience while filming a commercial on Yakushima Island. This UNESCO World Heritage Site is home to a primeval forest of cedar trees, many of which are estimated to be over 1,000 years old. Confronted with the realization of how short our human lives are so short compared with the lifespan of these magnificent trees and yet we still manage to destroy so much of nature, Odate did some soul searching to find his new place in the world. He soon began crafting items such as lamps, clocks and furniture out of reclaimed wood, old pillars and the like. Using his imagination, he creates stories and makes things he believes are useful or interesting, which means each item he crafts is unique in form and concept. He hopes to make things "that make people kinder" and hopefully help them live a more environmentally conscious life.



## GALLERY HASEKURA Delightful Unique Creations Reusing Old Wood



## FUJII RISABURO YAKUBO A Long-lasting Tradition Stays Alive



### An Ancient Apothecary Still Selling Traditional Medicine for Monks

Imagine you're a practitioner of the Shugendo religion in the seventh century headed for a mountain pilgrimage. A long and arduous journey lies ahead of you. What do you want to make sure you've got on hand for the trek? Medicine for digestive ailments, of course. Fujii Risaburo Yakubo is the traditional medicine shop in Yoshino that monks would frequent for this very purpose. With a history spanning more than 1,300 years, the store still sells its digestion cures (which are incidentally also good for hangovers), although the recipes have evolved somewhat along with the development of science and new techniques. What hasn't changed is the shop's historic front and the staff's dedication to their clientele. The store's mascot, a three-legged frog, is said to bring good health and fortune to those who cross its path. The owners are extremely friendly and allow for photos to be taken of the frogs and the store – a short tour may even be on the table if you're lucky. Fujii Risaburo Yakubo has also teamed up with a candy store to create a delicious sweet using the flavors of their medicine – don't worry, it doesn't contain any medicine; it's merely for fun.



#### Top Tip:

From mid-June to early July the Hydrangea Festival brings Yoshinoyama to life with colorful flowers and a warm festival atmosphere. Fujii Risaburo Yakubo is also a stone's throw away from **Kinpusenji** (p121), one of the most important temples in Shugendo, a religion based on mountain worship.

#### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Medicine or candy starts from around ¥500

**Fujii Risaburo Yakubo**  
2413 Yoshinoyama,  
Yoshino-cho, Yoshino-gun

**Opening Hours:**  
9am-5pm daily

**Website:**  
[visitnara.jp/venues/S01246](http://visitnara.jp/venues/S01246)





*Nature &  
Outdoors*



### Essential Info:

**How much:**  
Adults ¥1,200  
Children ¥300

**Isuien Garden**  
74 Suimon-cho, Nara City

**Opening Hours:**  
9:30am-4:30pm

Closed Tue

**Website:**  
[isuien.or.jp/en/](http://isuien.or.jp/en/)

### Top Tip:

Also located inside the garden, Neiraku Museum of Art boasts a collection of over 2,000 objets d'art that are exhibited in cycles. Items include ancient Chinese seals, Korean ceramics and more.

### Stroll Through Two Traditional Landscapes from Different Eras

Despite its proximity to the bustling crowds of Todaiji and Kohfukuji temples, this strolling garden is a place of calm and serenity. This unique space is designed in two styles from two different eras — the Edo (1603-1868) and the Meiji periods (1868-1912) — making the contrasts between the front garden (Edo period) and the back garden (Meiji period) distinctive. Explore the difference in influences, design elements and even plant selection in each garden to see how tastes changed with the times. The Sanshutei Tea House offers a view of the front garden and serves both tea and light meals. For a tea break facing the back garden, head to the Hyoshintei Tea House where you can take in the view through antique handcrafted glass windows.

**Note:** Because some of the paths have stepping stones, Isuien is not wheelchair accessible. No smoking or eating in the garden is permitted.

## ISUIEN GARDEN Two Gardens in One Place





## MENFUDO LIMESTONE CAVE Kansai's Largest Limestone Cave

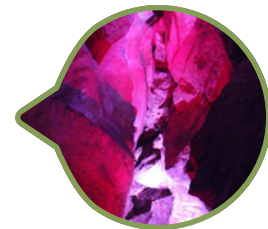


### Enter a Deep Cave High up in the Mountains

Hidden towards the edge of Nara prefecture, Menfudo Limestone Cave was discovered in 1933 and is considered the largest limestone cave in the Kansai region. It was added to UNESCO's World Heritage list under Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range along with Mt Omine and Mt Yoshino [p84-85] in 2004. To get to the cave mouth, head uphill either on foot (15 minutes) or via a quirky log-themed monorail (five minutes). The monorail offers a thrilling view on the way up and a sweeping panorama of the surrounding area at the observation deck at the upper station. To use it, simply press the intercom button and the train will arrive shortly. Pay the fare and the entrance fee for the cave at the top.

Multi-colored LED lights illuminate the inside of the cave, making it easy to explore the giant millennial-aged stalactites and stalagmites up close. The 280m-long cave maintains a cool eight degrees Celsius year-round and takes about 20 to 30 minutes to explore fully.

**Note:** Rental helmets are available for a small fee at the cave entrance.



### Top Tip:

For a place to stay in the area, check out either Dorogawa Onsen's **Kadojin** [p100-101] or **Misenkan** [p106-107] in Tenkawa village.

### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Adults ¥450, Children ¥200  
Monorail (round-trip):  
Adults ¥500, Children ¥300

**Menfudo Limestone Cave**  
673-89 Dorogawa,  
Tenkawa-mura,  
Yoshino-gun

### Opening Hours:

9am-5pm daily  
Closed irregularly  
(may depend on weather conditions) and over the New Year holidays

### Website:

[vill.tenkawa.nara.jp/tourism/spot/cavern](http://vill.tenkawa.nara.jp/tourism/spot/cavern)

### Essential Info:

**How Much:**

Adults ¥900  
Elementary school-aged  
children and up ¥450

**Takidani Hanashobu  
Garden**

348 Muroutakiya, Uda City,  
Uda-gun

**Opening hours:**

9am-6pm  
(Open until 9pm during  
firefly viewing season)

**Tel:**

0745-92-3187

**Website:**

[takidani.net](http://takidani.net)

### Top Tip:

Many visitors stop by  
**Murouji** or **Abe-Monjuin  
temples** (p92-93) on the  
same day as they visit the  
garden.

### A Treasure Trove of Experiences in Every Season

Starting out as an iris garden more than 35 years ago, Takidani Hanashobu Garden boasts an impressive 33,000 square meters of stunning natural beauty. The park's flowers start blooming in early April, when the weeping cherry blossoms that line the garden's edge envelop it in a delightful soft shade of pink. From then on the flowers bloom in quick succession – carpets of bright pink moss phlox appear in mid-to-late April, followed by soft purple and white clematis in early May. The high season begins in late May, when the irises bloom and they are closely followed by vibrant hydrangea. Toward the end of June fireflies take the stage and visitors can enter the garden after hours to witness these glowing bugs float in the evening sky. From late July to the end of September visitors can pick blueberries and make blueberry jam (reservations needed). During late autumn and winter, preparations for the next year's flowers are underway, but visitors with reservations can enjoy a delightful meal of botan nabe – a traditional wild boar hot pot – jam-packed with locally sourced ingredients from November to March, and a charcoal-grilled matsutake mushroom sukiyaki (hot pot) dish in September and October. Visitors during the park's flowering season have a range of dining options available, including a restaurant, a café and outdoor eating spaces for those with packed lunches, making it easy to spend a whole day here.

## TAKIDANI HANASHOBU GARDEN Flowers and Food Galore





## YOSHINOYAMA 30,000 Cherry Blossom Trees



### A Relaxing Retreat for Hot Springs, Cherry Blossoms and Cuisine

Mt Yoshino has been one of Japan's most famous cherry blossom spots for centuries. With 30,000 cherry trees scattered across the mountain, it's no surprise that this area is a huge draw every year around late March to mid-April. Even though weather conditions affect the flowers and it's not easy to predict exactly when they'll be in bloom, with so many trees spread across such a vast area there's a good chance of catching some in bloom during this period.

Mt Yoshino and its primary town Yoshino-cho have plenty more to offer in other seasons, too. The mountain turns a blazing bright red in fall, and the cool mountain water means that the sake made here is one of the best in region. Gourmets will appreciate the delicate flavors of Yoshino kuzu [p20-21] and tofu [p22-23] made on site. For those searching for a place to unwind, there are several traditional inns with hot springs, while adventurous souls may appreciate the many hiking trails around the mountain.



#### Top Tip:

Drop by in early October to catch the **Yoshinoyama Autumn Festival**, where a giant one-ton traditional Japanese taiko drum is hauled around to wish for a good harvest.  
[www.yoshinoyama-sakura.jp/english/events.htm](http://www.yoshinoyama-sakura.jp/english/events.htm)

#### Essential Info:

**Mt Yoshino  
Tourist Association**  
2430 Yoshinoyama,  
Yoshino-cho  
Yoshino-gun

**Website:**  
[yoshinoyama-sakura.jp/  
english](http://yoshinoyama-sakura.jp/english)



### Essential Info:

#### How Much:

Parking fee: ¥800/day

#### Soni Village

##### Tourist Association

495-1 Imai, Soni-mura,  
Uda-gun

#### Website:

[sonimura.com/en](http://sonimura.com/en)

### Top Tip:

#### Soni Kogen Farm Garden

is a 30-minute walk from the Soni Highland main parking lot and has a shop, restaurant and craft beer brewery.  
[sonimura.com/en/sightseeing/41](http://sonimura.com/en/sightseeing/41)

Also consider a dip in the outdoor hot springs at **Okame-no-yu Onsen**.  
[www.visitnara.jp/venues/A00731](http://www.visitnara.jp/venues/A00731)

### Nature Trails for Both Novice and Experienced Hikers

Soni Highland is a vast basin and plateau between the Kogo and Kuroso mountains. The area is a verdant wonderland of stunning views with mountain backdrops and iconic scenery. Best known for its stunning autumn vistas when the pampas grass turns a pale gold color, this is one of the few places in Japan where this ethereal grass – formerly vital for roof construction – can be seen growing wild. The Yama Akari festival from mid September to late November makes the most of its beauty by lighting up 200 lanterns along pathways on the plateau, creating a golden glow even at night. From early February to early March (timing varies), visitors can witness the annual controlled burn of the pampas grass, which creates an impressive fiery blaze across the fields.

There are several hiking routes that range from easy to challenging and can take from a few minutes to several hours. The tourist information office carries several recommended routes around the highland. Don't miss Okame-ike, a small wetland area near the main parking lot. Over 50 plant species make their home here and it is said to be one of the best spots to catch a Nara sunset.

**Note:** Hikers should come prepared with appropriate attire and supplies as the weather can change quickly. There is only one toilet facility, located in the lower parking lot.

## SONI HIGHLAND Stunning Natural Grasslands







## Walk Through Untouched Natural Scenery

There are few places in Japan so naturally blessed with pristine forests and cascading waterfalls that are still left mostly untouched. Mitarai Valley is one of the rare exceptions and it's in part thanks to its historic inaccessibility. These days it's primarily used by hikers keen on forest bathing – or, if they're brave, actual bathing in the emerald green waters in summer. Beautiful in every season, Mitarai Valley presents its most colorful side in autumn, when its vibrant foliage turns shades of vermillion, gold and rust.

One of the easiest ways to access the area is via the Tenkawa Village Tourist Office. Here you can get maps and advice on highlights along the way. From the office it's a 30 to 40-minute walk to the main trail, which follows the Tennokawa River. One of the area's highlights is where the three rivers Sanjogawa, Shirakurakawa and Kosegawa converge.



### Top Tip:

Reward your hiking efforts with a dip in a hot spring. The hike between Tenkawa Village Tourism Office and **Dorogawa Onsen Village** [p46-47] is a moderate 7.4km trek (approximately two hours) and there are many ryokan (traditional inns) with baths to choose from. While you'll need a reservation to use a ryokan's onsen, the **Dorogawa Onsen Center** is available without booking.

### Essential Info:

**Tenkawa Tourism Office**  
263-1 Kawai Tenkawa-mura,  
Yoshino-gun

**Website:**  
[vill.tenkawa.nara.jp/tourism/spot/mitarai](http://vill.tenkawa.nara.jp/tourism/spot/mitarai)



*Essential Info:*

**How Much:**  
Experiences from ¥5,000

**Evergreen Head Office**  
312 Hara-cho  
Gojo City

**Website:**  
[evaguri.com](http://evaguri.com)

*Top Tip:*

Heading here in winter?  
Evergreen also offers  
snowshoeing treks through  
the beautiful **Yoshino  
forests** from December to  
March.

**Take Your Nara Nature Experience  
to a New Level**

The Yoshino area [p84-85] in Nara, with its rocky terrain and fast-flowing streams, is the perfect spot for canyoning. Evergreen – an outdoor adventure specialist – offers small group tours for those looking to take a more hands-on approach to their nature experience. Best known for their canyoning tours, Evergreen's experienced guides will take you cascading down water chutes, climbing up rocky cliffs and splashing around in deep pools of crystal clear water.

The company also offers packrafting trips, where participants carry their own compact inflatable rafts through the forest before navigating the wild waters in one-man-sized rafts. For those who prefer a more family-oriented adventure, rafting tours for groups are also available. Children aged four and up can join.

If splashing about isn't your thing, there are trekking tours and even recreational tree-climbing trips. Longer expeditions are available on set dates and include overnight stays in the area.

**Note:** Some activities will require participants to bring their own items, while some gear is available for rental. Age limits vary according to activity. Check the website for details.





## NARA-YAMATO FOUR TEMPLES JUNREI (PILGRIMAGE) Follow the Path of Ancient Ascetics



### Wander the wilderness in search of four sacred temples

Visiting temples to pay homage to Buddha is a long-established Japanese tradition that dates back over 1,000 years. The word junrei refers to a traditional pilgrimage that would entail a long and potentially life-threatening trek involving several temple visits and an ultimate cleansing of mind, body and spirit. These days, the four temples on the Nara-Yamato Four Temple Pilgrimage trail are easily accessed by car or public transport and can all be visited in one day. However, many people still follow the 32-kilometer route on foot to get a taste of the towns and villages they pass along the way.

There is no set order in which to visit each temple, so whichever works best with your travel plans is fine. Okadera houses the Buddha of Wish-granting and is reputed to be the first temple built for driving away bad luck. Abe-Monjuin temple was founded as early as 645 and houses the Buddha of Wisdom. Hasedera is home to the Buddha of Compassion and is the head temple of a large branch of the Shingon sect. Finally, deep in the woods at Murouji, is the Buddha of Enlightenment.

#### Top Tip:

Those attempting the journey can buy a goshuincho (a stamp book used by people visiting shrines and temples) to receive stamps at each destination (for a fee), creating a memorable souvenir to take home.

#### Essential Info:

**How Much:**  
Admission fees for temples vary. Four-temple combo ticket: ¥2,200

**Nara-Yamato Four Temple Pilgrimage Office**  
645 Abe, Sakurai City

**Website:**  
[nara-yamato.com](http://nara-yamato.com)





Stay



### Essential Info:

**Kidera no Ie**  
779 Kidera-cho  
Nara city 630-8306

**Website:**  
[machiado.com](http://machiado.com)

### Top Tip:

For a refreshing cup of coffee in the same neighborhood head to **Bolik Coffee** [p16-17].

### Get Away from It All in the Center of Nara's Old Town District

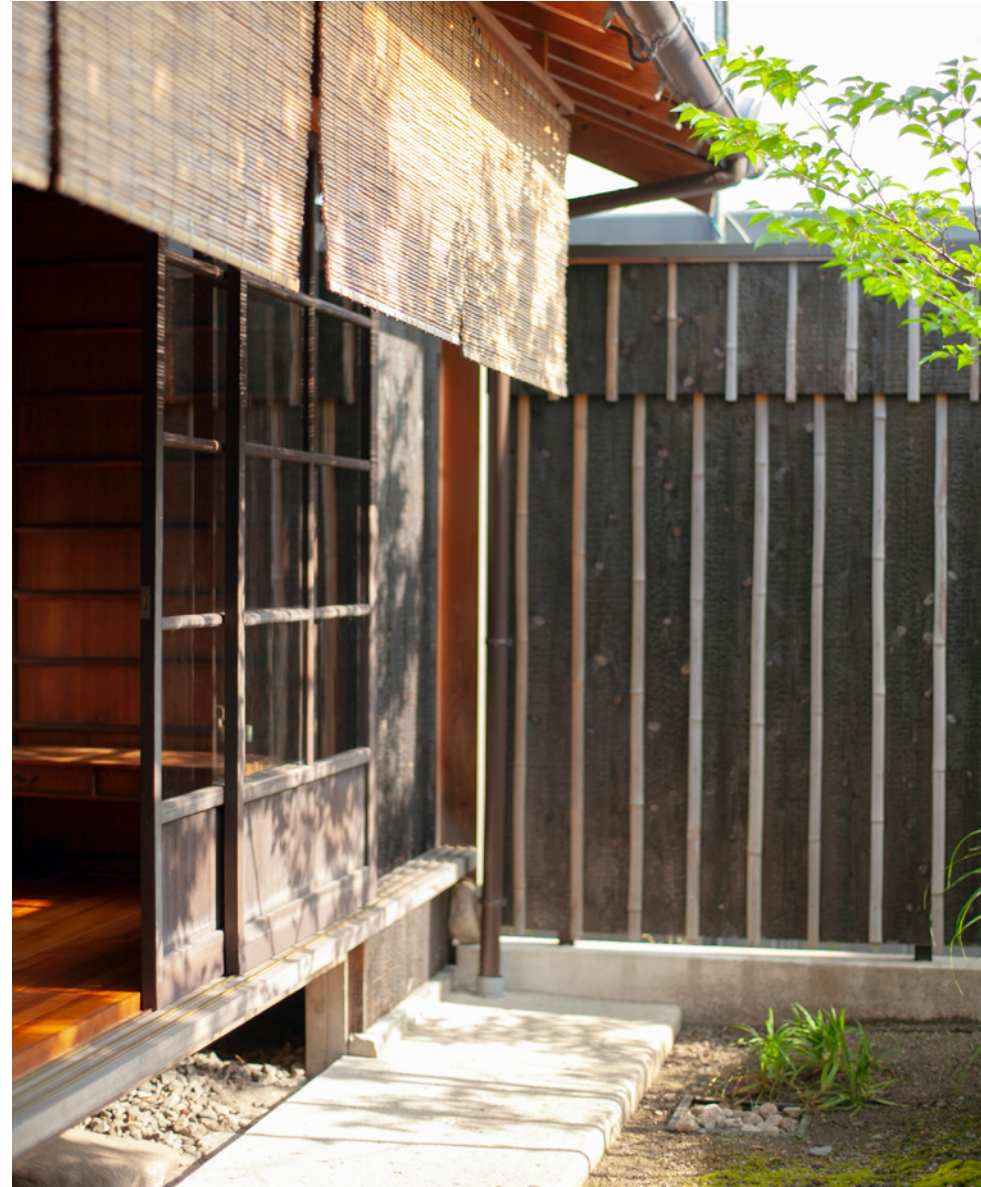
Some years ago, five traditional machiya houses in Nara's old town district of Naramachi faced destruction. Thankfully, the houses were saved and restored and now offer visitors a true taste of what it's like living in this historic city. Each house differs slightly in design and style, boasting its own unique charms. All the houses are situated in a surprisingly quiet area, ensuring privacy and a feeling of tranquility despite their central locations. A traditional Japanese breakfast is included in your booking, featuring local seasonal fare. For dinner, staff members are happy to help guests make restaurant reservations if needed.

Up to four or five people (depending on the house) may stay here. Parking is available for an extra fee of ¥1,000 as is TV rental. Though the Kidera no Ie website is only in Japanese, simply fill out the enquiry form in simple English and an English-speaking staff member will get back to you regarding your query.

**Note:** Smoking is strictly forbidden on all properties.



## KIDERA NO IE A Traditional Stay in Naramachi



## SARUSAWAIKE YOSHIDAYA A Secluded Oasis in Nara City



### Historic Inn With a Fantastic View of One of Nara's Most Famous Sights

Right in the middle of Nara's tourist district is a quiet space tucked away from the bustling crowds outside. Sarusawaike Yoshidaya is a historic traditional inn that first opened in 1868 and now boasts an elegant mix of Japanese modern amenities with time-honored interior design. The lounge area looks out over a well-manicured garden and is the perfect spot for an afternoon coffee break. Many guests find the hotel's private semi-open-air bath one of the highlights of their stay – it can be reserved at no extra fee. It's perfect for couples, families and those who feel a bit too shy to use conventional shared bath facilities. The bath is located on the fourth floor and commands an excellent view of Kohfukuji temple and its five-storied pagoda. Guests looking to taste the finest of Nara's local fare won't be disappointed. Sarusawaike Yoshidaya has two restaurants – Mahoroba inside the main building and Yamatoji, a short walk away. Both offer a sumptuous culinary experience featuring fresh seasonal ingredients and Nara-sourced Yamato beef and pork.

**Note:** Not all rooms have their own bathtub. Confirm when booking if this is a concern. Dietary requirements can be catered to if notified in advance.



#### Top Tip:

**Nigatsudo** temple [p36-37] is a comfortable trek from the hotel and offers fantastic views over the city and **Todaiji** temple.

#### Essential Info:

**Sarusawaike Yoshidaya**  
246 Takabatake-cho  
Nara City

**Website:**  
[nara-yoshidaya.co.jp](http://nara-yoshidaya.co.jp)



*Essential Info:*

**Kadojin**

240 Dorogawa, Tenkawa-mura, Yoshino-gun

**Website:**

[kadojin.com](http://kadojin.com)

*Top Tip:*

The surrounding area is fantastic to explore (see **Mitarai Valley** on p88-89) and is stunning year-round.



**Soak Troubles Away in the Onsen of a Traditional Japanese Ryokan**

Tucked away in the shadow of Mt Omine in Dorogawa Onsen Village [p46], Kadojin is a historic ryokan (Japanese inn) famed for its giant tatami rooms and private onsen (hot spring baths). The hotel, which has been run by the same family for generations, got its start as a place for Shugendo practitioners to wash their feet as they progressed on their mountain pilgrimage. Eventually, it evolved into a full-fledged ryokan where travelers rest weary bones and enjoy local cuisine. Boasting both private and public baths, Kadojin suits big groups, couples or families who are looking to enjoy a stay in a traditional Japanese setting. Dorogawa Onsen Village is a little challenging to access, but the rewards are real for anyone who makes the journey here. The summertime, while a spectacular time to visit, is Kadojin's peak season and since the inn only has eight rooms, booking early is advised.



## L'AUBERGE DE PLAISANCE SAKURAI

Sophisticated Suites in Sakurai



### Get a Taste of French Elegance Fused with Nara's Natural Bounty

Situated on the outskirts of Sakurai city, L'Auberge de Plaisance Sakurai brings French sophistication to Nara's rural landscape. This modern inn only has nine guest rooms (seven twin rooms and two suites), each with its own terrace. Rooms are spacious and offer the latest amenities while keeping the design minimal but with a luxurious twist. The decor mimics the surrounding natural environment, with natural wood elements throughout the building. It's the perfect place to sit back and enjoy the slow life, listening to birdsong and the breeze, while the inn's staff caters to your needs.

With a commanding view of the countryside, the hotel is an easy place to enjoy each of Nara's distinct four seasons – as is the inn's restaurant. Chefs here offer a unique take on French cuisine, combining Nara local produce with French techniques to create gourmet masterpieces that suit each season. Ingredients are sourced locally and include Nara heirloom produce, as well as seafood from Wakayama and Akashi harbors. L'Auberge de Plaisance Sakurai prides itself on its close relationship with local farmers to offer the best and freshest seasonal flavors. The restaurant also boasts an extensive selection of French wines.

**Note:** Reservations are recommended for those wishing to dine without staying at L'Auberge de Plaisance Sakurai, especially on weekends.



#### Top Tip:

Nearby hiking trail **Yamanobe no Michi** is said to be the oldest road in Japan, and one of the most beautiful stretches is located not far away, between Tenri and Sakurai cities.

#### Essential Info:

**L'Auberge de Plaisance Sakurai**  
2217 Taie,  
Sakurai City  
**Website:**  
[www.hiramatsuhotels.com/plaisance-sakurai](http://www.hiramatsuhotels.com/plaisance-sakurai)



### Essential Info:

**Sasayuri-ann**  
656 Fukano,  
Muro, Uda-gun

**Website:**  
[mindfulness-japan.jp](http://mindfulness-japan.jp)

### Top Tip:

Take the trail to the 48 Waterfalls of **Akame** (a four-kilometer return trip) to discover why it has been a central place of spirituality for Shugendo practitioners for centuries.  
[stayjapan.jp/ZAO/RES/taki\\_trail/index.html](http://stayjapan.jp/ZAO/RES/taki_trail/index.html)

### Spend a Luxurious Night in a 200-year-old Edo-period Thatched-roof House

Get away from it all – light pollution, busy crowds and the constant buzz of the city – at one of Nara’s most fascinating lodgings. Sasayuri-ann has two breathtakingly beautiful houses – Zao and Ozunu – open to guests in the middle of the Uda countryside. Zao is a restored 200-year-old farmhouse with a thatched roof and a traditional open hearth. Its interior has been modernized where needed and left untouched where possible to maintain the structure’s original beauty. The house offers sweeping views of mist-covered mountains and rice fields stretching out into the distance.

Ozunu is a newly constructed building, but was made using the same ancient traditions and techniques of yore. It boasts three different gardens – a rock garden, a pine tree garden and a scenery-borrowing garden – all classic Japanese horticulture styles. There is also a 100-year-old teahouse that has been relocated to the property. Workshops are available for guests, including bamboo flute making, yoga and zen meditation, as well as a variety of organic farming and eco-tourism experiences. Delectable dinners can be ordered in advance, including a multi-course meal served by a Michelin star-awarded chef. Self-catering is also possible.



## SASAYURI-ANN Go Back in Time in Uda





## MISENKAN A Cozy Inn by the Water



### Stay at a Secluded Hotel on Sacred Land

For a secret hideaway almost all to yourself, head to Misenkan in Tenkawa village, a casual Japanese inn charmingly decorated with touches of traditional and mid-century retro style. It sits perched above a stream that runs off the Tennokawa River, which, together with the surrounding area, has been considered a nexus of spiritual power for more than 1,000 years. It's considered the sacred home of the gods, in particular of Benzaiten, the goddess of water and anything that flows (speech, time, music and performing arts) who has purportedly blessed the waters here – many guests claim the area's tap water is the tastiest in Japan.

The inn only houses five groups per night, making it the perfect peaceful getaway. Some rooms have decks overlooking the forest for an extra boost of tranquility. There is a private open-air bath (booking required and according to availability) for guests to experience the local water's revitalizing effects in solitude or as a pair. Misenkan serves seasonal fare, with meals including locally caught venison, boar or freshwater fish depending on the timing.

**Note:** There are no elevators or escalators inside the building. Also, please notify of any dietary restrictions when booking. The inn sells rice ball lunchboxes for daytime excursions – simply notify the night before if you would like one.



#### Top Tip:

Visit the **Tenkawa Daibenzaiten Shrine**, one of Japan's three largest shrines dedicated to Benzaiten, for a boost in luck and creativity. It's also famous for its noh performances usually held in July.  
[tenkawa-jinja.or.jp](http://tenkawa-jinja.or.jp)

#### Essential Info:

**Misenkan**  
267 Kawai Tenkawa-mura  
Yoshino-gun

**Website:**  
[misenkan.com/en](http://misenkan.com/en)



# *Itinerary & Travel Tips*



# 1 DAY IN NARA

## Old Town Atmosphere

Explore a historic town in the middle of Nara city. Naramachi boasts well-preserved buildings with latticework windows and other charming architectural accents. There are many quaint shops and galleries, perfect for a relaxing day in this charming corner of Nara.



### Nara Craft Museum

More info on pages 68-69

1 min on foot



### Bolik Coffee

More info on pages 16-17

6 min on foot



### Awa Naramachi

More info on pages 12-13

3 min on foot



### Network Gallery Nawrap

More info on pages 56-57

2 min on foot

Start



### Stroll through the Naramachi area

15 min on foot from JR Nara Station



### Lamp Bar

Enjoy a quiet drink before setting off home

More info on pages 18-19

6 min on foot



## 2 DAYS IN NARA

### A Tour of Historic Nara

Discover Asuka's historic structures and Buddhist heritage by bike before heading to Hasedera to explore a mountain temple and a unique woodworking shop and then staying the night in an Edo-period farmhouse. Spend day two enjoying the rich outdoors in Murou village.



Try a selection of locally sourced delicacies at retro Cafe Kotodama.



Enjoy the harmonic balance of art and nature at Murou Art Forest

Day 1



#### Complex of Man'yo Culture

More info on pages 62-63

20 min by bike from Asuka Station



#### Lunch at Café Kotodama

More info on pages 24-25

5 min by bike



#### Hasedera Temple

Perched on the side of a mountain, this temple has over 1,300 years of history and is one of the destinations on the Nara-Yamato Junrei pilgrimage.

More info on pages 92-93

Approx. 35 min by train and 20 min on foot from Hasedera Station



#### Dinner and Stay at Sasayuri-ann

More info on pages 104-105

20 min by train and 15 min by car from Nabari Station (pick-up available)



#### Gallery Hasekura

More info on pages 72-73

Approx. 10 min on foot

Day 2



#### Takidani Hanashobu Garden

More info on pages 82-83

Approx. 25 min on foot from Sambommatsu Station



#### Murouji Temple

Long ago people believed sacred dragons inhabited the forests near Murouji temple, one of the stops on the Nara-Yamato Junrei pilgrimage route.

More info on pages 92-93

10 min by car or 45 min on foot



#### Murou Art Forest

More info on pages 60-61

20 min on foot

# 3 DAYS IN NARA

## Countryside to Cityscapes

Start your deep exploration of Nara in the midst of its natural environment. Hike on trails that pass through deep valleys and scale mountains, offering astounding views along the way. Finish your journey in the city navigating an ancient temple and getting a taste of traditional Japanese culture.



Day 1



Day 2



Day 3

From top Mitarai Valley boasts breathtaking views of untouched nature

JW Marriott Hotel Nara is one of Nara city's latest luxury accommodation additions

Shinryoku Cafe / Fuji Gallery offers a quiet space to enjoy a quick bite and stunning local art.



→  →  →  → 

**Menfudo Limestone Cave**  
More info on pages 80-81

**Tenkawa Benzaiten-sha Shrine**  
The goddess of performing arts blesses those who pray at her shrine  
More info on pages 106-107

**Hike through Mitarai Valley to Dorogawa Onsen**  
More info on pages 88-89 and 46-47

**Stay at Kadojin**  
More info on pages 100-101

→  →  → 

**Hike the Soni Highland area**  
Grab lunch and a craft beer at nearby Soni Kogen Farm Garden  
More info on pages 86-87  
Take a dip at Okame-no-yu Onsen, a hot spring with a view

**Nigatsudo**  
Catch the sunset from one of Nara city's most beautiful temple buildings  
More info on pages 36-37

**JW Marriott Hotel Nara**  
Enjoy a touch of luxury in central Nara

→  →  → 

**Horyuji Temple**  
Home to the world's oldest wooden structures

**Horyuji Gallery Shinryoku Cafe**  
Have lunch while appreciating art on display  
More on pages 58-59

**Taiseian**  
Enjoy a tea ceremony experience  
More on pages 38-39



## ANNUAL EVENTS

Nara hosts hundreds of fascinating events throughout the year – here are a select few. For more, go to [visitnara.jp](http://visitnara.jp)



From top left: Mt Yoshino Cherry Blossoms, Spring Kemari Festival, Dorogawa Gyoja Festival, Tatsuta Taisha Fuchin Festival, Cluster-Amaryllis Festival, Kadofusa Shrine Lion Dancing, Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri, Dadaoshi Festival

### Spring

#### Mt Yoshino Cherry Blossoms

Around 30,000 cherry blossoms of about 200 varieties burst into bloom on Mt Yoshino in April, turning the mountain into delicate shades of soft pink.

📅 Late Mar to mid-Apr

📍 Yoshinoyama, Yoshino-cho, Yoshino-gun

🌐 [visitnara.jp/venues/E02027/](http://visitnara.jp/venues/E02027/)

#### Spring Kemari Festival

Kemari is an ancient aristocratic hacky sack-style game that crossed over from China over 1,400 years ago. Witness Kemari Preservation Society members in elaborate traditional costumes show off their skills.

📅 Apr 29

📍 Tanzan Shrine, 319 Tonomine, Sakurai City

🌐 [visitnara.jp/venues/E02031/](http://visitnara.jp/venues/E02031/)

### Summer

#### Dorogawa Gyoja Festival

The quiet streets of hot spring town Dorogawa come to life with song, dance and merriment as revelers take to the streets celebrating En-no-Gyoja, a Shugendo sect founder.

📅 Aug 2-3

📍 Dorogawa, Tengawa, Yoshino-gun

🌐 [visitnara.jp/venues/E02066/](http://visitnara.jp/venues/E02066/)

#### Tatsuta Taisha Fuchin Festival

This event is dedicated to the god of wind and participants pray for protection against storm damage and epidemics. The ending ceremony's unique handheld fujin hanabi fireworks are an awe-inspiring sight.

📅 First Sunday of Jul

📍 Tatsuta Shrine, 1-29-1 Tatsuno-minami, Sango-cho, Ikoma-gun

🌐 [visitnara.jp/venues/E02051/](http://visitnara.jp/venues/E02051/)

### Autumn

#### Cluster-Amaryllis Festival

Celebrate the onset of autumn with the fiery red spider lilies that scatter the photogenic terraced fields of Asuka.

📅 Late Sep

📍 Asuka Inabuchi, Historical National Government Park, and Ishibutai Tumulus, Asuka City

🌐 [visitnara.jp/venues/E02077/](http://visitnara.jp/venues/E02077/)

#### Kadofusa Shrine Lion Dancing

This vibrant lion dancing practice dates back more than 300 years with the purpose of praying for good harvests and the continued good health of the villagers.

📅 Early Oct

📍 Kadofusa Shrine, 733 Imai, Soni-mura, Uda-gun

🌐 [visitnara.jp/venues/E02090/](http://visitnara.jp/venues/E02090/)

### Winter

#### Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri

Held consecutively for almost 900 years, this event features a procession of people dressed in authentic 8th to 19th-century garb and following customs and mannerisms of bygone eras.

📅 Dec 15-18

📍 Kasugataisha Shrine, 160 Kasunagacho, Nara City

🌐 [visitnara.jp/venues/E02102/](http://visitnara.jp/venues/E02102/)

#### Dadaoshi Festival

This fire festival is one of Nara's biggest and the ritual is meant to help ward off evil. Keep an eye out for the three demons during the festivities.

📅 Feb 14

📍 Hasedera Temple, 731-1 Hase, Sakurai City

🌐 [visitnara.jp/venues/E02015/](http://visitnara.jp/venues/E02015/)



## NARA TRAVEL TIPS

Some basic info to help you make the most of your visit to Nara



## Good to Know

### **NARA Visitor Center & Inn**

This one-stop destination has a wealth of resources and facilities including lodging, currency exchange, activities, free baggage storage, prayer rooms, free wi-fi and more. More info at [sarusawa.nara.jp](http://sarusawa.nara.jp)

### **Cash & Credit Cards**

Many restaurants and shops do not accept credit cards. You can withdraw cash from 7-Eleven or JP Bank ATMs, or exchange currency at any major banks.

### **Carry Your Passport**

As a visitor, you are legally required to have your passport on your person in Japan. Also, present your passport at certain facilities and receive a discount on the admission fee.

### **Public Transport**

Use Nara Kotsu bus services (go to [narakotsu.co.jp](http://narakotsu.co.jp) for information on their added value passes) to get around Nara city. JR and Kintetsu train lines will get you further afield around the prefecture.

### **Smoking**

Smoking is only permitted in designated smoking areas. Do not smoke on the street.

### **Photos**

Some shrines and temples prohibit photography. Confirm before whether it is allowed.

### **Shrines and Temples**

Please refrain from speaking loudly at shrines and temples. Also, eating and drinking on shrine and temple premises is generally prohibited.

### **Wi-Fi**

Free Wi-Fi is available at many hotels, cafés and train stations across Nara Prefecture, as well as at many tourist spots.

### **Nara Deer**

Do not feed the deer anything except the crackers available for sale in Nara Park or they will get sick. Keep in mind that deer are wild animals and they may become aggressive, especially during mating season (September-November) and when the fawn are young (May-July). Do not hit or chase the deer.





## Temples and Shrines

Japan's ancient capital is filled with historical monuments, each with its own significance and unique heritage. Dig deep into Nara's history at any of these seven locations to discover more about how they remain important today.



**Kasugataisha Shrine**  
(春日大社)

The head of 3,000 auxiliary shrines, Kasugataisha Shrine's 3,000 donated lanterns add a magical mood to its grounds.

¥ Admission fee:  
Free (inner area: ¥500)

📍 160 Kasuganocho,  
Nara city

🌐 [kasugataisha.or.jp/about/index\\_en.html](http://kasugataisha.or.jp/about/index_en.html)



**Yakushiji Temple**  
(薬師寺)

Built in 697, this massive temple complex was built to pray for Emperor Tenmu's wife, Empress Jito, to recover from an illness.

¥ Admission fee:  
¥800 (special mural viewing ¥1,100)

📍 457 Nishinokyo-cho,  
Nara city

🌐 [yakushiji.or.jp](http://yakushiji.or.jp)



**Asukadera Temple**  
(飛鳥寺)

Said to be the oldest full-scale temple in Japan, Asukadera was founded in 588 and boasts the nation's oldest image of Buddha.

¥ Admission fee:  
¥350

📍 682 Asukamura, Asuka,  
Takaichi-gun

🌐 [visitnara.jp/venues/A00522](http://visitnara.jp/venues/A00522)



**Omiwa Jinja Shrine**  
(大神神社)

Believed to be Japan's oldest existing Shinto shrine, its main enshrined god is said to have created Japan. He descended here at Mt Miwa.

¥ Admission fee:  
Free

📍 1422 Miwa, Sakurai city

🌐 [oomiwa.or.jp/english](http://oomiwa.or.jp/english)



**Kinpusenji Temple**  
(金峯山寺)

Yoshino's leading temple and an important place of pilgrimage for Shugendo mountain ascetics.

¥ Admission fee:  
¥500 (¥1,000 for special Buddhist statue viewing)

📍 Yoshinoyama, Yoshino-cho,  
Yoshino-gun

🌐 [kinpusen.or.jp](http://kinpusen.or.jp)



**Tamaki Jinja Shrine**  
(玉置神社)

Often shrouded in mist, this ancient shrine is one of the stopping points on the famous Ormine-Okugake Trail.

¥ Admission fee:  
Free

📍 1 Tamaigawa,  
Totsukawa-mura,  
Yoshino-gun

🌐 [tamakijinja.or.jp](http://tamakijinja.or.jp)

## Historical Site



**Heijo Palace Site** (平城宮跡)

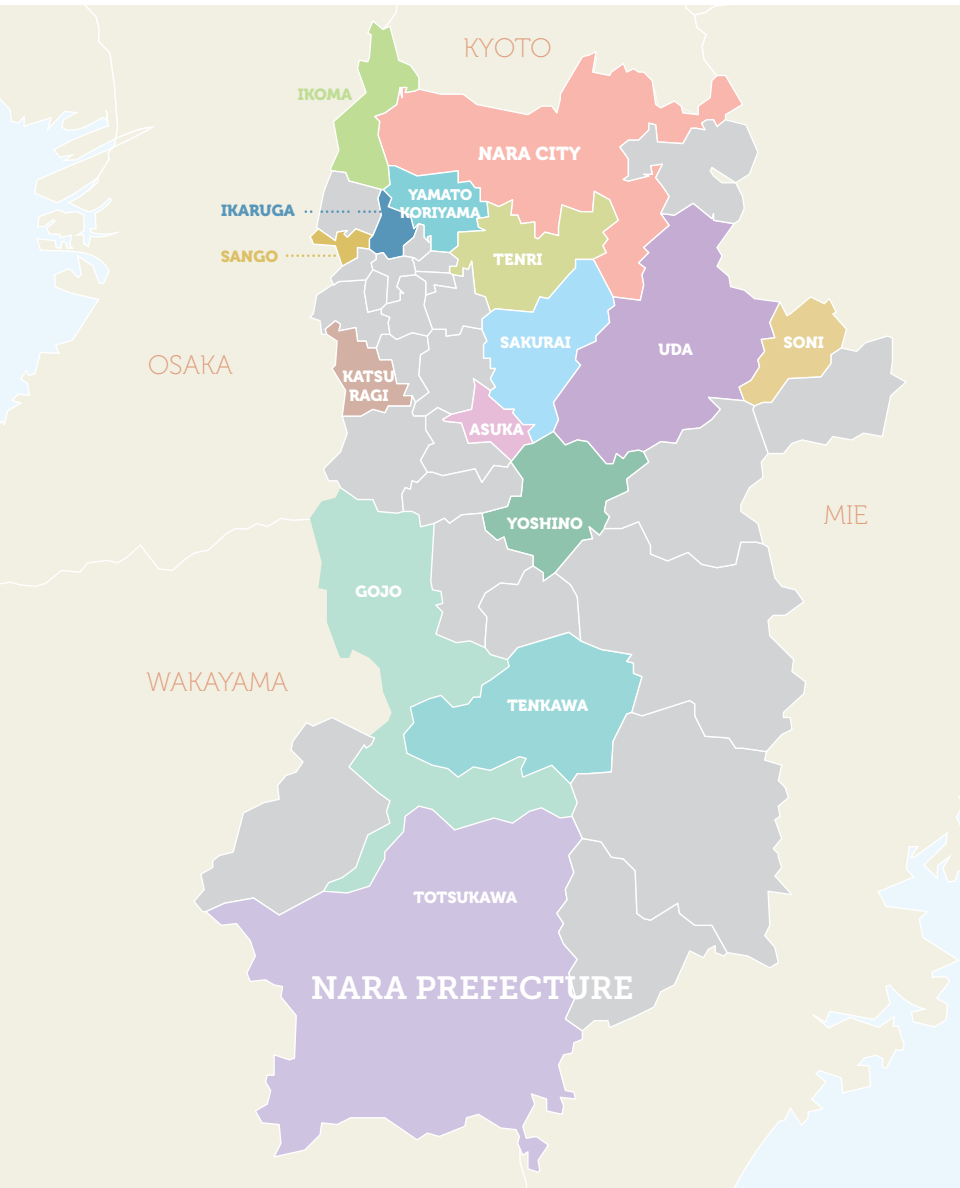
The Heijo Palace site covers an extensive area – a testament to how powerful and prosperous the ancient capital was. Today, visitors and locals alike enjoy exploring its many structures and surroundings.

¥ Admission fee: Free

🌐 [heijo-kyo.com](http://heijo-kyo.com)

## HOW TO GET THERE

Find out how to get to Nara City from Osaka, Kyoto and Tokyo



### From Osaka

**Kansai International Airport**  
85 mins  
(Limousine Airport Bus)  
↓  
Kintetsu Nara Station

**Osaka Station**  
50 min  
(Yamatoji Rapid Service)  
↓  
JR Nara Station

**Osaka Namba Station**  
40 min  
(Kintetsu Nara Line)  
↓  
Kintetsu Nara Station

### From Kyoto

**Kyoto Station**  
45 min  
(JR Rapid Express)  
↓  
JR Nara Station

**Kyoto Station**  
35 min  
(Kintetsu Limited Express)  
↓  
Kintetsu Nara Station

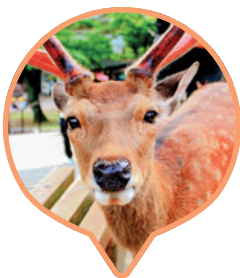
*\*Times are just approximate.*

### From Tokyo

**Tokyo Station**  
140 min  
(Tokaido Shinkansen)  
↓  
Kyoto Station  
45 min  
(JR Rapid Express)  
↓  
JR Nara Station


**Haneda Airport**  
75 min (by air)  
↓  
Kansai International Airport  
85 mins  
(Limousine Airport Bus)  
↓  
Kintetsu Nara Station





**NARA Prefecture**

30 Noborioji-cho Nara 630-8501

 [visitnara.jp](http://visitnara.jp)