

— Nara's Temples and Shrines —

Inner Journeys

祈の回廊

NARA

The wishes and hearts
of the ancients reach us across time.

Visit temples and shrines in Nara,
where we wish for a healthy life, happiness,
and peace for all living beings in the world.

JAPAN

Tenkawa

The spiritual heaven where celestial water flows

Tenkawa is the name of the village as well as the river, and literally translates as 'river of heaven'. Tenkawa Daibenzaiten-sha Shrine, built in the 7th century, is considered one of the major places with spiritual energy in Japan. As the centre of the ancient Japanese mountain worship known as Shugendo, Tenkawa has also long been home to ascetic religious practices.



Even at the height of summer, this mountain town is calm and cool, making it a popular local escape. Visitors can enjoy the natural blessings of this religious and spiritual atmosphere, as far down as the Mitarai Valley, Ryusenji Temple, Goyomatsu Limestone Caves and more!

Dorogawa Onsen (hot spring) is the main highlight nearby. It is a small hot spring town whose main street is lined with traditional shops and ryokan inns, many managed by the same family for 400 years or more. The hot spring water comes from sacred Mt. Omine where hundreds of Shugendo pilgrims in white robes start their journey up the mountain here every August. The streets are strung with paper lanterns lighting the town, creating a romantic old-time atmosphere after dark when the stars seem impossibly bright.

Goro-goro Mizu Water

The name, 'Goro-goro Mizu', is derived from a story about En-no Gyoja, the founder of Shugendo (a form of native Japanese religion). When he tried the water here after his ascetic training, he described the sound of the water flowing out from the depths of the cave as 'goro goro', as if pebbles were rolling. Visitors are welcome to taste Goro-goro Mizu and can take some home.



Meisui Tofu

The taste of tofu made with the local spring water is the taste of the nature around Tenkawa Village. Tofu is made of two main ingredients: soy beans and water – so simple. That means, the quality of the pure water decides the flavour of tofu. Don't forget to try the Meisui Tofu which lets you taste nature's power!



Ryusenji Temple

In the 8th century, En-no Gyoja, the founder of Shugendo, discovered a deep spring of an extremely blue colour in the Dorogawa area and enshrined the Dragon Deity near the spring. This is the origin of this temple, the Temple of Dragon Spring. Since its founding around 645, Shugendo practitioners have been gathering at this temple for prayers and meditation before entering Mt. Omine.



Prayers to Water

Mythological water sites in Nara



Chozu purifying basin at Kasugataisha Shrine (Nara City):
*Usually, water pours out from the deer's mouth. However, due to Covid restrictions, it is not functioning at this time.



Mitarai Valley (Tenkawa Village)

Chozu – purify yourself before you visit the sacred sites

When you visit a temple or a shrine, no matter how small or big it is, you will never miss seeing a small water area on the approach to the central courtyard. This small pavilion-like place is called chozu-ya.

Chozu is the customary way to clean and purify yourself before offering prayers at shrines or temples. Originally, people had to cleanse their entire bodies by soaking in river water or pouring spring water over themselves. This traditional rite was later simplified for the general public, and people can now cleanse their hands and mouths at the chozu-ya.

At some temples and shrines in Nara, the chozu-ya itself is worth visiting for its beautiful arrangement. One example is at Okadera Temple in the Asuka area. You will be welcomed by the chozu-ya which is filled with a countless number of colourful flowers. Another recommendation for splendid chozu-ya is Yoshino Jingu Shrine in the Yoshino mountain area. In addition to seasonal flowers, origami cranes are also floated on the water emanating a classically Japanese ambience.

*For the prevention of the spread of COVID-19, chozu-ya at many temples and shrines may not have running water or allow visitors to only wash their hands.



Okadera Temple (Asuka Village)
<http://www.okadera3307.com>



Yoshino Jingu Shrine (Yoshino Town)
https://www.instagram.com/yoshino_jingu/



Abe-Monjuin Temple (Sakurai City)

As an island country, Japan has always been blessed with water. In addition to the fact that the nation's land is surrounded by the sea all around, the country has always been greatly influenced by abundant pure spring water in terms of its history, culture, food, and people's beliefs.

More practically, in the wet field rice-based culture of Japan, water was central for the production of food to survive. Traditionally, the yearly cycle of Japan used to rotate around the planting and harvesting of the rice crop. Rice has been an essential staple food of Japan and plays the central role in a number of typical Japanese dishes.

Water is the element of life. Water keeps us alive. Clear water never stays still but always flows. In Nara, the ancient capital of Japan with over 1300 years of history, you will discover a number of connections and reasons why water is so revered and important in Japanese faith and people's lives.

Ryujin – the guardian of water

Many chozu-ya have a dignified dragon design at the water outlet. In Shinto, dragons are worshipped as the guardian of water, known as Ryujin and are connected with agricultural rituals, prayers for rain, and the success of fisherman. By incorporating dragon designs into the religious precincts, people considered that they could protect the place or themselves even more. This is why at many chozu-ya, water often runs from the dragon's mouth.



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Access from Japan's Major Cities

From Osaka

Approx. 35min
(Kintetsu Osaka-Namba Sta. - Kintetsu-Nara Sta.)

From Kansai Int'l Airport

Approx. 1h 30min
(JR Kansai Airport Sta. - JR Nara Sta.)
Approx. 1h 35min
(Nankai Kansai-Airport Sta. - Kintetsu-Nara Sta.)

From Hiroshima

Approx. 2h 40min
(JR Hiroshima Sta. - JR Nara Sta.)

From Fukuoka

Approx. 3h 50min
(JR Hakata Sta. - JR Nara Sta.)

From Kyoto

Approx. 35min
(Kintetsu Kyoto Sta. - Kintetsu-Nara Sta.)

From Chubu Centrair Int'l Airport

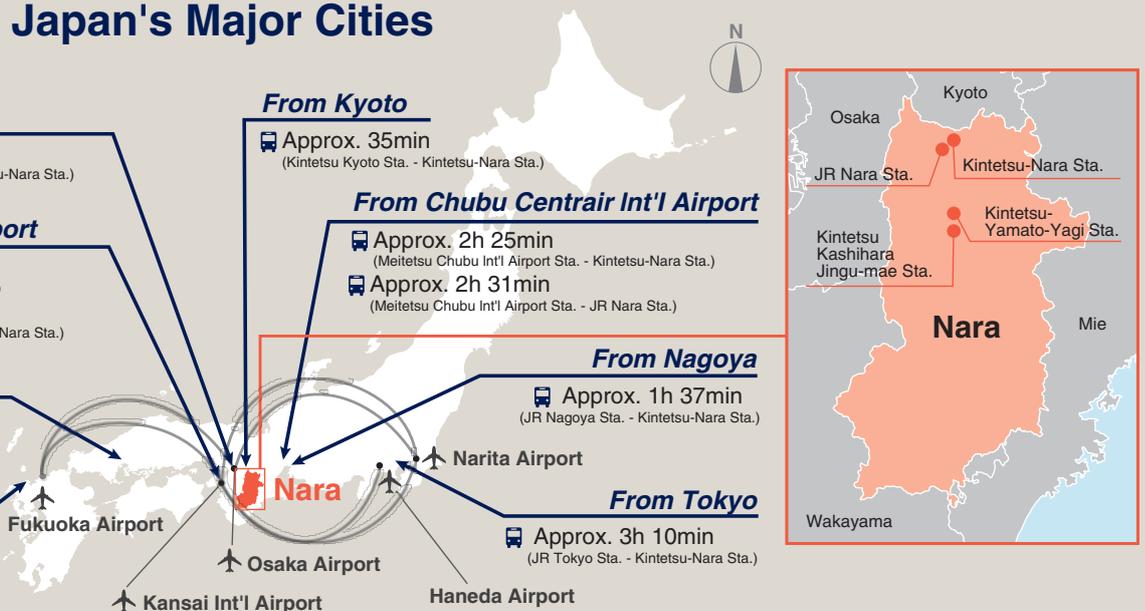
Approx. 2h 25min
(Meitetsu Chubu Int'l Airport Sta. - Kintetsu-Nara Sta.)
Approx. 2h 31min
(Meitetsu Chubu Int'l Airport Sta. - JR Nara Sta.)

From Nagoya

Approx. 1h 37min
(JR Nagoya Sta. - Kintetsu-Nara Sta.)

From Tokyo

Approx. 3h 10min
(JR Tokyo Sta. - Kintetsu-Nara Sta.)



The NARA Visitor Center & Inn

Address: 3 Ikono-cho, Nara

Phone: 0742-81-7461

(8:00-21:00)

<https://www.sarusawa.nara.jp/>



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