NARA CITY

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5. Nara National Museum 16p
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27. Nara Hotel 46p
28. Nara Ugaya Guesthouse 47p
29. Nara Visitor Center & Inn
   3 Ikeno-cho, Nara-shi
   T.0742-81-7461
   www.sarusawa.nara.jp
30. Nara Prefecture
    Tourist Information Center
    16 Kasugano-cho, Nara-shi
    T.0742-27-2003
31. JR Nara Station
    Tourist Information Center
    Sanjo honmachi 1, Nara-shi
32. Nara City Tourist
    Information Center
    23-4 Kamisanjo-cho, Nara-shi
    T.0742-22-3900
33. Kintetsu Nara Station
    Tourist Information Center
    Kintetsu Bldg. 1F, 28 Higashimuki
    Nakamachi, Nara-shi
    T.0742-24-4858
34. Kuroneko Nara Tabi Center
    14 Tarui-cho, Nara-shi
NARA

Most visitors to Japan go to Tokyo for a slice of urban contemporary Japanese culture and Kyoto, the old capital, for a taste of Japan’s traditional culture and history. This makes visiting Nara the next step if culture and history is your thing. As the first permanent capital of Japan, from AD 710 to 794, Nara offers a very different, more ancient view of Japanese history and culture, and boasts the most UNESCO World Heritage sites in Japan. Yet, Nara’s charm is not just about temples and shrines. As well as the lovingly restored old townscapes of downtown Naramachi and Gojo-Shinmachi, the towns of Yoshino, Uda, Totsukawa or Asuka, known as the birthplace of Japan, embody the unique natural beauty of Japan and are also well worth a visit. At any of the numerous cafes and restaurants that use local Nara, yamatosyasai produce, you can savour the delightful freshness of Japanese food like nowhere else. Did you know that sake too originated in Nara? The filtered, clear drink we enjoy today was first made here, and still today there are over 30 active breweries in the prefecture. Nara is a great place to immerse yourself in the splendour of the Japanese countryside, with abundant hiking trails in Sakurai, the mountains of Yoshino, the Kumano-Kodo trail in Totsukawa, and the magnificent Mitarai Valley in Tenkawa. Getting around the prefecture can be a bit of a challenge, due to limited public transport, but that has its upside too – you won’t run into hordes of tourists making your experience more personal and relaxed. You should also find the people of Nara to be amongst the most friendly and open in Japan, humble, but at the same time justifiably proud of their culture and history. If you want to experience the “Real Japan,” look no further.
**SPRING**

**TITLE**
- Shuni-e
- Machiya Hina-meguri
- Nerikuyo-Eshiki
- Uchiwa-maki
- Sakura

**DATE**
- Shuni-e: March 1 to 14
- Machiya Hina-meguri: March 1 to 31
- Nerikuyo-Eshiki: May 14
- Uchiwa-maki: May 19
- Sakura: Late March to mid April

**LOCATION**
- Shuni-e: Todaiji Temple (p.11)
- Machiya Hina-meguri: Takatori-cho
- Nerikuyo-Eshiki: Taimadera Temple (p.85)
- Uchiwa-maki: Toshodaiji Temple (p.15)
- Sakura: Various locations

**SUMMER**

**TITLE**
- Renge-e & Kaeru-tobi
- Gyoja Matsuri
- Nara Tokae
- Chugen Mantoro
- Azisai

**DATE**
- Renge-e & Kaeru-tobi: July 7
- Gyoja Matsuri: August 2 & 3
- Nara Tokae: August 5 to 14
- Chugen Mantoro: August 14 & 15
- Azisai: Early June to Mid July
- Hasu: July to late August

**LOCATION**
- Renge-e & Kaeru-tobi: Kimpusanji Temple (p.72)
- Gyoja Matsuri: Dorogawa Onsen (p.88)
- Nara Tokae: Nara Park (p.10)
- Chugen Mantoro: Kasugataisha Shrine (p.12)
- Azisai: Various locations

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**Shuni-e** is an annual event heralding the arrival of spring held at Todaiji Temple in the Nagatsubo (“February Hall”). The most well-known event of the various ceremonies that make up this festival is the otaimatsu, in which pine torches are set alight in the evening around 19:00. Anyone can take part, but this usually attracts throngs of people, so it’s best to arrive early. For details, please ask at one of the Nara Tourist Information Centres. **Machiya Hina-meguri** is held in Takatori-cho, once a thriving castle town. While strolling through the old district of Takatoritosa lined with machiya townhouses, you can view beautiful dolls for the Hina-Matsuri girls’ festival lovingly displayed by their owners in the entrance ways and porches of their homes. **Nerikuyo-Eshiki** is a special spring festival that has been held at Taima-dera Temple for over 1,000 years. The event is a re-enactment of the legend of Princess Chjo, said to have attained Buddhahood within her own lifetime at Taimadera. **Uchiwa-maki** is a “fan scattering” festival held at Toshodaiji Temple that began in the Kamakura period (1192-1333) with the offering of fans on the death anniversary of a high-ranking Buddhist priest called Kakujo, renowned for his great virtue. Large numbers of fans are thrown towards the assembled visitors. Catching one of the fans is said to bring good fortune, to prevent disease and protect against evil. **Sakura**, cherry blossoms, can be enjoyed in many different parts of Nara Prefecture, including Mt. Yoshino, Nara Park, Nara Palace Site, Koriyama Castle, and the Sahogawa River.

**Renge-e & Kaeru-tobi.** At the Buddhist ceremony of Renge-e, lotus flowers from the Benten-ike Pond in Okuda, Yamato Nakada City are offered to Zao Gongen (an incarnation of Buddha). This pond is where according to legend the 7th century mystic En no Gyoyo, considered to be the founder of mountain ascetic training, was given his first bath as an infant. The accompanying Kaeru-tobi ritual (literally “frog jumping”) is a re-enactment of an ancient legend. A large green frog that was previously a human is paraded around the town on a big float, after which it is transformed back into human form by the power of Buddhist incantations in front of the Zao Hall of the temple. **Gyoja Matsuri.** En no Gyoyo was once exiled by the government for treason but later acquitted. On his return he was met with great enthusiasm by the people of the village. The Gyoja Matsuri commemorates this scene with young men in demon masks dancing through the streets of Dorogawa Onsen. **Nara Tokae.** The ancient city of Nara is lit up nightly for a period of ten days in summer. Candles are lit at eight locations around Nara Park, including Ukimino-enchi Park, Sarusawa-ike Pond and Todaiji Temple. **Chugen Mantoro** is a Shinto ritual in which some 2,000 stone lanterns and 1,000 hanging lanterns within the Kasugataisha Shrine are lit all the lanterns. The lanterns are lit around 19:00. **Azisai** (hydrangeas). Yata-dera Temple and Nanamagari-saka at Mt. Yoshino are some of the best places in Nara to enjoy blossoming hydrangeas. **Hasu** (lotus). The three temples of Kikojii, Toshodoji and Yakusiji are all famous for their lotus blossoms and the path connecting the three is known as “Lotus Road”. Note that the lotus flowers are open only in the morning.
## AUTUMN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uneme Matsuri</td>
<td>Mid-autumn full moon</td>
<td>Sarusawa-ike Pond</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shika no Tsunokiri</td>
<td>Second Saturday, Sunday and Monday of October</td>
<td>Nara Park (p.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kemari Matsuri</td>
<td>November 3 &amp; April 29</td>
<td>Tanzen Jinja Shrine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Koyo</td>
<td>Late October to early December</td>
<td>Various locations</td>
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**Uneme Matsuri.** This festival is performed to appease the soul of an uneme (a court lady serving the emperor as a maid-in-waiting) who threw herself into the Sarusawa-ike Pond in grief after falling out of favour with the emperor. At 17:00 there is a procession of hanaogi, large fans decorated with flowers; at 18:00 a Shinto ritual is held at Uneme Jinja Shrine, a shrine dedicated to the uneme, close to the pond; and at 19:00 the hanaogi are loaded onto sacred boats, which are then rowed out around the pond. Finally, the hanaogi are floated on the water of the pond and prayers are recited for the peace of the uneme’s soul and the happiness of all people. **Shika no Tsunokiri** (deer antler cutting). In this soul-stirring and colourful autumn event, held in the grounds of Kasuga Taisha Shrine, wild deer are herded into the cutting area and held still by sekō while a Shinto priest cuts off their antlers. This tradition dates back to the mid 17th century and was started to eliminate the danger to people posed by deer antlers and to protect trees. **Kemari Matsuri.** This festival commemorates the first audience of Fujiwara no Kamatari and Prince Naka no Oe at a kemari meeting, which led to the Taika Reforms of 645, which basically laid the foundations of the Japanese State. Kemari is a kind of ball-kicking game believed to have been introduced to Japan from China around 1,400 years ago. The festival features the figures of aristocrats dressed in beautiful period attire elegantly kicking a ball between themselves. **Koyo.** The spectacle of deeply coloured autumn leaves, can be enjoyed in many parts of Nara, including Nara Park, Yamanobe-no-Michi, Tanzen Jinja Shrine, Mt. Yoshino, and the Mitara Valley.

## WINTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kasuga Wakamiya On-Matsuri</td>
<td>December 15 to 18</td>
<td>Kasugataisha Shrine (p.12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ominugui</td>
<td>December 29</td>
<td>Yakushiji Temple</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wakakusayama-yaki</td>
<td>Fourth Saturday of January</td>
<td>Nara City</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dadaoshi</td>
<td>February 14</td>
<td>Hasedera Temple (p. 52)</td>
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**Kasuga Wakamiya On-Matsuri.** This annual festival has been held every year since 1136 with prayers for a bountiful harvest and the safekeeping and happiness of all people. One highlight of the festival is the procession held at noon on December 17, featuring historical dress and customs from the Heian to Edo periods (8th to 19th centuries). After dusk, a variety of traditional arts are performed for the deities, including kagura (sacred Shinto music and dancing), bugaku (traditional court music and dancing), and sei-no-o dancing. **Ominugui** is an event in which Buddhist priests make mochi steamed rice cakes in the morning, in preparation for the New Year festivities, and then clean Buddhist statues with the water used in making the mochi. The cleaning starts at 13:00. **Wakakusayama-yaki** (Grass-burning Festival on Mt. Wakakusa) is one of Nara’s largest festivals. The grass on Mt. Wakakusa, which overlooks the city, is set on fire. As the mountainside burns people pray for the repose of their ancestors’ souls, for the safety of Nara and for world peace. 600 fireworks are set off to start the festival, and 33 hectares of grassland are set alight all at the same time, to mark the coming of early spring. **Dadaoshi.** To the violent sounds of taiko drums and conch shells, red, blue and green demon figures wearing huge masks run amok in the streets, only to be dispelled by the incantations and large flaming torches of Buddhist priests. This is another fire festival that heralds the arrival of spring. It is believed that taking home one of the pine torches ensures good health and safety for the year ahead.
ACCESS

(1) From Narita International Airport
60 minutes by Airport Express to Tokyo Station then (3)

(2) From Haneda International Airport
25 minutes by train to Tokyo Station then (3)

(3) From Tokyo Station
140 minutes by Shinkansen to Kyoto Station then (4)

(4) From Kyoto
• 45 minutes by JR Rapid Express to JR Nara Station or
• 35 minutes by Kintetsu Limited Express to Kintetsu Nara Station

(5) From Kansai International Airport
85 minutes by Airport Limousine Bus to Kintetsu Nara Station or 90 minutes by train
*Both JR Nara and Kintetsu Nara Stations are located in central Nara City.

WEATHER

Nara enjoys a generally mild climate. Particularly in mountainous areas such as Yoshino, there are many days when it rains, so always take a raincoat and umbrella with you when you go out. In July and August it is generally very hot, so it is essential to drink plenty of liquids to prevent dehydration. While most areas of Nara Prefecture get little or no snow in the winter, it can get very cold, so be sure to dress warmly.

NARAMACHI

Despite its compactness, there is a surprising variety of things to see and do in the city of Nara. Right in the centre of the city, there is the enormous Nara Park. Then there’s the old town, known as “Naramachi,” the old city of Nara, offers an absorbing collection of cafes, restaurants, and traditional arts and crafts stores. In this section, we will introduce you to our favourite museums, shops, and restaurants in and around Nara Park and Naramachi.
NARA PARK

Nara Park, the heart of the ancient capital of Nara, covers a huge area — 4 km east to west by 2 km north to south. The park includes not only the famous heritage sites of Todaiji Temple, Kasugataisha Shrine, and Kofukuji Temple, the extensive grassed areas are also popular as a place to relax or even picnic. What travellers find particularly fun, of course, are the numerous deer that roam free in the park. The deer, which are considered sacred, have coexisted with the people of Nara for more than 1,000 years. While these cute residents of Nara are accustomed to people, they are not domesticated, so please do not feed them and certainly do not hurt them. See p.94 for more details about the do’s and don’ts of interacting with deer in the park.

TODAIJI TEMPLE

To many people, Nara is synonymous with the daibutsu (Great Buddha) of Todaiji Temple. The massive bronze Buddha statue is housed in the Great Buddha Hall, the largest wooden structure in the world. The sight of the magnificent seated Buddha illuminated by candles in the dimly lit space of the hall is sublime. There is much to see at Todaiji, which was originally built in the 8th century and is now registered as a World Heritage Site, so after visiting the Great Buddha, take the time to enjoy a stroll around the vast grounds of the temple. The area around the Nigatsu-do is especially recommended. The hall offers wonderful panoramic views of the city of Nara. If you head northwest from here, you will encounter an elegant laneway that follows an earthen wall — known as the rear approach to the Nigatsu-do. The interior of the Sangatsu-do with its group of Buddhist statues is a must for the Buddha carving enthusiast. To avoid the crowds, it’s advisable to come in the early morning or evening.

ADDRESS 奈良市東大寺町406-1 / 406-1 Zoshicho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-22-5511 / WEB todaiji.or.jp / OPEN 8:00-16:30 (November-February); 8:00-17:00 (March); 7:30-17:30 (April-September); 7:30-17:00 (October) / ADMISSION ¥500
KASUGATAISHA SHRINE

The vivid vermilion-coloured buildings of this large and ancient shrine contrast beautifully with the lush greenery of the forest in which it stands. The Kasuga Primeval Forest, considered holy ground, makes a delightful spot for a meditative walk. The main shrine buildings are surrounded by long corridors lined with 1,000 hanging lanterns, which is a beautiful sight indeed. When they and the 2,000 stone lanterns in the grounds are all lit up once in February and again in August, the sight is quite breathtaking. This shrine was built in the 8th century, when Nara was Japan’s capital, for the protection of the country’s prosperity and the happiness of its people. In 1998 the shrine was registered as a World Heritage Site. Perhaps one of the most beautiful times of the year here is late April, when the entire grounds of the shrine are abloom with wild fuji (wisteria). This space is a work of devotional art, in harmony with nature, and well worth taking time to view at a slow pace.

ADDRESS 奈良市春日野町 160 / 180 Kasugano-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-22-7788 / WEB kasugataisha.or.jp / OPEN 5:00–18:00 (April–September); 6:30–17:00 (October–March) (Check the web site for details) / ADMISSION Free, however ¥500 for access to the Inner Shrine.
The five-storied pagoda of Kofukuji Temple is perhaps Nara's most distinctive landmark. The temple is also home to the must-see Kofukuji National Treasure Museum. Within the vast collection of outstanding Buddhist works of art here, the temple's Buddhist sculptures stand out; they are acclaimed by art connoisseurs from around the world. Some of the most popular works are the Senju Kannon Buddha Goddess of Mercy with 1,000 arms, the Ashura statue, and Kongo Rikishi guardian deity statues. Time will pass so quickly as you view the numerous powerful, dignified, or humorous Buddhist sculptures that inspire silence yet seem to speak to you. During the Nara Tokae Festival each summer, both the perimeter of Sarusawa-ike Pond, with the figure of the five-storied pagoda reflected in its waters, and the sando approach to the temple are lined with candles, and a night visit to Kofukuji Temple is an unforgettable experience.

**ADDRESS** 奈良市大和町 48 / 48 Noboriji-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-22-7755 / WEB kofukuji.com / OPEN 9:00-17:00 / ADMISSION ¥600 (National Treasure Museum), ¥300 (Eastern Golden Hall), ¥500 (Both) (Scheduled closing times of National Treasure Museum: July 19-22, 2016, January 1 - December 31, 2017)

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**唐招提寺**

TOSHODAIJI TEMPLE

Today, Toshodaiji Temple is just outside Nara City proper, but when Nara was Japan's capital the temple was right in the heart of Nara, and therefore right at the heart of Japan. Toshodaiji was established in 759 by the Chinese monk Ganjin (Jianzhen) as a seminary for Buddhist training. The structure is very much in the style of the Nara period. The large scale of the Kondo (main hall) and other buildings within the grounds and the spacious layout of the compound make it different from most other Japanese temples. The Buddhist statues in the Kondo and the Kodo (lecture hall), as well as the buildings themselves have survived intact since the 8th century, which is very rare. Take a slow, meditative walk around the whole grounds and don't forget to see the beautiful moss garden at the very back of the temple compound.

**ADDRESS** 奈良市五条町 13-46 / 13-46 Gojo-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-33-7900 / WEB toshodaiji.jp / OPEN 8:30-17:00 (Entry until 16:30) / ADMISSION ¥600
NARA NATIONAL MUSEUM

This is the only museum in Japan specialising in the Buddhist fine arts. Even a fairly brisk tour of the museum requires up to two hours, but if you have to narrow your focus, the Buddhist sculptures are highly recommended. The permanent collection, which includes a huge number of National Treasures and Important Cultural Properties, is also well worth seeing. The autumn annual exhibition of treasures from Todaiji Temple’s Shosoin Imperial Treasury (of 8th century works of art) draws huge crowds of enthusiasts from around Japan and overseas. The museum shop offers interesting souvenirs, such as T-shirts with Buddha image designs and products depicting treasures from the Shosoin, and there is a quiet café in the basement for coffee or light meals. Access to the shop and café is free of charge.

NARAMACHI KOSHI NO IE

The streets of the old town of Naramachi centered around the World Heritage site Gangoji Temple are lined with traditional machiya townhouses. The Naramachi Koshinoie machiya museum is a reproduction of a machiya from the end of the 19th century, and you can experience here how people in Nara lived then. You can see up close some of the features that are typical of machiya; the koshi lattice on the windows specially constructed to make it harder to see in from the outside, the traditional stamped dirt floor, and the layout of the inner courtyard designed to improve air flow and bring in more light. The museum is a great place to take a break and offers information on local walking tours. Free Admission.

ADDRESS Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-23-4820 / OPEN 9:00-17:00 (Closed Mondays and days after public holidays except on Saturdays and Sundays) / ADMISSION Free
The Nara Craft Museum displays examples of the many local crafts that have been passed down over the generations for more than 1,000 years. The exhibition of traditional works by first-class craftsmen from the prefecture includes Narazarashi textiles, Akahada-yaki pottery, sumi (charcoal) ink, and Nara fude (writing brushes), and is a great opportunity to appreciate the wonderful skill and dedication of the craftsmen. Some of the works are also available for sale at the museum shop. A visit to the museum, during your stroll around Naramachi, is a great to acquaint yourself with the traditional crafts of Nara.

ADDRESS: 奈良市五条万字町 1-1-1
Azemane-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE: 0742-27-0033 / WEB: azemane.web.fc2.com / OPEN: 10:00-18:00 (Closed Mondays) / ADMISSION: Free

Nara is the birthplace of Japanese seisoku [refined sake]. Omiwa-jinja Shrine (p.53) in the city of Sakurai enshrines the Shinto god of Japanese sake, and it is said that it was at a temple in Nara that clear, filtered seisoku was first made. Before that sake was cloudy. This store located near the entrance to the old Naramachi district can be reached by passing through the shopping arcade opposite the railway station. Opened in 2012, the store has over 120 varieties of sake made by 29 local breweries, and sake enthusiasts will be happy to know that they can relax at the counter inside the store and sample the different sake’s in 50cc glass from ¥200 with snacks starting at ¥200. Rare local sake produced by the smaller breweries, as well as seasonally limited sake varieties are also on offer.

ADDRESS: 奈良市西寺林町 22 / 22
Nishiterabayashi-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE: 0742-26-6078 / WEB: naraizumi.jp / OPEN: 11:00-20:00 (Closed Thursdays)
ISUIEN GARDEN

This elegant Japanese garden, extending over an area of 11,000 square metres, is composed of two separate gardens of different eras — the front garden created in the 1670s and the rear garden in the early 20th century. The shakkei “borrowed scenery” of the rear garden is especially delightful. The borrowed scenery incorporates Mt. Wakakusa, Mt. Kasuga and Mt. Mikasa in the far distance and the Nandaimon Gate of Todaiji Temple into the landscape of the garden and generates an impressive sense of depth. There are no houses, telephone poles and the like to be seen from the garden, leaving you fully immersed in the natural beauty of a classic Japanese garden. A Japanese-style house overlooking the garden serves tea. For garden lovers, the beautiful Yoshikien Garden is right next door.

ADDRESS 奈良市水門町 74 / 74 Suimon-chō, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-25-0781 / WEB isuien.or.jp / OPEN April 1 to June 1: 9:30-17:00 (Last entry 16:30); June 2 to March 31: 9:30 to 16:30 (Last entry 16:00) / (Closed Tuesdays, except in April, May, October and November) / ADMISSION ¥900
What to Buy

1. Dried fruits by Horiuchi Fruit Farm - From ¥756 / Where to buy: Nippon-Ichi (p. 25), Naranomi (p. 26) / horiuchi-fruit.jp

2. Socks by 2&9 - From ¥1,296 / Where to buy: Nippon-Ichi (p. 25) / 2to9.jp

3. Jikatabi-style sneakers by TABI-JI - From ¥3,888 / Where to buy: Shop TABI-JI (p. 28) / tabi-ji.jp

4. Japanese granola by Kuruminoki-¥702 / Where to buy: Kuruminoki (p. 38) / kuruminoki.co.jp

5. Nara sake / Where to buy: Naraizumi Yusai (p. 19)

6. Takayama chasen - From around ¥2,500 / Where to buy: Kite Mite Nara Shop (in the Nara Prefecture Commerce & Industry Tourist House) / Tel: 0742-26-8828 / nara-shop.jp


8. Aioi kabuse sencha green leaf tea (by the can) from Tea Farm Inokura - ¥1,296 / Where to buy: So (p. 33), Soramitsu (p. 27) / inokura.co.jp
If you’re fond of stylish clothes and fabric accessories, you must check out “Yu Nakagawa.” This is the flagship store, directly managed by the textile company “Nakagawa Masashichi Shoten,” a 300-year-old establishment that deals in Narazarashi, a local and traditional bleached linen fabric. With a brand concept of “Japanese fabrics,” they utilize high-quality materials, and dyeing and weaving technologies from all over Japan to manufacture elegant clothes in a contemporary style. The store offers a wide selection of items, including dresses, shawls, and other fashionable wear, as well as interior fabrics such as tapestries, and even raw fabrics. The limited edition designs of the store’s popular tea towels featuring deer make a wonderful souvenir of your visit to Nara.

**ADDRESS**: 奈良市元林院町 31-1 / 31-1 Gannincho, Nara-shi / **PHONE**: 0742-22-1322 / **WEB**: yu-nakagawa.co.jp / **OPEN**: 10:00-18:30

**Nippon-Ichi**

Nippon-Ichi (Lit: Japan Market) offers a wide range of attractively presented and designed local crafts and specialties from all over Japan. The wide selection of goods includes beautifully packaged omiyage (souvenirs), snacks such as senbei (Japanese crackers), decorative items featuring traditional Japanese motifs like Mt. Fuji and daruma dolls, seasonal interior goods, and socks from the Nara-based brand “269.” One of the most popular items here is an omikuji (fortune-telling ornament) in the shape of a deer, available only here at the Nara store. The product design quality is high, even on the little accessories priced below ¥500, and the store is known for its own original products only available here. Nippon-Ichi can be reached easily in about 5 minutes from the Kintetsu Nara Station, and is the last stop for many tourists to buy all of their souvenirs before heading off.

**ADDRESS**: 奈良市北御所町 1-1 / **PHONE**: 0742-23-5650 / **WEB**: yu-nakagawa.co.jp/p/213 / **OPEN**: 10:00-19:00
NARANOMI

This little select shop offers a wide range of day-to-day goods, carefully selected by the lady owner, and is known for things that grow on you the more you use them. In addition to stationery, cooking utensils, accessories made from natural materials, clothing, and baby goods, there are products from the Hariuchi Fruit Farm in Nara and many other local specialties. There are plenty of nice items at around ¥1,000, so shopping here is fun, whether you’re picking up a souvenir for someone or just looking to get something for yourself. The traditional Japanese craft items in more modern designs are a favourite with all overseas visitors, while the brass accessories seem to be particularly popular with Asian tourists. If you ask, the staff will even choose a gift set for you. Credit cards are accepted for purchases of over ¥5,000.

ADDRESS 奈良市鶴福院町13 / 13
Tsurufukuin-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-23-7557 / WEB narano-mi.com / OPEN 11:00-18:00

SORAMITSU

This gallery-like craft shop offers products selected individually by the owner based on the theme of “Beautiful Tools Made in Japan.” For first-time visitors, finding the way to the store is something of a challenge, because it is located deep within a quiet residential area. You take a leisurely stroll through the narrow lanes and paths, and just when you think you may be lost you’ll see the old Japanese-style house, home to the shop. The simple, understated interior of the store is redolent of the Japanese wabi aesthetic. The range of craft goods on offer includes beautifully designed everyday items like bottle openers and scissors, which would make a special interesting souvenir. Exhibitions are also held irregularly. See the web site for details before visiting.

ADDRESS 奈良市高畑町1445-1 / 1445-1
Takabatake-cho, Nara-shi / WEB soramitsu.com / OPEN 11:00-18:00 (-17:00 from December to March) (Closed Monday to Wednesday)
SHOP TABI-JI

Traditionally worn by carpenters and gardeners, TABI-JI is a modern take on Japan’s traditional jika-tabi (split-toed sneakers). Opened in 2007, the Nara-based brand focuses on “tradition, modernity, and health,” and has built up a steady following, both locally and internationally, for its chic designs. The classic split-toed form is said to make walking easier and be good for your health. TABI-JI’s unisex tabi sneakers (around ¥9,000) give a modern design twist to this classic form. Also check out the tabi socks and slippers, decorated with distinctive Nara patterns.

ADDRESS 奈良市橿井町 2-2F / 2F-2, Tarui-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-26-3588 / WEB tabi-ji.jp / OPEN 11:00-19:00 (Closed Wednesdays)

Itadakimasu
Let’s eat!

Where to eat?

Of course, one of the pleasures of travel is getting to know the local cuisine, by trying the traditional cooking and the fresh produce of a region. There are many great cafes and restaurants in Nara City and in this section we have included a selection of our favourites, particularly those that use the traditional yamato vegetables of Nara — available in no other part of Japan.

Gochisousama
That was delicious
HIRASO

This shop specialises in persimmon leaf-wrapped sushi (Kaki-no-ha zushi): a typical homemade dish from the Yoshino region. Yoshino’s location deep in the mountains far from the sea made mackerel (saba) a precious commodity. Salted Mackerel was wrapped in persimmon leaves (kaki-no-ha), for their preservative and antibacterial effect, and this was served as a delicacy to special guests. The kaki-no-ha zushi of Hiraso, founded in Yoshino more than 150 years ago, is as popular with locals as with visitors. Try the assorted (morikawase) kaki-no-ha zushi at ¥1,240 including miso soup or suimono clear soup. Vegetarians can request sushi made with vegetables instead of fish. Since this type of sushi remains good to eat for up to three days, you can also get takeaway for a later lunch or dinner. Do try the unique flavour of this traditional type of sushi.

ADDRESS 奈良市今御門町 30-1 / 30-1
Imamikado-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-22-0856 / WEB hiraso.jp / OPEN 10:00-20:00 (Closed Mondays)

AWA NARAMACHI

This restaurant is in a beautifully restored traditional machiya townhouse. The menu features a wide range of yamato-ysai, local vegetable varieties that have been cultivated in the Nara region for generations. Each of the courses offered uses between 30 and 50 different kinds of vegetables. When dishes are brought to the table, guests receive a detailed explanation of the vegetables used. This unique aspect of the service reflects Awa’s dedication to ensuring that the yamato-ysai of Nara are passed on to future generations. Dishes are superbly arranged, so the meal will be a feast for your eyes too. Awa Naramachi offers four lunch sets from ¥2,900, and three dinner sets from ¥3,900, some of which include yamato-ushi, the local Nara beef. This is a reservation-only restaurant, so you will need to book early. [A charge applies for same-day cancellations]. Although only Japanese is spoken, don’t let that stop you from enjoying a marvellous meal at Awa Naramachi.

ADDRESS 奈良市勝南院町 1 / 1 Shonami-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-24-5699 / WEB kiyosumi.jp/awa-naramachi / OPEN 11:30-15:00 & 17:30-22:00 (Closed Tuesdays)
Located between Kofukuji Temple [p.14] which is famed for its five-storied pagoda, and the old district of Naramachi, coto coto is a perfect spot to drop in to when you’re strolling around town. In the spacious dining space, you can enjoy traditional vegetables, local brand meat and other produce unique to Nara, lovingly prepared. The healthy and well balanced menu includes dishes of gorgeous, colourful vegetables and seasonal soups in generous quantities. Lunch sets start at ¥1,200, dinner courses at ¥2,400. Local Nara sake and craft beers also served.

ADDRESS 奈良市東寺林町38 ならまちセンター 1階 / 1F Naramachi Center 38 Higashiterabayashi-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-22-5922 / WEB cotocoto.nara.jp / OPEN 11:30-17:00 & 18:00-24:00. Sundays: 11:30-17:00 (Closed Tuesdays)

This café specializes in local Nara tea and Japanese wagashi sweets. Proprietor Sosetsu Yamada, a qualified teacher of the tea ceremony in the Omotesenke school and also a former Shinto priest, has lived a life deeply immersed in Japanese culture. He opened the café in 2014, inspired by his love of Nara’s delicious tea and a desire to create a place where it can be accessibly experienced. The menu here offers up over 30 varieties of tea produced in Nara, including sencha green leaf tea, macha green powdered tea, bancha coarse tea, and hojicha roasted tea. Choosing what to drink is a pleasant challenge. If you order a macha the kimono-ed proprietor will prepare the tea for you himself. Just observing the beautiful movements of the preparing of the tea brings tranquility to the mind; a simple cup of tea can create a soothing spirit of harmony.

ADDRESS 奈良市下御門町 17-1 2F / 2F Shimomikado-cho, Nara-shi / WEB amoblo. jp/shimomikado / OPEN 14:30-19:00 (Closed Thursdays)
Eating breakfast at the Kamado restaurant and grocery is a pleasure, not just for the taste of the food but also for the wonderful interior and ambience. Gazing across the counter you can watch rice cooking over a traditional kamado wood-burning stove. The crackling of the burning wood and the fragrant smell of the cooking rice soothe both body and soul. The recommended breakfast set of freshly cooked rice, accompanied by miso soup and one okazu side dish is only ¥550. In the adjacent grocery corner you can also buy local food products. Next door there is a small tourist office with English-speaking staff on hand at all times, as well as a Japanese herb garden.

**KASHIYA**

Try the sweets here to experience the skill of a master confectioner. Before opening this shop in 2008, the master specialised in making seasonal wagashi, Japanese-style sweets, to order, for such prestigious clients as the Kasugataisha Shrine, many other Nara shrines and temples, as well as for local tea ceremony masters. The shop, located in an old traditional house, is right next to Awa Naramachi (p.31), a restaurant renowned for its culinary focus on traditional Nara vegetables. Soft jazz background music and antique Japanese furnishings combine to create a lovely ambience. Since there are only about 15 seats, it can get a little crowded at times, but the staff is polite and pleasant, so do line up. The joyo-manju steamed rice cakes filled with exquisite anko red bean jam (¥350) are highly recommended. Even those overseas visitors that don’t normally like anko rave about this place. So give it a try.

**ADDRESS** \(\text{Sika no fune} \) 11 Inoue-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-94-5520 / WEB kuranoki.co.jp/shikanofune / OPEN 8:00-18:00 (Closed Wednesdays)

**ADDRESS** 奈良市中條町 22-3 / 22-3 Chūn-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-22-8899 / WEB kasiya.jp / OPEN 9:00-18:00
Open the door of this little coffee shop and you’ll feel right at home in this tastefully renovated machiya townhouse. Owner Yoko Fukumoto opened Minamo in December 2014, after having learned the craft for nearly five years at one of Nara’s great cafes. Her homely dishes are lovingly prepared using fresh vegetables and loved by both locals and tourists. Teishoku set meals (¥1,000) consist of a main dish, soup, salad and rice, with the menu changing every three days. The popular tomato and chicken curry (¥900) is also a hit among regulars. Her homemade desserts, including classic cheesecake and rich gateau au chocolat are perfect matches for the excellent hand drip coffee on offer. A perfect spot for a slow-paced lunch in a relaxing atmosphere right in the middle of Naramachi.

**ADDRESS** 奈良市東城南町28 / 28 Higashijodocho, Nara-cho / PHONE 0742-27-7165 / WEB minamocoffee.tumblr.com / OPEN 11:00-18:00 (Closed Tuesdays)

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This cafe and gallery near Todaiji Temple [p.11] is open only on weekends. The wooden building built by a temple carpenter around 90 years ago was once a factory making yoghurt beverages, hence the name that literally means “old factory”. It is a handsome building which the current owner, Kazuo Kita, wants to preserve in its original state as far as possible. Inside the cafe, which occupies the old office and consignment area, the smell of coffee interplays with the old-world charm of the space to create a warm inviting mood. An early morning stroll around Todaiji Temple, followed by breakfast and coffee (¥1,200) here would make a wonderful start to your day.

**ADDRESS** 奈良市芝辻町543 / 543 Shibutsujicho, Nara-cho / PHONE 0742-22-2215 / WEB kojoato.jp/wp / OPEN Friday 11:00-18:00; weekends and public holidays 9:00-18:00 (Closed Monday to Thursday)
Owner Yukiko Ishimura opened this café and general store on the outskirts of the city in 1984. Since then, it has won a devoted clientele of both locals as well as fans from all over Japan, some of whom come to Nara just to visit Kuruminoki. Surrounded by greenery, the interior space is simple, yet warm and inviting, and everything on the menu is delicious. The very popular weekly lunch special (¥1,820), features generous amounts of traditional Nara vegetables and other seasonal produce; it is so popular that even on weekdays you may have to wait in line. The adjacent store offers a great selection of basic ceramics, cooking utensils, comfortable clothing, food items and a thoughtful selection of souvenirs and gifts.

**MIA’S BREAD**

This shop is located in the midst of a residential area, close to the Nara Palace Site a bit out the way. You can’t miss it, though. Just look for the line of cars and people; that’ll be “Mia’s Bread.” Fans come from all over Japan to buy the additive-free bread and sweets created by proprietor Miwa Morita, who has also published a number of cooking books based on the products in her store. She uses only the finest ingredients, and her store is very popular amongst the health conscious. The sandwiches, made with generous quantities of seasonal vegetables offer a superb balance of taste, texture, and colour are a popular choice, and there is also a café in the bakery where you can enjoy your sandwich with a coffee, for a total price of around ¥1,000. Crowded even on weekdays, reservations are essential if you want to eat in the café. Thankfully, a new store is set to open at 48 Tsubai-cho in April 2016 (approximately 5 minutes on foot from Kintetsu Nara Station).

**ADDRESS** 奈良市法蓮町 567-1 / 567-1 Monen-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-23-8288 / WEB kuruminoki.co.jp / OPEN Monday to Thursday: 11:30-17:30; Friday to Sunday: 11:30-21:00

**ADDRESS** 奈良市佐紀町 2406-1 / 2406-1 Sakijicho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-36-1298 / WEB miasbread.com / OPEN 10:30-18:00 (Bread sales); 10:30-16:00 (Café) (Closed Mondays)
セヴ
SALON DES VINS SÈVE

If you are looking for a great place to enjoy glass of good wine, this is the place to head to. Proprietor Ryo Okunishi really knows his wines, having worked as a sommelier in France as well as in a winery. Not surprisingly, he’s well known to all the local wine buffs. Salon des vins Sève enjoys many repeat customers, both local and international, who come to enjoy French wines, cheeses and cured hams in an informal, relaxing setting. The daily wine by the glass ranges from ¥1,000 to ¥2,400, and bottles can be had for ¥6,000 or more. Note also that French is spoken.

ADDRESS 奈良市西寺林町19-1/19-1
Nishiterabaya-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-25-2233 / WEB yaplog.jp/closdetart1985 / OPEN 18:00 - 24:00 (Closed on Mondays)

ランプバー
LAMP BAR

This is the perfect bar for adding that special touch to your visit to Nara. The “Cocktail Journey” theme of the bar welcomes you to the world of the owner/bartender, Michito Kaneko, who recently won the worldwide “Bartender of the Year” contest. First-time visitors often comment on the interior: the subdued lighting over the Italian leather counter and a secret door concealed behind antique suitcases. The interior and the service will help you to forget time. Expect to pay around ¥4,000 to enjoy two cocktails. The sort of bar you might want to dress up a little to visit and where you feel completely comfortable even just by yourself.

ADDRESS 奈良市角振町26 いせやビル104号
Isey Building 104, 26 Tsunofuri-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-24-2200 / OPEN 17:00 - 2:00 (Closed Tuesdays)
Other Restaurants

Fujin [Izakaya]
奈良市 東向中町 S-1 浅川ハーベストビル 2F /
Asakawa Harvest Bldg 2F, S-1 Higashimuki-
-Nakamachi, Nara-shi / T.0742-26-1008 /
11:00-15:00 (L.O. 14:30) & 17:00-24:00 (L.O. 23:00) / fujin-nara.com / Credit cards OK. /
Lunch: ¥1,000 / Dinner: ¥3,000-4,000

Kinai (Vegan & Vegetarian)
奈良市 杉ヶ町 25-1 フェリス駅前 1F / Ferris-
Ekima 1F, 25-1 Suruga-machi, Nara-shi / 
T.080-6110-6105, 0742-20-6188, 070-
6682-6105 / kinai.com / Lunch: 11:30-
15:00, Dinner: Reservations only / Closed
Mondays / Credit cards OK. / Lunch: 
¥700-¥2,500 / Dinner: ¥3,000-5,000

Kyoya (Japanese)
奈良市 竜田町 27 / 27 Minamiichi-cho, Nara-
shi / T.0742-23-1520 / 11:30-14:00 & 17:00-
23:30 (L.O. 22:00) / Closed Sundays / 
Credit cards OK. / Lunch: ¥1,000 / Dinner: 
¥3,000-4,000

Mentouan (Udon Noodles)
奈良市 桃本町 30-1 / 30-1 Hashimoto-cho, 
Nara-shi / T.0742-25-3581 / 11:00-18:00 or 
until supplies last / Closed Tuesdays (or 
the following day if Tuesday is a public 
holiday) / Cash only / Lunch: ¥1,000 / 
Dinner: ¥1,000

Ristorante l-lunga [Italian fine dining]
奈良市 東向中町 16 豊国広場 / Yamato- 
Kaze Plaza, 16 Kasugano-cho, Nara-shi / T. 
0742-93-8300 / 11:30-15:00 & 18:00-22:00 / 
llunga.jp / Credit cards OK. / Lunch:
¥6,000-¥8,000 / Dinner: ¥10,000-15,000

Shikiyuji (Izakaya)
奈良市 三条町 523-1 / 523-1 Sanjo-cho, 
Nara-shi / T.0742-20-2030 / 11:30-15:00 
& 17:00-24:00 / shikiyuji.com / Credit 
cards OK. / Lunch: ¥800-¥1,000 / Dinner: 
¥5,000-¥4,000

Trattoria Piano [Casual Italian]
奈良市 橋本町 15-1 / 15-1 Hashimoto-cho, 
Nara-shi / T.0742-26-1837 / 1F, 11:00-
24:00 (L.O. 23:00), 2F, 11:00-15:30 (L.O. 
14:30), 17:00-23:00 (L.O. 22:00) / piano.
syncronicity.co.jp / Credit cards OK. / 
Lunch: ¥1,000-¥2,000 / Dinner: ¥3,000-
4,000

Yuan (Yakitori - Grilled Chicken)
奈良市 杉ヶ町 14-1 第一西田ビル 1F / Daichi-
Nishida Bldg 1F, 14-1 Suruga-machi, Nara-
shi / T.0742-81-7794 / 18:00-24:00 / Closed 
Mondays / Credit cards OK. / Dinner: 
¥3,000-4,000

Where to stay?

Nara offers visitors many appealing accommodation options. While it’s certainly possible to make a pleasant day trip to Nara from Kyoto or Osaka, staying for at least one night allows you to experience the delight of an early morning walk in Nara Park when few people are around, or the tranquil charm of Naramachi by night. For your stay, you can choose from reasonably priced guest houses, or something more special, like Kiidera-no-ie (p.44), which rents out entire machiya townhouses in the old Naramachi district. Another unique option is the venerable Nara Hotel (p.46), which has operated continuously since the Meiji Era (1868-1912). Even if you don’t stay the night here, be sure to visit the classic Nara Hotel Bar for a cocktail or two.
KIDERA NO-IE

If you are looking to see what living in an old Nara machiya townhouse is like, Kidera-No-Ie is the place for you. Five machiya townhouses, each around 100 years old, have been tastefully renovated for an experience that’s closer to “living in Nara” than just staying overnight at a regular hotel. Guests have their own kitchen, bath, bedroom and living room. Interiors are modern Japanese with western amenities added for comfort, and each of the 5 houses is different: some have beds on a terracotta floor, and others let guests spread futon mattresses on tatami. These one-of-a-kind houses bring the traditional Japanese home into the modern age with innovative renovation ideas and conjure up a simpler style of living. Complementary Japanese style breakfast delivered to your door included. Rates from ¥18,000.

ADDRESS 奈良市紀寺町 779 / 779 Kideracho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-25-5500 / WEB machiyado.com
NARA HOTEL

This classic hotel, founded in 1909, counts the Japanese royal family, Audrey Hepburn and many other dignitaries and celebrities amongst its guests. The architectural style is a fusion of Western and Japanese styles, with guest rooms divided between the main building and an annex. The interior of the main building is particularly striking, with features such as mantelpieces in the form of torii, the distinctive gateways at the entrance to Shinto shrines. The large windows of the main dining room offers superb views of the five-storied pagoda of Kofukuji Temple, and in fact the restaurant here is recognized by Nara Prefecture as offering one of the finest scenic dining experiences in Nara. Guests are offered a choice of three types of breakfast — Western, Japanese, and local. Many people come to the hotel just to eat breakfast. Above all, it’s the hotel’s genuine spirit of hospitality that will make your stay here memorable. Prices start at ¥29,700 for a twin room in the main building.

ADDRESS 奈良市高畑町 1096 / 1096 Takabatake-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-26-3300 / WEB narahotel.co.jp

NARA UGAYA GUESTHOUSE

This very reasonable, comfortable guest house, with prices starting from just ¥2,500 per night, is just 5 minutes on foot from JR Nara Station. Nestled within a quiet residential area, Ugaya is an impecably clean, renovated traditional house, which makes guests feel right at home during their stay, and attracts guests from all over the World. The owner, Ippei Seto, plays the biwa, a traditional Japanese lute, and he can be persuaded to play for guests in the lounge. Ugaya is also attentive to the individual time constraints and needs of each guest and has many repeat lodgers. There is both a mixed male-female dormitory and a female-only dormitory (bunk beds and Japanese rooms).

ADDRESS 奈良市吉照町 4-1 / 4-1 Okukomori-cho, Nara-shi / PHONE 0742-95-7739 / WEB ugaya.net
Hotels and Ryokans in Nara City

Edosan
奈良市高畑町 1167 / 1167 Takabatake-cho, Nara-shi / T.0742-26-2662 / edosan.jp / From ¥20,000

Hotel Asyl Nara
奈良市油阪町 1-58 / 1-58 Aburasa-cho, Nara-shi / T.0120-220-350 / worldheritage.co.jp/asyl / From ¥15,000

Hotel New Wakasa / Wakasa Bettei
奈良市北半田東町 1 / 1 Kitahandahigashimachi, Nara-shi / T.0742-23-5858 / n-wakasa.com / From ¥15,500 / From ¥24,840

Hotel Nikko Nara
奈良市三条本町 8-1 / 8-1 Sanjohonmach, Nara-shi / T.0742-35-8831 / nikkonara.jp / From ¥14,700

Hotobil
奈良市府塚町 181-15 / 181-15 Kainoduka-cho, Nara-shi / T.0742-37-3278 / hotobil.com / From ¥7,020 (per person with breakfast) * Female-only guesthouse (Men can stay too if accompanying a woman)

Koto-no-yado Musashino
奈良市春日野町 90 / 90 Kasugano-cho, Nara-shi / T.0742-22-2739 / nara-musashino.com / From ¥33,480

Nara Tsukihi-tei Ryokan
奈良市春日野町 158 / 158 Kasugano-cho, Nara-shi / T.0742-26-2021 / nara-ryoutei.com/tsukihitei / From ¥30,000

Ryokan Matsumae
奈良市東寺林町 28-1 / 28-1 Higashiterabayashi-cho / T.0742-22-3686 / matsumae.co.jp / From ¥9,400 (per person without meals)

The Deer Park Inn
奈良市春日野町 158-5 / 158-5 Kasugano-cho, Nara-shi / T.0742-81-7222 / From ¥7,800 (per person without meals)

Yu-kei no Yado Heijo
奈良市川上町 728 新若草山ドライブウェイ沿い / 728 Kawakami-cho, Nara-shi (along the New Mt. Wakakusa Driveway) / T. 0742-23-5255 / heijo.co.jp / From ¥16,200

*K Prices quoted are approximate. Actual prices may vary with season/dates or for other reasons. The quoted prices, unless otherwise noted, are generally for a one-night stay per person (assuming two persons per room) with breakfast and dinner included. All prices include 8% consumption tax.

Konnichiwa
Hello

Out of town

Nara is much more than just downtown Naramachi. Outside of the city there are many places where you can enjoy the beauty of rural Japan, and unique local culture. In this chapter we will suggest trips not only to the three most beautiful areas of Nara Prefecture — Sakurai, Gojo and Yoshino — but also some special, out-of-the-way spots that you won't want to miss.

Of course, recommendations for great places to stay and eat are also included.

Sayonara
Good Bye
SAKURAI

Sakurai can be reached from Nara City in just 30 minutes or so by train. For a great one-day hike you can set off from JR Miwa Station, taking the Yamanobe-no-Michi trail (p.55) from behind Omiwa Shrine (p.53) and continuing on as far as Tenri Station (18 km, about 5.5 hours). Spring and Autumn are probably the best times to hike through this beautiful, unspoilt area. If you have some spare time before your hike, make sure to visit the Hasedera Temple (p.52).

HASEDERA TEMPLE

Also known since ancient times as hanano-mitera, “the temple of flowers,” Hasedera Temple has colourful displays of flowers and greenery that change from one season to the next. It is especially known for its sakura (cherry blossoms), ajisai (hydrangeas), shakuyaku (Chinese peonies), and koyo (coloured autumn leaves). One of the most beautiful sights here is the long stairway covered walkway, lined with hanging lanterns. The worship hall in the main temple sanctuary, built at the edge of a steep cliff halfway up the mountain has a “floating platform” that projects outwards from the front of the building and affords a spectacular view. The main sanctuary is dedicated to an 11-faced Kannon statue that is over 10 meters high, making it one of the largest images of its type in Japan. (Usually only the upper body can be viewed. Full viewings of the statue are possible only during special seasons.) It is well-worth taking some time to explore this temple at your leisure.

ADDRESS 桜井市別府731-1 / 731-1 Hase, Saku-ashi / PHONE 0744-47-7001 / WEB hasedera.or.jp / OPEN 8:30-17:00 (April-September), 9:00-17:00 (October, November, March), 9:00-16:30 (December-February) / ADMISSION ¥500

OMIWA SHRINE

The object of worship here is Mt. Miwa, which towers behind the shrine grounds — that is, the beautiful mountain is considered to be a god. This is a Shinto shrine of ancient form, with no inner shrine; only an outer shrine. The devotional spirit of the people of antiquity, who revered nature as a deity can still be felt here. Since Omiwa Shrine is also considered the home of the god of sake, it is a place of pilgrimage for sake brewers from all over Japan. Walk around the shrine grounds from the approach path, lined with huge and vigorous sugi (Japanese cedar) trees, every leaf of which seems charged with holiness. Just being here makes you feel purified. This very old shrine can give you an insight into ancient Shinto beliefs that have survived to the present day.

ADDRESS 桜井市三輪 1422 / 1422 Miwa, Saku-ashi / PHONE 0744-42-6633 / WEB omiwa.or.jp / OPEN Free access to shrine grounds / ADMISSION Free
Somen, a kind of thin noodles, is a Nara specialty, and Miwa somen are particularly well-known. Located right next to the torii archway of the Omiwa Shrine (p.53) is Morisho, a casual Miwa noodle eatery that boasts many regular patrons that drop in whenever they visit the shrine. The shop was started by the mother of the current proprietor, a skilled cook, in the front garden of her home, and to this day the noodles are cooked with painstaking care. The locals tend to favour the classic hiyashi somen cold noodles (¥950), the hot nyumen noodles, prepared with miso or soy sauce (¥850), and kaki-no-ha sushi saba, a traditional Nara specialty of mackerel sushi wrapped in persimmon leaves (¥700 yen for 5 pieces). The garden setting of the shop makes your meal a pleasure for all five senses. On cold days, hot soup noodles will warm you up, while on hot days the cold noodles will cool you down.

ADDRESS 桜井市三輪535 / 535 Miwa, Sakurai-shi / PHONE 0744-43-7411 / OPEN 10:00-17:00; Sundays and public holidays 9:30-17:00 (*Subject to change according to season and weather) (Closed Tuesdays and irregularly on Mondays)

山辺の道
YAMANOBÉ NO MICHÍ

On of the most popular hiking courses in Nara is this 16 km hike between Sakurai and Tenri on the Yamanobe-no-Michi route, the oldest recorded road in Japan. The hike takes about 1 day allowing for a few stops along the way. On the walk, along the foothills on the eastern side of the relatively low mountains that surround the Nara basin, you will experience typical Japanese countryside, walking along trails between the rice paddies not wide enough for cars, see bamboo groves and moss-covered stone Buddha statues, and unmanned stands selling local produce outside farm houses. There are also a number of temples and shrines on the way, including the Omiwa Shrine (p.53) and the Isonokami-jingu Shrine (p.58), as well a number of burial mounds and other historical sites. No matter the season, you will be able to take in some of Japan’s natural beauty at your own pace.
Isonokami-jingu Shrine, considered one of Japan’s oldest Shinto shrines, is the final stop on the hike along the Yamanobe-no-Michi trail from Miwa Station to Tenri Station. The chickens with long tails feathers that wander around the shrine and seem like servants of the deities are part of the charm of this sacred green oasis. The shrine can be reached in 30 minutes on foot from Tenri Station.

**ADDRESS** 天理市布留町 384 / 384 Furu-cho, Tenri-shi / PHONE 0743-62-0900 / WEB isonokami.jp / **OPEN** Free access to shrine grounds / **ADMISSION** Free

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**CAFE WAWA**

This cafe, run by a fruit farming family, is located in an idyllic country landscape along the Yamanobe-no-Michi hiking route (p.55). The family opened a small, casual eatery about ten years ago to provide a resting place for hikers. Slowly, by word of mouth, it became quite popular, and four years ago, they renovated and built a mountain lodge-style cafe, complete with wood burning stove. In addition to hikers, the cafe also attracts customers who drop in while out for a drive. The menu, centred around local vegetables and fruit produced by the farm, includes a beef curry, subtly flavoured with persimmon, made using Yamato-ushi, a local Nara brand of beef (¥1,000), pizza with farm-fresh vegetables baked in an wood-fired oven (¥900), and freshly squeezed juice of mikan (mandarin orange) made from fruit straight from the tree (¥400).

**ADDRESS** 天理市園原町 183 / 183 Sonohara-cho, Tenri-shi / PHONE 0743-66-1685 / WEB tenri-kankounouen.com/cafe.html / **OPEN** 10:00-16:00 (Closed on Mondays)
As you stroll about halfway down the shopping arcade opposite Tenri Station, amidst the local and friendly ambience, “Inada Sake Brewery” appears in the guise of a century-old Japanese-style house. The much loved sake produced by this venerable old brewery under the brand name “Inaten” is an all-round sake with a refreshing taste that goes well with almost any meal. You can sample the sake in the store free of charge. Mitsumori Inada, the 5th generation proprietor says that he is keen to explain the sake brewing process to his overseas guests, and his guided tours of the brewery (reservation required) are highly regarded by sake fans. As a souvenir or gift idea, check out the Narazuke (Nara pickles) made from the lees of this famous sake. The robust taste and rich fragrance of these pickles make them highly addictive.

**ADDRESS** 天理市三島町 379 / 379 Mishima-cho, Tenri-shi / PHONE 0743-62-0040 / WEB inaten.com / OPEN 9:00-18:00

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This nine-room inn was launched in the autumn of 2015 in Sakurai, which is renowned for its wonderful natural environment and a history linked to the ancient gods of Japan. The inn became an instant success for its fine dining using local ingredients, and as an ideal base from which to explore the nearby Yamanobe-no-Michi trail (p.55), Asuka (p.87) and other attractions of the region. It is known for its sophisticated French cuisine prepared with unique Nara produce, such as traditional yamato-ysai vegetables and yamato-ushi beef. The inn offers special course dinners that include sommelier-recommended wines, procured directly from wineries in France, matched to the food. Another treat here is the magnificent view from the main dining room out over the idyllic rural landscape. A twin room with breakfast and dinner is ¥51,140 per night for two people.

**ADDRESS** 桜井市高家 2217 / 2217 Tale, Sakurai-shi / PHONE 0744-49-0880 / WEB hiramatsuhotels.com/plaisance-sakurai
GOJO

You can reach Gojo in around one and a half hours from Nara City by train. Gojo Shinmachi, a lovingly preserved townscape dating from the Edo Period (1603-1868), is a must, but there is also plenty for nature lovers to do here, like rafting on the nearby Yoshino River (p.68).

Since Mt. Koya is just an hour and 15 minutes away by train, Gojo makes an ideal base for a visit to the sacred mountain. If you are staying overnight, consider staying at the beautifully renovated old machiya townhouse, Yanaseya (p.67).

Access:
From Nara: JR Nara > Oji > Gojo: 1 hour 17 minutes
From Koya: Nankai Koyasan Station > Nankai Gokurakubashi > Nankai Hashimoto > JR Hashimoto > JR Gojo Station: 1 hour 15 minutes
In the heart of the old district of the city of Gojo is a street called “Shinmachi-dori.” Elegant traditional old buildings line both sides of this narrow street, just wide enough for a single car to pass. The street is very precious because it is one of the very few remaining well-preserved traditional townscapes in Japan. As you stroll down Shinmachi-dori, admiring the buildings, you can experience the flow of history in the townscape, visible in the variety of architectural styles of the houses, ranging from traditional Japanese-style wooden buildings of the samurai period to the stately Western-style buildings of the Meiji period (1868-1912). Many of these historical structures are still in use in which has helped them to be preserved. You can experience a “genuine” taste of old urban Japan here in Shinmachi. There are also a few interesting (and free!) museums to visit such as the “Machinami Denshokan” (town heritage museum) and “Machiya-kan” (traditional townhouse museum) which are well worth a visit. There’s more than enough here to keep you interested for a whole day.
五条 源兵衛
GOJO GENBEI

Locals proudly recommend this restaurant to anyone looking for an authentic taste of the refined elegance of the historical Gojo townscape. Located in a renovated 250-year-old traditional house within the historic building preservation district, the menu here offers a selection of dishes featuring local ingredients, with lunch sets from ¥2,500 and full-course dinners from ¥5,000. The menus are designed by chef Akihito Nakatani. He personally inspects the fields of the farmers that supply the restaurant so that he is assured of getting the best and freshest vegetables available. Unsurprisingly, many gourmands are fans of Gojo Genbei’s sophisticated cuisine. A sincere devotion to hospitality is one of the charms of the restaurant, reflected in its willingness to arrange special courses on the request of guests. Reservations are required.

カフェ KAKIHA
CAFE KAKIHA

A stop-off at Cafe KAKIHA is a must when you are strolling through Gojo Shinmachi. The cafe, set in a traditional house, specializes in sweets made with persimmon, kaki in Japanese, as the Gojo area is one of Japan’s leading centres of persimmon production. The cafe offers a wide variety of original persimmon-based sweets, featuring fastidiously selected leaves and fruits, presented with contemporary panache. The cafe is especially popular with young women for its persimmon pudding, which is so delicious that it sells out immediately, and refreshing smoothies made with vitamin C-packed persimmon leaves, which they believe to enhance the beauty of their skin. This is a wonderful place to eat a healthy dessert and relax your travel-weary bones.

ADDRESS 五条市本町 2-5-17 / PHONE 0747-23-5566 / WEB genbei.info / OPEN Lunch: 11:00-12:30 & 12:30-14:00; Dinner: 17:00-20:30

ADDRESS 五条市新町 2-5-12 / PHONE 0747-34-0518 (Nara Yoshino Ishii) / WEB kakihajp/cafe / OPEN 9:00-17:00 (Closed Mondays)
After sunset, Gojo is very quiet, but if you feel like a drink at a quiet bar, stroll down Shinmachi street to Girocco. You can sit at the bar under the original wooden beams of this renovated interior of an old sakagura (sake brewery), or sit around a piano-shaped table. The standard and original cocktails created by host Kenji Yamada are first-class and start at ¥650. A recommended speciality is the persimmon cocktail made using fresh local Gojo persimmons. If you are hungry, try the pizza, pasta, and other snacks, featuring local ingredients as far as possible. Live music every Saturday from 20:00.

**ADDRESS** 五條市本町 2-2-2 / 2-2-2 Honmachi, Gojo-shi / PHONE 0747-23-2805 / WEB girocco.jp / OPEN 17:30-24:30 Monday to Thursday; 17:30-2:00 Friday, Saturday, and days preceding public holidays (Closed Sundays and 4th Monday of the month)

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**旅宿 やなせ屋**

TABIYADO YANASEYA

This Japanese inn is a renovated machiya townhouse in the historic district of Gojo-Shinmachi. There are two separate buildings for guests, a hanare and kura, both of which are characteristic features of traditional Japanese house architecture. The inn only accommodates two sets of guests per day. The hanare is a sukiya tea ceremony-style building that offers views of the garden from a Japanese-style room. The bathtub of hinoki cedar exudes a lovely, invigorating scent. The kura, on the other hand, is renovated in the Western style, with a modern interior and comforts. With its three-meter ceiling, the downstairs living room feels very spacious. Upstairs there is a bedroom for two as well as a bathroom. Dinner is not provided as standard, but guests have the option of choosing a plan with meals from Gojo Genbei (p.64), across the road. Breakfast is available served in your room, for ¥2,000 per person; you can choose Japanese o-kayu rice porridge, or a Western breakfast. Prices start at ¥20,000 per night per person (without meals).

**ADDRESS** 五條市本町 2-1-7 / 2-7-3 Honmachi, Gojo-shi / PHONE 0747-25-5800 / WEB yanaseya.info
YOHINO RIVER RAFTING

Rafting is the ultimate way to enjoy the great outdoors, paddling down the rapids in a huge rubber boat. The gentle current of the Yoshino River makes it ideal for beginners who want a less intense introduction to rafting. A professional guide will join you, and rafters as young as the first grade of elementary school (with a guardian adult) are welcome, making this a fun activity for all the family. Midway through your tour, you’ll stop at a safe and scenic spot where you can take a dip in the river. Adults will feel like kids again, and the whole family can spend a fun day at one with Nara’s natural splendor. Rafters can also request a more thrilling ride down the swift rapids if you dare.

ADDRESS 五條市小島町533（集合場所: モンベル 五條店）/ 533 Kojima-cho, Gojo-shi (Meeting place: Montbell Gojo Store) / PHONE 0720-936-007 or 06-6538-0208 (Montbell Outdoor Challenge) / WHEN Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays from late April to early July and from September to October, and daily from mid-July to late August / PRICE from ¥9,800 (elementary school students from ¥7,800) (Member’s discount available; shoe rental fee not included)
YOSHINO

It takes approximately two hours to reach Yoshino from Nara City. Although it’s a bit of a journey, you should find the effort well worthwhile. The 30,000 sakura cherry trees that blossom on Mt. Yoshino in spring are renowned as one of Japan’s most spectacular hanami cherry blossom viewing spots. Another must see is the Kimpusenji Temple (p.72), the birthplace of the syncretic religion of Shugendo, which is a form of mountain-dwelling asceticism combining elements of Buddhism with the more ancient Japanese mountain worship. If you wish to experience the natural beauty of Japan’s mountains and forests in their fullest splendour, Yoshino is the place to go.

Access: Kintetsu Nara > Yamato-Saidaiji > Kashihara-ji-mae > Yoshino; 1 hour 40 minutes
In Japan, mountains have long been venerated as being home to sacred spirits. The history of Kimpusenji Temple, on the holy grounds of Mt. Yoshino, begins in the late 7th century, as a place of ascetic practice connected with this religious belief. Over time, the temple came to flourish as a nationwide centre of this syncretic religion of Shugendo. The main hall (a National Treasure) is a huge 34-meter high structure and is the second-largest wooden building in Japan after Todaiji’s Great Buddha Hall [p.11]. The three Buddhist statues housed in the hall are especially worth seeing. These masterpieces feature stern-looking Buddhist divinities in vivid blue, with ferocious, golden eyes. In the old days, people wanted not only statues of gentle Buddhas, but also fierce Buddhas to dispel demonic forces, and in these figures you get a sense of the power of the old mountain religion that arose from this awesome natural environment. These Buddhist statues are not normally displayed to the public, but for a ten-year period from 2012 the temple is allowing special public viewings for about one month each year. For exact dates please see the temple’s website.

ADDRESS 吉野郡吉野町吉野山 2500 / 2500 Yoshinoyama, Yoshino-cho, Yoshino-gun / PHONE 0746-32-8371 / WEB kinpusen.or.jp / OPEN 8:30-16:30 / ADMISSION ¥500 (Special public viewings: ¥1,000)
YOSHINOYAMA

It has been in operation continuously since 1928 and is Japan’s oldest cable car still in active service. A one-way ride from Senbonguchi Station at the gateway to Mt. Yoshino, to Yoshinoyama Station at the entrance to the mountain takes three minutes and costs ¥360.

ADDRESS Yoshino-, Yoshino-cho, Yoshino-gun / PHONE 0746-32-1007 (Yoshinoyama Tourism Association)

CAFE KITON

About ten minutes southeast from Kimpusenji Temple is Yoshinoyama Naka-senbon, where small gift shops and restaurants line the street. On this street you will find the trendy Cafe Kiton that opened in 2013. The owner, Yoshinori Tsujimura, launched his own “Tsujimura” brand of sweets made with kuzu (Japanese arrowroot), a local specialty of Yoshino. He renovated his family home to create this space where locals and travelers could connect. The modern space, featuring latticework of Yoshino sugi cedar on the windows, is tastefully designed and the pleasant warmth of the woodwork is very relaxing. The menu includes kuzu sweets handmade in the café’s basement kitchen. A set of kuzu sweet + Yamato hojicha roasted tea is ¥950.

ADDRESS 吉野郡吉野町吉野山 950 / PHONE 0746-32-3032 / WEB tsujimura-yoshino.com / OPEN 9:00-18:00 (Closed Tuesdays)
萬松堂
MANSHODO
This is a long-established wagashi (Japanese-style confectionery) store, opposite the Deva gate of Kimpusenji Temple. Manshodo has been serving tea and mochi [sweets made with pounded steamed glutinous rice] to temple worshippers for close to 100 years. During the cherry blossom season, yakan sweet jelly and sakura-mochi made with cherry-blossom leaves are both popular. The most popular sweet made here though is kusa-mochi, flavoured with yomogi (mugwort), which sells for ¥130 a piece. Yomogi is renowned for its health-giving properties and is richly fragrant of fresh grass. It complements beautifully the homemade sweet adzuki bean paste filling. The store’s Japanese sweets are all made to bring out the taste of the ingredients to the full, and contain no additives. No wonder they are so popular! Seeing the master confectioner and proprietor Hideyuki Hashimoto in the store making his sweets by hand, one by one, only adds to the charm of this old confectionary store.

ADDRESS 吉野郡吉野町吉野山448 / 448 Yoshinoyama, Yoshino-cho, Yoshino-gun / PHONE 0746-32-2834 / OPEN 8:30-17:00 (Closed irregularly)

谷嶋誠心堂
TANISHIMA SEISHINDO
Yoshino is the home of Japanese washi paper making, renowned throughout Japan for the excellence of its manufacture and quality. In the midst of the many souvenir shops and hotels that line the Naka-senbon area of Mt. Yoshino, you will find the Tanishima Seishindo paper shop which stocks a range of papers produced by local washi workshops. In recent years plain white paper has been supplemented with more modern washi designs with patterns that make them perfect for a range of paper crafts. The shop owner especially recommends sugikawa washi. It’s made with the fibres of the bark of the famous Yoshino cedar using traditional techniques which give the washi a distinctive warm colour and smooth texture. The large-sized washi, ideal for tapestries, light covers and other interior materials, is particularly popular with overseas visitors.

ADDRESS 吉野郡吉野町吉野山944 / 944 Yoshinoyama, Yoshino-cho, Yoshino-gun / PHONE 0746-32-4008 / OPEN 9:00-17:00 (Closed irregularly)
RYOKAN KATO

This ryokan, or Japanese-style inn, was established around 1780. In business for more than 230 years, the number of overseas guests is steadily increasing. The seventh generation young couple that currently own the ryokan, are known for their warm hospitality and service, making you feel right at home. The homely log house-style guest rooms, made by the proprietors themselves out of local Yoshino sugi cedar and hinoki cypress, are very cozy and the warmth of the wood, the fireplace, and the view of lush green vegetation from the large windows combine to relax and relieve the tension and weariness of the traveller. The inn makes an excellent base for exploring Mt. Yoshino. Prices start from ¥7,000 per person without meals, or from ¥16,000 (two persons in one room) with breakfast and dinner included. In addition to Ryokan Kato, another widely recommended ryokan in Yoshino is the Chikurinin Gunpoen, which also has a beautiful garden.
YAMATO
KORIYAMA
AREA

Access
Kintetsu Nara Stn. >
Yamato-Saidaiji Stn. >
Kintetsu Koriyama Stn.
16 minutes

Yamatakoriyama, reachable in just 16
minutes or so from Kintetsu Nara Station,
is Japan’s biggest centre of goldfish
production. A visit to the site of the ruins
of Koriyama Castle, selected amongst
the 100 most beautiful places in Japan
for viewing sakura cherry blossoms, is
highly recommended in spring. Some
points of interest around Kintetsu
Koriyama Station are listed below. These
can all be enjoyed in about half a day at
a leisurely pace on foot.

Hakomotokan Konya
(Indigo dyeing experience)
大和郡山市細屋町 19-1 / 19-1 Konya-
machii, Yamatakoriyama-shi / T 0743-
58-5531 / hakomoto.com / OPEN 9:00-
17:00 [Closed Mondays] [Open if Monday
is public holiday and closed the day
after] / ADMISSION ¥300

Omiyage-dokoro Kochikuya
& Goldfish Scooping
(Gift / Souvenir shop)
大和郡山市細屋町 23-1 / 23-1 Konya-
machii, Yamatakoriyama-shi / T 0743-
55-7770 / kotikuya.sakura.ne.jp / OPEN
8:30-18:30

K COFFEE
Excellent home-roasted drip coffee, featuring
a telephone booth goldfish tank!
大和郡山市柳 4-46 / 4-46 Yanagi,
Yamatakoriyama-shi / T 090-6886-3255
/kcoffee.jp / OPEN 10:00-17:00 [Closed
Thursdays]

Photo: K Coffee

This temple is also known as the cha-no-yu-
dera, the “tea ceremony temple,” because
the tea master Sekishu Katagiri designed
the whole temple — the approach, the
gate, and the garden — as if it were one
huge tea room for holding tea ceremonies.
The tea house built by the master in one
corner of the temple and the other buildings
are wonderful examples of Japanese
architecture, and are not to be missed.
Perhaps a bit unusually for a Zen temple
the carefully tended gardens are planted
with lots of shrubs, not just gravel and large
standing stones. As you walk around the
garden, you will be able to imbibe the 300-
year old spirit of the tea ceremony. Matcha
green powdered tea is available in the large
main room of the temple, to complete the
experience.

JIKO-IN TEMPLE

 ADDRESS 大和郡山市小泉町 865 / 865 Koizumi-
cho, Yamatakoriyama-shi / PHONE 0743-52-
3004 / WEB www.kcn.ne.jp/~jikoin / OPEN 9:00-
17:00 / ADMISSION ¥1,000 (including matcha
tea)
ASUKA AREA

Ishibutai Kofun
(Ancient tomb made with massive stones)
高市郡明日香村網 / Shimasha, Asuka-mura, Takaichi-gun / T.0744-54-6577 (Asuka Village Tourism Association) / asukadeasobo.jp/kankou/ishibutai / OPEN 8:30-17:00 / ADMISSION ¥250

Asuka no Yumeichi
(Store selling local vegetables and other food products)
高市郡明日香村網 / Shimasha, Asuka-mura, Takaichi-gun / T.0744-54-9450 / asukadeasobo.jp/shop/yumeichi / OPEN 10:00-18:00 (until 17:00 on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays)

Café Kotodama
高市郡明日香村網 / 1223 / 1223 Oka, Asuka-mura, Takaichi-gun / T.0744-54-4010 / cafe-kotodama.com / OPEN 10:00-17:00 (until 18:00 Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays) (Closed Tuesdays and every third Wednesday)

Asuka Guest House
高市郡明日香村飛鳥 / 659 / 659 Asuka, Asuka-mura, Takaichi-gun / T.0744-54-5658 / asukaguesthouse.com / From ¥2,800 per night (dormitory)

Access
Kintetsu Nara Stn. >
Yamato-Saidaiji Stn. >
Kashihara-jingu-mae Stn. >
Asuka Stn.: 1 hour 3 minutes

Asuka can be reached in one hour from Kintetsu Nara Station. The best option for getting around and exploring the area when you get here is to rent a bicycle near the station. Asuka is known as the birthplace of Japan, because before Nara was made the capital the heart of Japan was located right here. So there are many interesting things to see. After cycling to see and savour the sights you can stay overnight at a local inn or if you only have time for a day trip you can easily head back to Nara.

飛鳥寺
ASUKADERA TEMPLE

This was Japan's first fully-fledged Buddhist temple. Its principal Buddhist statue, commonly known as the Asuka Daibutsu, is a seated Shakyamuni Tathagata (the historical Buddha). Created using 15 tons of copper and 30 kilos of gold, it is the oldest Buddha statue in Japan. The face of the three-meter high image is said to have a stern expression when viewed from the right and a gentle expression when viewed from the left, and the oval-shaped face, almond-shaped eyes and other features suggest the influence of continental Chinese culture. It is possible to view the statue up very close and photos are allowed. Don't miss the chance to visit this daibutsu (Great Buddha), which has been enshrined here for the past 1,400 years, watching protectively over the territory of Asuka.

ADDRESS 高市郡明日香村大字飛鳥 682 / 682 Asuka, Asuka-mura, Takaichi-gun / PHONE 0744-54-2126 / OPEN 9:00-17:15 (April-September), 9:00-16:45 (October-March) / ADMISSION ¥350

Photo: Asuka Village
KATSURAGI AREA

Katsuragi Sumo Museum, “Kehaya-za”
Katsuragi-shi / T.0745-48-6611 / katsuragi.nara.jp/index.cfm/14,0,41.html / OPEN 10:00-17:00 [Closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays but open if a public holiday] / ADMISSION ¥300

Chujodo
[Wagashi, Japanese-style sweets]
Katsuragi-shi / T.0745-48-3211 / chujodo.com / OPEN 9:00-18:00 (Closed July, mid August to August 31 & December 31 to early January)

Kamameshi “Tamaya”
[Restaurant renowned for kamameshi, traditional pot-cooked rice dishes]
Katsuragi-shi / T.0745-48-5470 / taima-tamaya.com / OPEN 11:00-17:00 [Closed Mondays and Tuesdays but open if a public holiday]

Access

Katsuragi can be reached in a little over an hour by train from Kintetsu Nara Station, but you can also get there in about an hour from Osaka. Katsuragi is considered to be the home of sumo, and has one of the few museums dedicated to sumo wrestling where you can try entering a full size sumo ring and much more.

TAIMADERA TEMPLE

The 7th century Taimadera temple is one of many in this large temple complex. There are many places to see, including the Mandala Hall [main temple], which is a National Treasure, and the two pagodas — the toto, East Pagoda, and the saito, West Pagoda. Another must-see is the chisen-kaiyu-style garden (Japanese-style garden with a path around a central pond and spring) in Sainai Temple. Also known as hana-na-tera, meaning “temple of flowers”, the garden is resplendent with colour throughout the four seasons: topped by the rhododendrons and peonies in the spring, and the maple leaves in the autumn. The West Pagoda reflected in the water is beautiful like a painting. In one corner of the garden there is a suikinkutsu, an underground water koto harp. Water drips from the stone basin and as it drains away it falls into a large pottery container buried in the earth. When the water drops hit the base of the container, they create enchanting, dreamlike sounds like the plucking of a Japanese koto harp. For an extra ¥400 you can also enjoy a matcha powdered green tea in the drawing room as you gaze out over the garden.

ADDRESS: Katsuragi-shi / PHONE 0745-48-2202 / WEB taimadera-sainain.or.jp / OPEN 9:00-17:00 / ADMISSION ¥300
UDA AREA

Uda-Matsuyama District
(A town with around
200 preserved traditional buildings)

Meika Kimigoromo-honpo
Shogetsudo
(Wagashi, Japanese-style sweets)

Rice-terrace villa
Sasayuri-ann
(len with views of a quasi-national park)

Ichinyoan
[Soba Noodles]

Access
Kintetsu Nara Stn. >
Yamato-Saidaiji Stn. >
Yamato-Yagi Stn. >
Haibara Stn.: One hour

A little over an hour by train from
Kintetsu Nara Station, Uda developed as
one of Nara's main production centres
of okigusuri (home-delivered medicines
provided on a "pay after you use" basis)
herbal medicines and basic drugs. If
possible, it is best to rent a car to be able
to enjoy driving around this area. There
are charming accommodation options
available in the area, so why not take it
nice and slowly and stay for at least one
night?

MURO-JI TEMPLE

This beautiful old temple is hidden away
in the Muro River valley, near Nara's border
with Mie Prefecture. Muro-ji is highly
recommended for lovers of Buddhist
statues, because of its treasure trove
of wooden Buddhist sculptures from
the early Heian period (794-1185). Other
noteworthy attractions are the stairway
built from layered natural stones, a small
(approximately 16 meters high) but elegant
droctor pagoda, which is a National
Treasure. It is known for the poetry of its
scenery that varies dramatically through
the four seasons: cherry blossoms and
rhododendrons in spring, coloured leaves in
autumn, and snow in winter. To reach the
inner miedo image hall, you need to climb
some 400 stone steps through a forest of
massive sugi cedar trees, but the silence
at the top of the mountain is well worth it.

Muro-ji Temple has always been a popular
place of pilgrimage for women, who have
always been welcomed at Muro-ji Temple,
unlike the temples of Mt. Koya, which once
prohibited them. For this reason, it is also
known as the “Mt. Koya for Women”.

Address: Uda-cho, Uda-shi / Phone
0745-83-2033 / Web: muro-ji.or.jp / Open:
8:30-17:00 (April-November); 9:00-16:00 (December-
March) / Admission ¥600
天川
TENKAWA AREA

Dorogawa Onsen
Hot Spring Resort
An onsen village with an old-world ambience
吉野郡天川村湯川温泉 / Dorogawa-Onsen, Tenkawa-mura, Yoshino-gun / T. 0747-64-0333 (Dorogawa Spa Tourism Bureau) / www.dorogawaonsen.jp

Hanaya Tokubei (inn)
吉野郡天川村渓川温泉 217 / 217
Dorogawa-Onsen, Tenkawa-mura, Yoshino-gun / T. 0747-64-0878 / tokubei.jp / From ¥13,800 per person per night with two meals

Kadojin (inn)
吉野郡天川村渓川 240 / 240 Dorogawa, Tenkawa-mura, Yoshino-gun / T. 0747-64-0336 / kadojin.com / From ¥4,400 per person per night with two meals

Koryokuen Nishisei (inn)
吉野郡天川村渓川 257 / 257 Dorogawa, Tenkawa-mura, Yoshino-gun / T. 0747-64-0306 / koryokuen.com / From ¥18,200 per person per night with two meals

Goro Goro Water
Famed mineral water gushing from caverns
天川村渓川 686-139 / 886-139
Dorogawa, Tenkawa-mura, Yoshino-gun / T.0747-64-0188 (Goro Goro Chaya) / OPEN 9:00-18:00 (July 20-August 3) from 8:00 / ADMISSION (including car parking): ¥500

Tenkawa in the Yoshino region, once a flourishing centre of Shugendo, a form of mountain asceticism, is now known for its onsen hot springs. When you get there, try the famous Goro Goro Water spring water, soft and refreshing. There are also plenty of great trails for mountain hiking. After seeing the Mitorai Valley what could be better than a relaxing soak at Dorogawa Onsen or spending the night at one of the many inns? Tenkawa is about two and a half hours by train and bus from Nara City.

みたらい渓谷
MITARAI VALLEY
For nature lovers, a trekking trip off the beaten track to the Mitorai Valley near the village of Tenkawa is highly recommended. The route is a well-prepared trail of approximately 7 km along a clear running stream. Against a background of primordial forest teeming with wildlife, you can enjoy superb views from suspension bridges, waterfalls, the murmuring sound of water flowing around huge rocks, and birdsong aplenty. Each season offers its own particular charms — the fresh green colours of spring and the invigorating sight of the water's edge in summer — but the scenic beauty of coloured leaves in autumn is said to stop many hikers in their tracks. Finally, if you make it to the excellent hot baths at Dorogawa Onsen (p.88), which is accessible via the trail, all the fatigue of your walking will instantly melt away.

ADDRESS 天川村北角 / Kinozumi, Tenkawa-mura, Yoshino-gun / PHONE 0747-63-0999 (Tenkawa Village Office of Tourism)

Photo: Dorogawa Onsen
Totsukawa, close to the border with Wakayama Prefecture, is a mountainous region renowned for its beautiful unspoilt natural beauty. It is great for hiking and onsen hot springs. It boasts Japan’s longest regular bus route (166.9 km). Since this part of the prefecture is so far from Nara City, it is perhaps best explored by car. Consider spending the night at one of the inns in the Totsukawa Onsen village.

Hotel Subaru (Inn)
吉野郡十津川村平谷 909-4 / 909-4
Hiradani, Totsukawa-mura, Yoshino-gun / T. 0746-64-1111 / hotel-subaru.jp / From ¥15,000 per person per night with two meals [twin share]

Sansui (Inn)
吉野郡十津川村平谷 946-1 / 946-1
Hiradani, Totsukawa-mura, Yoshino-gun / T. 0746-64-0402 / onsen-sansui.com / From ¥12,000 per person per night with two meals [twin share]

KUMANO SANKEIMICHI KOHECHI

The World Heritage site Kumano Kodo is made up of a number of sacred sites and pilgrimage routes in the Kii Mountain Range. The Kohechi pilgrimage route from Mt. Koya to the Kumano Hongu Taisha Shrine is about 70 km long and passes through the mountain village of Totsukawa in Nara Prefecture. The route crosses the Hatenaishi Pass, at an altitude of over 1,000 m, is a challenging one, but as you walk it you will become immersed in a different world as you look out over the mist-enveloped mountains and are comforted by the sight of beautiful stone Buddha images. Along the trail you will also pass through the small village of Hatenaishi where life seems to go on much as it did in days long gone. It takes around three nights and four days to hike this pilgrimage route, so time and some planning are needed, but it is sure to be worth the effort for the special memories that will remain with you forever.
Good to Know

Here is some basic information to help you make the most of your visit to Nara.

**Nara Visitor Center & Inn**
This tourist information centre set up by Nara Prefecture in 2015 next to the Sarusawa Pond, close to Kofukuji Temple, should be your first stop when you visit Nara. Very welcoming staff who can speak English and Chinese, are on hand at all times to assist you with your travel plans in Nara, or any other parts of Japan. The Nara Visitor Center & Inn is not merely a tourist information centre; it also offers you the opportunity to directly experience the culture of Nara and Japan through various events. Soon it will also provide accommodation for tourists (as of March 2016). For all the latest information please visit the web site. Available services: Tourist Information / Nara and Japanese Culture Experience / Free Wi-Fi / Free PC Use / Free Resting Space / Currency Exchange (only foreign currency to yen) / Baggage Storage / Rent-a-cycle / ATM with Foreign Bank Card Support / Tourist Brochures / Convenience Store

ADDRESS 奈良市池之町3 / Ikeno-cho, Nara-shi / TEL 0742-81-7461
WEB sarusawa.nara.jp / OPEN 8:00-21:00
* For other Tourist Information points, please see the Nara City Guide Map.

**ATM & Currency Exchange**
Although the number of shops accepting credit cards has increased in recent years, there are still many shops that only accept cash. The ATMs in 7-Eleven convenience stores and post offices are handy for withdrawing cash. Most of the major banks provide currency exchange.

**Wi-Fi**
While many hotels, cafes, and other businesses also offer free Wi-Fi, a free Wi-Fi service is available all the way along the main walking routes between JR Nara Station and Kintetsu Nara Station and Nara Park, as well as at all Tourist Information points and major tourist spots in Nara Prefecture. To access the Wi-Fi service, just launch a web browser and enter the requested user ID information. The Wi-Fi network name is “Nara_Free_Wi-Fi.”

**Multilingual Call Center**
A free telephone translation service is available at all facilities displaying the sticker shown below. The service is available 24 hours a day for English, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, and Portuguese, and between 12:00-18:00 for French. So if you need translation to overcome serious communication difficulties, just inform a staff member that you would like to use the service.

**Getting Around**
One of the charms of Nara City is that it is compact and features a large number of tourist spots within easy walking distance of each other. However, if you find walking difficult or prefer not to walk, Nara City’s rent-a-cycle service and the City Bus service are convenient alternatives. If you wish to use the City Bus service, it is advisable to buy a Nara Bus Pass from Nara-Kotsu Bus Lines. There are three types of pass, valid for different periods of time and areas. Each pass also comes with a special map that entitles you to various discounts and other privileges. The Nara Kotsu web site (narakotsu.co.jp) provides information about the different passes and explains how to catch the bus, so make sure to check it out before arriving in Nara. Bicycles can be rented from the Nara City Rent-a-cycle service at the Nara Visitor Center & Inn, outside railways stations, and at selected hotels, inns, and guest houses. You can inquire about the most convenient rental location at the Nara Visitor Center & Inn or at any other Tourist Information point.

**Public Transport**
There are two railway companies in Nara prefecture, JR and Kintetsu. Both offer a variety of passes with different validity periods and area coverage. It is advisable to check on what’s available before coming to Nara. West Japan Railway Company: westjr.co.jp/global; Kintetsu Corporation: kintetsu.co.jp It’s important to note that some areas are serviced only by Kintetsu and some only by JR. Note also that on some routes there may be trains without a conductor on-board or unmanned stations. It may take some courage to board certain trains, but then again you are sure to have experiences unlike any you could have in the big cities.

**Don't Forget Your Passport**
The listed seven facilities offer free admission to overseas tourists on presentation of their passport, so don't forget to carry your passport with you at all times: Heijokyo History Museum / Nara Prefectural Museum of Art / Nara Prefectural Museum of Folklore / Nara Prefecture Complex of Manyo Culture / The Museum, Archaeological Institute of Kashiwara, Nara Prefecture / Yoshiiki-en Garden / Katsuragi Sumo Museum

**Do Not's**
• Please refrain from smoking except in designated smoking areas.
• Taking photos or video is prohibited at some shrines and temples. Please always check this beforehand.
• Please refrain from speaking loudly at shrines and temples.
• Please note that eating or drinking is prohibited in some areas within shrines and temples.
• Please avoid touching old buildings and artefacts.
**Nara Deer**

 Within Nara many deer can be seen wandering around the paths and areas of the park. In light of the fact that the “Deer of Nara” have been designated a Natural Monument, all visitors to Nara are asked to observe the following rules:

* Please do not hit, chase, or play with the deer in any way.
* To avoid harming the health of the deer, do not feed them with anything other than the deer crackers sold at kiosks within Nara Park.
* Although the “Deer of Nara” are accustomed to the presence of people, they are very much wild animals. At times deer may become aggressive, so always be cautious with them. (Take particular care with young children.)
* Female deer may be particularly irritable around May and June if they are giving birth, while male deer tend to be most sensitive during the mating season between July and November, so please do not approach deer during these periods.

* Please avoid touching fawns (young deer), otherwise the mother may become aggressive.

* If you buy deer crackers please feed them to the deer immediately. If you tease a deer with food it may become aggressive. Once the crackers are finished, hold out your hand at the level of the deer’s eyes to indicate that you have nothing more to give.

* The paper tape used to bundle the deer crackers is made of 100% pulp and printed with soy ink, so it is not harmful to the deer. For this reason, it can be fed to the deer together with the crackers.

* There has never been a single recorded case of rabies or other infectious disease resulting from a bite or scratch from a deer. In fact, there has not been a single case of rabies in Japan for more than 50 years.

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