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A journey to the ancient capital

NARA

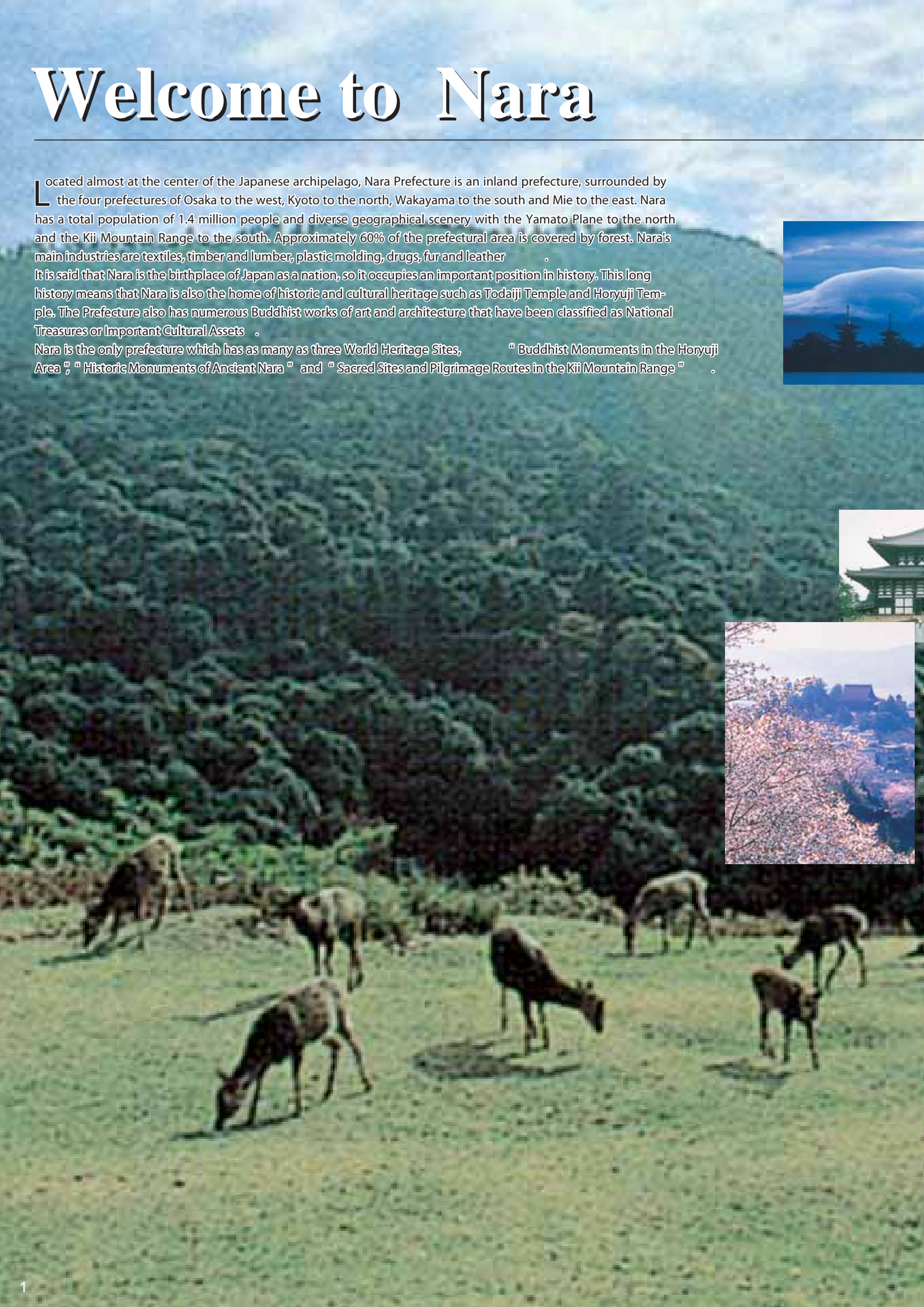
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# Welcome to Nara

Located almost at the center of the Japanese archipelago, Nara Prefecture is an inland prefecture, surrounded by the four prefectures of Osaka to the west, Kyoto to the north, Wakayama to the south and Mie to the east. Nara has a total population of 1.4 million people and diverse geographical scenery with the Yamato Plane to the north and the Kii Mountain Range to the south. Approximately 60% of the prefectural area is covered by forest. Nara's main industries are textiles, timber and lumber, plastic molding, drugs, fur and leather.

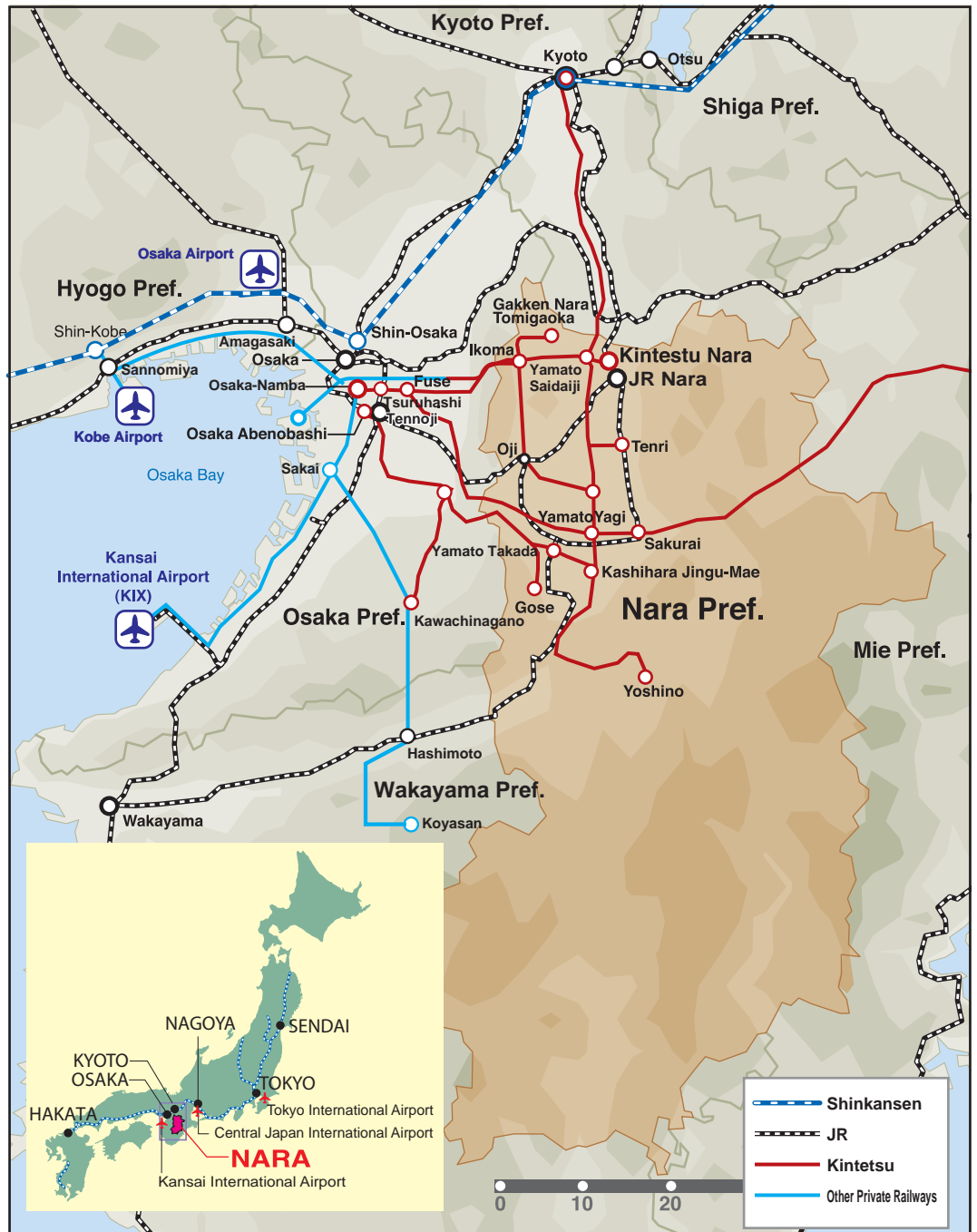
It is said that Nara is the birthplace of Japan as a nation, so it occupies an important position in history. This long history means that Nara is also the home of historic and cultural heritage such as Todaiji Temple and Horyuji Temple. The Prefecture also has numerous Buddhist works of art and architecture that have been classified as National Treasures or Important Cultural Assets.

Nara is the only prefecture which has as many as three World Heritage Sites, "Buddhist Monuments in the Horyuji Area", "Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara" and "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range".

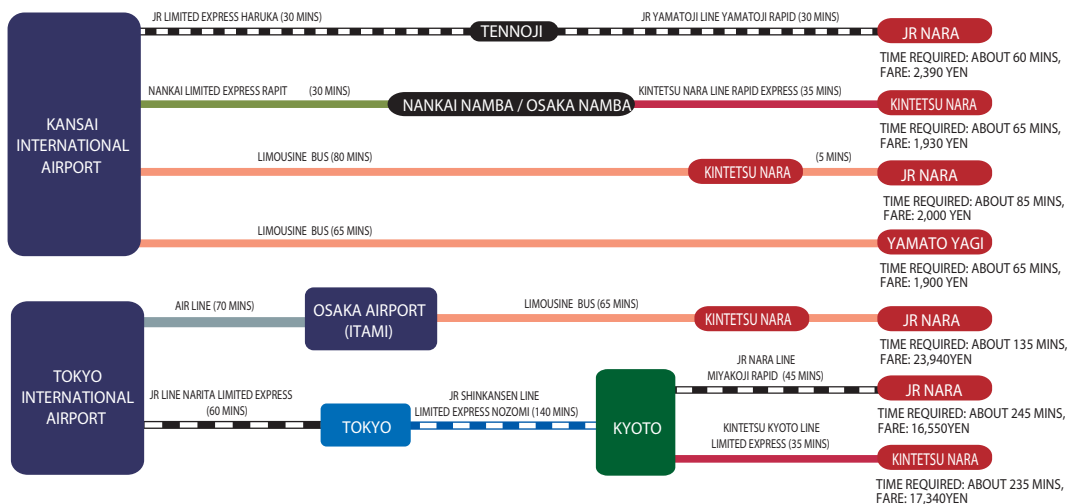




## Area Map (Kansai Region)



### ACCESSES TO NARA





法隆寺

## Horyuji Temple

**Preserving the ideals of Prince Shotoku and a treasure house of ancient culture**

According to old literature, Horyuji Temple was built in 607 A.D. by Prince Shotoku, a vigorous supporter of Buddhism. It was inscribed on the World Heritage list in 1993 as the oldest wooden structure in the world. The Kudara Kannon-do Hall of the Daihozoden Treasure House contains and displays various national treasures representing Japan's oldest Buddhist art, such as the statue of "Kudara Kannon".

The temple is divided into the "Sai-in" (West Precinct) and "To-in" (East Precinct). In the former are buildings from the Asuka Period or 8th century. These include the five-storied pagoda and the Kondo Hall. The precinct also holds "Tamamushi-no-Zushi", a Buddhist altar from the Asuka Period, the "Yumechigai Kannon" statue, as well as other temple treasures. The "Tamamushi-no-Zushi" is decorated with the wings of jewel beetles laid under metal open-work.

In the East Precinct is the "Yumedono", the oldest octagonal hall in Japan. A life-sized wooden statue of Prince Shotoku known as the "Guze Kannon" is kept here. The statue is open to the public from mid-April to mid-May.



春日大社

## Kasuga Taisha Shrine

**Stone-lanterns line the road to the sanctuary**

Kasuga Taisha Shrine was founded to protect the Heijo-kyo Capital and is the head shrine for about 3,000 Kasuga shrines all over Japan. At the "Mantoro Festival", about 2,000 stone lanterns along the path leading to the shrine and approx. 1,000 hanging lanterns in the main precinct are lit creating a solemn atmosphere. About 300 kinds of trees and plants are planted in the "Man'yo Botanical Garden". All of them appear in Japan's oldest poetry anthology, "Man'yoshu."



東大寺

## Todaiji Temple

**The Great Image of Buddha greets visitors.**

The world famous Todaiji Temple, designated on the World Heritage list, contains various pavilions and halls, including many designated as national treasures of Japan. Among them, the "Daibutsuden Hall" is one of the world's largest wooden buildings, and the home of the popular "Great Buddha of Nara". This gigantic statue is 15m tall and weighs approximately 380 tonnes.



興福寺

## Kofukuji Temple

**The five-storied pagoda rises with a quiet dignity above the Deer Park.**

Originally built in 730, the five-storied pagoda is a symbol of the Deer Park (Nara Park). The existing pagoda was last rebuilt in 1426 after being damaged in a succession of civil wars and is 50.8m high. Kofukuji Temple is listed as World Heritage, and in its sanctuary are a number of buildings listed as national treasures, such as Nan'endo Hall. The pretty area around Sarusawake Pond, including the five-storied pagoda, is a must see.



春日山原始林

## Mt. Kasuga Primeval Forest

**A mountain home of the gods**

Mt. Kasuga is a primeval forest of ever-green broad leaf trees such as oak and beech which has been protected against logging as it is a sacred mountain. Within the forest are many gigantic trees more than 400 years old with trunks measuring more than 9m in circumference. It has been confirmed that the forest is the home to rare species such as forest green tree frogs and clouded salamanders. The entire forest is designated as a World Heritage "cultural landscape".

# Heritage



元興寺

## Gangoji Temple

### Temple featuring Mandala

The home of a famous monk named Chiko who lived in the Nara Period (8th century). In 1244, the Chiko Mandala was dedicated for worship, since then the temple is called Gokurakubo, or the temple of comfort free from suffering. The Main Hall and Zen Room of Gokurakudo are listed as World Heritage.



平城宮跡

## Heijo Palace Site

### The ancient capital of Japan in the 8th century

Nara Heijo-kyo Capital was established in 710 A.D. and prospered as the political, economical and cultural heartland of the nation. Situated at the center of the capital was the gigantic Heijo Palace Site that extended 1.3 km east to west and 1km north to south (the land area: 1.2km<sup>2</sup>). The capital's main gate, the "Suzakumon" and the "Toin Teien" Garden have been beautifully reconstructed. On top of that, in 2010 the reconstruction of the capital's main building, the "Daigokuden" Imperial Audience Hall has been completed just in time for the 1300th anniversary. It was the hall where national ceremonies and ceremonies for welcoming foreign delegates took place. At the Nara Palace Site Museum, the process of the palace excavation can be traced and models of the old buildings are on display.



薬師寺

## Yakushiji Temple

### The eastern terminus of the Silk Road

The 34m high Eastern Pagoda is the only building that remains from the Hakuho Period (8th century) in this temple. Inside the Kondo Hall are the Buddhist statues of "Yakushi Nyorai", a divine protector against illness, and his two side-attendants. These three Buddhist statues, which are collectively referred to as the "Yakushi Sanzon", are 2.6m high, made of bronze, and are among the finest examples of Buddhist art in Japan.



唐招提寺

## Toshodaiji Temple

### Uchiwamaki - a ceremony in which paper fans are given away to ward off bad luck

Toshodaiji Temple was founded in 759 A.D. by Ganjin, a priest of the Tang Dynasty, as a place for teaching the Ritsu Sect of Buddhism. Ganjin underwent tremendous hardships in his attempts to visit Japan. After a period of 12 years, in which he failed five times to cross the Japan Sea, he was finally able to land in Japan, though it is said that he had by that time become blind due to the tough voyages. The "Ganjin Wajo-zo" (statue of the Priest Ganjin) is a national treasure, and is the oldest portrait sculpture in Japan. The Uchiwamaki ceremony takes place on May 19th, when heart shaped paper fans are scattered among the crowd to ward off bad luck.



法起寺

## Hokiji Temple

### The oldest three-storied pagoda in Japan.

The three-storied pagoda was built in 706 A.D. and is approx. 24m in height. It is the oldest and also the largest of its kind in Japan and has been registered on the World Heritage List. The temple also contains the statue, "Juichimen Kannon" or divine Buddhist savior with eleven faces (ten on top of its main face) which has been designated as an important cultural asset.



## World Heritage

### "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range"

The "Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range" is designated as a World Heritage site. The area includes various sacred sites of the Kii Peninsula (Yoshino/ Omine and Kumano), as well as roads and paths including Omine Okugake Michi, Kumano Sankei Michi Kohechi, Nakahechi and Iseji.

The paths and roads in the Kii Peninsula extend over the three prefectures of Nara, Wakayama and Mie and include mountains that are over 1000m above sea-level. They have been used for over a thousand years by ascetics and believers who made pilgrimages. Countless people have followed the trails.

The entire site is an integral part of Japanese culture. Most of the cultural assets are still preserved in good condition, along with the nature that surrounds them. In July, 2004, the entire area was registered as a World Heritage site by UNESCO.

Cultural assets in the Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range. (within Nara Prefecture)

- Yoshinoyama Mountainous Area
- Yoshino Mikumari Shrine
- Kinpu Shrine
- Kinpusenji Temple
- Yoshimizu Shrine
- Ominesanji Temple
- Omine Okugakemichi
- Tamaki Shrine
- Kumano Sankeimichi Kohechi



Omine Okugakemichi Route

# Nature and Flower



## Yatadera Temple

### The temple of hydrangeas

Though officially called Kongosenji Temple, it is more familiarly known as Yata-no-ojizosan. The "Jizobosatsu" statue, or divine all-nourishing mother, is designated as an important cultural asset. Yatadera Temple is also known as the temple of hydrangeas. A stunning sight, 8,000 plants of 60 different species of hydrangeas greet visitors and worshippers during June and July.



## Hasedera Temple

### A temple for Kannon surrounded by peony gardens

The main hall of Hasedera Temple extends southwards on a raised stage and is one of Nara Prefecture's biggest halls. There is a "Juichimen Kannon", an eleven-faced statue of the divine savior of all the people in the world. The statue of "Juichimen Kannon", is about 10m in height and is covered in gold. Hasedera Temple is famous for its peony garden and has 7,000 plants from 150 species of peony planted in the grounds. It is a breath-taking site when they are in full bloom.



## Tanzan Shrine

### Magnificent shrine buildings surrounded by beautiful maple leaves

The vermilion shrine buildings are beautifully set in the thick forest that surrounds them. There is a thirteen-story pagoda approx. 17m in height, located in the sanctuary. Tanzan Shrine is a famous sight-seeing spot for autumn leaves, as there are around 3,000 maple trees within the temple grounds.



## Taimadera Temple

### Famous for its tree peonies

Taimadera Temple has countless precious Buddhist works of art. These include a three-storied pagoda, designated as an important cultural asset, a statue of "Miroku" and statues of "Shitenno". From the end of April to mid-May, the peonies are in full bloom, and attract many visitors. Visitors are also given the chance to make a handwritten copy of Buddhist sutras or statues.



## Muroji Temple

### A temple surrounded by rhododendrons and open to women worshippers (Nyoin Koya)

Its five-storied pagoda is the smallest of its kind in Japan, only 16.1m high. The temple is dedicated to Shaka Nyorai Buddha, a founder of Buddhism. There is a 106.3cm high statue of the Buddha which gives modern visitors an idea of 9th century Buddhist art. While the famous Mt. Koya (Kongobu-ji Temple) closed its doors to women worshippers, Muroji Temple, from the same Buddhist sect, accepted them. This temple is also famous for its beautiful rhododendrons.



## Odaigahara Plateau

### A primeval forest surviving to the present day

Odaigahara plateau extends 4km east to west and 2 to 3km north to south. It is referred to as the "Roof of the Kin-ki Region". Located 1,300m to 1,600m above sea-level, it is one of the areas with the heaviest precipitation in Japan. The entire area is covered with a forest of fir trees and beeches and is the home to wild animals such as Japanese deer and foxes. There are two walking trails, "Higashi (East) Odai" and "Nishi (West) Odai", each extending approx. 9km. Although the Nishi Odai area has been popular among visitors for its quiet and primeval atmosphere, the entry to this area is now limited in order to protect the precious nature into the future.



## Yoshinoyama Mountainous Area

### A panoramic view of beautiful cherry blossoms

Yoshinoyama is famous for its spectacular cherry blossom trees. The entire mountain is covered in cherry blossom trees. It is divided into the four areas of "Shimo Senbon", the lower forest, "Naka Senbon", the middle forest, "Kami Senbon", the upper forest, and "Oku Senbon", the deep forest, according to the order in which the cherry blossoms bloom in April. As well as the spring, Yoshino is worth visiting at other times of the year: to see the colored leaves in fall and snowscapes in winter.



Peony (in winter)

Japanese plum tree

Cherry blossom tree

Rhododendron

Hydrangea

Iris (hanashobu)

Manjushage

Cosmos

Autumn leaves

Sazanka (Camellia sasankana)

# Historical Sites



## Ishibutai Burial Mound

### An ancient tomb built from gigantic stones

Ishibutai, made from 30 gigantic stones, is one of the largest stone tombs in Japan and is a symbol of the Asuka Area. Its stone chamber is 19.1m long and the burial chamber is 7.7m high, 3.9m wide and 7.6m deep. The total weight of the stones is estimated to be 2,300 tonnes. The gigantic stone on top of the tomb weighs 77 tonnes, and is the largest of its kind among ancient Japanese tombs.

## Takamatsuzuka Burial Mound and Wall Painting Museum

### Full color wall paintings, preserved by modern technology

This two-staged circular tomb is approx. 23m (lower stage), approx. 18m (higher stage) in diameter and 5m high. It came under the spotlight in 1972 when colorful paintings were discovered on the walls of the stone chamber. In order to preserve the paintings, temperature and moisture inside the chamber were kept constant. Despite this, they were damaged by rainwater penetration. The Agency for Cultural Affairs has been conducting repair work since October, 2006 when the mound started to be dismantled. The Wall Painting Museum adjacent to the mound displays replicas of various burial artifacts as well as copies of the paintings, including pictures of human figures, the constellations, a blue dragon and a white tiger. The facility gives full explanations of the Takamatsuzuka Burial Mound in a plain and straightforward manner.



## Nara Prefecture Complex of Man'yo Culture

### Feel the breath of Man'yo Culture

Designed around the theme of the Man'yoshu, the poetry anthology in the 8th century, and other aspects of ancient culture, the Nara Prefecture Complex of Man'yo Culture is a pleasant place to learn about ancient Japan. The facility includes a display of Japanese paintings that used poems from the Man'yoshu for their inspiration. It also displays excavated objects such as "fumonsen", the oldest coins in Japan, found during the construction of the Complex. Other items include, a reproduction of an ancient market square, a theater showing poets of the Man'yo poetry anthology, an information search system called the "Man'yo Hyakka System," and a library containing 10,000 books.

Admission for international visitors will be free upon presentation of a foreign passport.

# Major Events

## Spring



### Shunie (Omizutori) in Todaiji Temple

March 1 to 14

This event is believed to be a call for the arrival of spring in Nara, as it's around this time that the climate begins to get warmer. The monks in Todaiji Temple offer prayers to the eleven-faced Kannon in Nigatsudo Hall for total forgiveness of the sins and misdeeds of mankind, as well as for world peace and happiness.

## Summer



### Nara Toka-e

From early- to mid-August (about 10 days)

Toka-e is a light festival held in early- to mid-August for 10 days. At night, ten areas in and around Nara Park are lit up beautifully by approx. 20,000 candles.

## Fall



### Kemari (ball kicking) Festival in Tazan Shrine

November 3 / April 29 - Spring Celebration

Otherwise known as Momiji-Matsuri Festival (literally maple leaf festival), people wearing period costumes play "kemari", an ancient ball-kicking sport, under the autumn leaves. This ball-kicking game originated in an incident related to the Taika Reforms (645A.D.) which were designed to rationalize ancient Japanese politics. The scene of people playing "kemari" in traditional costumes amidst the brightly colored autumn leaves is a beautiful sight.

## Winter



### Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri

December 15 to 18

Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri is a gorgeous festival held in Nara at the end of the year. Beautifully dressed people walk about in costumes from the 9th to 19th century. Some of them ride horses. During the festival days, Kagura and Maigaku (traditional Japanese musical instruments) are dedicated to the shrine.

# Hot Springs

What is a Japanese Hot Spa?

An onsen, or hot spring, is defined as a hot water spring of above a certain temperature possessing a high mineral content. A visit to an onsen is beneficial for certain diseases, and is very refreshing. Onsen are public places so, there are certain procedures you should follow when you visit.



宝来温泉

### Horai Hot Springs

Visit this onsen for a pleasant, comfortable time in the ancient capital.

ゆららの湯

### Yurara no Yu

Popular foot bathing and open-air bathing are available here.

あすかの湯

### Asuka no Yu

The 18 different types of baths here include a Hinoki Buro (Japanese cypress bath), an open-air bath and an extra-large bath.



月ヶ瀬温泉

### Tsukigase Hot Springs

This place is famous for Japanese plum trees. There is also a spacious open-air bath here.



倍貴山温泉

### Shigisan Hot Springs

There is a story about the origin of this spring: an old man found a wounded egret, took it home and nursed it back to health. After the egret recovered and returned to the wild, it left the old man a hot spring in his garden as a parting gift.



神の牧温泉

### Kaminomaki Hot Springs

This onsen features a dynamic open-air bath, a sauna, a steam bath, a cave bath, a Kakure bath and a Hinoki Kaori bath (bath with the aroma of Japanese cypress).



長谷寺温泉

### Hasedera Hot Springs

The onsen is located just in front of the Hasedera Temple, famous for its peony garden and beautiful autumn leaves.

大和温泉

### Yamato Hot Springs

In addition to the joy of bathing in hot spas, recreational facilities and an indoor swimming pool are available.



吉野山の温泉

### Yoshinoyama Hot Springs

Enjoy a refreshing bath as you appreciate the beauty of the cherry blossom trees.



洞川温泉

### Dorogawa Hot Springs

Located at the foot of Mt. Omine, a sacred place for ascetics.



十津川温泉・湯原地温泉・上湯温泉

### Totsukawa Hot Springs, Tosenji Hot Springs and Kamiyu Hot Springs

Three of the most famous spas in Nara Prefecture. Enjoy beautiful spring greenery and the autumn red of the surrounding mountains while bathing in the springs.

# Arts and Crafts

## Ink (Sumi)



Sumi are ink sticks that are used in the art of calligraphy. Nara is famous for producing the largest amount, as well as the best quality sumi in Japan. It is said that Kukai, the founder of the Shingon Sect of Buddhism, introduced sumi from the T'ang dynasty in China. Since then, priests of Kofukuji Temple supposedly produced it by using soot from candles.

## Nara Sarashi



Nara Sarashi is one of Nara's traditional industries. The first mention of Nara Sarashi appears in the old "Kojiki" chronicles that were compiled in 712 A.D. Nara Sarashi are hand-woven hemp cloth, bleached a pure white. Recently, this Sarashi textile has been used for interior decoration, such as Noren curtains and tablecloths dyed with Shoso-in Monyo patterns.



## Nara Uchiwa (Round Fans)

It is said that Nara's uchiwa were first made by one of the priests at Kasuga Taisha Shrine, who made fans similar to those used by feudal lords to command and raise the morale of their soldiers on the battlefield. Nara uchiwa are made of Japanese "washi" paper dyed in beautiful colors with see-through patterns. In Nara, these patterns include deer and wisteria. Uchiwa are ideal for interior decoration or gifts.

## Writing Brushes (Nara Fude)

In Japan, the production of Fude (writing brushes) dates back to the 6th century. The production of Nara Fude writing brushes started when Kukai, the founder of the Shingon Sect of Buddhism, introduced them from the T'ang dynasty in China, and instructed Nara's craftsmen on how to make them. Nara Fude are recognized by the Japanese Government as one of Japan's traditional arts and crafts.



## Tsunozaiku Crafts



Tsunozaiku are crafts made of deer antlers. In the 17th century, when the Tsunokiri or antlers cutting ceremony started in Kasuga Taisha Shrine, many deer antler craftsmen started to work in Nara. Quite recently, accessories such as broaches and other practical items are made using deer antlers.

# Delicacies of Nara



## Somen noodles

Somen are extremely thin noodles and have a history of more than 1000 years.

## Narazuke pickles

Narazuke pickles date back to the Nara Period (8th century) or possibly even further. They are pickled using "sakekasu" or sake lees.



## Chagayu (tea gruel)

Chagayu is one of Nara's famous homemade meals. It is made of rice, water and roast tea cooked together.



## Kakinoha zushi

Kakinoha zushi is a kind of sushi made of rice seasoned with vinegar and slices of salmon or salted mackerel on top. It is formed in the shape of a cube and wrapped with a "kakinoha" (persimmon) leaf.



## Asukanabe

Asukanabe is a local dish from the Asuka area in Nara. Vegetables and chicken are cooked in a broth made from milk and "miso" (soy bean paste). It is a very healthy meal that is also very filling.

## Information

Tourism information centers with staff who speak foreign languages. Information on goodwill guides is also available.

Kansai Tourist Information Center	072-456-6025	8:30 ~ 20:30 (Apr. ~ Oct.) 9:00 ~ 21:00 (Nov. ~ Mar.)	
Nara Prefecture Information Center (Okumura Commemorative Museum)	0742-27-2003	10:00 ~ 17:00	Goodwill guide service is available.
Nara City Tourist Center	0742-22-3900 (Japanese only) 0742-22-5595 (Foreign language available)	9:00 ~ 21:00	Goodwill guide service is available.
JR Nara Station Tourist Information Center	0742-22-9821	9:00 ~ 17:00	Goodwill guide service is available.
Kintetsu Nara Station Tourist Information Center	0742-24-4858	9:00 ~ 17:00	Goodwill guide service is available.
Sarusawa Tourist Information Center	0742-26-1991	9:00 ~ 17:00	Goodwill guide service by students may be available.
NIFS Lounge	0742-27-2436	9:00 ~ 17:00 (Tue. ~ Sat.)	English (Tuesday - Saturday) Chinese (Thursday and Friday) Portuguese (Tuesday and Saturday)
Horyuji i Center	0745-74-6800	8:30 ~ 16:00	Goodwill guide service is available.

## Goodwill Guide (No fees charged)

Reservation for the "Goodwill Guide Service" should be made at least one day before the planned tour day. The service is offered free of charge, but the applicants are to pay for the transportation and meals of their goodwill guide. At some temples, shrines and facilities, the guides are not charged for admission fees.

Nara S.G.G. Club	0742-22-5595	9:00 ~ 17:00	English, French, Germany
Nara YMCA	0742-45-5920	9:00 ~ 17:00	English
Nara Student Guide	0742-26-4753	9:30 ~ 17:00	English
Ikaruga Ices S.G.G.	0745-74-6800	8:30 ~ 16:00	English

## Nara Prefectural Government

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