



奈良

A journey to the ancient city

NARA

良

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.

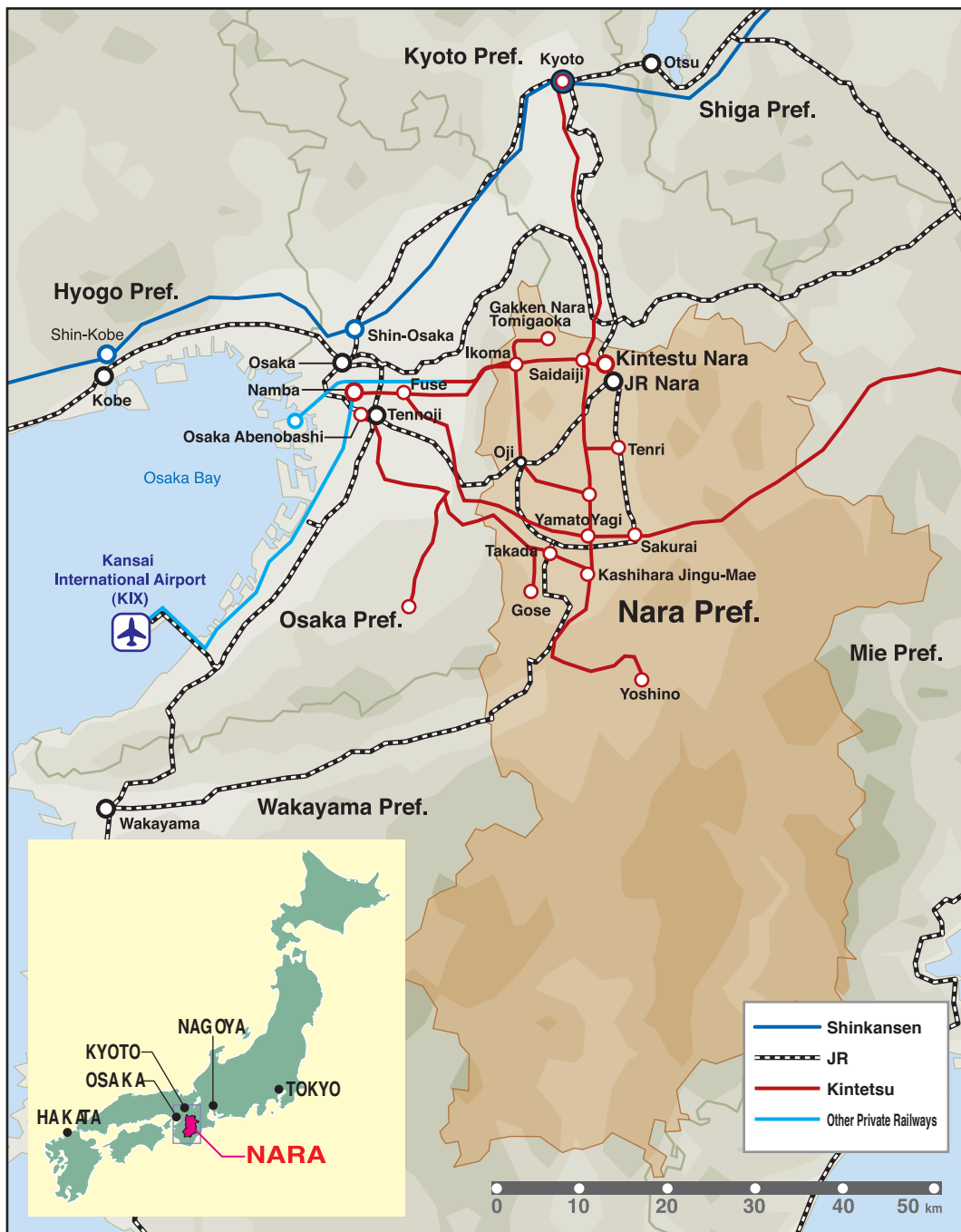
Nara occupies an important position in history as it was the location of Japan's first state. This long history means that Nara is also the home of several World Heritage sites such as Todaiji Temple and Horyuji Temple. The Prefecture also has numerous Buddhist works of art and architecture that have been classified as National Treasures or Important Cultural Assets.

The ancient capital, Nara Heijokyo was established in 710 A.D. It was an international city modeled on the Capital of Tang Dynasty China, Changan. Nara Heijokyo is now a World Heritage site and will soon celebrate the 1300th anniversary of its founding. Nara has been promoting local development with the key words of 'history', 'culture' and 'friendship exchange', anticipating the next 100 years or even 1,000 years to come.





Area Map (Kansai Region)



ACCESSES TO NARA

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|---------|--|---------------|---|
| KANSAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT | JR LIMITED EXPRESS HARUKA (30 MINS) | TENNOJI | JR YAMATOJI LINE YAMATOJI RAPID (30 MINS) | JR NARA | TIME REQUIRED: ABOUT 60 MINS, FARE: 2,390 YEN |
| | NANKAI LIMITED EXPRESS RAPIDα (30 MINS) | NAMBA | KINTETSU NARA LINE RAPID EXPRESS (40 MINS) | KINTETSU NARA | TIME REQUIRED: ABOUT 70 MINS, FARE: 1,930 YEN |
| | LIMOUSINE BUS (85 MINS) | | | JR NARA | TIME REQUIRED: ABOUT 90 MINS, FARE: 1,800 YEN |
| | LIMOUSINE BUS (65 MINS) | | | YAMATOYAGI | TIME REQUIRED: ABOUT 65 MINS, FARE: 1,700 YEN |
| | | | | | |
| KYOTO | JR NARA LINE RAPID (45 MINS) | | | JR NARA | TIME REQUIRED: ABOUT 45 MINS, FARE: 690 YEN |
| | KINTETSU KYOTO LINE EXPRESS (45 MINS) | | | KINTETSU NARA | TIME REQUIRED: ABOUT 45 MINS, FARE: 610 YEN |



法隆寺

Horyuji Temple

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

Established in 607 A.D. by Prince Shotoku, a vigorous supporter of Buddhism, Horyuji Temple was inscribed on the world heritage list in 1993 as the oldest wooden structure in the world. Various national treasures representing Japanese oldest Buddhist art are displayed, such as the statue of "Kudara Kannon" in the Kudara-Kannon-Do Hall of the Daihozoden treasure house.

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-story 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 "Kasuga Taisha Shrine Jin'en Park". 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 as a world heritage site, contains various pavilions and halls, including many designated as national treasures of Japan. Among them, the "Daibutsuden Hall" is the world's largest wooden structure, and the home of the popular "Great Buddha of Nara". This gigantic statue is 15m tall and weighs approximately 250 tonnes.



興福寺

Kofukuji Temple

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

Originally built in 730, the five-story pagoda is a symbol of the Deer 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 a world heritage site, and in its sanctuary are a number of buildings listed as national treasures, such as Nan'endo Hall. The pretty area around Sarusawaike Pond, including the five-story 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 Gokurakubo are world heritage sites.



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). Inside the Main 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.



法起寺

Hokiji Temple

The oldest three-storied pagoda in Japan.

The three-storied pagoda, approx. 24m in height, is the oldest and also the largest of its kind in Japan and has been registered as a world heritage site. The temple was established in 706 A.D. 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.



平城宮跡

Heijo-kyo Palace Site

The ancient capital of Japan in the 8th century

Nara Heijo-kyo was the capital of Japan for 74 years from 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-kyo palace that extended 1.3km east to west and 1km north to south. The capital's main gate, the "Suzakumon" and the "Toin Teien" garden have been reconstructed beautifully. At the moment, the capital's main building, the "Daigokuden" where national ceremonies and ceremonies for welcoming foreign delegates took place is being reconstructed. It is expected to be completed in time for the celebrations of the 1300th anniversary of the Heijo-kyo Capital in 2010. Pictures of Heijo-kyo Palace excavations and models of the old buildings are on display on site at the Nara Palace Site Museum.



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 he had, by that time, become totally 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.



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/ Ohmine and Kumano), as well as roads and paths including Ohmine Okugake Michi, Kumano Sankai 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 and were used by religious novices to train themselves, so 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, 2007, 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

- Yoshinoyama Mountainous Area (important historical places and sceneries)
- Zaodo Hall of Kinpusenji Temple (National Treasure)
- Yoshino Mikumari Shrine (Important Cultural Asset)
- Hondo Hall of Ohminesanji Temple (Important Cultural Asset)
- Tamaki Shrine (Important Cultural Asset)
- Ohmine Okugake Michi
- Kumano Sankai Michi Kohechi



Ohmine Okugakemichi Route

Nature and Flower



矢田寺

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.



談山神社

Tanzanjin 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 sightseeing spot for autumn leaves, as there are around 3,000 maple trees within the temple grounds.



室生寺

Murouji Temple

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

Its five-storied pagoda is the smallest of its kind in Japan, only 16.7m high. The temple is dedicated to Shaka Nyorai Buddha, a founder of Buddhism. There is a 105.5cm high statue of the Buddha which gives modern visitors an idea of 9th century Buddhist art. While the home of the Shingon sect of Buddhism, the famous Mt. Koya (Kongobuji Temple) closed its doors to women worshippers, Murouji Temple, from the same Shingon sect, accepted them. This temple is also famous for its beautiful rhododendrons.



長谷寺

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.



當麻寺

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.



大台ヶ原

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 Kinki 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.



吉野山

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)



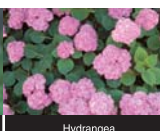
Japanese plum tree



Cherry blossom tree



Rhododendron



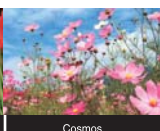
Hydrangea



Iris (hanashobu)



Manjushage



Cosmos



Autumn leaves



Sazanka (Camellia sasanqua)

Historical Sites



石舞台古墳

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.

高松塚古墳・壁画館

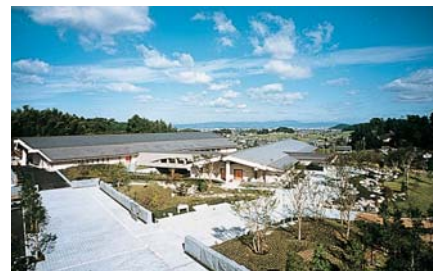
Takamatsuzuka Burial Mound and Wall Painting Museum

Full color wall paintings in a tomb, 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 mural paintings were discovered with the mounds 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.



奈良県立万葉文化館

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 Prefectural 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 "tumonsen", 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 poetic anthology, an information search system called the "Man'yo Hyakka System," and a library containing 10,000 books.

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

Toka-e is a light festival held in mid-August for 10 days. At night during the period, ten points around Nara Park are lit up beautifully by approx. 20,000 candles.

Fall



Kemari (ball kicking) Festival in Tanzanjinja 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 Wakayama 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 dances and performance of ancient 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.



信貴山温泉

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.



吉野

Yoshino Hot Springs

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



十津川温泉・
湯泉地温泉・
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



Ittobori Dolls (literally, "One-Chisel" Carvings)

Nara dolls, otherwise known as "Ittobori," are beautiful dolls with expressive faces and bright colors. These dolls were originally used for festivals held in Kasuga Taisha Shrine around the 13th Century. The craft was enhanced to the level of art by Morikawa Toen, a fine craftsman of the 19th Century.



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 Tang dynasty in China. Since then, priests of Kofukuji Temple supposedly produced it by using soot from candles.



Akahadaya Pottery

This fine, milky white pottery is made using red clay from Akahada-cho in western Nara. The delicate color is produced from the effect of iron contained in the red clay and glaze. The Akahada pottery was first made popular when a noted craftsman, Okuda Mokuhaku, produced tea bowls for tea ceremony practitioners.

Writing Brushes (Nara Fude)

In Japan, the production of Fude (writing brushes) dates back to 6th Century. The production of Nara Fude writing brushes started when Kukai, the founder of the Shingon Sect of Buddhism, introduced them from the Tang 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.



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 Shoson 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.



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.

Kogakumen Masks

The Buddhist art of Kogakumen arrived in Japan together with Buddhism at the beginning of the 7th century. Later, Kogakumen became the general name for masks used in the traditional Japanese theater arts of "Gigaku" and "Bugaku", events held at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, and other traditional performing arts. Today, imitations of masks used for "Gigaku" and "Bugaku" are sold as ornaments.



Information

Please contact the following facilities in case of emergency. Bilingual staff will be happy to help you in the case of difficulties such as falling ill or losing something.

| | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------|--|
| 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 | 9:00~17:00 | English |
| Ikaruga Ices S.G.G. | 0745-74-6800 | 8:30~16:00 | English |

Nara Prefectural Government

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