

Nano Ra

Uda City: Nara's Eastern Treasure

Hiking with Na no Ra
Mt. Torimiyama

Murouji • Onoji
Tour around the Temples

Uda Animal Park
Learning and animals

Hidden Charms of Uda
Whats the city really like?

奈の良

Issue Eight
Uda City

HIKING WITH NA NO RA: UDA CITY TORIMIYAMA

Taking 60-90 min

to complete this route

offers fantastic views

and historical sites

For this issue of Na no Ra, we will be hiking from Haibara station in Uda City to the top of Mt. Torimiyama. Well known in the area for its natural beauty and easy access by train from Yamato Yagi station, Uda is packed with hiking routes suitable for both beginners and the more experienced. The city has put together an excellent hiking spot guide which can be found at the tourist information center near Haibara station, so stop by and take a look if you have the chance!

Torimiyama and the park located near its peak offers fantastic views of the city and the surrounding Yamato basin. It's also a must-see spot for maple leaves in the autumn, and remains beautiful all through the years with an array of wild flowers – notably azalea – covering its steep slopes. There are also plenty of cultural and historical sites to see on the way too, so let's get going!

- Walking from Haibara Station, you can head up the old Ise Kaido road that once lead pilgrims to the Ise Grand Shrine in Mie. From the Edo period onwards, a boom in the number of travelers and worshippers led to a boom in accommodation and other businesses along the way. This is still seen today with the aburaya ryokan, a traditional traveler's inn that retains much of its original character. Open to the public and packed with interesting articles relating to local history, the aburaya is definitely worth a visit if passing through Haibara.





The road is quiet and pretty, providing an ever-widening view as we progress up Torimiyama. Uda City's Commerce and Tourism Division says that the mountain is particularly famous for its scenery and the variety of wildflowers that can be seen there through the year. On my way up, I saw wild lilies and azalea, the latter of which is in such abundance that the mountain hosts an azalea festival every year in May.

- Torimiyama Park lies just before the mountain's summit. A place of profound natural beauty, complete with a mountain shrine and tranquil pool, the park also houses a large stone monument to Emperor Jinmu and numerous stones engraved with ancient poetry. Did you know?

Jinmu is the mythical first Emperor of Japan who was said to have worshipped on top of this very mountain. Indeed, the mountain's name comes from the ancient historical record the Nihon Shoki, testifying to the ancient civilization that once made the area around Nara its political center.

- The last stretch of the path up a steep flight of stairs leads to the observatory on the mountain's peak. From here, one can see the whole of Uda and Haibara, with the scenery in autumn being a particular highlight. What's more, the mountain's peak has onward paths towards Hasedera in Sakurai or the grave of the ancient poet Yamabe no Akahito, so those who are looking for a challenge can push onwards. Taking between 60-90 minutes to complete, this route offers both fantastic views and historical sights on the way, so if you make the trip down to Uda don't miss this chance!



A tour around Murouji and Onoji Temples

Come and relax at Murouji Temple

Murouji temple was established somewhere between 770 – 780 CE on the site of a ritual for longevity performed for Emperor Kanmu who was at the time afflicted by illness. As such the temple has a history spanning over 1200 years. The temple is counted as one of the Dojo (places of meditation) for Shingon Buddhism, a set of teachings that were brought over from Tang China by the Buddhist monk Kukai. As such Murouji is a temple with a long history with China.



Stone Pillar



Yoroizaka (photo provided by Asukaen)

Once you cross over the traditional red bridge, in front of the mountain gate, you can see a stone pillar with the words Nyonin koya Murouji (lit. female high field Murouji) engraved upon it. Koyasan Kongobuji, another temple related to Shingon teachings forbade the entrance of women; in contrast Murouji has become widely famous for being open to all genders and has come to be known also as "Nyonin Koya".

Pass through the Deva gate and the famous "Yoroizaka" hill appears before you. Around the end of May the hill is surrounded on both sides by beautiful rhododendrons in full bloom. Taking each step up the stone stairs prepares your mind for visiting the historical temple, truly a path worthy of Murouji and its thousand year history.



Temple grounds map (photo provided by Murouji temple)



Left 1: 11-faced Goddess of Mercy (national treasure) Left 2: Miroku Shaka Nyorai Seated Buddha (national treasure) (photos provided by Asukaen)

The Kondou (lit. Golden hall) may not be made of gold as its name may infer, but the beauty of the Buddhist figures, carved from single pieces of wood, holds its own beauty that's value is no less. Especially the 11 faced Goddess of Mercy statue (National Treasure) which is known as a treasure among treasures, and can only be seen as specified times during the year (Left 1). These figures, which are said to have been preserved for 1200 years, still retain their lively faces and coloured hues. These Japanese wood carving techniques are said to have come from ancient China. Unfortunately, in China such beautifully preserved wood carvings number amongst the few. These rare pieces of history have survived not only because of Murouji temple's location in the mountains, hidden safely from the ravages of war fire, but also because of the 1000 year care of temple architects. The fact that, even today, people can view this history is due to none other than these diligent workers.

To the south west of the Kondou hall is the Mirokudou hall. Found here is the "Nikurube" seated Buddha (Left 2), which with its white face left the greatest impression on me. This statue is said to have been displayed in a German exhibition for the duration of world war two.

On your way to the five storied pagoda you pass by the Main hall (Kanjoudou). Approximately 400m back from the main hall is found the Mikagedou hall.

In Japan there occurred a syncretism of Shinto and Buddhism. Mt. Murou where Murouji temple is located was said to once be the home of a dragon god, and while Murouji is a Buddhist temple, a shrine to pray to the dragon god for rain was established around the 8th century CE and has continued to be visited by the masses since.

For the Japanese, both God and Buddha exist as part of nature and it is a society that greatly respects nature itself. This is apparent in the wooden architectural designs of the Kondou, Kanjou, and Miroku halls.



From the left (Photos provided by Asukaen): 11-faced Goddess of Mercy (national treasure), Monjyu Bosatsu (important treasure), Nikurube (national treasure), Yakushi Nyorai (important treasure), Jizou Bosatsu (important treasure)

Meeting with the Magaibutsu: Onoji Temple



Mirokudou Hall (national treasure)
(photo provided by Asukaen)



Interviewing Murouji director Mr. Okada



Five storied Pagoda from
the bottom of the stairs



Five Storied Pagoda (national Treasure)



Onoji Temple Miroku Magaibutsu

The Origin of Onoji's Magaibutsu

Onoji Temple is found at Murouji's western gate. The Miroku Nyorai is Japan's largest stone Buddha standing at 11.5 meters tall and carved directly into a stone wall by the Uda River. According to Onoji Temple's chief priest Mr. Okada, retired emperor Gotoba invited Chinese sculpting group the "Igyoumatsu" to Koufukuji Temple to build it. The Miroku Nyorai was renovated just once approximately 30 years ago.

Even after 800 years, we are not only able to feel a connection to history through the creations of those past but also the long history between Japan and China.

*Igyoumatsu shudan: A sculpting group that came to Japan in the Kamakura period.



Onoji Temple Miroku Geshou Kyokoku Dai Magaibutsu
(photo provided by Onoji Temple)

Migawari Jizouson

Legends say that Migawari Jizouson burned himself to save another. Locals still greatly respect the Migawari Jizouson and have given it the nickname Buji kousou lit. Great priest of safety. Even today on the 24th of each month they perform a Jizouson ceremony.

Legends say that the five storied pagoda of Murouji temple was built overnight; With a height of 16.1 metres it is not only the second oldest wooden pagoda in Japan but also its smallest. From the base of the stairs the pagoda seems to be grand but as you draw closer it appears longer and narrower than one may first have thought, I found this change to be extremely interesting. Please take the time to come and see it for yourself.

I spoke with Mr. Yamaoka of Murouji temple who told me the following "Even though there may be no wars in Japan today, as in olden times, people still live alongside their daily concerns. How to save people's hearts and minds is the modern mission of temples today. Please come and relax at Murouji Temple". Even if you have no particular concerns, please come to see the harmonious balance between the nature of Mt. Murouji and the beauty of Buddhist artistry.

While listening to the sounds of the Muro River and the calls of the birds, if you look up at the wooden Chuzon Buddha statue you cannot help but align your hands to the statues. This type of peaceful experience can only be found here away from cities. I would advise all to, at least once, come and enjoy the surrounding nature of Mt. Murouji, the beauty of these ancient artworks, and the relaxation provided here at Murouji temple.

The temple has pamphlets available in English and if you call in advance they can prepare guides etc. for foreign tourists.

Murouji Homepage: <http://www.murouji.or.jp/>



Shidare Sakura

The 300 year old shidare sakura tree of Onoji Temple is also famous. Unfortunately, the tree has had its branches cut to help it recover from recent illness, but in a few years, visitors will be able to see it again in its entire splendor.



Shidare Sakura (photo provided by Asukaen)

Come along anytime!

learning, fun and animals!

Uda Animal Park

The scene could be straight from a fairy tale. The sky is blue, the grass green, and goats roam freely without a care in the world. According to Mr. Sakaguchi, this place was made for people to have fun with different animals and discover their importance to us. Welcome to Uda Animal Park!

Butter Churning



Visitors to the park can take part in a variety of activities, one of which is butter churning. Following the instructions of the staff, first you repeatedly shake a bottle full of cream to separate the fat and proteins, making

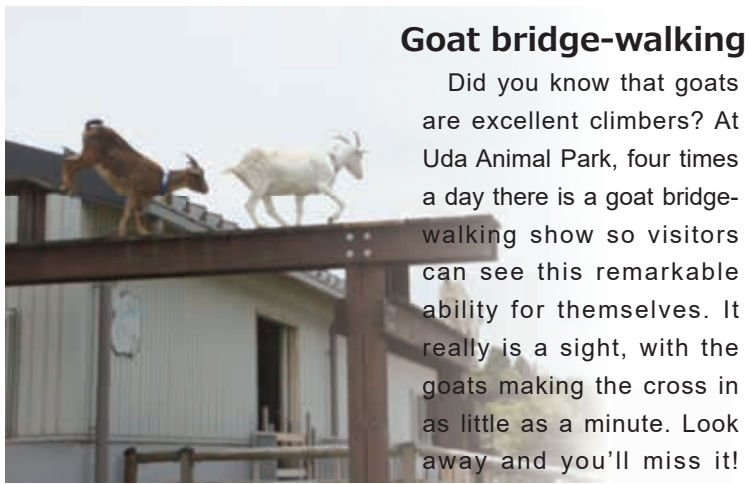
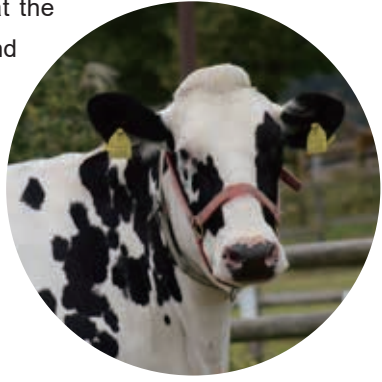
butter and buttermilk. At first the cream sounds like water, but soon it thickens and the sound disappears. A new sound can then be heard as the butter begins to take form. Having used your senses to judge when the butter is churned, you can see the finished product of buttermilk and a light, white butter. Don't miss out on trying the delicious, creamy buttermilk too!

The butter is served on crackers, and its simple, unsalted flavor is a real treat. It's really healthy too, making this activity perfect for families on a day out!



Cow Milking

Those who have signed up for butter churning can also take part in the cow milking experience. When we visited, the retired milking cow Sumomo-chan was kind enough to lend us a hand. You may think that milking a cow would involve drinking fresh milk, but the milk produced here is not for drinking. Sumomo-chan is past rearing-age, and so her milk is a little more watery than usual. Instead, she now lives at the park and helps visitors understand where the milk they drink comes from, and what role animals play in our everyday lives. Experiences like this make you understand just how strong out links to nature really are.



Goat bridge-walking

Did you know that goats are excellent climbers? At Uda Animal Park, four times a day there is a goat bridge-walking show so visitors can see this remarkable ability for themselves. It really is a sight, with the goats making the cross in as little as a minute. Look away and you'll miss it!



Goat and sheep feeding

The goats and sheep of Uda Animal Park are fed at the entrance to their pens, and visitors can take part too! We saw plenty of adorable kids and lambs when we visited, so don't miss out on this chance to see the animals up close.

Uda Animal Park is also home to ponies, rabbits and other animals you can meet on your visit. The various activities and experiences are great additions that also serve to educate about the importance to us of animal life and nature. Our visit was almost like one to a theme park, and with all the cute animals I'm sure that you too will find Uda Animal Park to be a truly enjoyable and thought-provoking trip.



Article: Ho-seon Lee

Uda Animal Park
<http://www.pref.nara.jp/1839.htm>



*Experiences and activities can change depending on the weather. Please see the homepage above for details and information on how to book.

Hidden charms of Uda

What is Uda City really like? What is it like to live there as a foreigner?

I interviewed Mr. Sylvain Chabrol, who has lived in Uda for six years, to find out more.

How did you come to live in Uda City?

I first met my wife when we were both working together on a herb farm in Australia. We soon moved to France, but we wanted to live in the countryside and looked for somewhere rich in nature. That's when we found Uda! We decided to move and I've never looked back since. I couldn't speak Japanese at first, but was lucky to find work as a baker at the Ao-Hani herb club. I stayed there for five years. What was behind your decision to start your Méli-Mélo gallettes? On a trip to Hakuba in Nagano, I was delighted to find that gallettes (a traditional savory buckwheat crepe native to the Brittany region) were not only available but popular in Japan. I'd always dreamed of being a chef, and we thought how wonderful it would be to have more people in Japan enjoy traditional French cuisine like gallettes. I left my job in April this year and we are now fully committed to Méli-Mélo. At present we take part in monthly events* and sell our gallettes there. We can also take requests to set up a stall as long as a 2m x 1m space is available!



What is special about Méli-Mélo?

We take care to make gallettes¹ that are tasty, enjoyable by anyone, and retain their links with the local area. We use local organic vegetables and ensure our gallettes are suitable for vegans and vegetarians. In addition, gallettes can even be made with soymilk to cater for those with allergies. Sometimes I wonder if by combining this traditional French dish with Japanese ingredients we've been able to act as a bridge between our two countries. I'd like to think so, at least!



Do you have any places you'd recommend in Uda?

Of course! First, there's 'Furusato Genkimura'. Genkimura is a facility that hosts art activities, one-day-chef courses for the local people to try their hand at cooking and various other projects. For those of us living in Uda, it's a place where you can really make connections with and interact with people of all different ages. It's very important in community life! Another recommendation is 'fufufu'. This café on the riverside features a charming terrace, and is host to numerous events too. Make a booking and you can even enjoy Méli-Mélo!

Lastly have you got a message for our readers?

When I came to Japan, I discovered how wonderful the communities were in local villages. People are always exchanging food and chatting: it's such a welcoming environment. Since starting to make Méli-Mélo, I've been blessed with new connections with my customers, farmers, those running the cafes and more. It's just such a pleasure to be here.

Check out the following Facebook pages for more information on Méli-Mélo!

Article: Jeanne Austray

*Events :
Harapekosato no Ichi (Nabari, Mie)
Mie Organic market
Organic to tsunagaru market Shiga

Every Wednesday
Second Saturday of the month
Third Sunday of the month

Links :
Méli-Mélo
Genkimura
fufufu

<https://www.facebook.com/Meli-Melo-392981520801494/>
<http://web1.kcn.jp/furusatogenkimura/>
<https://www.facebook.com/fufufu222/>

¹Gallettes are originally a specialty of the Brittany province of France.

Simply put Gallettes are crepes made from buckwheat flour with a salty aftertaste.

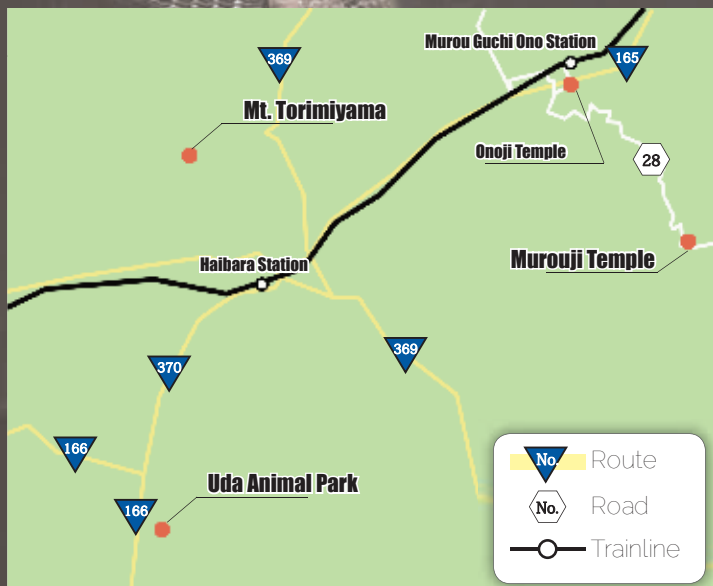
What is 'Na no Ra'?

We're the Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs) for Nara Prefecture. We work at the International Affairs Division of the Prefectural Government. Our aim is to deepen international exchange between Nara and other countries and help to build bridges between them.

'Na no Ra' is made up of articles about places in the prefecture that we, as foreign residents ourselves, visited and thought would be of interest to both visitors from overseas and the local Nara community. We hope it will be of some interest and will serve to help everyone discover the charm that Nara holds!

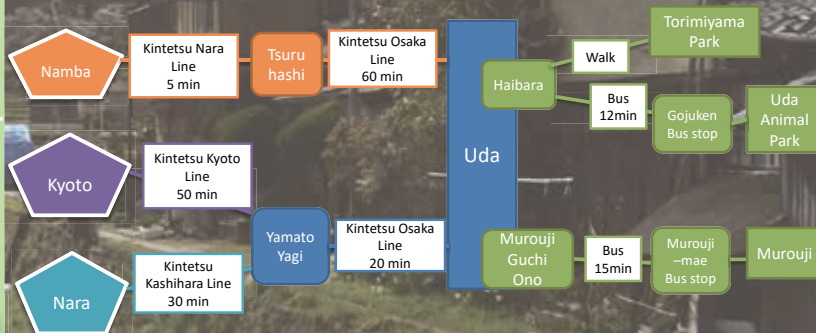


Places to visit



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Access by Train



Access by Car

From Osaka / Nagoya :
Get off the Meihan Kokudo Hari Interchange and travel down Route 369 for 20 minutes.

From Nara :
Get off Route 169 at Sakurai and travel down Route 165 for 20 minutes.

A Note from the Editors

'Na no Ra' would like to sincerely thank the people of Uda Town and all those who assisted in the creation of this issue, including the Uda Animal Park, Uda City Hall, Onoji Temple, Méli-Mélo, and Murouji Temple.

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For opinions on or questions relating to this publication, please contact:
Dep. of International Affairs, Nara Prefectural Government,
Noborioji-cho 30, Nara 630-8501

TEL: 0742-27-8477
FAX: 0742-22-1260

