

From Nara with Love Kansai Nara Treasure Travel

We love Nara, and want to share this historic area's traditional culture and treasures with visitors from all over the world.



Why Choose Us?

Our deep ties to local businesses and exclusive relationship with Nara's shrines and temples mean we can create a one-of-a-kind journey for each guest. Many of the experiences we offer are only available through us, the result of decades of trust and friendship with the wonderful people of Nara.

Supporting Local Businesses

With over 1300 years of history, it takes a lot of work to preserve Nara's treasures for future generations. By choosing to visit the 'cradle of Japan' you help ensure that the ancient culture, buildings and connection with nature the people of Nara have nurtured for centuries will be passed on.

How to Book Your Adventure with Us



01

Take a look at some trip options on our site



02

Get in touch, and customize your trip with our Nara-specialist consultants



03

Pay a 20% deposit to confirm, and the rest before arrival



04

Meet your expert guide at the airport



05

Discover the beauty of Nara your way!

Find Out More

KANSAI NARA Treasure Travel



Request Form

<https://nara-sightseeing.com/> support@nara-sightseeing.com

Kansai Nara Treasure Travel

Just Off the Beaten Path, But a World Away

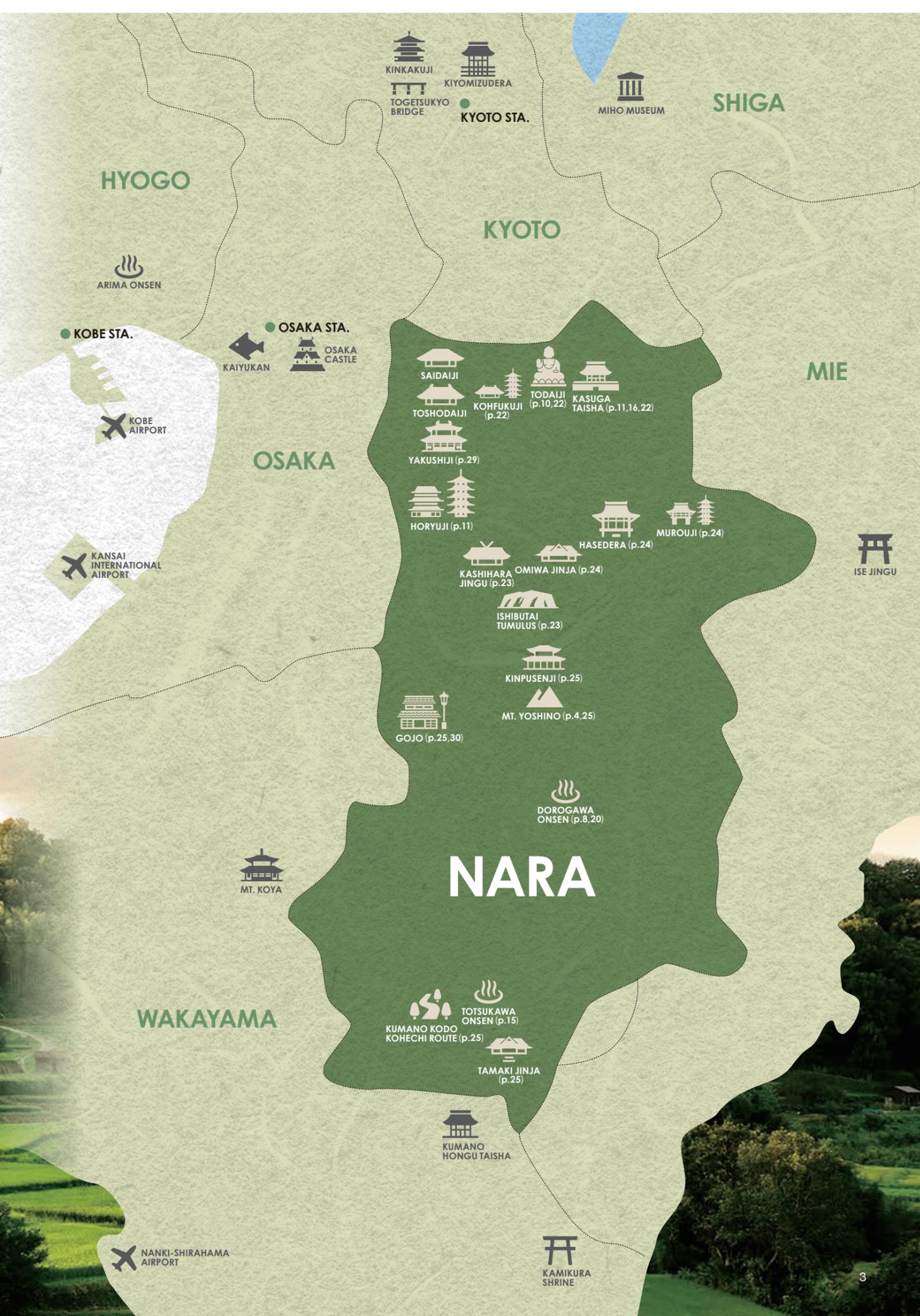


WHY NARA?

Right in the heart of the Kansai region, Nara is not only an excellent base for exploring the area but also the starting point of many of Japan's traditions. Home to the country's first emperors, with deep roots in spirituality and nature, Nara retains its proud culture to this day.

Nara might not be as fast paced as some of Japan's bustling big cities. But for those seeking to understand the heart and origins of Japan, there is no better destination.

We (and our friendly sacred deer) can't wait to welcome you to the gem of Kansai.



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Spring

in Nara

Blooming flowers give Nara a rosy hue

Summer

in Nara

Join in this season of festivals and fun



Mount Yoshino Cherry Trees

Bask in the wonder of one of Japan's most famous spots for cherry blossom viewing. Between late March and mid-April, the mountainside erupts in an expanse of different shades of pink as the 30,000 cherry trees blossom. Around 200 varieties of sakura trees grow on Mount Yoshino, and for centuries people have made the pilgrimage here to marvel at the blossom's fleeting but breathtaking beauty.

Yoshino

The town comes alive at this time of year, with food and souvenir stalls lining the road up to the peak alongside the temples and shrines. Make the most of the festive atmosphere by enjoying a *hanami* picnic under a bower of petals at one of the area's many parks and viewpoints.



Mount Katsuragi Azaleas

Gose

Missed the cherry blossom season? In May the slopes of Mount Katsuragi transform into a bright red floral carpet of blooming azaleas, in striking contrast with the deep green of the surrounding forest.

Nara Tokae Lantern Festival

Nara

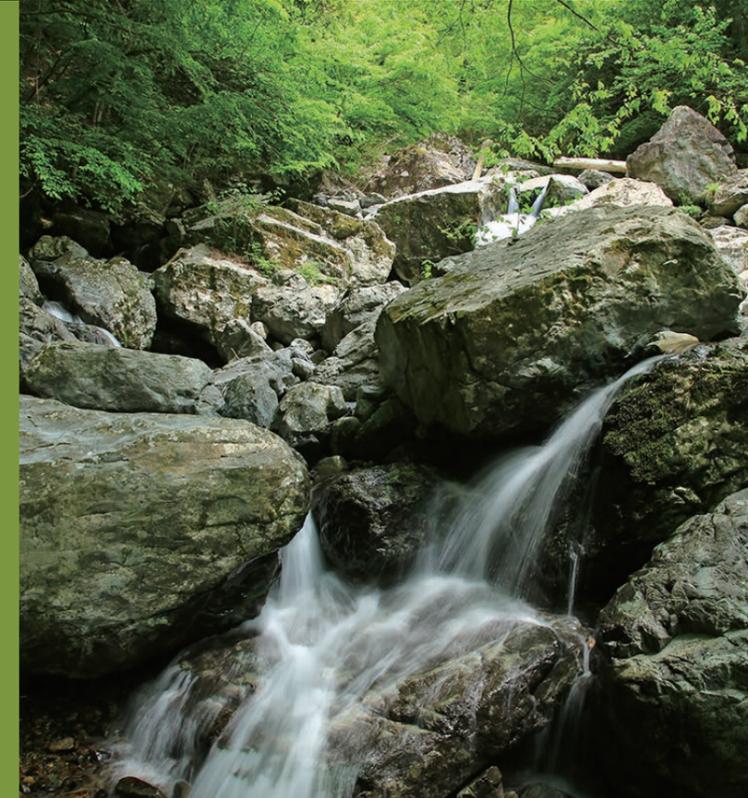
Lose yourself in the beauty of this magical twilight event, as Nara shimmers in the soft glow of 20,000 flickering candles. Every night from August 5 to 14, the city's most famous sights are illuminated by countless lanterns, transforming the city into an ocean of light. Some are arranged into shapes such as hearts and stars, while others simply highlight the artistry of the existing features. Among the most romantic spots are Ukimido Pavilion and Sarusawa Pond. Here you can spend the warm summer evenings strolling among twinkling lights, a scene straight from the pages of a fairytale. For a small fee you can join in the festival and light a candle of your own.



Ofusa Kannon Wind Chime Festival

Kashihara

Ward off the heat with the gentle, tinkling tones of thousands of delicate glass wind chimes. The quintessential sound of the Japanese summer, it provides the perfect soundtrack for refreshments in the temple tearoom.



Mitarai Valley

Tenkawa

Adventure awaits you in this mountain locale off the beaten track. Soak up the scenic forest hiking trails, cascading waterfalls, refreshing pools of emerald water and unparalleled views from the striking suspension bridge.



Yamanobe-no-michi Trail

Tenri - Sakurai

Get a glimpse of Nara's rural side by hiking the oldest road in Japan. This scenic trail winds pleasantly past rolling rice fields, traditional temples, historical shrines and ancient tombs.

Autumn

in Nara

Bright fall leaves bring a touch of technicolor to Nara



Sakurai

Fall Leaves at Tanzan Shrine

Breathe in the crisp air and enjoy the splendor of Japan's spectacular autumn leaves at this secluded mountain shrine. Tanzan Shrine is one of the best places in Nara to view fall foliage, with the colors reaching their peak around late November. The bright scarlet of the shrine blends beautifully with the myriad of red-leafed trees surrounding it, offering picture-perfect views and an enchanting atmosphere.

Sakurai

From the main hall you can gaze out over the vermillion forest from a wooden balcony decorated with ornate hanging brass lanterns. Be sure to bring a camera to capture the sight of the shrine's 13-story pagoda peeping out from between the 3,000 fiery maples.

Soni Highland Pampas Grass

Soni

The perfect spot for an autumn hike, as the setting sun dips below the horizon the fields of pampas grass glow a captivating silver-gold.



Shoryakuji Temple

Nara

Shoryakuji is hailed as the birthplace of modern sake. As you gaze out at the blazing autumn leaves, immersed in the smell of incense and gentle sound of the river, you'll realize this temple is every inch the utopia it was designed to be.



Cosmos in the Fujiwara Palace Ruins

Kashihara

The palace may be gone, but vivid red pillars marking the foundations give you a sense of its scale. In early fall, pink and white cosmos flowers spring up merrily in the surrounding fields.

Winter

in Nara

A time to celebrate ancient traditions and new beginnings



Image

Mount Wakakusa Yamayaki

Nara

Winter sees Nara's most dramatic festival light up the night sky in a phenomenal display of fireworks and flames. Every year on the fourth Saturday of January, the grass-covered slopes of Mount Wakakusa are set alight with sacred fire in a joint ceremony held by Todaiji Temple, Kohfukuji Temple and Kasugataisha Shrine.

Shortly preceding the burning of the mountainside, spectacular fireworks explode overhead in a dazzling array of colors and patterns. Thanks to Wakakusa's elevation you can watch the pyrotechnics and burning hillside from vantage points all over the city, for a night you'll never forget.

Tsukigase Plum Festival

Nara

Witness over 10,000 plum trees burst into blossom along the banks of the Satsuki River from mid-February through March, in an ethereal sea of white and pink petals.



Kasuga Wakamiya Onmatsuri Festival

Nara

From December 15 to 18, join other revelers for this ancient annual festival. One of the highlights is the elaborate costumed procession on December 17. Traditional music and dance performances rarely seen in modern Japan will transport you back in time.



What's Happening in Nara?



29 Apr. / 3 Nov.

Spring Kemari Festival Autumn Kemari Festival

Sakurai

This biannual festival at Tanzan Shrine combines stateliness with lighthearted fun, as participants garbed in colorful 7th century attire play *kemari*, an entertaining cross between soccer and hacky-sack.



mid - late May.

Mount Katsuragi Azaleas

Gose

May brings with it the blossoming of the azaleas that grace the slopes of Mount Katsuragi, painting the mountainside a vivid red against the deep green forest and blue skies of early summer.



1 Jul. - 31 Aug.

Ofusa Kannon Wind Chime Festival

Kashihara

Find respite from the summer heat in the soft melody of thousands of intricate glass wind chimes dancing in the breeze. From the beginning of July to the end of August, over 2,500 wind chimes are hung throughout the grounds of Ofusa Kannon Temple. Created in all different shapes and sizes by artisans from across the country, their tinkling tones are believed to have a cooling effect.



2 - 3 Aug.

Dorogawa Gyoja Festival

Tenkawa

A lively two-day summer celebration more akin to a street party, this festival features parades of masked dancers, traditional music, and stunning fireworks displays. The slightly racy "demon dance" may well elicit a giggle or two.

5 - 14 Aug.

Nara Tokae Lantern Festival

Nara

Like a scene from a fairytale, during this August festival Nara's ancient sights glow in the magical illumination of 20,000 flickering lanterns.



mid Sep. - late Nov.

Soni Highland Yama Akari

Soni

From mid-September to late November you can walk under the stars on lantern-lined trails that wind through golden pampas grass.



8 - 14 Feb.

Nara Rurie

Nara

Every February ethereal illuminations transform Nara City into an otherworldly spectacle, centered on an iridescent carpet of azure stars that look like they have fallen straight from the heavens.

Fourth Sat of Jan.

Mount Wakakusa Yamayaki

Nara

See spectacular fireworks explode in a dazzling display across the night sky before the mountainside burns in this dramatic January festival.



19 Jul. - 11 Feb.

Oni Festival

Yoshio

Enjoy exciting displays by performers clad as demons in this unusual take on the Setsubun festival, welcoming ogres rather than chasing them away.



spring, summer, autumn

Heijyokyo Tempyo Festival

Nara

A window into ancient Nara, this trio of festivals showcases the city's rich history and traditions at the former site of Heijo Palace. From spring to fall, each season brings with it a different variation on the festivities. In March, historical ceremonies and parades are reenacted by participants dressed in traditional costumes. Autumn's version boasts lively drumming and dance performances, as well as participants dressed as imperial guards.

The summer event at the end of August, meanwhile, takes its theme from the heavens to celebrate Tanabata, a festival based on the legend of two lovers who were transformed into stars and fated to meet only once a year. Night markets, illuminations, mesmerizing light displays and dance shows combine to create sparkling evenings.

March

Machiyano Hinameguri Doll's Festival

Takatori

Throughout March, around 80 houses in Takatori's Tosa Street set up exquisite displays of traditional *hina* dolls to celebrate Girl's Day. Visitors are welcome to enter their Edo-style homes to admire them. Don't miss the 15-tiered display featuring 500 intricate dolls!



Iconic Nara

Nara was the cradle of Japan's civilization—it was from these fertile fields that Japan's first capital rose all the way back in 710. For centuries nature and spirituality have harmonized in a virtuous cycle, as Nara's many temples and shrines have helped preserve the area's natural beauty. Sacred groves, lushly green burial mounds and thriving

rice fields are allowed to flourish with minimal interference. The calm faces of Buddhas inside quiet temples, red *torii* gates that peep out behind massive cedars and locally-harvested rice and vegetables—not to mention sake, which was invented in Nara—all point to a long-standing love of peace, beauty and nature.



Todaiji Temple Nara

This massive temple was commissioned by Emperor Shomu to pray for the happiness of all living beings. The Great Buddha housed within gazes down at visitors with a beatific smile. Completed in 752, half of Japan's population at the time (about 2.6 million) was involved in its construction.



Photo by Benrido

Horyuji Temple Ikaruga

Feel the weight of time as you walk through this temple complex, home to the oldest wooden buildings in the world. Gaze up at the soaring pagoda—still standing strong after 1300 years— and be sure to ask your guide about the “seven mysteries”.



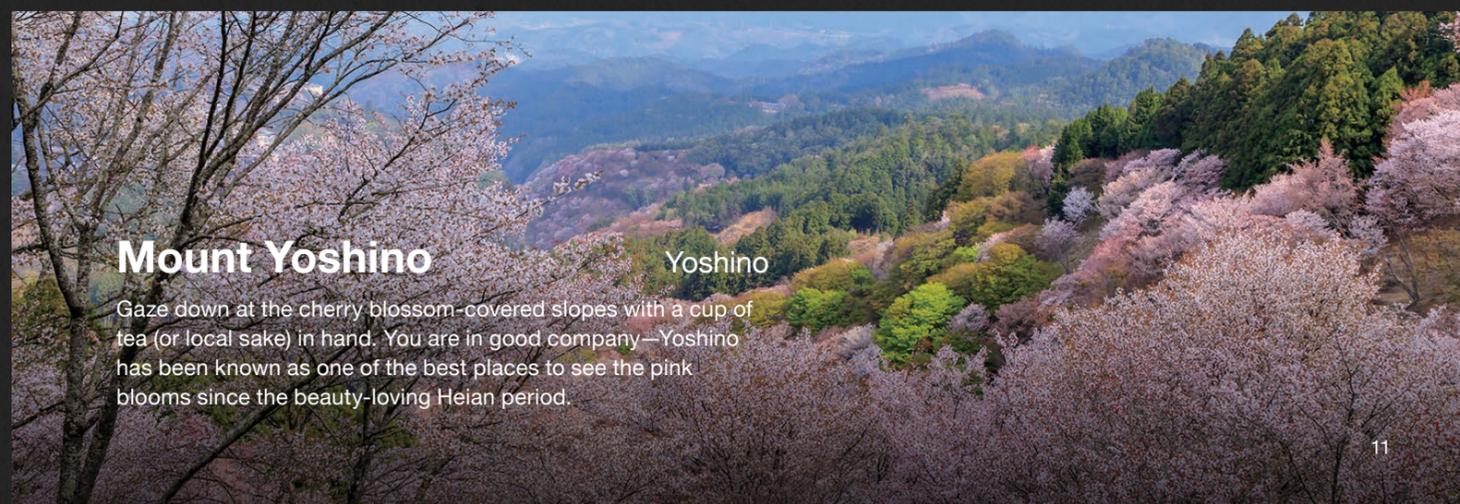
Kasugataisha Shrine Nara

Backed by the Kasugayama Primeval Forest, this bright vermilion shrine is graced with 3000 lanterns. Offer up a prayer for safe travels, and the four-footed messengers of the gods will carry it to the heavens.



Asuka Asuka

Although once the home of Japan's first emperors and a cradle of Buddhism, nowadays the terraced rice paddies, lush fields and laid back atmosphere attract visitors in search of peace and rural beauty.



Mount Yoshino Yoshino

Gaze down at the cherry blossom-covered slopes with a cup of tea (or local sake) in hand. You are in good company—Yoshino has been known as one of the best places to see the pink blooms since the beauty-loving Heian period.



Eat Like an Emperor



Gojo Genbei Gojo

Set inside a traditional 250-year-old building, this sophisticated restaurant creates art-like dishes that showcase Nara's unusual local vegetables at their best. Serving up Japanese-style set courses that are deeply influenced by the seasons, the chef visits local farms to seek inspiration for his menu. Choose one of the tatami rooms with a view out over the garden, and soak up the venue's Edo period atmosphere.

40 Seats



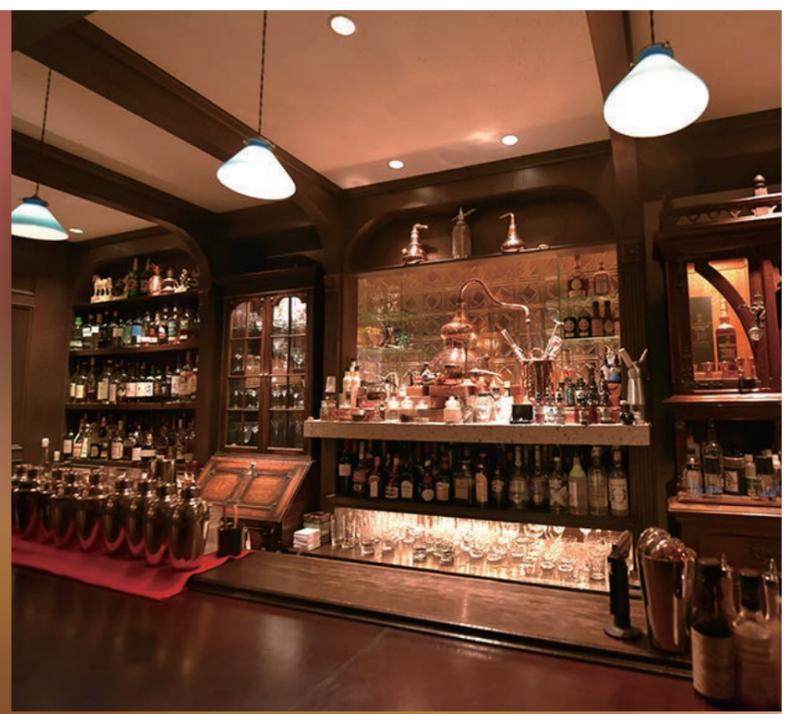
L'Auberge de Plaisance Sakurai Sakurai



The cuisine and magnificent views of the Yamato plain will compete for your attention at this gem in Sakurai. The menu features a range of dishes that

artfully combine French cuisine techniques with the freshest ingredients from Nara and around the Kansai region. Paired with quality French wines sourced directly from the makers, this is Nara-style fine dining at its very best.

40 Seats



Lamp Bar Nara

Tucked away down an unassuming side street, this stylish speak-easy brings a touch of whimsy to Nara. There are no menus in this alchemist's den. Instead, owner Michito Kaneko—who was crowned



World Class Bartender of the Year in 2015—and his talented staff fashion original cocktails based on the personal preferences of each customer. Lamp Bar's unique flavors, impeccable service, and creative presentation are sure to blow you away.

20 Seats

(recommended for couples or groups of 4 or under)

Kagetsu Nara

This cozy restaurant boasts friendly staff, superb sake, and a menu that features an assortment of wild game. Take a seat at the counter to get a glimpse of the chef in action.

39 Seats



Wasabi Nara

Dine on exquisitely displayed and sublimely fresh sushi, hand-crafted by one of the few female sushi chefs in the country.



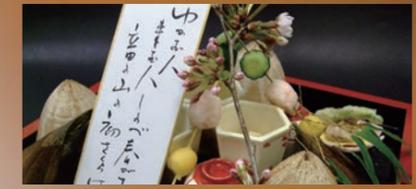
6 Seats



Awa Naramachi Nara

This laid-back restaurant is nestled within a refurbished 140-year-old *machiya* townhouse in the narrow streets of Naramachi. The elegantly served menu highlights the beauty and flavor of Nara's home-grown produce, from traditional Yamato vegetables and beef to locally-brewed sake.

32 Seats



Nishiyamato Saeki Kawai

Known for the vibrant and skillful presentation of their artistic *kaiseki* cuisine, guests can enjoy the refined menu while looking out over the rock garden and natural landscape.

110 Seats



Ichinyoan Uda

Featured in the Michelin Guide, this rustic restaurant specializes in soba noodles and traditional vegetarian temple cuisine. Ichinyoan harmonizes old-world charm with contemporary cuisine, with antique wooden furniture, hearthside seating and garden views from the large windows just adding to the atmosphere.

18 Seats

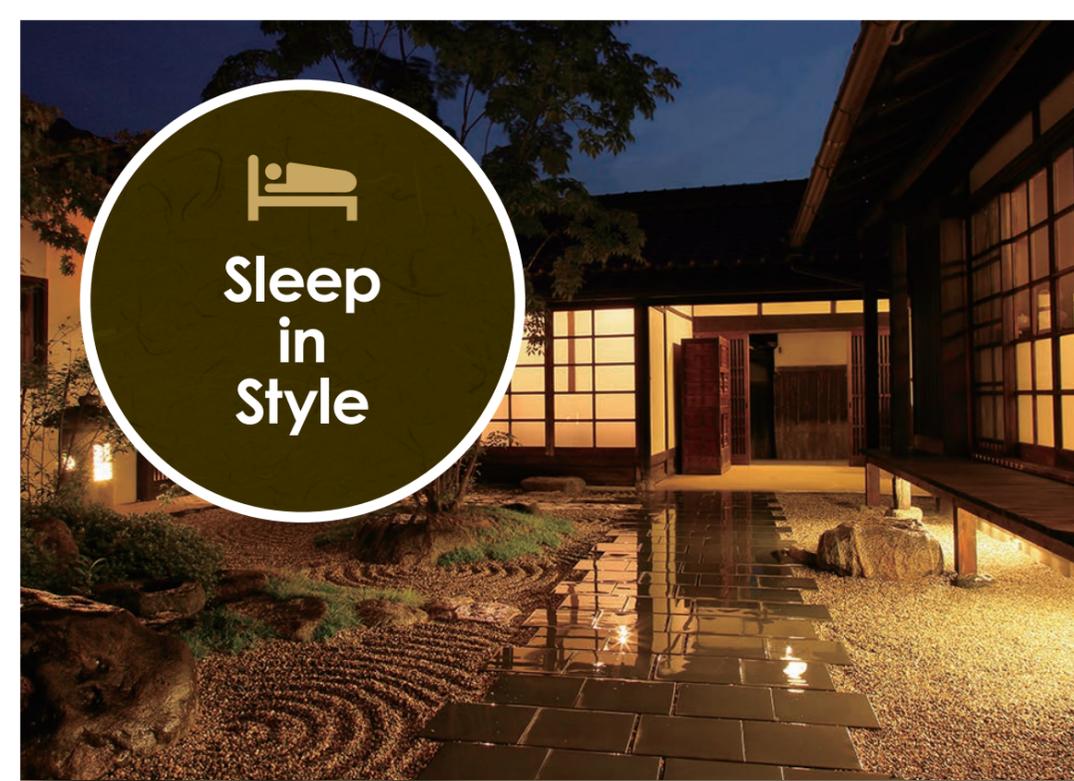


Tsurubesushi Yasuke Shimoichi



Slip back in time at this Michelin-recognized restaurant, where you can enjoy sushi and other perfectly executed small dishes. Once used as a kabuki theater, the retro, red building looks like it could have popped out of a Japanese fairytale.

28 Seats



Shinrajuku

A renovated farmhouse rented exclusively to one group at a time, Shinrajuku provides the utmost in rural luxury. You can check-in as early as 9 a.m. and check out at 4 p.m. on the following day, allowing you to slow down and enjoy

Asuka

your visit without rushing. Watch the sunset over the surrounding rice fields, gaze up at the starry night sky, and lose track of time in the silence of the countryside.



Ubusuna no Sato Tomimoto Ando

Once the family home of pioneering ceramist Tomimoto Kenkichi, this hotel is an exquisite mix of the traditional and the modern. With only two suites amid the elegant gardens, it is an oasis of taste and exclusivity. The comfortable beds and deep private baths create a supremely relaxing environment, while the restaurant serves beautifully presented seasonal menus. Optional pottery classes help you connect with the hotel's namesake.



Mount Shigi Gyokuzoin Temple Stay

Immerse yourself in a spiritual atmosphere by lodging at this thousand-year-old temple in the mountains. Relax in a simple, Japanese-style room, enjoy traditional Buddhist meals, and take the opportunity to participate in morning prayers and ascetic practices.

Heguri



Ryokan Kato Yoshino

Spend the night in an authentic Japanese ryokan inn in the peaceful heart of Yoshino, enjoying the hearty hotpot and hot spring facilities. From the large windows you can admire the natural beauty of the mountainside as it changes color with the seasons—pretty in pink during the spring, lushly green in the summer, fiery red in autumn and icy white in winter.



Noborioji Hotel Nara Nara

This small luxury hotel in the heart of Nara city allows you to wake up to the majestic sight of Kohfukuji Temple just outside your window. As well as an unbeatable location, Noborioji boasts an elegant bar, top quality French cuisine



made with local ingredients, and the finest in old-school Japanese hospitality.



Dive into Local Culture



Sumo Wrestling Experience

Katsuragi

Try your strength against amateur sumo wrestlers at Sumo Museum Kehayaza. But before you step into the ring, listen to traditional sumo *jinku* songs and learn about all the etiquette, training and tradition associated with Japan's national sport.



Exclusive Evening Tour of Kasugataisha Shrine

Nara

Only available through us, get special access to the iconic shrine after closing hours. One of Kasugataisha's Shinto priests will give you a totally private tour of the sacred halls, with the atmosphere made even more magical by thousands of glowing lanterns lit for the occasion.



Mount Kasuga Primeval Forest Hike

Nara

Follow your knowledgeable nature guide into the untouched forest Kasugataisha Shrine has protected for centuries, where you will discover 1,000-year old trees, moss-covered Buddhist images and quiet walking trails. From easy downhill walks starting at Mount Wakakusa to full-day hikes, choose your own adventure.



Private Cycling Tour of Asuka

Asuka

Bike tours are the most scenic way to get around Asuka's historical sights. Pedaling along terraced rice fields and ancient tombs, your guide will introduce you to hidden gems. Take a break to pick fresh fruit and breathe in the clean country air of this timeless village.



Nishiuchi Sake Brewery

Sakurai

While the inner workings of the brewery are usually kept secret, get special access to see how they make their award-winning rice wines, including a special sake used in ceremonies at nearby Tanzan Shrine. You will be welcomed into the historic 150-year-old building to sample a wide selection of their brews, made using only the best native Yamato rice.



Futsunomasataka Sword Forge Visit

Tenri

Japanese sword makers are becoming increasingly rare, but in Nara you can still watch a master craftsman skillfully hammer blades into shape on his red-hot forge. You can even buy a paper knife made using the same traditional technique!





Yamato Tea

Yamato Highlands

For over a thousand years farmers have grown Yamato tea in the mountains of the Yamato Highlands. Kenichi Natural Tea's plantations continue to grow tea sustainably, using ancient techniques and without using pesticides or other agricultural chemicals. The perfect harmony of climate, fresh air and clean soil, combined with the boundless passion of the farmers, results in high-grade tea that is healthy, deeply flavorful, and good for the environment.

Nara Uchiwa Fans

Nara

These delicate fans are made using bamboo and dyed Japanese *washi* paper, into which intricate designs are meticulously hand-cut. Ikeda Gankodo has been creating these masterpieces for 160 years, and is the only store that still makes them using traditional methods. Beautiful and practical, they can be used to keep cool or displayed as a decorative item.



Photo by Hirasao

Kakinoha Sushi

Gojo, Yoshino

Possibly Nara's most famous local delicacy, this distinctive sushi is a must-try for visitors to the prefecture. Fish—usually salmon or mackerel—and sushi rice are carefully wrapped in persimmon leaves, which keep it fresh and imbue each bite with the delicate aroma of the leaves. Through the use of these ingredients, the finished product is said to represent the natural trio of sea (fish), land (rice) and mountains (persimmon leaf).

Yoshino Cedar/Cypress

Yoshino

Akari Yoshino crafts a charming range of minimalist lamps from handmade *washi* paper, cedar and cypress grown locally in Yoshino. The warm glow of the light through these natural materials combines with the delicate scent of the wood to bring the ambience of traditional Japan into your home.



Arrowroot Sweets

Yoshino

Popular with locals and visitors alike, Nakai Shunpudo creates a range of confections using local Yoshino arrowroot, from exquisite flower-shaped candy to unique noodle desserts with black sugar syrup that are particularly delicious when freshly made. Watch the sweet magic take place through live demonstrations in the shop window.

Somen Noodles

Sakurai

The city of Sakurai is considered the birthplace of these exceptionally thin noodles, which are traditionally made with water sourced from local springs. Commonly served cold as a refreshing summer dish, somen are also delicious when eaten warm. For something extra special, opt for a multicolored variety box. Using natural ingredients such as sweet potato, plum and citrus, the delicate strands are dyed a rainbow assortment of colors, for meals that are both artistic and tasty.



Photo by Senjutei



Asuka Ruby Strawberries

Asuka

The Asuka Ruby is a special variety of strawberry, grown locally in the village of Asuka. Known for their ruby red color and delicious sweetness, you can enjoy picking (and eating) them fresh off the vine from mid-January to late May.



Tosakaido (Takatori)

Takatori

As you stroll up Tosa Street, see if you can spot all the clues that point to Takatori's history as a medicine-making town. Take in the views from Tsubosakadera Temple, where Japanese and Indian-style statues playfully combine. You can also climb up to the imposing ruins of Takatorijo, one of Japan's three great mountaintop castles.

Imaicho

Kashihara

A tangle of labyrinthine streets and charming lattice-fronted buildings, Imaicho retains the timeless atmosphere of Edo period Japan. Over 500 traditional houses from this thriving merchant town have been restored and preserved, making it the largest historical district in the country. Many of the buildings still function as soy sauce producers or sake breweries, while others have been converted into cafés or are open to the public. Originally designed in a maze-like fashion to protect the town's inhabitants, Imaicho's meandering lanes now serve as a way to encourage conversation between locals and visitors.



Naramachi Nara

Lose yourself in the Nara of old, a maze of narrow lanes lined with *machiya* merchant houses that now house cafés, shops and sake breweries.



Dorogawa Onsen

Tenkawa

Secluded deep in the mountains, this hidden gem of a hot springs town is an ideal spot for hiking, relaxing, and escaping the summer heat. After dark take a walk down the lanes lined with glowing lanterns, and keep an eye out for pilgrims dressed in white heading towards sacred Mount Omine.



Uda Matsuyama

Uda

Step back in time in this 500-year-old traditional townscape. Famous for its plethora of medicinal herbs, this area's streetscapes and herb gardens are carefully preserved as a living museum.



Around Nara City

Peek into cafés and galleries tucked inside traditional merchant houses, and meet sociable deer among the city's numerous World Heritage sites.



Central Nara

This area's timeless air well befits the birthplace of Japanese civilization, where residents ardently preserve their traditional ways of life.



Todaiji Temple, Kasugataisha Shrine & Kohfukuji Temple

Nara

These are Nara's shining stars. From the soaring pagoda of Kohfukuji and Todaiji's serene giant Buddha to the tree-lined paths of Kasugataisha Shrine, each is as much a symbol of the city as the sacred deer roaming freely around them.



Nara Izumi Yusai

Nara

A great spot to begin your journey to sake connoisseurship, this friendly standing bar carries over 120 different types of locally-brewed Japanese rice wine.



Ishibutai Tumulus

Asuka

Feel the weight of history at this colossal tomb constructed from huge boulders that weigh a total of 2,300 tons, thought to be the largest megalithic structure in Japan.



Umenoyado Brewery

Katsuragi

Although it boasts over 120 years of history, this brewery is definitely not old fashioned. Lead by fifth-generation owner Kayo Yoshida, they are pushing the boundaries of sake culture and turning out a selection of highly acclaimed rice wines and fruit liqueurs.



Gallery Kusakouji & Yu Nakagawa

Nara

Drop by this fashionable gallery to find one-of-a-kind traditional crafts made by local artists. Nearby, Yu Nakagawa has repurposed an old *machiya* townhouse into a stylish retailer of textiles and other chic Nara mementos.



Isuien Garden

Nara

Experience the artistry of borrowed scenery in this secluded Japanese-style garden.



Kashihara Jingu

Kashihara

Nestled in the forested foothills of Mount Unebi, follow the stately pathway lined with stone lanterns to this grand shrine's main hall, where Japan's very first emperor is enshrined.



Kawai Brewery & Tsuneoka Soy Sauce Brewery

Kashihara

Get a taste of tradition and meet the brewers of these two establishments that have been perfecting their craft for over 200 years.

Chogosonshiji Temple

Heguri

A large papier-mâché tiger greets you at the entrance to this mountaintop temple that is sure to be a big hit with kids of all ages. Keep an eye out for all the different tiger statues as you wander up the lantern-lined pathway to take in the views from the veranda.



Hokkiji Temple

Ikaruga

Playing peekaboo among the trees, timeless Hokkiji blends harmoniously with nearby rice fields. The centuries-old three-storied pagoda makes a particularly delightful contrast to the magenta cosmos fields that bloom in the fall.



Inabuchi Tanada Terraced Rice Fields

Asuka

Rent a bike to pedal around the winding roads among rice paddies and tiny roadside stalls selling fresh veggies, and exchange smiles with the farmers who help maintain this idyllic countryside. From late August to mid November the area is dotted with surprisingly cute scarecrows.



Eastern Nara

Characterized by sweeping plateaus and valleys dotted with Yamato tea plantations, eastern Nara is a local gem untouched by mass tourism.



Southern Nara

Find yourself in the deep cedar forests of the spiritual heart of Nara, home to numerous pilgrimage routes and sacred sites.



Soni Highland

Soni

From the fresh greens of summer to the silver-gold pampas grass of autumn, this plateau is a nature lover's dream. Hike up Mount Kuroso for panoramic views of the grassy valley and rugged tree-covered mountains.



Kubo Honke Brewery

Uda

Visit this riverside sake brewery to learn more about their 300-year history and traditional techniques, before settling down to a sake tasting and some nibbles.



Hasedera Temple

Sakurai

Known as the "temple of flowers," climb 399 gentle steps lined with lanterns to reach the main hall of this peaceful temple. In the spring, survey a sea of peonies and cherry trees from your perch high on the mountainside.

Omiwa Jinja Shrine & Miwa Somen

Sakurai

Dedicated to the worship of sacred Mount Miwa, Omiwa is thought to be the oldest Shinto shrine in Japan. Nearby you can try the local delicacy: delicate, thread-like *miwa somen* noodles.



Murouji Temple

Uda

Cross the arched bridge to enter the precincts of this temple complex, known for its vibrant spring rhododendrons and autumn leaves. Stretching back deep into the forested mountainside, a svelte red five-storey pagoda awaits you among the trees.



Gojo Historic Town

Gojo

This photogenic town is the epitome of ancient Japan. Take your time strolling along Shinmachi-dori, the oldest street in the country, admiring the galleries and quaint shops housed in buildings that date back to the Edo and Meiji periods.

Kumano Kodo Kohechi Route (Hatenashi-toge Pass)

Totsukawa

Trek part of the Kumano Kodo's thousand-year-old network of sacred pilgrimage trails. Exchange waves with locals as you hike this intermediate-level forested route up to Hatnashi, a mountain village that seems to float above the clouds.



Kinpusenji Temple & Mount Yoshino

Yoshino

Mount Yoshino's natural landscapes are enchanting all year round—from achingly beautiful cherry blossoms in spring to crimson fall foliage in autumn. Pay your respects at Kinpusenji Temple, where you may catch a glimpse of the towering blue-skinned Zao Gongen if you visit at the right time.



Yaen Ropeway

Totsukawa

Dangle high above the river on this ingenious human-powered ropeway. A tiny cable car just big enough for one person, you'll have to rely on your strength and adrenaline to make it across the river!

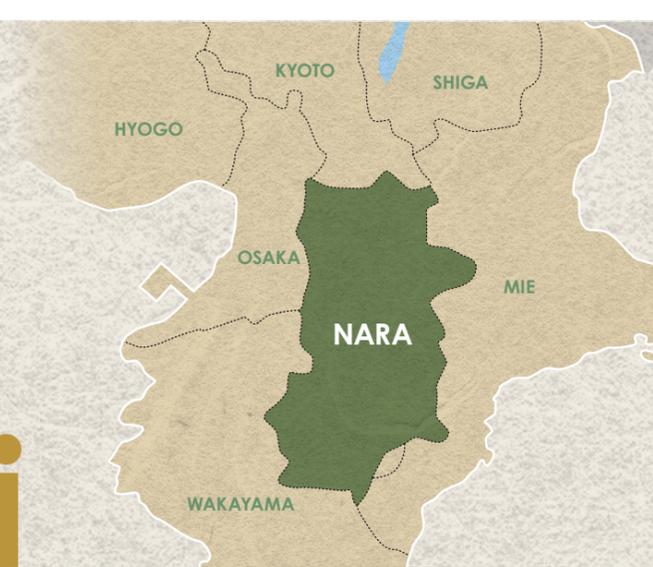


Tamaki Jinja Shrine

Totsukawa

Shrouded in mist and surrounded by primeval cedar trees, this shrine is a mystical spot on the Kumano Kodo trail.

Discover More of Kansai



Iga

Mie

School yourself in the ancient art of stealth at the birthplace of ninja, complete with a dedicated museum and impressive castle. Great option for those traveling with kids!

Matsusaka

Mie

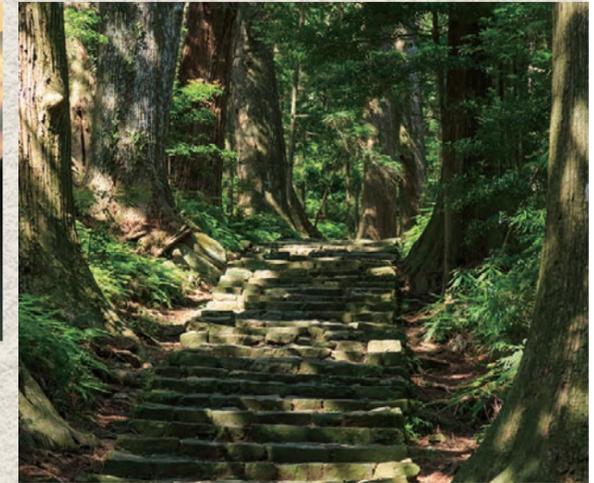
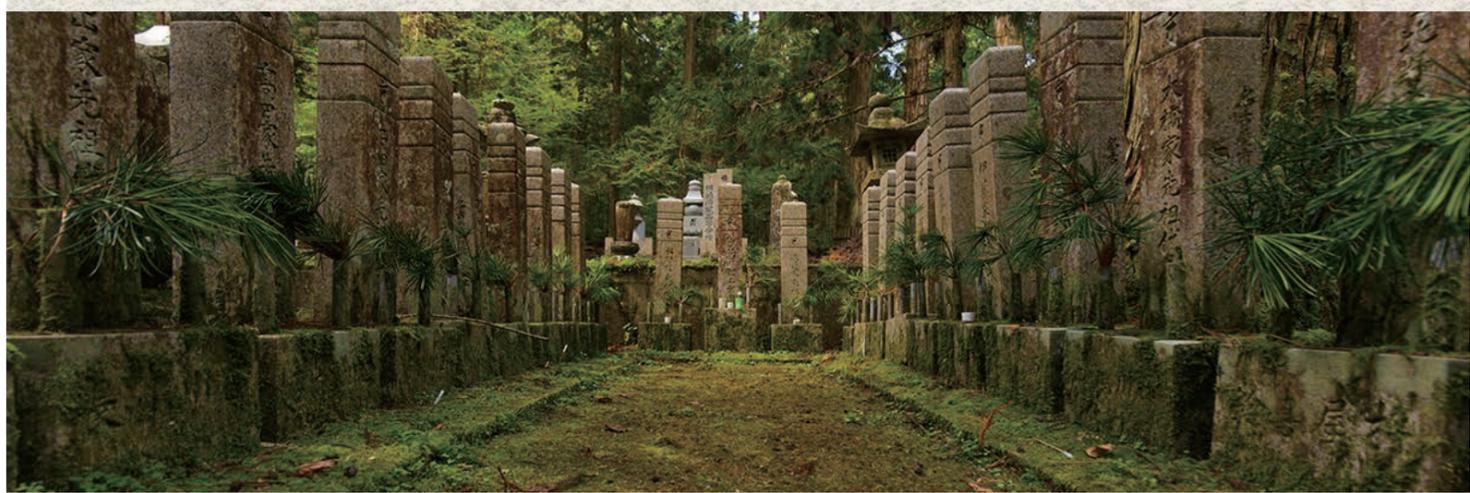
Unmissable for foodies—thanks to its famous beef—this merchant town also boasts samurai residences, castle ruins and pretty indigo-dyed cotton crafts.

Katsuoji Temple and Mino

Osaka

Scattered throughout the grounds of Katsuoji Temple are the distinctive round, red figures of countless *daruma* dolls. Locals pray for their wishes to come true by painting in one of the *daruma*'s eyes. After their wish is granted, they paint in the second eye and gratefully return the doll to the temple grounds.

Autumn is a particularly beautiful time of year to visit, when the surrounding gardens and mountainside glow in a kaleidoscope of reds, oranges and yellows as the leaves change color. Nearby Mino Park also offers spectacular views of the fall foliage, forming a dramatic backdrop for the cascading waterfall that lies at the end of the hiking trails.



Mount Koya

Wakayama

Connect with your spiritual side in this sacred mountain town. Slow down and take your time by staying at temple lodgings, experiencing the morning prayer ceremony and traditional vegetarian Buddhist cuisine.

Wandering the misty pathways of Okunoin Cemetery and coming across red-hatted *jizo* statues amongst the trees, you may well forget about the world below entirely.

Kumano Kodo Trail

Wakayama

Follow in the footsteps of emperors and monks by hiking thousand-year-old pilgrimage trails through the mountains of Japan's spiritual heartland.

Uji

Kyoto

Stroll across Uji's picturesque bridge and step into the landscape from the *Tale of Genji*. Sip top-grade local matcha in a traditional teahouse and admire exquisite Byodoin Temple, which graces Japan's 10 yen coin.



Travel Inspiration

In Nara fall is the time to enjoy seasonal food, culture and contemplation. Ditch the crowds and take in the sight of Nara's many shrines and temples surrounded by bright red Japanese maples and sunny yellow ginkgo trees.

Fall Leaves Off the Beaten Track



Discover Kyoto's Sights

Explore Kyoto and Arashiyama surrounded by bright fall leaves.



Into the Heart of Nara

Play hide and seek in the retro streets of Imaicho, then get your fill of crimson leaves at Tanzan Shrine. You can even visit the nearby Nishiuchi brewery, where they make the sacred sake used in the shrine's ceremonies. Buy a bottle or two to sip as you relax on the veranda at Sasayuri-ann.



After a hearty dinner and relaxing bath, enjoy stargazing in the evening quiet.



A Day in the Mountains

Hike high up in the Soni Highland, where the golden pampas grass sways against a backdrop of blue mountains. Then visit Mount Yoshino, where you can wind your way among the autumn colors to Kinpusenji Temple and watch the sunset envelope the trees in a golden halo.



End the day with a warm welcome from Ryokan Kato, which includes a dinner full of local Yamato vegetables.



Hot Springs and Fall Leaves

Many of the shops and inns along Dorogawa Onsen's lantern-lined streets have been in the same family for over 400 years. Before sinking into a hot spring bath, hike down to see the blazing foliage in the Mitarai Valley, or chat with the monks at Ryusenji Temple.



Kadojin offers private onsen baths to soothe your soles after a full day of exploring.



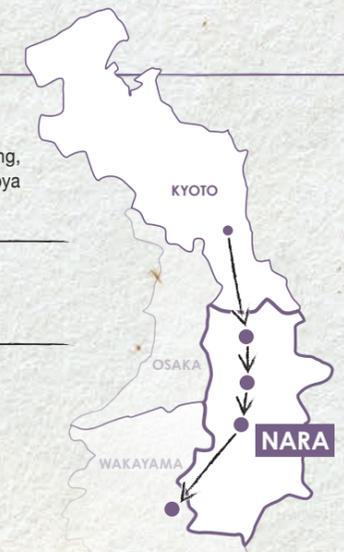
Onwards to Osaka or Kansai Airport

Either forge on to Osaka or get dropped off at the airport. Hope to see you again soon!

Travel Inspiration

Ideal for first-time visitors who want to get the full experience without rushing, book a classical trip to Japan with a twist. Explore Nara, Kyoto and Mount Koya and get a feel for the atmosphere, flavors and beauty of the Japan of yore.

The Heart of Old Japan



Visit Kyoto's Temples and Shrines

Spend a day exploring the sights and sounds of Japan's second oldest capital.



Welcome to Nara!

Greet the friendly local deer as you explore sacred Kasugataisha Shrine and Todaiji Temple, or head to majestic Yakushiji Temple. After a fragrant bowl of local soba noodles, meander through the streets of the retro Naramachi area, and perhaps stop for a sake tasting at Harushika Sake Imanishi Sebei.



A night at the venerable Noborioji Hotel and dinner—prepared by a rare female sushi chef—round out the day perfectly.



Go Retro in Imaicho and Asuka

Start your day with a cup of coffee and a stroll through the prosperous "walled town" of Imaicho, stopping at sake and soy sauce breweries with centuries of tradition. After following in the footsteps of the mythical first Emperor of Japan at Kashihara Jingu and a French/Japanese fusion lunch at Tama, head to Asuka and check in at your private retreat, Shinrajuku.



Time seems to move more slowly in Asuka, with its temples, shimmering terraced rice fields and laidback air.



Savor Asuka and Gojo

After enjoying the view of the sun rising over rice fields from the veranda, hop on a bike to cycle through Asuka's calm trails. Visit the Ishibutai Tumulus to feel the weight of history and stop by a local cafe for a light lunch. A walk through the retro streets of Gojo will sharpen your appetite for a dinner of Michelin-starred Nara veggies at Gojo Gembei.

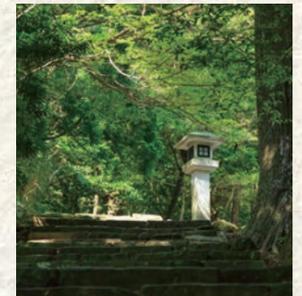


After dinner settle down for a sound night's sleep at Yanaseya, an elegantly renovated storehouse.



A Moment of Zen at Mount Koya

Breathe in the incense-scented breeze of this mountain town while meandering through the otherworldly Okunoin cemetery. Staying overnight at one of the many temples and joining the monks for their morning prayers is a truly unforgettable experience.



Travel Inspiration

For adventurous travelers keen on walking two of Japan's most ancient pilgrimage routes, a trip full of inspiring trails, fantastic food and muscle-soothing hot springs may be just the thing!

Yamanobe Trail and Kumano Kodo Trail



Join in the Cheerful Chaos of Osaka

Fuel up for your adventure in this food-obsessed city. Be sure to try savory *okonomiyaki*!



Get to Know Nara

Dive right into history in Nara City, where culture and nature are deeply interwoven. Say hello to the deer peeping out between Kasugataisha Shrine's lanterns, marvel at the Great Buddha and head down the twisty lanes to Awa Naramachi for a healthy lunch of local Yamato beef and vegetables.



Nipponia Hotel's staff will help you find the perfect sake to match your dinner—and a cheeky nightcap at swanky Lamp Bar is always a treat.



Walk the Yamanobe-no-Michi Trail

Over 1000-years old, this winding road is said to be the oldest in Japan. Pleasantly flat, the 11-kilometer trail takes you past rice paddies, some of Nara's most historic temples and plenty of little vegetable stalls and somen noodle shops.



At L'Auberge De Plaisance Sakurai take in the view of the lush rice fields before treating yourself to their top-class cuisine, made with hyper-local ingredients and lovingly prepared by students of their culinary college.



Retro Gojo and Relaxing Totsukawa

On the way to the Kumano Kodo, stop to explore the retro streets of Gojo while sampling some of the local sweets. Your destination for the night is Totsukawa Onsen, a popular starting point for hikers taking on the trail.



After checking out the thrilling suspension bridge and praying at Tamaki Shrine, soak in glorious private hot spring baths at Yunotani Senkei, one of the gems of this beloved *onsen* town.



Hit the Kumano Kodo Trail.

After a hearty breakfast, it's time to hit the road! The 15-kilometer section of the Kohechi route between Totsukawa and Kumano Hongu Taisha shrine will give you a taste of the unspoiled nature and spiritual aura of this ancient pilgrimage route.



Up For Another Hike?

For those who want to explore even more of the Kumano Kodo, your guide can drop you off at Koguchi, from where a 14-kilometer section of the Nakahechi trail will lead you through the forest all the way to majestic Nachi Taisha. Seeing the shrine's pagoda against the backdrop of a mighty waterfall, you may well understand why this place has been considered holy for centuries.

Travel Inspiration

Spend your days under fluttering cherry blossoms and evenings indulging in the very best of Japanese hospitality for a spring trip to remember. This flower-filled journey hits all the sakura highlights in Nara, with a few little surprises for good measure.

Cherry Blossoms and Ancient Beauty



Get to Know Osaka

Check out Osaka Castle framed by cherry trees and hit the food stalls to try some savory local snacks!



Cherry Blossoms, Temples and Sweets, Oh My!

The first stop of the day is Chog-osonshiji Temple, which appears to float on a cloud of cherry blossoms. Be sure to say hi to Fukutora, the huge papier-mâché tiger. After lunch wander through Nara Park or head to Mount Wakakusa to capture perfect snapshots of the sacred deer beneath the blossoms.



Treat yourself to a sake tasting and some sakura sweets, but be sure to leave room for dinner at magical Tsukihitei.



See Japan's Most Famous Cherry Trees

An early start will allow you to gaze at the blossom-covered slopes of Mount Yoshino while it is still quiet... perhaps stopping for a cup of coffee and some arrowroot sweets near lofty Kinpusenji Temple? In the afternoon explore the flower-filled temples, ancient monuments and lush rice fields of Asuka.



Drift off to sleep listening to the rustling leaves at Tsukihitei.



Get Off the Beaten Track

Winding through backroads, your guide will take you to some secret cherry blossom spots that are definitely not in guidebooks. After strolling under a tunnel of blooms head deep into the forest for a peek at the scarlet pagoda of Murouji Temple.



Watch the sunset from Sasayuri-ann, before tucking into dinner served around the traditional *irori* stove.



Continue Your Journey in Kyoto

After a slow breakfast overlooking the valley below Sasayuri-ann, head to Kyoto.