

Inner Journeys

October 2019 - March 2020

Nara's Temples and Shrines



INNER
JOURNEYS



Exquisite Japanese Gardens in Nara
Journey to two World Heritage Sites in the Nishinokyo Area
Hidden Treasures & Hidden Buddhas Special Public Openings

Photo : National Site of Scenic Beauty "The Garden of Former Daijo-in Temple (名勝旧大乘院庭園)"

Exquisite Japanese Gardens in Nara

Gardens in Japan are reflections of the traditional insights of Japanese people. Since ancient times, the Japanese have discovered subtle beauty in nature and the seasonal transitions. There are a variety of designs of Japanese gardens: “Shakkei,” meaning “borrowed scenery,” is one of the popular forms which incorporates distant mountains behind the garden as a part of the background design. Other forms are utilizing plants and rocks to represent mountains and rivers while still more employ the entire garden design to express the profound world of Buddhism. Japanese gardens illustrate the aesthetic of Japan which extracts true beauty from the natural world.



Jikoin Temple Shoin Room (Important Cultural Property) Photo: Jikoin Temple

Jikoin Temple

Jikoin Temple was commissioned by Sadamasa Katagiri (aka Sekishu) who was a samurai governing the area and also a tea ceremony master about 350 years ago. It imparts a different structure from other temples since the entire temple grounds were designed to be the venue for tea ceremony. You can take a Nara Kotsu Bus bound for Horyuji Temple from Kintetsu Koriyama Station. You will reach “Jikoin” bus stop after about 10 minutes, however, getting off at the next stop, “Katagiri Nishi Shogakko” is recommended as it is closer to the temple entrance. Return on the same road for about 100 meters and turn left at the traffic light, then the stone-paved temple approach will appear on your right-hand side.

The approach is shaded by trees with their roots exposed on the steep mound. You may find this temple somewhat lonesome, however, upon passing through the thatched roofed Ibaraki-mon Gate, you will encounter a totally different scenery. A broad and bright garden with beautifully trimmed rhododendron bushes will welcome you. The view from the Shoin Room (Important Cultural Property) is the most stunning. You can enjoy matcha and a sweet in Shoin while appreciating this superb garden.



The temple founder, Sadamasa Katagiri (aka Sekishu), was also the founder of the Sekishu School of tea ceremony. The garden and Shoin Room you can see today remain exactly the same as when the temple was founded. There is the Hojo (main hall) behind Shoin where a statue of Sekishu is enshrined with a painting of a dragon on the ceiling.

🕒 9:00-17:00 (last entry: 17:00) ☎ 0743-53-3004

¥ 1000 yen (with matcha tea) 🚶 A 20-min. walk from JR Yamato Koizumi Station, or take a bus bound for Horyuji Temple from Kintetsu Koriyama Station and get off at Katagiri Nishi Shogakko (approx. 19 min.).

🌐 <https://www.visitnara.jp/venues/A00505/>



Isuien Garden

Isuien Garden is situated on the west side of the famous Todaiji Temple which is one of the representative superb gardens in Nara. The garden consists of two parts: Zen-en, or Front Garden, and Ko-en, or Back Garden. The Front Garden spreads out just on the right-hand side of the entrance. A large pond with a small island is located at the center. At Sanshutei room by the pond, visitors can enjoy meals such as Mugi-meshi Tororo (cooked rice and barley with grated yam potato). With its thatched roof, Sanshutei emanates a truly classical Japanese atmosphere. Its appearance is also exquisite when viewed from across the pond. The vast Back Garden utilizes the Shakkei (borrowed scenery) technique skillfully having Nandaimon Gate of Todaiji Temple, Mount Wakakusa and Mount Mikasa as its backdrops. Strolling along the pond, you will discover small charms one after another such as a tea ceremony room, a hut with a water wheel, and a little waterfall.



The two gardens were created in different periods. The Front Garden was made about 350 years ago by a wealthy merchant in Nara who amassed a fortune from his quality Nara Sarashi (linen fabric) business which used to be one of the main products of Nara. The Back Garden was completed in the modern age and was commissioned by a local business person. Both gardens display their sublime beauty throughout the year, however, the best season to visit would be in autumn when trees will be dressed with colored leaves.

🕒 9:30-16:30 (last entry: 16:00) ※ Closed on Tuesdays (open every day in Oct. & Nov. 2019; closed during maintenance period of the garden (end of Dec. to late Jan.)) ☎ 0742-25-0781 ¥ 900 yen 🚶 Approx. 15-min. walk from Kintetsu Nara Station (west side of Todaiji Temple) 🌐 <https://www.visitnara.jp/venues/A00493/>



依水園

Koguen Garden in Nakanobo of Taimadera Temple 當麻寺中之坊 香藕園

Taimadera Temple flourished as a massive Buddhist temple at the foot of Mount Nijo, the local symbol of spiritual worship, since ancient times. The spacious temple precincts accommodate a number of sub-temples which support Taimadera Temple and Nakanobo is one of them. From Kintetsu Taimadera Station, you will find a shop, Chujodo Honpo, which sells a popular local specialty, Chujo-mochi (rice cake using felon herb topped with sweet red bean jam). Turn to the right at the shop and walk for about 10 minutes, then, Niomon Gate (Todaimon Gate) will appear in front of you. Go through the gate and the building with white walls is Nakanobo, home to Koguen Garden. Situated behind the Shoin Room (Important Cultural Property), the garden is not so large yet incorporates some special skills. With low earthen walls separating the gardens into inside and outside, and including the East Pagoda (National Treasure) as Shakkei (borrowed scenery) makes the garden look more spacious than it actually is.

Nakanobo houses the oldest temple buildings in Taimadera Temple complex where the monks lived. It is said that the legendary Princess Chujo cut her hair at this temple and became a nun. She is said to have woven an exceptional mandala called Taima Mandala (National Treasure) which depicts the imaginary Buddhist Pure Land. The main image of the temple is an Eleven-faced Kannon which is believed to be the guardian deity of Princess Chujo.

🕒 9:00-17:00 (last entry: 16:30) ☎ 0745-48-2001 ¥ 500 yen 🚶 Approx. 15-min. walk from Kintetsu Taimadera Station 🌐 <https://www.visitnara.jp/destination/destination/taimadera-temple/>



Training Hall for Tracing Buddhist Images “Room with Decorative Ceiling Paintings”



*Yakushiji Temple, in the process of restoration and Toshodaiji Temple, where the ambience of ancient Nara is still alive

Journey to two World Heritage Sites
in the Nishinokyo Area



Nishinokyo is the area located on the west side of Japan's ancient capital Heijokyo, founded about 1300 years ago. Many historical sites from those days still remain, such as Sugawara Tenmangu Shrine, Kikohji Temple, Toshodaiji Temple, and Yakushiji Temple. Yakushiji Temple and Toshodaiji Temple are especially popular and are both designated as World Heritage Sites. The two temples are adjacent to each other and located within walking distance from Kintetsu Nishinokyo Station.

Yakushiji Temple Hakuho Garan Photo : Askaen Co. Ltd.



Yakushi Sanzon (Main Image) (National Treasures)
Photo : Yakushiji Temple

somewhere at the bottom of the ocean. The main images enshrined in Kondo Hall are the three statues known as Yakushi Sanzon (National Treasures). They remain in their original state as they miraculously survived the fire in which the building itself was burnt to the ground. The dignified statue located at the center is the sitting Yakushi Nyorai, flanked by two attendants, Nikko and Gakko Bosatsu, who elegantly stand with their hips slightly twisted. The three statues used to be entirely covered with gold which no longer remains, however, the dark blackish color of the present statues give them a more solemn look. Toindo Hall (National Treasure) standing on the east side of the corridor enshrines another valuable statue of a standing Sho Kanzeon Bosatsu (National Treasure) which was also produced during the Hakuho period with the Yakushi Sanzon. This is another highlight that should not be missed. During the special opening period in spring and autumn and from January 1st to 8th, the statue of Shaka Shiso (*1) housed on the first floor of the West Pagoda and the Picture of Amida Sanzon in the Pure Land (*2) will be open to public viewing.

Sho Kanzeon Bosatsu Standing Statue (National Treasure)
Photo : Askaen Co. Ltd.

The Yakushiji Temple complex lies just by Nishinokyo Station. Upon exiting the station, you will see a street stretching to the east which separates the two large precincts of Yakushiji Temple: the one on the south side is called Hakuho Garan and the other on the north side is Genjo Sanzoin Garan. Enter through the Yorakumon Gate to Hakuho Garan. The first building you will see is Jikido Hall which was reconstructed in 2017. Starting with Jikido Hall, Daikodo Hall, Kondo Hall, and Chumon Gate, were designed to stand in one straight line. The vermillion and white-colored walls appear vividly since all of these buildings have also been restored in recent years.

Before entering each building, it is recommended to proceed to the south end of the precinct until arriving at the Nakamon Gate. There, upon turning around, you can enjoy a magnificent view of the Kondo Hall at the center with the West Pagoda and the East Pagoda (National Treasure) on each side. The view is often described in poetry as if it were the ancient imaginary palace, "Ryugu," that one can find

After seeing the statues of Miroku Bosatsu (Important Cultural Property) and the Stone Footprints of the Buddha (National Treasure) in the Daikodo Hall, cross the street to the Genjo Sanzoin Garan. Entry to the inside of the temples is possible only during limited times in spring and autumn and from January 1st to 8th. Here you can enjoy the superb "Wall Painting of the Great Tang of the Western Regions" by the renowned Japanese painter, Ikuo Hirayama (1930-2009). Hirayama spent almost 30 years attempting to recreate the extraordinary journey that Genjo Sanzo, a highly respected Chinese monk, made.

Leaving Yakushiji Temple to the west, a little path stretching to the north will lead you to Toshodaiji Temple. It is a nice five-minute walk seeing old houses here and there. In contrast to massive Yakushiji Temple with its vivid vermillion color, Toshodaiji Temple emanates a sedate and historical ambience. The temple is home to many valuable Buddhist statues and artifacts such as the sitting Rushana-butsu (National Treasure), the standing statue of Yakushi Nyorai (National Treasure), and the standing statue of Thousand-hand Kannon (National Treasure) in the Kondo Hall (National Treasure). Generally, the Raido Hall (Important Cultural Property) is not open to the public, but the doors will be opened specially from October 21st to 23rd and visitors can view the Kinki Reliquary (National Treasure) and the standing statue of Shaka Nyorai (Important Cultural Property) along with other exceptional Buddhist assets.



Kinki Reliquary
(National Treasure)
Photo : Askaen Co. Ltd.



Thousand-hand Kannon Standing Statue
(National Treasure)
Photo : Askaen Co. Ltd.

*1 Special opening of the interior of the first floor of the West Pagoda and the statue of Shaka Shiso

*2 Special opening of Jikido Hall

From September 16th (Mon. / nat'l holiday) to November 30th (Sat.), January 1st (Wed. / nat'l holiday) to January 8th (Wed.), 2020, March 1st (Sun.) to June 30th (Tue.), 2020, August 13th (Thu.) to 15th (Sat.), 2020



Yakushiji Temple

薬師寺

🕒 8:30-17:00 (last entry: 16:30)

☎ 0742-33-6001

¥ When the Genjo Sanzoin Garan is opened : 1100 yen, When the Genjo Sanzoin Garan is closed : 800 yen.

*1 & *2: An additional 500 yen is necessary to enter each place.

📍 ● A short walk from Kintetsu Nishinokyo Station. ● Take a bus bound for Nara Pref. General Medical Center from either JR or Kintetsu Nara Station and get off at Yakushiji bus stop, and a short walk to the temple.

🌐 <https://www.visitnara.jp/venues/A00499/>



Toshodaiji Temple

唐招提寺

Toshodaiji Temple was commissioned in the 8th century by a high-ranking Buddhist monk named Ganjin who arrived in Japan from the Tang Dynasty of China in order to ensure that the correct Buddhist commandments (norms which monks must follow) prevailed. Fortunately, the temple buildings, including four buildings originally built at the temple's foundation, have never experienced large fires and other disasters and they still speak of the feeling of the old Nara period.

🕒 8:30-17:00 (last entry: 16:30) ☎ 0742-33-7900 ¥ 600 yen

📍 ● Approx. 8-min. walk from Kintetsu Nishinokyo Station. ● Take a bus bound for Nara Pref. General Medical Center from either JR or Kintetsu Nara Station and get off at Toshodaiji bus stop, and a short walk to the temple.

🌐 <https://www.visitnara.jp/venues/A00500/>



Access to Nishinokyo

From Kintetsu Nara Station, it takes about 15 minutes to reach Nishinokyo (changing at Yamato Saidaiji Station to the trains bound for Kashiharajingu-mae or Tenri). Or, you can rent a bicycle at Nako Rental Cycle Center outside Kintetsu Nara Station. Since the distance between Kintetsu Nara Station and Nishinokyo is a little over 5 km, it will make a nice cycling tour if the weather is fine. You can return the bike at Nako Rental Cycle branch at Nishinokyo Station if you want to end the bike tour here. There are also several shared bicycle stations (Docomo Bike Share, Mobike) available in the city.

*Nako Rental Cycle Nishinokyo Branch will be closed in Dec., Jan. and Feb.



Hasedera Temple

長谷寺



Hasedera is a temple located amongst the mountains in the Hase area. There is a little temple town near the Niomon Gate (Important Cultural Property) and where shops sell local specialties, such as mugwort rice cakes. Enter through the gate and walk up the 399 steps (Important Cultural Property) to reach the main hall (National Treasure). Hasedera is also known as “Temple of Flowers” since the temple is adorned with seasonal flowers and plants throughout the year. The leaves change to red and orange in autumn and elegant peonies start to bloom in winter.

❶ Special Opening of the Main Image Dai Kannon (Eleven-faced Kannon Bosatsu) (Important Cultural Property)

❷ Autumn Special Exhibition of Temple Treasures (Shuhozo Museum) (Important Cultural Properties and others)

❶❷ October 12th (Sat.) to December 1st (Sun.)



The main image of Hasedera Temple is a large standing Eleven-faced Kannon Bosatsu (Important Cultural Property) which is over 10 meters tall. In general, visitors are allowed to see the image across from the main hall but during the special opening period, you can enter inside and even can touch the feet of the Kannon. Special opening of Shuhozo Museum is held at the same time.

☞ Morning devotion: a devotion exercise is held every morning at 7:00 (at 6:30 from April to September) in front of the main hall. The solemn voices of monks' chanting resonate throughout the mountain.

🕒 9:30-16:30 (last entry: 16:00) ☎ 0744-47-7001 💰 ❶ 1000 yen ❷ Free of charge * ❶❷ Additional admission fee is needed (500 yen) 🚌 An approx. 15-min. walk from Kintetsu Hasedera Station.

🌐 <https://www.visitnara.jp/venues/A00517/>



Kasugataisha Shrine

春日大社



Kasugataisha Shrine in Nara is the head shrine of some 3000 branch shrines throughout the country. A long 1.5-km approach starts from the First Torii Gate to the hallway (Important Cultural Property) where the main shrine halls are gathered. General entry permits a visitor to come in front of the Heiden Hall and Buden Hall (Important Cultural Properties), but the special entry allows you to pray toward the main hall (National Treasure) from the Chumon Gate and Oro Hallway (Important Cultural Property).

❶ Sacred Animals – Adorable Messengers of Deities – (National Treasure)

❷ The Ancient Japanese Swords Kohoki by Yasutsuna (National Treasure) (Tentative Title)

❶ September 7th (Sat.) to December 13th (Fri.) ❷ First term: December 28th (Sat.), 2019 to January 26th (Sun.), 2020. Second term: February 1st (Sat.) to March 1st (Sun.), 2020

A variety of special exhibitions is held at the Kasugataisha Museum near the Second Torii Gate. The special exhibition scheduled to start from December, “The Ancient Japanese Swords Kohoki by Yasutsuna,” displays valuable Japanese swords, including National Treasures and Important Cultural Properties, produced by the oldest swordsmith school led by Yasutsuna.

☞ Deer Fortune: A lovely wooden deer has a fortune paper in his mouth. English ones are available.

🕒 Opening hours of the Kasugataisha Museum 10:00-17:00 (last entry: 16:30) ☎ 0742-22-7788 💰 ❶ 500 yen ❷ 1000 yen 🚌 ● Take a bus bound for Kasugataisha Honden from either JR or Kintetsu Nara Station, and get off at the last stop followed by a short walk to the shrine. ● Take the city circular bus from either JR or Kintetsu Nara Station, and get off at “Kasugataisha Omotesando”, and approx. 10-min. walk to the shrine. 🌐 <https://www.visitnara.jp/venues/A00487/>



Sword, Tachi (long-sword)-style Blade Attributed to Yasutsuna
Photo:Kasugataisha Shrine

Chogosonshiji Temple

朝護孫子寺



The large precinct of Chogosonshiji Temple stands on Mount Shigi. Approaching the temple along a path lined with lanterns from the nearby car park, you will find a large papier-mâché figure of a tiger with the main hall behind it. Several statues of Bishamonten, the deity of battle, are enshrined in the main hall. Generally, visitors are allowed to worship the substitutional statue only, however, the hidden main statues in the closed hall are open to the public during a certain period at the beginning of the year and in February.

❶ Special Opening of the Picture Scrolls of Shigisan Engi “Amagimi-no Maki” (National Treasure) ❷ Bishamonten (Hidden Main Image)

❶ October 26th (Sat.) to November 10th (Sun.) ❷ January 1st (Wed.) to 13th (Mon.), 2020, February 1st (Sat.) to 29th (Sat.), 2020

The Picture Scrolls of Shigisan Engi (National Treasure) dating from the 12th century, depict the religious experiences of a Buddhist monk, Myoren, who successfully restored Chogosonshiji Temple. They consist of three volumes and

the reproductions are on a regular display in the Reihoan Museum in front of the main hall. In autumn, the Amagimi-no Maki, the last volume of the scrolls, will be open to the public as a special exhibit.

☞ Temple accommodation: there are three sub-temples and Shukubo, temple lodgings, where visitors can stay overnight and can try shakyo (copying Buddhist sutra by calligraphy brush) and zazen (meditation).

🕒 ❶❷ 9:00-16:00 (❷ last entry: 16:00; no entry if a ceremony is held) ☎ 0745-72-2277 (Honbo)

💰 ❶ 400 yen ❷ 500 yen (with an amulet) 🚌 Take a bus bound for Shigisanmon from JR or Kintetsu Oji Station or Kintetsu Shigisan-shita Station, and get off at Shigi Ohashi, and an approx. 5-min. walk to the temple. 🌐 <https://www.visitnara.jp/venues/A00509/>



Kinpusenji Temple

金峯山寺

Kinpusenji Temple is the holy place of Shugendo, a native religion of Japan in which mountain worship and other religions, such as Buddhism, are combined. The temple is on the mountain which can be reached by ropeway. The main hall, Zaodo (National Treasure), is a massive temple hall with the height of 34 meters. The main images are three statues of Kongo Zao Gongen (Important Cultural Properties) which are hidden from the public view in general but a special opening is held around the time when the cherry trees on Mount Yoshino change their colors in autumn.

❶ Special Opening of the Japan's Largest Hidden Main Images, Kongo Zao Daigongen (Important Cultural Property)

❷ Special Display of Main Images from 36 Temples in Relation to Enno Gyoja

❶ October 20th (Sun.) to November 30th (Sat.) ❷ November 13th (Wed.) to 17th (Sun.)

The statue of Kongo Zao Gongen is almost seven meters tall and is enshrined in the large zushi (shrine hall with doors). Holding its right arm and leg up high, the dignified and powerful figure looks as if it were alive. During the special opening period of Zao Gongen, valuable main images from 36 temples related to Enno Gyoja (the founder of Shugendo) will be gathered at Zaodo Hall and open to the public view.

☞ Morning devotion: Morning devotion is held every day at Zaodo Hall from 6:30. The sound of conch shell horn and drum echo throughout the area.

🕒 8:30-16:30 (last entry: 16:00) ☎ 0746-32-8371 💰 1000 yen

🚌 Approx. 30-min. walk from Kintetsu Yoshino Station or take a ropeway to Yoshinoyama and an approx. 10-min. walk to the temple.

🌐 <https://www.visitnara.jp/venues/A00532/>



Deer in Nara

Meeting deer roaming freely around Nara Park is one of the best tourist highlights of Nara. There is an ancient legend which says that the Deity Takemikazuchi descended on the land of Nara riding on the sacred white deer. Since then, the wild deer inhabiting this area have been cherished as a sacred existence. Today, approx. 1400 deer live around Nara Park as protected species of the country. Although they are very tame, they are still wild animals. Especially male deer in autumn can become aggressive. Please remember that you must not feed deer with anything but deer crackers sold around the park for the sake of their health.

Warning

The deer of Nara Park are wild animals. They can occasionally attack people, so please be careful.



Deer Antler Cutting Photo: Nara Deer Preservation Foundation

October is the time for the annual "Tsuno-kiri," or deer's antler cutting event. The ritual has continued for about 340 years and is one of the autumn highlights of Nara. The male deer with big antlers are gathered into the field surrounded by a fence and their antlers are ritually cut using saw - it's such an energetic and exciting event. By the way, antlers for deer are like nails of human beings, therefore, deer experience no pain while their antlers are cut. The Nara Deer Preservation Foundation sells the cut antlers and the revenue will be utilized for the further protection of deer in Nara.

Access from Japan's Major Cities

From Osaka

Approx. 35 min
(Kintetsu Osaka-Namba Sta. - Kintetsu-Nara Sta.)

From Kansai Int'l Airport

Approx. 1h 32 min
(JR Kansai Airport Sta. - JR Nara Sta.)
Approx. 1h 35 min
(Nankai Kansai-Airport Sta. - Kintetsu-Nara Sta.)

From Hiroshima

Approx. 2h 40 min
(JR Hiroshima Sta. - JR Nara Sta.)

From Fukuoka

Approx. 3h 50 min
(JR Hakata Sta. - JR Nara Sta.)

From Kyoto

Approx. 35 min
(Kintetsu Kyoto Sta. - Kintetsu-Nara Sta.)

From Chubu Centrair Int'l Airport

Approx. 2h 25 min
(Meitetsu Chubu Int'l Airport Sta. - Kintetsu-Nara Sta.)
Approx. 2h 31 min
(Meitetsu Chubu Int'l Airport Sta. - JR Nara Sta.)

From Nagoya

Approx. 1h 37 min
(JR Nagoya Sta. - Kintetsu-Nara Sta.)

From Tokyo

Approx. 3h 10 min
(JR Tokyo Sta. - Kintetsu-Nara Sta.)

Fukuoka Airport

Osaka Airport

Kansai Int'l Airport

Haneda Airport

Narita Airport



The NARA Visitor Center & Inn

Address: 3 Ikono-cho, Nara
Phone: 0742-81-7461 (8:00-21:00)
<https://www.sarusawa.nara.jp/>



Nara Travel Guide

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