The Official Nara Travel Guide

The official website featuring all you need to know about travel in Nara. Visit nara.jp is the official travel guide presented by Nara Prefecture, providing comprehensive information on events, tourist attractions, restaurants, shopping and accommodation in the Nara region.

https://www.visitnara.jp

Customised Tours

http://nara-sightseeing.com/

nara-sightseeing.com presents a wide range of tours and authentic cultural experiences where you can feel, touch and taste the unique history of Nara and the Kansai region.

Experience Program

http://nara-experience.com/

nara-experience.com is a booking and reservation service for optional tour activities, including special visits to shrines and temples, enjoyable outdoor activities and inspiring local experiences in Nara.
Welcome to Nara, the birthplace of umazake

Nara is regarded as the birthplace of Japanese refined sake. Sake produced in Nara is created from natural water and fine rice - in abundant supply from the local environment - combined with traditional brewing techniques inherited from the pioneering master brewers. The rich, deep flavors and fragrances of umazake are truly memorable and delicious.

はじめまりの食事へ。水と米が育む「うま酒」

清酒発祥の地と呼ばれる奈良は、その豊かな自然が育む水と米、そして先人が受け継がり伝わる技術から醸し出される、深い味わいとふんわり香りの習熟酒です。

Freshly made sake originates from Mt. Miwa

In Japanese classical poetry the expression umazake or ‘delicious sake’ always refers to Mt. Miwa, a sacred mountain where the deities of Ohiwa Jinja Shrine reside. The guardian deity of sake brewers is also enshrined here. In November, brewers from all over Japan gather at the shrine to receive sugidama, a ball of fresh cedar branches from Mt. Miwa. The sugidama are hung in front of shops and breweries as a sign that the season’s fresh sake is available.

The essence of sake is within the shubo

In the Muromachi period (1336-1573), unfiltered cloudy sake was the standard sake throughout Japan before improved techniques in the brewing process led to a more refined, clear filtered sake called nihonshu. Historical records note that Shoryukiji Temple established the foundation for modern sake brewing using an innovative method called bodaimoto. There is a stone monument that testifies Shoryukiji Temple as the origin of Japanese refined sake alongside the river at the temple entrance. Every January, shubo (yeast starter) is made at the Bodaimoto Sake Festival, held in the temple precinct. Thanks to the recent sake boom in Japan, the number of visitors to the festival has been increasing annually. Brewers in Nara participate in cultivating the shubo, and on return to their breweries make their own sake using the shubo received from Shoryukiji Temple. Each master brewer’s final sake, although made with the same source shubo, varies greatly in taste.
Brewing premium sake is challenging work
The taste of sake can change in a second
Rice rapidly absorbs water, so master brewers time the stages of production to the second. The sake brewing process requires constant attention and high levels of concentration. Using traditional methods ensures that sake from Nara retains the umami of the original, high quality rice.

The traditional skills of master craftsmen ensure the fine taste of sake from Nara
The brewing of sake is an exacting process where a split second can change the taste of the final product. Timing is of utmost importance and some stages of the process such as soaking the rice, or checking fermentation, rely on intuition along with the full faculties of sight, sound and smell. The coldest months of the winter season are the best time for making sake as the conditions for fermenting are easier to control. It’s an arduous and anxious time for the sake brewery and the busiest time of year for the brewers. At Imanishi Brewery, founded 350 years ago, the 14th generation chief brewer, Imanishi Masayuki, is a young and energetic man who is making some of the most interesting sakes in Japan; a dedication to local craft and the sacred area of Mt. Miwa.

Visit a traditional sake brewery
Each region within Nara has developed distinctive ways of brewing sake in multiple varieties, influenced by the local resources, climate and environment.
By enjoying a visit to a traditional sake brewery you can learn more about sake production, taste their produce, and feel closer to the nature, traditions and culture of Nara.

伝統と新たな技が守り抜いてきた
奈良の酒
奈良県の南部、大和川を流れる一帯で、季節の風物詩としてのさまざまな結晶が詰まっています。春爛漫の奈良、秋の紅葉の時、「日本の酒」の名門・今西酒造が、各地の地酒へと伝承されてきました。新旧を織り交ぜた「酒の国」で、季節の味わいを楽しむことができます。

水道水を用いること、米を蒸し、蒸した米と酒母（かすのし）が作る3段階の発酵過程、発酵した米を竹製のすくい網で洗浄、清酒に仕上げる。そして、酒母を末尾に付けることで、発酵を続ける。これにより、季節の酒が作られます。奈良の酒は、季節感が強い酒であり、新旧の技術が融合した酒が楽しめます。

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Water sourced from Mt. Miwa, steam rice and add sake mold (sake mold) are added to the mixture three times, as a three-step fermentation process.
Rice is thoroughly washed and soaked in pure water.
Polishing rice enables brewers to use the purest center of each grain.
Matured (fermented mash) is placed into sacks for weighting.
In praise of Nara sake

There are many great brewers and varieties of sake in Nara. Each of us has our own personal preferences and favours, so I recommend exploring the full range of sake from each region. Taking time for fresh taste sensations leads to exciting new discoveries, experiences and stories.

Andrew Thomas

Andrew was born in Manchester, England and has lived in Japan for over 20 years. He founded award-winning studio Creative Visionary in 2002, working as a director/producer for commercial film productions. Attracted by the beautiful nature and historic charm of the region, he moved to Nara in 2012, and has been actively involved in creative and business development for publishing projects and events to promote Nara produce, culture and tourism. He enjoys photography, writing and travel around the region, as well as tasting premium Nara umazake.

En route to sake appreciation

I have lived in Nara with my wife and young family since the summer of 2012. The history, culture and environment of Nara have inspired much of my work over recent years. I enjoy visiting ancient sites in the mountains, through shaded valleys, alongside streams and rivers. At any time of the year, the fresh air and atmosphere of the forests, and sounds of natural water reinvigorate and inspire me.

Through living and working in Nara, I have developed a growing interest in the regional produce, cuisine and sake, and have been learning how to cultivate rice in neighboring fields. At harvest time we offer freshly cut rice as a blessing to the deities of our local shrine, and enjoy making and tasting sake during the local matsuri. By connecting with the soil and traditional ways of growing rice, I became interested in the local sake of Nara and sample recommended varieties at home. After discovering and discussing sake with friends and colleagues, I became increasingly curious about the ways in which sake is produced, and how many of the varieties of Japanese sake were used in traditional techniques, the essential processes to create umasake.

The increasing interest in premium sake

Over the past decade, global interest and overseas sales of Japanese sake have grown significantly. The development of educational sake-related media in languages other than Japanese has contributed to this trend, as well as the changing profile of sake to qualified experts and enthusiasts. Through books and articles, specialist websites and online stores, the global community of sake lovers have spread the word about the increased appreciation of Nara’s umazake across the rest of the country. You can now find varieties of sake from Nara at restaurants, specialist sake shops and bars in Tokyo and other major cities across Japan, as well as internationally. Although this is our current state, it’s always appreciated at drinking locally.

Favourite varieties of Nara sake

One of my earliest memories of encountering Nara sake was at a friendly and popular bar situated in a narrow alleyway in the heart of Naramachi, where I had my first ever glass of Kaze no Morii. As well as finding the enervating flavour and brightness of the sake immediately appealing, I was impressed by the stylistic and distinctive illustration and the subtle tones of colour and quality, this was used in print for the label. I credit this brand of umazake as sparking my interest in and appreciation of umazake from Nara.

I began to further appreciate and support the production of local sake - the ‘pure rice’ method, made without the addition of distilled alcohol - as well as the various features of sake, such as the overburn at Yashino, and a broad range of methods to achieve its unique qualities.

Another outstanding brand is Hanahime, both in terms of its standout label design and the traditional robust character. The brewery is located near the plum blossom at Yashino, and works in combination with traditional techniques with some unorthodox approaches to make their highly distinctive sake.

A bottle of Hanahime sake

One of my most memorable experiences was when I visited a modern brewery for the first time and remained interested in the engine room of a ship, where large tanks dominate the space connected by a network of pipes, tubes and cables. You can sense the intense work and activities of the brewing season, when maximum attention is paid to the team effort involved in making premium quality sake.

Another benefit of visiting a rural sake brewery is that you will encounter some of the treasures of Japanese culture and history along the way. Many breweries are located in the peaceful and atmospheric merchant quarters of well-preserved towns and villages. Spending time to explore ‘deep Nara’ is truly rewarding, and provides a window into the heart of Japanese culture.

A walk along the Yamanobe-no-michi trail leads you through an inspiring rural landscape that nurtures the emergence of sake brewing, towards sacred Mt. Iwakuni and Omiwa Jinja Shrine, the most venerable shrine for the Japanese sake industry. If you have time I highly recommend to walk to the peak of Mt. Iwakuni, to fully appreciate the sacred nature of the mountain and for views across the ancient lands. You can rejuvenate by drinking cold spring water at source, and of course sampling local varieties of Nara sake.

Sake culture strongly relates to food and cuisine, and in particular the seasonal side dishes that usually accompany Nara sake: Nanzure (pickled vegetables and fruits) is another specialty of the region. There are many fine ways to enjoy food with Nara sake, such as small portions of strong-flavoured and creamy cheeses with savoury crackers.

酒糟を訪ねて、会う力で無実の怪を除く、酒榊の陰に隠れていた
都会の観客を体験することができる。また訪れる客が、資料館にない
ような魅力あるものを認め、酒糟を訪ねたことで新しい発見がある
だろう。
Learn more about Nara sake

Our 5 recommended brewery tours

1. Imanishi Seibei Brewery
   Established in 1886, this brewery is located on a large plot in historic Nara. Their main brand, Harushika, one of Nara’s best-known sakes, is exported to over 10 countries worldwide. Visit the adjacent house, garden and café, which offers sours and light lunch sets. At the spacious brewery shop, you can taste five different varieties of sake for ¥500, with a souvenir glass to keep.

2. Umenoyado Brewery
   Umenoyado is a 120-year-old brewery located in a quiet neighborhood of Nara city. They specialize in handmade varieties of sake, uonuma and other liquors, and aim to share the pleasures of sake globally while staying true to their heritage and innovative methods. Tours are available on weekdays for groups of a maximum of twenty people per group. Reservations should be made at least five days in advance.

3. Gojo Brewery
   Gojo Brewery was established at the base of Mt. Kongo in 1924. At this pleasant location, fresh water that cascades down from the mountains is blended with natural spring water from a local well to make lovely, mild-tasting sake using traditional brewing methods. Their main brand is Goshin, named from combining the go of Gojo City, and the character shin meaning gold.

4. Kubo Honke Brewery
   A 130-year-old brewery in the picturesque village of Osaka, located alongside a tranquil river. Their varieties of sake include Naramagami, Suriya and Koma no Sato, and are made with a commitment to using traditional techniques. At the Datangeno Café you can enjoy a fine lunch and sake in the splendid surroundings of a beautifully maintained period building.

5. Kawai Brewery
   This picturesque house and brewery was established in the traditional merchant town of Imamiya during the Edo period (1603-1867). The greenery is open, reflecting the cuisine of the family business. In most merchant houses, the upper floor is a loft for storage or apprentice’s quarters, but here there are spacious sitting rooms. With a prior arrangement, you can view the in-house exhibition including sake brewing equipment. The friendly staff are happy to guide you through free tasting of several varieties of sake.

Reservation is also available at NARA Visitor Center & Inn, 3, Ikarucho, Nara, tel: 0742-81-7461 (8:00 - 21:00)
Recommended sake bars in Nara

Introducing great bars where you can taste and buy premium Nara sake

**Enjoy Nara sake as a local**

Established in 2012, this specialty sake bar offers over 120 varieties of sake only.
At the standing bar, locals and tourists can meet and discuss sake in a friendly atmosphere, enjoying the experience of tasting together.
The menu includes information on regional brews, with the grades of sake to match, and some educational material about sake production.
A range of mountain side dishes and other snacks are served to accompany delicious Nara sake.

**Nara Izumi Yusai**

[22 Nishitakeyacho, Nara](tel:0742-26-6078)
Open: 11:00 - 20:00. Closed: Every Thursday
Serving: ¥200 per 50ml glass.

**Noyori Nara Sanjo**

[1F Nakanoura Building, Nara](tel:0742-24-5608)
Open: 11:00 - 22:00.
Bar from 13:00 (Table charge ¥200)
Closed: Every Tuesday
Serving: ¥400 for three varieties of premium sake in 50ml glasses, and other options.

**Drink Nara sake the traditional way**

A lively, traditional liquor store located in a historic wooden building - designated as a national cultural property - directly in front of the main entrance to Kōfuku-ji Temple.
The shop sells a wide variety of beverages, including wine, beer and many options of Nara sake presented in various grades.
Visitors can enjoy a drink with views at the outdoor seating area in the shade of the shop entrance.

**Ogawa Matabei**

[8 Kasasagiuch, Nara](tel:0742-27-4615)
Open: 11:00 - 19:00 on weekdays, 11:00 - 19:00 on weekends & holidays
Serving: ¥500 for three grades of sake in 60ml glasses, and other options.
Find your favorite Nara umazake

Nara Sake Map

Our selection of Izakaya, bars and restaurants where you can savor delicious food and sake around JR Nara and Kintetsu-Nara stations. These places are popular with locals as well as tourists.

Junpei Izakaya
Known for a variety of dishes using vegetables from local farms, free-range Yamato-Kikudōri chicken and fresh seafood, complimented by their selection of Nara sake. With top quality cuisine, you can experience the great taste of fresh ingredients and produce of Nara.
7 Kamimairi-cho, Nara 17:00 – 26:00 (L.O.) 0742-31-7140

Namakura Sake
Filled with the warmth of the wood interior. Namakura Sake is the perfect place for your special day. Families can also enjoy dining in the comfortable Japanese-style seating and private rooms. They have a wide range of Nara sake and English menu.
2-1 Shimomaruyama, Nara 12:00 – 23:00 (L.O.) 0742-25-1001

Toyonoakari
A hidden gem, Toyonoakari is located on the second floor of a building on Mochidōna shopping street, with a relaxing vibe and traditional wooden interior. Kōza-mabe, a hot pot full of Yamato-Yasai vegetables, is a must dish to order. They also have reasonably priced sake tastings.
Nakamura Building 2F, 3-1 Mochidōna-cho, Nara 11:00 – 14:00 (L.O.) 17:00 – 23:00 (L.O.) 0742-31-8343

Kagetsu
Enjoy a great selection of fusion cuisine cooked with seasonal ingredients and matched with a varied selection of Nara sake. At Kagetsu the seating is Japanese style, you can take off your shoes, relax and enjoy.
28-1 Shimomikadocho, Nara 11:30 – 14:00 (L.O.) 17:30 – 21:00 (L.O.) Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays 11:30 – 15:00 (L.O.) 17:30 – 23:00 (L.O.) 0742-25-1018

Wayo Bar Nakagawa
The owner personally selects varieties of Nara sake that complement with seasonal fish, as well as Japanese and Western dishes. With fine Nara sake, you can taste a great combination of Japanese and Western food, prepared using local ingredients.
2-3 Konohashita, Nara 11:30 – 14:00 (L.O.) / 17:00 – 23:30 (L.O.) 0742-24-3760
Soba

Using buckwheat flour made in the highland region, Kaeruan offers smooth textured soba, filled with rich aroma. The owner personally tastes the annual varieties of fresh Nara sake and carefully selects top quality varieties for his customers.

24-1 Shimomosanjo, Nara
11:00 - 16:00 / 17:00 - 19:30 [L.O.]
0742-24-8365

\[coto coto Restaurant\]
Located near Sarusawaike Pond, on the edge of Nara Park, coto coto offers dishes filled with traditional Yamato-Yasai vegetables. Along with their unique seasonal vegetables, they have excellent course meals cooked with Yamato-ikari beef and Yamato-Mikudori chicken.

Nara City Naramachi Center 1F, 38 Hisashiborabashi, Nara
0742-22-4922
11:30 - 14:30 [L.O.]
18:00 - 21:00 [L.O.]

\[Umasshu Sake bar\]
A short walk from Kintetsu-Nara station, Umasshu bar provides premium sake from local breweries in Nara. With a brewery-style interior, you can enjoy sake and food in casual comfort. They also serve beers and other libations.

Hoppo Mochish: Building 1F, 11 Hisashiborabashiki, Nara
0742-28-6403
15:00 - 22:00 [L.O.]
Sundays, and holidays
15:00 - 21:30 [L.O.]

\[Bar Fiddich\]
Located in a side street in Naramachi, Bar Fiddich has a tranquil atmosphere where you can enjoy Nara sake, beer, cocktails and more. You can casually drop by, prices are reasonable, and the bar opens rather early, from 4 pm.

Uchita Building 2F, 4 Minsinmichicho, Nara
16:00 - 24:30 [L.O.]
0742-27-4390

\[Kurarau Sake bar\]
A nihonshu izakaya run by a brewery. Their sake is delivered directly from Toyo Sawa Brewery every day. You can enjoy refined Toyo Sawa nihonshu and foods at reasonable prices.

Nara Kintetsu Building 8F, 25 Hisashiborabashiki, Nara
14:00 - 21:30 [L.O.]
0742-26-2625

\[Noma-Zaru Izakaya\]
Eating quality meat and drinking premium sake is the spirit of this izakaya, with many tasty meat dishes. You can enjoy dishes of grilled Yamato-ikari beef and fried chicken, and their popular “sirloin plate” is a must to try!

1F, 14-12 Naizencho, Kashihara
17:30 - 23:00 [L.O.]
0744-23-7788

\[Hana Izakaya\]
Carefully selected seasonal fresh fish and vegetables are the main ingredients of a well-balanced menu of Japanese & Western cuisine, including meat dishes served with traditional Yamato-Yasai vegetables. Panchhi varieties of Nara sake are available and recommended to complement each meal.

Toyokuni Building 1F, 27-1 Shinjaco, Kashihara
11:00 - 13:30 [L.O.]
17:00 - 22:00 [L.O.]
0744-24-8540

\[Kuramoto Hoshuku Sake Shop\]
Known for its traditional Japanese course meals, cooked with seasonal ingredients that change each month. You can enjoy your meal in a modernized Japanese-style room, with inner garden and takemona alcove.

Fukuda Fudosan Yagi Ekimae Building 1F, 5-3-21 Naizencho, Kashihara
11:00 - 14:00 [L.O.]
17:00 - 21:30 [L.O.]
0744-24-0200

\[Sanka Japanese Restaurant\]
An Izakaya offering creative sushi, fish and seafood menus with sake. The skilled chef makes Japanese dishes, as well as a la carte dishes of fresh seafood. They have a varied selection of sake. At Wasabi, you can experience Japan with all five senses.

1-3-3 Naizencho, Kashihara
11:00 - 14:00 [L.O.]
17:00 - 23:00 [L.O.]
0744-25-7504

\[Yamato-Yagi Sake Map\]
Both Kintetsu Osaka and Kashihara lines stop at this station, and there are many traditional, stylish Izakaya in the vicinity.

\[Nyoizakaya\]
With dozens of daily specials and drinks from all around Japan, this izakaya is always packed with locals. Nyoizakaya offers you tasty kashimi, Yamato-Mikudori chicken and a large selection of sake.

5-1-14 Naizencho, Kashihara
15:00 - 23:00 [L.O.]
0744-24-8303

\[Wasabi Sake Bar\]
An izakaya featuring creative sushi, fish and seafood menus with sake. The skilled chef creates Japanese dishes, as well as a la carte dishes of fresh seafood.

1-3-3 Naizencho, Kashihara
11:00 - 14:00 [L.O.]
17:00 - 23:00 [L.O.]
0744-25-7504

\[Sake Map\]
Kintetsu Yagi Ekimae Station
Bus Terminal
Kashihara City Tourism Information Center
Kintetsu Osaka Line