Inner Journeys

Nara's Temples and Shrines

March - September 2019

Opportunities for cultural experiences in Nara
Hidden Treasures & Hidden Buddhas
Special Public Openings
Opportunities for cultural experiences in Nara

Nara is famous for its many traditional crafts, refined over centuries, including sumi ink and bamboo tea whiskss. Many of them are still made using original techniques today. Visitors can experience certain aspects of these crafts at one of several workshops. There are also temples where visitors can get glimpses into the spirit of Japan through practices such as zazen meditation. Here we introduce spots in Nara Prefecture which offer such opportunities to see and learn about Japanese culture.

Gripped sumi ink experience / Kinkoen 跳吟院

- 1,500 yen + tax per session (includes a paulownia wood box)
- Need to book by midday the day before your session

An opportunity to try making nigiri zumi, which involves squeezing or gripping raw sumi ink (sumi is made using soot). Workshops are held in long-established premises where master craftsmen have been making traditional Nara sumi for generations. You’ll have a chance to feel the softness and warmth of the raw ink, all under expert guidance. The precious, finished ink will be put in a paulownia wood box for you to take home.

Making and learning about chasen (bamboo tea whisks) / Wahokudo Tango Tamamura 和北堂谷村製

- Please enquire
- About 70 to 90 minutes
- From 3 to 20 people. Must book at least 10 days in advance.
- Participants must be over 10 years old.

Elegant tea whisks, used in the tea ceremony, are a traditional craft product of Takayama-cho in Ikoma City. Ikoma has been a centre of the tea whisk craft in Japan since the 15th century. These workshops give you detailed insights into Wahokudo Tango Tamamura, a fine whisk-maker established 500 years ago and still employing techniques handed down from father to son.

Alizome dyeing / Hakomotokan Konya 鞘本館（縄屋）

- Handkerchief (44cm x 44cm) from 1,200 yen. Scarf (90cm x 130cm) 1,400 yen.
- Scarf (90cm x 130cm) 1,400 yen. Scarf (90cm x 130cm) 1,800 yen.
- About 60 to 90 minutes
- Booking required, Wed, Sat, Sun, Holidays: from 10:00, 13:00, 15:00 (each session up to 5 people). Tue, Thu, Fri: from 13:00 only (each session up to 3 people)

An opportunity to experience traditional alizome (indigo) dyeing at a restored indigo dyer’s house where dyeing has been done for nine generations since the Edo Period. Tying with clothes pegs and rubber bands, and then dyeing, produces vivid, original patterns. There is a roadside canal, used for washing dyed indigo fabrics, adjacent to the building.

Making hand-made washi (Japanese paper) / Fukunishi Washi Honpo 福西和紙本舗

- 1,500 yen
- About 60 minutes (about 15 minutes per person)
- Booking accepted from 10 people. Must book in advance.

In spite of being thin, washi paper is resilient and lasts a long time. Recently, it has been used for the conservation and repair of cultural treasures and fine art works. You can try making this paper at Fukunishi Washi Honpo, where traditional Japanese paper-making methods are carefully kept alive. You can make your own original Japanese paper, adding colours.

Meditation, Sutra copying / Shigisan Gyokuzo-in 信貴山玉祖院

- Meditation 1,000 yen. Sutra copying 1,500 yen
- About 60 minutes
- Booking required

Meditation, sutra copying, and other practices can be experienced at Gyokuzo-in, one of several temple buildings in the precincts of Chogosonshiji Temple, located half way up Shigisan, a sacred mountain in the western part of Nara Prefecture. They also have shukubo temple accommodations which welcomes visitors to stay. Overnight stays, as well as shorter, day visits, are therefore possible.

A bowl of matcha tea at Jikoin Temple / Jikoin Temple 慈光院

- 1,000 yen contribution
- Booking not required

A temple built by Katagiri Sekishu of the Yamato Koizumi domain, founder of the Sekishu school of tea. All visitors are welcomed with a cup of matcha tea and a Japanese sweet in the Shinon building, designated an Important Cultural Property. The garden is simply beautiful. If you book the day before your visit, you can also enjoy a chakin ryori lunch (vegetarian cuisine) at 6,100 yen.

* If you need a guidance in English, inquire at NARA Visitor Center & Inn. Please refer to the back page for more information.
Introducing the special opening to the public of hidden treasures and hidden Buddhas from March to September.

MARCH

Tsubosakadera Temple (壷阪寺)

A famous temple, constructed at the beginning of the 8th century, located in the centre of Nara Prefecture. The main object of worship is a seated eleven-faced Senjū Kannon statue. Known as the Buddha healing eye diseases, people continue to visit from all over the country. A 20m tall standing Dai-ō Kannon statue and what is reputed to be one of the world’s largest stone images, the Tenjiku Buddha (Important Cultural Property). The temple is much loved as the ‘Hydrangea Temple’, one of Kansai’s ‘Flower Temples’. Benzaiten is the god of learning, wealth, and treasure. Rasetsuten, originally an Indian spirit, in Buddhist form became a benign goddess. Nyoirin Kannon Bosatsu, through the powers of the Nyoirin, wish-fulfilling stone, and the Buddha’s teachings, bring salvation to all sentient beings. These three images will be open to the public.

Fixtures & Fittings
- High
- School students
- Adult
- Jr.
- Junior high school student
- Elem.
- Elementary school student
- University
- Student
- Directions
- URL

Hidden Buddha – Bato Kannon Bosatsu standing statue (Important Cultural Property)

Friday 1 March – Sunday 31 March

The largest in Japan. Hidden Standing Zao Gongen statue, the main object of worship (Important Cultural Property). The temple is much loved as the Hydrangea Temple, one of Kansai’s Flower Temples. Benzaiten is the god of learning, wealth, and treasure. Rasetsuten, originally an Indian spirit, in Buddhist form became a benign goddess. Nyoirin Kannon Bosatsu, through the powers of the Nyoirin, wish-fulfilling stone, and the Buddha’s teachings, bring salvation to all sentient beings. These three images will be open to the public.

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Gansenji Temple (仏見寺)

Hidden Buddha – Nyoirin Kannon (Bodhisattva of Compassion), Benzaiten, Rasetsuten

Monday 1 April – Friday 31 May

Main object of worship is a statue Amida Nyorai statue (Important Cultural Property). The temple is much loved as the Hydrangea Temple, one of Kansai’s Flower Temples. Benzaiten is the god of learning, wealth, and treasure. Rasetsuten, originally an Indian spirit, in Buddhist form became a benign goddess. Nyoirin Kannon Bosatsu, through the powers of the Nyoirin, wish-fulfilling stone, and the Buddha’s teachings, bring salvation to all sentient beings. These three images will be open to the public.

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Shoryakuji Temple (長楽寺)

Main object of worship seated Yakushi Nyorai (Important Cultural Property)

Thursday 18 April – Wednesday 8 May

At the time when the temple was built in the 10th century, the temple precincts were large, with 80 sub-temples and other buildings covering the mountain. Many of these were lost in fires, but the surrounding nature remains beautiful. Today the temple is famous for its autumn maple tree tints. The main object of worship, specially open to the public at this time, is a statue seated on a plinth, in a unique posture with its knees apart and feet resting on lotuses.

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Hidden Buddha – Benzaiten

Photo: Aksen Co. Ltd.

Boto Kannon Bosatsu standing statue (Important Cultural Property)

9:00 – 17:00 (last entry 16:30)

Boto Kannon Bosatsu, standing on the same pedestal as Benzaiten, is the god of wealth. It is said that Benzaiten and Rasetsuten, originally Indian spirits, in Buddhist form became benign goddesses. Benzaiten is the god of learning, wealth, and treasure. Rasetsuten, originally an Indian spirit, in Buddhist form became a benign goddess. Nyoirin Kannon Bosatsu, through the powers of the Nyoirin, wish-fulfilling stone, and the Buddha’s teachings, bring salvation to all sentient beings. Benzaiten is the god of learning, wealth, and treasure. Rasetsuten, originally an Indian spirit, in Buddhist form became a benign goddess. Nyoirin Kannon Bosatsu, through the powers of the Nyoirin, wish-fulfilling stone, and the Buddha’s teachings, bring salvation to all sentient beings. Benzaiten is the god of learning, wealth, and treasure. Rasetsuten, originally an Indian spirit, in Buddhist form became a benign goddess. Nyoirin Kannon Bosatsu, through the powers of the Nyoirin, wish-fulfilling stone, and the Buddha’s teachings, bring salvation to all sentient beings. Three images will be open to the public.

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Hasedera Temple (平等寺)

Main object of worship Dai Kannon Sonzo statue (Important Cultural Property)

Spring Special Temple Treasures Exhibition (Treasure Storehouse) (Important Cultural Properties etc.)

Friday 1 March – Sunday 30 June

Built in the 7th century. The current Main Hall, which features a large verandah, was rebuilt in the 17th century. Beautiful peonies arranged on both sides of the corridor, which have 399 different varieties. The main object of worship, specially open to the public at this time, is a statue seated on a plinth, in a unique posture with its knees apart and feet resting on lotuses.

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**Sekkoji Temple** 石光寺

The oldest Miroku stone statue in Japan.

Saturday 20 April – Monday 20 May

Built in the 7th century. Otherwise known as Somedera Temple. There is a well in which it is said that Chujohime (legendary princess who, in the 8th century, wove the Taima Mandala with lotus threads), dyed threads from the lotus in five colours. The oldest stone Buddha in Japan, discovered in 1991, will be on display in the Mirokudo Hall during the special opening.

**Zuto** 灰塚

Zuto, National Historic Site, Buddhist stone relief carvings (Important Cultural Property)

Saturday 27 April – Monday 6 May (Public Holiday)

Remains of a pyramid structure built in the 8th century by the Todaiji Temple priest Sichu as an expression of a desire for peace in the land. The sides of the pyramid are about 32m square, and height 10m, making it the largest of its type in Japan, and quite rare. On each side there are multiple stone Buddhist relief carvings, line engravings, such as Nyorai triptychs.

**Yatadera Temple** 矢田寺

Jizo Bosatsu standing statue, Enmado Hall (Important Cultural Property)

Saturday 1 June – Sunday 30 June

Built in the 7th century. Stone Buddha statues can be seen scattered across large areas around the temple precincts on Yatayama. The main object of worship is a most unusual standing statue of Jizo Bosatsu with thumb and forefinger forming a circle (Important Cultural Property, Hidden Buddha). With no staff in its right hand, the image is known as the ‘Yata Form Jizo’. The Enmado Hall will be opened during this period, was built in 1884 as a guest house, has Western architectural features. Coloured glass used at the time is still in place today and can be seen as a part of the beautiful interior décor.

**Kikohji Temple** 喜光寺

Hidden Ugajin Statue

Friday 7 June – Sunday 18 August

Built at the beginning of the 8th century. The main object of worship is a seated Amida Nyorai Buddha statue. The Main Hall is said to have been modelled on Todaji Temple’s Daibutsuden (Giant Buddha Hall), and is also referred to as the ‘Great Hall of Aspiration’. It is said that Ugajin was transferred from Kofukuji Temple and worshipped here when the priest Eison (early 13th century) built the Bentendo Hall. Ugajin has a mysterious form, with a coiled snake up to his neck and the face of an old man with long beard.

**Hozanjii Temple** 至遠寺

Shishikaku Hall (Important Cultural Property)

Friday 3 May (Public Holiday) – Monday 6 May (Public Holiday)

Sundays in August (4, 11, & 18th), Monday 12 August (Public Holiday)

In the 8th century, the place where En no Gyoja and Kukai (also known as Kobo Daishi, the priest who founded Mount Koya) carried out their ascetic practices, it was restored by Tankai in the 17th century. Kangiten is worshipped here. The Shishikaku Hall, which will be opened during this period, was built in 1884 as a guest house, has Western architectural features. Coloured glass used at the time is still in place today and can be seen as a part of the beautiful interior décor.

**Ofusa Kannon Temple** おふさ観音

Lifelike dolls – Temple treasures

Wednesday 15 May – Saturday 31 August

In the 7th century, Kannon appeared from the pond on a white tortoise. The story goes that Ofusa, a girl living nearby, discovered this, and built a small temple to commemorate the discovery. The main object of worship is a standing eleven-faced Kannon Bosatsu statue (Hidden Buddha). An incredibly lifelike doll, made by Yasumoto Kamehachi—known as a master doll maker, will be on display during the special opening.

**Shishikaku Hall Internal (Important Cultural Property)**

A wind chime festival is held here in the summer. More than 2,500 wind chimes are hung and create a beautiful soundscape in the temple precincts. The temple also has a famous rose garden.

**Hana Sugawara bus stop. Temple is immediately adjacent to the bus stop. Alternatively, the temple is about 3 minutes’ walk from Horai Higashiguchi bus stop.**

**JUNE AND JULY**

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Jizo Bosatsu standing statue, Enmado Hall (Important Cultural Property)

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**Much loved by locals as Shoten-san, it is believed prayers will help bring commercial success, and that he will grant wishes.**

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Originally built between the years 710 and 714, the Chukondo (Central Golden Hall) of Kohfukuji Temple was lost to fires sparked by warfare or natural disasters a total of seven times. Although it was successfully rebuilt the first six times, the temple lacked the means for a full-scale reconstruction in the wake of the final fire, which occurred in 1717. After a period of more than three centuries, the Central Golden Hall has finally reconstructed, and is now open to the general public following its dedication in October of 2018.

Kohfukuji Central Golden Hall

The NARA Visitor Center & Inn
The Nara Visitor Center & Inn is Nara’s leading tourist information and visitor center. The comprehensive facility is equipped with information counters manned by multi-lingual staff, a traveler’s lounge with free Wi-Fi and internet, a foreign currency exchange machine and a gallery showcasing Nara crafts and products. With a wide array of services offered, you can book accommodations, sightseeing tours, make transportation arrangements and get useful information throughout Nara. A selection of cultural experience workshops, either free or for a small fee, are also offered on a regular basis.

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

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