

Nara

Nara Prefecture · Japan

TRAVEL GUIDE

Tripomatic



Overview

Nara was Japan's first permanent capital, in the 8th century. Today it is a compact city of temples, shrines and gardens, set at the edge of a large park. Wild deer walk freely through the park and the streets nearby. The main sights are close together, which makes Nara one of the easiest places in Japan to see on foot.

It suits first-time visitors, history and architecture fans, and families. Many people come on a day trip from Kyoto or Osaka. A night or two lets you see the main sights without crowds, in the early morning and evening.

When to visit

Late April to May and October to November are the best times. Days are mild and the park is green or full of autumn colour. June to September is hot, humid and rainy, so start early. Winter is cold, with frost at night and some snow, but crowds are smaller.

Plan around the Wakakusa Yamayaki, when the grass on Mt. Wakakusa is set on fire on the fourth Saturday of January. Bad weather can cancel or postpone it.

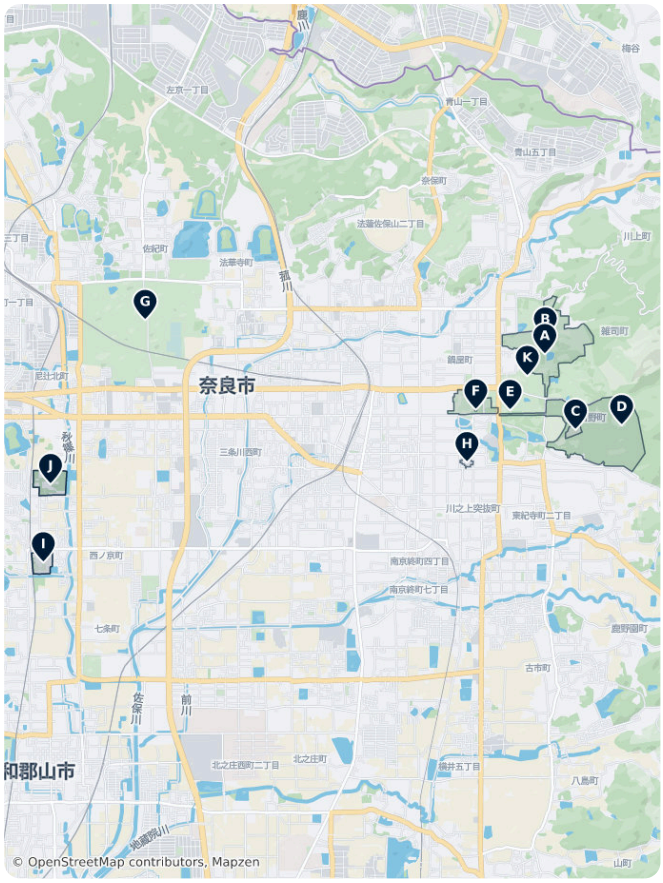
MONTH	CONDITIONS	DAY °C avg / max	NIGHT °C avg / min	
January	Poor Poor for sightseeing	8° / 14° Feels like 4°	0° / -2°	Dry air
February	Fair Fair for hiking	9° / 17° Feels like 5°	1° / -2°	Dry air
March	Good Good for hiking	13° / 20° Feels like 10°	3° / -1°	Dry air
April	Good Good for hiking	19° / 24°	8° / 2°	Dry air
May	Great Great for sightseeing	23° / 27°	13° / 8°	12 rainy days · Calm winds
June	Good Good for sightseeing	27° / 30°	18° / 14°	16 rainy days · Muggy, humid air · Calm winds
July	Fair Fair for sightseeing	30° / 33° Feels like 34°	23° / 19°	16 rainy days · Oppressive humidity · Calm winds
August	Poor Poor for sightseeing	31° / 34° Feels like 35°	23° / 20°	16 rainy days · Oppressive humidity · Calm winds
September	Fair Fair for sightseeing	28° / 32°	20° / 15°	16 rainy days · Muggy, humid air · Calm winds
October	Great Great for sightseeing	22° / 27°	13° / 8°	12 rainy days · Calm winds
November	Great Great for hiking	17° / 22°	8° / 3°	Dry air · Calm winds
December	Fair Fair for hiking	11° / 17° Feels like 7°	2° / -1°	Dry air

Best months: May, October

Climate data: NASA POWER (MERRA-2) · 1996–2025

Top sights

- A Todai-ji Temple was founded in the 8th century and is the city's main sight. Its main hall, B Great Buddha Hall, was rebuilt in 1709. It holds a bronze Buddha almost 15 m high.
- C Nara Park is the large park around the main temples and shrines. Wild deer live here and are part of local folklore. It is free to enter.
- D Kasuga Grand Shrine was founded in 768 by the Fujiwara family. Thousands of stone and bronze lanterns line the forest paths.
- E Kofuku-ji Temple was the Fujiwara family temple. Its 50 m F Five-storied Pagoda is the second tallest in Japan, but it is covered for renovation for several more years.
- G Heijō Palace is the site of the old imperial palace, west of the centre. The gate and main hall have been rebuilt, and the wide grass site feels very open.
- H Gangō-ji sits in the old merchant quarter of Naramachi. It is quieter than the temples in the park.
- I Yakushiji Temple and J Toshodaiji Temple are two important temples in west Nara. They are close together and easy to visit in one trip.
- K Isuien Garden is a quiet Japanese garden close to Todai-ji. It is a calm stop after the busy park.



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What to experience

- Feed the deer: buy deer crackers (shika senbei) from the stalls in the park. They cost about 200 yen. Deer are wild animals and can push or bite when you hold food, so feed them calmly.
- Omizutori: this Buddhist fire and water ceremony is held from 1 to 14 March at Nigatsu Hall.
- Wakakusa Yamayaki: on the fourth Saturday of January, fireworks and a torch procession end with the grass of Mt. Wakakusa set on fire. The fire is visible from many places in the city.
- Lantern nights in summer: the Nara Tokae festival lights Nara Park with candles on evenings in early August. At Kasuga Grand Shrine, about 3,000 lanterns are lit around 14 and 15 August. The front window of the Great Buddha Hall is also opened for evening viewing in mid-August.
- Early walk in the park: go before the tour groups arrive. The paths are quiet and the deer are calm in the morning.

Day trips

The trips below are listed from closest to farthest, one way from Nara.

- Horyuji and Ikaruga: about 15 minutes by JR Yamatoji Line. Horyuji was founded in 607 and has some of the oldest wooden buildings in the world. It was one of Japan's first two World Heritage Sites.
- Kyoto: under 1 hour by JR or Kintetsu train. A Kyoto has the temples, gardens and old streets that most visitors want to see in Japan.
- Osaka: under 1 hour by JR or Kintetsu train. B Osaka is a good choice for street food, shopping and nightlife in the evening.
- Asuka: about 1 hour by Kintetsu train and a short ride on the local line. This quiet village was an early capital before Nara. Burial mounds and old temples are spread through the fields, and renting a bicycle is the best way to see them.
- Yoshino: about 2 hours, changing trains. The mountain is famous for thousands of cherry trees, which bloom in April.



Getting there

- By air: Nara has no airport. Most visitors use Kansai International Airport or Osaka Itami Airport. From Kansai, a direct bus to Nara takes about 1 hour 45 minutes. By train it takes about 1 hour 30 minutes with a change. Itami is closer, at about 1 hour 15 minutes by bus and train.
- By train from Kyoto and Osaka: both are less than an hour away. Use the JR Nara Line from Kyoto or the Kintetsu line to Kintetsu Nara Station. From Osaka use the JR Yamatoji Line or the Kintetsu Nara Line. Kintetsu rapid express trains also run through from Kobe Sannomiya.
- Which station: Kintetsu Nara Station is closer to the main sights. JR Nara Station is about 1 km to the west. It is about 20 minutes on foot to Kofuku-ji.
- Passes: a Kintetsu Rail Pass covers Osaka, Nara and Kyoto. JR-West also sells rail passes.

Kintetsu Railway (English) and JR-West (English) have timetables and passes.

Getting around

- On foot: the main sights are in and around the park. Todai-ji is about a 30-minute walk from Kintetsu Nara Station. Kofuku-ji is a 5-minute walk from Kintetsu Nara Station. Naramachi is about 10 minutes south of Kintetsu Nara Station.
- Bus: Nara Kotsu buses link both stations with Todai-ji, Kasuga Taisha and farther temples. A ride to Kasuga Taisha costs about 250 yen. Touch payment with a Visa, Mastercard, JCB or other contactless card works on some routes only, so keep coins or a day pass ready.
- Day passes: Nara Kotsu sells 1-day passes for the park area and for the west temples, and a wider pass that adds Horyuji. A 2-day pass also covers Asuka.
- Heijo Palace and the west temples: Yakushiji and Toshodaiji are far from the park. Take a bus or train, or rent a bicycle.

Nara City tourism (English) lists sights, events and transport.

Getting around on foot & by bike

WALKABILITY

Moderate

The main temples, shrines and park are within a few kilometres and easy to walk. Heijo Palace and the west temples are farther out.

CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE

Moderate

The city is flat and bicycles can be rented, but central paths are crowded with walkers and deer.

Driving

- Is a car worth it? No, for the city. Trains and buses reach every main sight, and the roads near the park are busy at weekends.
- Countryside: a car helps only for places such as Asuka and the mountains south of Nara. Traffic drives on the left.

Food & drink

Nara has its own traditional foods. Look for **nara-zuke**, vegetables pickled for more than 1,300 years in a sweet and salty way. Try kakinoha sushi, pressed sushi wrapped in a persimmon leaf, and Miwa somen, very thin noodles usually eaten cold in summer. Nara is also known for Yamato tea.

For a meal, go to the lanes of Naramachi, near Naramachi Museum. Old merchant houses there now hold small restaurants and cafes. The Higashimuki shopping street, near Kintetsu Nara Station, has many more casual places.

What to eat & drink

DINNER

Sushi · 寿司 (Sushi)
Vinegared rice paired with raw fish, seafood, or vegetables; ranges from casual conveyor-belt shops to high-end counters.

Ramen · ラーメン (Ramen)
Wheat noodles in a meat or fish-based broth, with countless regional styles.

Tempura · 天ぷら (Tempura)
Lightly battered, deep-fried seafood and vegetables.

Okonomiyaki · お好み焼き (Okonomiyaki)
A savory grilled pancake with cabbage and a choice of fillings, popular in Osaka and Hiroshima.

SNACKS & STREET FOOD

Onigiri · おにぎり (Onigiri)
Rice balls wrapped in seaweed, often with a savory filling; an everyday convenience-store staple.

Yakitori · 焼き鳥 (Yakitori)
Grilled skewers of chicken, popular at izakaya alongside beer or sake.

DRINKS

Green Tea · 緑茶 (Ryokucha)
The everyday non-alcoholic drink, served hot or cold.

Sake · 日本酒 (Nihonshu)
Rice wine served warm or chilled, a traditional accompaniment to a meal.

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Safety & health

Nara is very safe for visitors. Serious crime is rare, and petty theft is uncommon.

The deer are the main risk. They are wild animals, and many tourists have been hurt while feeding them. Do not tease them. Avoid touching the deer, as they can carry ticks.

In summer, heat and humidity are strong. Carry water and rest in the shade in the afternoon.

History

Nara became Japan's capital in 710, as Heijo-kyo. The court left in 784. The powerful Buddhist temples of Nara were part of the reason. The city then stayed a religious centre, which is why so many temples survive.

You can see the old capital at Heijō Palace, where the main hall was rebuilt and opened in 2010. Kofuku-ji Temple was founded in 710 as the Fujiwara family temple, and Kasuga Grand Shrine was founded in 768 for the same family. Gangō-ji moved here from Asuka after the capital moved. Eight sites in Nara, including these, became a World Heritage Site in 1998.

Country facts

Here are the essentials for traveling in Japan:

CURRENCY
JPY ¥

ELECTRICITY

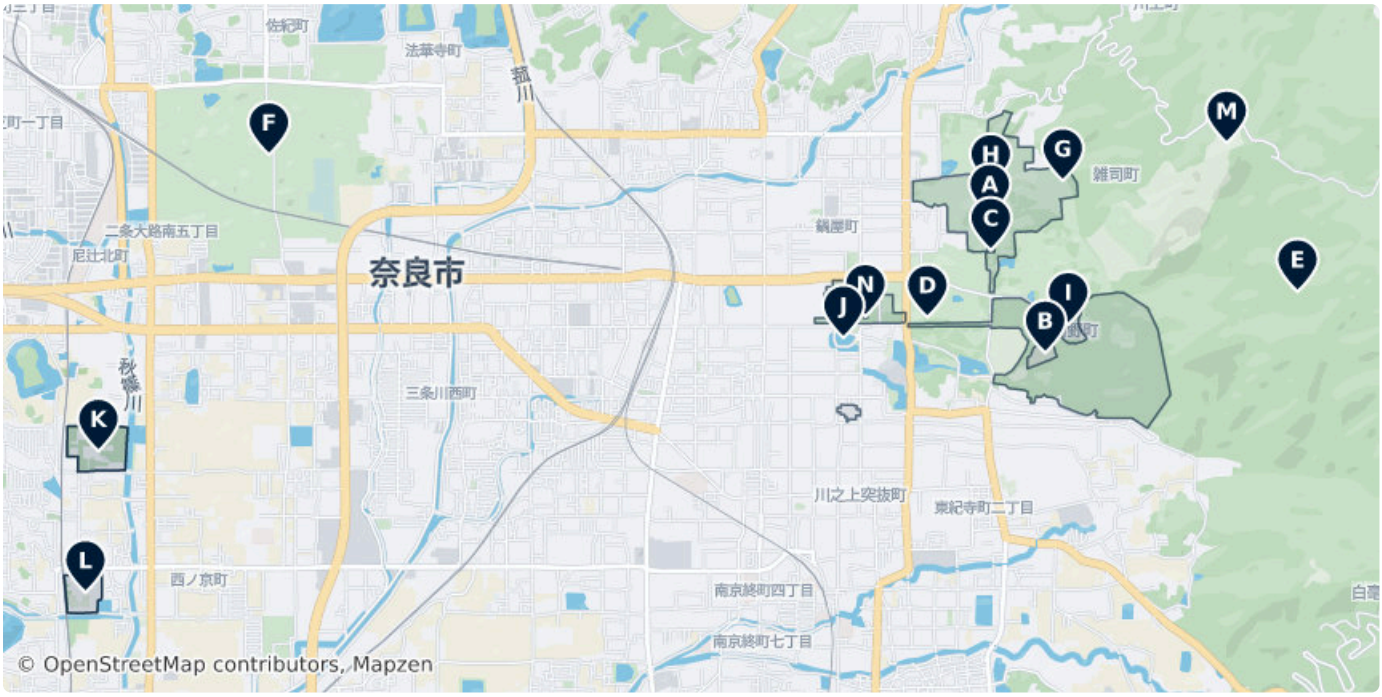
Type A / Type B
100 V

LANGUAGES
Japanese

TAP WATER
Safe to drink

Nara's Timeless Treasures: A Lifetime Visit

Nara served as Japan's first permanent capital from 710 to 784, a period that shaped the country's Buddhist foundations and political structure. This collection highlights the city's UNESCO World Heritage sites, including Todai-ji's Great Buddha Hall and the sprawling Heijo Palace ruins. The list also features the historic Nara Park, home to over 1,000 free-roaming sacred deer, and the ancient temples of Yakushi-ji and Toshodai-ji, which showcase architectural styles and religious art from the 8th century.





A Todai-ji Temple

This temple, founded in the 8th century AD, is home to the largest bronze statue of Buddha in the world, which is seated in The Great...

Todaiji Office 406-1 Zoushi-cho Nara-shi Nara-ken 630-8587,Japan (34.68750, 135.83981)

Apr-Oct Mo–Su	07:30–17:30
Nov-Mar Mo–Su	08:00–17:00



B Deer Park

This park, established as early as the 13th century AD, is one of the oldest parks in Japan.

雑司町 4-6-9, 630-8211 Nara (34.68066, 135.84319)

Mo–Su	Open 24/7

nara-park.com, +81 742 27 8036



C Nandaimon-gate

This massive wooden gate serves as the main entrance to Todai-ji Temple. Rebuilt in the late 12th century, it houses two 8-meter-tall Nio guardian statues, which are designated National Treasures of Japan.

Nara, Japan (34.68580, 135.83987)

todaiji.or.jp/information/nandaimon/



D Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara

The UNESCO World Heritage Site Historic Monuments of Ancient Nara encompasses eight places in the old capital Nara in Nara Prefecture,...

(34.68244, 135.83600)



E Nara Park

Nara Park is a public park located in the city of Nara, Japan, at the foot of Mount Wakakusa.

Japan (34.68372, 135.85858)



F Heijō Palace

Heijō Palace was the imperial residence in the Japanese capital city Heijō-kyō, during most of the Nara period.

Japan (34.69059, 135.79585)

Mo	Closed
Tu–Su	09:00–16:30



G Nigatsu Hall

Founded as early as in the 8th century, this important religious structure overlooks the city of Nara.

Japan (34.68927, 135.84427)



H Great Buddha Hall

The Daibutsuden is one of the world's largest wooden structures. It houses Japan's largest bronze statue of Buddha, standing approximately 15 meters tall, representing the celestial Buddha Vairocana.

Nara, Japan (34.68899, 135.83987)

Mo–Su 08:00–17:00

todaiji.or.jp/information/daibutsuden/, 0742-22-5511



I Manyo Botanical Garden, Nara

The Manyo Botanical Garden, also known as the Kasuga Taisha Garden, is a botanical garden located next to the Kasuga Shrine at 160 Kasugano...

Japan (34.68209, 135.84460)

kasugataisha.or.jp/h_s_tearoom/manyou-s/



J Sarusawa Pond

The setting of this tranquil lake offers a scenic view of the pagoda of Kofukuji Temple.

Nara, Japan (34.68141, 135.83089)



K Toshodaiji temple

Tōshōdai-ji is a Buddhist temple of the Risshū sect in the city of Nara, in Nara Prefecture, Japan.

Japan (34.67573, 135.78545)



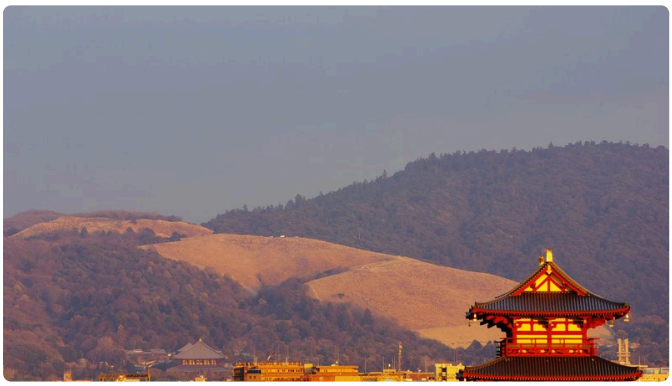
L Yakushiji Temple

Yakushi-ji is one of the most famous imperial and ancient Buddhist temples in Japan, and was once one of the Seven Great Temples of Nanto,...

630-8563 奈良市, JP (34.66864, 135.78466)

Mo–Su 08:30–17:00

nara-yakushiji.com, +81 742336001



M Mt. Wakakusa

Mount Wakakusa, also known as Mount Mikasa, is a 342-metre-high hill located to the east of Nara Park in the city of Nara, Nara Prefecture,...

Japan (34.69117, 135.85426)



N Five-storied pagoda

Standing at 50 meters, this is Japan's second-tallest wooden pagoda. Originally founded in 730, the current structure dates to 1426 and serves as a landmark symbol of the Kofuku-ji temple complex.

Nara, Japan (34.68248, 135.83222)

kohfukuji.com/construction/c06/

Editor's Choice: Nara Highlights

This selection features significant historical and cultural landmarks across Nara. The Manyo Botanical Garden displays over 300 plant species mentioned in ancient Manyoshu poetry, located beside the Kasuga Taisha shrine. The Koriyama Castle ruins preserve 16th-century stone walls and moats, while the Naramachi Museum documents local urban history and traditional crafts. Art collections are represented by the Neiraku Museum's ancient ceramics and the Yamato Bunkakan, which houses a diverse range of Asian art within a building designed by architect Isoya Yoshida.





A Manyo Botanical Garden, Nara

The Manyo Botanical Garden, also known as the Kasuga Taisha Garden, is a botanical garden located next to the Kasuga Shrine at 160 Kasugano...

Japan (34.68209, 135.84460)

kasugataisha.or.jp/h_s_tearoom/manyou-s/



B Ruins of the Koriyama Castle

Sixteenth-century fortification ruins featuring extensive original stone walls, moats, and reconstructed gates. The site is notable for masonry that incorporates repurposed Buddhist stone carvings and serves as a major location for seasonal cherry blossom viewing.

Yamato-Koriyama, Japan (34.65188, 135.77902)

city.yamatokoriyama.nara.jp/ourcity/history/shiseki/0002...



C Naramachi Museum

Visit this quaint museum if looking for information about Nara, its history, and local culture.

Nara, Japan (34.67691, 135.83015)



D Neiraku Museum

Neiraku Museum is an art museum in the city of Nara, central Japan.The museum opened in April 1969.

(34.68603, 135.83716)

isuien.or.jp



E Yamato Bunkakan

Private art museum housing over 2,000 works of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean art, including paintings, calligraphy, and ceramics. The building, designed by Isoya Yoshida, is integrated into a natural park landscape overlooking a large pond.

Japan (34.69540, 135.75672)

kintetsu-g-hd.co.jp/culture/yamato/

Hidden Gems

Nara's lesser-known corners feature specialized museums, traditional architecture, and unique culinary stops. Explore the Naramachi district to find the Mechanical Toy Museum's collection of traditional playthings and the Koshi-no-Ie Residence, a preserved merchant house showcasing historical urban living. Local flavors include handmade wagashi at a century-old confectionery and regional okonomiyaki. For unusual landmarks, visit the wooden pillar at Todai-ji Temple containing a passage the size of the Great Buddha's nostril, or interact with owls at a local animal cafe.



A Owl Cafe Watawata

This animal cafe is quite special and as the title suggests here you can dine and enjoy your coffee with owls hanging out with you.

(Unnamed Road), Nara, Japan (34.68192, 135.82858)

Mo–Su 11:00–19:00

wata-wata.com

B 中西与三郎

Founded in the early 20th century, this confectionery specializes in handcrafted traditional Japanese sweets, or wagashi, made on-site.

(34.67820, 135.82891)



C Naramachi Mechanical Toy Museum

Opened in 2012, this museum invites all children to come and play with their collections of traditional Japanese toys.

Nara, Japan (34.67730, 135.82809)

Mo–Su	09:00–17:00

karakuri-omochakan.jimdo.com

D Koshi-no-Ie Residence

An original Nara type of residence shows the way people had lived not such a long time ago.

Nara, Japan (34.67502, 135.83067)

japan-guide.com/e/e4108.html

E Surugamachi no Okonomiyakiya

One of the best okonomiyakis - Japanese savory pancakes filled with various ingredients - in the area.

Nara, Japan (34.67969, 135.82076)

Mo–Sa	12:00–15:00, 17:00–21:30
Su	12:00–15:00, 17:00–21:00

+81 742-27-8238

F Buddha's Nostril

A hole through a wooden pillar in Todai-ji Temple's Daibutsuden hall, sized to match the nostril of the Great Buddha statue. Squeezing through the opening is traditionally believed to bring good luck.

猫段, Zoshicho, Nara, Suimoncho 630-8211, Japan (34.68887, 135.83994)

DATA SOURCES

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