



# Kansai

## Includes »

Osaka.....	302
Kōbe.....	319
Himeji.....	325
Hikone.....	328
Nara.....	331
Temples Southwest of Nara.....	341
Kii Peninsula.....	346
Kōya-san.....	346
Shirahama.....	351
Ise.....	357
Kinosaki.....	360
Amanohashidate...	362

## Best Places to Eat

- » Café Absinthe (p314)
- » Misono (p322)
- » Tempura Asuka (p338)
- » Imai Honten (p314)
- » Fukutei (p327)

## Best Places to Stay

- » Guesthouse Sakuraya (p337)
- » Arietta Hotel (p311)
- » Blue Sky Guesthouse (p355)

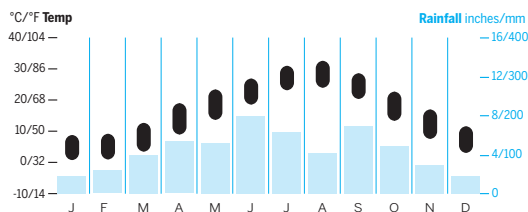
## Why Go?

Kansai (関西) is the heart of Japan. Nowhere else in the country can you find so much of historical and cultural interest in such a compact area. Indeed, if you had to choose only one region to explore, Kansai would be the easy choice. Kyoto, covered in the preceding chapter, is hands down the most rewarding destination in Japan for the traveller, and it makes a good base for exploring the region.

Nara, Japan's first permanent capital, is a dense collection of traditional sights and is home to Japan's most impressive Buddhist temple: Tōdai-ji. Osaka is a great place to sample Japanese city life in all its mind-boggling intensity, while Kōbe is one of Japan's most attractive cities. In Mie-ken you'll find Ise-jingū, Japan's most sacred Shintō shrine, and in Wakayama-ken there are great onsen (hot springs), a rugged coastline and the temple complex of Kōya-san, Japan's most important Buddhist centre.

## When to Go

### Osaka



**Late Mar–mid-Apr** The beauty of the cherry blossoms is really over the top.

**May–Sep** Sure, July and August are hot, but summer is a great time to explore Kansai.

**Oct–early Dec** The sights of Kansai are sublime against a backdrop of bright red maple leaves.



## Kansai Highlights

- 1** Gaze in awe at the **Great Buddha** (Daibutsu) at Nara's Todai-ji (p334)
- 2** Feast your eyes on the colourful human parade of Osaka's **Dōtombori area** (p305)
- 3** Feel the power radiating from the main hall of **Ise-jingu** (p358), Japan's most sacred Shintō shrine
- 4** Wander the mystical forest of Kōya-san's **Oku-no-in** (p348)
- 5** Soak in the restorative waters of the three onsen of **Hongū** (p355)
- 6** Walk the ancient pilgrimage trails of Wakayama's **Kumano Kodō** (p352)
- 7** Put on your *yukata* (light cotton kimono) and stroll from onsen to onsen in the quaint town of **Kinosaki** (p360)