



Kansai

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Best Places to Eat

- Café Absinthe (p349)
- Misono (p369)
- Imai Honten (p351)
- Fukutei (p373)

Best Places to Stay

- Nishimuraya Honkan (p409)
- Guesthouse Sakuraya (p385)
- Arietta Hotel (p348)
- Blue Sky Guesthouse (p403)

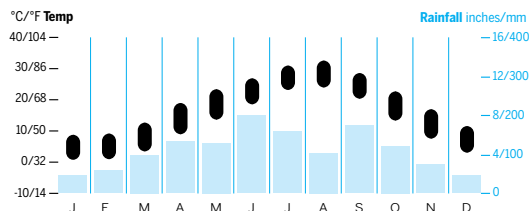
Why Go?

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 of Japan to explore, Kansai would be the easy choice. Kyoto, covered in the preceding chapter, makes the perfect base for exploring Kansai and is home to an extraordinary range of first-rate attractions.

Nara, Japan's first permanent capital, is thick with traditional sights and is home to the awe-inspiring Tōdai-ji Temple. Osaka is a great place to sample Japanese city life in all its mind-boggling intensity, while Kōbe retains some of the international feeling that dates back to its days as a foreign treaty port. In Mie-ken, you'll find Ise-jingū, one of Japan's three most important shrines, and in Wakayama-ken there are great onsen, a rugged coastline and the temple complex of Kōya-san, Japan's mountaintop Buddhist retreat centre.

When to Go

Osaka



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

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

Oct–early Dec Kansai's sights are sublime against a backdrop of bright red maple leaves



Kansai Highlights

- 1** Gaze in awe at the **Great Buddha** (p381) at Nara's Todai-ji
- 2** Feast your eyes on the colourful human parade of Osaka's **Dōtombori area** (p341)
- 3** Feel the power radiating from the main hall of **Ise-jingu** (p404), Japan's most sacred Shintō shrine
- 4** Wander the mystical forest of Kōya-san's **Oku-no-in** (p395)
- 5** Soak in the restorative waters of the three onsen of **Hongū** (p402)
- 6** Walk the ancient pilgrimage trails of Wakayama's **Kumano Kodō** (p398)
- 7** Put on your *yukata* (light cotton kimono) and stroll from onsen to onsen in the quaint town of **Kinosaki** (p408)