



Day Trips from Kyoto

Nara p125

Thirty minutes away from Kyoto by express train, Nara boasts a compact collection of truly first-rate sights. If you're in Kyoto for more than four days, Nara is a must!

Osaka p128

A short train trip from Kyoto, Osaka is a great place to see modern Japan in all its hyperkinetic intensity. If you aren't going to Tokyo, consider a trip to Osaka.

Miyama-chō p131

If you want to see rural Japan (thatched-roof cottages etc), hire a car and head to these villages in the mountains north of the city.

Nara

Explore

Nara is the most rewarding day trip from Kyoto and it's very easy to reach. Indeed, by taking the Kintetsu limited express (*tokkyū*) from Kyoto Station to Kintetsu Nara Station, you're there in about 30 minutes – less time than it might take you to visit some of the more distant parts of Kyoto itself.

Whether you go by JR or Kintetsu, grab a map at the nearest tourist information centre (there's one at each station) and walk to Nara-kōen (Nara Park), which contains the thickest concentration of must-see sights in the city, including the awesome Daibutsu (Great Buddha) at Tōdai-ji. On the way, don't miss Isui-en, a compact stunner of a garden. With a 9am start, you can see the sights and be back in Kyoto in time for dinner.

The Best...

- ➔ **Sight** Tōdai-ji (p125)
- ➔ **Place to Eat** Kameya (p127)
- ➔ **Place to Drink** Nara Izumi Yūsai (p128)

Top Tip

Unless you're travelling with a Japan Rail Pass, take a comfortable *tokkyū* on the private Kintetsu line from Kyoto Station (south side of the station) to Kintetsu Nara Station.

Getting There & Away

➔ **Kintetsu line (train)** The Kintetsu line, which runs between Kintetsu Kyoto Station (in Kyoto Station) and Kintetsu Nara Station, is the fastest and most convenient way to travel between Nara and Kyoto. There are *tokkyū* (¥1110, 33 minutes) and *kyūkō* (¥610, 40 minutes). The *tokkyū* trains run directly and are very comfortable; the *kyūkō* usually require a change at Saidai-ji.

➔ **JR line (train)** The JR Nara line also connects JR Kyoto Station with JR Nara Station (*JR Miyakoji Kaisoku*, ¥690, 41 minutes) and there are several departures an hour during the day. This is good for Japan Rail Pass holders.

Need to Know

- ➔ **Area Code** ☎0742
- ➔ **Location** 37km south of Kyoto
- ➔ **Tourist Office** (☎22-9821; www.narashikanko.or.jp/en; ☺9am-9pm)



SIGHTS

★TŌDAI-JI

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(東大寺) Nara's star attraction is the famous Daibutsu (Great Buddha), housed in the Daibutsu-den Hall of this grand temple. Though Tōdai-ji is often packed with tour groups and schoolchildren from across the country, it's big enough to absorb huge crowds and it belongs at the top of any Nara itinerary. Except for the Daibutsu-den Hall, most of Tōdai-ji's grounds can be visited free of charge.

Before entering, check out the Nandai-mon, an enormous gate containing two fierce-looking **Niō guardians**. These recently restored wooden images, carved in the 13th century by the sculptor Unkei, are some of the finest wooden statues in all of Japan, if not the world. They are truly dramatic works of art and seem ready to spring to life at any moment. The gate is about 200m south of the temple enclosure.

★DAIBUTSU-DEN HALL

BUDDHIST TEMPLE

(大仏殿; Hall of the Great Buddha; 406-1 Zōshichō; admission ¥500, joint ticket with Tōdai-ji Museum ¥800; ☺8am-4.30pm Nov-Feb, to 5pm Mar, 7.30am-5.30pm Apr-Sep, to 5pm Oct) Tōdai-ji's Daibutsu-den is the largest wooden building in the world. Incredibly, the present structure, rebuilt in 1709, is a mere two-thirds of the size of the original. The Daibutsu (Great Buddha) inside is one of the largest bronze figures in the world and was originally cast in 746. The present statue, recast in the Edo period, stands just over 16m high and consists of 437 tonnes of bronze and 130kg of gold.

The Daibutsu is an image of Dainichi Nyorai (also known as Vairocana Buddha), the cosmic Buddha believed to give rise to all worlds and their respective Buddhas. Historians believe that Emperor Shōmu ordered the building of the Buddha as a charm against smallpox, which ravaged Japan in preceding years. Over the centuries the statue took quite a beating from earthquakes and fires, losing its head a couple of