



Day Trips from Tokyo

Nikkō p182

Take in the grandeur of old Edo at the spectacular shrines and temples of Nikkō, in the wooded mountains north of Tokyo.

Hakone p186

A centuries-old onsen (hot-spring) resort, Hakone offers beautiful landscape, a serene lake, traditional inns and even the smoking remains of a volcano.

Kamakura p189

An ancient feudal capital, seaside Kamakura is packed with temples and shrines, plus the famous Daibutsu (Big Buddha) statue.

Mt Fuji p192

Follow the pilgrim trail up Japan's most famous peak for a sunrise to beat all others, or admire views of the perfect snowcapped cone from below.

Nikkō 日光

Explore

Nikkō's premier attraction is its cluster of World Heritage shrines and temples, set amongst towering cedars. Among these is Tōshō-gū, an elaborate shrine rebuilt in 1634 as a memorial to the first Tokugawa shogun. The major sights, a 30-minute walk (or a five-minute bus ride) from the train station, can be visited on foot in an afternoon; however, it's well worth budgeting more time to explore. In the hills beyond are a smattering of smaller sights, often overlooked by the crowds.

On weekends and holidays, Nikkō can become extremely packed. It's best to visit early on a weekday; alternatively, stay the night to get an early start and use the extra day to explore the mountains, marshlands and onsen (p239) of the sprawling Nikkō National Park.

The Best...

- **Sight** Tōshō-gū
- **Place to Eat** Gyōshintei (p185)
- **Place to Sleep** Nikkō Kanaya Hotel (p185)

Top Tip

Nikkō is most attractive – and thus most crowded – in October when the hills blaze red. During this time expect serious traffic delays on the way to Chūzen-ji Onsen.

Getting There & Around

- **Train** From Tokyo, Tōbu-Nikkō line trains leave from Tōbu Asakusa Station (it's well signposted from the subway). You can usually get last-minute seats on the hourly reserved *tokkyū* (limited-express) trains (¥2700, 110 minutes). *Kaisoku* (rapid) trains (¥1360, 2½ hours, hourly from 5.39am to 4.50pm) require no reservation; be sure to ride in the last two cars (some cars may separate at an intermediate stop). Note that with either train, you may need to change at Shimo-Imaichi.
- **Bus** In front of Nikkō Station, buses leave regularly for the short trip to Shinkyō, the bus stop for the World Heritage sites (¥200, five minutes).

Need to Know

- **Area Code** ☎0288
- **Location** 120km north of Tokyo
- **Tourist Office** (☎54-2496; www.nikko-jp.org; 591 Gokomachi; ☀9am-5pm)

SIGHTS

★ TOSHŌ-GŪ

SHINTO SHRINE

(東照宮; www.toshogu.jp; 2301 Sannai; adult/child ¥1300/450; ☀8am-4.30pm Apr-Oct, to 3.30pm Nov-Mar) A World Heritage Site, Tōshō-gū is a brilliantly decorative shrine in a beautiful natural setting. Among its notable features is the dazzling 'Sunset Gate' Yōmei-mon.

As the shrine gears up for its 400th anniversary a major restoration program is underway. Until at least 2018, the Yōmei-mon and Shimojinko (one of the Three Sacred Storehouses) will be obscured by scaffolding. Don't be put off visiting, as Tōshō-gū remains an impressive sight. A new museum building is also set to open during 2015.

The stone steps of **Omotesandō** lead past the towering stone *torii* (entrance gate) **Ishidōrii** (石鳥居), and the **Gōjūnotō** (五重塔; Five Storey Pagoda), an 1819 reconstruction of the mid-17th-century original, to **Omotemon** (表門), Tōshō-gū's main gateway, protected on either side by Deva kings.

In Tōshō-gū's initial courtyard are the **Sanjinko** (三神庫; Three Sacred Storehouses); on the upper storey of the Kami-jinko (upper storehouse) are relief carvings of 'imaginary elephants' by an artist who had never seen the real thing. Nearby is the **Shinkyūsha** (神厩舎; Sacred Stable), adorned with relief carvings of monkeys. The allegorical 'hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil' simians demonstrate three principles of Tendai Buddhism.

Further into Tōshō-gū's precincts, to the left of the drum tower, is **Honji-dō** (本地堂), a hall known for the painting on its ceiling of the Nakiryū (Crying Dragon). Monks demonstrate the hall's acoustical properties by clapping two sticks together. The dragon 'roars' (a bit of a stretch) when the sticks are clapped beneath its mouth, but not elsewhere.

Once the scaffolding comes off in 2018, the **Yōmei-mon** (陽明門; Sunset Gate) will be grander than ever, its gold leaf and intricate,