

NanoRa

The Nara City I didn't know until now

Yagyu Road

Passing through Japanese History

Japanese Seishu Sake

The Origin of Seishu Sake

Cherry Blossoms

Nara's Hidden Landmarks

Nara Tea Ceremony

A Once in a Lifetime Encounter

Issue 10

Passing through Japanese History

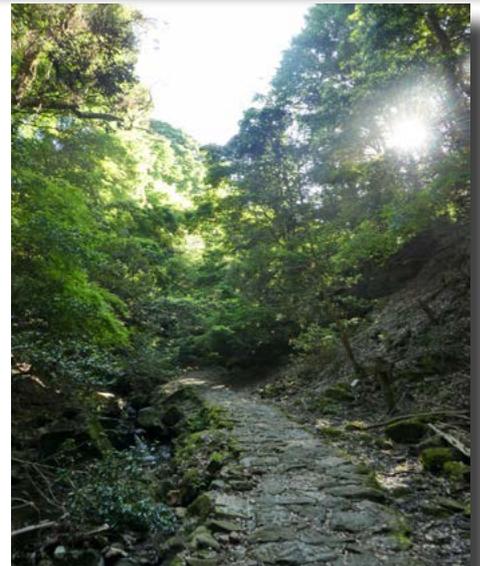
Yagyu Road

If you pass through the primitive Kasuga mountain forest and walk along the famous blacksmith from the Edo period, you will surely find yourself going back in time as you hike up the trail, on Yagyu Road, which sits on the border of both the Nara and Kyoto Prefectures in Kasagi.



From Kasuga Mountain to Enjouji Temple

I started walking just as the little birds were chirping and the sun was rising, because my hike was 32 kilometres long. To hike to Enjouji Temple, you must first pass along the river in M.t. Kasuga's primitive forest, where you will walk on a road paved with stone steps, up a gentle slope. Walking through the cedar forest, passing under many trees, the scenery where the road is illuminated by the light under the trees, it feels as if I have passed into a different world where time has stopped. Since long ago it has been possible to do a pilgrimage to Kasuga Taisha shrine, which is situated on Yagyu Road. Here in the quiet forest with the wild animals, you can meet a Jizo, a guardian deity for children and feel the long history he has experienced. On the way I went through Jigokudani. I really recommend going there, especially since the valley itself is not so deep, therefore you can walk along it and see beautiful scenery. Upon arriving at Nara city's Enjouji Temple, situated deep in the mountains, the first portion of my hike has come to an end. Centring on the pond in the garden, there is Tahou Tower, a temple with a calm presence.



From Enjouji Temple to Yagyu Road

From Enjouji Temple, you must enter the mountain road once again, until you come to the forest's mountain road, which gives way to Yamaguchi Shrine. Continuing on from there, the road and rice fields will be bathed in sunlight as you walk along them. There are many places with good views, because the road is higher than the village. Here you can even find a traditional Yagyu house, with its blue tiled roof, which looks very beautiful against the green of the rice fields.

Quite villages, terraced rice fields, small shrines and temples, along with tranquil surroundings can all be found here. For a foreigner such as myself, I hardly ever am able to see Japanese villages, that have stood the test of time, but being here makes me feel like I can imagine the scenery that was here once before. We finish when the road passes through the mountain pass. The mountain pass is not particularly high, but the road is considerably steep. However, this steep road does not continue for too long and the descent reveals a private residence, as well as Yagyu's bus stop.



From Yagyū Bus Stop to Kasagi Train Station

From Yagyū bus stop, you continue to walk along the river, where you will return to the mountain once again. If you go until Kasagi Temple, then you have reached the climax of your hike. It takes no time at all. From between the trees the village and the temple come into view. This section is the easiest part of the hike. It should also be noted that Kizu River flows near Kasagi station. After hiking along the river, it feels good to take a nap.

An important point to take into consideration is that there are very few trains from Kasagi station, so it is best to check the timetable beforehand.



If you think a 32 Kilometre hike is too much, please remember that the ascent and descent are, as a whole not too steep at all. Even beginners can do it! It takes approximately 6 to 7 hours. Of course this all depends on the individual's speed.

In the Tourist Information Centre, in Nara City, there are detailed pamphlets on hiking. They have been translated into many languages; therefore I would advise that you take them with you when you go hiking. They are a real lifesaver!

Reference:



Japanese

English

French

Japanese seishu sake's origin began in the south-east of Nara City, in Shoryakuji Temple. Nara's sake brewing industry began long ago before the turn of the century with the collection of poems, 'The Kojiki and the Nihonshoki and Manyo.' During the Nara period, it was manufactured as sacred sake that would be presented to the gods or Buddha, which was reminiscent of what was done at Heijo Palace, Todaiji Temple, Kohfukuji Temple and Kasuga Taisha Shrine. This time I would like to introduce one brewery, situated in the middle of the city that produces seishu sake that anyone can enjoy.

Yagi Brewery Co., Ltd.

Yagi Brewery Co., Ltd is located to the south-east of Nara Park, in the 'Shimizu-cho' district, at the foot of Kasagi Mountain's primitive forest. The brewery itself was founded and named 'Yokotaya' before the Edo period and was later inherited during the Meiji era, in the year 1877. Yagi Brewery's famous 'meishu' sake has been beloved as the sake of Nara ever since.

Interview with Yagi Brewery Co., Ltd.'s representative Takeki Yagi

• Could you please tell me in your own words, about the history of seishu sake?

Sake brewing began during the Muromachi period, when the temples were in power. There is a record on alcohol from a diary from Kohfukuji Temple, named 'Tamon Institutions Diary,' it seems that sake brewing became prosperous in a series of temples including Shoryaku Temple. At that time, there was an account in a Portuguese dictionary about Nara's seishu sake, the oldest record of the initial creation of the first refined sake, was said to be in Shoryaku Temple. In Shoryaku there is a stone monument with the words 'The birthplace of Japanese seishu sake' wrote on it. Until then it had been unrefined sake, only the froth of the seishu sake was taken, which led to it being seen as a luxury and marked the start of Nara's sake industry.



• What were the reasons for opening the business?

This brewery is from the Edo period. The brewery is located on Kiyomizu Avenue, or in English Clean Water Avenue, just like the name suggests the water used, is Kusaga Mountain's clean water. The Meiji era's first brewer spent years creating sake, but at that time it did not take fruition, at the same time, in Doujima in Osaka my great grandfather who ran a rice shop, purchased the brewery and started to make sake.

• Could you please talk about your flagship product?

Our flagship product is called 'shouhei.' I had a tea ceremony master create the name 'shouhei,' from a Chinese poem.

For those participating in the tour, what is the best drink to order?

Depending on the season the alcohol is made differently. From June we start making umeshu or plum flavoured alcohol. As well, from June until September mirin or sake with a lower alcohol count is also made. The observation tour is not just a tour at the factory, but it is actually in the factory that makes the alcohol. If the timing and period is appropriate, you can actually see the alcohol being made. But because there isn't enough room for a lot of people, 20 is the limit.

So that they can enjoy Nara's seishu sake, could you please say a few words to everyone?

It is said that Nara is the birthplace of seishu sake, which is something that is not just appealing in Japan, but also throughout the world. Nara has deer, Todaiji Temple as well as a wealth of other fun things; however I want people to also have an interest in Nara's alcohol.



You are immediately drawn to the sign with the name 'shouhei' on the entrance of the brewery. It seems that the sign was written about 70 years ago by the wholesaler from Osaka. Having the product's name wrote down like that, you can really feel the power it holds.

With regards to the water used for brewing sake, until Showa period or 1965, the water from a well was used but at present, water is taken from 100 meters underground and used. When you enter the cellar there are various machines, during the sake brewing observation tour, the raw material of the alcohol, mainly rice, goes through a steaming process. In order to preserve the temperature, while it is being shipped, it needs to be stored.

Although nowadays the majority of the brewing is done by machines, there are processes still carried out by hand. The designs of the labels of seishu sake flavours, such as Yuzu and plum are thought up by the company, in order to make the Japanese paper, it's not machines, but in fact people, who stick each label on.



In order to maintain the suitable temperature, the seishu sake is stored in a cool place. A slight smell of seishu sake wafts through the air.



After the tour it was time to try some alcohol. First I was given the flagship product, the 'shouhei.' My mouth was immediately filled with flavour. There's an abundance of flavour and smell, however the flavour is not persistent. You can tell that they used good water.

Next is the yuzu sake. This is the drink that the workers stuck the blue stickers on during the tour. At first there is a refreshing flavour of the yuzu and then the acidity spreads, despite this, an alcoholic taste remains. Without being too sweet or too strong, the alcohol's smell strikes a perfect balance. The plum sake is sweet, but moderate with an elegant flavour. Even for me, someone who is bad with sweet alcohol, I found the plum sake delectable. Nara, of course has a deep history with regard to alcohol, but how about going to Yagi Brewery where you can try a variety of sake, including plum, yuzu and shochu.



Tour Information

Business Hours 10.00am-4.00pm
Closed: Saturday, Sunday, Holidays, Summer holiday and New Years

Tour Price

(Adult) :Free
(Children) : Prohibited
In the event there is more than 20 people, a reservation is required.
Please ring for a reservation



Shop Information

Address :Takabatake-cho 915, Nara City, Nara Prefecture, 630-8301.
Business Hours: Monday-Sunday 9.00am-5.00pm

Article : Hyunjung Nam
Translation : Katie Clancy

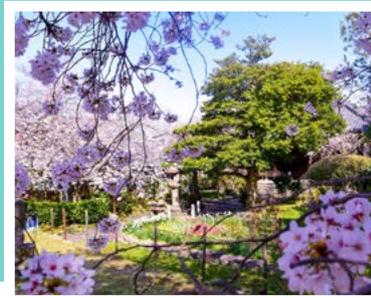


Cherry Blossoms

Nara City is always a beautiful place to visit, but when the cherry blossoms float down from the trees, it creates a particularly special scene. Nara Park is where the double flowered cherry blossoms or Yaezakura start; more than 1,700 cherry blossom trees were planted, as the cherry blossoms or Kokonoezakura bloom crowds of people come to visit. This time round, I want to show you my 3 favourite spots for Hanami or flower viewing and for taking pictures with the exception of Nara Park.

The Area around Gangoji Tower

Under a small space, situated in the middle of the private residents in Naramachi, until 1859 a splendid tower used to exist. At present, only the remnants of the tower remain, however, in this area, the gorgeous blooming flowers and the falling cherry blossoms, breathe new life into this historical setting.



Nara Prefectural Gokoku Shrine

Nara Prefectural Gokoku Shrine was built in the year 1942. Compared to Gango Temple, Gokoku Shrine, despite being shallower does not lose its calm atmosphere. Even in the middle of cherry blossom season, the park retains its still nature. The cherry blossom's dazzling pink and white are enhanced by the deep green of their surroundings. If you continue up from the shrine to Sahotanki University, you can see a wonderful view of Naramachi and there is also a café with some delicious treats for you to enjoy.

Along Saho River

About approximately a quarter of the 19 kilometre long Saho River, is lined with more than 1000 cherry blossom trees. During lunch, walking alongside the trees, you can see the cherry blossoms falling down gently from above into the flowing river. At night if you walk alongside the river when the paper Tourou lanterns are lit, it creates a completely different atmosphere. Although the vicinity around Shin-Omiya station can be crowded, if you walk by yourself you can definitely find a spot soon, where you can enjoy the cherry blossom world. Saho River is not just the best place to relax during cherry blossom season, but also all year round.





Nara Tea Ceremony: A Once in a Lifetime Encounter

Jukou Tea Ceremony's QRCode



Jukou tea ceremony being carried out in Toshodaiji Temple
(Provided by the Nara City Tourism Strategy Division)

With special thanks to Jukou tea ceremony's tea master, Murata Jukou

Nara is the birthplace of Japanese tea ceremony. Born in Nara in the year 1422, tea master Murata Jukou is known as the founder of 'wabi-cha', a Japanese tea ceremony style. 100 years later in the year 1522, the Japanese tea ceremony expert, Sen no Rikyu was born. Every year since February 2014, Jukou tea ceremony, which is associated with Jukou, has been carried out in Nara, the ancient capital. The event is held over the course of a few days, in different places in Nara City, even foreigners who are not familiar with Japanese tea ceremony, are invited to participate. In order to understand the thoughts that the tea masters of present day Nara have about Jukou tea ceremony, I spoke with the tea ceremony master, Soushin Nishimura, who can teach you about the urasenke tea school tradition in his own home at certain times during the day. In addition to this, I also spoke with Muneshige Hirano, who is also a tea ceremony master and the owner of 'kissakoan', a tea ceremony premise, which many foreign tourists visit.



Here I am looking at the hanging scroll that says 'elegance' with Mr. Nishimura.

Mr. Nishimura, Practitioner of Traditional Japanese Tea

When I visited him, I could see a garden being sprinkled with water, through a slightly open door. This is how a tea master welcomes his guests to 'come right on in' without using any words. After you take one step into the residence, you are already enveloped into the quiet world of tea. Mr. Nishimura, the tea ceremony master, who passionately teaches in Nara, about Jukou tea ceremony in Nara and has done so for a long time, has stated that 'Tea ceremony is a comprehensive art, if you want to make a tea room properly, you have to learn about Japanese traditional buildings, gardens, stones, shrubs, flowers and china.' Certainly, the tea room is different to an ordinary room; the master of the house would have sympathy and obsession for it. The precious scroll hanging on the wall, wrote by the 14th head of the school of urasenke, Tantsai (1893-1964) along with the appropriate items for the tea ceremony, were as beautiful as works of art. You can experience traditional Japanese culture for yourself through the practice of tea ceremony.

Mr. Nishimura's address: Omori nishi-cho 21-6 Nara City 630-8132
Business Hours: Every Wednesday and Saturday in his residence.
E-mail: ichiro.tea.master.1224@ezweb.ne.jp



A large stone lantern situated in the garden.

For those that will come to Nara City, please try to have a positive attitude if you want to experience Japanese tea ceremony. It allows you to peep into the entrance of Japanese culture

'Kissakoan' the Tea Ceremony Trial

'Kissakoan' is a word from China's Tang Dynasty period. It means 'how about a cup of tea' in English. The owner, Mr. Hirano has quite the sense of humour and 70 percent of his clients are foreign tourists. It seems he is quite good at responding in English. In the shop itself, several tea ceremony courses are prepared; it is recommended that beginners do what is called 'the light brown course'. Tea ceremony classes are also held.

Kissakoan
Address: Kunodo-cho 6, Nara City, 630-8382
E-mail:kissakoan@tiara.ocn.ne.jp
Business Hours: 10am to 6 pm Closed: Every Wednesday



100 years of Naramachi Traditional House

In Naramachi, on the grounds of 'Jukou Tea Ceremony's' building, there is also a traditional house, whose construction is 100 years old. Here, within this townhouse, you can experience tea ceremony for yourself. Among the clients that use this facility, approximately 30 percent are from abroad (27 countries in total). In the last 3 years, the number of clients, from both within the country and abroad, has exceeded 300,000. There is staff who can respond in English and Chinese, in addition to this, clients without any experience or prior knowledge about tea ceremony can enjoy it at their leisure. If participants exceed 10 people a prior reservation is required. There are also many traditional and cultural events apart from tea ceremony carried out.

Naramachi Traditional House
Nakanoshinya-cho 5, Nara City, 630-8333
E-mail:nigiwainoie@gmail.com
Business Hours: 9.00am to 5.00pm Closed: Every Wednesday



'Kissakoan' owner Mr. Hirano



Interview with Mrs. Ono



Jukou Tea Ceremony in 'Naramachi Traditional House'

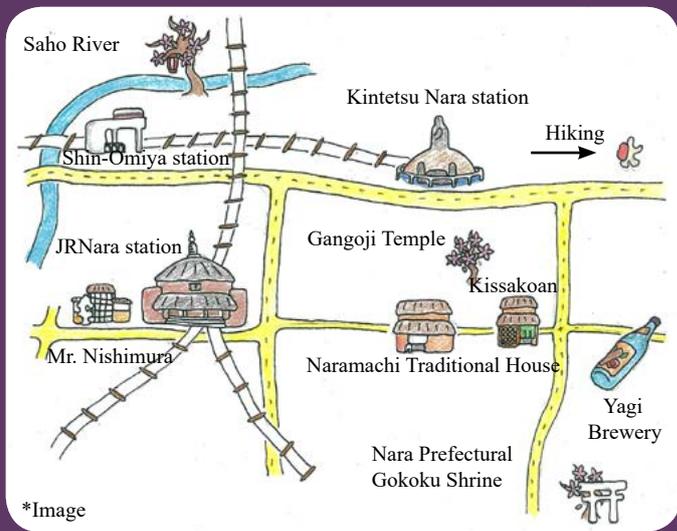
What is 'Na no Ra'?

We're the Coordinators for International Relations (CIR) for Nara Prefecture. We work at the International Affairs Division of the Prefectural Government. Our aim is to deepen international exchange between Nara and other countries and help to build bridges between them.

'Na no Ra' is made up of articles about places in the prefecture that we, as foreign residents ourselves, visited and thought would be of interest to both visitors from overseas and the local Nara community. We hope it will be of some interest and will serve to help everyone discover the charm that Nara holds!



Places Mentioned

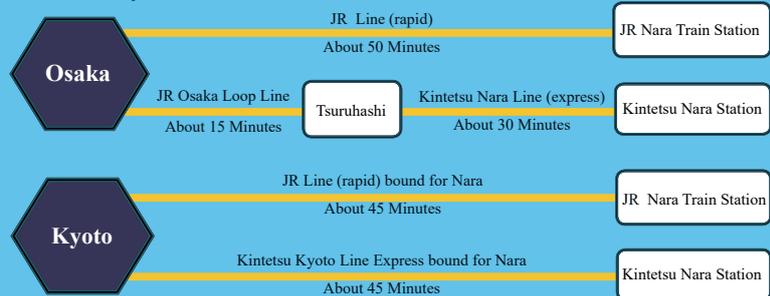


A Note from the Editors

'Na no Ra' would like to sincerely thank the people of Nara City and all those who assisted in the creation of this issue, including Yagi Brewery Co., Ltd, Nara City Tourism Strategy Division, urasenke instructor Soushin Nishimura, Naramachi Traditional House and Kissakoan.

Access

Access by Train



Access by Car

From Osaka: Get off the Tenri Interchange and use the highway
 From Kyoto: Get off the Kizu Interchange and use the highway

'Na no Ra'

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