

DESTINATION: NARA'S 1300TH ANNIVERSARY APPROACHES



Nara, the ancient city many perceive as the birthplace of Japan, is celebrating its 1300th anniversary. The city has a spectacular history and retains a very strong appeal and charm.

In 2010, all eyes in Japan will turn to Nara, the once-great capital of Japan, which after 13 centuries still remains a very important political and cultural centre. **Many believe it is the true birthplace of Japan.**

At the beginning of the 7th century, Nara became the first international capital of Japan. The traditional Japanese culture blended with many others thanks to the Silk Road, which led many international tradesmen to Nara.

Nara is also a very important religious and spiritual centre which holds many Buddhist treasures and attracts thousands of visitors every year. In fact, Shugendo, the Japanese mountain religion was born here. Local temples are simply magnificent and the book collections as well as Buddha statues spectacular. **The famous Daibutsu is the largest Buddha statue in Japan and actually, one of the largest ones in the world.** Its home is the Daibutsu-den, an exceptionally large wooden building which features several other unique statues and is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

The Nara Park is a beautiful and wide piece of greenery which is sacred; a legend has it that the god of the Kasuga Taisha came here, riding a white deer. Until today, deer are still held in very high esteem and are kept in the park as its divine residents; though they have grown accustomed to being fed by the tourists.

Visitors who wish to learn more about Nara's history and cultural heritage visit the **Nara National Museum which is famous for its fantastic collection of Buddhist art.** There are no tours around the museum, however, anyone keen to dig a little deeper is welcome to ask any of the local guides who are surprisingly knowledgeable.

Nara is simply a city of strong Buddhist tradition and an impressive cultural heritage. It remains one of the historically most important cities for the Japanese and hopefully, next year's anniversary will be one to remember.

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