

Horyuji Temple in Ikaruga

Japan's first World Heritage Site

Nara

Home of Prince Shotoku

Ikaruga Town is the location where Buddhist culture, which started 1,300 years ago in Japan, remains even today.

At its center lies Horyuji Temple, which together with Hokiji Temple, became the first Japan's World Cultural Heritage Site in 1993. In this temple, the Kondo (Main Hall), Goju-no-To (Five-storied Pagoda), Chumon (Central Gate), and Kairo (Covered Corridor) are the world's oldest and most valuable wooden buildings in existence.

According to the inscription on the halo of the Yakushi Nyorai in the Kondo (Main Hall), Horyuji Temple was built in accordance with the last wishes of

Emperor Yomei, the father of Prince Shotoku, who wanted a temple built for Yakushi Nyorai as a prayer for his recovery from his illness.

However, Ikarugadera Temple was destroyed by a fire in 670, and the remains are the present Wakakusa Precinct. It is said that the Horyuji Temple we can see today was completed by 711.

The temple grounds cover a vast area of 187,000m². There are many buildings, sculptures and artifacts from various periods in Japan's history, and 39 of them have been designated as National Treasures.

Horyuji Temple, this place is amazing!

Wooden buildings that convey the style of the Asuka period (7th c.)

At Horyuji Temple, you can see the remnants of culture that came from the continent together with Buddhism. For example, the Kondo (Main Hall), Goju-no-To (Five-storied Pagoda), and Chumon (Central Gate) have features of the Asuka style such as the cloud-shaped bracket, "Kumohijiki." Moreover, the Kondo (Main Hall) murals were influenced by the wall paintings of the Ajanta Caves in India and the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, China.

The tragedy of Horyuji Temple saw the birth of a new law

In the early morning of January 26, 1949, a fire broke out in the Kondo (Main Hall), which was undergoing major repairs during the Showa period, and valuable murals were burnt by the fire. Fortunately, none of the Buddhist images (statues) were damaged because they had been moved to other places, and also the roof and small murals had been removed. Even now, the burnt murals and the members of the first layer are solidified with resin and are stored in the repository. Due to this tragedy, the Act on Protection of Cultural Properties was enacted the following year.



World-class masterpiece of Buddhist murals
Murals of the Kondo
(Main Hall) at Horyuji Temple
Burned in a fire in 1949

Priest Saeki Joun standing
in the ruins of the fire

The carpenters of Horyuji Temple are amazing

Nishisato, to the west of Horyuji Temple, is said to have long been the home of a group of carpenters who support Horyuji Temple.

In particular, Nakai Masakiyo, as the master builder carpenter of Horyuji Temple, was involved in the construction of Toyotomi Hideyoshi's (1537-1598) Osaka Castle, and after that he served Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543-1616) and was involved in various projects such as Fushimi Castle and Nijo Castle in Kyoto, Zojoji Temple and the Donjon and Honmaru of Edo Castle.

In addition, Tsunekazu Nishioka, who carried out major repairs in the Showa period (20C), was known as the "oni" of Horyuji Temple because of his disciplined, non-compromising attitude. He explained the advantages of ancient wooden buildings and restored the ancient carpenter tools known as Yuriganna. After that, he devoted himself to the reconstruction of the three-storied pagoda of Horinji Temple and the buildings of Yakushiji Temple.

In 2020, "Traditional skills, techniques and knowledge for the conservation and transmission of wooden architecture in Japan" that have been handed down by Miyadaiku (shrine carpenters), plasterers, and other craftspeople who are said to have supported traditional Japanese architectural culture, was registered as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Temple with the largest number of National Treasures in Japan

Currently, there are 39 National Treasures at Horyuji Temple. There are 18 buildings, 21 sculptures and artifacts, and this number is the largest in all of Japan's temples. There are many National Treasures among the treasures that were dedicated to the Imperial Family in the Meiji period and which are preserved in the Tokyo National Museum Gallery of Horyuji Treasures.

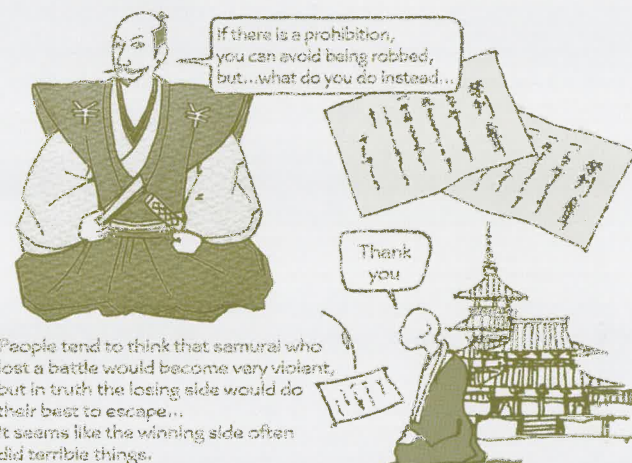
How has Horyuji Temple survived for 1300 years...

The buildings at Horyuji Temple are re-roofed every 100 years, and a complete structural restoration is done every 300 years, allowing the temple to survive until today. Traces of repair can be seen in the patterns of repaired pillars and roof tiles.

Within the precincts of this temple it is possible to see not only the Asuka period (7th c.) but also the Buddhist architecture that represents all periods thereafter in Japan's history. Horyuji Temple is the only temple in Japan where the entire complete seven-structured temple compound is designated as a National Treasure.

The three great warlords of the Sengoku period are associated with Horyuji Temple

Horyuji Temple is also associated with great warlords (also known as the three unifiers) during the Sengoku period (Period of Warring States). In 1574, Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582) established rules prohibiting rebellion, lodging, or cutting of bamboo and trees on the grounds of Horyuji Temple. Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598) set the crop yield by conducting a land survey and his son, Hideyori (1593-1615), carried out major repairs during the Keicho era. Tokugawa Ieyasu visited the temple to pray for victory before departing for the Siege of Osaka.

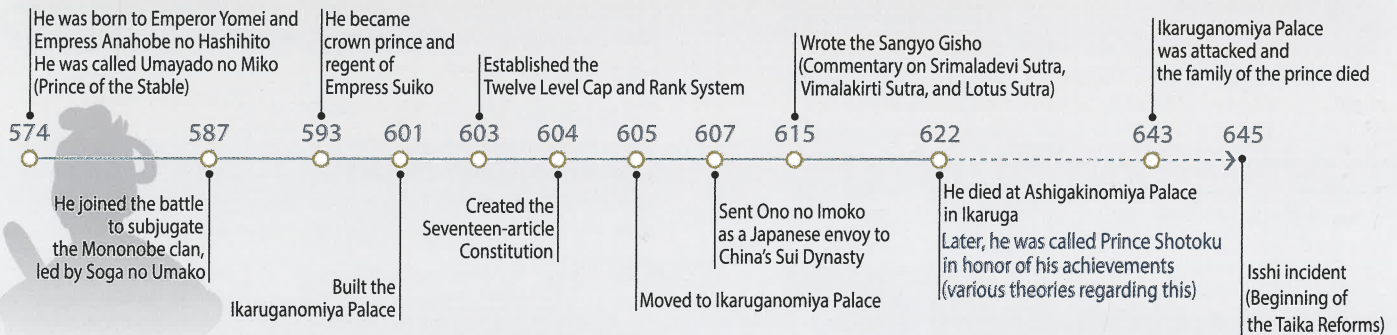


Construction method for the Goju-no-To (Five-storied Pagoda) that is still used today

Tokyo Skytree adopts a new vibration control system which is based on the Goju-no-To (Five-storied Pagoda), which is said to be strong against earthquakes.

Life of Prince Shotoku

The facts behind his life vary between historical records.



Prince Shotoku's footsteps in Ikaruga

Hokiji Temple

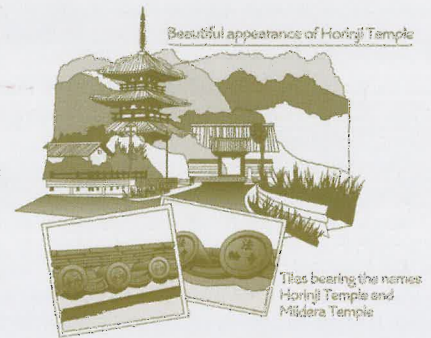
It is said that the Okamotonomiya Palace where Prince Shotoku gave a lecture on the Lotus Sutra was made into a temple. It has the oldest three-storied pagoda (Asuka period (8th c.) – National Treasure). Along with Horyuji Temple, it is registered as a World Cultural Heritage Site.

Every fall, the area around Hokiji Temple changes into fields of cosmos flowers. The view of the three-storied pagoda from these fields makes a special picture.



Horinji Temple

It is said that Prince Shotoku's son Prince Yamashiro built this temple to pray for the recovery of his father. The original three-storied pagoda was destroyed by a fire in 1944 and the current pagoda was built in 1975. Visitors can worship Buddhist images (statues) of the Asuka and Heian periods.



Taishimichi – Sujikaimichi Road

This is a road that diagonally passes across the Nara Basin and it is where it is said that Prince Shotoku traveled from Ikaruga to Asuka. There are only traces remaining in the rice fields of Ikaruga, but even today it still remains as a road in the neighboring towns of Ando and Miyake.

The Historic Site of Chuguji Temple

This is located 400 m east of the present Chuguji Temple, and are the ruins of Nakanomiya Palace which was built for Prince Shotoku's mother, and it was located mid-way between Ikaruganomiya Palace, Okamotonomiya Palace, and Ashigakinomiya Palace. Following an archaeological survey, the foundation stones of the pagoda and Kondo (Main Hall) were reconstructed and maintained, and it is used as a historical park.

Kamiya Iseki Park

It is said that Ashigakinomiya Palace was here and this is where Prince Shotoku died, and the results of excavations have yielded earthenware from the Asuka period (7th c.), and they also discovered the remains of large dug-standing pillar buildings from the Nara period (8th c.).

Akazome Well

This is located on the north side of Horinji Temple and is said to be one of the three wells dug by Prince Shotoku.

Fujinoki Tumulus

This was built in the latter half of the 6th century, and it is thought from the stunning grave goods that have been excavated here, such as luxurious harnesses, that high ranking people such as the imperial family and local ruling families were buried here. Judging from the time and place of construction, it is believed that people close to Prince Shotoku could have been interned here.

Tatsutajinja Shrine

When Prince Shotoku was looking for a place to build a temple, an old man (who was Tatsuta Myojin, the god of the wind and harvests) told him that this was an appropriate place for one, and so that god was enshrined here. In front of the shrine is the Nara-Kaido Road, which connects Osaka and Nara. If you head west, you will arrive at the Shitennoji Temple, which was built by Prince Shotoku.

The Seven Mysteries of Horyuji Temple

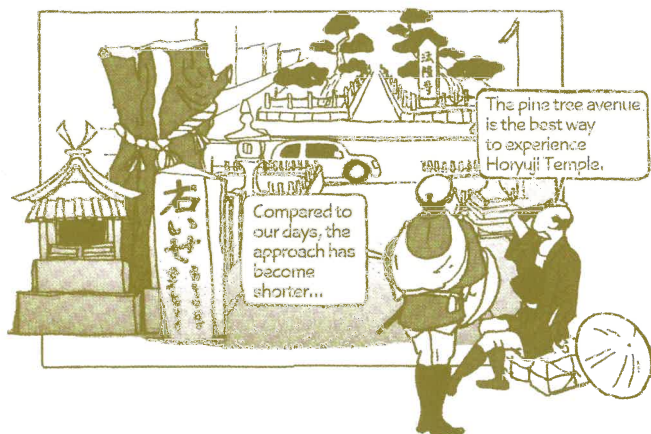
There are various theories on this

- 1 Seabream-shaped stone platform in front of Nandaimon (South Main Gate)**
No matter how big a flood is, the water level never reaches this platform.
- 2 Three storehouses in the temple grounds**
Underground storehouses that are said to open if something happens at Horyuji Temple.
- 3 The four sickles in the finial of the Goju-no-To (Five-storied Pagoda)**
These are said to be talismans against lightning or represent wishes for a good harvest.
- 4 There are no holes made by rain in the ground**
It is said that the foundation is very firm.
- 5 Gate that does not open (Akazu no mon Gate) and gate that does not close (Shimezu no mon Gate)**
It is said that the Akazu no mon (unopened gate) could not be passed through because an Imperial scroll of Empress Suiko (scroll written by the empress) was once hanging there, and the nearby Shimezu no mon (unclosed gate) does not close because it is located on a street that was used as a thoroughfare by the townspeople and had to remain open to allow passage.
- 6 No spider webs in the buildings**
The reason why it is said that there are no spider webs in the buildings of Horyuji Temple is because the people of the temple pay respect to Prince Shotoku and have always kept it clean.
- 7 Sweat dripping beneath the Buddhist altar of Yumedono (Hall of Dreams)**
According to one theory, there is a well underneath the altar so there is a lot of humidity.

Main Attractions of Horyuji Temple (Buildings, etc.)

1 Approach to Horyuji Temple

An avenue of pine trees from Nara-Kaido Road to Horyuji Temple. It is said to have been planted in 1261 during an imperial visit by the Retired Emperor Gosaga, but it became divided in 1932 when National Route 25 was planned.



2 Nandaimon (South Main Gate)

Muromachi (15th c.)
National Treasure

The entrance gate of Horyuji Temple, which was rebuilt in the Muromachi period. The absence of Nio guardian statues at the Nandaimon (South Main Gate) is a feature of the Asuka period (7th c.), but you can also see aspects of the new style of the Muromachi period, such as the large curvature of the roof and the flower-shaped decorative bracket arms.

3 Saiendo (West Octagonal Hall)

Kamakura (13th c.)
National Treasure

This is an octagonal hall that was erected on a small hill in the northwest of the temple grounds. It has the nickname of Mine no Yakushi and is worshiped by common people. Inside the hall, there is a large Seated Statue of Yakushi Nyorai (Nara (8th c.), National Treasure) – the Buddha of healing and medicine. The bell next to the Saiendo (West Octagonal Hall) is used as the bell for tolling every two hours.

4 Nishimuro (West Quarters) and Sangyoin (Hall of Three Sutras)

Kamakura (13th c.)
National Treasure

This was originally the temple quarters or dormitory where priests lived. The south side was remodeled into a hall where lectures were given on the three sutras (Lotus Sutra, Srimaladevi Sutra, and Vimalakirti Sutra).

5 Chumon (Central Gate)

Asuka (8th c.)
National Treasure

The pillars bulge in an entasis design and retain the style of the Asuka period. The oldest pair of Kongo Rikishi Statues (Nio guardian deities enshrined in 711) welcomes visitors in.

6 Goju-no-To (Five-storied Pagoda)

Asuka (8th c.)
National Treasure

The relics of the Buddha are enshrined under this building. It has a central pillar that passes through the center of the structure and its foundation stone contains the enshrined remains. The width of this pagoda becomes narrower the further up it goes. The fifth level is half the width of the first level, making it both stable and beautiful. The first level features clay statues on each of the four sides, with a famous scene of the death of Buddha depicted on the north side.

7 Daikodo (Great Lecture Hall)

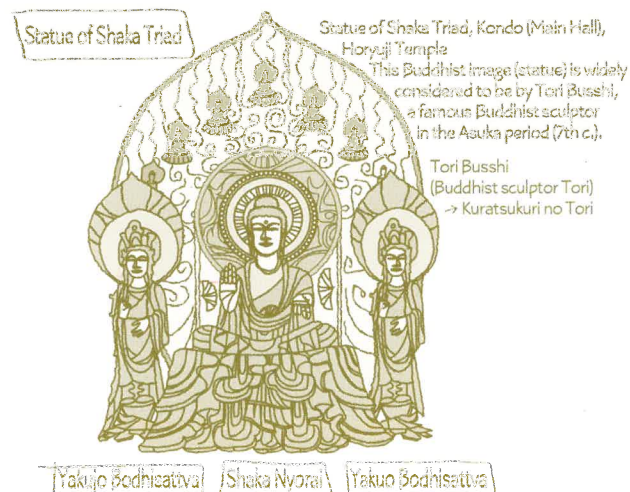
Heian (10th c.)
National Treasure

This is the largest building of Horyuji Temple and serves as the location for Buddhist studies and rituals. The Statues of the Yakushi Triad enshrined in this hall were made in the Heian period and are national treasures.

8 Kondo (Main Hall)

Asuka (8th c.)
National Treasure

It is believed to be the first wooden structure built in Horyuji Temple, as well as the oldest wooden structure in the world. It still retains the characteristics of the Asuka style. In this hall, three principal images (statues of Buddha) have been enshrined, and there are reproductions of the paintings (murals) on the four walls and canopies for each Buddhist image have been hung on the ceiling.



Seated Statue of Yakushi Nyorai (East Bay)

Asuka (7th c.)
National Treasure

This is a Buddhist statue that marks the origin of Horyuji Temple. It is said that Prince Shotoku made it in accordance with the will of his father, Emperor Yomei, to heal his illness.

Statue of Shaka Triad (Central Bay)

Asuka (7th c.)
National Treasure

A life-size statue of Buddha in the likeness of Prince Shotoku was made by Tori Busshi to pray for the prince's recovery from illness and for his rebirth in the Pure Land after his death. The statue is characterized by its long face, almond-shaped eyes, and an archaic smile on the statue's mouth with both ends raised.

Statues of Amida Triad (West Bay)

Kamakura (13th c.)
Important Cultural Property

This is said to have been made for the mother of Prince Shotoku, but it was stolen in 1098 and the current statue was completed in the Kamakura period. The Statue of Attendant Bodhisattva Seishi was moved out of the temple at the end of the Edo period. It is now at the Guimet Museum in France, and so this is a replica.

Statues of the Four Heavenly Kings

Asuka (7th c.)
National Treasure

The Statues of the Four Heavenly Kings are the oldest in Japan and they are characterized by their calm appearance. The expression of the evil ogre that is being trampled underneath each one is interesting.

Statues of Bishamonten and Kichijoten

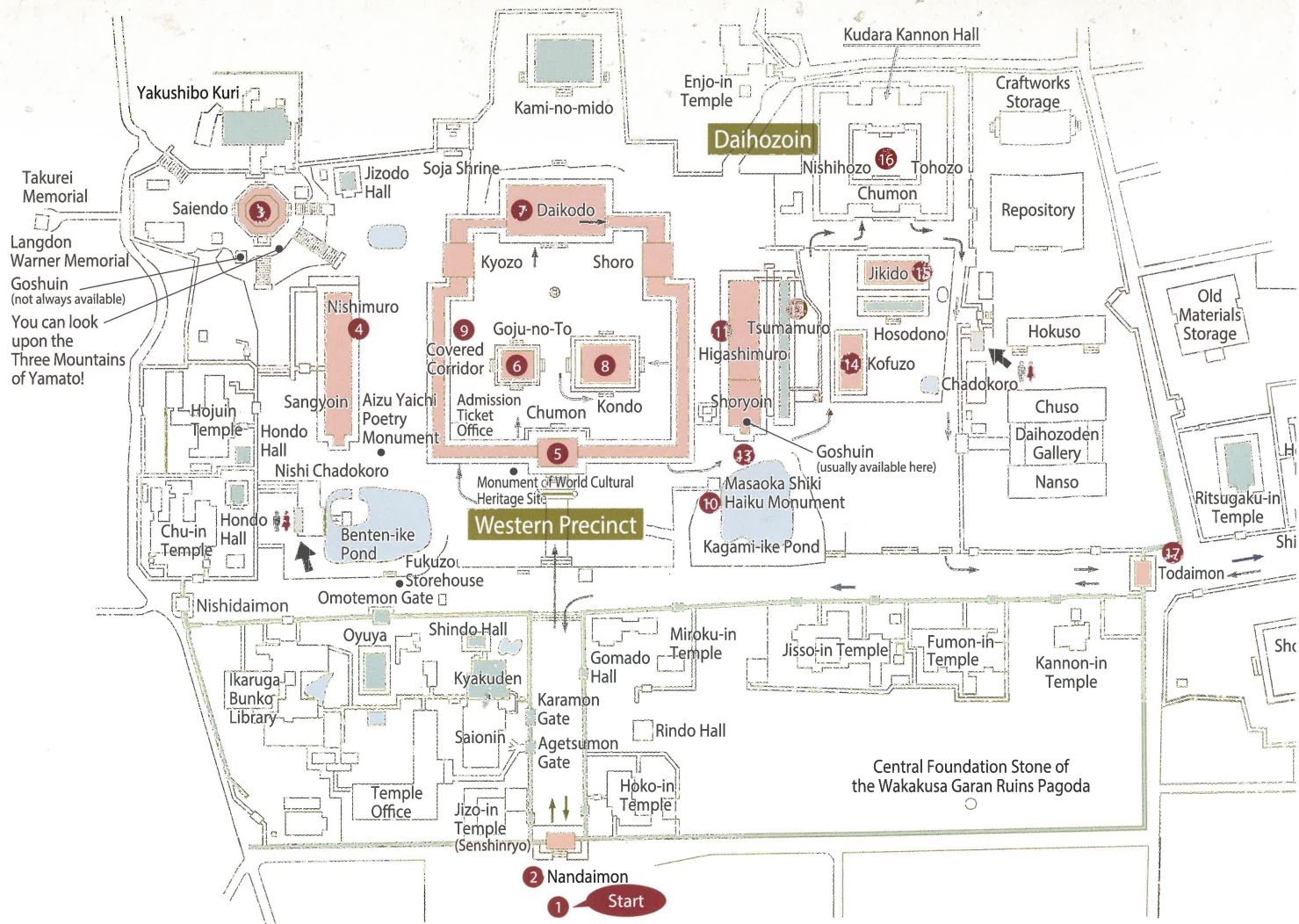
Heian (11th c.)
National Treasure

These are the principal images for the Kondo-Shushoe (New Year's Service at main hall) which prays for the security of the nation in the New Year.

9 Kairo (Covered Corridor)

Asuka (8th c.)
National Treasure

This is a covered corridor that separates Buddhist temple, the Kondo (Main Hall) and the Goju-no-To (Five-storied Pagoda) as the holy precincts of Buddha, and at the same time it is a structure for monks to gather in the pursuit of knowledge and Buddhist services. This corridor is characterized by Asuka style entasis pillars and lattice windows. The Kyozo (Sutra Repository) (Nara period (8th c.) – National Treasure) can be seen to the left of the Chumon (Central Gate), and the Shoro (Bell Tower) (Heian period (10th c.) – National Treasure) to the right.



10 Haiku Monument of Masaoka Shiki

"Eating persimmons, the bell of Horyuji rings"

A haiku written by Masaoka Shiki himself is carved on a monument sitting by the edge of Kagami-ike Pond. In the past, there was a tea house and this was a place of recreation and relaxation.



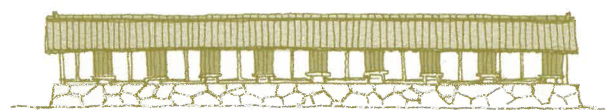
11 Higashimuro (East Quarters)

Nara (8th c.)
National Treasure

12 Tsumamuro (Living Quarters)

Heian (10th c.)
Important Cultural Property

Like Nishimuro (West Quarters), it was a temple quarters or dormitory where priests lived, and the adjacent Tsumamuro (Living Quarters) was also the quarters for their attendants.



Higashimuro (East Quarters) and Tsumamuro (Living Quarters) were both residences where priests and their attendants lived. Depending on the number of monks, there were times when they were crammed into small rooms.

13 Shoryoin (Hall of Prince Shotoku's Soul)

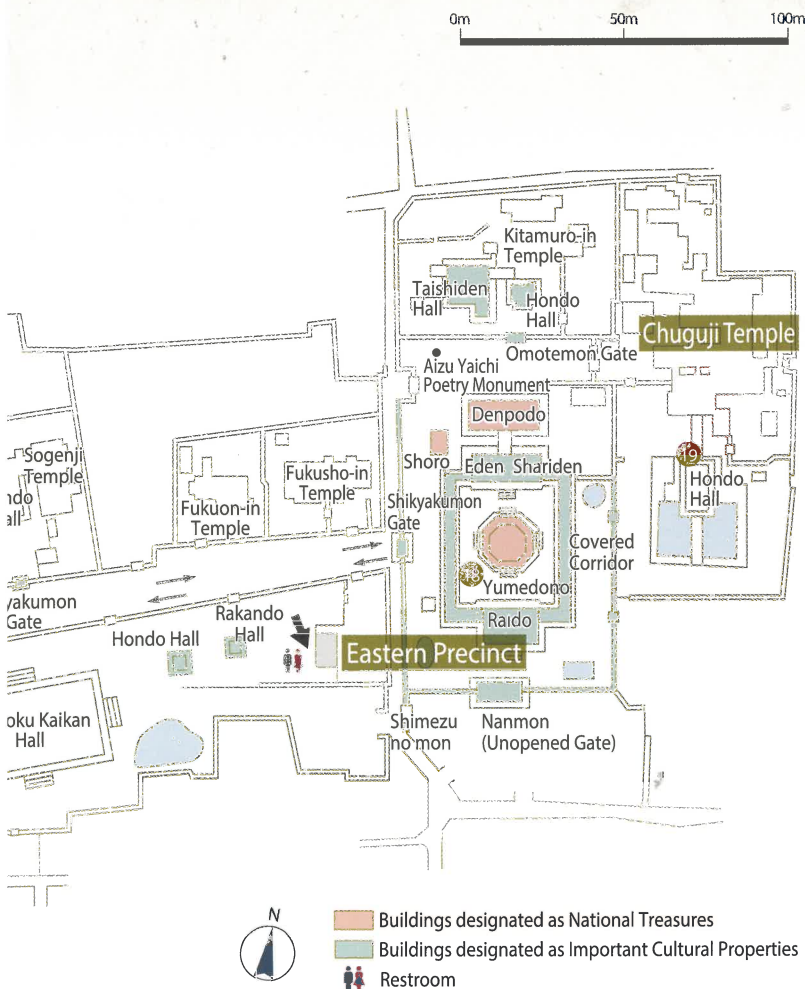
Kamakura (13th c.)
National Treasure

This building is at the center of the Prince Shotoku faith, and the south side of the Higashimuro (East Quarters) was remodeled to enshrine the Statue of Prince Shotoku (National Treasure - Hidden Buddha statue). Oeshiki, a Buddhist memorial service for Prince Shotoku held from March 22 to 24 every year, is the biggest ceremony of Horyuji Temple.

14 Kofuzo (Storehouse)

Heian (9th c.)
National Treasure

This is a raised floor plaster wall storehouse where the temple's treasures are stored and is characterized by its two separate storehouses, one at each end, covered by one roof.



15 Jikido (Refectory)

Nara (8th c.)
National Treasure

This was originally a place for managing temple affairs, but is said to have been converted into a dining hall during the Heian period.

16 Daihozoin (Great Treasure Gallery)

This is a treasure gallery that is centered around the Kudara Kannon Hall. There are also various treasures on display which represent Japan.

Statue of Yumechigai Kannon

Asuka (7th to 8th c.)
National Treasure

This is a Kannon statue that is said to turn nightmares into pleasant dreams, and its gentle and graceful figure is quite fascinating.

Statue of Kumen Kannon (Nine-headed Kannon)

Chinese Tang Dynasty
National Treasure

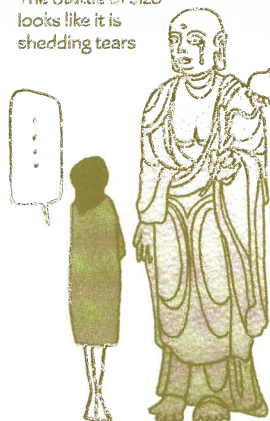
This is a Kannon statue with nine faces consisting of a main face and eight faces on top of the head. This is a finely detailed masterpiece carved from a single block of sandalwood. It was brought to Japan from the Tang Dynasty in ancient China.

Statue of Jizo

Heian (9th c.)
National Treasure

A Jizo bodhisattva statue in the beginning of Heian period (9th c.). It has a sacred gem placed on a lotus-shaped pedestal in its left hand, which is different from what is normally held by such statues.

The Statue of Jizo looks like it is shedding tears



Belongings of Jizo bodhisattva

Shakugo (Pewee staff topped with metal rings traditionally carried by monks)

It is said that it was named Shakugo because of the sound it makes.

There are 6 or 12 rings in the ring shape loop of the head part. 6 rings are more common...

National Treasure - Wooden Standing Jizo Bodhisattva
Daihozoin (Great Treasure Gallery) at Horyu-ji Temple, Nara

Tamamushi Shrine

Asuka (7th c.)
National Treasure

It is so named because tamamushi jewel beetle wings cover the surface below the gilt bronze openwork metal fittings of the palace section. It consists of an Asuka-style palace on the upper part and a dais for a Buddhist image on the lower part, and on its sides there are paintings of tales of the Buddha's previous life such as "Shasin-sikozu."



Please check out the Shasin-sikozu on the right side of the Tamamushi Shrine



4,500 jewel beetles (more than 9,000 wings)



Statue of Kudara Kannon

Asuka (7th c.)
National Treasure

This statue is world-famous as a Buddhist image that represents Japan. It is a tall figure of more than 2 m, holding a water jar in its left hand, and it has a graceful and merciful facial expression.

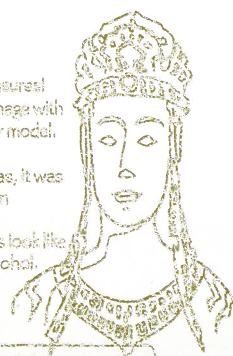


Kudara Kannon

One of the best National Treasures! It is a very beautiful Buddha image with long arms and legs like a super model.

In the Meiji and Taisho eras, it was also called Saketani Kannon (sake-buying Kannon)... Come to think of it, it does look like someone going to buy alcohol.

Made from a single block of camphor wood



● Lady Tachibana Shrine

Asuka (7th to 8th c.)
National Treasure

Amida Nyorai (Amitabha Tathagata) sits on a lotus flower that extends from a lotus pond, and two attendants follow on lotus buds on either side.

● One Million Pagodas

Nara (8th c.)
Important Cultural Property

It is a small wooden pagoda that represents Emperor Shotoku's prayers for peace after a civil war. The center of the pagoda is hollowed out and filled with printed sutras (paper prayer charms), and it is said to be the oldest printed material in the world. In the Nara period, literally one million pagodas were made and dedicated to ten great temples, such as Kohfukuji Temple, Todaiji Temple and Gangoji Temple, but only the ones at Horyuji Temple have survived up until today.

17 Todaimon (Great East Gate)

Nara (8th c.)
National Treasure

If you look up from beneath the gate, it appears as if there are two buildings lined up in front and behind. It is called the Hakyakumon Gate, with four main pillars and eight secondary pillars supporting three ridgepoles, and it has one large roof.

18 Eastern Precinct

This is the former site of the Ikaruganomiya Palace where Prince Shotoku lived, and the location of Joguoin Temple which was built in memory of his virtue after his death.

● Yumedono (Hall of Dreams)

Nara (8th c.)
National Treasure

The main building of the Eastern Precinct.

This is an octagonal hall, with beautiful gilt bronze Hoju Roban (base of pagoda finial) on the top of the roof. In the hall, there is the Statue of Kuse Kannon (Hidden Buddha statue) and the Statue of the Monk Gyoshin Sozu (Nara period - National Treasure), who is said to have built the Eastern Precinct.

● Statue of Kuse Kannon

Asuka (7th c.)
National Treasure

This is said to be a statue of Prince Shotoku and has long been kept secret from the public eye as a Hibutsu (hidden) Buddha statue. However, it was unveiled to the public in 1884 by artist researchers Ernest Fenollosa (USA) and Okakura Tenshin. (Special public unveiling every spring and fall)



19 Chuguji Temple

It is said that the Nakanomiya Palace of Empress Anahobe no Hashihito, the mother of Prince Shotoku, was used as a temple.

● Statue of Hanka Shiyui Bodhisattva (Thought to be Cintamani Chakra Budhisattva)

Asuka (7th c.)
National Treasure

Made from camphor wood, its right hand is on its cheek with a gentle smile, and its right leg is crossed.

● Tenjukoku Shucho Mandala (Replica)

This is the oldest embroidery in Japan. It is said to have been made by Princess Tachibana after the death of Prince Shotoku. It is a precious textile that shows us how things were in those days, with depictions of the clothes people wore along with marvelous stitching of letters on a depiction of a shell of a turtle.

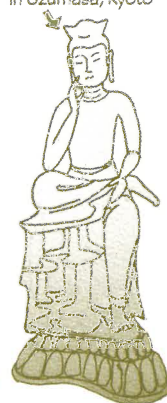


The Hanka Shiyui Statue of Chuguji Temple is most beautiful when viewed from a slightly forward-right angle.

Absolute masterpiece of Asuka sculpture (Archaic smile)

Hanka Shiyui Statue of Chuguji Temple (National Treasure)

Hanka Shiyui Statue (National Treasure) at Koryuji Temple in Uzumasa, Kyoto

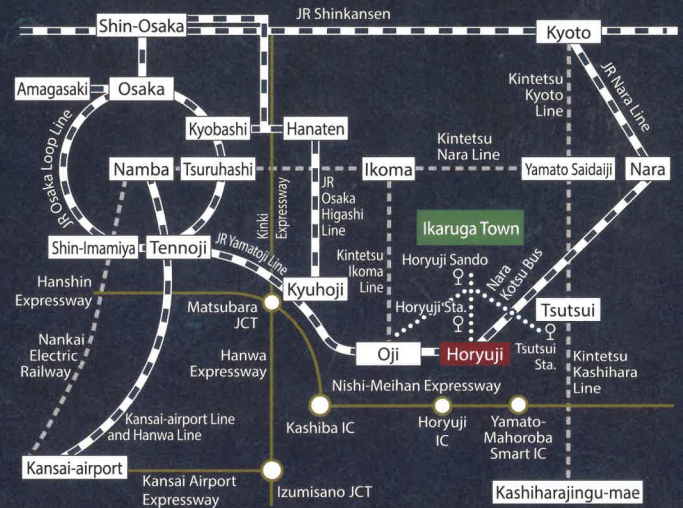


MAIN ANNUAL EVENTS (Buddhist Events)

Shari-ko (at Toin shariden <East Reliquary Hall>)	January 1-3
Kondo Shusho-e	January 7-14
Joguoin Shusho-e (at Yumedono <Hall of Visions>)	January 16-18
Saiendo Shuni-e	February 1-3
Saiendo Tsuinashiki	February 3
Sanzo-e (at Sangyoin)	February 5
Nehan-e (at Daikodo <Great Lecture Hall>)	February 15
(Memorial service to be held on the anniversary of the death of Buddha. The day when the Buddha passed away.)	
Oeshiki Taiya Hoyo (at Shoryoin)	March 21
Oeshiki (at Shoryoin)	March 22-24
(Memorial service to be held on the anniversary of the death of Prince Shotoku.)	
Bussho-e (at Daikodo <Great Lecture Hall>)	April 8
(Memorial service to be held on the birthday of Buddha.)	
Geango (at Nishimuro <The West Room>)	May 16 - August 15
Benten-e (at the Benten Shrine)	July 7
Toin Jizo-e (at Denpodo)	July 24
Urabon-e (at Ritsugaku-in Temple)	August 14-15
Jion-e (at Daikodo <Great Lecture Hall>)	November 13
Shoman-e (at Daikodo <Great Lecture Hall>)	November 15
Yumedono Honzon Tokubetsu Kaihi	
(Special spring opening of Yumedono to allow worship of the Honzon.)	
(Special autumn opening of Yumedono to allow worship of the Honzon.)	
	April 11 - May 18
	October 22 - November 22

Access to Ikaruga Town (around Horyuji Temple)

<Map of Ikaruga Town surroundings>



<From Kansai International Airport>



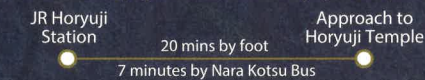
<From JR Shin-Osaka Station>



<From JR Kyoto Station / Kintetsu Kyoto Station>



<From Horyuji Station to Horyuji Temple>



If you are looking for tourist information about Ikaruga Town

Horyuji i Center

(General Incorporated Ikaruga Tourism Association)

1-8-25 Horyuji, Ikaruga-cho, Ikoma-gun, Nara Prefecture 636-0116

TEL: 0745-74-6800 FAX: 0745-75-9090

- Opening hours: 8:30 AM to 6:00 PM (open throughout the year)
- Admission is free (however, there is a charge for renting the multi-purpose hall)
- Bicycle rental is available
- Sightseeing volunteer tour guides are available (advance reservation required)

<https://horyuji-ikaruga.nara.or.jp>

JR Horyuji Station

Tourist Information Center

Within Horyuji station, Yamatoji Line

- Business hours: 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM

Illustrations by Toru Tsubooka

In cooperation with Ikaruga Town Tourism Volunteer Association

Issued by

General Incorporated
Ikaruga Tourism Association

*Information is correct as of December 2024.

Please check before visiting as changes may be made without prior notice.