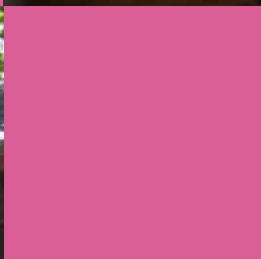
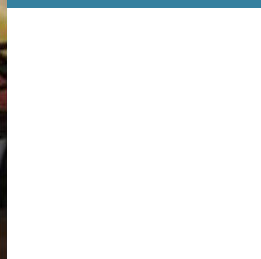
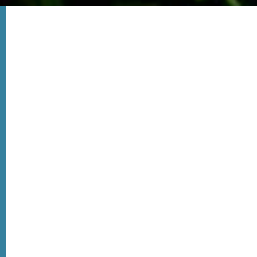
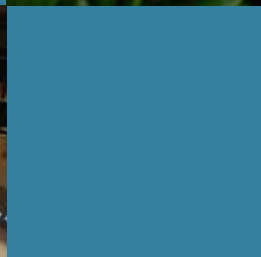
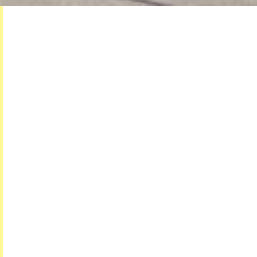
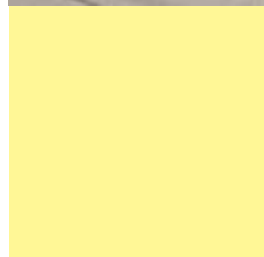


奈の良

Things
to
see
in
Nara!!

Na no Ra

Katsuragi: the birthplace of Japanese culture



P.2 : Katsuragi: Birthplace of Sumo Wrestling

P.3 : A Road that Spans the Ages/Chujo Mochi

P.4-5 : Buddhism Brought to Life: *Oneri Kuyou* at Taimadera

P.6-7 : Hiking with Na no Ra: Mystical Mount Nijo

Issue 6

Katsuragi: Birthplace of Sumo Wrestling



Sumo wrestling is one of the most instantly recognised examples of Japanese culture, and is famous all over the world. But who really knows about sumo beyond its appearance? Did you know, for instance, that sumo contains 88 different 'moves' or techniques? For this issue of Na no Ra, I visited the supposed birthplace of sumo in Taima, Katsuragi City, in an attempt to find out more.

Katsuragi City is home to the Kehayaza Sumo Museum, which opened in 1990. It contains a vast amount of information relating to sumo wrestling, and is popular with both locals and foreign visitors.

Discover Sumo...

The Sumo Museum's main attraction offers a truly unique experience to visitors. That's right: the Kehayaza is home to a full-sized sumo ring! Meanwhile, the second floor is overflowing with exhibitions and insights into the history of sumo wrestling. At the museum, I had the chance to talk to Mr. Koike (the manager) and Mr. Yoshimura, head of the Kehaya Sumo Jinku (traditional sumo song) Association.



The Kehayaza's full-size Sumo ring

The first thing I learned was about the relationship between sumo and Katsuragi. In the reign of Emperor Suinin, there was a strong man from Taima in Yamato Province known as Taima no Kehaya. Kehaya was searching for an opponent against whom he could test his strength. Having heard this, the emperor summoned Nomi no Sukune from Izumo province, and the subsequent bout between the two became the first ever sumo contest. Despite all his confidence, Taima no Kehaya lost his life in this competition. Many years from then, Sumo is thought to have reached its current form and become a spectator sport in the Edo period (1603-1868).

The Kehayaza is also packed with pictures and photos relating to sumo history and the sport's current wrestlers. In addition, there are lots of sumo tools and materials that make the trip truly fascinating, including the ornamental aprons worn by wrestlers as they first enter the ring, and a traditional wrestler-ranking list.

Perhaps Taima no Kehaya would be happy if he knew how long sumo would continue to be loved by the people. For me, the sumo Museum was a really fascinating trip not only because of my experience in Olympic wrestling, but also because one can really learn in detail about the sport's different techniques and remarkable history.



Taima vs. Nomi

Experience Sumo!

The Sumo Museum also holds events featuring traditional sumo song-stories known as jinku on a regular basis. Better than this however is the sumo wrestling experience! Booking is required in advance, but anyone is free to take part. Massively popular amongst foreign visitors and tourists, this experience allows you to wear either an 18-meter loincloth or a sumo costume, enter the ring, receive some instructions and actually try your hand at sumo!

I was lucky enough to try both the loincloth and the costume, the latter of which people found particularly hilarious. The loincloth is recommended for the brave! If you get the chance to visit the Sumo Museum, give the sumo experience a try and deepen your understanding of this amazing sport whilst feeling like a real wrestler.



Trying the loincloth...



and the costume!

Doing my best to take up the role, I entered the ring and purified the ground by spreading salt. Even throwing the salt was difficult, but after putting in a little extra effort I finally managed to make it fly. Next, I tried stomping on the ground, as we often see in videos of sumo, before having a mock bout and practicing the face-slap technique so familiar to sumo fans. The ground that makes up the ring is remarkably hard, and I thought that real wrestlers must get injured quite often, so please take care as you wrestle!

Sumo: Japan's national sport. Visit the Kehayaza Sumo Museum in Katsuragi City to both learn about and experience this fantastic piece of Japanese culture.



Wrestler ranking board

Mouloud Hammadou

See the guide to the Kehayaza by Katsuragi City for more details!



<http://www.city.katsuragi.nara.jp/index.cfm/23,4225,89,250,html>

A Road that Spans the Ages

Takenouchi Kaido

• Japan's Oldest National Road

Roads make connections between people and things. If there were no roads, there would be no crossing over mountains, and no mixing with people from different countries. It is roads that bring us together, and roads that connect the world in which we live.

The Takenouchi Kaido is a 26km road that connects Sakai in the East of Osaka Prefecture to Katsuragi in Western Nara. 1400 years ago, it served as an important road between the port of Naniwa (today's Osaka) and the capital of Asuka, in central Nara prefecture. As a result, it is said to be Japan's oldest 'national' road, with envoys to Tang China and embassies from other countries visiting Asuka thought to have used it at some point. In a way therefore, the Takenouchi Kaido is the link that connected ancient Japan with the outside world.

• Takenouchi Kaido and Shiba Ryotaro

Shiba Ryotaro was a Japanese novelist famous for his historical and detective fiction. When he was young, Shiba is said to have lived in Katsuragi for a period. In the travel novel 'On the Highways', he referred to the Takenouchi Kaido as the 'only road that deserves to be designated as a national treasure'.

Shiba also talks about his memories of the area in the novel. He writes that one day, an old woman in a red jumper passed him by on a bicycle as she came riding downhill. As Shiba walked up the hill, he thought for a moment that he had seen the woman smile at him, and turned to look back. Looking downhill however, the woman had disappeared between the houses. Although it was just a single moment, for Shiba this became a memory of the Takenouchi

Kaido that he would never forget.

Roads are not just something we walk down: they are a place where memories are made and where we meet the people who make up our lives.

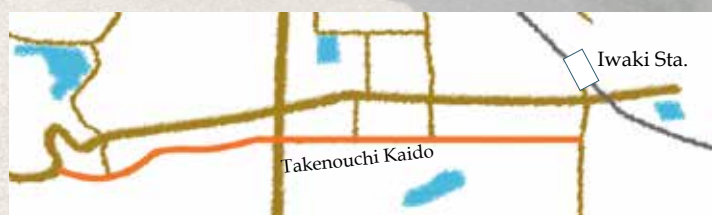
• Takenouchi Kaido Today

On leaving the main exit of Iwaki station on the Kintetsu Minami Osaka Line, head left and one comes out into a small, quiet town. Going further west, the road turns into a long, narrow slope. Though its appearance may have changed since ancient times, its role as an important road has remained the same. In the Edo Period, there were inns here to rest pilgrims who were heading along the road to the Ise Grand Shrine. The remains of this can still be seen today, with houses and inns from across the ages lining the side of the road. With not a single tall building in sight, the view of Mount Nijo whilst walking is another highlight.

Although the times may change, the Takenouchi Kaido has remained. Once used for foreign relations, it has become a site of memories, and today connects us with times gone by. Try walking down the Takenouchi Kaido, and experience old and new Japan at once for yourself.

Lee Ho-Seon

Map of the Takenouchi Kaido



*Shiba Ryotaro 'Kaido wo Yuku', Asahi Bunko

Local
Sweets

Chujo Mochi

In Katsuragi, there is a type of sweet mochi - or sticky rice cake - made with the herb yomogi and topped with sweet azuki beans, that has long been adored by the locals. This local delicacy is known as chujo mochi, and I paid a visit to the local sweetshop, the Chujo-do close to Taimadera station, to give it a try.

At the Chujo-do, azuki beans are placed on top of the soft yomogi mochi so as to resemble a peony flower. The unique aroma of the yomogi and the sweetness of the azuki gives the chujo mochi an exquisite balance, and its softness is such that it can be cut with just a small wooden skewer.

Inside the shop, you can rest your weary feet while you eat and watch the mochi being made. The 'Chujo Mochi Tea Set' uses not only locally-picked yomogi for the mochi, but also Nara-produced rice, and comes served with green tea. The tea too is 'Yamato tea' grown in the prefecture, making this afternoon treat a must for those who want to try the natural blessings Nara has to offer.

Why not stop by the Chujo-do, right in front of Taimadera Station, and enjoy a truly Japanese afternoon tea?



Opening Times

- 9:00 - 18:00
- Close in event of sell-out

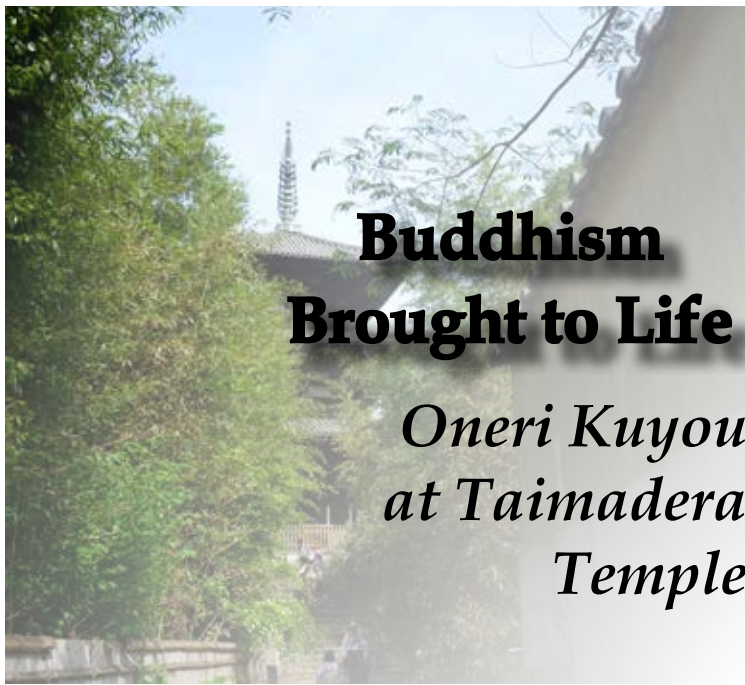
Closed Periods

- July
- Mid-Late August
- December 31-Early January

See the homepage for details!



<http://www.chujodo.com/> (JP only)



Buddhism Brought to Life

Oneri Kuyou at Taimadera Temple

① Having got off the train at Taimadera station on the Kintetsu Minami Osaka line, I could tell something was different from the sheer number of people. It was mid-May and swelteringly hot, yet we were all heading uphill to pay witness to a spectacle. This was the day of the *oneri kuyou* ceremony at Taimadera temple: where Japanese Buddhism comes to life.

Arriving in the temple grounds, a high wooden bridge had been put up between two of the temple's wooden halls, creating a path that cut over 100 metres through the air. Local families were sat waiting in the shade, having undoubtedly arrived hours beforehand to get the best view. And what a view it turned out to be. For westerners, *oneri kuyou* (literally meaning 'offering parade') offers an invaluable insight onto a mysterious religion that is often thought of in no greater terms than 'zen' and 'meditation'. It only takes place once a year, and once seen will never be forgotten.



The *raigohashi* wooden bridge

② Taimadera temple was founded in the seventh century, with documents noting that *oneri kuyou* is said to date back over 1000 years, and to the Kamakura period in its current form. The ceremony is held on May 14th every year, the anniversary of the death of the nun Chujo-hime. Chujo-hime was the pious daughter of a nobleman in the middle ages. She resided at Taimadera and, according to legend, over a single night wove a tapestry – the taima mandala – depicting the Buddhist heaven or 'pure land' that awaits the faithful after death. The finished mandala is on display in the temple's main building. Chujo-hime is said to have been so faithful that on her death a retinue of 25 Bodhisattva (a kind of Buddhist angel) descended from heaven to guide her to the Pure Land. It is this divine procession, passing from heaven to the human world before returning, that is reproduced in the costumes and masks of *oneri kuyou*, some of which are hundreds of years old. Never before had I seen such a



The procession returns

③ vivid, poignant illustration of Japanese Buddhist belief. Right here in Nara, one can come face-to-face with the oldest example of Pure Land Buddhist proselytising in all of Japan.

Around 4 P.M., a ceremonial chorus of flutes, bells, and conches echoes through the temple grounds. Everyone turns to the main hall of worship, from the edge of which extends the tall, wooden bridge. The procession begins in simple enough fashion, with local children dressed in kimono walking above the crowds. Next come a group of Buddhist monks, reminding the onlookers of the day's religious overtones. Soon, the music changes to the relentless chanting of sutras, and the crowd waits in expectation. The first of the masked figures – the Bodhisattva Jizo – emerges and walks down the bridge as if hovering over the heads of the spectators. Then come the spectacular gold masks and costumes of the 25 Bodhisattva, walking one after the other, slowly and deliberately, to the hall on the other side of the temple grounds.

4 The whole event is rich with symbolism: the deities come from the main hall, with the mandala symbolising heaven, and cross the bridge to the smaller shaba-do, which symbolises our impure 'human realm', where a statue of Chujo-hime in Buddha-form awaits them. The last of the Bodhisattva to walk down the bridge are the most eye-catching. Representing the Bodhisattva Kannon, one of them carries an empty lotus pedestal which is paraded before the crowd with ritual movements. Once at the shaba-do, the statue of Chujo-hime is placed on the pedestal and the procession makes its return up the bridge to the Pure Land. In the fading light, the statue returns with the Bodhisattva to the main hall, and with the chanting still in the background the event comes to a close.

Oneri kuyou initially began, as mentioned above, as a method of illustrating Pure Land Buddhist doctrine to the people. In the middle-ages, when the idea of salvation for the faithful attained by relying on Bodhisattva was still a very radical one, the ceremony



Bodhisattva Jizo

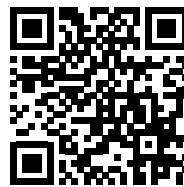


6 religious scene that quite literally displays Pure Land Buddhist ideas about life after death.

Tucked away at the foot of rugged the Katsuragi Mountains, Taimadera's yearly spectacle is not to be missed for those who want to deepen their understanding of Japanese culture and get an up-close view of one of its most important aspects: Buddhist belief. Taimadera is also well-known for its cherry blossoms and peonies in the spring, lotus flowers in the summer, and coloured leaves in the autumn.

Tom Heaton

See the Gonenin homepage below for details!



Taimadera, Gonenin (JP only)
<http://taimadera-gonenin.or.jp>

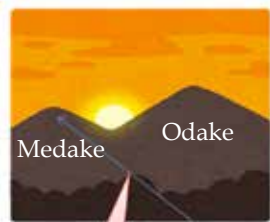
5 with its robes and masks served to make the doctrine more easily understandable. Another important aspect of the ceremony is its connection to the surrounding community: the performers are almost all local residents who perform every year and have attended since they were children. With most of the roles chosen every year by ballot, *oneri kuyou* is a fixed event on their calendar. In addition, the Chief Priest of the temple's Gonenin tells us that the ceremony acts as it did in times gone by as an expression of personal belief and faith in the Pure Land Doctrine. *Oneri kuyou* is thus a deeply personal affair for everyone involved, something that is evident in the care and dedication shown every year by the people of Katsuragi to reproduce for the masses a key part of their beliefs.

Japanese Buddhism goes far beyond the ideas of Zen and meditation that many in the West are familiar with. *Oneri kuyou* illustrates this in the most vivid way possible, re-enacting a

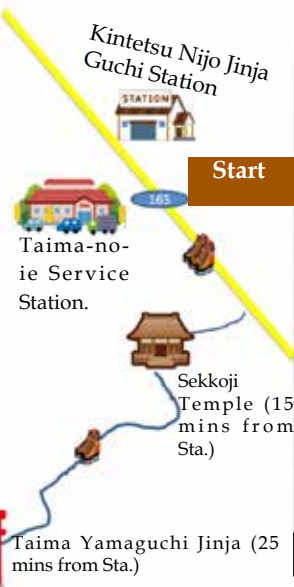


Bodhisattva mask

A Hike around Mystical Mt. Nijo



Hiking with Na no Ra!



Yuusenji Temple - peak of Metake 35 mins

Yuusenji Temple approx 40 min walk from station

Photo Spot!

Start

Taima-no-ie Service Station.

Sekkoji Temple (15 mins from Sta.)

Taima Yamaguchi Jinja (25 mins from Sta.)



A complete view of the Nara Basin from the top of Mt. Nijo!

Mt. Nijo is a mountain on the north side of the Katsuragi mountain range in the south-west of Nara prefecture. Formed from two main peaks, the mountain possesses a special kind of beauty. The surrounding area too is awash with mystical religious and historical sites, such as the Taima Yamaguchi Jinja Shinto shrine, and Sekkoji Buddhist temple, which is home to the oldest stone Buddha statue in all Japan. This issue's hiking route takes us through all these sites and more, so get ready for a truly magical experience.

Taima Yamaguchi Jinja Shrine

Everything is quiet in the foothills of Mt. Nijo. At the entrance to the shrine is a stone torii gate: these common features of Shinto shrines are said to separate our human world from the sacred land of the gods inside. I met with the Takatsu family who run the shrine at the main hall, and asked why the torii faced Mt. Nijo rather than the path into the shrine. They told me that this was likely done to honour the 7th century Prince Otsu, who was falsely accused of rebellion and was buried on the mountain. Itsuki Hiroki writes in 'Pilgrimages to 100 Temples' that the people of Yamato (Nara) saw the shrine as representing their world, and the mountain across the river as heaven. Mt. Nijo is, in other words, the border between the worlds of life and death.



Mr. Takatsu and the shrine's second torii

Resident Deities

There are three deities enshrined at Taima Yamaguchi Jinja, the latter two of which are said to be married. The oldest and most venerated of the three is Ooyamazuminomikoto, who is said to calm the spirits of the departed that inhabit the mountain to the right of the shrine. The pair of married gods came to be worshipped here with a legend that the wife set fire to her delivery room in an act of purification after being suspected of adultery by her husband, before going on to give birth to three children in the midst of the blaze. This legend led to rumors that the shrine could aid with relationships, marriage and child-raising. Even today, the human, drama-like nature of the gods in these stories brings a smile to one's face. The majority of foreign visitors are likely thinking: just where are all these gods, then? In Japanese Shinto belief, the gods in shrines are invisible, but their presence can be felt in one's heart.

Shinto gods are said to be limitless in number and exist in all things: mountains, rocks, rivers. Shrines are the places where they can be appreciated, and gratitude can be shown towards them.

Taima Yamaguchi Jinja is surrounded by aging cedars, and deep in the forest the atmosphere is spiritual to the extreme. The sound of worshippers clapping before the main hall (an act said to summon the gods) fills the air, and their wishes to be free from misfortune seem to echo through the trees.

Festivals

According to the Takatsu family, Taima Yamaguchi Jinja is recorded in the 'Engishiki', a 10th century list of official shrines, as a 'great shrine' that received offerings from the imperial court. It holds four festivals a year, with its rice planting festival on April 23rd dating back to the Edo period. Here, after the ritual offering of prayers, a performance of traditional rice-planting can be enjoyed, featuring cow-costumes and rice cakes offered to the gods being distributed. This is an ancient Shinto ritual, where eating the same thing as the gods is said to provide one with energy. The local children all apparently enjoy the festival after hiking, somehow reflecting their deep respect for nature.

Before the start of your hiking trip, stop by Taima Yamaguchi shrine and refresh your spiritual side!



Rice-planting festival at Taima Yamaguchi Jinja

Taima Yamaguchi Jinja

<http://www.taimayamaguchi-jinja.org/>

See the homepage for more details!

Sekkoji Temple: Mystery in the Foothills of Mt. Nijo

Legend of Chujo-hime

The other key legendary figure associated with Mt. Nijo is the medieval princess-nun Chujo-hime. Residing in Taimadera temple during the reign of Emperor Seimu, Chujo-hime once received a divine instruction to 'draw a thread from the stem of a lotus flower and cleanse it in the sacred well of Sekkoji Temple'. The legend goes that when she hung the thread to dry on a cherry blossom tree near the well, it dried in 5 colours, and the princess brought the thread back to Taimadera to weave in one night the fabled Taima Mandala. The well where she purified the thread remains to this day in Sekkoji temple. Sekkoji temple's sect of Pure Land Buddhism originated in India before being transmitted to Japan via China, and the Taima Mandala depicts this 'Pure Land' or Heaven in rich detail. In his book 'The Writings of the Departed', the author Orikuchi Shinobu takes up the legend of Chujo-hime and describes how in the past the Japanese people believed that the Pure Land lay where the sun set: the beliefs of the ancient Japanese were certainly deep-seated in nature.



Statue of Chujo-hime and the well

Japan's Oldest Stone Buddha

Sekkoji temple also contains Japan's oldest stone Buddha statue. Ancient documents claim that the Emperor Tenji (who reigned from 668) visited the site and noticed a strange light coming from the ground. The emperor ordered the ground to be dug, and there they discovered a stone in the shape of the Buddha. This is then said to have been carved into the image of the Buddha Maitreya and worshipped with the temple built around it. An alternative archaeological theory, according to the temple's Head Priest, is that the statue was carved from a stone on Mt. Nijo by refugees from the Korean kingdom of Paekche following their defeat in the Battle of Baekgang in 683. Despite its mysterious origins, what remains certain is that at some point over the course of history, the statue vanished from the temple.

Or so it was thought, until April 1991. An archaeological survey was conducted at Sekkoji temple whilst the building was being repaired, and the Buddha's head and chest were discovered in the earth. Carved from one single stone, this unprecedented discovery made headlines all over Japan.

Despite having met with fire numerous times, the re-carved face of the Buddha looks somehow friendly. The Head Priest tells me that just looking at it makes him feel at ease. Why not pay a visit to Sekkoji temple, and see a real piece of history with this over 1300 year-old statue?



Japan's oldest surviving stone Buddha

Flowers and Gardens

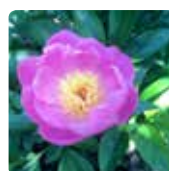
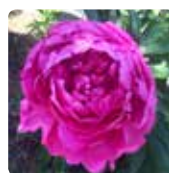
Sekkoji temple's flowers too are most certainly not to be missed. The temple contains some 2000 flowers of 300 types of peony, enough to give it the nickname of the 'Peony Temple'. The spring peonies are best seen in late April, and the winter peonies from early-late December. In addition, 1000 American Peonies best seen from early-mid May are also grown here. Peonies were originally grown in temples after the ancient monk Kukai brought them back from China as a medicine. At Sekkoji, the Head Priest manages the planting, pruning, digging and fertilizing himself. I asked for their secret to growing such beautiful peonies, and the Head Priest answered with an inspiring story: 'in the past I would try my hardest to grow the peonies as well as I could, but they would all wither and it caused me a lot of pain. However, I soon learned the importance of picking myself up and vowing to plant another variety next year. Perhaps this is what is really meant by the Buddhist teaching of impermanence.'

Visit Sekkoji before your hiking trip and wow yourself with its mythical well, the ancient stone Buddha, and its beautiful peony flowers.

Please see the homepage for more details!



Sekkoji Temple
<http://sekkouji.or.jp/>

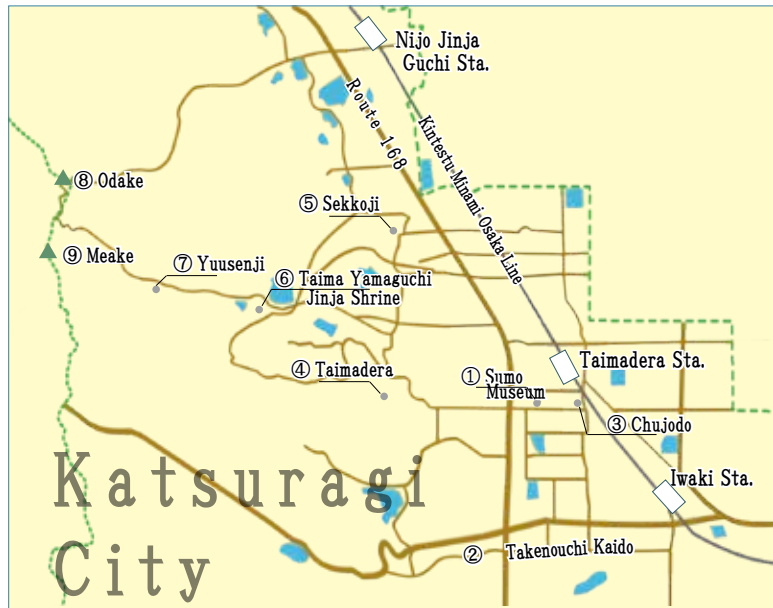


Peonies blossoming when we visited in May

'Na no Ra' Issue 6: Katsuragi City

For this issue of Na no Ra, we visited Katsuragi City in western Nara Prefecture. With its vivid depictions of Buddhist belief, 'Sumo experience' opportunities in the area where the sport was born, ancient road, temples and shrines, Katsuragi is truly a place where one can feel and experience Japanese culture and history up close. Make the trip and see for yourself!

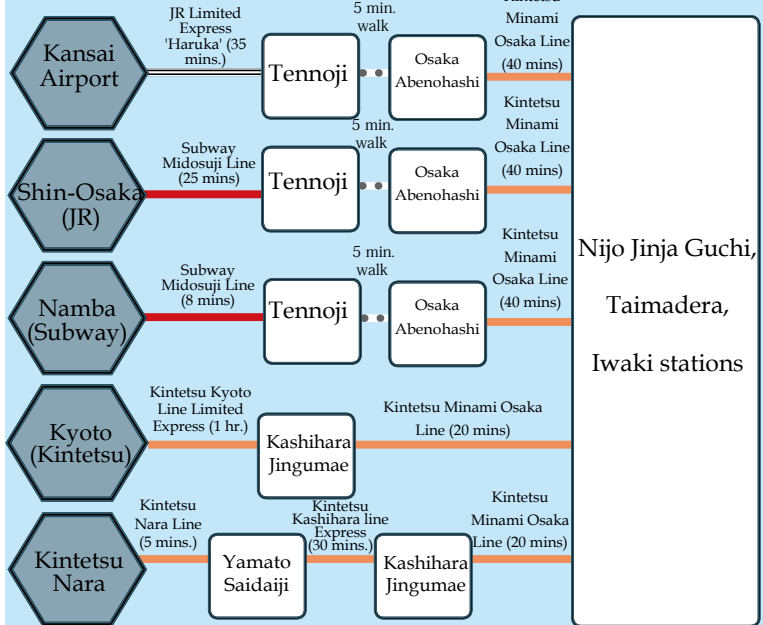
Katsuragi City



- P.2 Katsuragi: Birthplace of Sumo : ①
- P.3 A road that Spans the Ages/Chujo Mochi : ②, ③
- P.4-5 Oneri Kuyou at Taimadera : ④
- P.6-7 A Hike around Mystical Mt. Nijo : ⑤, ⑥, ⑦, ⑧

Access

By train:



By car:

- 50 Mins. from Kansai Airport
- 40 Mins. from Osaka City
- Come off the Minami-Hanna road at the Katsuragi Interchange and drive 5 mins.
- Come off the Nishi-Meihan Expway at the Kashiba Interchange and drive 20 mins. down Route 168.
- Come off the Nishi-Meihan Expway at the Kashiwara Interchange and drive 20 mins. down Route 168.

What is 'Na no Ra'?

Hello!

We're the Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs) 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!

Nara Pref's CIRs:



A Note from the Editors:

'Na no Ra' would like to sincerely thank the people of Katsuragi City and all those who assisted in the creation of this issue: The Katsuragi City Sumo Museum, Taimadera, Sekkoji, Taima Yamaguchi Jinja, and Chujodo.

'Na no Ra'

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