

Nara Prefecture

Thinking deeper about World Heritage

World Heritage Journal



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Nara Prefecture, Japan

Special Feature:

"Buddhist Monuments in the Horyu-ji Area"

Temples called Horyu-ji and Hokki-ji, located in Ikaruga-cho, Ikoma-gun, Nara Prefecture, are component parts of the World Heritage property which was inscribed on the World Heritage List for the first time in Japan in 1993. In this edition of the World Heritage Journal, we introduce the value of Japan's first World Heritage Site, "the Buddhist Monuments in the Horyu-ji Area", as well as some of the less noticeable structures that are inscribed as components parts in the World Heritage List.

With this journal in hand, we invite you to walk around Ikaruga area from a different perspective.

What is Horyu-ji?

Horyu-ji is a Buddhist temple that Prince Shotoku set his mind to establish in Ikaruga, the mid-west of the Nara Basin and completed around 607.

Horyu-ji's vast precincts include the Sai-in Garan (Western Precinct), with its pagoda and Kondo (main hall), and the To-in Garan (Eastern Precinct), built to hold a memorial service for Prince Shotoku on the site of the Ikaruga Palace where he lived.

Besides, there is a wealth of cultural heritage to be preserved and passed on, including Buddhist statues, Buddhist altar fittings, scriptures, and various religious events from ancient times to the present day,

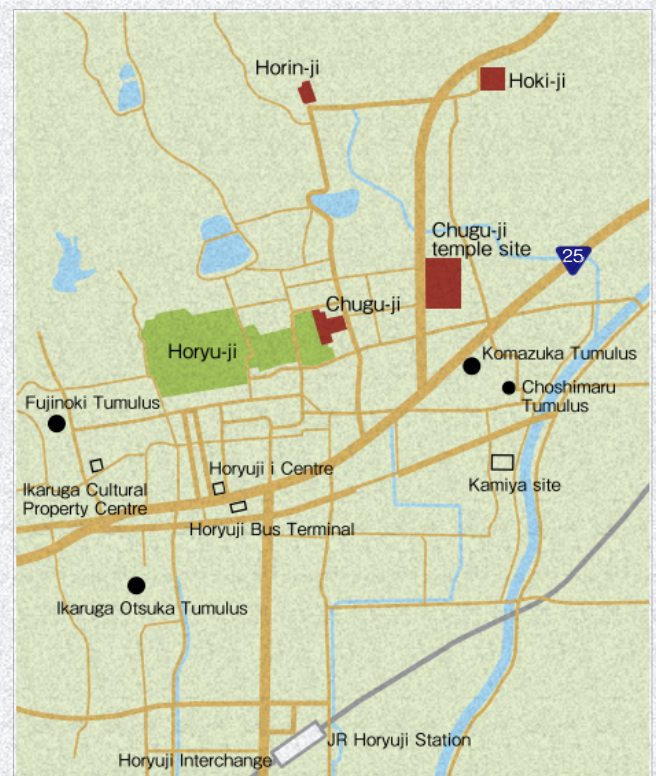
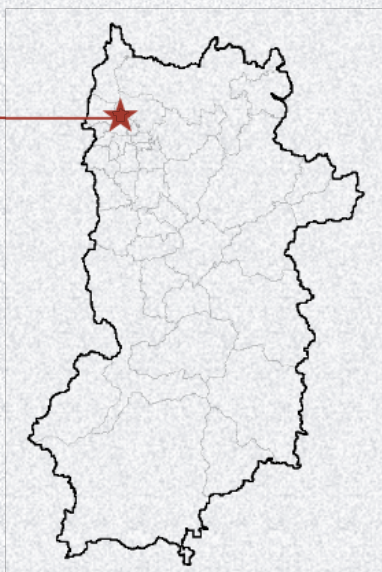


To-in (eastern precinct) Yumedono (Hall of Dreams)

<National Treasure>

This is the main hall of To-in, an octagonal round hall built in the Nara period (8th century).

Ikaruga-cho



Access

20 minutes on foot from Horyuji Station.
5 minutes on foot from Horyuji Busstop.
About 3 km from Horyuji Interchange.

What is the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of “the Buddhist Monuments in the Horyu-ji Area”?

The following is a summary of the OUV of “the Buddhist Monuments in the Horyu-ji Area” as inscribed on the World Heritage List, although it is a little long and difficult to follow.

Summary of OUV (some additions and alterations have been made)

The “Buddhist Monuments in the Horyu-ji Area” are in Nara Prefecture. This World Heritage Site comprises **48 wooden buildings** in two temples, Horyu-ji and Hoki-ji.

“The Buddhist Monuments in the Horyu-ji Area” are the existing oldest Buddhist monuments in Japan, built shortly after the arrival of Buddhism in Japan, and have had a profound influence on subsequent temple architecture.

The 11 buildings on the property date from the late 7th and 8th centuries and are among **the oldest existent wooden structures in the world**. The original Horyu-ji structures were destroyed by fire in 670, but their remnants remain beneath the present-day precincts of the temple.

Reconstruction began almost immediately after the fire and continued until the early 8th century.

These **masterpieces of wooden architecture** are important not only in the history of art, as they show the adoption of Chinese Buddhist architecture and layout into Japanese culture, but also in the history of religion, as their construction coincides with the arrival of Buddhism in Japan from China via the Korean Peninsula. From the time of its construction, Horyu-ji was under the protection of the imperial families. From the 12th century onwards, it attracted many devotees due to **the growing veneration of Prince Shotoku**. As a result, Horyu-ji has always been maintained and conserved in perfect condition.

Point!

It is extremely rare for a person’s name to be spoken of in terms of OUV, as is the case with “Prince Shotoku”. Until 1986, seven years before the property was inscribed on the World Heritage List, the 10,000-yen note showed the image of “Prince Shotoku”, perhaps because, due to the influence of “Japan Money” in the 1980s, “Prince Shotoku” might have been a well-known figure abroad.



2021-2022
聖徳太子没後1400年

In addition, the following “criteria” were applied as conditions for inscription as a World Heritage Site.

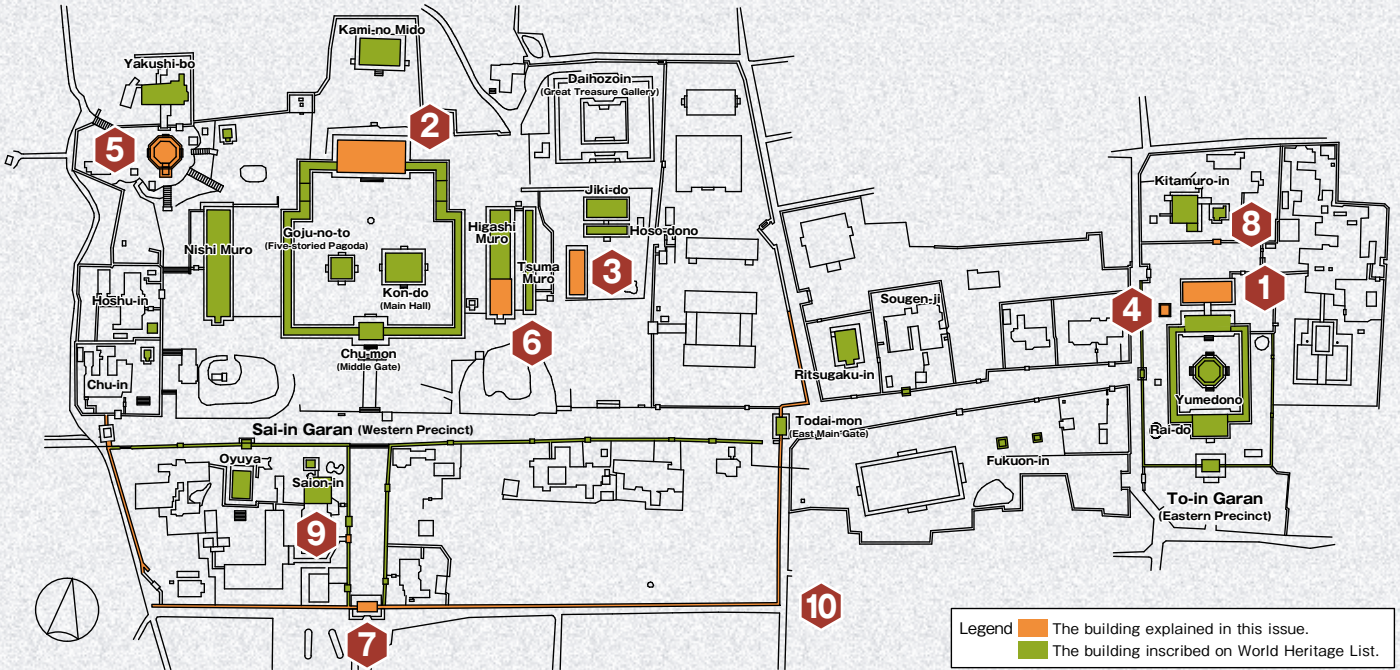
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| Criterion (i) | “The Buddhist Monuments in the Horyu-ji Area” are masterpieces of wooden architecture, both in overall design and in decoration. |
| Criterion (ii) | These are the earliest Buddhist monuments in Japan, dating from shortly after the introduction of Buddhism to the country, and had a profound influence on subsequent religious architecture. |
| Criterion (iv) | The Horyu-ji monuments represent the adaptation of Chinese Buddhist architecture and temple layout to Japanese culture and the subsequent development of a distinct indigenous style. |
| Criterion (vi) | The introduction of Buddhism into Japan and its promotion by Prince Shotoku marks a significant stage in the spread of Buddhism over this cultural zone. |

The criteria are presented in the second issue of the Journal. Please see also.



Hoki-ji Sanju-no-to
<Three-storied Pagoda, 8th century/National Treasure>

A hidden treasure trove of Buddhist monuments from ancient to modern times



Most visitors to Horyu-ji pay attention to the Western Precinct called Sai-in Garan, the existing world's oldest wooden buildings, or the Hall of Dreams in the To-in Garan, which dates from the Nara period (710-794). However, few people realise that Horyu-ji is not only home to ancient buildings from the Asuka (592-710) and Nara periods, but also to many other buildings from different periods, including 48 buildings that are component parts of the World Heritage List.

1 To-in Denpo-do <Lecture Hall, National Treasure>

This is the lecture hall of the To-in Garan, which was moved from a nobleman's residence in the Nara period (around mid-8th century) and converted into a Buddhist temple. As a result, the interior is floored, which is unusual for a Buddhist temple of the Nara period. It is very valuable as it is the only known example of a noble house from the Nara period.



Highlight!

On the upper part of the side of the building, there is a typical design which shows a basic type of framework for the roof called *nijuukoryou* Kaerumata.

2 Sai-in Dai-Ko-do <Great Lecture Hall, National Treasure>

It was rebuilt in 990, after the previous building was burned down in 925.

The original number of spaces between the pillars in the front was eight, which was an unusual even number, as was the case with the middle gate in the west wing. In later times the west side was expanded and the number of the spaces became nine.



Highlight!

Although it is the largest building in Horyu-ji, bracket complexes on the pillars are of a simple style called *hira-mitsudo*, which is characteristic of the Heian period (794-1185) when Buddhist architecture became more "Heian nationalistic".

3 Kofu-zo <Storehouse, National Treasure>

It is a high-floored storehouse for storing temple treasures as well as scriptures and is estimated to have been built in the early Heian period (around the 9th -10th centuries).

It is characterised by storehouses with plastered walls at either end of the building, and an open space in the centre. The treasure house called Shōsōin is the most famous example of this style, the twin warehouses, but this is the only one with an open space in the centre.

This is the highlight!

The doors of the two storehouses open towards the central open space, as the ladders were used to access the storehouses.



4 To-in Sho-ro <Bell Tower, National Treasure>



It is estimated to have been built in the early Kamakura period (around the 13th century) in the form of a bell tower with trapezoidal spread of the lower storey. The main feature of the belfry is a skirt-like wall on the outside of the lower storey, which is said to be one of the oldest in existence.

The Nara-period(the 8th century) temple bell hanging from the upper storey is inscribed with the name of Chugu-ji Temple, which moved next door to Horyu-ji in modern times.

5 Saien-do <Octagonal Hall, National Treasure>



This octagonal hall is in the northwest corner of the Horyu-ji precincts, on a hill overlooking the Sai-in Garan (western precinct). It is estimated to have been built in the Nara period (710-794) but was damaged in 1050 and rebuilt in 1250 during the Kamakura period.

It has the same octagonal shape as the Yumedono hall in To-in, but there are many differences, such as the jewel at the top of the roof and the mud wall at the back.

6 Shoryo-in <National Treasure>



This is the highlight!

The Shoryo-in has latticed shutters on the front and sides, opening doors and sliding doors, which look like a catalogue of old architectural fittings.

The Shoryo-in is the centre of the worship of Prince Shotoku with the statue of Shotoku Taishi as the main deity. It was originally a monk's quarters called Higashi Muro built in the Nara period (710-794), but three units at the southern end were converted into a Buddhist temple at the end of the Heian period (794-1185), and then completely rebuilt in 1284 during the Kamakura period (1185-1333).

The wide eaves of the cypress bark roof at the front create a wide open space.



The miniature shrine inside the building is also noteworthy, with the oldest existing *undulating bargeboard in Japan*, called kara hafu.

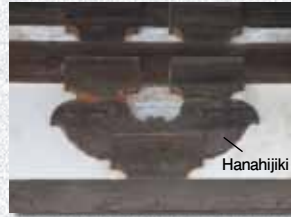


7 Sai-in Nandai-mon <South Main Gate, National Treasure>



Nandai-mon is in front of the temple precincts after passing through a path lined with pine trees. This is the main gate of Horyu-ji, which was rebuilt in 1438 during the Muromachi period.

It has a hip and gabled roof, and the decorative carvings on the members, which are called *hijiki* and *kibana* and have been seen since the Middle Ages, are one of its distinctive features.



Highlight!

The Todai-mon (East Main Gate, National Treasure), built in the Nara period (710-794), is almost identical to the Nandai-mon in terms of the flat floor plan. However, the shape of the roof, bracket complex and structure of the eaves are completely different. Please come and compare them.



Todai-mon (National treasure)

8 Kitamuro-in Omote-mon <Gate, Important Cultural Property>

The date of construction is not certain, but it is estimated to have been built in the early Muromachi period (around the early 15th century).

The gate is the "hirakaramon" style, in which both sides of the roof are covered with bow-shaped eaves. It is oldest of its kind in Nara Prefecture.



Highlight!

The roof of the gate used to be tile-roofing. However, the repairing work showed that the original roof was covered with cypress bark, and it was restored to its original form.

There are still many discoveries to be made in the daily repairs of the buildings on the grounds. We hope you will keep an eye on these repairing projects.

9 Saion-in Agetsuchi-mon <Gate, Important Cultural Property>

Agetsuchi-mon is a unique style of gate with a semicylindrical shaped roof made of mud. Although it is depicted in picture scrolls, it is extremely rare in that only this gate and the West Gate of Horin-ji Temple actually exist. It was built in the early Edo period (around the 17th century), and the roof is actually made of cypress bark instead of mud.

It is the entrance to the Horyu-ji temple office, and many people pass through the gate every day without even thinking about it, but it is actually one of the World Heritage component parts!



10 Sai-in Ogaki <Mud Walls, Important Cultural Property>



The remaining *tsuji-bei* walls surrounding Sai-in were repaired in the early to mid-Edo period, in the 17th century.

The foundations were made of hewn stone, and the walls were built using a technique called "Hanchiku", in which soil was piled up one layer at a time. It is amazing that this ancient civil engineering technique has been handed down through the centuries to the Edo period(1603-1868).

More on Buddhist Monuments in the Horyu-ji Area in the next issue.

All photographs in this feature are courtesy of Horyu-ji Temple.

What's "OUV"?

"OUV" is an abbreviation of "Outstanding Universal Value".

OUV was defined as follows by "Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention" in the Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

Outstanding Universal Value means cultural and/or natural significance which is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries and to be of common importance for present and future generations of all humanity. As such, the permanent protection of this heritage is of the highest importance to the international community as a whole.

For something to obtain "OUV" status, it must be proven to have an important value that can be shared and understood by everyone living on the earth—not just those of us living in the present but also future generations, without being bound by national, ethnic, or religious frameworks.

Part 3



<http://asuka-fujiwara.jp>

Making "Asuka-Fujiwara" a World Heritage Property!

Asuka Palace Site

The Asuka Palace Site is one of the stages where the ancient Japanese state took shape, and is a very important palace site at the core of the "Asuka-Fujiwara".



Left : the Central building Right : the Large well



From the results of excavations for more than 60 years since 1959, we have found that

1st period: Asuka Okamoto Palace of Emperor Jomei
 2nd period: Asuka Itabuki Palace of Empress Kogyoku
 The 3rd period: Empress Saimei's "Nochino Asuka Okamoto Palace" and Asuka Kiyomihara Palace" of Emperor Tenmu

It is estimated that there were three periods of change.

The layout of the central area, known as the Naikaku (inner area), and the Seiden (main hall) suggests that the palace was a combination of official ceremonial and political space and the imperial families' living quarters.

The extensive use of stone paving around the central building and the well is a major feature not seen in later palaces.

Garden Remains of Asuka-kyo Capital

The Garden Remains of Asuka-kyo Capital is the remains of a large-scale court garden built adjacent to the north western part of the Asuka Palace Site, which was discovered during excavations in 1999.

There were two ponds, north and south, protected by stone walls, and the south pond had a fountain-like stone structure and a central island, and the central island was planted with pine trees. The seeds and pollen excavated from the pond indicate that lotus and other flowers bloomed in the pond, and fruit trees such as pears were planted around the pond.

Although the structure of the garden was strongly influenced by the Korean peninsula, it is a very valuable site which can be regarded as the origin of later Japanese gardens.



The island in the south pond

Asuka Mizuochi Site -Water Clock Tower-



Remains of the Water Clock Tower

This is the site of the oldest water clock called Rokoku dai in Japanese. It is recorded in the “Nihon Shoki” (literally, chronicles of Japan) as having been built in 660. The foundations of the sturdy buildings and the copper pipes used to drain the water were found during the excavations. It shows the control of the people by keeping track of time and is testimony of the development of government offices and bureaucracy in Japan.

In the “Man’yoshu” (Japanese oldest anthology of poems), there is a poem about this, showing that Asuka people would know the time with the number of drums and bells that officials beat.

Sakafuneishi Site

A mysterious stone structure called Sakefuneishi was placed at the site, and excavations have confirmed that the entire hill was surrounded by a stone wall. It is presumed that this stone wall was built in 656 by Empress Saimei, as recorded in “the Nihon Shoki”.

In addition, in the valley on the north side of the hill, a stone-paved ritual facility consisting of stone structures such as a turtle-shaped stone tank was built.

Although the then latest technology introduced from abroad was used in the processing of the stone structures, the rituals are thought to have inherited the character of water rituals since the Kofun period (around the late 3th-7th centuries) in Japan.

The site shows the fusion of traditional Japanese culture and foreign technology.



The turtle-shaped stone tank