

# Kansai 関西



For fans of traditional Japanese culture, Kansai is an unmissable destination. Nowhere else in the country can you find so much of historical interest in such a compact area. And, since plenty of international carriers now fly into Kansai International Airport, it is perfectly possible to make Kansai your first port of call in Japan.

Kansai's major drawcards are Kyoto and Nara. Kyoto was the imperial capital between 794 and 1868, and is still considered by most Japanese to be the cultural heart of Japan. Nara predates Kyoto as an imperial capital and also has an impressive array of temples, burial mounds and relics. Both cities should feature prominently in even the busiest travel itinerary.

Osaka is a great place to sample Japanese city life in all its mind-boggling intensity, while Kōbe is one of Japan's most cosmopolitan and attractive cities. Himeji, west of Kōbe, has the best of Japan's many feudal castles. Kyoto is the logical base for an exploration of Kansai, but you could also base yourself in Osaka or Nara. The former allows you to enjoy Japanese modern city life and excellent transport connections; the latter is much quieter and is a good place to relax. You will almost certainly find that Kansai is the perfect place to sample both modern and traditional Japan without having to spend too much time moving from place to place.

The main attractions of the prefecture Mie-ken are Ise-jingū, Japan's most sacred Shintō shrine, and the seascapes around the peninsula, Shima-hantō. Wakayama-ken offers *onsen* (hot-spring spas), a rugged coast and the temple complex of Kōya-san, Japan's most important Buddhist centre. Finally, the northern coast of Kansai has some fabulous scenery, a number of good beaches and the lovely Tango-hantō (Tango Peninsula).

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Visit **Kyoto** (opposite), Japan's cultural capital, with more than 2000 temples and shrines
- Uncover the roots of Japanese culture in **Nara** (p400), the country's ancient capital
- Sample the bustling nightlife of **Osaka** (p373), Japan's most down-to-earth city
- Soak in open-air hot springs in mountainous **Kii-hantō** (p415)
- Spend a quiet night in atmospheric temple lodgings atop sacred **Kōya-san** (p417)



## Climate

For information on the climate of Kansai, see p311.

## Language

The Japanese spoken in Kansai is referred to as Kansai-ben, a rich and hearty dialect that is immediately distinguishable from standard Japanese if you know what to listen for. One thing to listen for is verb endings: in Kansai-ben, verbs often end with '-hen' instead of the standard '-nai' (in simple negative constructions).

## Getting There & Away

Travel between Kansai and other parts of Japan is a breeze. Kansai is served by the Tōkaidō and San-yō *shinkansen* lines, several JR main lines, and a few private rail lines. It is also possible to travel to/from Kansai and other parts of Honshū, Shikoku and Kyūshū by long-distance-highway buses. Ferries sail between various Kansai ports (primarily Kōbe/Osaka) and other parts of Honshū, Kyūshū, Shikoku and Okinawa. Ports in northern Kyoto-fu serve ferries that run to/from Hokkaidō. Finally, Kansai has several airports, most notably Osaka's Itami Airport (ITM), which has flights to/from many of Japan's major cities, and Kansai International Airport (KIX), which has flights to dozens of foreign cities. For more information, see the Kyoto Getting There & Away section (p364).

## KYOTO 京都

☎ 075 / pop 1.47 million

Kyoto is the storehouse of Japan's traditional culture and the stage on which much of Japanese history was played out. With 17 Unesco World Heritage sites (see boxed text, p313), more than 1600 Buddhist temples and over 400 Shintō shrines, Kyoto is also one of the world's most culturally rich cities. Indeed, it is fair to say that Kyoto ranks with Paris, London and Rome as one of those cities that everyone should see at least once in their lives. And, needless to say, it should rank near the top of any Japan itinerary.

Kyoto is where you will find the Japan of your imagination: raked pebble gardens, poets' huts hidden amid bamboo groves, arcades of vermilion shrine gates, geisha disappearing into the doorways of traditional

restaurants, golden temples floating above tranquil waters. Indeed, most of the sites that make up the popular image of Japan probably originated in Kyoto.

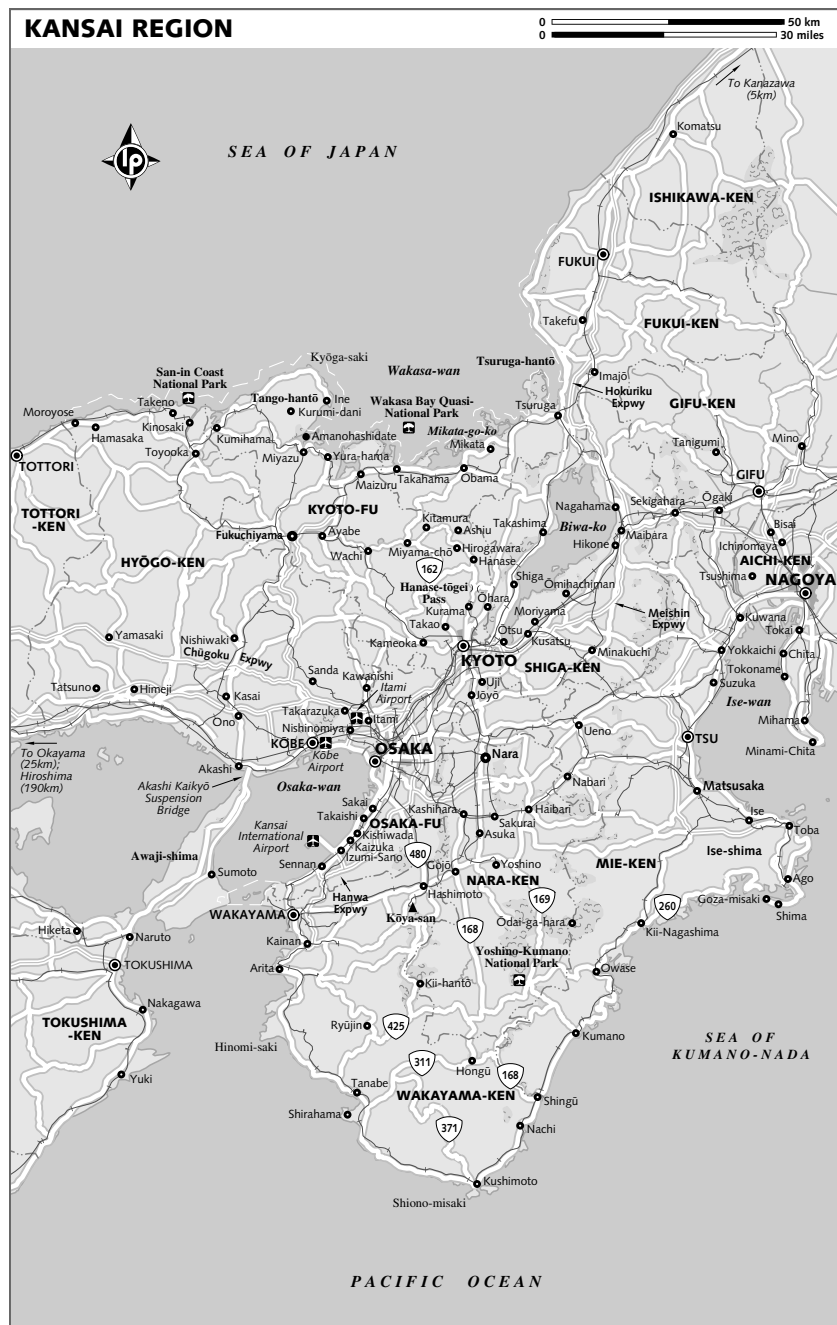
That said, first impressions can be something of an anticlimax. Stepping out of Kyoto station for the first time and gazing around at the neon and concrete that awaits you, you are likely to feel that all you've heard and read about Kyoto is just so much tourist-literature hype. We can only advise you to be patient, for the beauty of Kyoto is largely hidden from casual view: it lies behind walls, doors, curtains and façades. But if you take a little time to explore, you will discover that there are hundreds, perhaps thousands of pockets of incredible beauty scattered across the city. And, the closer you look, the more there is to see.

## HISTORY

The Kyoto basin was first settled in the 7th century, and by 794 it had become Heian-kyō, the capital of Japan. Like Nara, a previous capital, the city was laid out in a grid pattern modelled on the Chinese Tang dynasty capital, Chang'an (contemporary Xi'an). Although the city was to serve as home to the Japanese imperial family from 794 to 1868 (when the Meiji Restoration took the imperial family to the new capital, Tokyo), the city was not always the focus of Japanese political power. During the Kamakura period (1185–1333), Kamakura served as the national capital, and during the Edo period (1600–1867), the Tokugawa shōgunate ruled Japan from Edo (now Tokyo).

The problem was that from the 9th century, the imperial family was increasingly isolated from the mechanics of political power and the country was ruled primarily by military families, or shōgunates. While Kyoto still remained capital in name and was the cultural focus of the nation, imperial power was, for the most part, symbolic and the business of running state affairs was often carried out elsewhere.

Just as imperial fortunes have waxed and waned, the fortunes of the city itself have fluctuated dramatically. During the Ōnin War (1466–67), which marked the close of the Muromachi period, the Kyoto Gosho (Imperial Palace) and most of the city were destroyed. Much of what can be seen in Kyoto today dates from the Edo period. Although



### SPECIAL TICKET DEALS

The **Kansai Thru Pass** is an excellent way to get around Kansai on the cheap. This pass – available at the travel counter in the arrivals hall of Kansai International Airport and at the main bus information centre in front of Kyoto station – allows unlimited travel on most bus and train lines in Kansai except the Japan Railways (JR) line. (The pass covers travel on the Nankai line, which serves Kansai International Airport.) It also qualifies you for discounts at several attractions around Kansai. The pass does not cover the Ise-Shima region.

When you buy the pass, be sure to pick up the handy companion English guide-map, which shows all the bus and train lines available.

Two-/three-day passes cost ¥3800/5000. It's possible to purchase multiple passes for longer explorations of Kansai. Like the Japan Rail Pass, however, these passes are only available to travellers on temporary visitor visas (you'll have to show your passport). For more on the pass, visit the **Kansai Thru Pass website** ([www.surutto.com/conts/ticket/3dayeng/](http://www.surutto.com/conts/ticket/3dayeng/)).

political power resided in Edo, Kyoto was rebuilt and flourished as a cultural, religious and economic centre. Fortunately Kyoto was spared the aerial bombing that razed other Japanese urban centres in the closing months of WWII.

Today, even though it has seen rapid industrialisation Kyoto remains an important cultural and educational centre. It has some 20% of Japan's National Treasures and 15% of Japan's Important Cultural Properties. In addition, there are 24 museums and 37 universities and colleges scattered throughout the city. Even though the city centre looks remarkably like the centre of a dozen other large Japanese cities, a little exploration will turn up countless reminders of Kyoto's long history.

### CLIMATE

The best and most popular times to visit Kyoto are the climatically stable seasons of spring (March to May) and autumn (late September to November).

The highlight of spring is the cherry-blossom season, which usually arrives in Kyoto in early April. Bear in mind, though, that the blossoms are notoriously fickle, blooming any time from late March to mid-April.

Autumn is an equally good time to travel, with pleasant temperatures and soothing autumn colours, which usually peak between late October and mid-November.

Be warned that Kyoto is crowded with domestic and international tourists during the cherry-blossom and autumn-foliage seasons, and accommodation can be hard to find; if you do come at these times, be sure to book well in advance.

Of course, you can visit Kyoto at any time of year, although the summer, from June to August, can be very hot and humid, and winter can be a little chilly for some people's taste.

### ORIENTATION

Like Manhattan, Kyoto is laid out in a grid pattern and is extremely easy to navigate. The main train station, Kyoto station (which serves the JR and Kintetsu lines), is located in the south of the city. The real centre of the city is around Shijō-dōri, which is about 2km immediately north of the station via Karasuma-dōri. The commercial and nightlife centres are between Shijō-dōri to the south and Sanjō-dōri to the north, and between Kawaramachi-dōri to the east and Karasuma-dōri to the west.

Although some of Kyoto's major sights are in the city centre, most of Kyoto's best sightseeing is on the outskirts of the city, along the base of the eastern and western mountains. These areas are most conveniently reached by bus or bicycle. Outside the city itself, the mountain villages of Ohara, Kurama and Takao make wonderful day trips and are easily accessible by public transport.

### Maps

Available at the TIC, the *Tourist Map of Kyoto* is a useful map with decent insets of the main tourist districts on the reverse side. The TIC also stocks the handy *Kyoto City Bus Sightseeing Map*. The TIC also has a leaflet called *Kyoto Walks*, which has detailed walking maps for major sightseeing areas in and around Kyoto (Higashiyama, Arashiyama, Northwestern Kyoto and Ohara).

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

**Junkudō** (Map p322; ☎ 253-6460; Kyoto BAL Bldg, 2 Yamazaki-chō, Sanjō kudarū, Kawaramachi-dōri, Nakagyō-ku; ☎ 11am-8pm) In the BAL Building, this shop has a great selection of English-language books on the 5-8 floor.

**Random Walk** (Map p322; ☎ 256-8231; 273 Enpukujimae-chō, Takoyakushi kudarū, Teramachi-dōri, Nakagyō-ku; ☎ 10am-8.30pm) In the Teramachi shopping arcade, this is the best English-language bookshop in town.

### Emergency

**Ambulance** (☎ 119)

**Fire** (☎ 119)

**Police** (☎ 110)

### Immigration

**Osaka Regional Immigration Bureau Kyoto**

**Branch** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 752-5997; 2F Kyoto Second Local Joint Government Bldg, 34-12 Marutamachi Kawabata Higashi iru, Higashi Marutamachi, Sakyō-ku; ☎ 9am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri)

### Internet Access

**Kinko's** (Map p322; ☎ 213-6802; 651-1 Tearaimizu-chō, Takoyakushi kudarū, Karasuma-dōri, Nakagyō-ku; per 10min ¥210; ☎ 24hr)

**Kyoto International Community House** (KICHC; Map pp326-7; ☎ 752-3010; 2-1 Torii-chō, Awataguchi; per 30min ¥200; ☎ 9am-9pm Tue-Sun) The machines here have Japanese keyboards and you are limited in the sites you can visit, but it's a fairly cheap place to log on.

**Kyoto Prefectural International Centre** (Map p321; ☎ 342-5000; 9F Kyoto Eki Bldg, Karasuma-dōri Shioikōji

kudarū; per 30min ¥250; ☎ 10am-6pm, closed 2nd & 4th Tue each month)

### Internet Resources

**Kyoto Temple Admission Fees** (www.templefees.com)

**Kyoto Visitor's Guide** (www.kyotoguide.com)

### Media

The free *Kyoto Visitor's Guide* is the best source of information on upcoming events. It has restaurant reviews, day walks, detailed maps, useful information sections and feature articles about various aspects of the city. Pick up a copy as soon as you arrive in Kyoto. It's available at the TIC, Kyoto International Community House and most major hotels.

Another excellent source of information about Kyoto and the rest of the Kansai area is *Kansai Time Out*, a monthly English-language listings magazine. Apart from lively articles, it has a large section of ads for employment, travel agencies, meetings, lonely hearts etc. It's available at the bookshops listed in this section (left) and at the TIC (opposite).

### Medical Services

**Kyoto University Hospital** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 751-3111; 54 Shōgoinkawara-chō, Sakyō-ku; ☎ 9am-noon) Best hospital in Kyoto. There is an information counter near the entrance that can point you in the right direction.

### Money

Most of the major banks are near the Shijō-Karasuma intersection, two stops north of Kyoto station on the Karasuma line subway.

International transactions (like wire transfers) can be made at **Tokyo Mitsubishi Bank** (Map p322; ☎ 221-7161; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri), which is one block southwest of this intersection. Other international transactions can be made at **Citibank** (Map p322; ☎ 212-5387; ☎ office 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, ATM 24hr), just west of this intersection. Finally, you can change travellers cheques at most post offices around town, including the Kyoto Central Post Office (below) next to Kyoto station.

### INTERNATIONAL ATMS

There's an international ATM (Map p321; open 10am to 9pm) on the B1 floor of the Kyoto Tower Hotel, very close to the TIC and Kyoto station. In the middle of town, you'll find another (Map p322; open 7am to midnight) on the basement floor of the Kyoto Royal Hotel. **Citibank** (Map p322; ☎ 212-5387; ☎ office 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, ATM 24hr) Has a 24-hour ATM that accepts most foreign-issued cards.

### Post

**Kyoto Central Post Office** (Map p321; ☎ 365-2414; Higashishioikōji-chō; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat, to 12.30pm Sun & holidays) Conveniently located next to Kyoto station (take the Karasuma exit, as the post office is on the northwestern side of the station). There's an after-hours service counter on the southern side of the post office, which is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

### Tourist Information

**Kyoto City Tourist Information Center** (Map p321; ☎ 343-6656; ☎ 8.30am-7pm) Inside the new Kyoto station building, on the 2nd floor just across from Café du Monde. Though it's geared towards Japanese visitors, an English-speaking staff is usually on hand and it's easier to find than the following.

**Kyoto Tourist Information Center** (TIC; Map p321; ☎ 344-3300; ☎ 10am-6pm, closed 2nd & 4th Tue of each month & New Year's holidays) The best source of information on Kyoto, this is located on the 9th floor of the Kyoto station building. To get there from the main concourse of the station, take the west escalator to the 2nd floor, enter Isetan department store and take an immediate left and look for the elevator on your left and take it to the 9th floor. It's right outside the elevator, inside the Kyoto Prefectural International Center. There is a Welcome Inn Reservation counter at the TIC that can help with accommodation bookings.

### Travel Agency

**IACE TRAVEL** (Map p322; ☎ 212-8944; 7F Hayakawa Bldg, Sanjō-Kawaramachi; ☎ office 10am-7pm Mon-

### KYOTO UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES

In 1994 13 of Kyoto's Buddhist temples, three Shintō shrines and one castle met the criteria to be designated World Heritage sites by the UN. Each of the 17 sites has buildings or gardens of immeasurable historical value and all are open for public viewing.

#### Castle

- Nijō-jō (p342)

#### Shrines

- Kamigamo-jinja (p333)
- Shimogamo-jinja (p333)
- Ujigami-jinja in Uji (p347)

#### Temples

- Byōdō-in (p347)
- Daigo-ji (p346)
- Enryaku-ji (p341)
- Ginkaku-ji (p339)
- Kinkaku-ji (p343)
- Kiyomizu-dera (p335)
- Kōzan-ji (p350)
- Ninna-ji (p343)
- Nishi Hongan-ji (p314)
- Ryōan-ji (p343)
- Saihō-ji (p347)
- Tenryū-ji (p344)
- Tō-ji (p334)

Fri, to 5pm Sat, phone consultation 10am-5pm Sun & holidays)

### Useful Organisations

**Kyoto International Community House** (KICHC; Map pp326-7; ☎ 752-3010; 2-1 Torii-chō, Awataguchi; ☎ 9am-9pm Tue-Sun) An essential stop for those planning a long-term stay in Kyoto, but it can also be quite useful for short-term visitors. Here you can rent typewriters, send and receive faxes, and use the internet. It has a library with maps, books, newspapers and magazines from around the world, and a notice board displaying messages regarding work, accommodation, rummage sales etc. KICHC is in

### KYOTO IN...

Kyoto is worth considering as a base for travel in Japan, especially as it is within easy reach of Osaka Itami and Kansai International Airports. And Kyoto is by far the best choice as a base for travel in Kansai because it has a wealth of accommodation and is close to Nara, Osaka, Kobe, Mie-ken and Wakayama-ken.

It is difficult to suggest a minimum itinerary for Kyoto – you should certainly consider it a city you must see while you are in Japan and allocate as much time as possible. The absolute minimum amount of time you should spend in Kyoto is two days, during which you could just about scratch the surface by visiting the **Higashiyama area** (p334) in eastern Kyoto. Five days would give you time to include **Arashiyama** (p344), **northwestern Kyoto** (p342) and **south-eastern Kyoto** (p346). A week would allow you to cover these areas, while leaving a day or so for places further afield or for in-depth exploration of museums, shops and culture.

A final word of advice is that it's easy to overdose on temples in Kyoto. If you don't find temples to your liking, there are plenty of other options. Instead, go for a hike in the mountains, browse in the shops around **Shijō-dōri** (p362), do some people-watching on Kiyomachi-dōri in **downtown Kyoto** (p315) or, best of all, find a good restaurant and sample some of the **finest food** (p355) in all of Japan.

### PRIVATE TOURS OF KYOTO

A private tour is a great way to see the sights and learn about the city without having to worry about transport and logistics. There's a variety of private tours on offer in Kyoto.

**All Japan Private Tours & Specialty Services** ([www.kyotoguide.com/lyjpt](http://www.kyotoguide.com/lyjpt)) This company offers exclusive unique tours of Kyoto, Nara and Tokyo as well as business coordination and related services.

**Chris Rowthorn's Walks & Tours of Kyoto & Japan** ([www.chrisrowthorn.com](http://www.chrisrowthorn.com)) Lonely Planet *Kyoto and Japan* author Chris Rowthorn offers private tours of Kyoto, Nara, Osaka and other parts of Japan.

**Johnnie's Kyoto Walking** (<http://web.kyoto-inet.or.jp/people/h-s-love>) Hirooka Hajime, aka Johnnie Hill-walker, offers an interesting guided walking tour of the area around Kyoto station and the Higashiyama area.

**Naoki Doi** (☎ 090-9596-5546; [www3.ocn.ne.jp/~doitaxi/](http://www3.ocn.ne.jp/~doitaxi/)) This English-speaking taxi driver offers private taxi tours of Kyoto and Nara.

eastern Kyoto. You can walk from Keihan Sanjō station in about 30 minutes (1.5km). Alternatively, take the Tōzai line subway from central Kyoto and get off at Keage station, from which it's a 350m (five-minute) walk downhill.

## SIGHTS

### Kyoto Station Area

Although most of Kyoto's attractions are further north, there are a few attractions within walking distance of the station (Map p321). And don't forget the station building itself – it's an attraction in its own right.

### KYOTO TOWER 京都タワー

If you want to orient yourself and get an idea for the layout of Kyoto as soon as you arrive in town, **Kyoto Tower** (Map p321; ☎ 361-3215; Karasuma-dōri-Shiokōji; admission ¥770; ☎ 9am-9pm) is the place to do so. Located right outside the Karasuma (north) gate of the station, this retro tower looks like a rocket perched atop the Kyoto Tower Hotel. The tower provides excellent views in all directions and you can really get a sense for the Kyoto *bonchi* (how the Japanese describe the Kyoto plain, literally, 'a flat tray'). There are free mounted binoculars to use, and these allow ripping views over to Kiyomizudera (p335) and as far south as Osaka.

### HIGASHI HONGAN-JI 東本願寺

When Tokugawa Ieyasu engineered the rift in the Jōdo Shin-shū school of Buddhism, he founded this **temple** (Map p321; ☎ 371-9181; Karasuma-dōri-Shichijō; admission free; ☎ 5.50am-5.30pm, to 4.30pm in winter) as competition for Nishi Hongan-ji (right). Rebuilt in 1895 after a fire, it's certainly monumental in its proportions, but it's less impressive artistically than its counterpart. A curious item on display is a length of rope made from hair donated by female believers, which was used to haul the timber

for the reconstruction. The temple, which is a five-minute walk north of Kyoto station, is now the headquarters of the Ōtani branch of the Jōdo Shin-shū school.

### NISHI HONGAN-JI 西本願寺

In 1591 Toyotomi Hideyoshi built this **temple** (Map p321; ☎ 371-5181; Horikawa-dōri-Hanaya-chō; admission free; ☎ 5.30am-5.30pm, to 6pm in summer), known as Hongan-ji, as the new headquarters for the Jōdo Shin-shū (True Pure Land) school of Buddhism, which had accumulated immense power. Later, Tokugawa Ieyasu saw this power as a threat and sought to weaken it by encouraging a breakaway faction of this school to found Higashi Hongan-ji (*higashi* means 'east') in 1602. The original Hongan-ji then became known as Nishi Hongan-ji (*nishi* means 'west'). It now functions as the headquarters of the Hongan-ji branch of the Jōdo Shin-shū school, with over 10,000 temples and 12 million followers worldwide.

The temple contains five buildings, featuring some of the finest examples of architecture and artistic achievement from the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568–1600). Unfortunately, the **Goe-dō** (Main Hall) is presently being restored and will be 'under wraps' until 2010. Nonetheless, it's worth a visit to see the **Daisho-in Hall**, which has sumptuous paintings, carvings and metal ornamentation. A small garden and two *nō* (classical Japanese dance-drama) stages are connected with the hall. The dazzling **Kara-mon** has intricate ornamental carvings. Both the Daisho-in Hall and the Kara-mon were transported here from Fushimi-jō.

If you'd like a guided tour of the temple (in Japanese only), reservations (preferably several days in advance) can be made either at the **temple office** (☎ 371-5181) or through the

TIC. The temple is a 12-minute walk northwest of Kyoto station.

### KYOTO STATION 京都駅

Kyoto's **station building** (Map p321; Karasuma-dōri-Shiokōji) is a striking steel-and-glass structure – a futuristic cathedral for the transport age. Unveiled in September 1997, the building met with some decidedly mixed reviews. Some critics assailed it as out of keeping with the traditional architecture of Kyoto; others loved its wide-open spaces and dramatic lines.

Whatever the critics' views, you'll be impressed by the huge atrium that soars over the main concourse. Take some time to explore the many levels of the station, all the way up to the 15th-floor observation level. If you don't suffer from fear of heights, try riding the escalator from the 7th floor on the eastern side of the building up to the 11th-floor aerial skywalk, high over the main concourse.

In the station building you'll find several food courts (see p355), the Kyoto Prefectural International Centre (see p312), a performance space and Isetan department store.

### SHŌSEI-EN 渉成園

About five minutes' walk east of Higashi Hongan-ji, the garden **Shōsei-en** (Map p321; ☎ 371-9181; Karasuma-dōri-Kamijuzuyachō; admission free; ☎ 9am-3.30pm) is worth a look. The lovely grounds, incorporating the Kikoku-tei villa, were completed in 1657. Bring a picnic (and some bread to feed the carp) or just stroll around the beautiful Ingetsu-ike pond.

### Downtown Kyoto

Downtown Kyoto (Map p322) looks much like any other Japanese city, but there are some attractions like Nishiki Market, Kyoto's best food market, the Museum of Kyoto, which has good exhibits on the city, and Ponto-chō, one of the city's most atmospheric lanes. If you'd like a break from temples and shrines, then downtown Kyoto can be a welcome change. It's also good on a rainy day, because of the number of covered arcades and indoor attractions.

### NISHIKI MARKET 錦市場

If you are interested in seeing all the really weird and wonderful foods that go into Kyoto cuisine, wander through **Nishiki Market** (Map p322; ☎ 211-3882; Nishikikōji-dōri btwn Teramachi & Takakura; ☎ 9am-5pm, varies for individual stalls). It's in the centre of town, one block north of (and parallel to)

Shijō-dōri. This market is a great place to visit on a rainy day or if you need a break from temple-hopping. The variety of foods on display is staggering, and the frequent cries of *Irasshaimase!* (Welcome!) are heart-warming.

### MUSEUM OF KYOTO 京都文化博物館

Housed in and behind the former Bank of Japan, a classic brick Meiji-period building, this **museum** (Map p322; ☎ 222-0888; Sanjō-dōri-Takakura; admission ¥500, extra for special exhibits; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Tue-Sun) is worth visiting if a special exhibit is on or if you need a break from temples. The regular exhibits consist of models of ancient Kyoto, audiovisual presentations and a small gallery dedicated to Kyoto's film industry. On the 1st floor, the Roji Tempō is a reconstructed Edo-period merchant area showing 10 types of exterior latticework (this section can be entered for free; some of the shops sell souvenirs and serve local dishes). The museum has English-speaking volunteer tour guides. The museum is a three-minute walk southeast of the Karasuma-Oike stop on the Karasuma and Tōzai subway lines.

### KYOTO INTERNATIONAL MANGA MUSEUM

京都国際マンガミュージアム  
This brand-new **museum** (☎ 075-254-7414; [www.kyotomm.com/english/](http://www.kyotomm.com/english/); Karasuma-Oike; adult/child ¥500/100; ☎ 10am-8pm Thu-Tue) has a collection of some 300,000 manga (Japanese comic books). Set in an atmospheric building that used to house an elementary school, the museum is the perfect introduction to the art of the manga. While most of the manga and displays are, naturally, in Japanese, the collection of translated works is growing.

In addition to the galleries that show both the historical development of manga and original artwork done in manga style, there are beginner's workshops and portrait drawings on weekends. Visitors with children will appreciate the children's library and the humorous traditional Japanese sliding picture shows (in Japanese and unspoken), not to mention the Astroturf lawn where the kids can run free. The museum hosts six month-long special exhibits yearly: check the website for details. While the collection is large, rest assured that it does not hold any of Japan's infamous *sukebe manga* (dirty comics) – trust us: a friend of ours looked.

(Continued on page 332)

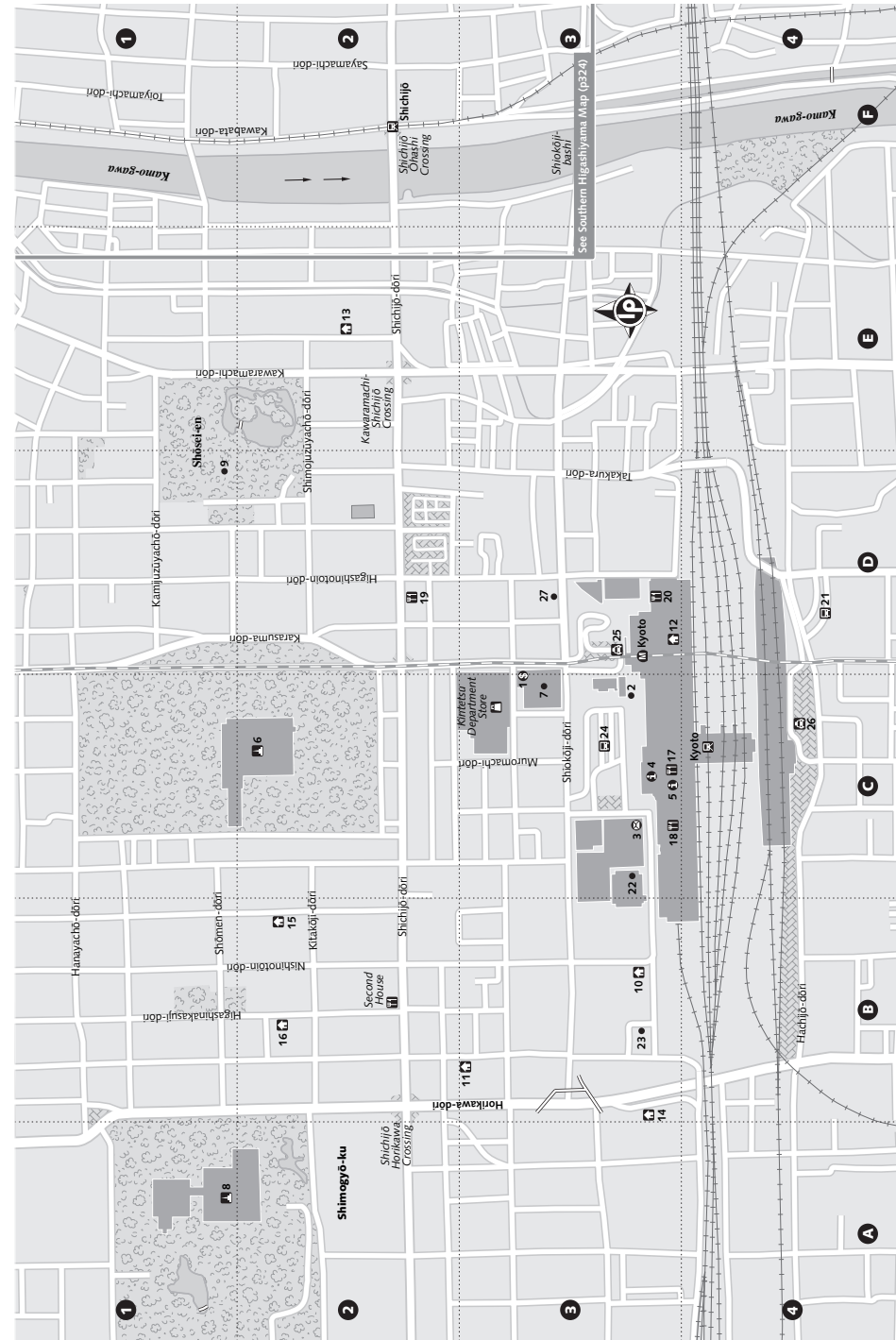




<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES (p314)</b>		Shimabara-no-Ōmon 京都 1 C3	Shimabara-no-Ōmon 鳥原の大門 .....17 B6	Kyoto ANA Hotel 京都全日空ホテル .....31 B4
Club Okitsu Kyoto クラブオクツ		Daisen-in 大仙院 .....2 B1	Daitoku-ji 大徳寺 .....3 B1	Ryokan Hinomoto 旅館ひのもと .....32 C5
Daitoku-ji Main Gate 大徳寺総門 .....4 B2		Fushimi-inari Taisha 伏見稲荷大社 .....5 D8	Gokō-yu 五香湯 .....6 B5	Ryokan Rakuchō 旅館洛頂 .....33 C1
Imperial Household Agency 宮内庁京都事務所 .....7 C3		Kyoto Botanical Gardens 京都府立植物園 .....8 C1	Kyoto Imperial Palace (Kyoto Goshō) 京都御所 .....9 C3	<b>EATING (p355)</b>
Kyoto Imperial Palace Park 京都御苑 .....10 C3		Kōtō-in 高桐院 .....11 B2	Manshu-in 曼殊院 .....12 F1	Café Bibliotic HELLO! カフェビブリोटイツクハロー .....34 C4
Mibu-dera 壬生寺 .....13 B5		Nishijin Textile Center 西陣織会館 .....14 B3	Seisho-mon 清所門 .....15 C3	Cocohana ここはな .....35 D7
Sentō Goshō Palace 仙洞御所 .....16 C3		<b>SLEEPING (p352)</b>	<b>SHOPPING (p362)</b>	Den Shichi 傳七 .....36 A5
		Casa de Nats Casa de 夏 .....26 C1	lppo-dō 一保堂 .....42 C4	Didi デイディ .....37 D2
		Crossroads Inn クロスロード イン .....27 B6	Kamiji Kakimoto 紙司柿本 .....43 C4	Hiragana-kan ひらがな館 .....38 E2
		Holiday Inn Kyoto ホリデーイン京都 .....28 D2	Kōbō-san Market 弘法さん (東寺露天市) (see 22)	Le Bouchon ルブション .....39 C4
		Hotel Fujita Kyoto ホテルフジタ京都 .....29 D4	Morita Washi 森田和紙 .....44 C5	Manzara Honten まんざら本店 .....40 D4
		Karasuma Kyoto Hotel からすま京都ホテル .....30 C5		Shuhari シュハリ .....41 D4

**KYOTO STATION AREA (p321)**

<b>INFORMATION (p312)</b>		<b>SLEEPING (p352)</b>	<b>SHOPPING (p362)</b>
International ATM 国際ATM .....1 C3	Kyoto Bus Information Center 京都バス案内書 .....2 C3	APA Hotel アパホテル .....10 B3	Isetan Department Store 伊勢丹百貨店 .....(see 5)
Kyoto Central Post Office 京都中央郵便局 .....3 C3	Kyoto City Tourist Information Center 京都市観光案内所 .....4 C3	Budget Inn バジエットイン .....11 B3	<b>TRANSPORT (p364)</b>
Kyoto Prefectural International Center 京都府国際センター .....(see 5)	Kyoto Tourist Information Center (TIC) 京都 ツーリストインフォメーション .....5 C3	Hotel Granvia Kyoto ホテルグランヴィア京都 .....12 D3	Airport Limousine Bus Stop 京都八条ロアバンティ前バス停 .....21 D4
<b>SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES (p314)</b>	Higashi Hongan-ji 東本願寺 .....6 C2	K's House Kyoto ケイズハウス京都 .....13 E2	Bicycle Parking Lot 京都駅前自転車駐車場 .....22 C3
Kyoto Tower 京都タワー .....7 C3	Nishi Hongan-ji 西本願寺 .....8 A1	リーガロイヤルホテル京都 .....14 B3	Kyoto Cycling Tour Project 京都サイクリングツアープロジェクト .....23 B3
Shōsei-en 渉成園 .....9 D1	<b>EATING (p355)</b>	Ryokan Shimizu 旅館しみず .....15 B2	Kyoto Station Bus Terminal .....24 C3
	Café du Monde カフェデュモンド .....17 C3	Tour Club 旅倶楽部 .....16 B2	Kyoto Station Taxi Stand (North) 京都駅前タクシーのりば(北) .....25 D3
	Cube キューブ .....18 C3	<b>SHOPPING (p362)</b>	Kyoto Station Taxi Stand (South) 京都駅前タクシーのりば(南) .....26 C4
	Eat Paradise イートパラダイス .....(see 18)	limura いいむら .....19 D2	Tōkai Discount Ticket Shop トウカイ格安きっぷ売り場 .....27 D3
	Kaiten-zushi Iwamaru 回転寿司岩丸 .....20 D3		









**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

- (p314) Ryokan Uemura 旅館うえむら ..... 15 C3
- Chion-in 知恩院 ..... 1 D2
- Kawai Kanjirō Memorial Hall  
河井寛治郎記念館 ..... 2 B5
- Kiyomizu-dera 清水寺 ..... 3 D4
- Kōdai-ji 高台寺 ..... 4 D3
- Kyoto National Museum  
京都国立博物館 ..... 5 B6
- Maika 舞香 ..... 6 B3
- Maruyama-kōen 円山公園 ..... 7 D2
- Sanjūsangen-dō 三十三間堂 ..... 8 B6
- Shōren-in 青蓮院 ..... 9 D1
- Tainai-meguri ..... (see 3)
- Yasaka Pagoda 八坂の塔 ..... 10 C3
- Yasaka-jinja 八坂神社 ..... 11 C2

**SLEEPING**

- (p352) Higashiyama Youth Hostel  
東山ユースホステル ..... 12 D1
- Hyatt Regency Kyoto  
ハイアットリージェンシー  
京都 ..... 13 B6
- Ryokan Motonago 旅館元奈古 ..... 14 C3

- (p314) Seikorō 旅館曙ころ ..... 16 A4
- EATING**
- (p355) Amazon アマゾン ..... 17 A6
  - Asuka 明日香 ..... 18 D1
  - Aunbo 阿吽坊 ..... 19 C3
  - Daikichi 大吉 ..... 20 C1
  - Gion Koishi 祇園小石 ..... 21 C2
  - Ichi-ban 一番 ..... 22 B1
  - Kagizen Yoshifusa ..... 23 B2
  - Kasagi-ya ..... 24 D4
  - Machapuchare マチャブチャレ ..... 25 A5
  - Ōzawa ..... 26 B2
  - Ryūmon 龍門 ..... 27 C1
  - Santōka ..... 28 B1
  - Senmonten 泉門天 ..... 29 C2
- DRINKING**
- (p361) Café Bon Appétit  
カフェボンアペチ ..... 30 B2
  - Gael ガエル ..... 31 B2

**ENTERTAINMENT**

- (p361) Gion Corner 祇園コーナー ..... (see 33)
  - Gion Kaikan Theatre 祇園会館 ..... 32 C2
  - Gion Kōbu Kaburen-jō Theatre  
祇園甲部歌舞練場 ..... 33 C3
  - Jumbo Karaoke Hiroba  
(Sanjō-Keihan Branch)  
ジャンボカラオケ広場  
(三条京阪店) ..... 34 B1
  - Minami-za Theatre 南座 ..... 35 B2
  - Miyagawa-chō Kaburen-jō  
Theatre 宮川町歌舞練場 ..... 36 B3
- SHOPPING**
- (p362) Kagoshin 籠新 ..... 37 C1
  - Kyoto Craft Center  
京都クラフトセンター ..... 38 C2
  - Onouechikuzaiten 尾上竹材店 ..... 39 C1
  - Tessai-dō てっさい堂 ..... 40 C3
- TRANSPORT**
- (p364) Gojō-zaka Bus Stop  
五条坂バス停 ..... 41 C4



- INFORMATION (p312)**
- Kyoto International Community Nanzen-ji 南禅寺.....14 F5
  - House 京都市国際交流会館.....1 E6
  - Kyoto University Hospital 京都大学医学部附属病院.....2 C3
  - Osaka Immigration Bureau 大阪入国管理局京都出張所.....3 C4
  - Kyoto Branch 京都支店.....3 C4
- SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES (p314)**
- Eikan-dō 永観堂.....4 G5
  - Fureai-kan Kyoto Museum of Traditional Crafts 京都伝統産業ふれあい館.....(see 11)
  - Ginkaku-ji 銀閣寺.....5 G2
  - Heian-jingū 平安神宮.....6 D4
  - Hōnen-in 法然院.....7 G2
  - Konchi-in 金地院.....8 F6
  - Kōtoku-an 高德庵.....9 G6
  - Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art 京都市美術館.....10 D5
  - Miyako Messe みやこめッセ.....11 D5
  - Murin-an Villa 無鄰菴.....12 E5
  - Nanzen-in 南禅院.....13 F6
- SLEEPING (p352)**
- B&B Juno B&B じゅの.....20 E1
  - Hotel Heian No Mori Kyoto ホテル平安の森京都.....21 F4
  - Kyoto Traveller's Inn 京都トラベラーズイン.....22 D5
  - Three Sisters Inn Annex 洛東荘別館.....23 D4
  - Three Sisters Inn Main Building スリーシスターズイン.....24 E4
  - Westin Miyako Hotel ウェスティン京都ホテル.....25 E6
  - Yachiyo Ryokan 八千代旅館.....26 E6
  - Yonbanchi 番地.....27 E3

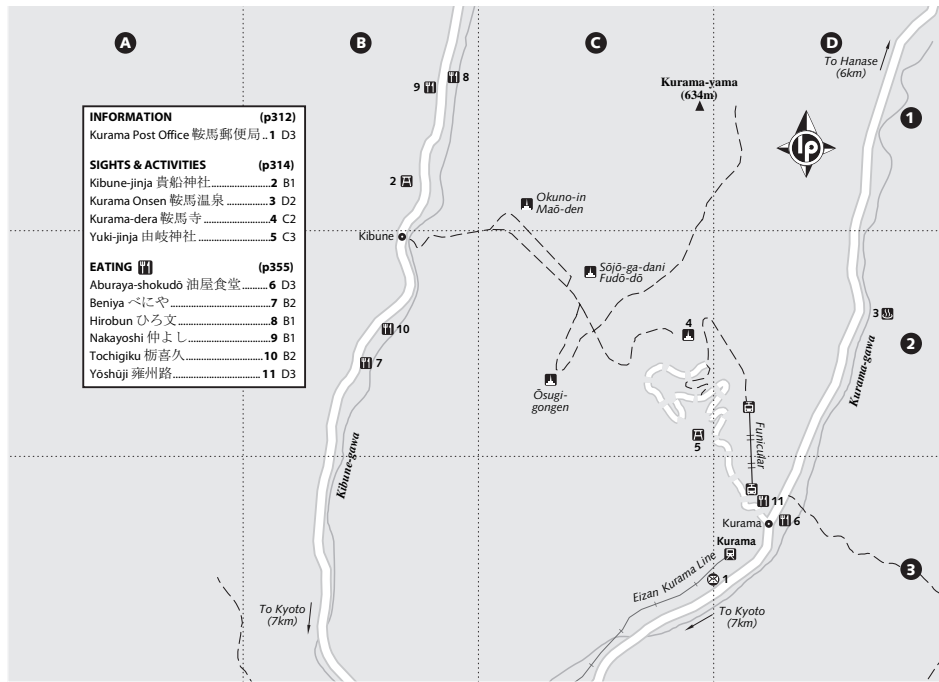
- EATING (p355)**
- Asian Diner アジアン ダイナー.....(see 29)
  - Buttercups バターカップス.....28 F3
  - Café Carinho カフェ カリーニョ.....29 E1
  - Café Peace カフェピース.....30 C1
  - Earth Kitchen Company アースキッチンカンパニー.....31 B4
  - Grotto ぐろっと.....32 E1
  - Hinode Udon 日の出.....33 F4
  - Karako 唐子.....34 C5
  - Kushi Hachi 串八.....35 F1
  - Okutan 奥丹.....36 F5
  - Omen おめん.....37 G2
  - Zac Baran ザックバラン.....38 D4
- ENTERTAINMENT (p361)**
- Kanze Kaikan Nō Theatre 観世会館.....39 D6
  - Metro メトロ.....40 B4
- SHOPPING (p362)**
- Kyoto Handicraft Center 京都ハンディクラフトセンター.....41 D4



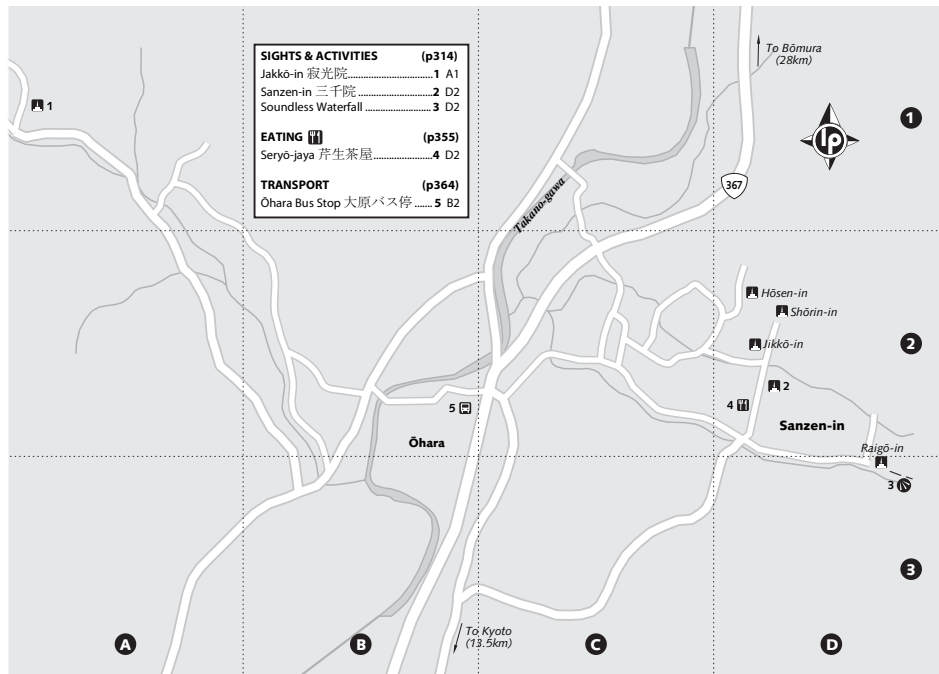
- SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES (p314)**
- Funaoka Onsen 船岡温泉.....1 E1
  - Kinkaku-ji 金閣寺.....2 D1
  - Kitano Tenman-gū 北野天満宮.....3 D2
  - Kōryū-ji 広隆寺.....4 B4
  - Myōshin-ji 妙心寺.....5 C3
  - Myōshin-ji 二条陣屋.....6 F4
  - Nijo-ji 二条城.....7 F4
  - Ninna-ji 仁和寺.....8 B2
  - Nishijin Textile Center 西陣織会館.....9 F2
  - Omura-san 織成閣.....10 E1
  - Ryōan-ji 龍安寺.....11 C1
  - Taizō-in 退藏院.....12 C3
  - Toei Uzunasa Movie Village 東映太秦映画村.....13 B3
- SLEEPING (p352)**
- Utano Youth Hostel 宇多野ユースホステル.....14 A2
- ENTERTAINMENT (p361)**
- Kamishichiken Kaburen-jō Theatre 上七軒歌舞劇場.....15 E2
- SHOPPING (p362)**
- Tenjin-san Market 天神さん市場.....(see 3)



- SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES (p314)**
- Adashino Nembutsu-ji 化野念仏寺.....1 A2
  - Arashiyama Monkey Park Iwatayama  
嵐山モンキーパークいわたやま.....2 B6
  - Giō-ji 祇王寺.....3 A3
  - Jōjakkō-ji 常寂光寺.....4 A4
  - Nison-in 二尊院.....5 A3
  - Nonomiya-jinja 野宮神社.....6 B4
  - Okochi-sansō Villa 大河内山荘.....7 B4
  - Rakushisha 落柿舎.....8 B3
  - Tagiguchi-dera 滝口寺.....9 A3
  - Tenryū-ji 天竜寺.....10 B4
  - Tenryū-ji North Gate 天竜寺北門.....11 B4
- EATING (p355)**
- Shigetsu 篩月.....(see 10)
  - Yoshida-ya よしだや.....12 C5
  - Yudōfu Sagano 湯豆腐鱈鱈野.....13 B5



- INFORMATION (p312)**
- Kurama Post Office 鞍馬郵便局.....1 D3
- SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES (p314)**
- Kibune-jinja 貴船神社.....2 B1
  - Kurama Onsen 鞍馬温泉.....3 D2
  - Kurama-dera 鞍馬寺.....4 C2
  - Yuki-jinja 由岐神社.....5 C3
- EATING (p355)**
- Aburaya-shokudō 油屋食堂.....6 D3
  - Beniya べにや.....7 B2
  - Hirobun ひろ文.....8 B1
  - Nakayoshi 仲よし.....9 B1
  - Tochigiku 栃喜久.....10 B2
  - Yoshuji 彌州路.....11 D3



- SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES (p314)**
- Jakkō-in 寂光院.....1 A1
  - Sanzen-in 三千院.....2 D2
  - Soundless Waterfall.....3 D2
- EATING (p355)**
- Seryō-jaya 芦生茶屋.....4 D2
- TRANSPORT (p364)**
- Ohara Bus Stop 大原バス停.....5 B2

(Continued from page 315)

It's a short walk from the Karasuma-Oike station on the Karuma line subway or the Tōzai line subway.

### PONTO-CHŌ 先斗町

A traditional nightlife district, **Ponto-chō** (Map p322) is a narrow alley running between Sanjō-dōri and Shijō-dōri just west of Kamo-gawa. It's best visited in the evening, when the traditional wooden buildings and hanging lanterns create a wonderful atmosphere of old Japan. This is also a good place to spot geisha and *maiko* (apprentice geisha) on their way to or from appointments. On weekend evenings you will probably notice one or two if you stand for a few minutes at the Shijō end of the alley.

### Central Kyoto

**KYOTO IMPERIAL PALACE PARK 京都御所**  
The Kyoto Goshō is surrounded by the spacious **Kyoto Imperial Palace Park** (Kamigyō-ku Kyoto goen; Map pp318-19; admission free; ☀ dawn-dusk), which is planted with a huge variety of flowering trees and open fields. It's perfect for picnics, strolls and just about any sport you can think of. Take some time to visit the pond at the park's southern end, which contains gorgeous carp. The park is most beautiful in the plum- and cherry-blossom seasons (March and April respectively). It is between Teramachi-dōri and Karasuma-dōri (to the east and west) and Imadegawa-dōri and Marutamachi-dōri (to the north and south).

### KYOTO IMPERIAL PALACE (KYOTO GOSHO) 京都御所

The original **imperial palace** (Map pp318-19) was built in 794 and was replaced numerous times after destruction by fire. The present building, on a different site and smaller than the original, was constructed in 1855. Enthronement of a new emperor and other state ceremonies are still held there.

The Goshō does not rate highly in comparison with other attractions in Kyoto and you must apply for permission to visit (see following). However, you shouldn't miss the park surrounding the Goshō.

To get there, take the Karasuma line subway to Imadegawa or a bus to the Karasuma-Imadegawa stop and walk 600m southeast.

### Reservation & Admission

Permission to visit the Goshō is granted by the Kunaichō, the **Imperial Household Agency** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 211-1215; ☀ 8.45am-noon & 1-4pm Mon-Fri, closed holidays), which is inside the walled park surrounding the palace, a short walk from Imadegawa station on the Karasuma line. You have to fill out an application form and show your passport. Children can visit if accompanied by adults over 20 years of age (but are forbidden entry to the other three imperial properties of Katsura Rikyū, Sentō Goshō and Shūgaku-in Rikyū). Permission to tour the palace is usually granted the same day (try to arrive at the office at least 30 minutes before the start of the tour you'd like to join). Guided tours, sometimes in English, are given at 10am and 2pm from Monday to Friday. The tour lasts about 50 minutes.

The Imperial Household Agency is also the place to make advance reservations to see the Sentō Goshō, Katsura Rikyū and Shūgaku-in Rikyū.

### SENTŌ GOSHO PALACE 仙洞御所

The **palace** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 211-1215; Kamigyō-ku Kyoto goen) is a few hundred metres southeast of the main Kyoto Goshō. Visitors must obtain advance permission from the Imperial Household Agency and be over 20 years old. Tours (in Japanese) start at 11am and 1.30pm. The gardens, which were laid out in 1630 by Kobori Enshū, are the main attraction.

### DAITOKU-JI 大徳寺

The precincts of this temple, which belongs to the Rinzaï school of Zen, contain an extensive complex of 24 subtemples, of which two are mentioned in following sections; eight are open to the public. If you want to experience Zen culture, this is the place to visit.

**Daitoku-ji** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 491-0019; Kita-ku Murasakino Daitokuji-chō; admission free; ☀ dawn-dusk) itself is on the eastern side of the grounds. It was founded in 1319, burnt down in the next century and rebuilt in the 16th century. The **San-mon** contains an image of the famous tea master Sen-no-Rikyū on the 2nd storey.

Around Daitoku-ji, two subtemples particularly worth a visit are **Daisen-in** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 491-8346; Kita-ku Murasakino Daitokuji-chō; admission free; ☀ 9am-4.30pm), for its two famous (if small) gardens, and **Kōtō-in** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 492-0068; Kita-ku Murasakino Daitokuji-chō; admission ¥400; ☀ 9am-4.30pm) for its lovely maples in autumn.

Admission charges to the various subtemples vary but are usually around ¥400. Those temples that accept visitors are usually open from 9am to 4.30pm.

The temple bus stop is Daitoku-ji-mae and convenient buses from Kyoto station are buses 205 and 206. Daitoku-ji is also a short walk west of Kitaō-ji subway station on the Karasuma line.

### SHIMOGAMO-JINJA 下鴨神社

This **shrine** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 781-0010; Shimogamo, Izumikawa-chō; admission free; ☀ 6.30am-5.30pm) dates from the 8th century and is a Unesco World Heritage site. It is nestled in the fork of the Kamo-gawa and Takano-gawa rivers, and is approached along a shady path through the lovely Tadasu-no-mori. This wooded area is said to be a place where lies cannot be concealed and is considered a prime location to sort out disputes.

The shrine is dedicated to the god of harvest. Traditionally, pure water was drawn from the nearby rivers for purification and agricultural ceremonies. The Hondō (Main Hall) dates from 1863 and, like the Haiden hall at its sister shrine, Kamigamo-jinja, is an excellent example of *nagare*-style shrine architecture.

The shrine is a only one-minute walk from Shimogamo-jinja-mae bus stop; take bus 205 from Kyoto station.

### KYOTO BOTANICAL GARDENS

京都府立植物園

The **Kyoto Botanical Gardens** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 701-0141; Sakyō-ku, Shimogamo; admission ¥200, greenhouse extra ¥200; ☀ 9am-5pm), opened in 1914, occupy 240,000 sq metres and feature 12,000 plants, flowers and trees. It is pleasant to stroll through the rose, cherry and herb gardens or see the rows of camphor trees and the large tropical greenhouse. The gardens are a two-minute walk from Kitayama subway station (Karasuma line).

### KAMIGAMO-JINJA 上賀茂神社

This **shrine** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 781-0011; Kamigamo Motoyama; admission free; ☀ 8am-4pm) is one of Japan's oldest shrines and predates the founding of Kyoto. Established in 679, it is dedicated to Raijin, the god of thunder, and is one of Kyoto's 17 Unesco World Heritage sites. The present buildings (over 40 in all), including the impressive Haiden hall, are exact reproductions of the originals, dating from the 17th to

19th century. The shrine is entered from a long approach through two torii (shrine gates). The two large conical white-sand mounds in front of Hosodono hall are said to represent mountains sculpted for gods to descend upon.

The shrine is a five-minute walk from Kamigamo-misonobashi bus stop; take bus 9 from Kyoto station.

### SUMIYA PLEASURE HOUSE

角屋もてなしの文化美術館

This **house** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 351-0024; Nishishin-yashikiageya-chō; admission ¥1000, Japanese-language tours available; ☀ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) is one of the last remaining *ageya* found in Shimabara. This district northwest of Kyoto station was Kyoto's original pleasure quarters. At its peak during the Edo period (1600-1867) the area flourished, with over 20 enormous *ageya* – magnificent banquet halls where artists, writers and statesmen gathered in a 'floating world' ambience of conversation, art and fornication. Geisha were often sent from their quarters (*okiya*) to entertain patrons at these restaurant-cum-brothels. By the start of the Meiji period, however, such activities had drifted north to the Gion district and Shimabara had lost its prominence.

Though the traditional air of the district has dissipated, a few old structures remain. The tremendous **Shimabara-no-ō-mon** gate, which marked the passage into the quarter, still stands, as does the Sumiya Pleasure House, now designated a National Cultural Asset. Built in 1641, this stately two-storey, 20-room structure allows a rare glimpse into Edo-era nirvana. With a delicate latticework exterior, Sumiya has a huge open kitchen and an extensive series of rooms (including one extravagantly decorated with mother-of-pearl inlay).

Sumiya is a seven-minute walk from JR Tanbaguchi station, or a 10-minute walk from Umekōji-kōen-mae bus stop; take bus 205 from Kyoto station.

### MIBU-DERA 壬生寺

Founded in 991, **Mibu-dera** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 841-3381; Bōjō-Bukkō-ji; admission free; ☀ 8.30am-5.30pm) belongs to the Risshū school. In the late Edo period, it became a training centre for samurai. Mibu-dera houses tombs of pro-shōgunate Shinsen-gumi members, who fought bloody street battles resisting the forces that succeeded in restoring the emperor in

1868. Except for an unusual stupa covered in Jizō statues, the temple is of limited interest. It is, however, definitely worth visiting during Mibu kyōgen performances (late April), or the Setsubun celebrations (early February).

The temple is a 10-minute walk from Hankyū Ōmiya station.

### TŌ-JI 東寺

This **temple** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 691-3325; Minami-ku Kujō; admission to grounds free, Kondō & Treasure Hall ¥500; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) was established in 794 by imperial decree to protect the city. In 818, the emperor handed the temple over to Kūkai, the founder of the Shingon school of Buddhism. Many of the buildings were destroyed by fire or fighting during the 15th century; most of those that remain date from the 17th century.

The **Kōdō** (Lecture Hall) contains 21 images representing a Mikkyō (Esoteric Buddhism) mandala. The **Kondō** (Main Hall) contains statues depicting the Yakushi (Healing Buddha) trinity. In the southern part of the garden stands the five-storey pagoda, which burnt down five times, was rebuilt in 1643 and is now the highest pagoda in Japan, standing 57m high.

The **Kōbō-san market-fair** is held here on the 21st of each month. The fairs held in December and January are particularly lively.

Tō-ji is a 15-minute walk southwest of Kyoto station.

### UMEKŌJI STEAM LOCOMOTIVE MUSEUM

梅小路蒸気機関車館

A hit with steam-train buffs and kids, this **museum** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 314-2996; Shimogyō-ku Kannon-ji-chō; adult/child ¥400/100, train ride adult/child ¥200/100; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) features 18 vintage steam locomotives (dating from 1914 to 1948) and related displays. It's in the former Nijō station building, which was recently relocated here and carefully reconstructed. For an extra ¥200 (¥100 for children), you can take a 10-minute ride on one of the fabulous old trains (departures at 11am, 1.30pm and 3.30pm). From Kyoto station, take bus 33, 205 or 208 to the Umekō-ji Kōen-mae stop (make sure you take a westbound bus).

### Southern Higashiyama

The Higashiyama district, which runs along the base of the eastern (Higashiyama) mountains, is the main sightseeing district in Kyoto

and it should be at the top of your Kyoto itinerary. It is, literally, thick with impressive sights: fine temples, shrines, gardens, museums, traditional neighbourhoods and parks. In this guide, we divide the Higashiyama district into two sections: Southern Higashiyama (this section) and Northern Higashiyama (p338).

We start this section with sights in the south, around Shichijō-dōri, and work north, to Sanjō-dōri. You could cover these in the order presented in a fairly long day. Be sure to see the Southern Higashiyama Walking Tour (p337). This is the most interesting route through the area.

### SANJŪSANGEN-DŌ 三十三間堂

The original **Sanjūsangen-dō** (Map p324; ☎ 525-0033; Higashiyama-ku Chaya-machi; admission ¥600; ☎ 8am-5pm Apr-mid-Nov, 9am-4.30pm mid-Nov-Mar) was built in 1164 at the request of the retired emperor Go-shirakawa. The temple burnt to the ground in 1249 but a faithful copy was constructed in 1266.

The temple's name refers to the 33 (*sanjū-san*) bays between the pillars of this long, narrow building that houses 1001 statues of the 1000-armed Kannon (the Buddhist goddess of mercy). The largest Kannon is flanked on either side by 500 smaller Kannon images, neatly lined up in rows.

There are an awful lot of arms, but if you're picky and think the 1000-armed statues don't have the required number of limbs, then you should remember to calculate according to the nifty Buddhist mathematical formula that holds that 40 arms are the equivalent of 1000 arms, because each saves 25 worlds. Visitors also seem keen to spot resemblances between friends or family members and any of the hundreds of images.

At the back of the hall are 28 guardian statues in a great variety of expressive poses. The gallery on the western side of the hall is famous for the annual **Tōshi-ya Matsuri**, held on 15 January, during which archers shoot arrows the length of the hall. The ceremony dates back to the Edo period, when an annual contest was held to see how many arrows could be shot from the southern end to the northern end in 24 hours. The all-time record was set in 1866, when an archer successfully landed over 8000 arrows at the northern end.

The temple is a 1.5km walk east of Kyoto station; alternatively, take bus 206 or 208 and

get off at the Sanjūsangen-dō-mae stop. It's also very close to Keihan Shichijō station. From the station, walk north on Karasuma-dōri, then turn right onto Shichijō-dōri and walk east; the temple is on the right.

### KYOTO NATIONAL MUSEUM

京都国立博物館

The **Kyoto National Museum** (Map p324; ☎ 531-7509; www.kyohaku.go.jp/eng/index\_top.html; Higashiyama-ku Chaya-machi; admission ¥500, extra for special exhibitions; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) is housed in two buildings opposite Sanjūsangen-dō. There are excellent displays of fine arts, historical artefacts and handicrafts. The fine arts collection is especially highly regarded, containing some 230 items that have been classified as National Treasures or Important Cultural Properties. Check what special exhibitions are on when you're in town, as these are often superb.

### KAWAI KANJIRŌ MEMORIAL HALL

河井寛次郎博物館

This **museum** (Map p324; ☎ 561-3585; Higashiyama-Gōjō-zaka; admission ¥900; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, closed around 10-20 Aug & 24 Dec-7 Jan, dates vary each year) was once the home and workshop of one of Japan's most famous potters, Kawai Kanjirō. The house is built in rural style and contains examples of his work, his collection of folk art and ceramics, and his kiln.

The hall is a 10-minute walk north of the Kyoto National Museum. Alternatively, take bus 206 or 207 from Kyoto station and get off at the Umamachi stop.

### KIYOMIZU-DERA 清水寺

This ancient **temple** (Map p324; ☎ 551-1234; Higashiyama-ku Kiyomizu; admission ¥300; ☎ 6am-6pm) was first built in 798, but the present buildings are reconstructions dating from 1633. As an affiliate of the Hossō school of Buddhism, which originated in Nara, it has successfully survived the many intrigues of local Kyoto schools of Buddhism through the centuries and is now one of the most famous landmarks of the city (for which reason it can get very crowded during spring and autumn).

The main hall has a huge veranda that is supported by hundreds of pillars and juts out over the hillside. Just below this hall is the waterfall **Otowa-no-taki** (Map p324), where visitors drink sacred waters believed to have therapeutic properties. Dotted around the precincts are other halls and shrines. At Jishu-

jinja, the shrine on the grounds, visitors try to ensure success in love by closing their eyes and walking about 18m between a pair of stones – if you miss the stone, your desire for love won't be fulfilled!

The steep approach to the temple is known as Chawan-zaka (Teapot Lane) and is lined with shops selling Kyoto handicrafts, local snacks and souvenirs.

To get there from Kyoto station take bus 206 and get off at either the Kiyomizu-michi or Gōjō-zaka stop and plod up the hill for 10 minutes.

### NINEN-ZAKA & SANNEN-ZAKA

二年坂・三年坂

Just below and slightly to the north of Kiyomizu-dera, you will find one of Kyoto's most lovely restored neighbourhoods, the Ninen-zaka-Sannen-zaka area (Map p324). The name refers to the two main streets of the areas: Ninen-zaka and Sannen-zaka, literally 'Two-Year Hill' and 'Three-Year Hill'. These two charming streets are lined with old wooden houses, traditional shops and restaurants. If you fancy a break, there are many teahouses and cafés along these lanes.

### KŌDAI-JI 高台寺

This **temple** (Map p324; ☎ 561-9966; Higashiyama-ku Kōdai-ji; admission ¥600; ☎ 9am-5pm) was founded in 1605 by Kita-no-Mandokoro in memory of her late husband, Toyotomi Hideyoshi. The extensive grounds include gardens designed by the famed landscape architect Kobori Enshū, and teahouses designed by the renowned master of the tea ceremony, Sen-no-Rikyū.

The temple is a 10-minute walk north of Kiyomizu-dera (left). Check at the TIC for the scheduling of summer and autumn nighttime illuminations of the temple (when the gardens are lit by multicoloured spotlights).

### MARUYAMA-KŌEN 円山公園

This **park** (Map p324; Maruyama-chō Higashiyama-ku) is a great place to escape the bustle of the city centre and amble around gardens, ponds, souvenir shops and restaurants. Peaceful paths meander through the trees and carp glide through the waters of a small pond in the centre of the park.

For two weeks in late March/early April, when the park's many cherry trees come into bloom, the calm atmosphere of the park is shattered by hordes of revellers enjoying

*hanami* (blossom-viewing). The centrepiece is a massive *shidarezakura*, a weeping cherry tree – truly one of the most beautiful sights in Kyoto, particularly when lit from below at night. For those who don't mind crowds, this is a good place to observe the Japanese at their most uninhibited. It is best to arrive early and claim a good spot high on the eastern side of the park, from which point you can safely peer down on the mayhem below.

The park is a five-minute walk east of the Shijō-Higashiōji intersection. To get there from Kyoto station, take bus 206 and get off at the Gion stop.

#### YASAKA-JINJA 八坂神社

This colourful **shrine** (Map p324; ☎ 561-6155; Higashiyama-ku Gion; admission free; 🕒 24hr) is just down the hill from Maruyama-kōen. It's considered the guardian shrine of neighbouring Gion and is sometimes endearingly referred to as 'Gion-san'. This shrine is particularly popular as a spot for *hatsu-mōde* (the first shrine visit of the new year). If you don't mind a stampede, come here around midnight on New Year's Eve or over the next few days. Surviving the crush is proof that you're blessed by the gods! Yasaka-jinja also sponsors Kyoto's biggest festival, Gion Matsuri (p351).

#### GION 祇園周辺

Gion, one minute's walk from Keihan Shijō station, is a famous entertainment and geisha district on the eastern bank of the Kamogawa. Modern architecture, congested traffic and contemporary nightlife establishments rob the area of some of its historical beauty, but there are still some lovely places left for a stroll. Gion falls roughly between Sanjō-dōri and Gojō-dōri (north and south, respectively) and Higashiyama-dōri and Kawabata-dōri (east and west, respectively).

**Hanami-kōji** is a street running north to south that bisects Shijō-dōri. The southern section is lined with 17th-century traditional restaurants and teahouses, many of which are exclusive establishments for geisha entertainment. If you wander around here in the late afternoon or early evening, you can often glimpse geisha or *maiko* on their way to or from appointments.

If you walk north from Shijō-dōri along Hanami-kōji, the fourth intersection you will come to is **Shinmonzen-dōri**. Wander in either direction along this street, which is packed

with old houses, art galleries and shops specialising in antiques. Don't expect flea-market prices.

For more historic buildings in a waterside setting, wander down **Shirakawa Minami-dōri** (sometimes called Shimbashi), which is parallel with, and a block south of, the western section of Shinmonzen-dōri. This is one of Kyoto's most beautiful streets, and, arguably, the most beautiful street in all of Asia, especially in the evening and during cherry-blossom season.

#### CHION-IN 知恩院

In 1234 **Chion-in** (Map p324; ☎ 531-2111; Shinbashi-dōri-Yamatōji Higashi iru; admission to grounds/inner buildings & garden free/¥400; 🕒 9am-4pm Mar-Nov, to 3.40pm Dec-Feb) was built on the site where a famous priest by the name of Hōnen had taught and eventually fasted to death. Today it is still the headquarters of the Jōdo school of Buddhism, which was founded by Hōnen, and a hive of activity. For visitors with a taste for the grand, this temple is sure to satisfy.

The oldest of the present buildings date back to the 17th century. The two-storey **San-mon**, a Buddhist temple gate at the main entrance, is the largest temple gate in Japan and prepares you for the massive scale of the temple. The immense main hall contains an image of Hōnen. It's connected to another hall, the Dai Hōjō, by a 'nightingale' floor (floors that sing and squeak at every move, making it difficult for intruders to move about quietly). The massive scale of the buildings reflects the popularity of the Jōdo school, which holds that earnest faith in the Buddha is all you need to achieve salvation.

The giant **bell**, cast in 1633 and weighing 74 tonnes, is the largest in Japan. The combined muscle-power of 17 monks is needed to make the bell ring for the famous ceremony that heralds the new year.

The temple is close to the northeastern corner of Maruyama-kōen. From Kyoto station take bus 206 and get off at the Chion-in-mae stop or walk up (east) from the Keihan Sanjō or Shijō station.

#### SHŌREN-IN 青蓮院

This **temple** (Map p324; ☎ 561-2345; Higashiyama-ku Sanjō-Awataguchi; admission ¥500; 🕒 9am-5pm) is hard to miss, with the giant camphor trees growing just outside its walls. Shōren-in was originally the residence of the chief abbot of

#### SOUTHERN HIGASHIYAMA WALKING TOUR

- Start: Gojō-zaka bus stop on Higashiōji-dōri, serviced by buses 18, 100, 206 and 207 (see Map p324)
- End: Jingū-michi bus stop on Sanjō-dōri, serviced by buses 5 and 100
- Distance: About 5km
- Time: Half-day

If you had only one day in Kyoto, this walk would be the best way to sample several of Kyoto's most important sights and neighbourhoods. It's pretty much a must-see route, heading right through the heart of Kyoto's premier sightseeing district. Be warned, though, that almost every visitor to Kyoto, both Japanese and foreign, eventually makes their way here, so you'll have to hit it very early in the day to avoid the crush.

The walk begins at Gojō-zaka bus stop (Map p324) on Higashiōji-dōri. From here, walk south for a few metres and turn up Gojō-zaka slope (there is an old noodle shop and pharmacy at the bottom of this street). Head uphill until you reach the first fork in the road; bear right and continue up **Chawan-zaka** (Teapot Lane). At the top of the hill you'll come to **Kiyomizu-dera** (p335), with its unmistakable pagoda rising against the skyline. Before you enter the main complex of Kiyomizu-dera, we recommend that you pay ¥100 to descend into the **Tainai-meguri**, the entrance to which is just to the left of the main temple entrance.

After touring Kiyomizu-dera, exit down Kiyomizu-michi, the busy approach to the temple. Walk down the hill for about 200m until you reach a four-way intersection; go right here down the stone-paved steps. This is **Sannen-zaka**, a charming street lined with old wooden houses, traditional shops and restaurants. There are many teahouses and cafés along this stretch.

Halfway down Sannen-zaka, the road curves to the left. Follow it a short distance, then go right down a flight of steps into **Ninen-zaka** (p335), another quaint street lined with historic houses, shops and teahouses. At the end of Ninen-zaka zigzag left (at the vending machines), then right (just past the parking lot), and continue north. Very soon, on your left, you'll come to the entrance to **Ishibe-kōji** – perhaps the most beautiful street in Kyoto, though it's actually a cobbled alley lined on both sides with elegant, traditional Japanese inns and restaurants. Take a detour to explore this, then retrace your steps and continue north, passing almost immediately the entrance to **Kōdai-ji** (p335) on the right up a long flight of stairs.

After Kōdai-ji continue north to the T-intersection; turn right at this junction and then take a quick left. You'll cross the wide pedestrian arcade and then descend into **Maruyama-kōen** (p335), a pleasant park in which to take a rest. In the centre of the park, you'll see the giant Gion *shidarezakura*, Kyoto's most famous cherry tree. Opposite the tree there's a bridge that leads across a carp pond to the lovely upper reaches of the park – this is a good place for a picnic, but you'll have to have brought something with you to eat, since the offerings in the park are limited to junk food.

From the park, you can head west (downhill) into the grounds of **Yasaka-jinja** (opposite) and descend from the shrine to Shijō-dōri and Gion and make your way home (it's about a 400m walk to Keihan Shijō station from here). However, if you've got the energy, it's best to return back through the park and head north to tour the grounds of the impressive **Chion-in** (opposite). From here it's a quick walk to **Shōren-in** (opposite), which is famous for its enormous camphor trees out front. From Shōren-in descend to Sanjō-dōri (you'll see the giant shrine gate of **Heian-jingū** (p340) in the distance). By going left on Sanjō-dōri, you'll soon come to the Jingū-michi bus stop where you can catch bus 5 or bus 100 to Kyoto station, or continue west a little further on Sanjō and you'll soon come to the Higashiyama-Sanjō station on the Tōzai line.

the Tendai school of Buddhism. The present building dates from 1895, but the main hall has sliding screens with paintings from the 16th and 17th centuries. Often overlooked by the crowds that descend on other Hi-

gashiyama temples, this is a pleasant place to sit and think while gazing out over the beautiful gardens.

The temple is a five-minute walk north of Chion-in (opposite).

## Northern Higashiyama

This is one of the city's richest areas for sight-seeing. It includes such first-rate attractions as Ginkaku-ji, Honen-in, Shūgaku-in Rikyū, Shisen-dō and Manshu-in. You can spend a wonderful day in Kyoto walking from Keage station on the subway Tōzai line all the way north to Ginkaku-ji (or vice versa), stopping in the countless temples and shrines en route. The sights in this section are presented from south to north. You could spend a very pleasant day working your way from Nanzen-ji, up the Tetsugaku-no-Michi (Path of Philosophy), to Ginkaku-ji. Sights further north should be tackled separately.

### NANZEN-JI 南禅寺

This is one of our favourite **temples** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 771-0365; nanzenji.com/english/index.html; Nanzen-ji Fuku-chi-chō; admission to grounds free, inner buildings & garden Hōjō Teien garden/San-mon/Nanzen-in ¥500/500/300; 🕒 8.40am-5pm Mar-Nov, to 4.30pm Dec-Feb) in all Kyoto, with its expansive grounds and numerous subtemples. It began as a retirement villa for Emperor Kameyama but was dedicated as a Zen temple on his death in 1291. Civil war in the 15th century destroyed most of the temple; the present build-

ings date from the 17th century. It operates now as headquarters for the Rinzaï school of Zen.

At its entrance stands the massive **San-mon**. Steps lead up to the 2nd storey, which has a fine view over the city. Beyond the gate is the main hall of the temple, above which you will find the **Hōjō**, where the **Leaping Tiger Garden** is a classic Zen garden well worth a look (try to ignore the annoying taped explanation of the garden). While you're in the Hōjō, you can enjoy a cup of tea while gazing at a small waterfall (¥400, ask at the reception desk of the Hōjō).

Dotted around the grounds of Nanzen-ji are several subtemples (see following sections) that are often skipped by the crowds.

To get to Nanzen-ji from JR Kyoto or Keihan Sanjō station, take bus 5 and get off at the Nanzen-ji Eikan-dō-michi stop. You can also take the subway Tōzai line from the city centre to Keage and walk for five minutes downhill. Turn right (east, towards the mountains) opposite the police box and walk slightly uphill and you will arrive at the main gate of the temple.

### Nanzen-ji Oku-no-in 南禅寺奥の院

Perhaps the best part of Nanzen-ji is overlooked by most visitors: **Oku-no-in** (Map pp326-7;

admission free; 🕒 dawn-dusk), a small shrine-temple hidden in a forested hollow behind the main precinct. To get there, walk up to the red-brick aqueduct in front of the subtemple of Nanzen-in. Follow the road that runs parallel to the aqueduct up into the hills, past several brightly coloured torii until you reach a waterfall in a beautiful mountain glen.

### Tenju-an 天授庵

This **temple** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 771-0365; Nanzen-ji Fuku-chi-chō; admission ¥400; 🕒 8.40am-5pm Mar-Nov, to 4.30pm Dec-Feb) stands at the side of the San-mon, a four-minute walk west of Nanzen-in. Constructed in 1337, the temple has a splendid garden and a great collection of carp in its pond.

### Konchi-in 金地院

When leaving Tenju-an, turn left and continue for 100m – **Konchi-in** (Map pp326-7; admission ¥400; 🕒 8.30am-5pm Mar-Nov, 8.40am-4.30pm Dec-Feb) is down a small side street on the left. The stylish gardens fashioned by the master landscape designer Kobori Enshū are the main attraction.

### MURIN-AN VILLA 無隣庵

This elegant **villa** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 771-3909; Nanzen-ji Kusakawa-chō ¥350; 🕒 9am-4.30pm) was the home of prominent statesman Yamagata Aritomo (1838–1922) and the site of a pivotal 1902 political conference as Japan was heading into the Russo-Japanese War.

Built in 1896, the grounds contain well-preserved wooden buildings including a fine Japanese tearoom. The Western-style annex is characteristic of Meiji-period architecture and the serene garden features small streams that draw water from the Biwa-ko Sōsui canal. For ¥300 you can savour a bowl of frothy *matcha* (green powdered tea) while viewing the 'borrowed scenery' backdrop of the Higashiyama mountains.

Murin-an is a seven-minute walk from subway Tōzai line Keage station.

### NOMURA MUSEUM 野村美術館

The **Nomura Museum** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 751-0374; Nanzen-ji Shimokawahara; admission ¥700; 🕒 10am-4.30pm Tue-Sun) is a 10-minute walk north of Nanzen-ji. Items on display include scrolls, paintings, tea-ceremony implements and ceramics that were bequeathed by the wealthy business magnate Tokushiki Nomura.

### EIKAN-DŌ 永観堂

**Eikan-dō** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 761-0007; www.eikando.or.jp/English/index\_eng.htm; Sakyo-ku Eikandō; admission ¥600; 🕒 9am-5pm) is a large temple famed for its varied architecture, gardens and works of art. It was founded in 855 by the priest Shinshō, but the name was changed to Eikan-dō in the 11th century to honour the philanthropic priest Eikan.

The best way to appreciate this temple is to follow the arrows and wander slowly along the covered walkways connecting the halls and gardens.

In the Amida-dō Hall, at the southern end of the complex, is the statue of Mikaeri Amida (Buddha Glancing Backwards).

From the Amida-dō Hall, head north to the end of the covered walkway. Change into the sandals provided, then climb the steep steps up the mountainside to the **Taho-tō** (Taho Pagoda), where there's a fine view across the city.

The temple is a 10-minute walk north of Nanzen-ji (opposite).

### TETSUGAKU-NO-MICHI (PATH OF PHILOSOPHY) 哲学の道

The **Tetsugaku-no-Michi** (Map pp326-7; Sakyo-ku Ginkaku-ji) has long been a favourite with contemplative strollers who follow the traffic-free route beside a canal lined with cherry trees that are spectacular when in bloom. It only takes 30 minutes to complete the walk, which starts just north of Eikan-dō (above) and ends at Ginkaku-ji (below).

### HÖNEN-IN 法然院

This fine **temple** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 771-2420; Sakyo-ku Shishigatani; admission free; 🕒 6am-4pm) was established in 1680 to honour Hönen, the charismatic founder of the Jōdo school. This is a lovely, secluded temple with carefully raked gardens set back in the woods. Be sure to visit in early April for the cherry blossoms and early November for the maple leaves, when the main hall is opened for a special viewing.

The temple is a 12-minute walk from Ginkaku-ji (below), on a side street that is accessible from the Tetsugaku-no-Michi (above); heading south on the path, look for the English sign on your left, then cross the bridge over the canal and follow the road uphill.

### GINKAKU-JI 銀閣寺

**Ginkaku-ji** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 771-5725; Sakyo-ku Ginkaku-ji; adult ¥500; 🕒 8.30am-5pm Mar-Nov, 9am-4.30pm Dec-Feb),

## THE LIVING ART OF THE GEISHA

Behind the closed doors of the exclusive teahouses and restaurants that dot the back streets of Kyoto, women of exquisite grace and refinement entertain gentlemen of considerable means. Patrons may pay more than \$3000 to spend an evening in the company of two or three geisha – kimono-clad women versed in an array of visual and performing arts, including playing the three-stringed *shamisen*, singing old teahouse ballads and dancing.

An evening in a Gion teahouse begins with an exquisite *kaiseki* (Japanese cuisine that obeys very strict rules of etiquette for every detail of the meal, including the setting) meal. While their customers eat, the geisha or *maiko* (apprentice geisha) enter the room and introduce themselves in Kyoto dialect.

A *shamisen* performance, followed by a traditional fan dance, is often given, and all the while the geisha and *maiko* pour drinks, light cigarettes and engage in charming banter.

It is virtually impossible to enter a Gion teahouse and witness a geisha performance without the introduction of an established patron. With the exception of public performances at annual festivals or dance presentations, they perform only for select customers. While geisha are not prostitutes, those who decide to open their own teahouses once they retire at 50 or so may receive financial backing from well-to-do clients.

Knowledgeable sources estimate that there are perhaps 80 *maiko* and just over 100 geisha in Kyoto. Although their numbers are ever decreasing, geisha (*geiko* in the Kyoto dialect) and *maiko* can still be seen in some parts of Kyoto, especially after dusk in the back streets between the Kamo-gawa and Yasaka-jinja and along the narrow Ponto-chō alley. Geisha and *maiko* can also be found in other parts of the country, most notably Tokyo. However, it is thought that there are less than 1000 geisha and *maiko* remaining in all Japan.

Geisha and *maiko* entertainment can be arranged through top-end hotels, ryokan and some private tour operators in Kyoto.



is one of Kyoto's premier sights. In 1482 Shōgun Ashikaga Yoshimasa constructed a villa here as a genteel retreat from the turmoil of civil war. The villa's name translates as 'Silver Pavilion', but the shōgun's ambition to cover the building with silver was never realised. After Yoshimasa's death, the villa was converted into a temple.

You approach the main gate between tall hedges, before turning sharply into the extensive grounds. Walkways lead through the gardens, which include meticulously raked canons of white sand (probably symbolic of a mountain and a lake), tall pines and a pond in front of the temple. A path also leads up the mountainside through the trees.

Note that Ginkaku-ji is one of the city's most popular sites, and it is almost always crowded, and it can be ridiculously packed during the spring and autumn. We strongly recommend going right after it opens or just before it closes.

From JR Kyoto or Keihan Sanjō station, take bus 5 and get off at the Ginkaku-ji-michi stop. From Demachianagi station or Shijō station, take bus 203 to the same stop.

#### OKAZAKI-KŌEN AREA 岡崎公園

Right in the heart of the northern Higashiyama area, you'll find Okazaki-kōen (Map pp326-7), which is Kyoto's museum district, and the home of one of Kyoto's most popular and important shrines, Heian-jingū.

Take bus 5 from Kyoto station or Keihan Sanjō station and get off at the Kyoto Kaikan Bijutsu-kan-mae stop and walk north, or walk up from Keihan Sanjō station (15 minutes). All the sights listed here are within five minutes' walk of this stop.

#### KYOTO MUNICIPAL MUSEUM OF ART

京都市美術館

The **Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 771-4107; Okazaki Enshōji-chō; admission varies by exhibition; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) organises several major exhibitions a year. These exhibitions are drawn from its vast collection of post-Meiji-era artworks. Kyoto-related works form a significant portion of this near-modern and modern collection.

#### NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

京都国立近代美術館

This **museum** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 761-4111; www.momak.go.jp/English; Okazaki Enshōji-chō; admission ¥420;

☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) is renowned for its collection of contemporary Japanese ceramics and paintings. Check to see what's on while you're in town.

#### MIYAKO MESSE & FUREAI-KAN KYOTO MUSEUM OF TRADITIONAL CRAFTS

みやこめッセ・京都伝統産業ふれあい館

The **museum** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 762-2633; Okazaki Seishōji-chō; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm) has exhibits covering things like wood-block prints, lacquerware, bamboo goods and gold-leaf work. It's in the basement of the Miyako Messe (Kyoto International Exhibition Hall).

#### HEIAN-JINGŪ 平安神宮

This impressive **shrine complex** (Map p326-7; ☎ 761-0221; Okazaki Nishitennō-chō; admission to shrine precincts/garden free/¥600; ☎ 6am-5.30pm Mar-Aug, to 5pm Sep-Feb) was built in 1895 to commemorate the 1100th anniversary of the founding of Kyoto. The buildings are colourful replicas, reduced to two-thirds of the size of the Kyoto Goshō of the Heian period.

The spacious garden, with its large pond and Chinese-inspired bridge, is also meant to represent the kind of garden that was popular in the Heian period. About 500m in front of the shrine there is a massive steel torii. Although it appears to be entirely separate from the shrine, this is actually considered the main entrance to the shrine itself.

Two major events are held at the shrine: Jidai Matsuri (Festival of the Ages; p351), on 22 October, and Takigi Nō (p406), from 1 to 2 June.

#### SHISEN-DŌ 詩仙堂

This **temple** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 781-2954; Ichijō-ji Monkuchi-chō; admission ¥500; ☎ 9am-5pm) was built in 1641 by Jōzan, a scholar of Chinese classics and a landscape architect, who wanted a place to retire to at the end of his life. The garden is a fine place to relax, with only the rhythmic 'thwack' of a bamboo *sōzu* (animal scarer) to interrupt your snooze.

The temple is a five-minute walk from the Ichijōji-sagarimatsu-mae bus stop on the No 5 route.

#### MANSHU-IN 曼殊院

Founded by Saichō on Hiei-zan, this **temple** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 781-5010; Ichijō-ji Takenouchi-chō; admission ¥500; ☎ 9am-5pm) was relocated here at the beginning of the Edo period. The architect-

ure, works of art and garden are impressive. The temple is situated around 30 minutes' walk (approximately 3km) to the north of Shisen-dō.

#### SHŪGAKU-IN RIKYŪ 修学院離宮

This imperial **villa** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 211-1215; Sakyō-ku Shūgakuin; admission free), or detached palace, was begun in the 1650s by the abdicated emperor Go-Mizunoo, and work was continued after his death in 1680 by his daughter Akenomiya.

Designed as an imperial retreat, the villa grounds are divided into three large garden areas on a hillside: lower, middle and upper. The gardens' reputation rests on their ponds, pathways and impressive use of 'borrowed scenery' in the form of the surrounding hills; the view from the Rinun-tei Teahouse in the upper garden is particularly impressive.

Tours, in Japanese, start at 9am, 10am, 11am, 1.30pm and 3pm (50 minutes). Admission is free, but you must make advance reservations through the Imperial Household Agency (see p332 for details).

From Kyoto station, take bus 5 and get off at the Shūgaku-in Rikyū-michi stop. The trip takes about an hour. From the bus stop it's a 15-minute walk (about 1km) to the villa. You can also take the Eiden Eizan line from Demachianagi station to the Shūgaku-in stop and walk east about 25 minutes (about 1.5km) towards the mountains.

#### HIEI-ZAN & ENRYAKU-JI 比叡山・延暦寺

A visit to 848m-high Hiei-zan and the vast **Enryaku-ji complex** (Map pp316-17; ☎ 077-578-0001; Sakamoto Honmachi, Ōtsu city; admission ¥550; ☎ 8.30am-4pm, closes earlier in winter) is a good way to spend half a day hiking, poking around temples and enjoying the atmosphere of a key site in Japanese history.

Enryaku-ji was founded in 788 by Saichō, also known as Dengyō-daishi, the priest who established the Tendai school. From the 8th century the temple grew in power; at its height it possessed some 3000 buildings and an army of thousands of *sōhei*, or warrior monks. In 1571 Oda Nobunaga saw the temple's power as a threat to his aims of unifying the nation and he destroyed most of the buildings, along with the monks inside. This school did not receive imperial recognition until 1823. Today only three pagodas and 120 minor temples remain.

The complex is divided into three sections – Tōtō, Saitō and Yokawa. The **Tōtō** (eastern pagoda section) contains the Kompon Chū-dō (primary central hall), which is the most important building in the complex. The flames on the three Dharma (the law, in Sanskrit) lamps in front of the altar have been kept lit for over 1200 years. The Daikō-dō (great lecture hall) displays life-size wooden statues of the founders of various Buddhist schools. This part of the temple is heavily geared to group access, with large expanses of asphalt for parking.

The **Saitō** (western pagoda section) contains the Shaka-dō, which dates from 1595 and houses a rare Buddha sculpture of the Shaka Nyorai (Historical Buddha). The Saitō, with its stone paths winding through forests of tall trees, temples shrouded in mist and the sound of distant gongs, is the most atmospheric part of the temple. Hold onto your ticket from the Tōtō section, as you may need to show it here.

The **Yokawa** is of minimal interest and a 4km bus ride away from the Saitō area. The Chū-dō here was originally built in 848. It was destroyed by fire several times and has undergone repeated reconstructions (most recently in 1971). If you plan to visit here, as well as Tōtō and Saitō, allow a full day for in-depth exploration.

#### Getting There & Away

You can reach Hiei-zan and Enryaku-ji by either train or bus. The most interesting way is the train-cable car-ropeway route. If you're in a hurry or would like to save money, the best way is a direct bus from Sanjō Keihan or Kyoto stations.

By train, take the Keihan line north to the last stop, Demachianagi, and change to the Yase-yūen/Hiei-bound Eizan Dentetsu Eizan-line train (be careful not to board the Kurama-bound train which sometimes leaves from the same platform). At the last stop, Yase-yūen (¥260), board the cable car (¥530, nine minutes) and then the ropeway (¥310, three minutes) to the peak, from which you can walk down to the temples.

Alternatively, if you want to save money (by avoiding the cable car and ropeway), there are direct Kyoto buses from Kyoto and Keihan Sanjō stations to Enryaku-ji, which take about 70 and 50 minutes respectively (both cost ¥800).

## Northwest Kyoto

Northwest Kyoto has many excellent sights spread over a large swath of Kyoto. Highlights include Nijō-jō, a shōgun's castle, Kinkaku-ji, the famed Golden Pavilion, and Ryōan-ji, with its mysterious stone garden. Note that three of the area's main sites – Kinkaku-ji, Ryōan-ji and Ninna-ji – can easily be paired together to form a great half-day tour out of the city centre.

### NIJŌ-JŌ 二条城

This **castle** (Map p329; ☎ 841-0096; Nijō-dōri-Horikawa; admission ¥600; 🕒 8.45am-5pm, last entry 4pm, closed Tue in Dec, Jan, Jul & Aug, & 26 Dec-4 Jan) was built in 1603 as the official Kyoto residence of the first Tokugawa shōgun, Ieyasu. The ostentatious style of construction was intended as a demonstration of Ieyasu's prestige and to signal the demise of the emperor's power. As a safeguard against treachery, Ieyasu had the interior fitted with 'nightingale' floors and concealed chambers where bodyguards could keep watch.

After passing through the grand **Kara-mon** gate, you enter **Ninomaru Palace** (admission palace & garden ¥600; 🕒 8.45am-4pm, closed 26 Dec-4 Jan), which is divided into five buildings with numerous chambers. The Ohiroma Yon-no-Ma (Fourth Chamber) has spectacular screen paintings. Don't miss the excellent **Ninomaru Palace Garden**, which was designed by the tea master and landscape architect Kobori Enshū.

The neighbouring **Honmaru Palace** dates from the middle of the 19th century and is only open for special viewing in the autumn.

To reach the castle, take bus 9 from Kyoto station to the Nijō-jō-mae stop. Alternatively, take the Tōzai line subway to the Nijō-jō-mae station.

### NIJŌ JINYA 二条陣屋

A few minutes' walk south of Nijō-jō is **Nijō Jinya** (Map p329; ☎ 841-0972; Ōmiya-dōri-Oike; admission ¥1000, reservations necessary in Japanese; 🕒 tours in Japanese 10am, 11am, 2pm & 3pm Thu-Tue), sometimes known in English as the 'Ninja House'. Built as a merchant's home in the mid-1600s, it served as an inn for provincial feudal lords visiting the capital. What appears to be an average Edo-period mansion, however, is no ordinary dwelling.

The house contains fire-resistant earthen walls and a warren of 24 rooms that were ingeniously designed to protect the *daimyō* (domain lords) against possible surprise at-

tacks. Here you'll find hidden staircases, secret passageways and a whole array of counter-espionage devices. The ceiling skylight of the main room is fitted with a trap door through which samurai could pounce on intruders, and sliding doors feature alternating panels of translucent paper to expose the shadows of eavesdroppers.

One-hour tours are conducted several times a day in Japanese and advance reservations must be made. Those who don't speak Japanese are asked to bring a Japanese-speaking guide.

### NISHIJIN 西陣

The Nishijin district (Map p329) is the home of Kyoto's textile industry, the source of the fantastic kimono and obi (ornamental kimono belts) for which the city is famous. It's one of Kyoto's more traditional districts, and there are still lots of good old *machiya* (traditional city houses) scattered about.

### NISHIJIN TEXTILE CENTER 西陣織会館

In the heart of the Nishijin textile district, this **centre** (Map p329; ☎ 451-9231; Horikawa-dōri-Imadegawa; admission free; 🕒 9am-5pm) is a good place to observe the weaving of fabrics used in kimono and obi. There are also displays of completed fabrics and kimono. It's on the southwest corner of the Horikawa-dōri and Imadegawa-dōri intersection.

### ORINASU-KAN 織成館

This **museum** (Map p329; ☎ 431-0020; Kamigyō-ku Daikoku-chō; admission ¥500; 🕒 10am-4pm Tue-Sun) is housed in a Nishijin weaving factory. It has impressive exhibits of Nishijin textiles. The Susamei-sha building next door is also open to the public and worth a look. With advance reservations, traditional weaving workshops can be attended. It's a short walk from the Nishijin Textile Center (above).

### KITANO-TENMAN-GŪ 北野天満宮

This **shrine** (Map p329; ☎ 461-0005; Kamigyō-ku Bakurochō; admission free; 🕒 5am-6pm summer, 5.30am-5.30pm winter) is of moderate interest. However, if you're in town on the 25th of any month, be sure to catch the **Tenjin-san market-fair** held here. This is one of Kyoto's two biggest markets and is a great place to pick up some interesting souvenirs. The markets held in December and January are particularly colourful.

From Kyoto station, take bus 50 and get off at the Kitano-Tenmangū-mae stop. From Keihan Sanjō station, take bus 10 to the same stop.

### KINKAKU-JI 金閣寺

The famed **Golden Temple** (Kinkaku-ji; Map p329; ☎ 461-0013; Kita-ku Kinkaku-ji-chō; admission ¥400; 🕒 9am-5pm) is one of Japan's best-known sights. The original building was constructed in 1397 as a retirement villa for Shōgun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. His son converted it into a temple.

In 1950 a young monk consummated his obsession with the temple by burning it to the ground. The monk's story was fictionalised in Mishima Yukio's *The Golden Pavilion*. In 1955 a full reconstruction was completed that exactly followed the original design, but the gold-foil covering was extended to the lower floors.

Note that this temple can be packed almost any day of the year. We recommend going early in the day or just before closing.

To get to the temple from Kyoto station, take bus 205 and get off at the Kinkaku-ji-michi stop. From Keihan Sanjō, take bus 59 and get off at the Kinkaku-ji-mae stop.

### RYŌAN-JI 龍安寺

This **temple** (Map p329; ☎ 463-2216; Ukyō-ku Ryōan-ji; admission ¥500; 🕒 8am-5pm Mar-Nov, 8.30am-4.30pm Dec-Feb) belongs to the Rinzaï school of Zen and was founded in 1450. The main attraction is the garden arranged in the *kare-sansui* (dry-landscape) style. An austere collection of 15 rocks, apparently adrift in a sea of sand, is enclosed by an earthen wall. The designer, who remains unknown, provided no explanation.

The viewing platform for the garden can be packed solid but the other parts of the temple grounds are also interesting and less of a target for the crowds. Among these, Kyōyō-chi pond is perhaps the most beautiful, particularly in autumn. Probably the best advice for Ryōan-ji is to come as early in the day as possible.

From Keihan Sanjō station, take bus 59 to the Ryōan-ji-mae stop.

### NINNA-JI 仁和寺

This **temple** (Map p329; ☎ 461-1155; web.kyoto-net.or.jp/org/ninnaji/eigo.htm; Ukyō-ku Omuroōchi; admission ¥500; 🕒 9am-4.30pm) was built in 842 and is the head temple of the Omura branch of the Shingon

school of Buddhism. The present temple buildings, including a five-storey pagoda, are from the 17th century. The extensive grounds are full of cherry trees that bloom in early April.

Admission to most of the grounds is free, but separate admission fees are charged for some of the temple's buildings, many of which are closed most of the year. To get there, take bus 59 from Keihan Sanjō station and get off at the Omuro Ninna-ji stop. From Kyoto station take bus 26.

### MYŌSHIN-JI 妙心寺

The vast temple complex **Myōshin-ji** (Map p329; ☎ 461-5226; Ukyō-ku Hanazono Myōshin-ji-chō; admission ¥500; 🕒 9.10am-3.40pm, closed lunch 1hr) dates back to the 14th century, and belongs to the Rinzaï school of Zen. There are over 40 temples, but only four are open to the public.

From the northern gate, follow the broad stone avenue flanked by rows of temples to the southern part of the complex.

The real highlight here is the wonderful garden of **Taizō-in** (admission ¥500; 🕒 9am-5pm), a temple in the southwestern corner of the grounds.

The northern gate of Myōshin-ji is an easy 10-minute walk south of Ninna-ji; or take bus 10 from Keihan Sanjō station to the Myōshin-ji Kita-mon-mae stop.

### TŌEI UZUMASA MOVIE VILLAGE

東映太秦映画村

In the Uzumasa area, this **attraction** (Tōei Uzumasa Eiga Mura; Map p329; ☎ 864-7716; Ukyō-ku Uzumasa Higashi Hachioka-chō; adult/child under 6/age 6-18 ¥2200/1100/1300; 🕒 9am-5pm Mar-Nov, 9.30am-4pm Dec-Feb) celebrates Kyoto's movie industry and all the films that have been filmed in the city. It has some recreations of Edo-period street scenes that give a decent idea of what Kyoto must have looked like before the advent of concrete. There's no denying that it's a tourist trap, but it's fun for the kids.

The main conceit of the park is that real movies are actually filmed here. While this may occasionally be the case, more often than not this entails a bunch of bored flunkies being ordered around by an ersatz movie 'director' complete with megaphone and a vintage 1930s-era movie camera. This seems to delight some tourists but leaves us a little less than convinced.

Aside from this, there are displays relating to various aspects of Japanese movies and

regular performances involving Japanese TV and movie characters like the Power Rangers. This should entertain the kids – adults will probably be a little bored.

It's a 13-minute walk from JR Sagano line Uzumasa station.

### KÖRYŪ-JI 広隆寺

One of the oldest temples in Japan, **Kōryū-ji** (Map p329; ☎ 861-1461; Ukyō-ku Uzumasa Hachioka-chō; admission ¥700; ☎ 9am-5pm Mar-Nov, to 4.30pm Dec-Feb) was founded in 622 to honour Prince Shōtoku, an enthusiastic promoter of Buddhism.

The Hattō (Lecture Hall), to the right of the main gate, houses a magnificent trio of 9th-century statues: Buddha flanked by manifestations of Kannon.

The Reihōkan (Treasure House) contains numerous fine Buddhist statues, including the Naki Miroku (Crying Miroku) and the world-renowned Miroku Bosatsu, which is extraordinarily expressive. A national upset occurred in 1960 when an enraptured (at least that's what he said) student clasped the statue and snapped off its little finger.

Take bus 11 from Keihan Sanjō station, get off at the Ukyō-ku Sogo-chosha-mae stop and walk north. The temple is also close to Uzumasa station on the Keifuku Arashiyama line.

### Arashiyama & Sagano Area

Arashiyama and Sagano, lying at the base of Kyoto's western mountains, is second only to the Higashiyama area as the most important sightseeing district in Kyoto. The attraction here is the temples scattered throughout the area's famous bamboo groves.

The main **bamboo grove**, just outside the north gate of Tenryū-ji (right), is one of Kyoto's most famous sites and is a dead ringer for the bamboo forest in the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Note that Arashiyama is wildly popular with Japanese tourists and can be packed, particularly in the cherry-blossom and maple-leaf seasons.

Bus 28 links Kyoto station with Arashiyama. Bus 11 connects Keihan Sanjō station with Arashiyama. The most convenient rail connection is the ride from Shijō-ōmiya station on the Keifuku-Arashiyama line to Arashiyama station. You can also take the JR San-in line from Kyoto station or Nijō station and get off at Saga Arashiyama station (be careful to take only the local train, as the express does not stop in Arashiyama).

The sites in this section are all within walking distance of Arashiyama station. We suggest walking from this station to Tenryū-ji, exiting the north gate, checking out the bamboo grove, visiting Ōkōchi Sansō, then walking north and to Giō-ji. All of these attractions are described in the following sections. If you have time for only one temple in the area, we recommend Tenryū-ji. If you have time for two, we suggest adding Giō-ji.

### KAMEYAMA-KŌEN 亀山公園

Behind Tenryū-ji, this **park** (Map p330) is a nice place to escape the crowds of Arashiyama. It's laced with trails, the best of which leads to a lookout over Katsura-gawa and up into the Arashiyama mountains. Keep an eye out for the monkeys; and keep children well away from the occasionally nasty critters.

### TENRYŪ-JI 天龍寺

One of the major temples of the Rinzai school of Zen, **Tenryū-ji** (Map p330; ☎ 881-1235; Saga Tenryū-ji; admission ¥600; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar) was built in 1339 on the former site of Emperor Go-Daigo's villa after a priest had dreamt of a dragon rising from the nearby river. The dream was interpreted as a sign that the emperor's spirit was uneasy and the temple was constructed as appeasement – hence the name *tenryū* (heavenly dragon). The present buildings date from 1900, but the main attraction is the 14th-century Zen garden.

Arashiyama's famous **bamboo grove** lies just outside the north gate of the temple.

### ŌKŌCHI SANSŌ 大河内山荘

This **villa** (Map p330; ☎ 872-2233; Saga Ogura-yama; admission ¥1000; ☎ 9am-5pm) is the home of Ōkōchi Denjiro, an actor in samurai films. The gardens allow fine views over the city and are open to visitors. The admission fee is hefty but includes tea and a cake. The villa is a 10-minute walk through bamboo groves north of Tenryū-ji.

### JŌJAKKŌ-JI 常寂光寺

If you continue north of Ōkōchi Sansō, the narrow road soon passes stone steps on your left which lead up to the pleasant grounds of **Jōjakkō-ji** (Map p330; ☎ 861-0435; Saga Ogura-yama; admission ¥300; ☎ 9am-5pm). The temple is famous for its maple leaves and the Tahōtō pagoda. The upper area of the temple precincts afford

good views east over Kyoto. The temple is a 10-minute walk north of Ōkōchi Sansō.

### RAKUSHISHA 落柿舎

This **hut** (Map p330; ☎ 881-1953; Saga Ogura-yama; admission ¥200; ☎ 9am-5pm) belonged to Mukai Kyorai, the best-known disciple of illustrious haiku poet Bashō. Literally meaning 'House of the Fallen Persimmons', legend holds that Kyorai dubbed the house Rakushisha after waking one morning after a storm to find the persimmons he had planned to sell from the garden's trees scattered on the ground. The hut is a short walk downhill and to the north of Jōjakkō-ji.

### NISON-IN 二尊院

Near Jōjakkō-ji, **Nison-in** (Map p330; ☎ 861-0687; Saga Nison-in Monzen-chō; admission ¥500; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) is in an attractive setting up the wooded hillside. The long approach to the temple, which is lined with lovely maple trees, is the biggest drawcard. The temple is a short walk north of Jōjakkō-ji.

### TAKIGUCHI-DERA 滝口寺

The history of this temple reads like a Romeo and Juliet romance. **Takiguchi-dera** (Map p330; ☎ 871-3929; Saga Kameyama-chō; admission ¥300; ☎ 9am-5pm) was founded by Heian-era nobleman Takiguchi Nyūdō, who entered the priesthood after being forbidden by his father to marry his peasant consort Yokobue. One day Yokobue came to the temple with her flute to serenade Takiguchi, but was again refused by him; she wrote a farewell love sonnet on a stone (in her own blood) before throwing herself into the river to perish. The stone remains at the temple. The temple is about 10 minutes' walk north of Nison-in.

### GIŌ-JI 祇王寺

This quiet **temple** (Map p330; ☎ 861-3574; Saga Nisonin Monzen-chō; admission ¥300; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) was named for the Heian-era *shirabyōshi* (traditional dancer) Giō. Aged 21, Giō committed herself here as a nun after her romance with Taira-no-Kiyomori, the mighty commander of the Heike clan. She was usurped by a fellow entertainer Hotoke Gozen (who later deserted Kiyomori to join Giō at the temple). Enshrined in the main hall are five wooden statues: these are Giō, Hotoke Gozen, Kiyomori, and Giō's mother and sister (who were also nuns at the temple). The temple is next to Takiguchi-dera.

### ADASHINO NEMBUTSU-JI 化野念仏寺

This rather unusual **temple** (Map p330; ☎ 861-2221; Sagatorii Moto Adashino-chō; admission ¥500; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) is where the abandoned bones of paupers and destitutes without next of kin were gathered. Thousands of stone images are crammed into the temple grounds, and these abandoned souls are remembered each year with candles here in the **Sentō Kuyō ceremony** held on the evenings of 23 and 24 August. The temple is about 15 minutes' walk north of Giō-ji.

### ARASHIYAMA MONKEY PARK IWATAYAMA

嵐山モンキーパークいわたやま

Home to some 200 Japanese monkeys of all sizes and ages, this **park** (Map p330; ☎ 861-1616; Arashiyama, Togetsu-kyō; adult/child ¥500/¥150; ☎ 9am-5pm 15 Mar-15 Nov, to 4pm winter) is fun for the kids. Though it is common to spot wild monkeys in the nearby mountains, here you can encounter them at a close distance and enjoy watching the playful creatures frolic about. Refreshingly, it is the animals who are free to roam while the humans who observe them are caged in a box!

You enter the park near the south side of Togetsu-kyō bridge, through the orange torii of Ichitani-jinja. Reaching the monkeys involves a moderate hike uphill. It's a 10-minute walk from Keifuku line Arashiyama station.

### HOZU-GAWA TRIP 保津川下り

The **Hozu-gawa river trip** (☎ 0771-22-5846; Hozu-chō Kameoka-shi; admission ¥3900; ☎ 9am-3.30pm, closed 29 Dec-4 Jan) is a great way to enjoy the beauty of Kyoto's western mountains without any strain on the legs. The river winds through steep, forested mountain canyons before it arrives at its destination, Arashiyama. Between 10 March and 30 November, there are seven trips (from 9am to 3.30pm) per day. During the winter, the number of trips is reduced to four per day and the boats are heated.

The ride lasts two hours and covers 16km between Kameoka and Arashiyama through occasional sections of tame white water – a scenic jaunt with minimal danger. The boats depart from a dock that is eight minutes on foot from Kameoka station. Kameoka is accessible by rail from Kyoto station or Nijō station on the JR San-in (Sagano) main line. The train fare from Kyoto to Kameoka is ¥400 one way by *futsū* (local train).

## Southeast Kyoto

### TÔFUKU-JI 東福寺

Founded in 1236 by the priest Enni, **Tôfuku-ji** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 561-0087; Higashiyama-ku Honmachi; admission to garden/grounds ¥400/free; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Dec-Oct, 8.30am-4.30pm Nov) now belongs to the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism. As this temple was intended to compare with Tōdai-ji and Kōfuku-ji in Nara, it was given a name combining characters from the names of each of these temples.

Despite the destruction of many of the buildings by fire, this is still considered one of the five main Zen temples in Kyoto. The huge **San-mon** is the oldest Zen main gate in Japan. The *tosu* (lavatory) and *yokushitsu* (bathroom) date from the 14th century. The present temple complex includes 24 subtemples; at one time there were 53.

The **Hōjō** was reconstructed in 1890. The gardens, laid out in 1938, are worth a visit. As you approach the northern gardens, you cross a stream over Tsūten-kyō (Bridge to Heaven), which is a pleasant leafy spot – the foliage is renowned for its autumn colour. The northern garden has stones and moss neatly arranged in a chequerboard pattern.

Tôfuku-ji is a 20-minute walk (2km) southeast of Kyoto station. You can also take a local train on the JR Nara line and get off at JR Tôfukuji station, from which it's a 10-minute walk southeast. Alternatively, you can take the Keihan line to Keihan Tôfukuji station, from which it's also a 10-minute walk.

### FUSHIMI-INARI TAISHA 伏見稲荷大社

This intriguing **shrine** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 641-7331; Fushimi-ku Fukakusa Yabunouchi-chō; admission free; ☎ dawn-dusk) was dedicated to the gods of rice and sake by the Hata family in the 8th century. As the role of agriculture diminished, deities were enrolled to ensure prosperity in business. Nowadays the shrine is one of Japan's most popular, and is the head shrine for some 30,000 Inari shrines scattered the length and breadth of Japan.

The entire complex consisting of five shrines sprawls across the wooded slopes of Inari-yama. A pathway wanders 4km up the mountain and is lined with hundreds of red torii. There are also dozens of stone foxes. The fox is considered the messenger of Inari, the god of cereal grains. The Japanese traditionally see the fox as a sacred, somewhat mysterious figure capable of 'possessing' humans –

the favoured point of entry is under the fingernails. The key often seen in the fox's mouth is for the rice granary.

The walk around the upper precincts of the shrine is a pleasant day hike. It also makes for a very eerie stroll in the late afternoon and early evening, when the various graveyards and miniature shrines along the path take on a mysterious air.

To get to the shrine from Kyoto station, take a JR Nara line train to Inari station. From Keihan Sanjō station take the Keihan line to Fushimi-Inari station. There is no admission charge for the shrine. The shrine is just east of both of these stations.

### DAIGO-JI 醍醐寺

**Daigo-ji** (Map pp316-17; ☎ 571-0002; Fushimi-ku Daigo Garan-chō; admission to grounds free, during cherry blossom & autumn foliage seasons ¥600, to Sampō-in ¥600; ☎ 9am-5pm) was founded in 874 by the priest Shobo, who gave it the name of Daigo. This refers to the five periods of Buddha's teaching, which were often compared to the five forms of milk prepared in India, the highest form of which is called *daigo* (ultimate essence of milk).

The temple was expanded into a vast complex of buildings on two levels – Shimo Daigo (Lower Daigo) and Kami Daigo (Upper Daigo). During the 15th century, the lower-level buildings were destroyed, with the sole exception of the five-storey pagoda. Built in 951, this pagoda still stands and is lovingly noted as the oldest of its kind in Japan and the oldest existing building in Kyoto.

The subtemple **Sampō-in** is a fine example of the amazing opulence of that period. The Kanō paintings and the garden are special features.

**Daigo-yama**, the mountain that forms the backdrop to the temple, is a steep climb that is enjoyable if you're in good shape and the weather is cool. From Sampō-in, walk up the large avenue of cherry trees, go through the Nio-mon gate and past the pagoda. From there you can continue for a steep climb through the upper part of Daigo-yama, browsing through temples and shrines on the way. Allow at least 50 minutes to reach the top.

To get to Daigo-ji, take the Tōzai line subway from central Kyoto to the last stop, Daigo, and walk east (towards the mountains) for about 10 minutes. Make sure that the train you board is bound for Daigo, as some head to Hama-Ōtsu instead.

## UJI 宇治

Uji is a small city to the south of Kyoto. Its main claims to fame are Byōdō-in and tea cultivation. The stone bridge at Uji – the oldest of its kind in Japan – has been the scene of many bitter clashes in previous centuries.

Uji is also home to Ujigami-jinja, a Unesco World Heritage site. Despite this status, it's not one of the Kyoto area's more interesting sights. Those who wish to see it can find it by crossing the river (using the bridge near Byōdō-in) and walking about 10 minutes uphill (there are signs).

Uji can be reached by rail in about 40 minutes from Kyoto on the Keihan Uji line or JR Nara line.

When arriving in Uji by Keihan train, leave the station, cross the river via the first bridge on the right, and then turn left to find Byōdō-in. When coming by JR, the temple is about 10 minutes' walk east (towards the river) of Uji station.

### Byōdō-in 平等院

This **Buddhist temple** (☎ 0774-21-2861; Uji-shi Uji rengo; admission ¥600; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm) was converted from a Fujiwara villa in 1052. The Hōō-dō (Phoenix Hall), more properly known as the Amida-dō, was built in 1053 and is the only original remaining building. The phoenix was a popular mythical bird in China and was revered by the Japanese as a protector of Buddha. The architecture of the building resembles the shape of the bird, and there are two bronze phoenixes perched opposite each other on the roof.

The building was originally intended to represent Amida's heavenly palace in the Pure Land. This building is one of the few extant examples of Heian-period architecture, and its graceful lines make one wish that far more of its type had survived Kyoto's past.

Inside the hall is the famous statue of Amida and 52 Bosatsu (Bodhisattvas) dating from the 11th century and attributed to the priest-sculptor Jōchō.

The temple, complete with its reflection in a pond, is one of Japan's top attractions and draws huge crowds. For a preview without the masses, take a look at the ¥10 coin.

## Southwest Kyoto

### SAIHŌ-JI 西芳寺

The main attraction at this **temple** (Map pp316-17; ☎ 391-3631; Nishikyō-ku Matsuo Jingatani-chō; admission

¥3000, entry as part of tour only, must reserve in advance) is the heart-shaped garden designed in 1339 by Musō Kokushi. The garden is famous for its luxuriant mossy growth, hence the temple's other name, Koke-dera (Moss Temple). Visiting the temple is recommended only if you have the time and patience to follow the reservation rules. If you don't, visit nearby Jizō-in (below) to get a sense of the atmosphere of Saihō-ji without the expense or fuss.

Take bus 28 from Kyoto station to the Matsuo-taisha-mae stop and walk 15 minutes southwest. From Keihan Sanjō station, take Kyoto bus 63 to Koke-dera, the last stop, and walk for two minutes.

### Reservations

To visit Saihō-ji, you must make a reservation. Send a postcard at least one week before the date you wish to visit and include details of your name, number of visitors, address in Japan, occupation, age (you must be over 18) and desired date (choice of alternative dates preferred). The address:

Saihō-ji,  
56 Kamigaya-chō,  
Matsuo, Nishikyō-ku,  
Kyoto-shi 615-8286  
JAPAN

Enclose a stamped, self-addressed postcard for a reply to your Japanese address. You might find it convenient to buy an Ōfukuhagaki (send-and-return postcard set) at a Japanese post office.

### JIZŌ-IN 地藏院

This delightful little **temple** (Map pp316-17; ☎ 381-3417; Nishikyō-ku Yamadakitano-chō; admission ¥400; ☎ 9am-5pm Mar-Nov, to 4.30pm Dec-Feb) could be called the 'poor man's Saihō-ji'. It's only a few minutes' walk south of Saihō-ji, in the same atmospheric bamboo groves. While the temple does not boast any spectacular buildings or treasures, it has a nice moss garden and is almost completely ignored by tourists, making it a great place to sit and think. For directions, see the previous Saihō-ji section.

### KATSURA RIKYŪ 桂離宮

This **palace** (Katsura Detached Palace; ☎ 211-1215; Nishikyō-ku Katsura misono; admission free) is considered to be one of the finest examples of Japanese architecture. It was built in 1624 for the emperor's brother, Prince Toshihito. Every

conceivable detail of the villa, the teahouses, the large pond with islets and the surrounding garden has been given meticulous attention.

Tours (around 40 minutes), in Japanese, commence at 10am, 11am, 2pm and 3pm. You should be there 20 minutes beforehand. An explanatory video is shown in the waiting room and a leaflet is provided in English. You must make advance reservations with the Imperial Household Agency (see p332 for details). Visitors must be over 20 years of age.

To get to the villa from Kyoto station, take bus 33 and get off at the Katsura Rikyū-mae stop, which is a five-minute walk from the villa. The easiest access from the city centre is to take a Hankyū line train from Hankyū Kawaramachi station to Hankyū Katsura station, which is a 15-minute walk from the villa. Don't take a *tokkyū* (express) train as they don't stop in Katsura.

### Kitayama Area

Starting on the north side of Kyoto city and stretching almost all the way to the Sea of Japan, the Kitayama mountains (literally 'Northern Mountains') are a natural escape prized by Kyoto city dwellers. Attractions here include the village of Ōhara (below), with its pastoral beauty, the fine mountain temple of Kurama (opposite), the rustic beauty of Hanase and Ashiu (opposite) and the trio of mountain temples in Takao (above).

### ŌHARA 大原

Since ancient times Ōhara (Map p331), a quiet farming town about 10km north of Kyoto, has been regarded as a holy site by followers of the Jōdo (Pure Land) school of Buddhism. The region provides a charming glimpse of rural Japan, along with the picturesque Sanzen-in, Jakkō-in and several other fine temples. It's most popular in autumn, when the maple leaves change colour and the mountain views are spectacular. During the peak foliage season (late October to mid-November) avoid this area on weekends as it will be packed.

### Sanzen-in 三千院

Founded in 784 by the priest Saichō, **Sanzen-in** (Map p331; ☎ 744-2531; Ōhara Raikōin-chō; admission ¥700; ☎ 8.30am-5pm Mar-Nov, to 4.30pm Dec-Feb) belongs to the Tendai sect of Buddhism. Saichō, considered one of the great patriarchs of Buddhism in Japan, also founded Enryaku-ji (Map p368) on nearby Hiei-zan. The temple's Yusei-en

is one of the most photographed gardens in Japan, and rightly so.

After seeing Yusei-en, head off to the Ojogokuraku Hall (Temple of Rebirth in Paradise) to see the impressive Amitabha trinity, a large Amida image flanked by attendants Kannon, goddess of mercy, and Seishi, god of wisdom, respectively. After this, walk up to the hydrangea garden at the back of the temple, where, in late spring and summer you can walk among hectares of blooming hydrangeas.

If you feel like a short hike after leaving the temple, head up the hill around the right side of the temple to the **Soundless Waterfall** (you'll note that it sounds pretty much like any other waterfall). The sound of this waterfall is said to have inspired Shomyo Buddhist chanting.

To get to Sanzen-in, follow the signs from Ōhara's main bus stop up the hill past a long arcade of souvenir stalls. The entrance is on your left as you crest the hill.

### Jakkō-in 寂光院

The history of **Jakkō-in** (Map p331; ☎ 744-2545; Ōhara Kusao-chō; admission ¥600; ☎ 9am-5pm Mar-Nov, to 4.30pm Dec-Feb) is exceedingly tragic. The actual founding date of the temple is subject to some debate (somewhere between the 6th and 11th centuries), but it acquired fame as the temple that harboured Kenrei Mon-in, a lady of the Taira clan. In 1185 the Taira were soundly defeated in a sea battle with the Minamoto clan at Dan-no-ura. With the entire Taira clan slaughtered or drowned, Kenrei Mon-in threw herself into the waves with her son Antoku, the infant emperor; she was fished out – the only member of the clan to survive.

She was returned to Kyoto, where she became a nun living in a bare hut until it collapsed during an earthquake. Kenrei Mon-in was accepted into Jakkō-in and stayed there, immersed in prayer and sorrowful memories, until her death 27 years later. Her tomb is located high on the hill behind the temple.

Unfortunately the main building of the temple burned down in May 2000 and the newly reconstructed main hall is lacking some of the charm of the original. Nonetheless, it's a nice spot.

Jakkō-in lies to the west of Ōhara. Walk out of the bus station up the road to the traffic lights, then follow the small road to the left. Since it's easy to get lost on the way, we recommend familiarising yourself with the

kanji for Jakkō-in (see p331) and following the Japanese signs.

### KURAMA & KIBUNE 鞍馬・貴船

Only 30 minutes north of Kyoto on the Eiden Eizan main line, **Kurama** and **Kibune** (Map p331) are a pair of tranquil valleys long favoured by Kyotoites as places to escape the crowds and stresses of the city below. Kurama's main attractions are its mountain temple and its *onsen* (hot-spring bath). Kibune, over the ridge, is a cluster of ryokan overlooking a mountain stream. It is best enjoyed in the summer, when the ryokan serve dinner on platforms built over the rushing waters of the Kibune-gawa, providing welcome relief from the summer heat.

The two valleys lend themselves to being explored together. In the winter one can start from Kibune, walk for an hour or so over the ridge, visit Kurama-dera and then soak in the *onsen* before heading back to Kyoto. In the summer the reverse is best; start from Kurama, walk up to the temple, then down the other side to Kibune to enjoy a meal suspended above the cool river.

If you happen to be in Kyoto on the night of 22 October, be sure not to miss the **Kurama-no-hi Matsuri** (Kurama Fire Festival; p351), one of the most exciting festivals in the Kyoto area.

To get to Kurama and Kibune, take the Eiden Eizan line from Kyoto's Demachiyanagi station. For Kibune, get off at the second-to-last stop, Kibune Guchi, take a right out of the station and walk about 20 minutes up the hill. For Kurama, go to the last stop, Kurama, and walk straight out of the station. Both destinations are ¥410 and take about 30 minutes to reach.

### Kurama-dera 鞍馬寺

This **temple** (Map p331; ☎ 741-2003; Sakyō-ku Kurama Honmachi; admission ¥200; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) was established in 770 by the monk Gantei from Nara's Tōshōdai-ji. After seeing a vision of the deity Bishamon-ten, guardian of the northern quarter of the Buddhist heaven, he established Kurama-dera in its present location, just below the peak of Kurama-yama. Originally belonging to the Tendai sect, Kurama has been independent since 1949, describing its own brand of Buddhism as Kurama Kyō.

The entrance to the temple is just up the hill from the Eiden Eizan main line's Kurama station. A tram goes to the top for ¥100; alterna-

tively, hike up by following the main path past the tram station. The trail is worth taking if it's not too hot, as it winds through a forest of towering old-growth *sugi* (cryptomeria) trees. At the top there is a courtyard dominated by the Honden (Main Hall). Behind the Honden, a trail leads off to the mountain's peak.

At the top, those who want to continue to Kibune can take the trail down the other side. It's a 45-minute hike from the Honden of Kurama-dera to the valley floor of Kibune. On the way down there are two pleasant mountain shrines.

### Kurama Onsen 鞍馬温泉

One of the few *onsen* within easy reach of Kyoto, **Kurama Onsen** (Map p331; ☎ 741-2131; Sakyō-ku Kurama Honmachi; admission ¥1100; ☎ 10am-9pm) is a great place to relax after a hike. The outdoor bath, with a fine view of Kurama-yama, costs ¥1100. The inside bath costs ¥2300, but even with the use of sauna and locker thrown in, it's difficult to imagine why one would opt for the indoor bath. For both baths, buy a ticket from the machine outside the door of the main building (instructions are in Japanese and English).

To get to Kurama Onsen, walk straight out of Kurama station, turn left up the main road and follow it for about 10 minutes. You'll see the baths down on your right. There's also a free shuttle bus that runs between the station and the *onsen*, leaving approximately every 30 minutes.

### Kibune-jinja 貴船神社

This **shrine** (Map p331; ☎ 741-2016; Kibune-chō Kurama; admission free; ☎ 6am-8pm), halfway up the valley-town of Kibune, is worth a quick look, particularly if you can ignore the unfortunate plastic horse statue at its entrance. Admission is free. From Kibune you can hike over the mountain to Kurama-dera, along a trail that starts halfway up the village on the eastern side (or vice versa – see left).

### HANASE & ASHIU 花背・芦生

Located directly north of Kurama, over the Hanase-tōgei pass, is the quiet rural valley of Hanase (Map p310), which is home to farmers, artists and nature-lovers. Further north, at the end of a Kyoto bus line, is Hirogawara, a small village that even has a small single-lift ski area that is open from January to March. Hirogawara is also the departure point for

hikes entering the famous Ashiu virgin forest. The entire Kitayama area is a delight for cyclists, hikers, cross-country skiers and photographers.

### Sleeping

There's good camping in the area. Otherwise, a good place to stay is **Hanase Suisen-Kyō** (水仙郷; ☎ 746-0185; fax 712-7023; www.suisenkyo.com; suisenkyo@mac.com; Hanase Harachi-chō; r per person ¥3200, bookings by email/fax only; ♿), which is located 31km north of Kyoto city between the small towns of Ofuse and Hirogawara. It's a secluded riverside getaway near several trailheads that must be reached via footbridge (across the river from the bus stop). Facilities include three guestrooms, full kitchen, traditional living areas and bicycles. Enjoy a relaxing picnic on the deck in the summer or warm your feet by the wood-burning stove and the in-floor hearth in the winter. To get there, take the bus described following and get off at Naka-no-cho (¥930, 1½ hours from Kyoto).

### Getting There & Away

Kyoto bus 32 (not Kyoto city bus) runs five times daily (four in winter) from Demachiyanagi (buses depart from the stand outside the Eizan-densha train station). It costs ¥1050 and takes one hour and 40 minutes to the end of the line in Hirogawara. Check the local bus times and incorporate a visit to Kurama to double your sightseeing pleasure.

### Takao 高雄

**Takao** (Map pp316-17) is a secluded district tucked far away in the northwestern part of Kyoto. It is famed for autumn foliage and the temples of Jingo-ji, Saimyō-ji and Kōzan-ji.

**Jingo-ji** (神護寺; Map pp316-17; ☎ 861-1769; Ukyō-ku Takao-chō; admission ¥400; ♿ 9am-4pm) is the best of the three temples in the Takao district. This mountain temple sits at the top of a long flight of stairs that stretch up from Kiyotaki-gawa to the temple's main gate. The Kondō (Gold Hall) is the most impressive of the temple's structures; it's roughly in the middle of the grounds, at the top of another flight of stairs.

After visiting the Kondō, head in the opposite direction along a wooded path to an open area overlooking the valley. Don't be surprised if you see people tossing small discs over the railing into the chasm below. These are *kawarakenage* – light clay discs that people

throw to rid themselves of their bad karma. Be careful: it's addictive, and at ¥100 for two, it can become expensive. You can buy the discs at a nearby stall. The trick is to flick the discs very gently, convex side up, like a Frisbee. When you get it right, they sail all the way down the valley, taking all that bad karma away with them.

The other two temples are within easy walking distance of Jingo-ji; **Saimyō-ji** (西明寺; Map pp316-17; ☎ 861-1770; Umegahata Togano-chō Ukyō-ku; admission free; ♿ 9am-5pm) is the better of the two. It's about five minutes' walk north of the base of the steps that lead up to Jingo-ji (follow the river upstream). To get to **Kōzan-ji** (高山寺; Map pp316-17; ☎ 861-4204; Umegahata Togano-chō Ukyō-ku; admission ¥600; ♿ 8.30am-5pm) you must walk back up to the main road and follow it north for about 10 minutes.

There are two options for buses to Takao: an hourly JR bus from Kyoto station which takes about an hour to reach the Takao stop (get off at the Yamashiro-Takao stop); and Kyoto city bus 8 from Shijō-Karasuma (get off at the Takao stop). To get to Jingo-ji from these bus stops, walk down to the river, then look for the steps on the other side.

## ACTIVITIES

### Baths

#### FUNAOKA ONSEN 船岡温泉

This old **bath** (Map p329; ☎ 441-3735; 82-1 Minami-Funaoka-chō-Murasakino Kita-ku; admission ¥390; ♿ 3pm-1am Mon-Sat, 8am-1am Sun & holidays) on Kuramaguchidōri is the best in all of Kyoto. It boasts an outdoor bath, a sauna, a cypress-wood tub, an electric bath, a herbal bath and a few more for good measure. Be sure to check out the *ranma* (carved wooden panels) in the changing room. Carved during Japan's invasion of Manchuria, the panels offer insight into the prevailing mindset of that era. (Frankly, we're surprised that they haven't been taken down, due to their violent content, which would be sure to upset Chinese visitors to the bath.)

To find the *onsen*, head west about 400m on Kuramaguchidōri from the Kuramaguchidōri intersection. It's on the left not far past Lawson convenience store. Look for the large rocks out the front.

#### GOKŌ-YU 五香湯

This popular **bath** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 812-1126; 590-1 Kakinomoto-chō-Gojō agaru Kuromon-dōri; admission ¥390; ♿ 2.30pm-12.30am Mon-Sat, 7am-midnight Sun,

11am-midnight holidays Tue-Sun except for 3rd Tue of each month) is another excellent bath. It has several good tubs and two saunas; one is merely hot, the other is roughly the same temperature as the centre of the sun.

### Geisha & Maiko Costume

If you ever wondered how you might look as a geisha or *maiko*, Kyoto has numerous outfits in town offering the chance. **Maika** (Map p324; ☎ 551-1661; www.maika.net; Higashiyama-ku, Miyagawa-suji; maiko/geisha from ¥6720/7350) is in the Gion district. There you can be dressed up to live out your *maiko* fantasy. If you don't mind spending a bit extra, it's possible to head out in costume for a stroll through Gion (and be stared at like never before!). The process takes about an hour. Call to reserve at least one day in advance.

### Japanese Culture (Tea Ceremony, Ikebana etc)

Kyoto is a fine place to get a taste of traditional Japanese culture, and there are several organisations that offer introductions to various aspects of Japanese culture, including the following.

**WAK Japan** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 212-9993; www.wakjapan.com; 412-506 Iseya-chō, Kamigyō-ku) offers a wide variety of excellent introductions to Japanese culture: tea ceremony, ikebana (Japanese flower arrangement), trying on kimonos, home visits, Japanese cooking, calligraphy, origami etc. Presenters-instructors either speak English or interpreters are provided. Pick-up service is available from your lodgings. This is highly recommended.

**Club Ōkitsu Kyoto** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 411-8585; www.okitsu-kyoto.com; 524-1 Mototsuchimikado-chō, Shimachi, Kamigyō-ku) offers an upscale introduction to various aspects of Japanese culture including tea ceremony, incense ceremony and traditional Japanese games. The introduction is performed in an exquisite Japanese villa near the Kyoto Goshō and participants get a real sense for the elegance and refinement of traditional Japanese culture. This is also highly recommended.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

There are hundreds of festivals in Kyoto throughout the year. Listings can be found in *Kyoto Visitor's Guide*, *Kansai Time Out* or weekend editions of the *Japan Times* and the *Yomiuri Daily*. The following are some of the

major or most spectacular festivals. These attract hordes of spectators from out of town, so book accommodation well in advance.

## February

**Setsubun Matsuri at Yoshida-jinja** This festival is held on the day of *setsubun* (2, 3 or 4 February; check with the TIC), which marks the last day of winter in the Japanese lunar calendar. In this festival, people climb up to Yoshida-jinja in the northern Higashiyama area to watch a huge bonfire. It's one of Kyoto's more dramatic festivals. The action starts at dusk.

## May

**Aoi Matsuri** (Hollyhock Festival) This festival dates back to the 6th century and commemorates the successful prayers of the people for the gods to stop calamitous weather. Today the procession involves imperial messengers in ox carts and a retinue of 600 people dressed in traditional costume. The procession leaves at around 10am on 15 May from the Kyōshō Goshō and heads for Shimogamo-jinja.

## July

**Gion Matsuri** Perhaps the most renowned of all Japanese festivals, this one reaches a climax on 17 July with a parade of over 30 floats depicting ancient themes and decked out in incredible finery. On the three evenings preceding the main day, people gather on Shijō-dōri, many dressed in beautiful *yukata* (light summer kimono), to look at the floats and carouse from one street stall to the next.

## August

**Daimon-ji Gozan Okuribi** This festival, commonly known as Daimon-ji Yaki, is performed to bid farewell to the souls of ancestors on 16 August. Enormous fires are lit on five mountains in the form of Chinese characters or other shapes. The fires are lit at 8pm and it is best to watch from the banks of the Kamo-gawa or pay for a rooftop view from a hotel.

## October

**Kurama-no-hi Matsuri** (Kurama Fire Festival) In perhaps Kyoto's most dramatic festival, huge flaming torches are carried through the streets by men in loincloths on 22 October. The festival climaxes around 10pm at Yuki-jinja (Map p331) in the village of Kurama, which is 30 minutes by train from Kyoto station on the Eiden Eizan line.

**Jidai Matsuri** (Festival of the Ages) This festival is of recent origin, only dating back to 1895. More than 2000 people, dressed in costumes ranging from the 8th century to the 19th century, parade from Kyoto Goshō to Heian-jingū on 22 October.



**Karasuma Kyoto Hotel** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 371-0111; fax 371-2424; www.kyotohotel.co.jp/karasuma/index\_e.html; Karasuma-dōri-Aneyakōji; s/d/tw from ¥10,164/23,100/18,480; ☒ ☑ ☑ ☑; ☉ Karasuma subway line, Shijō station, exit South-6) This busy downtown hotel occupies the middle ground between a business hotel and a standard hotel, with clean, well-maintained rooms. It's very popular with business people and travellers, many of whom like the convenience of a Starbucks right in the lobby.

**Hotel Fujita Kyoto** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 222-1511; fax 222-1515; www.fujita-kyoto.com/e/; Kamogawa Nijō-Ōhashi Hotori; s/d/tw from ¥10,395/26,565/16,170; ☒ ☑ ☑ ☑; ☉ Tōzai subway line, Shiyakusho-mae station, exit 2) Located on the banks of the Kamo-gawa, this hotel has acceptable rooms and a great on-site bar, as well as a few decent rooms. The hotel is usually rather quiet and has a restful feeling. It's a short walk to the downtown entertainment district.

**Kyoto ANA Hotel** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 231-1155; fax 231-5333; www.anahotels.com/eng/hotels/uky/index.html; Nijō-jō-mae-Horikawa-dōri; s/d/tw from ¥13,000/16,000/16,000; ☒ ☑ ☑ ☑; ☉ Tōzai subway line, Nijō-jō-mae station, exit 2) Directly opposite Nijō-jō on the west side of downtown, this large hotel gets plenty of foreign guests. Rooms are typical for a hotel of this class, and there are all the usual on-site facilities (pool, restaurants and bars) and something you won't find at most other hotels: an on-site fortune teller.

## Southern Higashiyama

### BUDGET

**Higashiyama Youth Hostel** (Map p324; ☎ 761-8135; fax 761-8138; www.syukuhaku.jp/english/top.html; Sanjō-dōri-Shirakawabashi; dm from ¥4360; ☒ ☑ ☑ ☑; ☉ Tōzai subway line, Higashiyama station, exit 1) This YH is very close to the sights of Higashiyama. It's regimented, but if you're the early-to-bed-early-to-rise type, it might suit.

### MIDRANGE

**Ryokan Uemura** (Map p324; ☎ /fax 561-0377; Ishibe-kōji-Shimogawara; r incl breakfast per person ¥9000; ☒ ☑ ☑; ☉ bus 206, Yasui stop) This beautiful little ryokan is at ease with foreign guests. It's on a quaint cobblestone alley, just down the hill from Kōdai-ji. Rates include breakfast, and there is a 10pm curfew. Book well in advance, as there are only three rooms. Note that the manager prefers bookings by fax and asks that cancellations also be made by fax (with so few rooms, it can be costly when bookings are broken without notice).

### TOP END

**Ryokan Motonago** (Map p324; ☎ 561-2087; fax 561-2655; www.motonago.com; 511 Washio-chō, Kōdaiji-michi, Higashiyama-ku; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥21,000; ☒ ☑ ☑; ☉ bus 206, Gion stop) This ryokan may have the best location of any ryokan in the city, and it hits all the right notes for a ryokan in this class: classic Japanese décor, friendly service, nice bathtubs and a few small Japanese gardens.

**Ryokan Seikōrō** (Map p324; ☎ 561-0771; fax 541-5481; www.seikoro.com/top-e.htm; 467 Nishi Tachibana-chō, 3 chō-me, Gojō kudarū, Tonyamachi-dōri, Higashiyama-ku; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥31,500; ☒ ☑ ☑; ☉ bus 17 or 205, Kawaramachi-Gojō stop) The Seikōrō is a classic ryokan that welcomes foreign guests. It's a fairly spacious place, with excellent, comfortable rooms, attentive service and a fairly convenient midtown location.

## Northern Higashiyama

### BUDGET

**Yonbanchi** (Map pp326-7; www.thedivvyam.com; 4 Shinnyo-chō; r per person ¥5000; ☒ ☑ wi-fi; ☉ bus 5, Kinrinshako-mae stop) Yonbanchi is a charming B&B ideally located for sightseeing in the Ginkakuji-Yoshida-Yama area. One of the two guest rooms looks out over a small Japanese garden. The house is a late-Edo-period samurai house located just outside of the main gate of Shinnyo-dō, a temple famed for its maple leaves and cherry blossoms. There is a private entrance and no curfew. Reservation by email only.

**B&B Juno** (Map pp326-7; www.gotokandk.com; Jōdo-ji-Nishida-chō; r per person ¥5000; ☒ ☑ wi-fi; ☉ bus 17, Shirakawa-mae stop) Located close to Ginkaku-ji, on the east side of Kyoto University, this large B&B-home, in an old private compound, has two bright Japanese-style rooms on the 2nd floor. It is run by a charming international couple with a wealth of inside information on Kyoto. Reservations by email only.

### MIDRANGE

**Kyoto Traveller's Inn** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 771-0225; fax 771-0226; www.k-travelersinn.com/english/index.php; Heianjingu Torii-mae; s/tw from ¥5775/10,500; ☒ ☑ ☑ ☑; ☉ bus 5, Kyōto Kaikan Bijyutsukan-mae stop) This small business hotel is very close to Heian-jingu, offering Western- and Japanese-style rooms. The restaurant on the 1st floor is open till 10pm. It's good value for the price and the location is dynamite for exploring the Higashiyama area.

**Three Sisters Inn Main Building** (Rakutō-sō Honkan; Map pp326-7; ☎ 761-6336; fax 761-6338; Kasugakita-dōri-Okazaki; s/d/tr ¥8900/13,000/19,500; ☒ ☑ ☑; ☉ bus 5, Dōbutsuen-mae stop) This is a good foreigner-friendly ryokan with a loyal following of foreign guests. It is well situated in Okazaki for exploration of the Higashiyama area.

**Three Sisters Inn Annex** (Rakutō-so Bekkan; Map pp326-7; ☎ 761-6333; fax 761-6338; Irie-chō-Okazaki; s/d without bathroom ¥5635/11,270, with bathroom ¥10,810/18,170, tr with bathroom ¥23,805; ☒ ☑ ☑; ☉ bus 5, Dōbutsuen-mae stop) In the same neighbourhood, this is run by another one of the three eponymous sisters, and is a good choice. The features are similar to the main building, but it's somewhat more intimate and the garden walkway adds to the atmosphere.

### TOP END

**Hotel Heian No Mori Kyoto** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 761-3130; fax 761-1333; www.heiannomori.co.jp/in Japanese; Okazaki Higashitenno-chō; d/tw from ¥17,325/18,480; ☒ ☑ ☑; ☉ bus 5, Tennōchō stop) This large, pleasant hotel is located close to Ginkaku-ji, Nanzen-ji and the Tetsugaku-no-michi (Path of Philosophy). The hotel is getting a little long in the tooth, but the location is excellent. The rooftop beer garden has a great view of the city in summer.

**Yachiyo Ryokan** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 771-4148; fax 771-4140; www.ryokan-yachiyo.com/top/englishtop.html; Fuku-chi-chō; r per person incl 2 meals approx ¥25,000; ☒ ☑ ☑; ☉ Tōzai subway line, Keage stop, exit 2) Located just down the street from Nanzen-ji temple, this large ryokan is at home with foreign guests. Rooms are spacious and clean, and some look out over private gardens. English-speaking staff is available. For pleasant and convenient evening strolling, this is a good bet.

**Westin Miyako Hotel** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 771-7111; fax 751-2490; www.westinmiyako-kyoto.com/english/index.html; Sanjō-dōri-Keage; s/d/tw from ¥26,600/28,900/32,400, Japanese-style r from ¥52,000; ☒ ☑ ☑ ☑; ☉ Tōzai subway line, Keage stop, exit 2) This sprawling complex is perched atop the Higashiyama area, making it one of the best locations for sightseeing in Kyoto. Rooms are clean, well maintained and tastefully decorated, and the staff is at home with foreign guests. On the down side, the main breakfast restaurant is dimly lit and the service here is not up to the prices.

## Northwest Kyoto

### BUDGET

**Utano Youth Hostel** (Map p329; ☎ 353-8250; Nakayama-chō; dm ¥2800; ☒ ☑ ☑ ☑; ☉ bus 10 or 59, Yuusu-hosteru-

mae stop) This is the best youth hostel in Kyoto. Bear in mind, though, that while it is conveniently located for touring sights in northwest Kyoto, it's something of a hike to those in other areas of the city. It is presently under reconstruction and scheduled to reopen in March 2008.

## EATING

Kyoto is one of the world's great food cities. First and foremost, it's the place to make a thorough exploration of Japanese cuisine. You could eat here for a month and still not exhaust the specialities on offer. And, if by some miracle you tire of the great Japanese food on offer, you'll find great international restaurants to satisfy every palate and budget.

Because Kyoto gets a lot of foreign travellers, you'll find a surprising number of English menus, and most places are quite comfortable with foreign guests – it's rare to see waitresses running for the exits at the first sign of a foreign face.

## Kyoto Station Area

The new Kyoto station building is chock-a-block with restaurants, and if you find yourself anywhere near the station around mealtime, this is probably your best bet in terms of variety and price.

For a quick cuppa while waiting for a train try Café du Monde (Map p321) on the 2nd floor overlooking the central atrium. Or you might want to snag a few pieces of sushi off the conveyor belt at Kaiten-zushi Iwamaru, on the ground floor at the east end of the station building.

For more substantial meals there are several food courts scattered about. The best of these can be found on the 11th floor on the west side of the building: the Cube food court and Isetan department store's Eat Paradise food court.

Outside the station building, there are lots of good places to eat.

**Iimura** (Map p321; ☎ 351-8023; Shichijō-dōri-Higashinotōin; set lunch ¥650; ☎ 11.30am-2pm; E) About 10 minutes' walk north of the station, this is a classic little restaurant that's popular with locals who come for its ever-changing set Japanese lunch. Just say *kyō no ranchi* (today's lunch) and you should be fine. It's in a traditional Japanese house, set back a bit from the street.



## Downtown Kyoto

Downtown Kyoto has the best variety of approachable Japanese and international restaurants. In addition to the choices listed here, don't forget the restaurant floors of the major department stores, which contain many easy-to-enter restaurants of all description.

**Park Café** (Map p322; ☎ 211-8954; Aneyakō-ji, Nakagyō-ku; drinks from ¥400; ☎ noon-midnight) This hip little café always reminds us of a Melbourne coffee shop. It's on the edge of the downtown shopping district and a convenient place to take a break.

**Café Independants** (Map p322; ☎ 255 4312; Sanjō-dōri-Gokomachi; salads & sandwiches from ¥400; ☎ 11.45am-midnight) Located beneath a gallery, the cool subterranean café offers a range of light meals and good café drinks in a bohemian atmosphere. A lot of the food offerings are laid out on display for you to choose from – with the emphasis on healthy sandwiches and salads. Take the stairs on your left before the gallery.

**Kyō-Hayashi-Ya** (Map p322; ☎ 231-3198; Sanjō-dōri, Nakagyō-ku; green tea ¥600; ☎ 11.30am-9.30pm) If you feel like a change from large American coffee chains and want to try some good Japanese green tea and enjoy a nice view over the mountains while you're at it, this is the place.

**Merry Island Café** (Map p322; ☎ 213-0214; Kiyamachi-dōri-Oike; lunch from ¥800; ☎ 11.30am-midnight, last order 11pm, closed Mon; E) This popular lunch-dinner restaurant strives to create the atmosphere of a tropical resort. The menu is *mukokuseki* (without nationality) and most of what is on offer is pretty tasty. It does a good risotto and occasionally has a nice piece of Japanese steak. In warm weather the front doors are opened and the place takes on the air of a sidewalk café. It's on the 6th floor; take the elevator.

**Kōsendō-sumi** (Map p322; ☎ 241-7377; Aneyakōji-dōri-Sakaimachi; lunch from ¥870; ☎ 11.30am-4pm, closed Sun; E) A good pick for a pleasant lunch while in the city centre. Kōsendō-sumi, is in an old Japanese house and serves a daily set lunch of simple Japanese fare. It's near the Museum of Kyoto.

**Kane-yo** (Map p322; ☎ 221-0669; Shinkyōgoku-dōri-Rokkaku; unagi over rice from ¥890; ☎ 11.30am-9pm) This is a good place to try *unagi* (eel). You can sit downstairs with a nice view of the waterfall or upstairs on the tatami. The *kane-yo donburi* set (¥850) is great value; it's served until 3pm. Look for the barrels of live eels outside and the wooden façade.

**Musashi Sushi** (Map p322; ☎ 222-0634; Kawaramachi-dōri-Sanjō; all plates ¥130; ☎ 11am-10pm, last order 9.50pm; E) This is the place to go to try *kaiten-zushi* (conveyor-belt sushi). Sure, it's not the best sushi in the world, but it's cheap, easy and fun. Look for the mini-sushi conveyor belt in the window. It's just outside the entrance to the Sanjō covered arcade.

**Shizenha Restaurant Obanzai** (Map p322; ☎ 223-6623; Koromonotana-dōri-Oike; lunch/dinner ¥840/2100; ☎ 11am-2pm & 5-9pm, closed dinner Wed) A little out of the way, but good value, Obanzai serves a good buffet-style lunch-dinner of mostly organic food. It's northwest of the Karasuma-Oike crossing, set back from the street a bit.

**Yak & Yeti** (Map p322; ☎ 213-7919; Gokōmachi-dōri-Nishikōji; curry lunch sets from ¥600; ☎ 11.30am-3pm & 5-10pm Tue-Sun; E) This is a little Nepali place that serves reliably good curry sets for lunch and tasty à la carte dinners. One visit and you'll see why many Kyotoites make this a regular pit stop. It's pretty chuffed about being listed in our guides and has posted a picture of an old edition out front – should be no trouble finding it.

**Kerala** (Map p322; ☎ 251-0141; Kawaramachi-dōri-Sanjō; lunch from ¥850, dinner from ¥3000; ☎ 11.30am-2pm & 5-9pm; E) This is where we go for reliable Indian lunch sets – great *thalis* that include two curries, good naan bread, some rice, a small salad etc. The dinners, however, are a little overpriced. It's on the 2nd floor; look for the display of food in the glass case on street level.

**Misoka-an Kawamichi-ya** (Map p322; ☎ 221-2525; Fuyachō-dōri-Sanjō; dishes ¥700-3800; ☎ 11am-8pm, closed Thu; E) This is the place to head for a taste of some of Kyoto's best *soba* noodles in traditional surroundings. They've been handmaking noodles here for 300 years. Try a simple bowl of *nishin soba* (*soba* noodles topped with fish), or the more elaborate *nabe* dishes (cooked in a special cast-iron pot). Look for the *noren* (Japanese curtains) and the traditional Japanese exterior.

**Katsu Kura** (Map p322; ☎ 212-3581; Teramachi-dōri-Sanjō; tonkatsu from ¥820; ☎ 11am-9pm; E) This restaurant in the Sanjō covered arcade is a good place to sample *tonkatsu* (deep-fried breaded pork cutlet). It's not the best in Kyoto, but it's relatively cheap and casual.

**Biotei** (Map p322; ☎ 255-0086; Sanjō-dōri-Higashinotōin; lunch from ¥840; ☎ 11.30am-2pm & 5-8.30pm Tue-Sat, lunch only Thu, dinner only Sat; E) Located diagonally across from the Nakagyō post office, this is a favour-

ite of Kyoto vegetarians. Best for lunch, it serves a daily set of Japanese vegetarian food (the occasional bit of meat is offered as an option, but you'll be asked your preference). It's up the metal spiral steps.

**Tagoto Honten** (Map p322; ☎ 221-3030; Sanjō-dōri-Teramachi; noodle dishes from ¥997; ☎ 11am-9pm; E) One of Kyoto's oldest and most revered *soba* restaurants makes a good break for those who have overdosed on *rāmen* (noodles in a meat broth with toppings). It's in the Sanjō covered arcade and you can see inside to the tables.

**A-Bar** (Map p322; ☎ 213-2129; Nishikiyamachi-dōri; dishes from ¥500; ☎ 5-11pm, last order 10.30pm; E) This student *izakaya* (Japanese pub-style venue) with a log-cabin interior is popular with expats and Japanese students for a raucous night out. The food is fairly typical *izakaya* fare, with plenty of fried items and some decent salads. It's a little tough to find – look for the small black-and-white sign at the top of a flight of steps near a place called Reims.

**Ganko Zushi** (Map p322; ☎ 255-1128; Sanjō-dōri-Kawaramachi; lunch from ¥1000, dinner from ¥3000; ☎ 11.30am-11pm, last order 10.30pm; E) Near Sanjō-ōhashi bridge, this is a good place for sushi or just about anything else. Look for the large display of plastic food models in the window. There is often a barker outside trying to drum up business.

**Tōsai** (Map p322; ☎ 213-2900; Takoyakushi-dōri-Sakaimachi East; dinner per person from about ¥3000; ☎ 5-10pm Tue-Sat; E) A great place to try a range of healthy and well-prepared Japanese dishes, there are plenty of choices here for vegetarians (the name of the place means 'Bean/Vegetable'). It's just east of a corner, next to a tiny parking lot – look for the traditional Japanese exterior.

**Mishima-tei** (☎ 221-0003; Teramachi-dōri-Sanjō kudar; sukiyaki sets from ¥4400; ☎ 11.30am-10pm, last order 9pm, closed Wed; E) In the Sanjō covered arcade, this is an inexpensive place to sample sukiyaki: there is a discount for foreign travellers!

**Yoshikawa** (☎ 221-5544; Tominokoji-dōri-Oike kudar; lunch ¥2000-6000, dinner ¥6000-12,000; ☎ 11am-2pm & 5-8pm) This is the place to go for delectable tempura. It offers table seating, but it's much more interesting to sit and eat around the small counter and observe the chefs at work. It's near Oike-dōri in a recently restored traditional Japanese-style building.

Finally, you'll find a few branches of the coffee chain Doutor in the downtown area,

including one set back just off of Kawaramachi-dōri, between Shijō and Sanjō.

## Central Kyoto

This section covers a large swath of Kyoto, and includes our picks that fall in the centre of the city, but don't fall on the Kyoto Station Area or Downtown Kyoto maps.

**Café Bibliotic HELLO!** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 231-8625; Nijo-dōri-Yanaginobanba higashi iru; food from ¥700, coffee ¥400; ☎ noon-11pm, closed irregularly; E) Like its name suggests, books line the walls of this cool café located in a converted *machiya*. You can get the usual range of coffee and tea drinks here, as well as light café lunches. Overall, this may be our favourite café in Kyoto, and it's worth the walk from the centre of town. Look for the plants out front.

**Cocohana** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 525-5587; Honmachi-dōri-Kujo; lunch from ¥680; ☎ 11am-11pm Thu-Mon, to 5.30pm Tue) This place is one of a kind: a Korean café in a converted old Japanese house. Dishes here include *bibimbap* (a Korean rice dish) and *kimchi* (Korean pickles). A full range of coffee and tea drinks is also available. It's a woody rustic place with both table and tatami seating. There is no English menu but the friendly young staff will help with ordering. This makes a great stop while explore south-eastern Kyoto (Tōfuku-ji etc).

**Le Bouchon** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 211-5220; Nijo-dōri-Teramachi; lunch/dinner from ¥900/2500; ☎ 11.30am-2.30pm & 5.30-9.30pm, closed Thu) This reliable French place serves good lunch and dinner sets and has a pleasant, casual atmosphere. The kitchen does very good work with fish, salads and desserts. The owner speaks English and French, as well as Japanese, and will make you feel right at home.

**Hiragana-kan** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 701-4164; Higashioji-dōri-Mikage; lunch/dinner from ¥800; ☎ 11.30am-4pm & 6-10pm, closed Tue) This place, popular with Kyoto University students, dishes up creative variations on chicken, fish and meat. Most mains come with rice, salad and miso soup for around ¥800. The menu is only in Japanese, but if you're at a loss for what to order try the tasty roll chicken *katsu*, a delectable and filling creation of chicken and vegetables. Look for the words 'Casual Restaurant' on the white awning.

**Shuhari** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 222-6815; Kawaramachi-dōri-Marutamachi agaru; lunch course from ¥850; ☎ noon-11pm Mon-Thu, to 2am Fri-Sun) Shuhari is a fine example of Kyoto's newest dining trend – fine

restaurants in renovated *machiya*. In this case, the food is casual French, with an emphasis on light fish dishes and healthy salads. Look for the red stovepipe with the name of the restaurant written on it out front.

**Didi** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 791-8226; Higashioji-dōri-Tanaka-Okubo-chō; lunch/dinner from ¥750/900; ☎ 11am-9.30pm, closed Wed; E) On Higashioji-dōri, north of Mikage-dōri, you'll find this friendly little smoke-free restaurant serving passable Indian lunch/dinner sets. There are plenty of vegetarian choices on the menu. It's easy to spot from the street.

**Den Shichi** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 323-0700; 4-1 Tatsumi-chō, Saiin, Ukyō-ku; sushi dinners from ¥3000; ☎ 11.30am-2pm & 5-11pm, closed Mon) A little out of the way, but well worth the trip, this is our favourite sushi restaurant in Kyoto. While we usually go for a sushi dinner here, the lunch deals are also great, including *tekkadon* (raw tuna over rice) for ¥504. In terms of price and quality, Den Shichi is always a good bet. Look for the black-and-white sign about 100m west of Hankyū Saiin station on Shijō-dōri.

**Manzara Honten** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 253-1559; Kawaramachi-dōri agaru; dinner courses from ¥4000; ☎ 5pm-midnight, last order 11.30pm) Manzara is located in a converted *machiya*. The fare here is creative modern Japanese and the surroundings are decidedly stylish. The *omakase* (chef's recommendation) course is good value, with eight dishes for ¥4000.

## Southern Higashiyama

**Gion Koishi** (Map p324; ☎ 531-0331; Higashiyama Gion North; tea from ¥500; ☎ 10.30am-7.30pm) This is where we go when we want to cool down on a hot summer day in Gion. The speciality here is *uji kintoki* (¥700), a mountain of shaved ice flavoured with green tea, sweetened milk and sweet beans (it tastes a lot better than it sounds, trust us). This is only available in the summer months. Look for the models of the sweets and tea out front.

**Kasagi-ya** (Map p324; ☎ 561-9562; Higashiyama-ku Kodajiri Masuya chō; sweets from ¥600; ☎ 11am-6pm, closed Tue) At Kasagi-ya, on the Ninen-zaka slope near Kiyomizu-dera, you can try o-hagi cakes made from *azuki* (sweet red beans). This funky old wooden shop has atmosphere to boot and friendly staff – which makes it worth the wait if there's a line. It's hard to spot; you may have to ask someone in the area to point it out.

**Amazon** (Map p324; ☎ 561-8875; Shichijō-dōri-Kawabata; coffee from ¥400; ☎ 7.30am-6pm, closed Wed) A

typical Japanese coffee shop that turns out some surprisingly tasty sandwiches. It's good for a bite or a cuppa while heading to/from Sanjūsangen-dō.

**Senmonten** (Map p324; ☎ 531-2733; Hanamikōji-dōri-Shinbashi; 10 dumplings ¥460; ☎ 6pm-2am, closed Sun) Senmonten serves only one thing: crisp fried *gyōza* – they're the best in town. Look for the metal-and-glass front door.

**Kagizen Yoshifusa** (Map p324; ☎ 561-1818; Higashiyama-ku Gion-chō; tea from ¥400; ☎ 9.30am-6pm, closed Mon; E) One of Kyoto's oldest and best-known *okashi-ya* (sweet shops) sells a variety of traditional sweets and has a cosy tearoom upstairs where you can sample cold *kuzukiri* (transparent arrowroot noodles), served with a *kuro-mitsu* (sweet black sugar) dipping sauce. It's in a traditional *machiya* up a flight of stone steps.

**Santōka** (Map p324; ☎ 532-1335; Sanjō-dōri-Kawabata; ramen from ¥750; ☎ 11am-2am) The young chefs at this sleek new restaurant dish out some seriously good Hokkaidō-style *rāmen*. You'll be given a choice of three kinds of soup when you order: *shio* (salt), *shōyū* (soy sauce) and *miso*. It's on the east side/ground floor of the new Kyōen restaurant-shopping complex.

**Machapuchare** (Map p324; ☎ 525-1330; 290 Kamihoritsume-chō, Sayamachi-dōri Shōmen kudaru, Higashiyama-ku; obanzai set from ¥840; ☎ 11.30am-8pm, closed Tue) This organic vegetarian restaurant serves a sub-lime vegetarian *obanzai* set (Kyoto home-style cooking). The problem is, the restaurant keeps somewhat irregular hours and the *obanzai* is not always available. Get a Japanese speaker to call and check before trekking here.

**Asuka** (Map p324; ☎ 751-9809; Sanjō-dōri-Higashiyama Nishi iru; meals from ¥1000; ☎ 11am-11pm, closed Mon; E) With an English menu, and a staff of old Kyoto *mama-sans* at home with foreign customers, this is a great place for a cheap lunch or dinner while sightseeing in the Higashiyama area. The tempura *moriawase* (assorted tempura set) is a big pile of tempura for only ¥1000. Look for the red lantern and the pictures of the set meals.

**Ryūmon** (Map p324; ☎ 752-8181; north side, Nishi iru Higashioji, Sanjō-dōri, Higashiyama-ku; dinner from about ¥1500; ☎ 5pm-5am) The place looks like a total dive, but the food is reliable and authentic, as the crowds of Kyoto Chinese residents will attest. There's no English menu, but there is a picture menu and some of the waitresses can speak English. Décor is strictly Chinese kitsch, with the exception of the deer head

over the cash register – still trying to figure that one out.

**Ichi-ban** (Map p324; ☎ 751-1459; Sanjō Ōhashi East; dinner from ¥3000; ☎ 5.30pm-midnight, closed Sun; E) This popular little *yakitori* (skewered meats or vegetables) joint on Sanjō-dōri has an English menu and a friendly young owner to help with ordering. Look for the yellow-and-red sign and the big lantern.

**Daikichi** (Map p324; ☎ 771-3126; Sanjō Ōhashi East; dinner about ¥3000; ☎ 5pm-1am, closed Wed; E) This is a good *yakitori* joint with a friendly owner. It's a little brightly lit for our taste, but the *yakitori* is tasty and it's easy to enter. It's on Sanjō-dōri; look for the red lanterns outside.

**Ōzawa** (Map p324; ☎ 561-2052; Gion-Shirakawa Nawate Higashi iru South; lunch ¥2500, dinner from ¥3800; ☎ 5-10pm, last order 9pm, closed Thu, lunch available advance request; E) Located on a beautiful street in Gion, this restaurant offers good tempura in traditional Japanese surroundings. Unless you choose a private tatami room, you'll sit at the counter and watch as the chef prepares each piece of tempura.

**Aunbo** (Map p324; ☎ 525-2900; Higashiyama-Yasaka Torii mae; lunch ¥2500, dinner ¥6000-10,000; ☎ noon-2pm & 5.30-10pm, closed Wed; E) Aunbo serves elegant, creative Japanese cooking in traditional Gion surroundings – the last time we were here we started with sublime sashimi, went on to fried *yuba* (tofu skimming) pockets and went from there. We recommend asking for the set and leaving the difficult decisions to the master. Aunbo takes reservations in the evening. There is no English sign; look for the traditional Japanese façade.

## Northern Higashiyama

**Buttercups** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 751-7837; 103 Shimobanbachō-Jōdo-ji Sakyō-ku; coffee/meals from ¥230/580; ☎ noon-10pm, closed Tue; E) This is a favourite of the local expat community and a great place for lunch, dinner or a cup of coffee. There is an international menu and this is one of the only places in town where you can get a proper salad.

**Café Carinho/Asian Diner** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 752-3636; Imadegawa-dōri-Shirakawa; coffee/lunch from ¥400/750; ☎ 11am-10pm Tue-Thu, to 11pm Fri-Sun; E) Located near Ginkaku-ji, this is a cosy little café. It serves good, strong Brazilian coffee, tasty cakes and some excellent sandwiches. The friendly owner speaks English and the wi-fi internet access is handy.

**Hinode Udon** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 751-9251; Nanzenji-Kitanobō-chō; noodle dishes from ¥400; ☎ 11am-6pm, closed

Sun; E) Filling noodle and rice dishes are served at this pleasant little shop with an English menu. Plain *udon* here is only ¥400, but we recommend you spring for the *nabeyaki udon* (pot-baked *udon* in broth) for ¥800. This is a good spot for lunch when temple-hopping near Ginkaku-ji or Nanzen-ji.

**Café Peace** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 707-6856; Higashioji-dōri-Imadegawa; drinks/food from ¥550/600; ☎ 11.30am-11pm Mon-Sat, to 10pm Sun & holidays; E) This is a pleasant spot for a cuppa or a light vegetarian meal. Lunch sets include green curry, sandwiches and Japanese fare. It's on the 3rd floor but there's a small sign on street level.

**Karako** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 752-8234; Okazaki-Tokuseichō; ramen from ¥650; ☎ 11.30am-2pm & 6pm-2am, closed Tue; E) This is our favourite *rāmen* restaurant in Kyoto. While it's not much on atmosphere, Karako has excellent *rāmen* – the soup is thick and rich and the *chāshū* (pork slices) melt in your mouth. We recommend the *kotteri* (thick soup) *rāmen*. Look for the lantern outside.

**Earth Kitchen Company** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 771-1897; Marutamachi-dōri-Kawabata; lunch ¥700; ☎ 10.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 3.30pm Sat, closed Sun; E) Located on Marutamachi-dōri near the Kamo-gawa, this is a tiny spot that seats just two people but does a bustling business serving tasty take-away lunch *ben-tō*. If you fancy a picnic lunch for your temple-hopping, this is the place.

**Zac Baran** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 751-9748; Higashioji-dōri-Marutamachi; dishes from ¥500; ☎ noon-3am; E) Near the Kyoto Handicraft Centre, this is a good spot for a light meal or a drink. It serves a variety of spaghetti dishes, as well as a good lunch special. Look for the picture of the Freak Brothers near the downstairs entrance. If you fancy dessert when you're done, step upstairs to the Second House Cake Works.

**Omen** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 771-8994; Shirakawa-dōri-Imadegawa; noodles ¥1000; ☎ 11am-10pm, closed Thu; E) This noodle shop is named after the thick, white noodles served in a hot broth with a selection of seven fresh vegetables. Just say *omen* and you'll be given your choice of hot or cold noodles, a bowl of soup to dip them in and a plate of vegetables (you put these into the soup along with some sesame seeds). It's a great bowl of noodles but that's not the end of the story: everything on the frequently changing menu is delicious. Best of all, there's a menu in English. It's about five minutes' walk from Ginkaku-ji in a traditional Japanese house with a lantern outside.

**Kushi Hachi** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 751-6789; Shirakawa-dōri-Imadegawa; dinner from ¥2000; ☎ 5-11.30pm, closed

Mon; E) Kushi Hachi, part of a popular Kyoto chain, is a fun spot to sample *kushi katsu*, a fried dish that is well suited to Western palates. We like to sit at the counter and watch as the frenetic chefs work the grills and deep-fryers.

**Okutan** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 771-8709; Nanzen-ji; set meals ¥3000; ☎ 10.30am-5pm Fri-Wed) Just outside the grounds of Nanzen-ji, this is a fine restaurant located inside the garden of Chōshō-in. Try a course of *yudōfu* (tofu cooked in a pot) together with vegetable side dishes.

**Grotto** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 771-0606; Imadegawa-dōri, Sakyo-ku; dinner courses from ¥4000; ☎ 6pm-midnight, closed Mon) This stylish little place along Imadegawa-dōri serves a killer dinner set menu that will take you through the major tastes in the Japanese gastronomy. It's a great way to spend two or three hours with someone special. Reservations are highly recommended.

## Arashiyama & Sagano Area

**Yoshida-ya** (Map p330; ☎ 861-0213; Saga-Tenryū-ji Tsukurimichi-chō; lunch from ¥800; ☎ 10am-6pm, closed Wed) This quaint and friendly little *teishokuya* (set-meal restaurant) is the perfect place to grab a simple lunch while in Arashiyama. All the standard *teishoku* favourites are on offer, including things like *oyakodon* (egg and chicken over a bowl of rice) for ¥1000. You can also cool off here with a refreshing *uji kintoki* (sweet *matcha* over shaved ice, sweetened milk and sweet beans; ¥600). It's the first place south of the station and it's got a rustic front.

**Shigetsu** (Map p330; ☎ 882-9725; Saga-Tenryū-ji; lunch from ¥3000; ☎ 11am-2pm) To sample *shōjin ryōri* (vegetarian meals) try Shigetsu in the precinct of Tenryū-ji. It has beautiful garden views.

**Yudōfu Sagano** (Map p330; ☎ 871-6946; Sagano-Tenryū-ji; lunch, dinner course from ¥3800; ☎ 11am-7pm; E) This is a good place to try that classic Arashiyama dish: *yudōfu*. Lunch and dinner courses go for ¥3800 (simply ask for the *yudōfu cosu*). Look for the wagon wheels outside.

## Ōhara

**Seryō-jaya** (Map p331; ☎ 744-2301; Ōhara Sanzenin-hōri; lunch sets from ¥2756; ☎ 9am-5pm) Just by the entry gate to Sanzen-in, Seryō-jaya serves wholesome *sansai ryōri* (mountain vegetable cooking), fresh river fish and *soba* noodles topped with grated yam. There is outdoor seating in the warmer months. Look for the food models.

## Kurama

**Aburaya-shokudō** (Map p331; ☎ 741-2009; Kurama-honmachi; meals from ¥800; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) Just down the steps from the main gate of Kurama-dera, this classic old-style *shokudō* (all-round restaurant) reminds us of what Japan was like before it got rich. The *sansai teishoku* (¥1700) is a delightful selection of vegetables, rice and *soba* topped with grated yam.

**Yōshūji** (Map p331; ☎ 741-2848; Kurama-honmachi; meals from ¥1050; ☎ 10am-6pm, closed Tue; E) Yōshūji serves superb *shōjin ryōri* in a delightful old Japanese farmhouse with an *irori* (open hearth). The house special, a sumptuous selection of vegetarian dishes served in red lacquered bowls, is called *kurama-yama shōjin zen* (¥2500). Or if you just feel like a quick bite, try the *uzu-soba* (*soba* topped with mountain vegetables; ¥1050). It's halfway up the steps leading to the main gate of Kurama-dera; look for the orange lanterns out front.

## Kibune

Visitors to Kibune from June to September should not miss the chance to cool down by dining at one of the picturesque restaurants beside the Kibune-gawa. Meals are served here on platforms (known as *kawa-doko*) suspended over the river as cool water flows just underneath. Most of the restaurants offer some kind of lunch special for around ¥3000. For a full *kaiseki* spread (¥5000 to ¥10,000) have a Japanese person call to reserve in advance. In the cold months you can dine indoors overlooking the river.

**Hirobun** (Map p331; ☎ 741-2147; Kurama-Kibune-chō; noodles ¥1200, *kaiseki* courses from ¥7000; ☎ 11am-9pm) If you don't feel like breaking the bank on a snazzy course lunch, head for this place where you can sample *nagashi-somen* (¥1200), thin white noodles that flow to you in globs down a split bamboo gutter; just pluck them out and slurp away (*nagashi-somen* is served until 5pm). Look for the black-and-white sign and the lantern.

**Nakayoshi** (Map p331; ☎ 741-2000; Kurama-Kibune-chō; lunch from ¥3500, dinner from ¥8500; ☎ 11am-9pm; E) One of the more reasonably priced restaurants is Nakayoshi, which serves a lunch *bentō* for ¥3500. *Kaiseki* dinners cost ¥8500.

**Beniya** (Map p331; ☎ 741-2041; Kurama-Kibune-chō; meals from ¥3000; ☎ 11am-7.30pm) This elegant riverside restaurant serves *kaiseki* sets for ¥6000, ¥8000 or ¥10,000, depending on size. There is a wooden sign with white lettering.

**Tochigiku** (Map p331; ☎ 741-5555; Kurama-Kibune-chō; sukiyaki from ¥8000; ☎ 11am-9pm, closed irregularly) Try this lovely riverside restaurant for sukiyaki and *kaiseki* sets. There is a small English sign.

## DRINKING

Kyoto has a great variety of bars, clubs and discos, all of which are good places to meet Japanese folks. And if you happen to be in Kyoto in the summer, many hotels and department stores operate rooftop beer gardens with all-you-can-eat-and-drink deals and good views of the city. Check the *Kyoto Visitor's Guide* for details.

## Bars

Kyoto is loaded with great bars and clubs – if you've got the energy left over after sightseeing, Kyoto is a great place to party!

**Ing** (Map p332; ☎ 255-5087; Nishikiyamachi-dōri-Takoyakushi; meals ¥250-700, drinks from ¥580; ☎ 6pm-2am Mon-Thu, to 5am Fri & Sat; E) Another one of our favourite spots, this little joint is the place for cheap bar snacks and drinks, good music and friendly company. It's on the 2nd floor of the Royal building; you'll know you're getting close when you see all the hostesses out trawling for customers on the streets nearby.

**Atlantis** (Map p322; ☎ 241-1621; Shijō-Pontochō agaru; drinks from ¥800; ☎ 6pm-2am) This bar is one of the few on Pontochō that foreigners can walk into without a Japanese friend. It's a slick, trendy place that draws a fair smattering of Kyoto's beautiful people and wanna-be beautiful people. In summer you can sit outside on a platform looking over the Kamo-gawa. Drinks average ¥1000.

**Café Bon Appétit** (Map p324; ☎ 525-0585; Shirakawa Nawate; drinks from ¥500; ☎ 11am-11pm) Not exactly a bar, not exactly a café, this is a fine spot to sip a drink and watch the characters of Gion stroll by. It's near the Shira-kawa canal and right alongside some of Kyoto's best cherry trees.

**Zappa** (Map p322; ☎ 255-4437; Takoyakushi-dōri-Kawaramachi; dishes from ¥850; ☎ 6pm-midnight Mon-Sat; E) Unbeatable if you're looking for a more intimate venue. It's a cosy little place that once played host to David Bowie (he's said to have discovered it by chance and decided to drop in for a drink). It serves savoury Southeast Asian fare and a few Japanese tidbits for good measure. It's down a narrow alley; turn south at the wooden torii.

**Mcloughlin's Irish Bar & Restaurant** (Map p322; ☎ 212-6339; Empire Bldg, Kiyamachi Sanjō-agaru; ☎ 6pm-late; ☎ wi-fi) This is our favourite expat bar in town. It's got a ripping view over the Higashiyama mountains, great beer on tap, good food and a nice, open feeling. It hosts some great music events as well. There is wi-fi internet access in case you want to do some surfing with your beer.

**Rub-a-Dub** (Map p322; ☎ 256-3122; Kiyamachi-dōri-Sanjō; meals from ¥500, drinks from ¥600; ☎ 7pm-2am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat; E) At the northern end of Kiyamachi-dōri, Rub-a-Dub is a funky little reggae bar with a shabby tropical look. It's a good place for a quiet drink on weekdays, but on Friday and Saturday nights you'll have no choice but to bob along with the crowd. Look for the stairs heading down to the basement beside the popular (and delightfully 'fragrant') Nagahama Rāmen shop.

**Tadg's Irish Pub** (Map p322; ☎ 525-0680; Yamatōji-dōri-Shijō agaru; drinks from ¥600; ☎ 5pm-1am, later Thu-Sun; E) Tadg's is a good little Irish bar on the doorstep of Gion. It's a great place to meet local expats and see what's going on in town.

**Jumbo Karaoke Hiroba** (Map p322; ☎ 761-3939; Keihan Sanjō branch, Sanjō-dōri-Kawabata, Sanjō-Hashi East; per person per hr all-you-can-drink ¥640; ☎ 11am-6am) is one of the cheapest places to indulge in this most Japanese of pastimes, karaoke. Kyoto expats love this place because it's in the same building as a popular '*gaijin bar*', the Pig & Whistle. There's a decent selection of English songs (ask the attendant to show you the menu) and it's all you can drink. There's a **second branch** (Map p322; ☎ 231-6777; Sanjō Kawaramachi branch, Kawaramachi dōri-Sanjō) in the Sanjō shopping arcade.

## ENTERTAINMENT

Most of Kyoto's cultural entertainment is of an occasional nature, and you'll need to check with the TIC or a magazine like *Kansai Time Out* to find out whether anything interesting coincides with your visit. Regular cultural events are generally geared at the tourist market and tend to be expensive and, naturally, somewhat touristy.

## Clubs

**Metro** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 752-4765; Kawabata-dōri-Marutamachi kudarū; admission Wed & Thu free, Fri-Sun ¥2000; ☎ 10pm-3am) This is one of the most popular clubs in town. It's part disco, part live house

and even hosts the occasional art exhibition. Every night is a different theme; check the *Kansai Time Out* for forthcoming events. On weekends there's usually an admission charge of between ¥1500 and ¥2000 (with one drink), while Wednesday and Thursday are usually free. It's inside exit 2 of the Keihan Marutamachi station.

**World** (Map p322; ☎ 213-4119; Nishikiyamachidōri-Shijō agaru; admission from ¥1500, drinks from ¥500; ☎ 10pm-5am) World is Kyoto's biggest club and it naturally hosts some of the biggest events. It has two floors, a dance floor and lockers where you can leave your stuff while you dance the night away. Events include everything from deep soul to reggae to techno to salsa.

### Geisha Dances

Annually in autumn and spring, geisha and their *maiko* apprentices from Kyoto's five schools dress elaborately to perform traditional dances in praise of the seasons. The cheapest tickets cost about ¥1650 (unreserved on tatami mats), better seats cost ¥3000 to ¥3800, and spending an extra ¥500 includes participation in a quick tea ceremony. The dances are similar from place to place and are repeated several times a day. Dates and times vary, so check with the TIC.

**Gion Odori** (祇園をどり; ☎ 561-0224; Higashiyama-ku-Gion; admission/with tea ¥3500/4000; ☎ shows 1pm & 3.30pm) Held at Gion Kaikan Theatre (Map p324) near Yasaka-jinja; 1 to 10 November.

**Kamogawa Odori** (鴨川をどり; ☎ 221-2025; Ponto-chō-Sanjō kudarū; normal/special/special with tea ¥2000/3800/4300; ☎ shows 12.30pm, 2.20pm & 4.10pm) Held at Ponto-chō Kaburen-jō Theatre (Map p322), Ponto-chō; 1 to 24 May.

**Kitano Odori** (北野をどり; ☎ 461-0148; Imadegawa-dōri-Nishihonmatsu nishi iru; admission/with tea ¥3800/4300; ☎ shows 1pm & 3pm) At Kamishichiken Kaburen-jō Theatre (Map p329), east of Kitano-Tenmangū; 15 to 25 April.

**Kyō Odori** (京をどり; ☎ 561-1151; Kawabata-dōri-Shijō kudarū; admission/with tea ¥3800/4300; ☎ shows 12.30pm, 2.30pm & 4.30pm) Held at Miyagawa-chō Kaburen-jō Theatre (Map p324), east of the Kamo-gawa between Shijō-dōri and Gojō-dōri; from the first to the third Sunday in April.

**Miyako Odori** (都をどり; ☎ 561-1115; Higashiyama-ku-Gion-chō South; reserved/nonreserved seat ¥3800/1900, reserved seat with tea ¥4300; ☎ shows 12.30pm, 2pm, 3.30pm & 4.50pm) At Gion Kōbu Kaburen-jō Theatre (Map p324), near Gion Corner; throughout April.

### Kabuki

**Minami-za Theatre** (Map p322; ☎ 561-0160; Shijō-Ōhashi; ¥4200-12,600; ☎ irregular) In Gion, this is the oldest kabuki theatre in Japan. The major event of the year is the Kao-mise Festival (1 to 26 December), which features Japan's finest kabuki actors. Other performances take place on an irregular basis. Those interested should check with the TIC. The most likely months for performances are May, June and September.

### Musical Performances

Musical performances featuring the koto, *shamisen* and *shakuhachi* are held in Kyoto on an irregular basis. Performances of *bugaku* (court music and dance) are often held at Kyoto shrines during festival periods. Occasionally contemporary *butō* dance is also performed in Kyoto. Check with the TIC to see if any performances are scheduled to be held while you are in town.

### Nō

**Kanze Kaikan Nō Theatre** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 771-6114; Sakyō-ku-Okazaki; admission free-¥8000; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) This is the main theatre for performances of nō. *Takigi-Nō* is a picturesque form of nō performed in the light of blazing fires. In Kyoto this takes place on the evenings of 1 and 2 June at Heian-jingū – tickets cost ¥2000 if you pay in advance (ask at the TIC for the location of ticket agencies) or you can pay ¥3300 at the entrance gate.

### Traditional Dance, Theatre & Music

**Gion Corner** (Map p324; ☎ 561-1119; Gion-Hanamikōji-dōri; admission ¥2800; ☎ performances nightly at 7.40pm & 8.40pm 1 Mar-29 Nov, closed 16 Aug) The shows presented here are a sort of crash course in Japanese traditional arts. You get a chance to see snippets of the tea ceremony, koto music, *ikebana*, *gagaku* (court music), *kyōgen* (ancient comic plays), *Kyōmai* (Kyoto-style dance) and *bunraku* (puppet plays). However, these are rather touristy affairs and may not satisfy those in search of more authentic experiences. On top of this, 50 minutes of entertainment for ¥2800 is a little steep by anyone's standards.

### SHOPPING

The heart of Kyoto's shopping district is around the intersection of Shijō-dōri and Kawaramachi-dōri. The blocks to the north

and west of here are packed with stores selling both traditional and modern goods. Kyoto's largest department stores (Hankyū, Takashimaya, Daimaru and Fujii Daimaru) are grouped together in this area.

### Antiques

The place to look for antiques in Kyoto is Shinmonzen-dōri, in Gion (Map p324). The street is lined with great old shops, many of them specialising in one thing or another (furniture, pottery, scrolls, prints etc). You can easily spend an afternoon strolling from shop to shop here, but be warned: if something strikes your fancy you're going to have to break out the credit card – prices here are steep!

### Camping & Outdoor Equipment

**Kōjitsu** (Map p322; ☎ 257-7050; Kawaramachi-dōri-Sanjō agaru; ☎ 10.30am-8pm) If you plan to do some hiking or camping while in Japan, you can stock up on equipment at this excellent little shop on Kawaramachi. You'll find that Japanese outdoor sporting equipment is very high quality (with prices to match).

### Food & Kitchen Utensils

Nishiki Market (Map p322), in the centre of town, is Kyoto's most fascinating food market (see p315).

If you do choose to visit, be sure to stop into the knife shop **Aritsugu** (Map p322; ☎ 221-1091; Nishikikōji-dōri-Gokōmachi nishi iru; ☎ 9am-5.30pm) near the eastern end of the market. Here, you can find some of the best kitchen knives available in the world, as well as a variety of other kitchenware.

For an even more impressive display of food, check the basements of any of the big

department stores on Shijō-dōri (perhaps Daimaru has the largest selection). It's difficult to believe the variety of food on display, or some of the prices (check out the ¥10,000 melons or the Kōbe beef, for example).

### Japanese Arts & Crafts

The paved streets of Ninnen-zaka and Sannen-zaka (close to Kiyomizu-dera), in eastern Kyoto, are renowned for their crafts and antiques. You'll also find lots of pottery shops along Gojō-dōri, between Kawabata-dōri and Higashijōji-dōri.

North of the city hall, Teramachi-dōri, between Oike-dōri and Marutamachi-dōri, there are a number of classic old Kyoto shops and this area is pleasant for strolling around and window-shopping.

**Kamiji Kakimoto** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 211-3481; Teramachi-dōri-Nijō agaru; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun & holidays) This place sells a good selection of *washi* (Japanese paper). It's not as good as Morita Washi, but it's great for things like *washi* computer paper.

**Morita Washi** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 341-1419; Higashinotōin-dōri-Bukkōji agaru; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm, to 4.30pm Sat) Not far from Shijō-Karasuma, it sells a fabulous variety of handmade *washi* for reasonable prices.

**Kyūkyō-dō** (Map p322; ☎ 231-0510; Teramachi-Aneyakōji agaru; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, closed Sun & 1-3 Jan) This old shop in the Teramachi covered arcade sells a selection of incense, *shodō* (calligraphy) goods, tea-ceremony supplies and *washi*. Prices are on the high side but the quality is good.

**Ippo-dō** (Map pp318-19; ☎ 211-3421; Teramachi-dōri-Nijō; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun & holidays, café 11am-5pm) This is an old-fashioned tea shop selling

### MARKETS & MALLS

If you're in town when one of the following markets is on, by all means go! Markets are the best places to find antiques and bric-a-brac at reasonable prices and are the only places in Japan where you can actually bargain for a better price.

On the 21st of each month, **Kōbō-san Market** (Map pp318-19) is held at Tō-ji to commemorate the death of Kōbō Daishi (Kūkai), who in 823 was appointed abbot of the temple.

Another major market, **Tenjin-san Market**, is held on the 25th of each month at Kitano Tenmangū, marking the day of the birth (and, coincidentally, the death) of the Heian-era statesman Sugawara Michizane (845–903).

If you're not in Kyoto on the 21st, there's also a regular antiques fair at Tō-ji on the first Sunday of each month. In addition, the **Antique Grand Fair** is a major event, with over 100 dealers selling a wide range of Japanese and foreign curios. It is held thrice-yearly at Pulse Plaza (Map pp316–17) in Fushimi (southern Kyoto). Ask at the TIC for more details as times vary each year.

all sorts of Japanese tea. You can ask to sample the tea before buying.

**Kyoto Handicraft Center** (Map pp326-7; ☎ 761-5080; Marutamachi-dōri-Kumano jinja east; ☎ 10am-6pm, closed 1-3 Jan) Just north of the Heian-jingū, this is a huge cooperative that sells, demonstrates and exhibits crafts (wood-block prints and *yukata* are a good buy here). It's the best spot in town for buying Japanese souvenirs and is highly recommended.

**Kyoto Craft Center** (Map p324; ☎ 561-9660; Gion-chō-Kitagawa; ☎ 11am-7pm Thu-Tue) Near Maruyama-kōen, this centre also exhibits and sells a wide range of handicrafts and souvenirs.

**Kagoshin** (Map p324; ☎ 771-0209; Sanjō-dōri-Ōhashi higashi iru; ☎ 9am-6pm) This small shop sells a wide variety of inexpensive bamboo products like flower holders and baskets.

**Onouchikuzaiten** (Map p324; ☎ 751-2444; Sanjō-dōri-Ōhashi higashi iru; ☎ 10am-7pm) Just a few doors from the previous, it's almost a carbon copy.

**Tessai-dō** (Map p324; ☎ 531-9566; Shimogawara dōri-Kōdaiji; ☎ 10am-5pm) Just outside Kōdai-ji, this small shop deals in original wood-block prints. Prices average ¥10,000 per piece.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

Kyoto is served by Osaka Itami airport, which handles mostly domestic traffic, and the new Kansai International Airport (KIX), which handles most international flights. There are frequent flights between Tokyo and Itami (¥18,800, 70 minutes) but unless you're very lucky with airport connections you'll probably find it as quick and more convenient to take the *shinkansen*. There are ample connections to/from both airports, though the trip between Kansai International Airport and the city can be both expensive and time consuming.

### Bus

The overnight bus (JR Dream Kyoto Go) runs between Tokyo station (Yaesu-guchi long-distance bus stop) and Kyoto station Bus Terminal (Map p321).

The trip takes about eight hours and there are usually two departures nightly in either direction, at 10pm (Friday, Saturday, Sunday and holidays) and 11pm (daily). The fare is ¥8180/14,480 one way/return. You should be able to grab some sleep in the reclining seats. There is a similar service to/from Shinjuku station's Shin-minami-guchi in Tokyo.

Other JR bus transport possibilities include one way/return Kanazawa ¥4060/6600 and Hiroshima ¥5500/10,000.

### Hitching

Although we never recommend it, for long-distance hitching head for the Kyoto-Minami Interchange of the Meishin Expressway, about 4km south of Kyoto station. Take bus 19 from Kyoto station and get off when you reach the Meishin Expressway signs. From here you can hitch east towards Tokyo or west to southern Japan.

### Train

#### SHINKANSEN (TOKYO, OSAKA, NAGOYA & HAKATA)

Kyoto is on the Tōkaidō-San-yō Hikari *shinkansen* line to/from Tokyo (¥13,520, two hours 22 minutes); to/from Nagoya (¥5640, 36 minutes); to/from Osaka (¥2930, 14 minutes); and to/from Hakata (¥15,610, three hours 15 minutes). Other stops on this line include Hiroshima, Okayama, Kōbe and Yokohama. The *shinkansen* operates to/from Kyoto station, in the south of town, and it goes to/from Tokyo, Shinagawa and Shin-Yokohama stations at the Tokyo end of the line.

### NARA

Unless you have a Japan Rail Pass, the best option is the Kintetsu line (sometimes written in English as the Kinki Nippon railway) linking Kyoto (Kintetsu Kyoto station, on the south side of the main Kyoto station building) and Nara (Kintetsu Nara station). There are direct limited-express trains (¥1110, 33 minutes) and ordinary express trains (¥610, 45 minutes), which may require a change at Saidai-ji.

The JR Nara line connects Kyoto station with JR Nara station (*shinkaisoku*, ¥690, 46 minutes) but departures are often few and far between.

### OSAKA

The fastest train other than the *shinkansen* between Kyoto station and Osaka is the JR *shinkaisoku* (special rapid train), which takes 29 minutes (¥540). In Osaka, the train stops at both Shin-Osaka and Osaka stations.

There is also the cheaper private Hankyū line, which runs between Hankyū Kawaramachi, Karasuma and Ōmiya stations in Kyoto and Hankyū Umeda station in Osaka

(*tokkyū* or limited express Umeda-Kawaramachi, ¥390, 40 minutes).

Alternatively, you can take the Keihan main line between Demachiyana, Sanjō, Shijō or Shichijō stations in Kyoto and Keihan Yodoyabashi station in Osaka (*tokkyū* to/from Sanjō ¥400, 45 minutes). Yodoyabashi is on the Midō-suji subway line.

### TOKYO

The *shinkansen* line has the fastest and most frequent rail links. The journey can also be undertaken by a series of regular JR express trains, but keep in mind that it takes around eight hours and involves at least two (often three or four) changes along the way. The fare is ¥7980. Get the staff at the ticket counter to write down the exact details of each transfer for you when you buy your ticket.

## GETTING AROUND

### To/From the Airport

#### OSAKA ITAMI AIRPORT 大阪伊丹空港

There are frequent limousine buses between Osaka Itami airport (Map p310) and Kyoto station (the Kyoto station airport bus stop is opposite the south side of the station, in front of Avanti department store). Buses also run between the airport and various hotels around town, but on a less regular basis (check with your hotel). The journey should take around 55 minutes and the cost is ¥1370. Be sure to allow extra time in case of traffic.

At Itami, the stand for these buses is outside the arrivals hall; buy your tickets from the machines and ask one of the attendants which stand is for Kyoto.

**MK Taxi Sky Gate Shuttle limousine van service** (☎ 721-2237) also offers limousine van service to/from the airport for ¥2000 (call at least two days in advance to reserve) or ask at the information counter in the arrivals hall on arrival in Osaka.

#### KANSAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (KIX)

##### 関西国際空港

The fastest, most convenient way to travel between KIX (Map p310) and Kyoto is on the special Haruka airport express, which makes the trip in about 75 minutes. Most seats are reserved (¥3490) but there are usually two cars on each train with unreserved seats (¥2980). Open seats are almost always available, so you don't have to purchase tickets in advance. First and last departures from Kyoto

to KIX are 5.45am and 8.16pm; first and last departures from KIX to Kyoto are 6.29am and 10.18pm.

If you have time to spare, you can save some money by taking the *kanku kaisoku* (Kansai airport express) between the airport and Osaka station and taking a regular *shinkaisoku* to/from Kyoto. The total journey by this method takes about 90 minutes with good connections and costs ¥1800, making it the cheapest option.

It's also possible to travel by limousine bus between Kyoto and KIX (¥2300, about two hours). In Kyoto, the bus departs from the same place as the Itami-bound bus (see left).

A final option is the **MK Taxi Sky Gate Shuttle limousine van service** (☎ 721-2237), which will pick you up anywhere in Kyoto city and deliver you to KIX for ¥3000. Call at least two days in advance to reserve. The advantage of this method is that you are delivered from door to door and you don't have to lug your baggage through the train station. MK has a counter in the arrivals hall of KIX, and if there's room they'll put you on the next van to Kyoto. A similar service is offered by **Yasaka Taxi** (☎ 803-4800).

### Bicycle

Kyoto is a great city to explore on a bicycle; with the exception of outlying areas it's mostly flat and there is a new bike path running the length of the Kamo-gawa.

Unfortunately, Kyoto must rank near the top in having the world's worst public facilities for bike parking and the city regularly impounds bikes parked outside of regulation bike-parking areas. If your bike does disappear, check for a poster in the vicinity (in both Japanese and English) indicating the time of seizure and the inconvenient place you'll have to go to pay a ¥2000 fine and retrieve your bike.

There are two bicycle parking lots in town that are convenient for tourists: one in front of Kyoto station and another on Kiyamachi-dōri, halfway between Sanjō-dōri and Shijō-dōri. It costs ¥150 per day to park your bicycle here. Be sure to hang onto the ticket you pick up as you enter.

### BICYCLE PURCHASE

If you plan on spending more than a week or so exploring Kyoto by bicycle, it might make

sense to purchase a used bicycle. A simple *mama chari* (shopping bike) can be had for as little as ¥3000. Try the used-cycle shop **Ei Rin** (Map p329; ☎ 752-0292; Imadegawa-dōri) near Kyoto University. Otherwise, you'll find a good selection of used bikes advertised for sale on the message board of the Kyoto International Community House.

### BICYCLE RENTAL

Tour Club (see p352) rents large-frame and regular bicycles for ¥800, with a ¥3000 deposit. Bicycles can be picked up between 8am and 9.30pm. It offers a similar deal at its sister inn, Budget Inn (p352).

Another great place to rent a bike is **Kyoto Cycling Tour Project** (KCTP; Map p321; ☎ 354-3636; www.kctp.net/en/index.html). These folks rent mountain bikes (¥1500 per day), which are perfect for getting around the city. KCTP also conducts a variety of bicycle tours of Kyoto, which are an excellent way to see the city (check the website for details).

Most rental outfits require you to leave ID such as a passport or driver's licence.

### Bus

Kyoto has an intricate bus network that is an efficient way to get around at moderate cost. Many of the bus routes used by foreign visitors have announcements in English. The core timetable for buses is between 7am and 9pm, though a few run earlier or later.

The bus terminal at Kyoto station is on the northern side of the station and has three main departure bays (departure points are indicated by the letter of the bay and number of the bus stand within that bay).

The TIC's *Kyoto Transportation Guide* is a good map of the city's main bus lines, with a detailed explanation of the routes and a Japanese/English communication guide on the reverse side.

Bus stops throughout the city usually display a map of bus stops in the vicinity on the top section. On the bottom section there's a timetable for the buses serving that stop. Unfortunately, most of this information is written in Japanese, and those who don't read the language will simply have to ask locals waiting at the stop for help.

Entry to the bus is usually through the back door and exit is via the front door. Inner-city buses charge a flat fare (¥220), which you drop into the clear plastic receptacle on top of

the machine next to the driver. The machine gives change for ¥100 and ¥500 coins or ¥1000 notes, or you can ask the driver.

On buses serving the outer areas, you take a *seiri-ken* (numbered ticket) when entering. When you leave, an electronic board above the driver displays the fare corresponding to your ticket number.

To save time and money, you can buy a *kaisū-ken* (book of five tickets) for ¥1000. There's also a one-day card (*shi-basu senyō ichinichi jōshaken kaado*) valid for unlimited travel on city buses and subways that costs ¥500. A similar pass (Kyoto *kankō ichinichi jōsha-ken kaado*) that allows unlimited use of the bus and subway costs ¥1200. A two-day bus/subway pass (*jutsuka jōsha-ken*) costs ¥2000. *Kaisū-ken* can be purchased directly from bus drivers. The other passes and cards can be purchased at major bus terminals and at the main bus information centre.

The main bus information centre is located in front of Kyoto station. Here, you can pick up bus maps, purchase bus tickets and passes (on all lines, including highway buses), and get additional information. Nearby, there's an English/Japanese bus information computer terminal; just enter your intended destination and it will tell you the correct bus and bus stop.

When heading for locations outside the city centre, be careful which bus you board. Kyoto city buses are green, Kyoto buses are tan and Keihan buses are red and white.

### Scooter

Scooters are a good way to get around the city. Just be sure you have a valid international licence. **Kyoto Rental Scooters** (☎ 864-1635; www.kyoto.zaq.ne.jp/rental-scooter) rents 50cc scooters for ¥4000/14,000 per day/week.

### Subway

The quickest way to travel between the north and the south of the city is to take the Karasuma line subway, which operates from 5.30am to 11.30pm. The minimum fare is ¥210.

There's also the new Tōzai line subway, which runs east-west across the city, from Daigo station in the east to Nijō station in the west, stopping at Sanjō-Keihan en route.

### Taxi

Kyoto taxi fares start at ¥640 for the first 2km. The exception is **MK Taxis** (☎ 721-2237), whose fares start at ¥580.

MK Taxis also provides tours of the city with English-speaking drivers. For a group of up to four people, prices start at ¥13,280 for a three-hour tour. Another company offering a similar service is **Kyōren Taxi Service** (☎ 672-5111).

Most Kyoto taxis are equipped with satellite navigation systems. If you are going somewhere unusual, it will help the driver if you have the address or phone number of your destination, as both of these can be programmed into the system.

## SHIGA-KEN 滋賀県

Just across the Higashiyama mountains from Kyoto is Shiga-ken, a small prefecture dominated by Biwa-ko, Japan's largest lake. The prefecture has a variety of attractions that are easily visited as day trips from Kyoto. The major attractions here are the towns of Nagahama, with its traditional Kurokabe Square neighbourhood of glass artisans, and Hikone, with its fine original castle. Other worthwhile destinations include temples like Mii-dera and Ishiyama-dera, and the Miho Museum, which is worth a trip just to see the building and the compound in which it is located.

### ŌTSU 大津

☎ 077 / pop 329,000

Ōtsu has developed from a 7th-century imperial residence (the city was capital of Japan for just five years) into a lake port and major post station on the Tōkaidō highway between eastern and western Japan. It is now the capital of Shiga-ken.

The **information office** (☎ 522-3830; ☎ 8.40am-5.25pm) is at JR Ōtsu station.

### Mii-dera 三井寺

Formally known as Onjō-ji, **Mii-dera** (☎ 522-2238; 246 Onjō-ji-chō; admission ¥500; ☎ 8am-5pm) is a short walk northwest from Keihan Hama-Ōtsu station. The temple, founded in the late 7th century, is the head branch of the Jimon branch of the Tendai school of Buddhism. It started its days as a branch of Enryaku-ji on Hiei-zan, but later the two fell into conflict, and Mii-dera was repeatedly razed by Enryaku-ji's warrior monks. The Niō-mon gate here is unusual for its roof, which is made of layers of tree bark, rather than tiles. It looks particularly fine when framed by the cherry trees in early April.

### Festivals & Events

**Ōtsu Dai Hanabi Taikai** (Ōtsu Grand Fireworks Festival) If you're in town on 8 August, be sure to catch this. Starting at dusk, the best spots to watch are along the waterfront near Keihan Hama-Ōtsu station. Be warned that trains to and from Kyoto are packed for hours before and after the event. **Ōtsu Matsuri** Takes place on 7 and 8 October at Tenson-jinja, close to JR Ōtsu station. Ornate floats are displayed on the first day and paraded around the town on the second day.

### Getting There & Away

From Kyoto you can take the JR Tōkaidō line from JR Kyoto station to JR Ōtsu station (¥190, eight minutes), or travel on the Kyoto Tōzai subway line to Hama-Ōtsu station (¥410, 20 minutes from Sanjō Keihan station).

### HIRA-SAN 比良山

Hira-san is the high mountain range that rises to the west of Biwa-ko. It is a great hiking destination and there are many excellent hiking courses crisscrossing the peaks. It is best accessed by the JR Kosei line, which leaves from Kyoto station (be careful to board a Kosei-line train, as most Shiga-bound trains head to the other side of the lake).

A good base for hiking in the area is the **Maiko Hut** (☎ 077-596-8190; www.trekstation.co.jp/index5.html; per person from ¥4500). The folks here will happily pick you up at Ōmi-maiko station (about 30 minutes from Kyoto) on the Kosei line if you call ahead to make arrangements. They can also arrange guided walks in the Hira-san range in English.

Several good hikes in the Hira-san range are described in Lonely Planet's *Hiking in Japan*, including the superb Yatsubuchi-notaki hike, which we reckon is the best one-day hike near Kyoto.

### ISHIYAMA-DERA 石山寺

This temple (☎ 077-537-0013; 1-1-1 Ishiyama-dera; admission ¥500; ☎ 8am-4.30pm), founded in the 8th century, now belongs to the Shingon sect. The room next to the Hondō is famed as the place where Lady Murasaki wrote *The Tale of the Genji*. The temple precincts are in a lovely forest with lots of good trails to explore, including the one that leads up to Tsukimitei hall, from which there are great views over Biwa-ko.

The temple is a 10-minute walk south from Keihan Ishiyama-dera station (continue along



from Kyoto) and then backtrack from there on the JR Tōkaidō line to Hikone (¥180, five minutes).

### NAGAHAMA 長浜

☎ 0749 / pop 84,000

Nagahama is a surprisingly appealing little town on the northeast shore of Biwa-ko, which can easily be teamed up with a trip to Hikone. The main attraction here is the **Kurokabe Square** neighbourhood northeast of the station.

If you're in the area from 14 to 16 April, check out the **Nagahama Hikiyama Matsuri**, in which costumed children perform Hikiyama *kyōgen* on top of a dozen festival floats decked out with elaborate ornamentation.

### Kurokabe Square 黒壁スクエア

Many of the old *machiya* (traditional city houses) and *kura* (storehouses) in this attractive old neighbourhood have been converted into shops and galleries highlighting the town's traditional (and modern) glass industry. Exit the east side of Nagahama station and take the first major left after the first traffic light and you will find the **Kurokabe Information Centre** (黒壁インフォメーションセンター; ☎ 65-8055; ☎ 10am-6pm), which has maps of the area.

We like the small collection of glass *objets* at the **Kurokabe Museum of Glass Art** (黒壁美術館; ☎ 62-6364; admission ¥600; ☎ 10am-4.30pm). While you're there, ask them to demonstrate the *suikinkutsu*, a strange 'musical instrument' formed from an overturned urn into which water is dripped.

Our hands-down favourite attraction in Kurokabe Square is the **Giant Kaleidoscope** (*kyūdaimangekyō*; 巨大万華鏡; admission free; ☎ dawn-dusk), which is located off the north arcade of the area. It's set back in the open area behind a place with an English sign that reads 'Antique Gallery London'.

Not far from the Giant Kaleidoscope is **Daitsū-ji** (大通じ; ☎ 62-0054; admission to garden/grounds ¥500/free; ☎ 9am-4.30pm), a True Pure Land sect temple that's worth a quick look (we don't recommend paying to enter the garden, though).

### Sleeping & Eating

**Kokumin-shukusha Hōkō-sō** (国民宿舎豊公荘; ☎ 62-0144; r per person from ¥7000; ☎) This place is five minutes' walk west of the station in

Hōkōen Park (*kokumin-shukusha* are people's lodges – cheap accommodation).

**Torikita** (鳥善多; ☎ 62-1964; dishes from ¥420; ☎ 11.30am-2pm & 4.30-7pm, closed Tue) This place specialises in one dish: *oyako-donburi* (chicken and egg over a bowl of rice; ¥580). It has raised this simple dish to a work of art. If you don't like raw egg, ask for *oyako-donburi nama tamago nashi de*. It's located 200m down the main street east of the station, on the left after the second light – look for the traditional front and white *noren* curtain in the doorway.

### Getting There & Away

Nagahama is on the JR Tōkaidō line (*shinkai-soku*, ¥1280, 61 minutes from Kyoto) and the Tōkaidō *shinkansen* line. Be aware that not all *shinkaisoku* from Kyoto go all the way to Nagahama; you may have to change in Maibara, which is a 10-minute ride south of Nagahama by *shinkaisoku* (¥190).

## NORTHERN KANSAI

### 関西北部

The spectacular coastline of northern Kansai is known as the San-in Kaigan Kokuritsu Kōen – the San-in Coast National Park. There are sandy beaches, rugged headlands, rocky islets and a laid-back atmosphere.

The JR San-in line runs the length of the area, but it spends a fair bit of time inland and in tunnels. The best way to see the coastline is on wheels, whether it be a rental car, a motorbike, a bicycle or by thumb. If you stick to the trains, make the effort to get off every now and then.

The text in this section moves from west to east, starting at the Tottori-ken–Hyōgo-ken border. It is a continuation of the route along the San-in Coast described in the Western Honshū chapter (see p494). If you're heading east to west, read this section backwards.

### MOROYOSE 諸寄

Moroyose, in Hyōgo-ken, near the border with Tottori-ken, is a pleasant little seaside town with a decent sand beach. **Youth Hostel Moroyose-sō** (諸寄荘ユースホステル; ☎ 0796-82-3614; 461 Moroyose; r per person ¥2625-2835) is a good spot to stay for backpackers, with fairly large rooms for a YH and breakfast/dinner for

¥525/945. It's a 10-minute climb uphill from the eastern end of the beach. Moroyose is on the JR San-in line; the station is in the centre of town, very close to the beach.

### TAKENO 竹野

Takeno is a pleasant little fishing village-summer resort with two good sandy beaches: **Benten-hama** (弁天浜) to the west and **Takeno-hama** (竹野浜) to the east. To get to Benten-hama, exit Takeno station and turn left at the first light and walk straight for about 15 minutes (you will cross one big street en route). To get to Takeno-hama, go straight out of the station and walk for around 20 minutes. There is an **information office** (☎ 0796-47-1080; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) on the beachfront at Takeno-hama in an orange brick building. This office can help with accommodation in local *minshuku* (B&B-style accommodation) and ryokan.

**Bentenhama camping area** (弁天浜キャンプ場; ☎ 0796-47-0888; camp sites adult/child ¥800/400) is on the seafront at Benten-hama. It's a decent, if crowded, spot to pitch a tent. **Kitamaekian** (北前館; ☎ 0796-47-2020; adult/child ¥400/250; ☎ 9am-9pm) is an *onsen* complex where the baths are on the 2nd floor with a great view of the beach and sea. It's at Takeno-hama, in a large grey building about 150m west of the information office.

Takeno station is on the JR San-in line, an easy trip from Kinosaki (¥190, 10 minutes). The train trip is a good chance to enjoy some of the coastal scenery.

### KINOSAKI 城崎

☎ 0796 / pop 4000

Kinosaki is one of the best places in Japan to sample the classic Japanese *onsen* experience – donning a *yukata* and walking from *onsen* to *onsen*. A willow-lined canal runs through the centre of this town and many of the houses, shops and restaurants retain something of their traditional charm. Add to this the delights of crab fresh from the Japan sea in winter, and you'll understand why this is one of our favourite overnight trips from the cities of Kansai.

### Information

Opposite the station is an **accommodation information office** (お宿案内所; ☎ 32-4141; ☎ 9am-6pm) where the staff will gladly help you find a place to stay and make bookings, as well as provide maps to the town. The same office

has rental bicycles available for two hours/a day ¥400/800 (return by 5pm). If you're just passing through, you could leave your bags in a coin locker, pick up a bicycle, go for a ride, have a bath or just soak your feet, and then carry on.

### Sights & Activities

Kinosaki's biggest attraction is its seven **onsen** (admission ¥600-800; ☎ 3-11pm, closed irregularly). Guests staying in town stroll the canal from bath to bath wearing *yukata* and *geta* (wooden sandals). Most of the ryokan and hotels in town have their own *uchi-yu* (private baths), but also provide their guests with free tickets to the ones outside (*soto-yu*).

Here is the full list of Kinosaki's *onsen*, in order of preference (get a map from the information office or your lodgings):

**Sato-no-yu** (さとの湯; admission ¥800; ☎ 7am-11pm) Fantastic variety of baths, including Arab-themed saunas, rooftop *rotemburo* (outdoor bath) and a 'Penguin Sauna' (basically a walk-in freezer – the only one we've seen anywhere – good after a hot bath). Women's and men's baths shift floors daily, so you'll have to go two days in a row to sample all of the offerings.

**Gosho-no-yu** (御所の湯; admission ¥800; ☎ 7am-11pm) Lovely log construction, a nice two-level *rotemburo* and fine maple colours in autumn. The entry area is decorated like the Kyoto Gosho (Imperial Palace).

**Kou-no-yu** (鴻の湯; admission ¥600; ☎ 7am-11pm) Nothing fancy, but a good *rotemburo* and pleasant inside baths.

**Ichi-no-yu** (一の湯; admission ¥600; ☎ 7am-11pm) Wonderful 'cave' bath.

**Yanagi-yu** (柳湯; admission ¥600; ☎ 3-11pm) Worth a quick soak as you make your way around town.

**Mandala-yu** (まんだら湯; admission ¥600; ☎ 3-11pm) Small wooden *rotemburo*.

**Jizo-yu** (地藏湯; admission ¥600; ☎ 7am-11pm) Small bath with no *rotemburo*. Good if others are crowded.

### Sleeping

**Suishōen** (水翔苑; 32-4571; www.suisyou.com in Japanese; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥19,050; ☎) This excellent modern ryokan is a short drive from the town centre, but they'll whisk you straight to the *onsen* of your choice in their own London taxi and pick you up when you're done. It's a strangely pleasant feeling to ride in the back wearing nothing but a *yukata*! The rooms are clean and well kept and the private *onsen* is great, with indoor and outdoor baths. Taking the price into consideration, it's great value.



**Mikuniya** (三国屋; ☎ 32-2414; www.kinosaki3928.com in Japanese; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥13,650; ♿) About 150m on the right on the street heading into town from the station, this fine ryokan is a good choice if you want something more traditional. The rooms are clean, with nice Japanese decorations, and the 'garden view' *onsen* bath is soothing. There is an English sign.

**Nishimuraya Honkan** (西村屋本館; ☎ 32-2211; honkan@nishimuraya.ne.jp; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥37,950; ♿) This is a classic and the ultimate of inns here. If you would like to try the high-class ryokan experience, this is a good place. The *onsen* baths here are exquisite and the rooms look out over private gardens. The excellent food is the final touch.

## Eating

Savoury crab from the Sea of Japan is a speciality in Kinosaki during the winter months. It's called *kani* and the way to enjoy it is in *kani-suki*, cooked in broth with vegetables right at your table.

**Heihachirō** (☎ 32-0086; ☎ 11.30am-2pm & 6-11pm, closed Wed) This is a great place to try *kani-suki* (¥4000) in winter. It also serves the usual *izakaya* fare, along with beer and sake. It's just before Mikuniya, on the left near the west end of the main street – look for a stone wall and a small English sign that reads 'Dining Bar Heihachiro'.

For simpler meals, try **Yamayoshi** (山よし), a simple *shokudō* outside the station on the 2nd floor (look for the pictures and food models out front). It serves the usual set meals as well as some local specialities like crab.

Note that most restaurants in Kinosaki shut down very early. This is because most people opt for the two-meal option at their accommodation. You should consider doing the same.

## Getting There & Away

Kinosaki is on the JR San-in line, 10 minutes north of Toyooka (¥190, 18 minutes), 2½ hours from Osaka, and three hours from Kyoto. There are occasional *tokkyū* from Kyoto (¥3880, two hours 22 minutes) and (Osaka ¥4620, two hours 36 minutes).

## TANGO-HANTŌ 丹後半島

Tango-hantō is a peninsula that juts up into the Sea of Japan on the north coast of Kansai. The inside of the peninsula is covered

with thick forest, idyllic mountain villages and babbling streams, while the serrated coast alternates between good sand beaches and rocky points.

The private Kita-Kinki Tango Tetsudō rail line runs between Toyooka and Nishi-Maizuru, cutting across the southern base of the peninsula and stopping en route at Amanohashidate (below). Thus, if you want to check out the peninsula you'll have to go by road. A bus runs around the peninsula, passing a small number of scenic fishing ports (Tango Ōkoku Romance gō; Tankai Bus ☎ 0772-42-0321; from ¥4300). A large car park and restaurant mark the start of the 40-minute round-trip walk (about 3km) to the **Kyōga-misaki Light-house** (経ヶ岬灯台).

The village of **Ine** (伊根), on a perfect little bay on the eastern side of the Tango-hantō, is particularly interesting. There are *funaya* houses that are built right out over the water, under which boats are drawn in, as if in a carport. The best way to check it out is by boat, and **Ine-wan Meguri** (☎ 0772-42-0321) tour boats putter around the bay (¥660, 30 minutes) from March to December. Buses (¥910) reach Ine in half an hour from Amanohashidate.

## Sleeping

One of the best ways to see Tango-hantō is with **Two to Tango** (<http://thediyyam.com>; lodging & 2½-day all-inclusive tour per person ¥100,000), an exclusive tour of the Tango peninsula offered by a French resident of Kyoto-Fu of more than 20 years. You will stay in a secluded farmhouse in Kurumi-dani (a six-house hamlet in the heart of Tango-hantō) and drive over scenic roads to beautiful *onsen*, excellent restaurants and lovely beaches. Everything is taken care of, including driving and guiding. The tour gives you an intimate look at a side of Japan rarely glimpsed by foreign travellers. Perfect for a gentle entry into the country or to unwind after a hectic trip.

There are several fine *minshuku* in the small village of Ine including **Yoza-sō** (与謝荘; ☎ 0772-32-0278; 507 Hirata; per person incl 2 meals from ¥9000; ♿).

## AMANOHASHIDATE 天橋立

☎ 0772 / pop 23,000

Amanohashidate (the Bridge to Heaven) is rated as one of Japan's 'three great views', along with Miyajima (p460) and the islands of Matsushima-wan (p513). The 'bridge' is

really a long, narrow tree-covered (8000 pine trees!) sand-spit, 3.5km in length. There is good swimming, as well as beach showers, toilet facilities and covered rest areas the length of the spit. It's a good example of a Japanese tourist circus, but it is pleasant enough and there are some decent attractions like Ine (opposite) in the vicinity.

The town of Amanohashidate consists of two separate parts, one at each end of the spit. At the southern end there are a number of hotels, ryokan, restaurants, a popular temple and Amanohashidate station. There's an **information counter** (☎ 22-8030; ☎ 10am-6pm) at the station. To get to the bridge from the station, take a right out of the station and walk along the main road for 200m to the first light and take a sharp left.

At the southern end of the bridge, **Amanohashidate View Land** (天橋立ビューランド; chairlift/monorail round-trip ¥850; ☎ 9am-5pm) is serviced by chairlift and monorail. From here, you are supposed to view Amanohashidate by turning your back to it, bending over and observing it framed between your legs! (It supposedly makes Amanohashidate look like it is 'floating'.)

At the northern end, **Kasamatsu-kōen** (傘松公園; funicular/chairlift round-trip ¥640; ☎ 8am-5.30pm) offers similar views and another chance to view the world from between your legs.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Amanohashidate Youth Hostel** (天橋立ユースホステル; ☎ 27-0121; per person incl/excl 2 meals ¥4250/2950; ♿) This fine YH has good views down towards Amanohashidate, friendly owners, well-kept rooms and an excellent hillside location. To get there take a bus from JR Amanohashidate station and get off at the Jinja-mae bus stop (¥520; 20 minutes). From the stop, walk to the main hall of the shrine, take a right and leave the shrine precinct and turn left up the hill and walk 50m, take a right and follow the sign for Manai Shrine. Turn at the stone torii, walk 200m uphill and it's on the right.

**Amanohashidate Hotel** (天橋立ホテル; ☎ 22-4111; per person incl 2 meals from ¥16,800; ♿) This hotel about 100m west of the station commands the best views of Amanohashidate. Rooms are mixed Japanese-Western style and there are several good communal baths that afford views of Amanohashidate and the bay. The hotel serves special crab cuisine in winter.

There are several decent but slightly overpriced *shokudō* at the southern end of Amanohashidate, including **Resutoran Monju** (れすとらん文珠; ☎ 22-2805; meals from ¥1000; ☎ 9.30am-4pm Fri-Wed), which has *asari udon* (udon noodles with clams), a local speciality, for ¥1000. Look for the red-and-white sign as you approach Chion-ji (the temple at the southern end of Amanohashidate).

## Getting There & Away

The Kita-kinki Tango Tetsudō line runs between JR stations at Toyooka to the west and Nishi-Maizuru to the east. Amanohashidate station is on this line, 1¼ hours from Toyooka (*futsū*, ¥1160) and 40 minutes from Nishi-Maizuru (*futsū*, ¥620). There are several direct trains from Kyoto daily, but JR pass holders will have to fork out for the Kita-kinki Tango Tetsudō part of the route (from Kyoto ¥3770, two hours, from Osaka ¥4630, 2¼ hours).

## Getting Around

You can cross Amanohashidate on foot, bicycle or on a motorcycle of less than 125cc capacity. Bicycles can be hired at a number of places for ¥400/1600 for two hours/a day.

## MAIZURU 舞鶴

There's nothing overly appealing about the two ports of Nishi-Maizuru and Higashi-Maizuru, but they play an important part in the area's transport networks. If you've come from the west on the Kita-kinki Tango Tetsudō trains, **Nishi-Maizuru** is the end of the line and where the JR Obama line comes out to meet the coast. If you're on your way to Amanohashidate, this is where you'll have to change to the private line.

There are regular ferry services to/from Otaru in Hokkaidō from Higashi-Maizuru. This is a cheap and interesting way of getting to/from Hokkaidō. The cheapest tickets are ¥9600 for the 20-hour journey. Call **Shin-Nihonkai Ferry** (☎ 06-6345-2921; www.snf.co.jp/yoyaku/yoyaku-c.html in Japanese) for details.

## OSAKA 大阪

☎ 06 / pop 2.48 million

Osaka is the working heart of Kansai. Famous for its down-to-earth citizens and hearty cuisine, Osaka combines a few historical and cultural attractions with all the delights of a



In Minami, this bookshop has a good selection of English books and magazines on its 4th floor.

**Junkudō** (Map p378; ☎ 4799-1090; 🕒 10am-9pm; 📍 Osaka station on the JR line) The best selection of foreign and Japanese-language books in Osaka can be found at this huge new bookstore, inside the Dōjima Avanza Building in Kita, about 10 minutes' walk from Osaka station. Most English-language books are on the 3rd floor along with a café, and English travel guides, including a good selection of Lonely Planet guides, are on the 2nd floor.

**Kinokuniya** (Map p378; ☎ 6372-5821; 🕒 10am-9pm; 📍 Umeda station on the Hankyū line) Also in Kita, inside Hankyū Umeda station, also has a decent selection of foreign books and magazines.

### Immigration Offices

**Osaka Immigration Office** (Map p375; ☎ 6941-0771; www.immi-moj.go.jp/english/soshiki/kikou/osaka.html; 🕒 9am-5pm Mon-Fri; 📍 Temmabashi station on the Tanimachi subway line) The main office for the Kansai region is a three-minute walk from exit 3 of Temmabashi station on the Keihan main line.

### Internet Access

**Aprecio** (Map p380; ☎ 6634-0199; www.aprecio.co.jp/namba/index.php in Japanese; Minami; per 30min from ¥200; 🕒 24hr; 📍 Namba station on the Midō-suji subway line)

**Kinko's** (Map p380; ☎ 6245-1887; Minami; 10min from ¥200; 🕒 24hr; 📍 Shinsaibashi station on the Midō-suji subway line)

**Media Café Popeye** (Map p378; ☎ 6292-3800; www2.media-cafe.ne.jp/branch/umedadd/index.html in Japanese; Kita; per 60min from ¥400; 🕒 24hr; 📍 Umeda station on the Hankyū line)

### Money

**Citibank** Kita (Map p378; ☎ 4802-0277; www.citibank.co.jp/en/branch/br025a.html; 🕒 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, ATM 8am-10pm; 📍 Umeda station on the Hankyū line or Osaka station on the JR line); Minami (Map p380; ☎ 6213-2731; www.citibank.co.jp/en/branch/br024a.html; 🕒 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, ATM 24hr; 📍 Shinsaibashi station on the Midō-suji subway line)

### Post

**Osaka Central Post Office** (Map p378; ☎ 6347-8034; 📍 Osaka station on the JR line) Has 24-hour service window.

### Tourist Information

All the offices can help book accommodation, but to avail yourself of this service you will have to visit the office in person.

For more information on events happening while you're in town, pick up a copy of *Kansai Time Out* magazine at any of the bookstores listed earlier, p312).

Osaka Itami and Kansai International Airports also have information counters.

**Kansai International Airport Information Center** (☎ 072-455-2500; 2F/North, 1F&4F/North, South & Central zones; 🕒 24hr)

**Kansai International Airport Information Center** (☎ 06-6856-6781; 1F Terminal Arrival Lobby, North & South zones; 🕒 8.30am-9.15pm).

**Visitors information office** (🕒 8am-8pm, closed 31 Dec-3 Jan) Namba station (Map p380; ☎ 6643-2125; Minami); Osaka station (Map p378; ☎ 6345-2189; Kita); Shin-Osaka station (Map p375; ☎ 6305-3311); Tennō-ji station (Map p375; ☎ 6774-3077) Operated by the Osaka Tourist Association, the Osaka station office is tricky to find: from JR Osaka station, exit the Midō-suji ticket gate/exit, turn right, and walk about 50m. The office is just outside the station, beneath a pedestrian overpass. From the subway, go out exit 9, and look for it outside the station, beside the bus terminal. Note that the station is presently under construction and there is word that this office might move again.

### Travel Agency

**Travel Wonderland Kansai** (Map p378; ☎ Asia 06-6131-1500, Europe 06-6131-1504, America 06-6131-1505; www.his-j.com/kix/shiten/kansai-tour.htm in Japanese; 🕒 11am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat, Sun & holidays; 📍 Umeda station on the Hankyū line)

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

### Kita Area

By day, Osaka's centre of gravity is the Kita area (Map p378). While Kita doesn't have any great attractions to detain the traveller, it does have a few good department stores, lots of places to eat and the eye-catching Umeda Sky building.

### UMEDA SKY BUILDING

梅田スカイビル Just northwest of Osaka station, the Umeda Sky building is Osaka's most dramatic piece of modern architecture. The twin-tower complex looks like a space-age version of Paris' Arc de Triomphe. Residents of Osaka are sharply divided about its appearance: some love its futuristic look while others find it an eyesore. What is certain is that the view from the top is impressive, particularly after sunset, when the lights of the Osaka-Kōbe conurbation spread out like a magical carpet in all directions.

There are two observation galleries: an outdoor one on the roof and an indoor one on the floor below. Getting to the top is only half the fun as you take a glassed-in escalator for the final five storeys (definitely not for vertigo sufferers). Tickets for the **observation decks** (Map p378; ☎ 6440-3855; 1-1-88 Ōyodonaka, Kita-ku; admission ¥700; 🕒 10am-10.30pm, last entry 10pm; 📍 Osaka station on the JR line) include the white-knuckle escalator ride and can be purchased on the 3rd floor of the east tower.

Below the towers, you'll find **Takimi-kōji Alley** (Map p378), a re-creation of an early Showa-era market street crammed with restaurants and *izakaya*.

The building is reached via an underground passage that starts just north of both Osaka and Umeda stations.

### Central Osaka

#### OSAKA MUSEUM OF HISTORY

##### 大阪歴史博物館

Just southwest of Osaka-jō, the new **Osaka Museum of History** (Osaka Rekishi Hakubutsukan; Map p375; ☎ 6946-5728; 4-1-32 Ōtemae, Chūō-ku; admission ¥600; 🕒 9.30am-5pm; 📍 Tanimachi-yonchōme station on the Tanimachi subway line) is housed in a fantastic new building adjoining the Osaka NHK Broadcast Center. The display floors of the museum occupy the 7th to the 10th floors of the new, sail-shaped building.

The displays are broken into four sections by floor; you start at the top and work your way down, passing in time from the past to the present. The displays are very well done and there are plenty of English explanations; taped tours are available.

The museum is a two-minute walk north-east of Tanimachi-yonchōme station.

### OSAKA-JŌ

大阪城 This **castle** (Osaka Castle; Map p375; ☎ 6941-3044; 1-1 Osaka-jō, Chūō-ku; admission grounds/castle keep free/¥600; 🕒 9am-5pm, to 8pm Aug, to 6pm Oct; 📍 Osaka-jō-kōen station on the JR Osaka Loop line) was built as a display of power by Toyotomi Hideyoshi after he achieved his goal of unifying Japan. One hundred thousand workers toiled for three years to construct an 'impregnable' granite castle, finishing the job in 1583. However, it was destroyed just 32 years later, in 1615, by the armies of Tokugawa Ieyasu.

Within 10 years the castle had been rebuilt by the Tokugawa forces, but it was to suffer a further calamity when another generation

of the Tokugawa clan razed it rather than let it fall to the forces of the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

The present structure is a 1931 concrete reconstruction of the original, which was refurbished at great cost in 1997 (serious fans of Japanese castles should head west to see the castle at Himeji, p398). The interior of the castle houses an excellent collection of displays relating to the castle, Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the city of Osaka. On the 8th floor there is an observation deck offering excellent views of Osaka and surrounding areas.

The castle and park are at their best in the spring cherry-blossom and autumn-foliage seasons.

The Ōte-mon gate, which serves as the main entrance to the park, is a 10-minute walk northeast of Tanimachi-yonchōme station (sometimes written as Tanimachi 4-chome) on the Chūō and Tanimachi subway lines. You can also take the Osaka Loop line, get off at Osaka-jō-kōen station and enter through the back of the castle.

### Nakano-shima

中ノ島 Sandwiched between Dōjima-gawa and Tosa-bori-gawa, this island (Map p375) is a pleasant oasis of trees and riverside walkways in the midst of Osaka's unrelenting grey. It's also home to **Osaka City Hall**, the Museum of Oriental Ceramics and **Nakano-shima-kōen**. The latter park, on the eastern end of the island, is a good place for an afternoon stroll or picnic lunch.

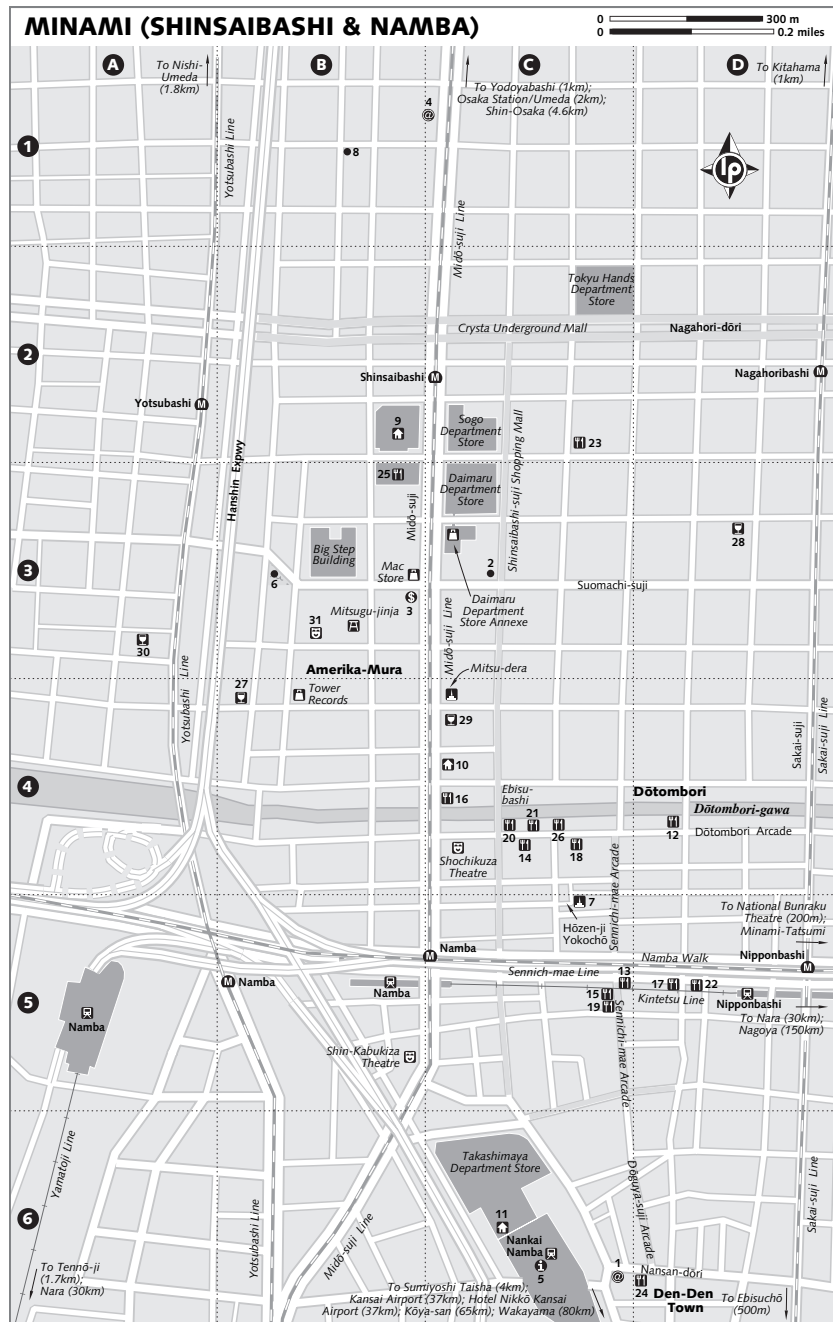
### MUSEUM OF ORIENTAL CERAMICS

##### 東洋陶磁美術館

With more than 2700 pieces in its permanent collection, this **museum** (☎ 6223-0055; 1-1-26 Nakanoshima, Kita-ku; admission ¥500; 🕒 9.30am-5pm, closed Mon; 📍 Yodoyabashi station on the Midō-suji subway line) has one of the finest collections of Chinese and Korean ceramics in the world. At any one time, about 300 of the pieces from the permanent collection are on display, and there are often special exhibits (which cost extra).

To get to the museum, go to Yodoyabashi station on either the Midō-suji line or the Keihan line (different stations). Walk north to the river and cross to Nakano-shima. Turn right, pass the city hall on your left, bear left with the road, and look for the squat brown brick building.



**INFORMATION**

Aprecio アルレシオ	1 C6
Athens アテネ書店	2 C3
Citibank (International ATM)	
シティバンク	3 B3
International ATM 国際ATM	(see 16)
Kinko's キンコーズ	4 C1
Namba Station Visitors Information	
Office 難波駅観光案内?	5 C6

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

Amerika-Mura Triangle Park	
アメリカ村三角公園	6 B3
Hōzen-ji 法善寺	7 C5
Kamigata Ukiyo-e Museum	(see 7)
Organic Building	
オーガニックビル	8 B1

**SLEEPING**

Hotel Nikkō Osaka ホテル日航大阪	9 B2
Hotel Riva Nankai	
ホテルリーバ南海	10 C4
Swissotel Nankai Osaka	
スイスホテル南海大阪	11 C6

**EATING**

Chibō 千房	12 D4
Doutor ドトール	13 C5
Ganko Zushi がんこ寿司	14 C4
Genroku Sushi	15 C5
Gin Sen 銀扇	16 C4
Hachisaburō 八三郎	17 D5
Imai Honten 今井本店	18 C4
Izumoya いずもや	19 C5
Kani Dōraku Honten かに道楽本店	20 C4

**DRINKING**

Cellar サラ	27 B4
Murphy's マーフーズ	28 D3
Pig & Whistle ビッグ & ホイッスル	29 C4
SoulFuckTry ソウルファクトリー	30 A3
Tavola 36 タヴォラ36	(see 11)

**ENTERTAINMENT**

Krungtep クンテープ	21 C4
Minami Taco Ume 南たこ梅	22 D5
Nishiya にし家	23 C2
Tonkatsu Ganko とんかつがんこ	24 D6
Ume no Hana 梅の花	25 B3
Zuboraya づぼらや	26 C4

complex of **Festival Gate** (Map p375; ☎ 6635-1000; 3-4-36 Ebisu higashi, Naniwa-ku; admission free, rides average ¥700; ☎ 10am-7pm, roller coaster operates Sat, Sun & holidays only; 🚗 Shinmamiya station on the JR Osaka Loop line), which is really an amusement park surrounded by a huge shopping-dining complex. The rides are in the open atrium of the complex and the roller coaster snakes its way over and around the walls of the places, offering tantalising glimpses of the city and the nearby Spa World bathing complex. It's a good spot to bring the kids.

**SHIN-SEKAI 新世界**

For something completely different, take a walk through this retro entertainment district just west of Tennō-ji-kōen. At the heart of it all you'll find crusty old **Tsūten-kaku** tower (Map p375), a 103m-high structure that dates back to 1912 (the present tower was rebuilt in 1969). When the tower first went up it symbolised everything new and exciting about this once-happening neighbourhood (*shin-sekai* is Japanese for 'New World').

Now, Shin-Sekai is a world that time forgot. You'll find ancient *pachinko* parlours, run-down theatres, dirt-cheap restaurants and all manner of raffish and suspicious characters.

**SHITENNŌ-JI 四天王寺**

Founded in 593, **Shitennō-ji** (Map p375; ☎ 6771-0066; 1-11-18 Shitennō-ji, Tennōji-ku; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm, closed 28 Dec-1 Jan; 🚗 Shitennō-ji-mae station on the Tanimachi subway line) has the distinction of being one of the oldest Buddhist temples in Japan, although none of the present buildings are originals; most are the usual concrete reproductions, with the exception of the big stone torii. This dates back to 1294, mak-

ing it the oldest of its kind in Japan. Apart from the torii, there is little of real historical significance, and the absence of greenery in the raked-gravel grounds makes for a rather desolate atmosphere. The adjoining **museum** (admission ¥200) is of limited interest.

The temple is most easily reached from Shitennō-ji-mae station on the Tanimachi subway line. Take the southern exit, cross to the left side of the road and take the small road that goes off at an angle away from the subway station. The entrance to the temple is on the left.

**SPA WORLD スパワールド**

Next door to Festival Gate is the superspa known as **Spa World** (Map p375; ☎ 6631-0001; 3-4-24 Ebisu higashi, Naniwa-ku; per 3hr/full day Mon-Fri ¥2400/2700, Sat, Sun & holidays ¥2700/3000; ☎ 10am-9pm; 🚗 Dōbutsuen-mae station on the Sakais-uji or Midō-suji subway line). Billed as the world's largest spa, it consists of two floors of baths, one Asian themed and one European themed, and a rooftop waterworld with pools and waterslides, along with restaurants and relaxation areas.

The Asian and European bath floors are segregated by sex; one month the ladies get the Asian bath floor and the men have the European bath floor, and then it switches to the opposite, so you will have to visit twice to sample all the baths (they're fairly similar, so you're not missing much if you don't). We particularly like the *rotemburo* on the roof, where you can show off your tan to folks whizzing by on the Festival Gate roller coaster (and from which you can see Tsūten-kaku tower rising like a retro space ship to the north). Be sure to bring a bathing suit if you want to visit the waterworld (or you can rent one for ¥300).

**SUMIYOSHI TAISHA** 住吉大社

This **shrine** (☎ 6672-0753; 2-9-89 Sumiyoshi, Sumiyoshi-ku; admission free; ☞ dawn-dusk; ☉ Sumiyoshi-taisha station on the Nankai main line) is dedicated to Shintō deities associated with the sea and sea travel, in commemoration of a safe passage to Korea by a 3rd-century empress.

Having survived the bombing in WWII, Sumiyoshi Taisha actually has a couple of buildings that date back to 1810. The shrine was founded in the early 3rd century and the buildings that can be seen today are faithful replicas of the originals. They offer a rare opportunity to see a Shintō shrine that predates the influence of Chinese Buddhist architectural styles.

The main buildings are roofed with a kind of thatch rather than the tiles used on most later shrines. Other interesting features are a collection of more than 700 stone lanterns donated by seafarers and business people, a stone stage for performances of *bugaku* and court dancing and the attractive Taiko-bashi, an arched bridge set in a park.

It's next to both Sumiyoshi-taisha station on the Nankai main line and Sumiyoshi-tori-mae station on the Hankai line (the tram line that leaves from Tennō-ji station).

**Tempōzan Area** 天保山エリア

Trudging through the streets of Kita or Minami, you could easily be forgiven for forgetting that Osaka is actually a port city. A good remedy for this is a trip down to Tempōzan, the best of Osaka's burgeoning seaside developments. On an island amid the busy container ports of Osaka Bay, Tempōzan has several attractions to lure travellers, especially those with children in tow.

Before hitting the main attractions, you might want to get some perspective on it all by taking a whirl on the **Giant Ferris Wheel** (大観覧車; Daikanransha; ☎ 6576-6222; 1-1-10 Kaigan-dōri, Minato-ku; admission ¥700; ☞ 10am-9.30pm; ☉ Osakakō station on the Chūō subway line). Said to be the largest Ferris wheel in the world, the 112m-high wheel offers unbeatable views of Osaka, Osaka Bay and Kōbe. Give it a whirl at night to enjoy the vast carpet of lights formed by the Osaka/Kōbe conurbation.

Next to the Ferris wheel, you'll find **Tempōzan Marketplace** (天保山マーケットプレイス; ☎ 6576-5501; 1-1-10 Kaigan-dōri, Minato-ku; admission free; ☞ shops 11am-8pm, restaurants to 9pm; ☉ Osakakō station on the Chūō subway line), a shopping

and dining arcade that includes the **Naniwa Kuishinbō Yokochō** (なにわ食いしんぼ横丁; ☎ 6576-5501; 1-1-10 Kaigan-dōri, Minato-ku; admission free; ☞ 10am-8pm; ☉ Osakakō station on the Chūō subway line), a faux-Edo-period food court where you can sample all of Osaka's culinary specialities.

**OSAKA AQUARIUM** 海遊館

Although it's fairly expensive, **Osaka Aquarium** (☎ 6576-5501; 1-1-10 Kaigan-dōri, Minato-ku; adult/child ¥2000/900; ☞ 10am-8pm; ☉ Osakakō station on the Chūō subway line) is well worth a visit. It's centred around the world's largest aquarium tank, which is home to the aquarium's star attraction, a whale shark, which shares its quarters with an astonishing variety of lesser sharks, rays, tuna and other fish.

A walkway winds its way around the main tank and past displays of life found on eight different ocean levels. The giant spider crabs in the Japan Ocean Deeps section look like alien invaders from another planet. Presentations have both Japanese and English captions and an environmentally friendly slant to them.

Take the Chūō subway line to the Osaka-kō, from where it's about a five-minute walk to the aquarium. Get there for opening time if you want to beat the crowds – on weekends and holidays long queues are the norm.

**SUNTORY MUSEUM**

サントリーミュージアム

On the southern side of Osaka Aquarium is the **Suntory Museum complex** (☎ 6577-0001; www.suntory.com/culture-sports/smt; 1-5-10 Kaigan-dōri, Minato-ku; admission average ¥1000; ☞ 10.30am-7.30pm, closed Mon; ☉ Osakakō station on the Chūō subway line), which holds an IMAX 3-D theatre and an art gallery with a collection of modern art posters and glass artwork. The building itself, designed by Andō Tadao, is at least as impressive as any of the displays. The **IMAX theatre** (☎ 6577-0001; www.suntory.com/culture-sports/smt; 1-5-10 Kaigan-dōri, Minato-ku; admission ¥1000; ☞ 10.30am-8pm, closed Mon; ☉ Osakakō station on the Chūō subway line) usually has screenings on the hour; check the *Meet Osaka* guide to see what's showing.

**Other Areas****OPEN-AIR MUSEUM OF OLD JAPANESE FARMHOUSES** 日本民家集落博物館

In Ryokuchi-kōen this fine open-air museum (☎ 6862-3137; 1-2 Hattori Ryokuchi, Toyonaka-shi; admission ¥500; ☞ 9.30am-5pm, closed Mon; ☉ Ryokuchi-kōen

station on the Midō-suji subway line, west exit) features 11 traditional Japanese country houses and other structures brought here from all over Japan. All have been painstakingly reconstructed and filled with period-era tools and other displays. Most impressive is the giant *gasshō-zukuri* (thatch-roofed) farmhouse from Gifu-ken.

The parklike setting, with plenty of trees and bamboo, gives the whole museum a pleasantly rustic air – and the whole place comes alive with fiery red maple leaves during the November foliage season. For anyone even remotely interested in traditional Japanese architecture, we highly recommend this excellent attraction. An English-language pamphlet is available.

To get there, take the Midō-suji subway line to Ryokuchi-kōen and walk northwest into the park.

**UNIVERSAL STUDIOS JAPAN**

ユニバーサルスタジオジャパン

**Universal Studios Japan** (☎ 6465-3000; Universal City; adult/child ¥5800/3900; ☞ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat, Sun & holidays, with seasonal variations; ☉ Universal City station on the JR Osaka Loop line) is Osaka's answer to Tokyo Disneyland. Closely based on its two sister parks in the USA, the park features a wide variety of rides, shows, restaurants and other attractions.

To get there, take the JR Loop line to Nishikujō station, switch to one of the distinctively painted Universal Studio shuttle trains and get off at Universal City station. From Osaka station the trip costs ¥170 and takes about 20 minutes. There are also some direct trains from Osaka station (ask at the tourist office for times; the price is the same).

**OSAKA HUMAN RIGHTS MUSEUM/LIBERTY OSAKA**

大阪人権博物館・リバティおおさか

This **museum** (Map p375; ☎ 6561-5891; 3-6-36 Naniwa nishi, Naniwa-ku; admission ¥250; ☞ 10am-5pm, closed Mon, closed 4th Fri of every month; ☉ Ashihara-bashi station on the JR Osaka Loop line), which goes by two names, is dedicated to the suffering of Japan's Burakumin people and other oppressed groups, including Koreans, the handicapped, the Ainu and women. The most fascinating exhibits deal with the Burakumin, outcasts in Japan's four-tiered caste system that was officially outlawed in 1879 under the Emancipation Edict issued by the Meiji government.

An English-language leaflet is available, and you can borrow a tape recorder and English tape for free. Take the JR Osaka Loop line to Ashihara-bashi station, leave via the southern exit, walk south down the main street for five minutes and the museum is on the right of the pedestrian crossing.

**NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ETHNOLOGY**

国立民族学博物館

Located in Osaka Banpaku-kōen (World Expo Park) this **museum** (☎ 6876-2151; 10-1 Senri Expo Park, Suita; admission ¥420; ☞ 10am-5pm, closed Wed, closed Thu if the preceding Wed is a national holiday) is arguably Osaka's best, and it's worth the trip from downtown Osaka or Kyoto, especially if there's a good special exhibit on (check the *Kansai Time Out* for upcoming exhibits).

The museum provides a whirlwind tour through the cultural artefacts of many of the world's cultures. Exhibits range from Bollywood movie posters to Thai tuk-tuks, with Ainu textiles, Bhutanese mandalas and Japanese festival floats in between. Exhibits are brilliantly displayed and all seem to merge into a lively kaleidoscope of colours and shapes – the whole is much more than the sum of the parts here. There is almost nothing in the way of English signage or explanations, but most of the materials are self-explanatory. You can also borrow a sheet of English explanations from the reception desk.

To get there from Osaka, take the Midō-suji subway to the last stop, Senri-chūō, and change to the Osaka Monorail and take it two stops east to the Banpaku-kinen-kōen stop. Exit the station, go left, cross the bridge over the highway, buy a ticket from the machines, go through the turnstile and walk towards the huge Tower of the Sun statue. Once past the statue, you will see the museum about 250m in front of you to the northwest (it's got several towers on its roof that resemble cooling towers). From Kyoto, you can take the Hankyū line to Minami Ibaraki station and change there to the Osaka Monorail.

**FESTIVALS & EVENTS**

**Tōka Ebisu** Huge crowds of more than a million people flock to the Imamiya Ebisu-jinja (Map p375) to receive bamboo branches hung with auspicious tokens from 9 to 11 January. The shrine is near Imamiya Ebisu station on the Nankai line.

**Tenjin Matsuri** Held on 24 and 25 July, this is one of Japan's three biggest festivals. Try to make the second day,



## Kita JAPANESE

**Umeda Hagakure** (Map p378; ☎ 6341-1409; 1-1-3 Umeda; noodles from ¥600; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Sun; 📍 Osaka station on the JR line) Locals line up outside this place for their fantastic *udon* noodles. It's on the B2 floor of the Ekimae Daisan building. Take the central escalator to the B2 floor, take a right and walk 25m and take another right. It is on the left with a small English sign. There are pictures outside to help with ordering. Our pick here is *tenzaru* (*udon* served on a plate with tempura; ¥1100).

**Dōjima Hana** (Map p378; ☎ 6345-0141; 2-1-31 Dōjima, Kita-ku; meals from ¥800; ☎ 11am-11pm; 📍 Osaka station on the JR line) If you crave something a little *kotteri* (rich and fatty), we recommend the tasty *tonkatsu* at this approachable restaurant a stone's throw from the excellent Junkudō bookstore. We recommend the *rosukatsu teishoku* (pork cutlet roast *teishoku*; ¥880/1080 regular/large). There is a limited picture menu and an English sign.

**Ganko Umeda Honten** (Map p378; ☎ 6376-2001; 1-5-11 Shibata; meals from ¥800; ☎ 11am-late; E; 📍 Umeda station on the Hankyū line) Big is the operative word at this giant dining hall alongside Hankyū Umeda station that serves a wide variety of Japanese dishes starting with sushi (if you want just sushi, you can sit at the counter and order à la carte). It's very approachable and has an English picture menu. It's just south of the huge DD House entertainment building. Look for the picture of the guy with the headband (the symbol of Ganko).

**Isaribi** (Map p378; ☎ 6373-2969; 1-5-12 Shibata; dinner from ¥2300; ☎ 11am-2pm & 5-11.15pm Mon-Fri, 4.30-11.15pm Sat, Sun & holidays; 📍 Umeda station on the Hankyū line) This is a great *robatayaki* place, down a flight of white-tile stairs outside Hankyū Umeda station. Like *yakitori*, this is drinking food, and *nama beeru* (draught beer) really flows at this place. It's a little tricky to spot – look for an English sign near a liquor distributor.

A great place for a cheap lunch or dinner while in Kita is the Shin-Umeda Shokudō-Gai (Map p378), which is located down the escalators and to the right of the main exit of Hankyū Umeda station (just past the McDonald's). There are heaps of good restaurants here that vie for the lunch-dinner custom with cheap set meals, many of which are displayed outside, making ordering easier. Our favourite spot here is a sashimi and grilled fish specialist

called **Maru** (Map p378; ☎ 6361-4552; 9-26 Kakuda-chō; meals from ¥800; ☎ 11.30am-11.30pm; 📍 Umeda station on the Hankyū line), where the lunchtime sashimi set meal costs about ¥800. It also serves *oden*, the classic Japanese winter dish of meat, vegetables and tofu stewed in broth. To get there, exit Hankyū station via the escalators, walk 10m past the McDonald's, take a left into the corridor and you will see it on the right after about 10m. Pictures of the set meals are on the wall and there's usually a young lady outside beckoning customers.

Another good food court in Kita is the Kappa Yokochō Arcade (marked 'Kappa Plaza' in English) just north of Hankyū Umeda station. Here you'll find **Gatara** (Map p378; ☎ 6373-1484; 1-7-2 Shibata; dinner around ¥3000; ☎ 11am-11pm; E; 📍 Umeda station on the Hankyū line), a cosy little spot that does creative twists on standard *izakaya* themes. Look for the glass front with credit-card stickers on the left as you head north in the arcade. Unlike most *izakaya*, this one has an English menu.

Another excellent food court is Hilton Plaza, on the B2 floor beneath the Osaka Hilton. Here, you will find the excellent **Shin-kiiraku** (Map p378; ☎ 6345-3461; 1-8-16 Umeda, Kita-ku; meals from ¥800; ☎ 11am-2.30pm & 4-11pm; 📍 Osaka station on the JR line), an excellent tempura specialist that packs 'em in at lunchtime. At lunch try the *ebishio-tendon* (shrimp tempura over rice, ¥880) and at dinner try the *osusume-gozen* (tempura full set; ¥2079). Take the escalator to the B2 floor, go right and look for the small English sign.

## INTERNATIONAL

**Org...Organic Life** (Map p378; ☎ 6312-0529; 7-7 Doyama-chō, Kita-ku; drinks from ¥250, meals ¥900-2500; ☎ 11am-11pm; 📍 Umeda station on the Hankyū line, Osaka station on the JR line or Higashi Umeda station on the Tanimachi subway line) At this open-plan, casual café you can grab a light meal or a quick pick-me-up while exploring Kita. You can get a pasta or risotto lunch for ¥900 here, and finish it off with cake and coffee. It's easy to spot, with an English sign. There's no English menu, but there is a picture menu and 'pasta lunch' or 'risotto lunch' will get your point across.

**Pina Khana** (Map p378; ☎ 6375-5828; 1-7-2 Shibata, Kita-ku; lunch/dinner from ¥850/3000; ☎ 11am-3pm & 5-10pm Mon-Thu, 11am-3.30pm & 5-10.30pm Fri-Sun; E, food only; 📍 Umeda station on the Hankyū line) A crowded spot in the Kappa Yokochō Arcade, this is our favourite Indian restaurant in Kita. The good-

value lunch sets usually include a good curry, nan or rice, and tandoori chicken. If you go between noon and 1pm you'll be fighting the salarymen and office ladies for a seat. Look for the Indian flag.

**Monsoon Café** (Map p378; ☎ 6292-0010; 15-22 Chayamachi, Kita-ku; meals from ¥1000; ☎ 11.30am-4am; E; 📍 Umeda station on the Hankyū line) For a fun night with decent pan-Asian cuisine and a casual international atmosphere, try the Osaka branch of this nationwide chain. It's in the Urban Terrace building, which is across from the Hotel Hankyū International.

## Minami JAPANESE

You will find lots of good Japanese choices in Minami, including a bunch of giant dining halls in Dōtombori Arcade.

**Nishiya** (Map p380; ☎ 6241-9221; 1-18-18 Higashi Shinsaibashi, Chūō-ku; noodle dishes from ¥630, dinner average ¥4000; ☎ lunch & dinner; E; 📍 Shinsaibashi station on the Midō-suji, Yotsubashi or Nagahori Tsurumiryōkuchi subway line) An Osaka landmark that serves *udon* noodles and a variety of hearty *nabe* (iron pot) dishes for reasonable prices, including a *tempura udon* (¥1100). Look for the semirustic façade and the food models about 10m north of the corner.

**Tonkatsu Ganko** (Map p380; ☎ 6646-4129; 2-2-16 Nambanaka, Naniwa-ku; meals from ¥800; ☎ lunch & dinner; 📍 Namba station on the Nankai Main line or Midō-suji, Yotsubashi or Sennichi-mae subway line) Sometimes you need something a little heavier than noodles and rice, and *tonkatsu* may be the call. This popular *tonkatsu* specialist near Namba station is easy to spot with food models in the glass case out front (next to an NTT Docomo shop). There's a picture menu.

**Gin Sen** (Map p380; ☎ 6213-2898; 2-4-2 Shinsaibashi-suji, Chūō-ku; all-you-can-eat *kushi-katsu* lunch/dinner ¥1980/2980; ☎ 11.30am-11pm; E; 📍 Namba station on the Midō-suji, Yotsubashi or Sennichi-mae subway line) This casual, approachable place serves delicious *kushi katsu* (meat and veggies deep fried on skewers), a greasy but tasty treat. It's on the 2nd floor of the Gurukas building; there's a Lawson convenience store on the ground floor.

**Ume no Hana** (Map p380; ☎ 6258-3766; OPA Bldg, 11th fl, 1-4-3 Nishi Shinsaibashi, Chūō-ku; dinner from ¥3670; ☎ 11am-4pm & 5-9pm; E; 📍 Shinsaibashi station on the Midō-suji subway line) This is part of an upscale chain that serves a variety of tofu-based dishes. It's on the 11th floor of the OPA building. The

elevator is on the southeast side of the building (entry from the street – look for the sign reading 'OPA Restaurant & Café').

Of course, Minami is all about *shōtengai* (shopping arcades) and the Sennichi-mae Arcade is one of the biggest. In addition to all the *pachinko* parlours here, you'll find lots of cheap, casual restaurants like **Genroku Sushi** (Map p380; 2-11-4 Sennichi-mae; ☎ 10am-10.40pm; 📍 Namba station on the Midō-suji subway line), a bustling automatic sushi place where plates of sushi cost a mere ¥130, and **Izumoya** (Map p380; ☎ 6632-1288; 2-11-10 Sennichi-mae, Chūō-ku; meals from ¥700; 11am-9pm Thu-Tue, closed 2nd & 4th Tue of month; 📍 Namba station on the Midō-suji subway line), an old *unagi* specialist that serves tasty dishes like *mamushi nami* (small *unagi* over rice) for ¥700, or the larger *tokujō* (special *unagi*; ¥1400). It's on the corner with a brownish marble front.

In Osaka half of the action is underground, in the city's vast *chikagai* (underground arcades). Namba Walk, near Nipponbashi station, is particularly packed with restaurants. **Hachisaburō** (Map p380; ☎ 6213-6170; 4-5 Namba Walk, 1 Sennichi-mae, Chūō-ku; sushi meals from ¥2000; ☎ 11am-10pm; E; 📍 Namba station on the Midō-suji, Yotsubashi or Sennichi-mae subway line), a casual sushi restaurant 5m west of the B25 entrance of the arcade, is a decent sushi place where the lunchtime *nigirisushi teishoku* (sushi set) costs only ¥800. Also in Namba Walk, about 5m east of the B29 entrance, is **Minami Taco Ume** (Map p380; ☎ 6213-6218; 5-10 Namba Walk, 1 Sennichi-mae, Chūō-ku; meals from ¥800; ☎ 11am-10pm; 📍 Namba station on the Midō-suji, Yotsubashi or Sennichi-mae subway line), an *oden* specialist that serves an *oden teishoku* for ¥840.

**Dōtombori Arcade** (Dōtombori, Chūō-ku; Map p380; 📍 Namba station on the Midō-suji, Yotsubashi or Sennichi-mae subway line) is the heart of Minami, and it's crammed with eateries. This is not the place to go for refined dining, but if you want heaping portions of tasty food in a very casual atmosphere, it can be a lot of fun. And because it sees a lot of tourists, most of the big restaurants here have English menus. Here is a quick list of our favourite spots:

**Imai Honten** (Map p380; ☎ 6211-0319; 1-7-22 Dōtombori, Chūō-ku; noodles from ¥577; ☎ 11am-10pm, closed Wed; E) One of the area's oldest and most revered *udon* specialists and our favourite place on the strip. Try the *tendon* (tempura over rice; ¥1575). It's sandwiched between two *pachinko* parlours. There's no English sign, but the traditional front stands out among the glitter. **Chibō** (Map p380; ☎ 6212-2211; 1-5-5 Dōtombori, Chūō-ku; *okonomiyaki* from ¥800; ☎ 11am-midnight; E)



A great *okonomiyaki* (grilled pancake-like treat) specialist. There's an English sign in addition to the English menu. Try the house special *Dōtombori yaki*, a toothsome treat with pork, beef, squid, shrimp and cheese for ¥1500.

**Ganko Zushi** (Map p380; ☎ 6212-1705; 1-8-24 Dōtombori, Chūō-ku; set meals from ¥1000; ☎ 11.30am-11pm; E) Giant sushi restaurant (can order à la carte at counter) that serves just about everything else.

**Kani Dōraku Honten** (Map p380; ☎ 6211-8975; 1-6-18 Dōtombori, Chūō-ku; lunch/dinner from ¥1600/3000; ☎ 11am-11pm; E) Popular crab specialist; look for giant crab on storefront.

**Zuboraya** (Map p380; ☎ 6211-0181; 1-6-10 Dōtombori, Chūō-ku; fugu sashimi ¥1800, full dinners from ¥3000; ☎ 11am-11pm) A huge *fugu* (Japanese puffer fish) specialist with a good picture menu. Look for the giant *fugu* out front.

## INTERNATIONAL

**Krungtep** (Map p380; ☎ 4708-0088; 1-6-14 Dōtombori, Chūō-ku; lunch buffet/dinner ¥980/2000; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Mon; 📍 Namba station on the Midō-suji, Yotsubashi or Sennichi-mae subway line) Dōtombori's most popular Thai place serves fairly authentic versions of the standard favourites like green curry and fried noodles. Look for the small English sign – it's on the B1 floor.

Finally, if you just feel like a Western-style sandwich or a quick cup of (so-so) coffee, drop into the Doutor (Map p380) at the mouth of the Sennichi-mae Arcade.

## DRINKING

Osaka is a hard-working city, but when quitting time rolls around Osakans know how to party. Take a stroll through Minami on a Friday night and you'd be excused for thinking that there is one bar for every resident of the city. Whatever your taste, you're sure to find something to your liking among this vast array of bars and clubs.

## Kita キタ

Although Minami is Osaka's real nightlife district, there are plenty of bars, clubs and *izakaya* in the neighbourhoods to the south and east of Osaka station (but be warned that most of the places in Kita-Shinchi cater only to Japanese salarymen on expense accounts).

**Canopy** (Map p378; ☎ 6341-0339; 1-11-20 Sonezakishinchi, Kita-ku; ☎ 5pm-6am Mon-Sat, 5pm-midnight Sun; 📍 Kitashinchi station on the JR Tōzai line) Café-style bar that pulls in a crowd of local expats for after-work snacks and drinks. The happy hour special here is a good and popular deal.

**Windows on the World** (Map p378; ☎ 6347-7111; 1-8-8 Umeda, Kita-ku; ☎ 11.30am-12.30am; 📍 Osaka station on the JR line) An unbeatable spot for drinks with a view – it's on the 35th floor of the Hilton Osaka. Be warned that there's a ¥1500-per-person table charge and drinks average ¥1000.

## Minami ミナミ

This is the place for a wild night out in Osaka. You simply won't believe the number of bars, clubs and restaurants they've packed into the narrow streets and alleys of Dōtombori, Shinsaibashi, Namba and Amerika-Mura. Go on a weekend night and you'll be part of a colourful human parade of Osaka characters – this is one of Japan's best spots for people-watching.

**Pig & Whistle** (Map p380; ☎ 6213-6911; meals/drinks from ¥500/700; ☎ 5pm-midnight Mon-Thu & Sun, to 1am Fri & Sat; 📍 Shinsaibashi station on the Midō-suji subway line) Like its sister branch in Kyoto, this is a good place to go for a pint and a plate of fish and chips. It's clearly marked from the street.

**Murphy's** (Map p380; ☎ 6282-0677; 1-6-31 Higashishinsaibashi, Chūō-ku; average cost per person ¥1000; ☎ 5pm-1am Sun-Thu, to 4am Fri & Sat; 📍 Nagahoribashi station on the Sakaisuji subway line) This is one of the oldest Irish-style pubs in Japan, and a good place to rub shoulders with local expats and Japanese. It's on the 6th floor of the Reed Plaza Shinsaibashi building, a futuristic building with what looks like a rocket moulded into the front.

**SoulFuckTry** (Map p380; ☎ 6539-1032; 1-9-14 Minami Horie, Nishi-ku; drinks from ¥700; 📍 Yotsubashi station on the Yotsubashi subway line) This interestingly named bar-club describes itself as a soul disco, and that pretty much nails it. Like most clubs, it's hit or miss. Turn down the narrow street opposite Eneos gas station.

**Cellar** (Map p380; ☎ 6212-6437; B1 Shin-sumiya Bldg, 2-17-13 Nishishinsaibashi, Chūō-ku; 📍 Shinsaibashi station on the Midō-suji subway line) Live music is often the draw at this popular basement bar on the west side of Nishishinsaibashi. Look for the entrance to the stairs a few metres north of the corner.

**Tavola 36** (Map p380; ☎ 6646-5125; 5-1-60 Namba, Chūō-ku; ☎ 11.30am-11.30pm Mon-Thu, to midnight Fri, 11am-midnight Sat, to 11.30pm Sun & holidays; 📍 Namba station on the Nankai Main line) This is where we go when we want something a little swanky. It's an Italian restaurant-bar on the 36th floor of the Swiss Hotel Nankai Osaka. The view is fantastic and the prices are too: there's a

¥1260-per-person table charge after 5.30pm and drinks start at ¥1300.

## ENTERTAINMENT

For up-to-date listings of forthcoming club events, check *Kansai Time Out*.

## Clubs

**Karma** (Map p378; ☎ 6344-6181; 1-5-18 Sonezakishinchi, Kita-ku; 📍 Osaka station on the JR line) A very long-standing club in Kita that is popular with Japanese and foreigners alike. On weekends it usually hosts techno events with cover charges averaging ¥2500.

**Grand Café** (Map p380; ☎ 6213-8637; 2-10-21 Nishishinsaibashi, Chūō-ku; 📍 Shinsaibashi station on the Midō-suji or Yotsubashi subway line) This hip underground club hosts a variety of electronica-DJ events. There's a comfy seating area and several dance floors. Look for the blue sign at street level.

## Traditional Japanese Entertainment

Unfortunately, neither of the following places has regularly scheduled shows. The best thing is to check with the tourist information offices about current shows, check the listings in the *Meet Osaka* guide or look in *Kansai Time Out*.

**National Bunraku Theatre** (Map p375; ☎ 6212-2531; 1-12-10 Nipponbashi, Chūō-ku; 📍 Nipponbashi station on the Sennichi-mae or Sakaisuji subway line) This is Osaka's main *bunraku* theatre. It's probably the best place in Japan to see *bunraku*. Just be warned that performances sell out quickly, so plan ahead.

**Osaka Nōgaku Hall** (Map p378; ☎ 6373-1726; 2-3-17 Nakasakinishi, Kita-ku; 📍 Osaka station on the JR line) A five-minute walk east of Osaka station, this hall holds nō shows about twice a month, most of which cost ¥4000.

## SHOPPING

Osaka has almost as many shops as it has restaurants. Look for department stores in the area around JR Osaka and Umeda stations. Most of the major department stores are represented here.

Osaka's speciality is electronics, and Den Den Town (Map p380) is Osaka's version of Tokyo's Akihabara. Taking its name from the Japanese word for electricity, *denki*, Den Den Town is an area of shops almost exclusively devoted to electronic goods. To avoid sales tax, check if the store has a 'Tax Free' sign outside and bring your passport. Most stores

are closed on Wednesday. Take the Sakaisuji subway line to Ebisu-chō station and take exit 1 or exit 2. Alternatively, it's a 15-minute walk south of Nankai Namba station.

For anything related to cooking and eating, head to the Dōguya-suji Arcade in Minami (p379).

**Kōjitsu Sansō** (Map p378; ☎ 6442-5267; Osaka Ekimae Daisan Bldg, 1-3 Umeda, Kita-ku; ☎ 10.30am-8pm; 📍 Osaka station on the JR line) If you need a new backpack or any other kind of outdoor gear, head to this excellent shop on the ground floor at the north-west corner of the Ekimae Daisan building.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

Osaka is served by two airports: the old Osaka Itami airport, which now handles only domestic traffic, and the newer Kansai International Airport (KIX), which handles all international and some domestic flights.

### Boat

The **Japan China International Ferry Company** (📍 in Japan 06-6536-6541, in China 021-6325-7642; www.funec.co.jp/chinjif in Japanese) connects Shanghai and Osaka/Kōbe (one way 2nd class ¥20,000/CNY1300, around 48 hours). A 2nd-class ticket costs around US\$200.

A similar service is provided by the **Shanghai Ferry Company** (📍 in Japan 06-6243-6345, in China 021-6537-5111; www.shanghai-ferry.co.jp in Japanese). The ferries (one way ¥20,000/CNY1300) leave from the Osaka Nankō international ferry terminal, which can be reached by taking the New Tram service from Suminoe-kōen station to Nankoguchi station.

Ferries also depart from Nankō ferry terminal and Kanome-futō and Bente-futō piers for various destinations around Honshū, Kyūshū and Shikoku. Destinations and 2nd-class fares include Beppu (from ¥8800, 11½ hours), Miyazaki (from ¥10,400, 12¾ hours), Shibushi (from ¥9900, 14¾ hours) and Shinmoji (from ¥7200, 12 hours) in Kyūshū; Shōdo-shima (from ¥3800, 4½ hours), Matsuyama (¥6300, 9¼ hours) and Niihama (¥5000, 9¼ hours) in Shikoku.

For detailed information about sailing schedules and bookings contact the tourist information offices.

### Bus

There is a long-distance highway bus service between Osaka and cities all across Honshū,

Shikoku and some cities in Kyūshū. Destinations include Tokyo (from ¥4300, eight hours), Nagasaki (¥11,000, 10 hours) and Kagoshima (¥12,000, 11 hours 54 minutes). Most buses depart from JR Osaka station (Map p378); check with the tourist information offices for more details.

## Train KÔBE

The fastest way between Kôbe and Osaka is a JR *shinkaisoku* that runs between JR Osaka station and Kôbe's Sannomiya and Kôbe stations (¥390, 31 minutes).

There is also the private Hankyū line, which takes a little more time but is cheaper. It runs from Osaka's Hankyū Umeda station (Map p378) to Kôbe's Sannomiya station (*tokkyū*, ¥310, 27 minutes).

## KYOTO

The fastest way to travel by train between Kyoto and Osaka, other than *shinkansen*, is a JR *shinkaisoku* that runs between JR Kyoto station and JR Osaka station (Map p378; ¥540, 28 minutes).

Another choice is the cheaper private Hankyū line that runs between Hankyū Umeda station in Osaka and Hankyū Kawaramachi, Karasuma and Ōmiya stations in Kyoto (*tokkyū* to Kawaramachi ¥390, 44 minutes).

Alternatively, you can take the Keihan main line between Sanjō, Shijō or Shichijō stations in Kyoto and Keihan Yodoyabashi station in Osaka (*tokkyū* to Sanjō ¥400, 51 minutes). Yodoyabashi is on the Midō-suji subway line.

## NARA

The JR Kansai line links Osaka (Namba and Tennō-ji stations) and Nara (JR Nara station) via Hōryū-ji (*kaisoku*, ¥540, 42 minutes).

The private Kintetsu Nara line also connects Osaka (Kintetsu Namba station) with Nara (Kintetsu Nara station). *Kyūkō* (express) and *futsū* services take about 39 minutes and cost ¥540. *Tokkyū* trains do the journey in five minutes less time but at almost double the cost, making them a poor option.

## SHINKANSEN

Osaka is on the Tōkaidō–San-yō *shinkansen* line that runs between Tokyo and Hakata (Kyūshū): Hikari *shinkansen* to/from Tokyo (¥13,750, three hours) and Hikari *shinkansen* to/from Hakata (¥14,590, 2¼ hours). Other

cities on this line include Hiroshima, Kyoto, Kôbe and Okayama.

## GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport OSAKA ITAMI AIRPORT

There are frequent **limousine buses** (Osaka Airport Transport Co; ☎ 06-6844-1124; www.okkbus.co.jp/eng/index.html) running between the airport and various parts of Osaka. Buses run to/from Shin-Osaka station every 20 minutes from about 8am to 9pm (¥490, 25 minutes). Buses run at about the same frequency to/from Osaka and Namba stations (¥620, 30 minutes). At Itami, buy your tickets from the machine outside the arrivals hall.

## KANSAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (KIX)

The fastest way by between KIX and Osaka is the private Nankai express Rapiit, which runs to/from Nankai Namba station on the Midō-suji subway line (¥1390, 38 minutes). The JR Haruka limited airport express runs between KIX and Tennō-ji station (¥1760, 33 minutes) and Shin-Osaka (¥2470, 51 minutes).

Regular JR express trains called *kankū kaisoku* also run between KIX and Osaka station (¥1160, 70 minutes), Kyōbashi station (¥1160, 66 minutes), Tennō-ji station (¥1030, 53 minutes) and JR Namba station (¥1030, 53 minutes).

The OCAT air terminal, in JR Namba station, allows passengers on Japanese and some other airlines to check in and deposit baggage before boarding trains to the airport. Check with your airline for details.

There are a variety of bus routes between KIX and Osaka. **Limousine buses** (Kansai Airport Transportation Enterprise; ☎ 0724-61-1374; www.kate.co.jp/pc/english/english.html) travel to/from Osaka Umeda, Osaka City Air Terminal (OCAT) Namba, Uehonmachi and Nanko (Cosmo Square) stations. The fare is ¥1300 (¥880 OCAT) for most routes and the journeys take an average of 50 minutes, depending on traffic conditions.

## Bus

Osaka does have a bus system, but it is nowhere near as easy to use as the rail network. Japanese-language bus maps are available from the tourist offices.

## Train & Subway

Osaka has a good subway network and, like Tokyo, a JR loop line (known in Japanese as

the JR Kanjō-sen) that circles the city area. In fact, there should be no need to use any other form of transport while you are in Osaka unless you stay out late and miss the last train.

There are seven subway lines, but the one that most short-term visitors are likely to find most useful is the Midō-suji line, which runs north to south stopping at Shin-Osaka, Umeda (next to Osaka station), Shinsaibashi, Namba and Tennō-ji stations. Most rides cost between ¥200 and ¥300. This book contains a full Osaka subway/tram map; see p422.

If you're going to be using the subway system a lot on any day, it might be worth considering a 'one-day free ticket' (*kyōtsū ichinichi jōsha ken*). For ¥850 ('no-my car free ticket' ¥600 on Fridays and the 20th of every month only) you get unlimited travel on any subway, the New Tram line and all city buses (but not the JR line). Note, however, that you would really have to be moving around a lot to save any money with this ticket. These tickets can be purchased from some of the ticket machines in most subway stations; push the button for 'one-day free ticket' (*kyōtsū ichinichi jōsha ken*) then press the illuminated button reading '¥850'.

## KÔBE 神戸

☎ 078 / pop 1.5 million

Perched on a hillside overlooking the sea, Kôbe is one of Japan's most attractive cities. It's also one of the country's most cosmopolitan, having served as a maritime gateway to Kansai from the earliest days of trade with China. To this day, there are significant populations of other Asian nationalities in Kôbe, as well as plenty of Westerners, many of whom work in nearby Osaka.

For many, Kôbe will always be associated with the Great Kôbe Earthquake of 17 January 1995, which levelled whole neighbourhoods and killed more than 6000 people. Fortunately, the city has risen, Phoenix-like, from the ashes and is now more vibrant than ever.

One of Kôbe's best features is its relatively small size – most of the sights can be reached on foot from the main train stations. Of course, it must be noted that none of these sights are must-sees: Kôbe is likely to appeal more to residents than to travellers. However, it does have some good restaurants, cafés and

bars and is a good place for a night out in Kansai if you just can't face the mayhem of Osaka.

## ORIENTATION

Kôbe's two main entry points are Sannomiya and Shin-Kôbe stations. Shin-Kôbe station, in the northeast of town, is where the *shinkansen* stops. A subway (¥200, one minute) runs from here to the busier Sannomiya station, which has frequent rail connections with Osaka and Kyoto. It's possible to walk between the two stations in around 20 minutes. Sannomiya station marks the city centre, although a spate of development in Kôbe Harbor Land is starting to swing the city's centre of gravity to the southwest. Before starting your exploration of Kôbe, pick up a copy of the *Kôbe City Map* at one of the two information offices.

## INFORMATION

The city's main **tourist information office** (☎ 322-0220; ☎ 9am-7pm) is on the ground floor on the south side of JR Sannomiya station's west gate (follow the signs for Santica, a shopping mall). There's a smaller information counter on the 2nd floor of Shin-Kôbe station. Both information centres carry the free *Kôbe City Map* and the *Kôbe Guide Map*.

**Citibank** (☎ 392-4122; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri, ATM 24hr; 📍 Sannomiya station on the Hankyū Kôbe line, Hanshin Main line or JR Kôbe line) Behind Kôbe City Hall; ATM accepts international cards.

**H.I.S.** (☎ 335-2505; ☎ 10am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 11am-5pm Sat; 📍 Motomachi station on the Hanshin Main line or JR Kôbe line) Travel agency on the 2nd floor near the corner, diagonally across from Motomachi station.

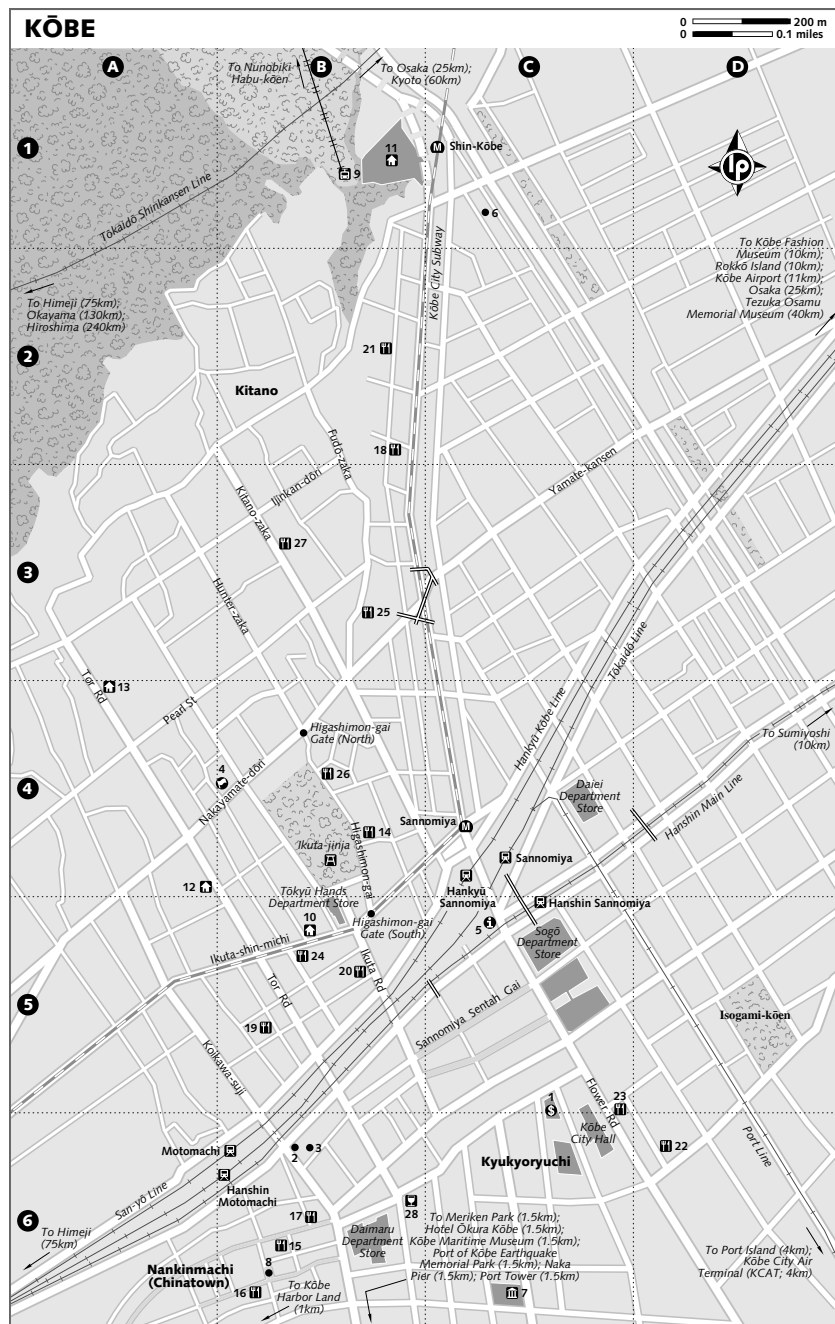
**Random Walk** (☎ 332-9200; ☎ 10am-8pm; 📍 Motomachi station on the JR Kôbe line) Small English-language bookshop on 2nd floor in shopping street.

**Wantage Books** (☎ 232-4517; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri; 📍 Shin-Kôbe station on the Seishin-Yamate subway line) Near Shin-Kôbe, used book specialist. Also houses office of *Kansai Time Out* magazine.

## SIGHTS

### Kitano 北野

Twenty minutes' walk north of Sannomiya is the pleasant hillside neighbourhood of Kitano, where local tourists come to enjoy the feeling of foreign travel without leaving Japanese soil. A European-American atmosphere is created by the winding streets and *ijinkan* (literally 'foreigners' houses') that housed some of Kôbe's early Western residents. Admission to



## INFORMATION

Citibank シティバンク	1	C5
H.I.S. エイチアイエス	2	B6
Kansai Time Out Office		
関西タイムアウト オフィス	(see 6)	
Random Walk ランダムウォーク	3	B6
South Korea Consulate		
大韓民国大使館	4	B4
Tourist Information Office		
観光案内所	5	C5
Wantage Books		
ウォンテージ ブックス	6	C1

## SIGHTS &amp; ACTIVITIES

Kôbe City Museum 神戸市立博物館	7	C6
Nankinmachi Square 南京町	8	B6
Shin-Kôbe Cable Car	9	B1

## SLEEPING

B Kôbe ザ・ビー神戸	10	B5
Crowne Plaza Kôbe		
クラウンプラザ神戸	11	B1
Hotel Tor Road ホテルトアロード	12	A4
Kôbe Kitano Hotel		
神戸北野ホテル	13	A4

## EATING

Daruma 達磨	14	B4
Furuya 古屋	15	B6
Ganso Gyôza-en		
がんそぎょうざ苑	16	B6
Kintoki 金時	17	B6
Mikami 味加味	18	B2
Modernark Pharm		
モダンーク ファーム	19	B5

Mon もん	20	B5
Nailey's Café ネイリーズ カフェ	21	B2
Okagawa お可川	22	D6
Shokutakuya 食卓家	23	C5
Sona Rupa ショナルパ	24	B5
Tanoshiya 楽舎	25	B3
Toritetsu とり鉄	26	B4
Upwards アップワーズ	27	B3
Wakkoku 和黒	(see 11)	

## DRINKING

New Munchen Club		
ニューミュンヘンクラブ	28	B6

## SHOPPING

Avenue shopping centre		
アベニュー	(see 11)	

some is free, to others ¥300 to ¥700, and most are open from 9am to 5pm daily. Although these brick and weatherboard dwellings may not hold the same fascination for Western travellers that they hold for local tourists, the area itself is pleasant to stroll around and is dotted with good cafés and restaurants.

## Shin-kôbe Cable Car &amp; Nunobiki Hâbu-kôen

新神戸ロープウェイ・布引ハーブ公園

The **Shin-Kôbe cable car** (Shin-Kôbe Ropeway; one way/return ¥550/1000; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm, later in summer; 🚉 Shin-Kôbe station on the Seishin-Yamate subway line) leaves from behind the Crowne Plaza Kôbe hotel near Shin-Kôbe station and ascends to a mountain ridge 400m above the city. The views from the top over Kôbe and the bay are particularly pretty after sunset. There's a complex of gardens, restaurants and shops below the top station known as the **Nunobiki Hâbu-kôen** (Nunobiki Herb Garden; admission ¥200; ☎ 10am-5pm, open later in summer; 🚉 Nunobiki Hâbu-kôen station on the Shin-Kôbe Ropeway). Note that you can easily walk down to the bottom station from the Herb Garden in about 30 minutes.

## Kôbe City Museum 神戸市立博物館

This **museum** (Kôbe Shiritsu Hakubutsukan; ☎ 391-0035; 24 Kyô-machi, Chûô-ku; admission varies by exhibition; ☎ 10am-5pm, closed Mon; 🚉 Sannomiya station on the JR Kôbe line) has a collection of so-called Namban (literally 'southern barbarian') art and occasional special exhibits. Namban art is a school of painting that developed under the influence of early Jesuit missionaries in Japan, many of whom taught Western painting techniques to Japanese students. The entrance is on the east side of the building.

## Nankinmachi (Chinatown) 南京町

Nankinmachi, Kôbe's Chinatown, is a gaudy, bustling, unabashedly touristy collection of Chinese restaurants and stores that should be familiar to anyone who's visited Chinatowns elsewhere in the world. The restaurants here tend to be overpriced and may disappoint sophisticated palates, but the place is fun for a stroll particularly in the evening, when the lights of the area illuminate the gaudily painted façades of the shops. If you fancy a bite while touring the area, we recommend a plate of *gyôza* and we list two good choices (see p396).

## Kôbe Harbor Land &amp; Meriken Park

神戸ハーバーランド

Five minutes' walk southeast of Kôbe station, Kôbe Harbor Land is awash with new megamall shopping and dining developments. This may not appeal to foreign travellers the way it does to the local youth, but it's still a nice place for a stroll in the afternoon. For a good view of the area, take the free glass lift to the 18th floor of the **Ecoll Marine building**.

A five-minute walk to the east of Harbor Land you'll find Meriken Park, on a spit of reclaimed land jutting out into the bay. The main attraction here is the **Kôbe Maritime Museum** (Kôbe Kaiyô Hakubutsukan; ☎ 327-8983; 2-2 Hatobachô, Chûô-ku; admission ¥500; ☎ 10am-5pm, closed Mon; 🚉 Motomachi station on the JR Kôbe line). The museum has a small collection of ship models and displays, with some English explanations.

## Rokkô Island 六甲アイランド

An artificial island, the main attraction here is the **Kôbe Fashion Museum** (Kôbe Fashion Bijutsukan; ☎ 858-0050; 2-9-1 Kôyôchônaka, Higashinada-ku; admission ¥500; ☎ 10am-6pm, closed Wed; 🚉 Island Centre station on

the Rokkō Liner monorail). The museum's collection of mostly foreign fashion is not quite up to the dramatic building in which it's housed but it's worth a look if you're interested in fashion. To reach the museum, take the Rokkō Liner monorail (¥240) from JR Sumiyoshi (four stops east of Sannomiya) and get off at the Island Centre stop.

### Hakutsuru Sake Brewery Museum

白鶴記念造酒資料館

The Nada-ku area of Kôbe is one of Japan's major sake-brewing centres and the dominant brewer here is the famous Hakutsuru company. The **Hakutsuru Sake Brewery Museum** (☎ 822-8907; 4-5-5 Sumiyoshi Minami-machi, Higashi-nada-ku; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-4.30pm, closed Mon, New Year & Obon; 📍 Sumiyoshi station on the Hanshin Main line) provides a fascinating look into traditional sake-making methods. There is not much in the way of English explanations, but the free English pamphlet should get you started. Free sake tasting is possible after you tour the facilities (ask at the counter).

Take the Hanshin line eight stops east from Sannomiya (¥180, 15 minutes, express trains do not stop) and get off at Hanshin Sumiyoshi station. Exit the station and walk south to the elevated highway and cross the pedestrian overpass; take a right at the bottom of the steps; take your first left, then a right and look for it on the right (there is no English sign). You have to sign in at the gate. Use the blue-and-white crane logo atop the modern wing of the factory as your guide.

### Tezuka Osamu Memorial Museum

手塚治虫記念館

While it's a bit of a hike from downtown Kôbe, this fine **museum** (☎ 0797-81-2970; 7-65 Mukogawa-chō, Takarazuka; adult/child ¥500/100; ☎ 9.30am-5pm, to 8pm in summer, closed Wed) is a must for serious fans of Japanese manga. Located in the town of Takarazuka (a short train ride from Kôbe's Sannomiya station), it celebrates the life and work of Tezuka Osamu, the father of Japanese animation and manga, and a man of such legendary output that his last words were rumoured to be 'I'm begging you, let me work!'

Tezuka's creations include *Tetsuwan Atomu* (Astro Boy) and *Black Jack* and *Rion Kôtei* (Jungle Emperor Leo, which Disney adapted to make the film *The Lion King*). The museum details Tezuka's life and has several of

his childhood drawings and diagrams from his time as a doctor. A small theatre plays an original anime film every 20 minutes (no spoken dialogue) and the 2nd floor has booths where you can watch a variety of old episodes such as the original 1960s *Astro Boy* pilot. First editions of his publications are also on display, and large manga collections are available to peruse.

The museum is a five-minute walk east of Hankyū Takarazuka station. To get to this station, take the Hankyū Takarazuka line from Nishinomiya station, which is on the main Hankyū line between Osaka and Kôbe. From Kôbe's Sannomiya station, the ride costs ¥270 and takes around 45 minutes with good connections (be sure to take the *tokkyū*). After exiting the station, follow the scenic Hana-no-Michi (Flower Ave); when this floral pathway ends, keep going east. Look for the building capped with a glass globe.

### FESTIVALS & EVENTS

**Luminarie**, Kôbe's biggest yearly event, is held every evening from around 12 to 25 December to celebrate the city's miraculous recovery from the 1995 earthquake (check with the Kôbe tourist information office to be sure of the dates as they change slightly every year). The streets southwest of Kôbe City Hall are decorated with countless illuminated metal archways, which when viewed from within look like the interior of some otherworldly cathedral.

### SLEEPING

**B Kôbe** (☎ 333-4880; fax 333-4876; www.ishinhotels.com/theb-kobe/en/index.html; s/d/tw from ¥8400/13,650/15,750; 📍 📍; 📍 Sannomiya station on the Seishin-Yamate subway line) The newly renovated and centrally located B Kôbe is a good utilitarian choice if you've got business in Kôbe or just want a clean place to lay your head in the evening. The windows are tiny and there's not much light, but if you're only there at night this shouldn't matter too much. We recommend springing for the deluxe twin rooms here (¥18,900).

**Hotel Tor Road** (☎ 391-6691; fax 391-6570; www.hoteltorroad.co.jp in Japanese; s/d/tw from ¥8662/17,325/17,325; 📍 📍; 📍 Sannomiya or Motomachi station on the JR Kôbe line) A step up from the typical business hotel, this Tor Road hotel is a good choice for those who want a little more comfort. Beds are larger than normal for this sort of hotel and quite clean. The friendly staff is another plus.

**Crowne Plaza Kôbe** (☎ 291-1121; fax 291-1151; www.ichotelgroup.com/h/d/cp/1/en/hotel/osakb; s/d/tw from ¥15,015/26,565/26,565; 📍 📍; 📍 Shin-Kôbe station on the Seishin-Yamate subway line or JR Sanyō Shinkansen) You'll feel on top of the world as you survey the bright lights of Kôbe from this perch atop the city. Conveniently located near JR Shin-Kôbe station, this first-class hotel offers clean and fairly spacious rooms and has an English-speaking staff. Downstairs in the Avenue shopping centre, you'll find several good restaurants to choose from.

**our pick** **Hotel Ôkura Kôbe** (☎ 333-0111; fax 333-6673; kobe.okura.com; s/d/tw from ¥16,800/22,050/26,250; 📍 📍; 📍 Motomachi station on the JR Kôbe line or Hanshin Main line) The Ôkura is the most comfortable and polished hotel in the city, and the harbourside location can't be beat. The rooms are clean, spacious and well maintained. Avoid the lower-floor rooms on the north side as these offer only highway views. There are several good on-site restaurants here.

**Kôbe Kitano Hotel** (☎ 271-3711; fax 271-3700; www.kobe-kitanohotel.co.jp/en/index.html; 3-3-20 Yamamoto-dōri, Chūō-ku; d/tw from ¥25,200/27,300; 📍 📍; 📍 Sannomiya or Motomachi station on the JR Kôbe line) This British-themed hotel is popular with Japanese ladies, who like the European feeling of the Kitano area, with its pleasant strolling and abundant café's. This place does a brisk business in hosting weddings, but it's also a nice place to stay. Unlike many other hotels in Japan, the rooms are fairly large and have bright and spacious bathrooms.

### EATING Japanese

Although Kôbe is more famous for its international cuisine, there are plenty of good Japanese restaurants to be found.

**Kintoki** (☎ 331-1037; 1-7-2 Motomachi-dōri, Chūō-ku; meals from ¥500; ☎ 10.30am-7pm, closed holidays; 📍 Motomachi station on the JR Kôbe line or Hanshin Main line) This is a good place to go for a taste of what Japan was like before it got rich. It's an atmospheric old *shokudō* that serves the cheapest food in the city. You can order standard noodle and rice dishes from the menu (plain *soba* or *udon* noodles are ¥250 and a small rice is ¥160) or choose from a variety of dishes laid out on the counter. Look for the blue-and-white awning about 20m north of the shopping street next to Evian Coffee Shop.

**Mikami** (☎ 242-5200; 2-5-9 Kitano-chō; meals from ¥420; ☎ 11am-3pm & 5-10pm, closed Wed; 📍; 📍 Shin-

Kôbe station on the subway Seishin-Yamate line) This is a friendly spot for good-value lunch and dinner sets of standard Japanese fare. Noodle dishes are available from ¥420 and *teishoku* from ¥950. Look for the large doghouse outside and a small English sign.

**Shokutakuya** (☎ 242-4060; 4-2-18 Hachiman-dōri, Chūō-ku; meals from ¥800; 📍 Sannomiya station on the JR Kôbe line, Hankyū Kôbe line or Hanshin Main line) Near Kôbe City Hall, this simple basement *izakaya*/restaurant serves filling sets of typical Japanese favourites like the *tonkatsu gozen* (fried pork fillet set, ¥890). There's a picture menu and a small English sign on street level (it's at the corner).

**Mon** (☎ 331-0372; 2-12-2 Ikatsuji, Chūō-ku; meals from ¥1100; ☎ 11am-9pm, closed 3rd Thu of month; 📍; 📍 Sannomiya station on the subway Seishin-Yamate line or Hankyū Kôbe line) This Kôbe institution serves a peculiar Japanese speciality known as *yōshoku*: Japanese versions of Western food like steaks and pork cutlets. It's pretty much what the Japanese imagined Westerners ate morning, noon and night when they first started showing up in those black ships. If you're in the mood for something heavier than noodles and rice, this might satisfy. The sign out front has a hilarious picture of two 'barbarians' who look like they could really go for a nice steak.

**Okagawa** (☎ 222-3511; 4-1-11 Hachiman-dōri, Chūō-ku; tempura from ¥1100; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Mon; 📍; 📍 Sannomiya station on the JR Kôbe line, Hankyū Kôbe line or Hanshin Main line) Not far from Kôbe City Hall, this fine tempura specialist is an oasis of calm, clean lines and good service. There are plenty of sets to choose from, and you won't go wrong with the *anago tendon* (conger eel tempura over rice; ¥1200). It's hard to spot at the top of a flight of steps over a place called Daichi (the stairs are on the left – look for the giant black spoon). There is a small English sign on street level.

**Daruma** (☎ 331-2446; 1-16-3 Nakayamate-dōri, Chūō-ku; yakitori dinner per person from ¥2000; ☎ 5-10.30pm, closed Mon; 📍 Sannomiya station on the JR Kôbe line, Hankyū Kôbe line or Hanshin Main line) This quaint little mom-and-pop *yakitori* restaurant serves simple skewers of the usual *yakitori* favourites and a very interesting Japan Alps dish known as *hōba miso* (¥550), which is a type of *miso* cooked over a leaf on a hibachi in front of you. There is no English menu, but it's easy to point at what you want. You'll be asked whether you want *shio-yaki* (cooked with salt) or *tare-yaki* (cooked with *yakitori*

sausage). There is an English sign (it's 10m in from Higashimon-gai).

**Tanoshiya** (☎ 242-1132; 1F Matsuda Bldg, 3-14-8 Kanô-chô, Chûô-ku; lunch/dinner from ¥1600/3500; ☎ 11.30am-2.30pm & 5pm-midnight; E; 📍 Sannomiya station on the JR Kôbe line, Hankyû Kôbe line or Hanshin Main line) This casual spot serves creative and fun food that might be termed 'nouvelle Japonaise'. This might include seared sashimi, skewers of chicken and assorted nibbles on the side. The chef speaks a bit of English. Look for the bamboo sign across from a diving school.

**Toritetsu** (☎ 327-5529; 1-16-12 Nakayamate-dôri, Chûô-ku; dinner per person from ¥3000; ☎ 5pm-midnight; 📍 Sannomiya station on the JR Kôbe line, Hankyû Kôbe line or Hanshin Main line) Almost opposite the Daiichi Grand Hotel on Higashimon-gai, this bustling yakitori restaurant is a good place to eat, drink and watch the chefs labour over their grills. The sign says 'yakitori' in English. There is some English on the menu.

**Wakkoku** (☎ 262-2838; 3F Shin Kôbe Oriental Avenue shopping mall, 1-1 Kitano-chô Chûô-ku; lunch/dinner from ¥2500/8000; ☎ 11.45am-10.30pm; E; 📍 Shin-Kôbe station on the Seishin-Yamate subway line) If you're a carnivore, you will want to try a bit of Kôbe's famous beef, and you'll find it cheaper and better here than overseas. Our favourite Kôbe beef place is this relatively approachable spot below the Crowne Plaza Kôbe. The steaks here are among the best we've had anywhere. We particularly like the way they 'introduce' your steak to you before they prepare it. It's on the 3rd floor of the Avenue shopping centre at the base of the hotel, just outside the elevator bank on the south side. There is no English sign – look for the black and grey marble exterior.

## International

**Furuya** (☎ 322-1230; 1-6-17 Motomachi-dôri, Chûô-ku; 8 gyôza from ¥320; ☎ 2-10pm; 📍 Motomachi station on the JR Kôbe line) We can't quite figure this place out: it's a *gyôza* specialist decorated with skiing, snowboarding and *The Sopranos* memorabilia. Sure, it makes no sense, but the owner is a friendly chap and the dumplings are great. Look above the restaurant for a sign that reads 'Original Gyoza Restaurant' in English.

**Ganso Gyôza-en** (☎ 331-4096; 2-8-11 Sakaemachi-dôri, Chûô-ku; 6 gyôza ¥380; ☎ lunch & dinner, closed Mon; 📍 Motomachi station on the JR Kôbe line or Hanshin Main line) This is the best spot in Nankinmachi for

*gyôza*. Try its wonderful fried dumplings (*yaki gyôza*) at lunch or dinner. At dinner it also makes steamed *gyôza* (*sui gyôza*). Use the vinegar, soy sauce and *miso* on the table to make a dipping sauce. It's next to a small parking lot – look for the red-and-white awning.

**Nailey's Café** (☎ 231-2008; 2-8-12 Kanô-chô, Chûô-ku; coffee from ¥430, lunch/dinner from ¥1050/1200; ☎ 11.30am-late, closed Tue; E; 📍 Shin-Kôbe station on the Seishin-Yamate subway line) Hip little café that serves espresso, light lunches and dinners. The menu here is European influenced and includes such things as pizza, pasta and salads. This is a good spot for an evening drink.

**Modernmark Pharm** (☎ 391-3060; 3-11-15 Kitanaagasa-dôri, Chûô-ku; lunch/dinner from ¥1000/2000; ☎ 11.30am-10pm, closed irregularly; E; 📍 Motomachi station on the JR Kôbe line) This interesting little restaurant serves tasty sets of Japanese and Western dishes, including burritos and rice dishes. There are some veggie choices here. Look for the plants.

**Upwards** (☎ 230-8551; 1-7-16 Yamamoto-dôri, Chûô-ku; meals from ¥1000; ☎ 11.30am-midnight Tue-Sun; 📍 Sannomiya station on the JR Kôbe line, Hankyû Kôbe line or Hanshin Main line) This fashionable eatery in Kitano serves pasta, sandwiches and salads in an airy, open space. It's another good spot for a drink in the evening. There's an English sign.

**Sona Rupa** (☎ 322-0252; 2-2-9 Yamate-dôri, Chûô-ku; lunch/dinner from ¥1650/3200; ☎ 11.30am-2pm & 5.30-9.30pm Thu-Tue; E; 📍 Sannomiya station on the JR Kôbe line, Hankyû Kôbe line or Hanshin Main line) We like this small Indian restaurant for its crispy nan bread, tasty curries and tranquil atmosphere. It's on the 3rd floor, with a sign on street level.

## DRINKING

Kôbe has a large foreign community and a number of bars that see mixed Japanese and foreign crowds. For Japanese-style drinking establishments, try the *izakaya* in the neighbourhood between the JR tracks and Ikuta-jinja. Also bear in mind that a lot of Kôbe's nightlife is centred around the city's many cafés, most of which transform into bars come evening (see left).

**New Munchen Club** (☎ 335-0170; 47 Akashi-chô, Chûô-ku; ☎ 11am-11pm; 📍 Motomachi station on the JR Kôbe line) A decent German-style pub that draws its share of foreign residents. It's got a picture menu for food. It can be a little smoky, but the beer is good and it's easy to enter. It's close to Daimaru department store, on the basement floor.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Boat

**China Express Line** (☎ in Japan 078-321-5791, in China 022-2420-5777; www.celkobe.co.jp in Japanese) operates a ferry (2nd-class ¥23,000, around 48 hours) between Kôbe and Tientsin. It departs Kôbe every Friday at 11.30am.

There are regular ferries between Kôbe and Shikoku (Imabari and Matsuyama) and Kyûshû (Ôita). Most ferries depart from Rokkô Island and are operated by **Diamond Ferry Company** (☎ 857-9525; www.diamond-ferry.co.jp in Japanese). The cheapest fares are as follows: Imabari ¥5400, Matsuyama ¥6300 and Ôita ¥8800.

### Train

JR Sannomiya station is on the JR Tôkaidô line as well as the private Hankyû and Hanshin lines (both of which run to/from Osaka).

The fastest way between Kôbe and Osaka station (¥390, 24 minutes) or Kyoto (¥1050, 54 minutes) is the JR *shinkaisoku*.

The Hankyû line is the more convenient of the two private lines, running between Kôbe's Hankyû Sannomiya station and Osaka's Hankyû Umeda station. Osaka has connections to/from Kyoto on the Hankyû line. Fares and times are as follows: Osaka – *tokkyû*, ¥310, 27 minutes; Kyoto – *tokkyû*, ¥600, 63 minutes, change at Jûsô or Umeda.

Shin-Kôbe station is on the Tôkaidô to San'yô *shinkansen* line. The Hikari *shinkansen* goes to/from Fukuoka (¥14,270, two hours 32 minutes) and to/from Tokyo (¥14,270, three hours 18 minutes).

Note that there are several discount ticket shops near Hankyû Sannomiya station.

## GETTING AROUND

### To/From the Airport

#### ITAMI OSAKA AIRPORT

There are direct limousine buses to/from Osaka's Itami airport (¥1020, 45 minutes). In Kôbe, the buses stop on the southwestern side of Sannomiya station.

#### KÔBE AIRPORT

The easiest way to get to/from Kôbe's spanking-new airport is with the Portliner, which makes the trip between Sannomiya (downtown Kôbe) and the airport in 18 minutes and costs ¥320. A taxi will cost between ¥2500 and ¥3000 and take 15 to 20 minutes.

## KANSAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

There are a number of routes between Kôbe and KIX. By train, the fastest way is the JR *shinkaisoku* to/from Osaka station, and the JR *kanku kaisoku* between Osaka station and the airport (total cost ¥1550, total time 87 minutes with good connections). There is also a direct limousine bus to/from the airport (¥1800, 1¼ hours). The Kôbe airport bus stop is on the southwestern side of Sannomiya station.

## Public Transport

Kôbe is small enough to travel around on foot. JR, Hankyû and Hanshin railway lines run east to west across Kôbe, providing access to most of Kôbe's more distant sights. A subway line also connects Shin-Kôbe station with Sannomiya station (¥200, two minutes). There is also a city loop bus service that makes a grand circle tour of most of the city's sightseeing spots (per ride/all-day pass ¥200/600). The bus stops at both Sannomiya and Shin-Kôbe stations; look for the retro-style green buses.

## HIMEJI 姫路

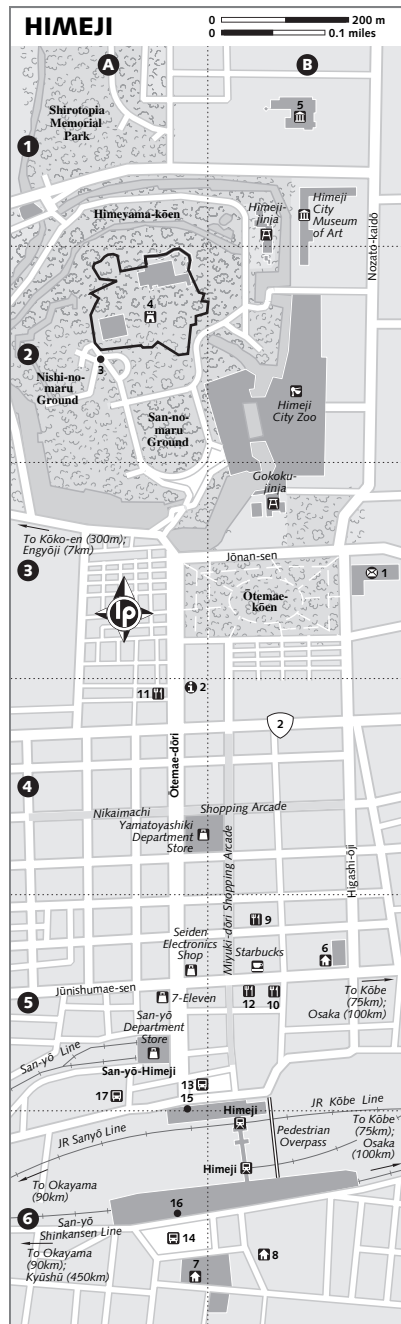
☎ 079 / pop 536,000

Himeji, a small city halfway between Osaka and Okayama, is home to Japan's most impressive castle: Himeji-jô. In addition to the castle, the city is home to the Hyôgo Prefectural Museum of History and Kôko-en, a small garden alongside the castle. The town may not be much to look at, but it's friendly and there are plenty of good places to eat. Best of all, Himeji can easily be visited as a day trip from Kyoto, Osaka or Kôbe.

## ORIENTATION & INFORMATION

In Himeji station, you'll find a **tourist information counter** (☎ 285-3792; ☎ 9am-5pm) on the ground floor to the left as you exit the central exit on the north side of the station. Between 10am and 3pm, an English-speaking staff is on duty. The castle is a 15-minute walk straight up the main road from the north exit of the station. If you don't feel like walking, free rental cycles are available; enquire at the information counter.

On the way to the castle you'll find **Himeji Tourist Information** (☎ 287-3658; ☎ 9am-5pm), which has information on movies filmed in Himeji, public toilets, a fantastic model of the castle and free rental bicycles.

**INFORMATION**

Himeji Post Office 姫路郵便局	1	B3
Himeji Tourist Information 姫路観光ナビポート	2	A4

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

Castle Ticket Office 姫路城切符売り場	3	A2
Himeji-jō 姫路城	4	A2
Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of History 兵庫県立歴史博物館	5	B1

**SLEEPING**

Himeji Washington Hotel Plaza 姫路ワシントンホテルプラザ	6	B5
Hotel Nikkō Himeji ホテル日航姫路	7	A6
Tōyoko Inn 東横イン	8	B6

**EATING**

Fukutei ぶく亭	9	B5
Len レン	10	B5
Me-n-me めんめ	11	A4
Rāmen-no-Hōryū ラーメンの寶龍	12	B5

**TRANSPORT**

City Bus Terminal 市バスターミナル	13	A5
City South Bus Terminal 市バス南ターミナル	14	A6
Himeji North Exit 北口	15	A5
Himeji South Exit 南口	16	A6
Shinki Bus Terminal 神姫バスターミナル	17	A5

**SIGHTS****Himeji-jō 姫路城**

This **castle** (☎ 285-1146; 68 Honmachi; admission ¥600; ☎ 9am-5pm, last admission 4pm, 1hr later in summer) is the most magnificent of the handful of Japanese castles that survive in their original (nonconcrete) form. In Japanese the castle is sometimes called *shirasagi*, or 'white heron', a title that derives from the castle's stately white form. Although there have been fortifications in Himeji since 1333, today's castle was built in 1580 by Toyotomi Hideyoshi and enlarged some 30 years later by Ikeda Terumasa. Ikeda was awarded the castle by Tokugawa Ieyasu when the latter's forces defeated the Toyotomi armies. In the following centuries the castle was home to 48 successive lords.

The castle has a five-storey main donjon (heavily fortified central tower) and three smaller donjon, and the entire structure is surrounded by moats and defensive walls punctuated with rectangular, circular and triangular openings for firing guns and shooting arrows. The walls of the donjon also feature *ishiotoshi* – openings that allowed defenders to pour boiling water or oil onto anyone who made it past the defensive slits and was thinking of scaling the walls. All things considered, visitors are recommended to pay the admission charge and enter the castle by legitimate means.

It takes around 1½ hours to follow the arrow-marked route around the castle. English-speaking guides are sometimes available at the castle ticket office. Unfortunately, reservations aren't accepted and there is no regular schedule – ask at the counter and hope for the best. The guide service is free.

**Kōko-en 好古園**

Just across the moat on the western side of Himeji-jō, you'll find **Kōko-en** (☎ 289-4120; 68 Honmachi; admission ¥300; ☎ 9am-4.30pm, to 5.30pm Jun-Aug), a reconstruction of the former samurai quarters of the castle. There are nine separate Edo-style gardens, two ponds, a stream, a tea arbour (¥500 for *matcha* and a Japanese sweet) and the restaurant **Kassui-ken**, where you can enjoy lunch while gazing over the gardens. While the garden doesn't have the subtle beauty of some of Japan's older gardens, it is well done and especially lovely in the autumn foliage season.

Note that a joint ticket to both the Kōko-en and Himeji-jō costs only ¥720, a saving of ¥180. These can be purchased at both the entrance to Kōko-en and Himeji-jō.

**Hyōgo Prefectural Museum of History****兵庫県立博物館**

This **museum** (Hyōgo Kenritsu Rekishi Hakubutsukan; ☎ 288-9011; 68 Honmachi; admission ¥200; ☎ 10am-5pm Tue-Sun, closed the day after national holidays) has good displays on Himeji-jō and other castles around Japan. In addition, the museum covers the main periods of Japanese history with some English explanations. At 11am, 2pm and 3.30pm you can even try on a suit of samurai armour or a kimono (ask about this at the front desk).

The museum is a five-minute walk north of the castle.

**Engyōji 円教寺**

Around 8km northwest of Himeji station, this mountaintop **temple complex** (☎ 266-3327; 2968 Shosha, Himeji-shi; admission ¥300; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) is well worth a visit if you've got time after visiting the castle. The temple and surrounding area are most beautiful in the April cherry-blossom season or November *momiji* (maple-leaf) season. Eight of the temple buildings and seven Buddha images have been designated Important Cultural Properties.

From the top cable-car station, it's about a 25-minute walk (about 2km) to the Maniden,

one of the main structures of the complex, which is dedicated to Kannon (the Goddess of Mercy). Five minutes further on brings you to the Daikō-dō, a lovely wooden auditorium where parts of *The Last Samurai* were filmed. The path to both of these buildings is lined with Senjū-Kannon (Thousand-Armed Kannon) figures.

To get there, take bus 6 or 8 from Himeji station (boarding position 2; ¥260, 25 minutes). Get off at 'Shosha Ropeway', and board the cable car (one way/return ¥500/900). The trip takes about half a day from downtown Himeji.

**FESTIVALS & EVENTS**

The **Nada-no-Kenka Matsuri**, held on 14 and 15 October, involves a battle between three *mikoshi* that are battered against each other until one smashes. Try to go on the second day, when the festival reaches its peak (around noon). The festival is held five minutes' walk from Shirahamanomiya station (10 minutes from Himeji station on the Sanyō-Dentetsu line); follow the crowds.

**SLEEPING**

Himeji is best visited as a day trip from other parts of Kansai. If you'd like to stay, however, there are plenty of choices.

**Tōyoko Inn** (☎ 284-1045; fax 84-1046; 97 Minami-ki-mae-chō; s/d/tw ¥580/7980/7980; ☎) This new business hotel is a good choice if you want to be close to the station. The rooms are serviceable, well maintained and, as usual in a business hotel, fairly small.

**our pick** **Himeji Washington Hotel Plaza** (☎ 225-0111; fax 25-0133; 98 Higashiekimae-chō; s/d ¥6754/13,508; ☎) This is the best midrange choice in town. It's pretty much everything a good business hotel should be: well run and clean with reasonable-size rooms (for a business hotel, that is). It's within easy walking distance of the castle and lots of restaurants.

**Hotel Nikkō Himeji** (☎ 222-2231; fax 24-3731; 100 Minami-ki-mae-chō; s/d/tw ¥11,200/20,700/20,700; ☎) A stone's throw from the south side of the station, this hotel has stylish and fairly spacious rooms and is the best choice for those who want something nicer than a business hotel. Some of the upper rooms on the north side have views of the top of the castle.

**EATING**

The food court in the underground mall at JR Himeji station has all the usual Western and

Japanese dishes. It's just to the right as you exit the north ticket gate of the station.

**Me-n-me** (☎ 225-0118; 68 Honmachi; noodles from ¥480; 🕒 11.30am-7pm Thu-Tue; E) They make their own noodles at this homey little noodle joint a few minutes' walk from the castle. It's not fancy, but if you want an honest, tasty bowl of *udon* to power you through the day, this is the spot. They usually put an English sign on the street.

**Rāmen-no-Hōryū** (☎ 223-0981; 316 Eki-mae-chō; buta miso rāmen ¥990; 🕒 11.30am-midnight Mon-Sat, to 11pm Sun & holidays) For good *gyōza* and hearty bowls of *buta miso rāmen* (pork *miso rāmen*), we recommend this friendly *rāmen* joint near the station. Buy your tickets from the machine. It's roughly opposite Starbucks – look for the faux wooden façade.

**Fukutei** (☎ 223-0981; 75 Kamei-chō; lunch/dinner ¥1500/3000; 🕒 11am-2.30pm & 4.30-9pm Fri-Wed; E) Japan could use a few more restaurants like this one: It's stylish and serves good food, but at the same time it's very approachable, even for foreigners. The fare here is casual *kaiseki*: a little sashimi, some tempura and the usual nibbles on the side. At lunch try the excellent *omakese-zen* (tasting set; ¥1500). There's a small English sign that reads: 'Omotenashi Dining Fukutei'.

**Len** (☎ 225-5505; 324 Eki-mae-chō; lunch/dinner ¥1500/3000; 🕒 11.30am-midnight Tue-Sun, closed holidays; E) If you find yourself in Himeji in the evening and feel like a good meal of pan-Asian *izakaya* fare, then try Len, where you can fill up on such tasty dishes as Vietnamese egg soup with crab and asparagus (¥550) or lemongrass grilled pork spareribs (¥800). There's a blue sign in English.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

The best way to reach Himeji from Kyoto, Osaka or Kōbe is by a *shinkaisoku* on the JR Tōkaidō line. Fares and times include: Kyoto (¥2210, 91 minutes); Osaka (¥1450, 61 minutes); and Kōbe (¥950, 37 minutes). From Okayama, to the west, a *tokkyū* JR train on the San-yō line takes 81 minutes and costs ¥1450. You can also reach Himeji from these cities via the Tōkaidō/San-yō *shinkansen* line, and this is a good option for Japan Rail Pass holders.

On the way to Himeji, take a look out the train window at the newly constructed Akashi Kaikyō Suspension Bridge. Its 3910m span links the island of Honshū with Awaji-shima,

making it the longest suspension bridge in the world. It comes into view on the southern side of the train approximately 10km west of Kōbe.

## NARA 奈良

☎ 0742 / pop 368,000

Japan's first real capital, Nara is one of the most rewarding destinations in the country. If you've got a day or two to spare after visiting Kyoto, we strongly recommend a trip down to this compact collection of interesting and historically significant sites.

Like Kyoto, Nara is uninspiring at first glance, but careful inspection will reveal the rich history and hidden beauty of the city. Indeed, with eight Unesco World Heritage sites, Nara is second only to Kyoto as a repository of Japan's cultural legacy.

Nara is so small that it's quite possible to pack the most worthwhile sights into one full day. Of course, it's preferable to spend at least two days here if you can. Those with time to spare should allow a day for Nara-kōen and another day for the sights in western and southwestern Nara. If you only have one day available for Nara, spend it walking around Nara-kōen.

## HISTORY

Nara is at the northern end of the Yamato Plain, where members of the Yamato clan rose to power as the original emperors of Japan. The remains of these early emperors are contained in *kofun* (burial mounds), some of which date back to the 3rd century AD.

Until the 7th century, however, Japan had no permanent capital, as native Shintō taboos concerning death stipulated that the capital be moved with the passing of each emperor. This practice died out under the influence of Buddhism and with the Taika reforms of 646, when the entire country came under imperial control.

At this time it was decreed that a permanent capital be built. Two locations were tried before a permanent capital was finally established at Nara (which was then known as Heijōkyō) in 710. Permanent status, however, lasted a mere 75 years. When a priest by the name of Dōkyō managed to seduce an empress and nearly usurp the throne, it was decided to move the court to a new location, out of

reach of Nara's increasingly powerful clergy. This led to the new capital being established at Kyoto, where it remained until 1868.

Although brief, the Nara period was extraordinarily vigorous in its absorption of influences from China, a process that laid the foundations of Japanese culture and civilisation. The adoption of Buddhism as a national religion made a lasting impact on government, arts, literature and architecture. With the exception of an assault on the area by the Taira clan in the 12th century, Nara was subsequently spared the periodic bouts of destruction wreaked upon Kyoto, and a number of magnificent buildings have survived.

## ORIENTATION

Nara retains the grid pattern of streets laid out in Chinese style during the 8th century. The two main train stations, JR Nara station and Kintetsu Nara station, are roughly in the middle of the city, and Nara-kōen, which contains most of the important sights, is on the eastern side, against the bare flank of Wakakusayama. Most of the other sights are southwest of the city and are best reached by buses that leave from both train stations (or by train in the case of Hōryū-ji). It's easy to cover the city centre and the major attractions in nearby Nara-kōen on foot, though some may prefer to rent a bicycle (see p409).

## Maps

Nara tourist information offices have two very useful maps: the *Welcome to Nara Sightseeing Map*, which is best for sightseeing within the city limits, and the *Japan: Nara Prefecture map*, which is best for outlying areas. In addition, their handout titled *Nara* has a basic map and useful transport information.

## INFORMATION

The **Nara City Tourist Center** (☎ 22-3900; 23-4 Kamisanjō-chō; 🕒 9am-9pm) is the main tourist office and is worth a stop if you start your sightseeing from JR Nara station. If you start from Kintetsu Nara station, try the helpful **Kintetsu Nara station information office** (☎ 24-4858; 🕒 9am-5pm), which is near the top of the stairs above exit 3 from the station.

There are two other information offices in Nara: the **JR Nara station office** (☎ 22-9821; 🕒 9am-5pm) and the **Sarusawa Tourist Information Office** (☎ 26-1991; 🕒 9am-5pm).

The information centres can put you in touch with volunteer guides who speak English and other foreign languages, but you must book at least one day in advance. Two of these services are the **YMCA Goodwill Guides** (☎ 45-5920; www.geocities.com/egg\_nara) and **Nara Student Guides** (☎ 26-4753; www.narastudentguide.org).

Outside the NTT telephone company office on Sanjō-dōri there is an IC Card international phone.

**Internet Café Suien** (☎ 22-2577; 1-58 Aburasaka-chō; per 1hr internet ¥200, 2hr with one drink ¥500; 🕒 7.30am-11pm) Inside Hotel Asyl Nara.  
**Media-Café Cocoon** (☎ 27-2039; 5 Konishi-chō; 1hr internet with drink ¥400; 🕒 11am-10pm).

## SIGHTS

### Nara-kōen Area 奈良公園

Many of Nara's most important sites are located in Nara-kōen, a fine park that occupies much of the east side of the city. The JNTO's leaflet entitled *Walking Tour Courses in Nara* includes a map for this area. This walking tour is probably the best way to get the most out of a day in Nara and is highly recommended.

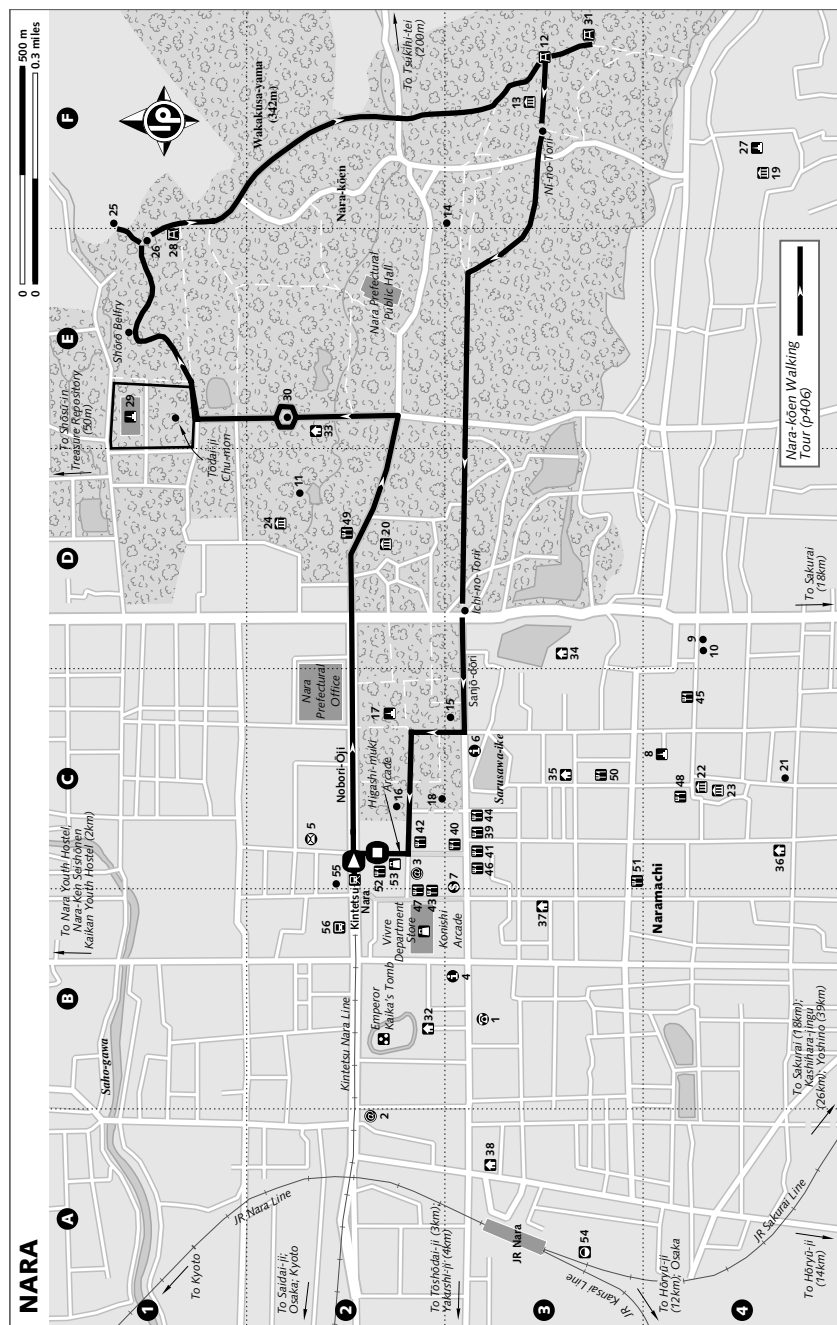
The park is home to about 1200 deer, which in pre-Buddhist times were considered messengers of the gods and today enjoy the status of National Treasures. They roam the park and surrounding areas in search of handouts from tourists, often descending on petrified children who have the misfortune to be carrying food. You can buy *shika-sembei* (deer biscuits) from vendors for ¥150 to feed to the deer. Note: don't eat them yourself, as we saw one misguided foreign tourist doing.

### NARA NATIONAL MUSEUM

#### 奈良国立博物館

The **Nara National Museum** (Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan; ☎ 22-7771; 50 Noborijō-chō; admission ¥500; 🕒 9am-5pm) is devoted to Buddhist art and is divided into two wings. The western gallery has a fine collection of *butsu-zō* (statues of the Buddha), while the new eastern gallery displays sculptures, paintings and calligraphy.

A special exhibition featuring the treasures of the Shōsō-in Hall, which holds the treasures of Tōdai-ji, are displayed here in May, as well as from 21 October to 8 November (call the Nara City Tourist Center to check, as these dates vary slightly each year). The exhibits include priceless items from the cultures along the Silk Road. If you are in Nara during these periods and are a fan of Japanese antiquities,



### INFORMATION

International Phone 国際電話	.....1 B3
Internet Café Suien 水煙	.....2 A2
Media-Café Cocoon	.....3 C2
メディアカフェコクーン	.....3 C2
Nara City Tourist Center	.....4 B3
奈良市観光センター	.....4 B3
Post Office 郵便局	.....5 C2
Sarusawa Tourist Information Office	.....6 C3
猿沢観光案内所	.....6 C3
SMBC Bank 三井住友銀行	.....7 C3

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Gangō-ji 元興寺	.....8 C4
Imanishi Seibei Shōten	.....9 D4
今西清兵衛商店	.....9 D4
Imanishike Shoin 今西家書院	.....10 D4
Isui-en 依水園	.....11 D2
Kasuga Taisha 春日大社	.....12 F3
Kasuga Taisha Hōmotsu-den	.....13 F3
春日大社宝物殿	.....13 F3
Kasuga Taisha Kamizono	.....14 F3
春日大社神廬	.....14 F3
Kōfuku-ji Five-Storey Pagoda	.....15 C3
興福寺五重塔	.....15 C3
Kōfuku-ji Hokuen-do Hall	.....16 C2
興福寺北円堂	.....16 C2
Kōfuku-ji Nanen-do Hall	.....17 C2
興福寺南円堂	.....17 C2

Kōfuku-ji National Treasure Hall	.....18 C2
興福寺国宝館	.....18 C2
Nara City Museum of Photography	.....19 F4
奈良市写真美術館	.....19 F4
Nara National Museum	.....20 D2
奈良国立博物館	.....20 D2
Naramachi Koushi-no-le	.....21 C4
ならまち資料館	.....21 C4
Naramachi Monogatari-kan	.....22 C4
奈良町物語館	.....22 C4
Naramachi Shiryō-kan Museum	.....23 C4
奈良町資料館	.....23 C4
Neiraku Art Museum 寧楽美術館	.....24 D2
Nigatsu-dō Hall 二月堂	.....25 F1
Sangatsu-dō Hall 三月堂	.....26 E1
Shin-Yakushi-ji 新薬師寺	.....27 F4
Tamukeyama-hachimangu	.....28 E1
手向山八幡宮	.....28 E1
Tōdai-ji Daibutsu-den	.....29 E1
東大寺大仏殿	.....29 E1
Tōdai-ji Nandai-mon 東大寺南大門	.....30 E2
東大寺南大門	.....30 E2
Wakamiya-jinja 若宮神社	.....31 F3

Neiraku Art Museum 寧楽美術館	.....24 D2
Nigatsu-dō Hall 二月堂	.....25 F1
Sangatsu-dō Hall 三月堂	.....26 E1
Shin-Yakushi-ji 新薬師寺	.....27 F4
Tamukeyama-hachimangu	.....28 E1
手向山八幡宮	.....28 E1
Tōdai-ji Daibutsu-den	.....29 E1
東大寺大仏殿	.....29 E1
Tōdai-ji Nandai-mon 東大寺南大門	.....30 E2
東大寺南大門	.....30 E2
Wakamiya-jinja 若宮神社	.....31 F3

### SLEEPING

Hotel Fujita Nara	.....32 B2
ホテルフジタ奈良	.....32 B2
Kankasō 観應荘	.....33 E2
奈良ホテル	.....34 D3
Ryokan Matsumae 旅館松前	.....35 C3

### EATING

Ayura Café アユラ カフェ	.....39 C3
Beni-e ベニ江	.....40 C3
Bikkuri Udon Miyoshino	.....41 C3
Don どん	.....42 C2
Doutor ドトール	.....43 B2
Drink Drank ドリンク ドランク	.....44 C3
Kana Kana カナカナ	.....45 C4
Kyōshō-An 京匠庵	.....46 C3
Mellow Café メロウ カフェ	.....47 B2
Nonohana Ohka ののはな黄花	.....48 C4
Shizuka 志津香	.....49 D2
Tempura Asuka 天ぷら飛鳥	.....50 C3
Ten Ten Café テンテンカフェ	.....51 C3
Tonkatsu Ganko とんかつがんこ	.....52 C2

### SHOPPING

Daisō サダイソー	.....53 C2
-------------	------------

### TRANSPORT

Eki Renta Car 駅レンタカー	.....54 A3
Highway Bus Tickets	.....55 C2
エアポートリムジン切符売り場	.....55 C2
Local Bus Stop 市バス停	.....56 B2

you should make a point of visiting the museum, but be prepared for crowds – these exhibits get packed!

### KŌFUKU-JI 興福寺

This temple was transferred here from Kyoto in 710 as the main temple for the Fujiwara family. Although the original temple complex had 175 buildings, fires and destruction as a result of power struggles have left only a dozen standing. There are two **pagodas** – three storeys and five storeys – dating from 1143 and 1426 respectively. The taller of the two is the second tallest in Japan, outclassed by the one at Kyoto's Tō-ji by a few centimetres.

The **Kōfuku-ji National Treasure Hall** (☎ 22-7755; 48 Noborioji-chō, Kokuhō-kan; admission ¥500; ♻️ 9am-5pm) contains a variety of statues and art objects salvaged from previous structures.

### ISUI-EN & NEIRAKU ART MUSEUM

依水園・寧楽美術館  
This **garden** (☎ 25-0781; 74 Suimon-chō; admission museum & garden ¥650; ♻️ 9.30am-4pm, closed Tue), dating from the Meiji era, is beautifully laid out and features abundant greenery and a pond filled with ornamental carp. It's without a doubt the best garden in the city and well worth a visit. For ¥450 you can enjoy a cup of tea on tatami mats overlooking the garden or you can have

lunch in the nearby Sanshū restaurant, which also shares the view.

The adjoining art museum, Neiraku Bijutsukan, displays Chinese and Korean ceramics and bronzes.

### TŌDAI-JI 東大寺

This **temple**, with its vast Daibutsu-den Hall and enormous bronze Buddha image, is Nara's star attraction. For this reason, it is often packed with groups of school children being herded around by microphone-wielding tour guides. Nonetheless, it is an awe-inspiring sight and should be high on any sightseeing itinerary.

On your way to the temple you'll pass through **Nandai-mon**, an enormous gate containing two fierce-looking **Niō guardians**. These recently restored wooden images, carved in the 13th century by the sculptor Unkei, are some of the finest wooden statues in all of Japan, if not the world. They are truly dramatic works of art and seem ready to spring to life at any moment.

Most of the temple grounds can be visited free of charge, with the exception of the main hall: the Daibutsu-den Hall.

### Daibutsu-den Hall 大仏殿

Tōdai-ji **Daibutsu-den** (Hall of the Great Buddha; ☎ 22-5511; 406-1 Zōshi-chō; admission ¥500; ♻️ 8am-5pm) is the



largest wooden building in the world. Unbelievably the present structure, rebuilt in 1709, is a mere two-thirds of the size of the original! The Daibutsu (Great Buddha) contained within is one of the largest bronze figures in the world and was originally cast in 746. The present statue, recast in the Edo period, stands just over 16m high and consists of 437 tonnes of bronze and 130kg of gold.

The Daibutsu is an image of Dainichi Buddha, the cosmic Buddha believed to precede all worlds and their respective historical Buddhas. Historians believe that Emperor Shōmu ordered the building of the Buddha as a charm against smallpox, which ravaged Japan in preceding years. Over the centuries the statue took quite a beating from earthquakes and fires, losing its head a couple of times (note the slight difference in colour between the head and the body).

As you circle the statue towards the back, you'll see a wooden column with a hole through its base. Popular belief maintains that those who can squeeze through the hole, which is exactly the same size as one of the Great Buddha's nostrils, are ensured of enlightenment. It's great fun to watch the kids wiggle through nimbly and the adults get wedged in like champagne corks – you wonder how often they have to call the fire department to extricate trapped visitors. A hint for determined adults: it's a lot easier to go through with both arms held above your head – and station a friend at either end to

help with pushing and pulling. And if you do get stuck, we'll be happy to write you up as a more-or-less permanent part of the temple!

### Nigatsu-dō & Sangatsu-dō

二月堂・三月堂

These two halls are an easy walk east of the Daibutsu-den; follow the path that winds uphill starting from the southeast corner of the Daibutsu-den (the normal exit point).

**Nigatsu-dō** (☎ 22-5511; 406-1 Zōshi-chō; admission free) is famed for its Omizutori Matsuri (see opposite) and a splendid view across Nara, which makes the climb up the hill worthwhile – particularly at dusk. Opening hours here are the same as those of the Daibutsu-den.

A short walk south of Nigatsu-dō is **Sangatsu-dō** (admission ¥500), which is the oldest building in the Tōdai-ji complex. This hall contains a small collection of fine statues from the Nara period. It's open the same hours as the Daibutsu-den.

### KASUGA TAISHA 春日大社

This **shrine** (☎ 22-7788; 160 Kasugano-chō; admission free; ☎ dawn-dusk) was founded in the 8th century by the Fujiwara family and was completely rebuilt every 20 years according to Shintō tradition until the end of the 19th century. It lies at the foot of the hill in a pleasant, wooded setting with herds of sacred deer awaiting handouts.

The approaches to the shrine are lined with hundreds of lanterns, and there are many hundreds more in the shrine itself. The **lantern festivals** held twice a year at the shrine are a major attraction (for details see Mantōrō, opposite).

The **Hōmotsu-den** (Treasure Hall; admission ¥420; ☎ 9am-4.30pm) is just north of the entrance torii for the shrine. The hall displays Shintō ceremonial regalia and equipment used in *bugaku*, *nō* and *gagaku* performances.

While you're in the area, it's worth walking a few minutes south to nearby Wakamiya-jinja.

### SHIN-YAKUSHI-JI 新薬師寺

This **temple** (☎ 22-3736; 1352 Takabatake-chō; admission ¥500; ☎ 9am-5pm) was founded by Empress Kōmyō in 747 in thanks for her husband's recovery from an eye disease. Most of the buildings were destroyed or have been reconstructed, but the present main hall dates from the 8th century. The hall contains sculptures of Yakushi Nyorai (Healing Buddha) and a set of 12 divine generals. Unfortunately, last time we were there

a television was playing a very loud programme about the temple in the main hall.

It's about 15 minutes' walk from Kasuga Taisha/Wakamiya-jinja (see opposite); follow the trail through the woods. When you come to the main street, look for the small signs in English leading up (south) into a suburban neighbourhood.

### NARA CITY MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY 奈良市写真美術館

Around the corner from Shin-Yakushi-ji, this small **museum** (Nara-shi Shashin Bijutsukan; ☎ 22-9811; 600-1 Takabatake-chō; admission ¥500; ☎ 9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun) is worth a visit if you are in the area or interested in a particular exhibit (there is no permanent collection). Ask at any of the tourist offices before making the trek. See Shin-Yakushi-ji for directions.

### Naramachi 奈良町

South of Sanjō-dōri and Sarusawa-ike pond you will find Naramachi, with many well-preserved *machiya* and *kura*. It's a nice place for a stroll before or after hitting the big sights of Nara-kōen, and there are several good restaurants in the area to entice the hungry traveller.

Highlights of Naramachi include the **Naramachi Shiryō-kan Museum** (☎ 22-5509; 14 Nishishinya-chō; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun), which has a decent collection of bric-a-brac from the area, including a display of old Japanese coins and bills.

**Naramachi Koushi-no-le** (☎ 23-4820; 44 Gangōji-chō; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) is a traditional Japanese house which, unfortunately, has been a little too thoroughly restored.

While you're in the neighbourhood, check out the **Naramachi Monogatari-kan** (☎ 26-3476; 2-1 Nakanoshinya-chō; admission free; ☎ 10am-4.30pm), an interesting little gallery that holds some worthwhile exhibitions.

**Imanishike Shoin** (☎ 23-2256; 24-3 Fukuchiin-chō; admission ¥350; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Sun, last entry 3.30pm) is a lovely old house dating to the Muromachi period and is built in the *shoin*, or library, style. There are a few small gardens here that are well framed by the house itself. Tea is served here. If you are a fan of sake, stop in next door at the **Imanishi Seibei Shōten**, an old sake merchant where for ¥400 you can sample five kinds of sake.

Lastly, Naramachi is also home to **Gangō-ji** (☎ 23-1378; 11 Chūin-chō; admission ¥400; ☎ 9am-5pm,

last entry 4.30pm, closed 29 Dec-4 Jan), a small temple that is listed as one of Nara's Unesco World Heritage sites. Despite its World Heritage listing, it's not particularly interesting and probably only merits a quick glance from outside.

## TOURS

**Nara Kōtsū** (☎ 22-5263) runs daily bus tours on a variety of routes, two of which include Nara city sights only and two of which include more distant sights like Hōryū-ji and the burial mounds around Asuka (see p413). An explanation tape in English is available for all but the Asuka route. Prices for the all-day trips range from ¥800 to ¥10,000 for adults (which includes all temple fees and tape-recorder rental). Lunch at a Japanese restaurant on the route is optional (reserve when buying your ticket). Nara Kōtsū has offices in JR Nara station and across the street from Kintetsu Nara station. For something more intimate, try one of the private tours operated by one of the Kyoto-based private tour operators (see p314) or one of the city's volunteer guide organisations (see p401).

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Nara has plenty of festivals throughout the year. The following is a brief list of the more interesting ones. Because the dates for some of these festivals vary, it's best to check with the Nara or Kyoto tourist information offices.

### January

**Yamayaki** (Grass Burning Festival) In early January (the day before Seijin-no-hi), this festival commemorates a feud many centuries ago between the monks of Tōdai-ji and Kōfuku-ji: Wakakusa-yama is set alight at 6pm, with an accompanying display of fireworks. Arrive earlier to bag a good viewing position in Nara-kōen.

### February

**Mantōrō** (Lantern Festival) Held in early February at Kasuga Taisha at 6pm, this is a festival renowned for its illumination, with 3000 stone and bronze lanterns; a *bugaku* dance also takes place in the Apple Garden on the last day. Also held around 14 August in O-bon.

### March

**Omizutori** (Water-Drawing Ceremony) The monks of Tōdai-ji enter a special period of initiation during 12 and 13 March. On the evening of 12 March, they parade huge flaming torches around the balcony of Nigatsu-dō (in the temple grounds) and rain down embers on the spectators

### NARA UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES

In 1998 eight sites in Nara met the criteria to be designated as World Heritage sites by the UN. They are the Buddhist temples of Tōdai-ji, Kōfuku-ji, Gango-ji, Yakushi-ji and Tōshōdai-ji; the shrine, Kasuga Taisha; Kasuga-yama Primeval Forest; and the remains of Heijō-kyō Palace.

Each of these sites is considered to be of immeasurable historical value. All are open for public viewing. Five are covered in detail in the text; of the remaining three, Kasuga-yama Primeval Forest is directly behind Kasuga Taisha, Gango-ji is in Naramachi, and the Heijō-kyō Palace ruins are 10 minutes' walk east of Saidai-ji station on the Kintetsu line.

to purify them. The water-drawing ceremony is performed after midnight.

## May

**Takigi Nō** (Firelight nō performances) Open-air performances of nō held after dark by the light of blazing torches at Kōfuku-ji and Kasuga Taisha, on 11 and 12 May.

## October

**Shika-no-Tsunokiri** (Deer Antler Cutting) Those pesky deer in Nara-kōen are pursued in a type of elegant rodeo into the Roku-en (deer enclosure) close to Kasuga Taisha on Sundays and holidays in October. They are then wrestled to the ground and their antlers sawn off. Tourist brochures hint that this is to avoid personal harm, though it's not clear whether they are referring

to the deer fighting each other or the deer mugging the tourists.

## SLEEPING

Although Nara is often visited as a day trip from Kyoto, it is pleasant to spend the night here and this allows for a more relaxing pace.

## Budget

**Nara Youth Hostel** (☎ 22-1334; fax 22-1335; www.jyh.gr.jp/nara/english/neweng.html; narayh@themis.ocn.ne.jp; dm per person from ¥3150; 🏠 📍) This clean and newish YH is easy to get to and well run. The reception here is efficient but brusque. From bus stand 7 at JR Nara station or bus stand 13

at Kintetsu Nara station, take bus 108, 109, 111, 113 or 115 and get off at the Shieikyūjō-mae bus stop – the hostel is almost directly next to the stop.

**Nara-ken Seishōnen Kaikan Youth Hostel** (☎ / fax 22-5540; www6.ocn.ne.jp/~naseikan in Japanese; naseikan@galaxy.ocn.ne.jp; dm from ¥2650; 🏠 📍) This YH is older and less pristine than the Nara Youth Hostel, but the warm and friendly staff more than makes up for this. The rooms are large and fairly well maintained; breakfast/dinner is ¥337/900. From bus stand 9 at JR Nara station or bus stand 13 at Kintetsu Nara station, take bus 12, 13, 131 or 140 and get off at the Ikuei-gakuen bus stop, from which it's a five-minute walk. The information offices have maps and directions.

**Ryokan Seikansō** (☎ / fax 22-2670; seikanso@chive.ocn.ne.jp; per person without bathroom from ¥4200; 🏠 📍) This traditional ryokan has reasonable rates and a good Naramachi location. The rooms are clean and spacious with shared bathrooms and a large communal bathtub. About two-thirds of the guests are foreigners, so communication should not be an issue. The lovely Japanese garden is the icing on the cake here.

**our pick Ryokan Matsumae** (☎ 22-3686; fax 26-3927; hanami626@yahoo.co.jp; per person without bathroom from ¥5250; 🏠 📍) This compact little ryokan gets excellent reviews from our readers, who never fail to mention the warm welcome and convenient location. The rooms are typical of a ryokan: tatami mats, low tables, TVs and futons. Some of the rooms are a little dark, but the feeling here is warm and relaxing. The friendly owner speaks English.

## Midrange

### HOTELS

**Super Hotel** (☎ 20-9000; fax 20-9008; www.superhotel.co.jp/s\_hotels/jrnara/jrnara.html in Japanese; s/d ¥4980/6980; 🏠 📍) Directly across from JR Nara station, the Super Hotel is part of a no-frills hotel chain that offers clean, small business hotel rooms at very reasonable prices. As with other business hotels, all rooms have en suite bathrooms. If all you need is a clean place to lay your head, this is a good choice.

**Hotel Fujita Nara** (☎ 23-8111; fax 22-0255; www.fujita-nara.com; info@fujita-nara.com; s/d/tw from ¥7500/10,500/12,600; 🏠 📍) Right smack in downtown Nara and close to both main train stations, this efficient midrange hotel hits all the right notes: clean rooms, reasonable prices

and some English-speaking staff. It's a good choice for those who want a conveniently located hotel.

## Top End HOTELS

**Nara Hotel** (☎ 26-3300; fax 23-5252; www.narahotel.co.jp/english/index.html; s/tw from ¥16,170/31,185; 🏠 📍) This is the grande dame of Nara hotels, having been in business almost 100 years (97 to be exact). It is a classic, with high ceilings and the smell of polished wood all around. All the rooms are spacious and comfortable with big beds. Unfortunately, some of the bathrooms have cramped unit baths. The rooms in the Shinkan (new wing) are nice, but we recommend the Honkan (main building) for its great retro atmosphere.

## RYOKAN

**Ryokan Tsubakisō** (☎ 22-5330; fax 27-3811; tubaki@pc5.so-net.ne.jp; per person without bathroom from ¥12,000; 🏠 📍) Popular with foreign guests, this excellent ryokan is a homey and wonderful place to stay in Nara. The bedrooms and bathrooms are clean and well maintained and the owner can prepare vegetarian meals upon request. Highly recommended.

**Kankasō** (☎ 26-1128; fax 26-1301; per person from ¥21,500; 🏠 📍) A stone's throw from Tōdai-ji, this ryokan offers the classic traditional ryokan experience, with an attentive staff, spacious and tastefully appointed rooms and nice big bathtubs. This is an elegant and pleasing place for those who want something other than a hotel.

**Tsukihitei** (☎ 26-2021; fax 20-3003; homepage3.nifty.com/tukihitei in Japanese; tukihitei-honten@nifty.com; per person from ¥31,500; 🏠 📍) Hidden in a valley above Nara-kōen, this traditional high-class ryokan offers fine rooms and excellent service. If you don't mind being a bit of a distance from the centre of town, this hideaway is a tempting choice.

## EATING

Nara is full of good restaurants, most of which are in the vicinity of Kintetsu Nara station or in Naramachi. There are not many decent choices up in the Nara-kōen area, so plan accordingly. In a pinch, you can get simple meals of noodles or rice at any of the cheap *shokudō* along the base of Wakakusa-yama, halfway between Tōdai-ji and Kasuga Taisha (the main walking route in the area).

## NARA-KŌEN WALKING TOUR

- Start: Kintetsu Nara station (see Map p402)
- End: Kintetsu Nara station
- Distance: about 5km
- Time: half a day

This walk meanders through the pleasantly wooded hills of Nara-kōen, taking in some of Nara's most important sights along the way. Start at exit 2 of Kintetsu Nara station. Walk straight up Ōmiya-dōri, passing **Kōfuku-ji (15-18; p403)** on your right (you can visit it now, or leave it until the return leg). After Kōfuku-ji, you have the option of taking a left to visit **Issui-en (11; p403)**, one of Nara's finest gardens. Otherwise continue straight on, passing the **Nara National Museum (20; p401)** on your right. At the next traffic light take a left, passing an arcade of souvenir stalls, some of which sell *shika-senbei* (deer crackers), to the delight of the herds of deer in the park. At this point, you'll see the massive **Nandai-mon (30)**, the main gate of **Tōdai-ji (29; p403)**. Stop in the gate to admire the Niō guardians and then continue to the temple.

After visiting Tōdai-ji, take the path that leads uphill from the southeast corner of the temple (just in front of the torii (main gate) for Tamukeyama-jinja). The path curves around and climbs to the **Shōrō Belfry**, then climbs to an open plaza in front of **Nigatsu-dō (25)** and **Sangatsu-dō (26)** halls (p404). The view from the veranda of Nigatsu-dō is one of the best in Nara, taking in the graceful curves of the Daibutsu-den and most of the Nara plain.

Exit from the plaza heading south, passing between a log cabin-like structure and gaudy **Tamukeyama-hachimangū (28)**. Follow the broad path through the woods, descend two staircases and follow the signs reading 'Kasuga Shrine'. You'll come to a road that leads uphill to the left; follow it along, passing under the bare slopes of Wakakusa-yama. At Musashino Ryokan (look for the small English sign), walk straight down the steps, cross a bridge, jog left, and at the T-intersection take a left up to **Kasuga Taisha (14; p404)**; you'll have to work around the side of it to find the main entrance).

After visiting the shrine, leave via the main entrance and bear left up the path to **Wakamiya-jinja (31)**, passing several small shrines on the way. After visiting the shrine, retrace your steps towards Kasuga Taisha, and take a left down the steps which lead back towards the centre of town. You'll pass first through **Ni-no-Torii** and then continue down the broad wooded arcade to **Ichi-no-Torii**. Cross the street and you'll soon see the pagoda of **Kōfuku-ji (15-18; p403)**. Walk through the Kōfuku-ji grounds, passing between the **Nanen-dō (17)** and **Hokuen-dō (16)** halls, and take the narrow lane that leads down to **Higashi-muki Arcade**. A quick right here will bring you back to where you started.

**Don** (☎ 27-7080; 13-2 Higashimukiminami-machi; donburi from ¥450; ☎ 11am-8pm; E) In the Higashi-muki arcade, the Don serves the eponymous *donburi* (rice bowl with various toppings) for absurdly low prices. It's healthy Japanese fast food and there's a picture menu to make ordering easier. It's opposite McDonald's, in more ways than one.

**Kyōshō-An** (☎ 27-7715; 26-3 Hashimoto-chō; green tea & sweets from ¥420; ☎ 11am-7.30pm, closed Mon; E) This simple shop wins no awards for ambience, but it's a great place to sample Japanese tea and sweets, and unlike most traditional tea-sweet shops in Japan, this one has an English menu. In the hot months, we recommend an *Uji kintoki* (sweetened green tea over shaved ice; ¥570). It's opposite Nanto Bank, up a flight of white steps – look for the pictures of tea and sweets.

**Drink Drank** (☎ 27-6206; 8 Hashimoto-chō; smoothies from ¥650, lunch sets ¥750-850; ☎ 11am-8pm, closed Wed; E) This is the sort of place you might just as easily find in New York or Melbourne. It serves a variety of fresh fruit drinks and light lunches including sandwiches and soup. If you want a break from Japanese food and feel like something light and casual, this might be the move.

**Nonohana Ohka** (☎ 22-1139; 13 Nakashinya-chō; coffee & tea average ¥500; ☎ 11am-5pm, closed Mon; E) With indoor and outdoor garden seating, this café is one of our favourite places for a drink or a light meal when in Naramachi. The cakes are usually very good here and they go down a treat with the excellent tea. It's easy to spot, with a glass front.

**Mellow Café** (☎ 27-9099; 1-8 Konishi-chō; lunch from ¥950; ☎ 11am-11.30pm; E) Located down a narrow alley (look for the palm tree), this open-plan café attempts to create the ambience of a South Seas resort in downtown Nara. Offerings include international and pan-Asian cuisine. Lunch specials are displayed in front to help you choose and order.

**Ten Ten Café** (☎ 26-6770; 19 Wakido-chō; meals from ¥750; ☎ 11am-8.30pm; E) Operated by a singer-songwriter, and venue for lots of live-music happenings, this open and airy café is a fine spot for a relaxing drink or light meal in the Naramachi area. It serves a daily lunch special for ¥750. Look for the English sign and plants out front.

**Tonkatsu Ganko** (☎ 25-4129; 19 Higashimukinaka-machi; meals from ¥780; ☎ 11am-10pm; E) You'll have to fight the locals to get into this popular new

*tonkatsu* specialist in the Higashi-muki Arcade, around the corner from Kintetsu Nara. There's a good picture menu with things like *hirekatsu zen* (fillet pork cutlet set; ¥980). Refills of rice, cabbage and pickles are free. It's next to Mr Donuts.

**Shizuka** (☎ 27-8030; 59-11 Noboriōji-chō; rice dishes from ¥800; ☎ 11am-8pm, closed Tue; E) The closest decent lunch option to Nara-kōen, Shizuka is a cosy little traditional restaurant that serves a Nara speciality known as *kamameshi* (rice cooked in a small iron pot with various vegetables, meat or fish thrown in). It's in a two-storey building that looks like a private home, with a white-and-black paper lantern-sign.

**Ayura Café** (☎ 26-5339; 28 Hashimoto-chō; lunch or dinner set from ¥1000; ☎ 11am-8pm, closed Wed) We highly recommend this tiny café for its wonderful (mostly veggie) set lunch or just a quick cuppa. It's right at the south end of Higashi-muki Arcade, on the 2nd floor. There's a small English sign.

**Bikkuri Udon Miyoshino** (☎ 22-5239; 27 Hashimoto-chō; meals average ¥1000; ☎ 11am-8.30pm, closed Wed; E) Miyoshino does good-value sets of typical Japanese fare – noodles and rice dishes predominate. Stop by and check the daily lunch specials on display outside. It's very close to the Ayura Café.

**Tempura Asuka** (☎ 26-4308; 11 Shōnami-chō; meals ¥1575-3675; ☎ 11.30am-2.30pm & 5-9.30pm, closed Mon; E) This reliable restaurant serves attractive tempura and sashimi sets in a relatively casual atmosphere. At lunchtime try its nicely presented *yumei-dono bentō* (a lunch box filled with a variety of tasty Japanese foods) for ¥1500. There is an English sign and the staff are used to foreigners here. It is highly recommended.

**Beni-e** (☎ 22-9493; 1-4 Higashimukiminami-machi; meals from ¥1600/2600; ☎ 11.30am-2.30pm & 5-9pm, closed Mon; E) If you want tempura without a lot of distractions, this tiny downtown *tempura* specialist is likely to satisfy. It serves good *tempura* sets for ¥1600/2100/2600 (*hana, tsuki* and *yuki* lunch sets respectively). It's located a little back from Higashi-muki Arcade, behind Regal Shoes; go down the alley and look for the red writing above the door.

**Kana Kana** (☎ 22-3214; 13 Kunōdō-chō; ☎ 11am-8pm, closed Mon) Inside an 80-year-old *machiya* in Naramachi, this simple, relaxing place serves healthy Japanese food, much of it (but not all) vegetarian. We recommend the *kanakanagohan* set (daily lunch special; ¥1155). It's

tricky to spot, since it hardly looks like a restaurant at all; look for the pile of rocks outside next to a house with a tree in its front yard.

Lastly, if you just need a quick cuppa or an eat-in or takeaway sandwich, there is a branch of the coffee shop Doutor in the Konishi Arcade (a five-minute walk from Kintetsu Nara).

## SHOPPING

Nara is a great place to stock up on souvenirs, and you'll find plenty of shops selling traditional Japanese crafts and clothing in the streets and shopping arcades between JR Nara station and Kintetsu Nara station.

**Daisō** (Higashi-muki Arcade) If you've never experienced a *hyaku-en shoppu* (a shop where everything costs ¥100), then be sure to drop in here.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Bus

There is an overnight bus service between Tokyo's Shinjuku (highway bus terminal) and Nara (one way/return ¥8400/15,120). The bus leaves Nara at 10.27pm and reaches Tokyo the next day at 6.15am. The bus from Tokyo leaves at 11.15pm and arrives in Nara the next day at 6.35am. In Nara, call **Nara Kotsu Bus** (☎ 22-5110; www.narakotsu.co.jp/kousoku/index.html in Japanese) or check with the Nara City Tourist Center for more details. In Tokyo, call **Kanto Bus** (☎ 03-3928-6011; www.kanto-bus.co.jp in Japanese).

### Train

#### KYOTO

Unless you have a Japan Rail Pass, the best option is the Kintetsu line, which runs between Kintetsu Kyoto station (in Kyoto station) and Kintetsu Nara station. There are direct *tokkyū* (¥1110, 33 minutes) and *kyūkō* (¥610, 40 minutes). The *kyūkō* usually require a change at Saidai-ji.

The JR Nara line connects JR Kyoto station with JR Nara station (*kaisoku*, ¥690, 53 minutes) but departures are not frequent.

### OSAKA

The Kintetsu Nara line connects Osaka (Kintetsu Namba station) with Nara (Kintetsu Nara station). *Kaisoku* and *futsū* services take about 36 minutes and cost ¥540. *Tokkyū* services do the journey in five minutes less but cost almost double, making them a poor option.

The JR Kansai line links Osaka (Namba and Tennō-ji stations) and Nara (JR Nara station). A *kaisoku* connects Namba and JR Nara station (¥540, 36 minutes) and Tennō-ji and JR Nara station (¥450, 30 minutes).

## GETTING AROUND Nara/From the Airport

Nara is served by Kansai International Airport. There is a **limousine bus service** (Nara Kotsu; ☎ 22-5110; www.narakotsu.co.jp/kousoku/limousine/nara\_kanku.html in Japanese) between Nara and the airport with departures roughly every hour in both directions (¥1800, 85 minutes). At Kansai International Airport ask at the information counter in the arrivals hall, and in Nara visit the ticket office in the building across from Kintetsu Nara station. Reservations are a good idea.

For domestic flights, there are **limousine buses** (Nara Kotsu; ☎ 22-5110; www.narakotsu.co.jp/kousoku/limousine/nara\_itami.html in Japanese) to/from Osaka's Itami airport (¥1440, 70 minutes).

## Bicycle

Nara is a convenient size for getting around on a bicycle. **Eki Renta Car Kansai** (☎ 26-3929; 1-1 Honmachi, Sanjō; ☎ 8am-8pm) is very close to JR Nara station and rents regular bicycles for ¥300 a day –unbelievable value. If you can't be bothered to pedal along Nara's mostly flat streets, you can opt for electric bicycle (¥1500 a day).

## Bus

Most of the area around Nara-kōen is covered by two circular bus routes. Bus 1 runs anti-clockwise and bus 2 runs clockwise. There's a ¥170 flat fare. You can easily see the main sights in the park on foot and use the bus as an option if you are pushed for time or get tired of walking (one-day Free Pass ¥500).

## AROUND NARA 奈良周辺

Southern Nara-ken was the birthplace of imperial rule and is rich in historical sites that are easily accessible as day trips from Osaka, Kyoto or Nara, provided that you make an early start. Of particular historical interest are the *kofun* that mark the graves of Japan's first emperors; these are concentrated around Asuka. There are also several isolated temples where you can escape the crowds that plague

Nara's city centre. Further afield, the mountaintop town of Yoshino is one of Japan's cherry-blossom meccas.

Easily reached by rail, Yamato-Yagi and Sakurai serve as useful transport hubs for the region. Keep in mind that the Kintetsu line is far more convenient than JR for most of the destinations in this section.

If you're starting from Nara, you may want to pick up a copy of the detailed *Japan: Nara Prefecture* map at any of the tourist information offices in Nara city before starting out.

## TEMPLES SOUTHWEST OF NARA

While Nara City has some impressively ancient temples and Buddhist statues, if you want to go right back to the roots of Japanese Buddhism it's necessary to head to three temples southwest of Nara: Hōryū-ji, Yakushi-ji and Tōshōdai-ji.

Hōryū-ji is one of the most important temples in all of Japan, largely for historical reasons. However, its appeal is more academic than aesthetic, and it's quite a slog to get there. Thus, for most people we recommend a half-day trip to Yakushi-ji and Tōshōdai-ji, which are easy to get to from Nara and very pleasant for strolling.

If you do want to visit all three temples, we recommend heading to Hōryū-ji first (it's the most distant from the centre of Nara) and then continuing by bus 52, 97 or 98 (¥560, 39 minutes) up to Yakushi-ji and Tōshōdai-ji, which are a 10-minute walk apart (for more on getting to/from these temples, see the respective entries). Obviously, this can also be done in reverse. Of all the buses that ply the southwest temple route, bus 97 is the most convenient, with English announcements and route maps.

### Hōryū-ji 法隆寺

This temple (☎ 75-2555; admission ¥1000; 🕒 8am-4pm) was founded in 607 by Prince Shōtoku, considered by many to be the patron saint of Japanese Buddhism. Legend has it that Shōtoku, moments after birth, stood up and started praying. Hōryū-ji is renowned not only as the oldest temple in Japan but also as a repository for some of the country's rarest treasures. Several of the temple's wooden buildings have survived earthquakes and fires to become the oldest of their kind in the world.

The temple is divided into two parts, **Sai-in** (West Temple) and **Tō-in** (East Temple). The

entrance ticket allows admission to Sai-in, Tō-in and the Great Treasure Hall. A detailed map is provided and a guidebook is available in English and several other languages.

The main approach to the temple proceeds from the south along a tree-lined avenue and continues through the Nandai-mon and Chūmon before entering the Sai-in precinct. As you enter this precinct, you'll see the **Kondō** (Main Hall) on your right and a pagoda on your left.

The Kondō houses several treasures, including the triad of the **Buddha Sakyamuni**, with two attendant Bodhisattvas. Though it is one of Japan's great Buddhist treasures, it's dimly lit and barely visible – you will need a flashlight to see it. Likewise, the pagoda contains clay images depicting scenes from the life of Buddha that are barely visible without a flashlight.

On the eastern side of Sai-in are the two concrete buildings of the **Daihōzō-den** (Great Treasure Hall), containing numerous treasures from Hōryū-ji's long history.

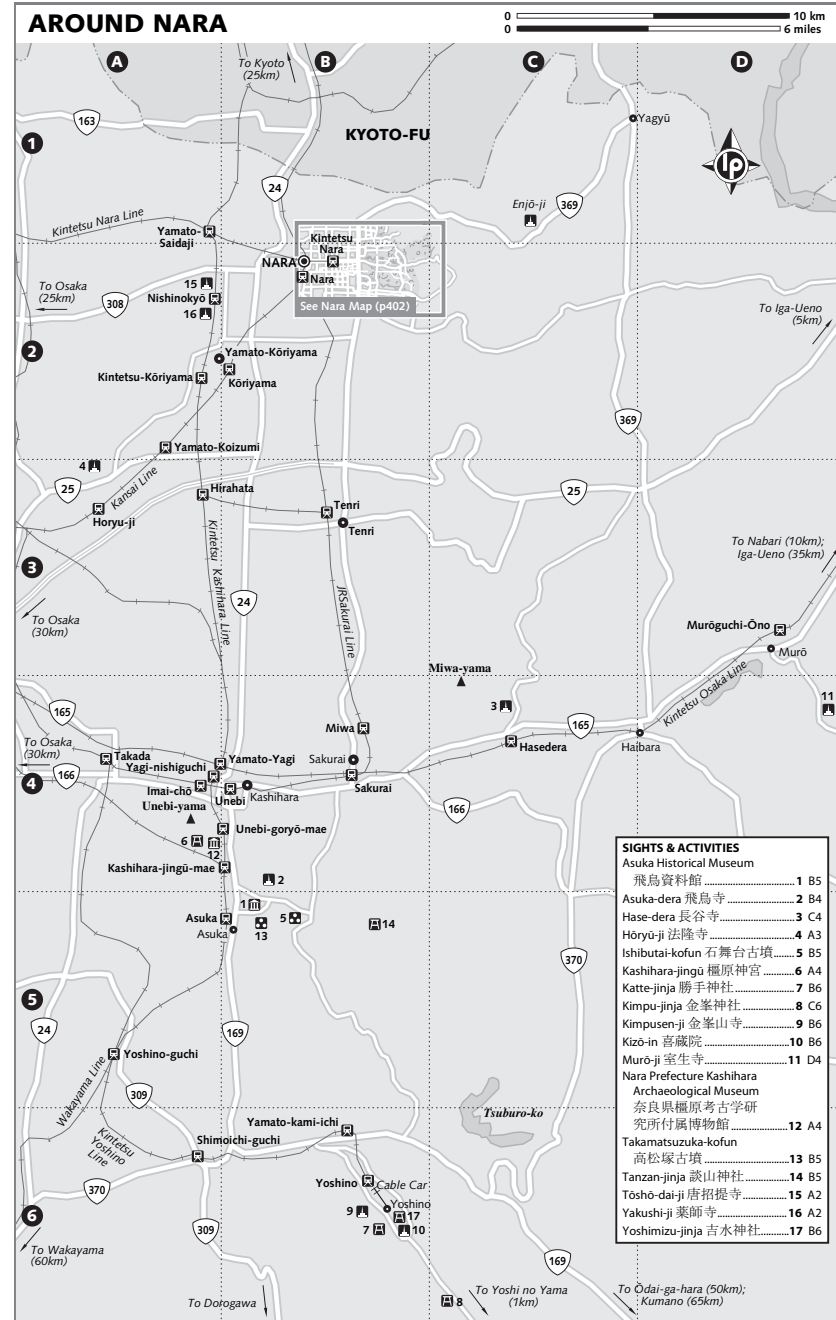
### GETTING THERE & AWAY

To get to Hōryū-ji, take the JR Kansai line from JR Nara station to Hōryū-ji station (¥210, 10 minutes). From there, bus 72 shuttles the short distance between the station and the bus stop Hōryū-ji Monzen (¥170, eight minutes). Alternatively, take bus 52, 60 or 97 from either JR Nara station or Kintetsu Nara station and get off at the Hōryū-ji-mae stop (¥760, 37 minutes by bus 60, 60 minutes by others). Leave the bus stop and walk west for about 50m, cross the road and you will see the tree-lined approach to the temple.

### Yakushi-ji 薬師寺

This temple (☎ 0742-33-6001; admission ¥500; 🕒 8.30am-5pm) houses some of the most beautiful Buddhist images in all Japan. It was established by Emperor Temmu in 680. With the exception of the **East Pagoda**, which dates to 730, the present buildings either date from the 13th century or are very recent reconstructions.

Entering from the south, turn to the right before going through the gate with guardian figures and walk to the **Tōin-dō** (East Hall), which houses a famous Shō-Kannon image, which in the 7th century and showing obvious influences of Indian sculptural styles. Exit the Tōin-dō and walk west to the **Kon-dō** (Main Hall).



The Kon-dō was rebuilt in 1976 and houses several images, including the famous **Yakushi Triad** (the Buddha Yakushi flanked by the Bodhisattvas of the sun and moon), dating from the 8th century. They were originally gold, but a fire in the 16th century turned the images an appealingly mellow black.

Behind (north of) the Kon-dō is the Kō-dō (Lecture Hall), which houses yet another fine Buddhist trinity, this time Miroku Buddha with two Bodhisattva attendants. You can exit to the north behind this hall and make your way to Tōshōdai-ji.

#### GETTING THERE & AWAY

To get to Yakushi-ji, take bus 52, 63, 70, 88, 89 or 97 from either JR Nara station or Kintetsu Nara station and get off at either the Yakushi-ji Higashiguchi stop or the Yakushi-ji (¥240, 19 minutes). From the stop, walk 100m south (same direction thebus was travelling) to a Mobil station, cross the road to the west, and walk west across a canal. From the main road it's 250m to the temple's south entrance.

You can also take a *futsū* on the Kintetsu Kashihara line and get off at Nishinokyō station, which is about 200m walk northwest of Yakushi-ji (and 600m walk south of Tōshōdai-ji). If you're coming from Nara, you will have to change trains at Yamato-Saidaiji (¥250, nine minutes; *kyūkō* and *tokkyū* do not stop at Nishinokyō).

#### Tōshōdai-ji 唐招提寺

This **temple** (☎ 33-7900; admission ¥600; 🕒 8.30am-5pm) was established in 759 by the Chinese priest Ganjin (Jian Zhen), who had been recruited by Emperor Shōmu to reform Buddhism in Japan. Ganjin didn't have much luck with his travel arrangements from China to Japan: five attempts were thwarted by shipwreck, storms and bureaucracy. Despite being blinded by eye disease, he finally made it on the sixth attempt and spread his teachings to Japan. The lacquer sculpture in the Mieidō Hall is a moving tribute to Ganjin: blind and rock steady. It is shown only once a year, on 6 June – the anniversary of Ganjin's death.

Unfortunately, the **Kon-dō** (Golden Hall) of the temple, which is the main hall of the temple, is presently under reconstruction and won't reopen until 2009.

Tōshōdai-ji is a 600m walk north of Yakushi-ji's northern gate; see above for transport details from Nara.

**AROUND YAMATO-YAGI** 大和八木周辺  
Easily reached on the Kintetsu line from Osaka, Kyoto or Nara, Yamato-Yagi is the most convenient transport hub for sights in southern Nara-ken. From Kyoto take the Kintetsu Nara/Kashihara line direct (*kyūkō*, ¥860, 57 minutes). From Nara take the Kintetsu Nara line to Saidaiji and change to the Kintetsu Kashihara line (*kyūkō*, ¥430, 27 minutes). From Osaka's Uehonmachi station, take the Kintetsu Osaka line direct (*kyūkō*, ¥540, 34 minutes).

#### Imai-chō 今井町

Southwest of Yamato-Yagi is Imai-chō, a neighbourhood with around 500 *machiya* preserved virtually intact from the Edo period. It's a pleasant place to walk around and seven of the **buildings** (admission ¥200; 🕒 10am-noon & 1-5pm) are open to the public. Your first stop should be the **Imai Machinami Koryū Sentā** (今井まちなみ交流センター; ☎ 0744-24-8719; 🕒 9am-5pm, closed Mon), which has a decent English map of the area with a suggested walking route.

The most interesting of the *machiya* are the huge **Imanishike Jyūtakū** (今西家; Imanishi House), which was completed in 1650, and the **Kyukometanike Jyūtakū** (旧米谷家住宅; Former Kometani House), which dates to the middle of the 18th century.

For a quick cuppa or a light meal while strolling around, try **Machiya-jaya Furuī** (町家茶屋古伊; ☎ 0744-22-2135; 🕒 10.30am-5pm Thu-Mon), which has coffee for ¥350 and *kitsune soba* (*soba* noodles with fried tofu) for ¥500.

To get to Imai-chō, take a Kintetsu line *futsū* or *kyūkō* one stop south from Yamato-Yagi to Yagi-nishiguchi (¥150, one minute). The neighbourhood is a 10-minute walk southwest of the station. Take the west exit out of the station, go left at the top of the stairs, and cross the bridge on the right over a canal and turn left under the train tracks then walk straight. Imai-chō will be on the right. The Imai Machinami Koryū Sentā will be on your right after about 300m.

#### Kashihara 橿原

Three stops south of Yamato-Yagi, on the Kintetsu Kashihara line, is Kashihara-jingū-mae station (¥200 from Yamato-Yagi, five minutes, all trains stop). There are a couple of interesting sights within easy walking distance of this station.

#### KASHIHARA-JINGŪ 橿原神宮

This **shrine** (☎ 0744-22-3271; admission free), at the foot of Unebi-yama, dates back to 1889, when many of the buildings were moved here from Kyoto Goshō. The shrine buildings are built in the same style as those of Ise-jingū's Grand Shrine (Japan's most sacred shrine) and are a good example of classical Shintō architecture. The shrine is dedicated to Japan's mythical first emperor, Jimmu, and an annual festival is held here on 11 February, the legendary date of Jimmu's enthronement. The vast, parklike grounds are pleasant to stroll around. The shrine is five minutes' walk from Kashihara-jingū-mae station; take the central exit out of the station and follow the main street in the direction of the mountain.

#### NARA PREFECTURE KASHIHARA

##### ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM

奈良県橿原考古学研究所付属博物館

This **museum** (Nara Ken-ritsu Kashihara Kōkogaku Kenkyūjo Fuzoku Hakubutsukan; ☎ 0744-24-1185; admission ¥400; 🕒 9am-5pm, closed Mon) is highly recommended for those with an interest in the history of the Japanese people. The objects on display come from various archaeological sites in the area, including several *kofun*. Although most of the explanations are in Japanese, there's enough English to give you an idea of what's going on.

To get there from Kashihara-jingū, walk out the northern gate of the shrine (to your left when you stand with your back to the main hall), follow the wooded avenue for five minutes, cross the main road and continue on in the same direction for 100m before turning left. It's on the left soon after this turn.

#### ASUKA 明日香

☎ 0744 / pop 6500

The Yamato Plain in central Nara-ken is where the forerunners of Japan's ruling Yamato dynasty cemented their grip on power. In these pre-Buddhist days, huge earthen burial mounds were used to entomb deceased emperors. Some of the best examples of these burial mounds, or *kofun*, can be found around the town of Asuka, an hour or so south of Nara on the Kintetsu line.

The best way to explore the area is by bicycle, which can be rented from one of several rental shops outside the station. There's a **tourist information office** (☎ 54-3624; 🕒 8.30am-5pm) outside Asuka station, which stocks an

excellent pamphlet with a suggested bicycle route of the area.

Two tombs worth seeing are **Takamatsuzuka-kofun** (高松塚古墳) and **Ishibutai-kofun** (石舞台古墳, admission ¥250; 🕒 8.30am-5pm). The former, which was excavated in 1972, is closed to the public but can be observed from outside. The Ishibutai-kofun is open to the public. It is said to have housed the remains of Soga no Umako but is now completely empty.

The best museum in the area is **Asuka Historical Museum** (飛鳥資料館; ☎ 54-3561; admission ¥260; 🕒 9am-4pm, closed Mon), which has exhibits from regional digs. It's across the street (take the underpass) from Takamatsuzuka-kofun.

If you have time left after visiting the earlier sights, take a look at **Asuka-dera** (飛鳥寺; ☎ 54-2126; admission ¥300; 🕒 9am-4.45pm), which dates from 596 and is considered the first true temple in all of Japan. Housed within is the oldest remaining image of Buddha in Japan – after more than 1300 years of venerable existence, you'll have to excuse its decidedly tatty appearance. You can just glimpse the Buddha image through the open doorway.

Lastly, if you'd like a bite to eat while in Asuka, try **Ashibi-no-sato** (あしびの郷; ☎ 0742-26-6662; simple meals from ¥800; 🕒 10am-6pm). To get there, exit the station and follow the canal to the right for about 150m.

Asuka is five stops south of Yamato-Yagi (change at Kashihara-jingū-mae) and two stops south of Kashihara-jingū-mae on the Kintetsu Yoshino line (¥220 from Yamato-Yagi, 20 minutes, *tokkyū* stops at Asuka).

#### AROUND SAKURAI 桜井周辺

There are a few interesting places to visit close to the town of Sakurai that can be reached directly from Nara on the JR Sakurai line (*futsū*, ¥320, 28 minutes). To reach Sakurai via Yamato-Yagi (when coming from Kyoto or Osaka), take the Kintetsu Osaka line from Yamato-Yagi (*kyūkō*, ¥200, seven minutes).

#### Tanzan-jinja 談山神社

This **shrine** (☎ 0744-49-0001; admission ¥500; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm) lies south of Sakurai and can be reached by bus 14 from stand 1 outside the southern exit of Sakurai station (¥460, 24 minutes). It's tucked away in the forests of Tōnomine-san, famous for their autumn colours. Enshrined here is Nakatomi no Kamatari, patriarch of the Fujiwara line, which effectively ruled Japan for nearly 500 years. Legend has it that Nakatomi

met here secretly with Prince Naka no Ōe over games of kickball to discuss the overthrow of the ruling Soga clan. This event is commemorated on the second Sunday in November by priests playing a game of kickball – call it di-vine hackey sack.

The central structure of the shrine is an attractive 13-storey pagoda best viewed against a backdrop of maple trees ablaze with autumn colours.

### Hase-dera 長谷寺

Two stops east of Sakurai on the Kintetsu Osaka line is Hasedera station. From the station, it's a 20-minute walk to lovely **Hase-dera** (☎ 0744-47-7001; admission ¥500; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm). After a long climb up seemingly endless steps, you enter the main hall and are rewarded with a splendid view from the gallery, which juts out on stilts over the mountainside. Inside the top hall, the huge Kannon image is well worth a look. The best times to visit this temple are in the spring, when the way is lined with blooming peonies, and in autumn, when the temple's maple trees turn a vivid red. From the station, walk down through the archway, cross the river and turn right onto the main street that leads to the temple.

### Murō-ji 室生寺

This temple (☎ 0745-93-2003; admission ¥500; 🕒 8am-5pm, to 4pm Dec-Feb) was founded in the 9th century and has strong connections with Esoteric Buddhism (the Shingon sect). Women were never excluded from Murō-ji as they were from other Shingon temples, and it is for this reason that it came to be known as 'the Woman's Koya'. Unfortunately, the temple's lovely five-storey pagoda, which dates from the 8th or 9th century, was severely damaged in a typhoon in the summer of 1999. The newly rebuilt pagoda lacks some of the rustic charm of the old one. Nonetheless, Murō-ji is a secluded place in thick forest and is well worth a visit.

After visiting the main hall, walk up to the pagoda and then continue on behind the pagoda in the direction of **Oku-no-in**, a hall of the temple located at the top of a very steep flight of steps. If you don't feel like making the climb, at least go about 100m past the pagoda to see the mammoth cedar tree growing over a huge rock here – an awesome sight that reminds us of Ta Prohm temple at Angkor Wat.

Murōguchi-Ōno station on the Kintetsu Osaka line is two stops east of Hasedera station. It's a 14-minute bus ride from Murōguchi-Ōno station to Murō-ji on bus 43, 44, 45 or 46 (¥400). In spring, there is a direct bus between Hase-dera and Murō-ji (¥830, end of April to early May, one or two buses per hour between 11am and 3pm).

### YOSHINO 吉野

☎ 0746 / pop 10,000

Yoshino is Japan's top cherry-blossom destination, and for a few weeks in early to mid-April the blossoms of thousands of cherry trees form a floral carpet gradually ascending the mountainsides. It's definitely a sight worth seeing, but the narrow streets of the village become jammed tight with thousands of visitors at this time, and you'll have to be content with a day trip unless you've booked accommodation long in advance. Once the cherry-blossom petals fall, the crowds depart and Yoshino reverts to a sleepy village with a handful of shrines and a couple of temples to entertain day-trippers.

### Information

Yoshino Visitors Center is about 400m up the main street from the top cable-car station, on your right just after Kimpusen-ji (look for the large tan-and-white building). It can help with *minshuku* bookings if necessary.

### Sights

Walk about 500m uphill from the cable-car station and you will come to the stone steps leading to the Ni-ō-mon gate of **Kimpusen-ji** (金峯山寺; ☎ 32-8371; admission ¥400; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm). Check out the fearsome **Kongō Rikishi** (guardian figure statues) in the gate and then continue on to the massive **Zaō-dō Hall** of the temple. Said to be the second-largest wooden building in Japan, the hall is most interesting for its unfinished wooden columns. For many centuries Kimpusen-ji has been one of the major centres for Shugendō, and pilgrims have often stopped here to pray for good fortune on the journey to Ōmine-san.

Continuing another 300m up the street brings you to a side road to the left (turn just past the post office) that leads to the small **Yoshimizu-jinja** (吉水神社), a small shrine that has a good view back to Kimpusen-ji. Another 150m up the street is **Katte-jinja** (勝手神社). The road forks just above this shrine.

Take the right (uphill) fork and you will soon pass **Kizō-in** (喜蔵院) on your left and come to **Chikurin-in** (竹林院) on the right, which has a wonderful garden (see below).

A few minutes' walk further on there is another fork, where you'll find some steps leading up to a wooden torii. Take the left fork and the next right up the hill for the 3km hike to **Kimpu-jinja** (金峯神社), a small shrine in a pleasantly wooded mountain setting. If you don't fancy this somewhat strenuous uphill hike, there are plenty of smaller shrines on the streets and alleys off Yoshino's main street.

### Sleeping

**Yoshino-yama Kizō-in** (吉野山喜蔵院; ☎ 32-3014; dm per person incl 2 meals ¥6000; 🕒) This is a temple, Kizō-in, which doubles as the local youth hostel and is the cheapest option in town. It's a pleasant place to stay, and several of the hostel's rooms look out across the valley. See above for directions to the temple.

**Chikurin-in Gumpo en** (竹林院群芳園; ☎ 32-8081; www.chikurin.co.jp/e/home.htm; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥13,650; 🕒) Not far past Kizō-in, on the opposite side of the street, this is an exquisite temple that now operates primarily as a ryokan. Both present and previous emperors have stayed here, and a look at the view afforded by some of the rooms explains why. Reservations are essential for the cherry-blossom season, and a good idea at all other times. Even if you don't plan to stay at the temple, you should at least visit its splendid garden (admission ¥300), said to have been designed by the famous tea master Sen-no-Rikyū.

### Eating

The speciality of Yoshino is *kaki-no-ha* sushi (persimmon-leaf sushi). Almost every store and restaurant in town sells it and you can buy two pieces to take away for ¥250.

**Hōkon-an** (芳魂庵; ☎ 32-8207; 🕒 9am-5pm, closed irregularly) This is an atmospheric little tea house, where you can sip your tea while enjoying a lovely view over the valley. The *matcha* (¥650) comes with a homemade Japanese sweet. Look for the rustic wooden façade and large ceramic urn on the left, just past the post office.

**Nakai Shunpūdō** (中井春風堂; ☎ 32-3043; 🕒 9am-5pm, closed irregularly) With a limited picture menu, it serves a *kamameshi teishoku* (rice cooked in an iron pot; ¥1050) and other typical lunch favourites; the view from the

windows is great. It's about 5m past the information office, on the opposite side – look for the ceramic *tanuki* (Japanese raccoon dog) figure out front.

### Getting There & Away

The village of Yoshino is on a shoulder of Yoshino-yama, at the bottom of which is Yoshino station. From Yoshino station, you can take the cable car to the village (one way/return ¥350/700) or walk up in 15 minutes on the path that leaves from beside the cable-car station. Note that the cable car stops running at 5pm – plan your day accordingly or you'll have to walk down to the station (30 minutes).

To get to Yoshino station from Kyoto or Nara, take the Kintetsu Nara-Kashihara line to Kashihara-jingū-mae (*kyūkō* from Kyoto, ¥860, 66 minutes; *kyūkō* from Nara, ¥480, 36 minutes) and change to the Kintetsu Yoshino line (*kyūkō*, ¥460, 52 minutes).

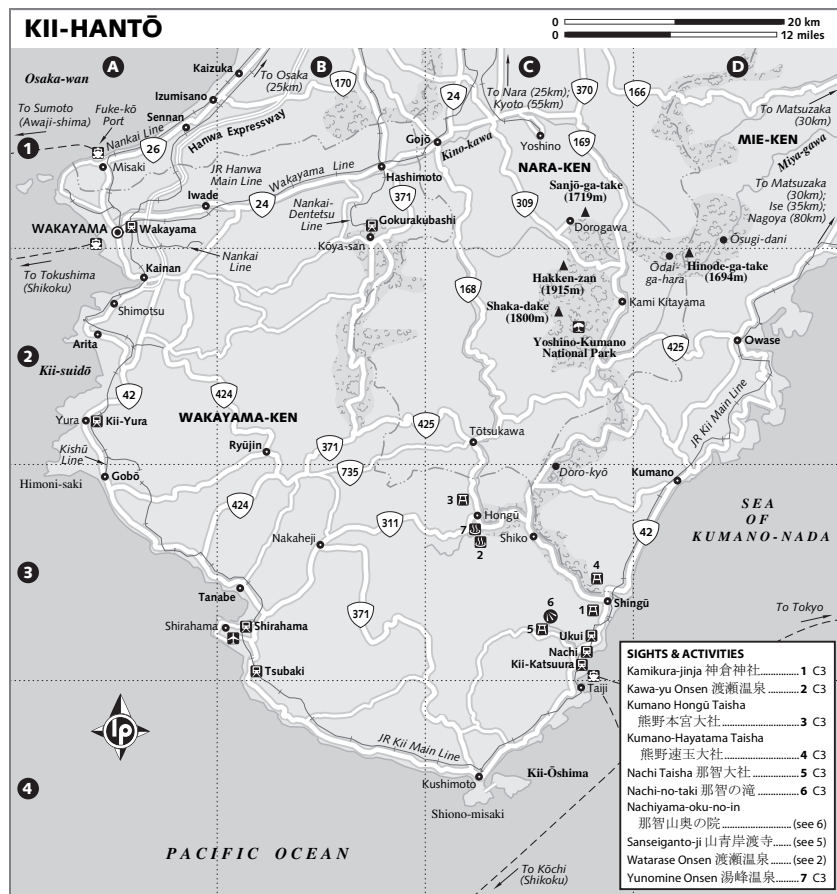
You can take a direct train on the Kintetsu Minami-Osaka-Yoshino lines from Osaka (Abenobashi station, close to Tennō-ji station) to Yoshino (*kyūkō*, ¥950, 75 minutes).

The closest JR station to Yoshino is Yoshino-guchi, where you can transfer to trains to/from Nara, Osaka and Wakayama.

## KII-HANTŌ 紀伊半島

The remote and mountainous Kii-hantō (Kii Peninsula) is a far cry from central Kansai's bustling urban sprawl. Most of the peninsula's attractions are found in Wakayama-ken, including the mountaintop temple complex of Kōya-san, one of Japan's most important Buddhist centres. Other Wakayama-ken attractions include the *onsen* clustered around the village of Hongū, in the centre of the peninsula, the beachside hot-spring resort of Shirahama, on the west coast of the peninsula, and the rugged coastline of Shiono-misaki and Kii-Ōshima, at the southern tip of the peninsula.

The JR Kii main line (Kinokuni line) runs around the coast of the Kii-hantō, linking Shin-Osaka and Nagoya stations (some trains originate/terminate at Kyoto station). Special Kuroshio and Nankii *tokkyū* trains can get you around the peninsula fairly quickly, but once you step off these express trains you're at the mercy of slow local trains and buses, so



plan accordingly. For this reason, renting a car is a good option for exploring this area.

We present the information in this section anticlockwise, working from Wakayama-shi around the horn to Mie-ken, but it's perfectly possible to do this the other way round (perhaps starting in Ise).

## WAKAYAMA 和歌山

☎ 073 / pop 374,000

Wakayama, the prefectural capital, is a pleasant little city useful as a transport hub for travellers heading to other parts of the prefecture.

There is a useful **tourist information counter** (☎ 422-5831; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 5.15pm Sun & holidays) inside JR Wakayama station, which

stocks copies of the excellent *Wakayama City Guide* map.

## Sights & Activities

### WAKAYAMA-JŌ 和歌山城

The city's main attraction is **Wakayama-jō** (☎ 435-1044; 3 Ichiban-chō; admission to grounds/castle keep free/¥350; ☎ 9am-4.30pm). The original castle was built in 1585 by Toyotomi Hideyoshi and destroyed by bombing in WWII. The present structure is a concrete postwar reconstruction; it's picturesque from afar and unprepossessing up close. However, the gardens surrounding the castle are well worth a stroll if you're in the area.

The castle is a 20-minute walk (about 2km) from JR Wakayama station. Alternatively, it's

about a 10-minute (about 1km) walk from Wakayama-shi station.

## MUSEUM OF MODERN ART WAKAYAMA

### 和歌山県立近代美術館

A short walk from the castle, this **museum** (☎ 436-8690; 1-4-14 Fukiage; admission ¥310, extra for special exhibitions; ☎ 9.30am-5pm, closed Mon) is worth a visit for its unique building and small but interesting collection of Japanese and Western 20th-century art. The collection contains, among other things, 4000 block prints, and works by Picasso, Miró and Klee. The museum is across the street south of the castle.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Kokumin-shukusha Shinwaka Lodge** (国民宿舎新和歌山ロッジ; ☎ 444-9000; 2-3 Shinwakaura; r per person incl/excl 2 meals ¥7000/4800; ☎) Located out in the western Shinwakaura area of the city, this is the most reasonable place in the area. Take bus 24 from stop 2 in front of JR Wakayama station to the last stop, Shinwaka Ura (¥380, 30 minutes). Continue on in the same direction along the main road, go through the tunnel and look for it on your left.

**Hotel Granvia Wakayama** (ホテルグランヴィア和歌山; ☎ 425-3333; hotel@granvia-wakayama.co.jp; 5-18 Tomoda-chō; s/d/tw ¥10,164/17,902/19,635; ☎) This place is right outside the station and offers new, clean rooms. This hotel has good reports from readers.

**Mendori-tei** (めんどり亭; ☎ 422-3355; 478 Yoshida; ☎ 8am-11pm) For a bite to eat, head to the restaurant arcade on the basement floor beneath JR Wakayama station. Among the choices here, this serves excellent *tonkatsu* dishes (try the *tonkatsu teishoku* for ¥980). Look for the brown curtains and the all-counter seating.

Otherwise, a short walk from JR Wakayama station you'll find **Ide Shōten** (井出商店; ☎ 436-2941; 4-8 Tanaka-machi; ☎ 11.30am-11.30pm Fri-Wed), where you can sample the local speciality, *shoyū ramen* (soy sauce *ramen*) for ¥600. But call it *chuka soba* (Chinese noodles) or you'll get funny looks from the staff! To get there from the station, walk straight out of the station and turn left on the main street – it's six short blocks south on the right, just past a parking lot.

## Getting There & Away

Wakayama is serviced by JR *tokkyū* trains from Shin-Osaka and Kyoto, but unless you've

got a Japan Rail Pass it's cheaper to take a local train on the JR Hanwa line from Osaka's Tennō-ji station (*kaisoku*, ¥830, 58 minutes). From Osaka's Namba station you can also take the private Nankai line to Wakayama-shi station (*kyūko*, ¥890, 63 minutes), which is linked to JR Wakayama station by the JR Kisei main line (*futsū*, ¥180, six minutes).

## KŌYA-SAN 高野山

☎ 0736 / pop 4000

Kōya-san is a raised tableland in northern Wakayama-ken covered with thick forests and surrounded by eight peaks. The major attraction here is the Kōya-san monastic complex, which is the headquarters of the Shingon school of Esoteric Buddhism. Though not quite the Shangri-la it's occasionally described as, Kōya-san is one of the most rewarding places to visit in Kansai, not just for the natural setting of the area but also as an opportunity to stay in temples and get a glimpse of long-held traditions of Japanese religious life.

Although you could visit Kōya-san as a day trip from Nara, Kyoto or Osaka, it's much better to reduce the travel stress and stay overnight in one of the town's excellent *shukubō* (temple lodgings). Be sure to bring some warm clothes when you go, as up on the mountain it tends to be around 5°C colder than down on the plains.

Whenever you go, you'll find that getting there is half the fun – the train winds through a series of tight valleys with mountains soaring on all sides, and the final vertiginous cable-car leg is not for the faint of heart.

## History

The founder of the Shingon school of Esoteric Buddhism, Kūkai (known after his death as Kōbō Daishi), established a religious community here in 816. Kōbō Daishi travelled as a young priest to China and returned after two years to found the school. He is one of Japan's most famous religious figures and is revered as a Bodhisattva, scholar, inventor of the Japanese *kana* syllabary and as a calligrapher.

Followers of Shingon believe that Kōbō Daishi is not dead, but rather that he is meditating in his tomb in Kōya-san's Oku-no-in Cemetery, awaiting the arrival of Miroku (Maitreya, the future Buddha). Food is ritually offered in front of the tomb daily to sustain him during this meditation. When Miroku

returns, it is thought that only Kōbō Daishi will be able to interpret his heavenly message for humanity. Thus, the vast cemetery here is like an amphitheatre crowded with souls gathered in expectation of this heavenly sermon.

Over the centuries the temple complex grew in size and attracted many followers of the Jōdo (Pure Land) school of Buddhism. During the 11th century, it became popular with both nobles and commoners to leave hair or ashes from deceased relatives close to Kōbō Daishi's tomb.

In the 16th century Oda Nobunaga asserted his power by slaughtering large numbers of monks at Kōya-san. The community subsequently suffered confiscation of lands and narrowly escaped invasion by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. At one stage Kōya-san numbered about 1500 monasteries and many thousands of monks. The members of the community were divided into *gakuryō* (clergy), *gyōnin* (lay priests) and *hijiri* (followers of Pure Land Buddhism).

In the 17th century the Tokugawa shōgunate smashed the economic power of the lay priests, who managed considerable

estates in the region. Their temples were destroyed, their leaders banished and the followers of Pure Land Buddhism were bluntly pressed into the Shingon school. During the Edo period, the government favoured the practice of Shintō and confiscated the lands that supported Kōya-san's monastic community. Women were barred from entry to Kōya-san until 1872.

Kōya-san is now a thriving centre for Japanese Buddhism, with more than 110 temples remaining and a population of 7000. It is the headquarters of the Shingon school, which numbers 10 million members and presides over nearly 4000 temples all over Japan.

### Orientation & Information

The precincts of Kōya-san are divided into two main areas: the Garan (Sacred Precinct) in the west, where you will find interesting temples and pagodas, and the Oku-no-in, with its vast cemetery, in the east. We recommend visiting both sites.

Note that there is a joint ticket (*shodōkyōtsu-naihaiken*; ¥1500) that covers entry to Kongōbu-ji, the Kondō, Dai-tō, Treasure

Museum and Tokugawa Mausoleum. It can be purchased at the information office.

For the best map of the area, pick up a copy of the Japanese map from the bus office outside the top cable-car station.

**Koyasan Interpreter Guide Club** (☎ 080-6148-2588; www.geocities.jp/koyasan\_i\_g\_c/) This offers four-hour private tours of Kōya-san for ¥5000 per group for up to five people. It also offers regularly scheduled tours on Wednesday from April to September for ¥1000 per person. The morning tour meets at Ichi-no-hashi at 8.30am and lasts 2½ hours and covers Oku-no-in. The afternoon tour meets at Kongōbu-ji at 1pm, takes 1½ hours, and covers Kongōbu-ji and the Garan.

**Kōya-san Tourist Association** (☎ 56-2616; fax 56-2889; ☎ 8.30am-5.30pm Jul & Aug, to 4.30pm Sep-Jun) In the centre of town in front of the Senjūin-bashi-mae bus stop. There are usually English speakers on hand and brochures and maps are available.

### Sights

#### OKU-NO-IN 奥の院

Any Buddhist worth their salt in Japan has had their remains, or just a lock or two of hair, interred in this **cemetery-temple** to ensure pole position when Miroku Buddha comes to earth.

The best way to approach Oku-no-in is to walk or take the bus east to Ichi-no-hashi-mae bus stop. From here you cross the bridge, **Ichi-no-hashi**, and enter the cemetery grounds along a winding, cobbled path lined by tall cedar trees and thousands of tombs. As the trees close in and the mist swirls the atmosphere can be enchanting, especially as night falls. Among the interesting graves and monuments to look out for are the **North Borneo War Victim Memorial**, which commemorates Japanese, Malay and Australian soldiers killed in

North Borneo in WWII (look for the flags), and the **White Ant Memorial**, built by a pesticide company to expiate its guilt for the murder of legions of the little critters.

The **Tōrō-dō** (Lantern Hall), the main building of the complex, is at the northern end of the graveyard. It houses hundreds of lamps, including two believed to have been burning for more than 900 years. Behind the hall you can see the closed doors of the Kūkai mausoleum.

On the way to the Lantern Hall is the bridge **Mimyo-no-hashi**. Worshippers ladle water from the river and pour it over the nearby Jizō statues as an offering for the dead. The inscribed wooden plaques in the river are in memory of aborted babies and those who died by drowning.

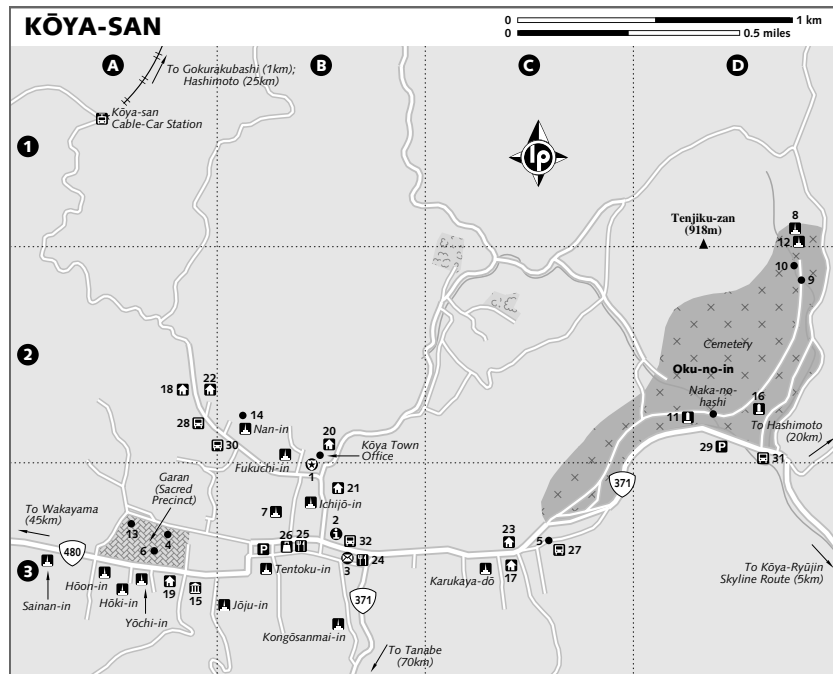
Between the bridge and the Tōrō-dō is a small wooden building the size of a large phone booth, which contains the **Miroku-ishi**. Pilgrims reach through the holes in the wall to try to lift a large, smooth boulder onto a shelf. The weight of the stone is supposed to change according to your weight of sin. We can only report that the thing was damn heavy!

Bus return to the centre of town from the Oku-no-mae bus stop, or you can walk back in about 30 minutes.

#### KONGŌBU-JI 金剛峯寺

This is the headquarters of the Shingon school and the residence of Kōya-san's abbot. The present **structure** (☎ 56-2011; admission ¥500; ☎ 8.30am-4pm) dates from the 19th century and is definitely worth a visit.

The main hall's Ohiro-ma room has ornate screens painted by Kanō Tanyu in the 16th century. The Yanagi-no-ma (Willow Room)



INFORMATION		Tokugawa Mausoleum 徳川家霊台 14 B2		SHOPPING	
Kōya Police Station 高野警察署	1 B3	Treasure Museum 霊宝館	15 A3	Supermarket	
Kōya-san Tourist Association		Tōrō-dō 灯ろう堂	(see A2)	スーパーマーケット	26 B3
高野山観光協会	2 B3	White Ant Memorial 白蟻墓	16 D2		
Post Office 郵便局	3 B3				
SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		SLEEPING		TRANSPORT	
Dai-tō 大塔	4 A3	Eikō-in 永光院	17 C3	Ichi-no-hashi-mae Bus Stop	
Ichi-no-hashi 一の橋	5 C3	Haryō-in 巴陵院	18 A2	一の橋前バス停	27 C3
Kondō (Main Hall) 金堂	6 A3	Henjōson-in 遍照尊院	19 A3	Isshin-guchi-mae Bus Stop	
Kongōbu-ji 金剛峯寺	7 B3	Kōya-san Youth Hostel		一心口バス停	28 A2
Kūkai Mausoleum 空海の墓	8 D1	高野ユースホステル	20 B2	Naka-no-hashi Parking	
Mimyo-no-hashi 御願橋	9 D2	Muryōkō-in 無量光院	21 B3	中の橋駐車場	29 D2
Miroku-ishi みろく石	10 D2	Rengejō-in 蓮華定院	22 A2	Namikirin-fudō-mae Bus Stop	
North Borneo War Victim Memorial		Shōjōshin-in 清浄心院	23 C3	波切不動前バス停	30 B2
北ボルネオ没者墓所	11 D2			Oku-no-in-mae Bus Stop	
Oku-no-in 奥の院	12 D1			奥の院前バス停	31 D2
Sai-tō 西塔	13 A3			Senjūin-bashi-mae Bus Stop	
		Hanabishi Honten 花菱本店	24 B3	千手院橋前バス停	32 B3
		Maruman 丸万	25 B3		



has equally pretty screen paintings of willows but the rather grisly distinction of being the place where Toyotomi Hidetsugu committed *seppuku* (ritual suicide by disembowelment).

The rock garden is interesting for the sheer number of rocks used in its composition, giving the effect of a throng of petrified worshippers eagerly listening to a monk's sermon.

Admission includes tea and rice cakes served beside the stone garden.

### GARAN 伽藍

This is a **temple complex** (☎ 56-2011; admission to each bldg ¥200; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm) of several halls and pagodas. The most important buildings are the **Dai-tō** (Great Pagoda) and **Kondō** (Main Hall). The Dai-tō, rebuilt in 1934 after a fire, is said to be the centre of the lotus-flower mandala formed by the eight mountains around Kōya-san. It's been repainted recently and is an awesome sight. The nearby **Sai-tō** (Western Pagoda) was most recently rebuilt in 1834 and is more subdued. It's well worth entering the Dai-tō to see the Dainichi-nyōrai (Cosmic Buddha) and his four attendant Buddhas.

### TREASURE MUSEUM 霊宝館

The **Treasure Museum** (Reihōkan; admission ¥600; 🕒 8.30am-5.30pm May-Oct, to 4.30pm Nov-Apr) has a compact display of Buddhist works of art, all collected in Kōya-san. There are some very fine statues, painted scrolls and mandalas.

### TOKUGAWA MAUSOLEUM 徳川家霊台

Built in 1643, the **Tokugawa Mausoleum** (Tokugawa-ke Reidai; admission without joint ticket ¥200; 🕒 8.30am-4.30pm) consists of two adjoining structures that serve as the mausoleums of Tokugawa Ieyasu (on the right) and Tokugawa Hidetada (on the left), the first and second Tokugawa shōguns respectively. They are ornately decorated, as with most structures associated with the Tokugawa shōguns. The mausoleum is not far from the Namikiri-fudō-mae bus stop.

### Festivals & Events

**Aoba Matsuri** Held on 15 June to celebrate the birth of Kōbō Daishi. Various traditional ceremonies are performed at the temples around town.

**Rōsoku Matsuri** (Candle Festival) This more interesting festival is held on 13 August in remembrance of departed souls. Thousands of mourners light candles along the approaches to Oku-no-in.

### Sleeping

There are more than 50 temples in Kōya-san offering *shukubō*. It's worth staying the night at a temple here, especially to try *shōjin-ryōri* (vegetarian food – no meat, fish, onions or garlic). Because *shukubō* is intended for religious pilgrims, in the morning you may be asked to participate in *o-inori* (Buddhist prayer services) or *o-tsutome* (work). While participation is not mandatory, taking part in these practices enables you to appreciate the daily workings of a Japanese temple.

Kōya-san's temples have recently formed a group to fix prices and now most lodgings start at ¥9500 per person including two meals. In practice, there is a lot of variation in prices, not just between temples, but also within temples, depending upon room and season.

You should make advance reservations by fax through the Kōya-san Tourist Association (p419) or directly with the temples. Even if you contact the temples directly, you will be asked to go to the Tourist Association to pick up a reservation slip-voucher.

**Kōya-san Youth Hostel** (☎ 56-3889; fax 56-3889; dm per person ¥3980; 🍷) This YH is a friendly and comfortable budget choice if the prices at the temples are out of your range. It's closed for parts of December and January. Call ahead for reservations.

**Haryō-in** (☎ 56-2702; fax 56-2936; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥7875; 🍷) This temple is an exception to the fixed-price rule and functions as a *kokumin-shukusha*.

**Ekō-in** (☎ 56-2514; fax 56-2891; ekoin@mbox.co.jp; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥10,000; 🍷) One of the nicer temples in town, Ekō-in is run by a friendly bunch of young monks and the rooms look onto beautiful gardens. This is also one of the two temples in town (the other is Kongōbu-ji) where you can study *zazen*. Call ahead to make arrangements.

**Henjōsan-in** (☎ 56-2434; fax 56-3641; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥10,000; 🍷) This is another good choice. The rooms here also have good garden views and are quite spacious. High-quality meals are served in the dining hall. The communal bathtubs here are huge and have nice views. And the flowers in the entryway are usually stunning.

Other good choices:

**Muryōkō-in** (☎ 56-2104; fax 56-4555; r per person incl 2 meals ¥9500; 🍷) A fine place with an interesting morning Buddhist ceremony.

(Continued on page 429)

(Continued from page 420)

**Rengejō-in** (☎ 56-2233; fax 56-4743; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥11,550; 🍷) An elegant establishment.

**Shōjōshin-in** (☎ 56-2006; fax 56-4770; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥9500; 🍷) Friendly spot.

### Eating

The culinary speciality of Kōya-san is *shōjin ryōri*, which you can sample at your temple lodgings. Two tasty tofu specialities are *goma-tōfu* (sesame tofu) and *kōya-tōfu* (local tofu). If you're just in town for the day, you can try *shōjin ryōri* at any of the temples that offer *shukubō*. Ask at the Kōya-san Tourist Association office (p419) and staff will call ahead to make reservations. Prices are fixed at ¥2500, ¥3500 and ¥5000, depending on how many courses you have.

There are various coffee shops and *shokudō* dotted around town where you can have breakfast or lunch (most close before dinnertime). There is also a supermarket in the centre of town.

**Maruman** (☎ 56-2049; noodle dishes from ¥470; 🕒 9am-5pm, closed irregularly) This simple *shokudō* is a good spot for lunch. All the standard lunch items are represented by plastic food models in the window. *Katsu-don* is ¥810 and noodle dishes start at ¥470. It's just west of the tourist office on the main street – look for the food models in the window and the phone out front (there's no English sign).

**Hanabishi Honten** (☎ 56-2236; 769 Kōyasan; lunch ¥2100-8400, dinner ¥2100-16,000; 🕒 11am-6pm, reservation required after 6pm, closed irregularly; E) If you fancy something a little nicer than a *shokudō*, you could try this slightly overpriced restaurant. At lunch, the *sankozen* set (a variety of vegetarian dishes; ¥2100) is a good choice. Look for the grey façade and the food models in the window (which will also help with ordering, if necessary).

### Getting There & Away

Unless you have a rental car, the best way to Kōya-san is by train. The Nankai-Dentetsu line has trains from Osaka's Namba station to Kōya-san. The trains terminate at Gokurakubashi, at the base of the mountain, where you board a funicular railway (five minutes, price included in train tickets) up to Kōya-san itself. From the cable-car station, you must take a bus into the centre of town, as walking is prohibited on the connecting road.

From Osaka (Namba station) you can travel directly on a Nankai-Dentetsu line *kyūko* to Kōya-san (¥1230, 82 minutes). For the slightly faster *tokkyū* service with reserved seats you pay a supplement (¥760).

From Wakayama you can go by rail on the JR Wakayama line to Hashimoto (¥820, one hour) and then continue on the Nankai-Dentetsu line to Gokurakubashi station (¥430, 38 minutes).

From Kyoto it's best to go via Namba in Osaka. From Nara you can take the JR line to Hashimoto, changing at Sakurai and Takadate en route.

### Getting Around

Buses run on three routes from the top cable-car station via the centre of town to Ichi-nohashi and Oku-no-in. The fare to the tourist office in the centre of town at Senjūin-bashi is ¥280. The fare to the final stop, Oku-no-in, is ¥400. An all-day bus pass (*ichi-nichi furee kippu*; ¥800) is available from the bus office outside the top cable-car station, but once you get into the centre of town you can reach most destinations quite easily on foot (including Oku-no-in, which takes about 30 minutes). Note that buses run infrequently, so you should make a note of the schedule before setting out to see the sights.

If you don't feel like walking, bicycles can be rented (per hour/day ¥400/1200) at the Kōya-san Tourist Association office (p419).

### SHIRAHAMA 白浜

☎ 0739 / pop 20,000

Shirahama, on the southwest coast of the Kii-hanto, is Kansai's leading beach-*onsen* resort and has all the trappings of a major Japanese tourist attraction – huge resort hotels, aquariums, amusement parks, the lot. However, because the Japanese like to do things according to the rules – and the rules say the only time you can swim in the ocean is from late July to the end of August – the place is almost deserted outside of the season and you'll have the place to yourself.

Shirahama has several good *onsen* and a great white-sand beach, and the rugged sea coast south of the town is stunning. This is a great place to visit in, say, June or September, and we've swum in the sea here as late as mid-October.

There's a **tourist information office** (☎ 42-2900; 🕒 9.30am-6pm) in the station, where you can pick up a map to the main sights and

accommodation. Since the station is a fair distance from the main sights, you'll need to take a bus (one way/all-day pass ¥310/980, 12 minutes to the beach) or rent a bicycle if you arrive by rail. The JR office at the station rents bicycles (¥500 per day).

## Sights & Activities

### ONSEN

In addition to its great beach, Shirahama has some of Japan's oldest developed *onsen* (they're even mentioned in the Nihon Shoki, one of Japan's earliest literary texts).

The **Sakino-yu Onsen** (崎の湯温泉; ☎ 42-3016; 1688 Shirahama-chō, Nishimuro-gun; admission ¥300; ☎ 7am-7pm Jul & Aug, 8am-5pm Sep-Jun, closed Wed) is sensational. It's built on a rocky point with great views of the Pacific Ocean (and you can climb down the rocks to cool off if the waves aren't too big). Come early in the day to beat the crowds. It's 1km south of the main beach; walk along the seafront road and look for the point below the big Hotel Seymor. The baths are segregated by sex.

Other baths include **Shirara-yu** (白良湯; ☎ 43-2614; 3313-1 Shirahama-chō, Nishimuro-gun; admission ¥300; ☎ 7am-11pm Wed-Mon, noon-10.30pm Tue), a pleasant bath right on the north end of Shirara-hama (the main beach), and **Murono-yu** (牟婁の湯; ☎ 42-0686; 1665 Shirahama-chō, Nishimuro-gun; admission ¥300; ☎ noon-10.30pm Thu, 7am-11pm Fri-Wed), a simple *onsen* not far from Sakino-yu, in front of Shirahama post office, on the way to Sakino-yu.

### SENJŌ-JIKI, SANDAN-HEKI & ISOGI-KŌEN

千畳敷・三段壁・いそぎ公園  
Just around the point south of the Sakino-yu Onsen are two of Shirahama's natural wonders: Senjō-jiki and Sandan-heki. **Senjō-jiki** (Thousand Tatami Mat Point) is a wildly eroded point with stratified layers that actually resemble the thousand tatami mats it is named for.

More impressive is the 50m cliff face of **Sandan-heki** (Three-Step Cliff), which drops away vertiginously into the sea (there are signs in Japanese warning off suicidal jumpers). While you can pay ¥1200 to take a lift down to a cave at the base of the cliff, it's better simply to clamber along the rocks to the north of the cliff – it's stunning, particularly when the big rollers are pounding in from the Pacific.

If you'd like to enjoy more rugged coastal scenery, walk south along the coast another 1km from Sandan-heki to **Isogi-kōen**, where

the crowds are likely to be thinner and the scenery just as impressive.

These attractions can be reached on foot or bicycle from the main beach in around 30 minutes, or you can take a bus from the station (¥430, 20 minutes to Senjō-jiki), from which you can walk to the others.

### SHIRARA-HAMA BEACH 白良浜

Shirara-hama, the town's main beach, is famous for its white sand. If it reminds you of Australia don't be surprised – the town had to import sand from down under after the original stuff washed away. This place is packed during July and August. In the off-peak season, it can actually be quite pleasant. The beach is hard to miss, as it dominates the western side of town.

The only drawback to this excellent beach is the loud music broadcast from loudspeakers during the summer months. The music is uniquely horrible and the only thing you can do to save yourself is to set up shop as far from the speakers as possible.

**Shirasuna-yu** (しらすな湯; ☎ 43-1126; 864 Shirahama-chō, Nishimuro-gun; ☎ 10am-7pm Tue-Sun) is a free open-air *onsen* off the boardwalk in the middle of the beach. You can soak here and then dash into the ocean to cool off – not a bad way to spend an afternoon.

## Sleeping

In Shirahama itself there are several *minshuku*, *kokumin-shukusha* and hotels of all shapes and sizes.

**Ohgigahama Youth Hostel** (扇ヶ浜ユースホステル; ☎ 22-3433; fax 22-3433; http://ohgigahama.web.infoseek.co.jp; 35-1 Shinyashiki-chō; dm ¥2625; ☎) This is a friendly, comfortable and cheap option if you don't mind staying outside the town of Shirahama. The hostel is 10 minutes on foot from Kii-Tanabe station, which is three stops north of Shirahama station on the JR Kisei line. No meals available.

**Minshuku Katsuya** (民宿かつ屋; ☎ 42-3814; fax 42-3817; 3118-5 Shirahama-chō, Nishimuro-gun; r per person exd meals ¥4000; ☎) Katsuya is the best-value *minshuku* in town and it's very central, only two minutes' walk from the main beach. It's built around a small Japanese garden and has its own natural *onsen* bath. There is red-and-white Japanese writing on the building and faint English on a small sign.

**Kokumin-shukusha Hotel Shirahama** (国民宿舎ホテルシラハマ; ☎ 42-3039; fax 42-4643; 813 Shira-

hama-chō, Nishimuro-gun; r per person incl 2 meals ¥6870; ☎) This is a good bet if Katsuya is full, and offers similar rates. It's a little dark and showing its age, but the rooms are spacious and there is an *onsen* bath. It's just off Miyuki-dōri, 100m past the post office towards the beach (look for a parking lot and the black-blue-red-and-white sign). The tourist information office at the station has maps to both places.

**Hotel Marquise** (ホテルマーキーズ; 42-4010, fax 43-2720; www.aikis.or.jp/~marquise/in Japanese; 1905 Yuzaki, Shirahama-chō; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥16,800; ☎) Very close to Sakino-yu Onsen, this hotel has excellent sea-view rooms, some with balconies. The Japanese-style rooms are spacious and clean. This hotel is popular with female guests and the ladies bath is larger than the mens (something of a rarity in Japan).

## Eating

There are many restaurants in the streets just in from the beach.

**Kiraku** (喜楽; ☎ 42-3916; 890-48 Shirahama-chō, Nishimuro-gun; ☎ 11am-2pm & 4-9pm Wed-Mon) There is nothing fancy about this friendly little *shokudō* that serves standard *teishoku* for around ¥800. There is a limited picture menu to help with ordering. It's about 5m in from Miyuki-dōri, on the beach side, close to a coin laundry (look for the plants out front).

**Gincho** (銀ちろ; ☎ 42-2514; Ginza-dōri, Shirahama-chō, Nishimuro-gun; set meals from ¥900; ☎ 11am-2pm & 4-9pm Thu-Tue) This is a more upmarket option, serving tempura and *unagi* set meals (there is a picture menu). It's on Hama-Ginza-dōri, directly across from a public foot bath (look for the traditional front and the black-and-white sign). The tourist information office at the station can provide a map to both places. Alternatively, ask for some directions at your accommodation.

If you'd like to self-cater, Sakae Supermarket is five minutes' walk from the main beach.

## Getting There & Away

Shirahama is on the JR Kii main line. There is a *tokkyū* train from Shin-Osaka station (¥5450, 132 minutes; *futsū*, ¥3260, 207 minutes). The same line also connects Shirahama to other cities on Kii-hantō such as Kushimoto, Nachi, Shingū and Wakayama City. A cheaper alternative is offered by **Meikō Bus** (☎ 0739-42-2112; www.13.ocn.ne.jp/~meikobus in Japanese; ☎ 9am-6pm), which runs buses between JR Osaka station

and Shirahama (one way/return ¥2700/5000, about 3½ hours).

## KUSHIMOTO, CAPE SHIONO-MISAKI & KII-ŌSHIMA 串本・潮岬・紀伊大島 ☎ 0735

The southern tip of Kii-hantō has some stunning coastal scenery. Shiono-misaki, connected to the mainland by a narrow isthmus, has some fine rocky vistas, but the real action is over on Kii-Ōshima, a rocky island accessible by a newly completed bridge.

The main attraction on Kii-Ōshima is the coastal cliffs at the eastern end of the island, which can be viewed from the park around **Kashino-zaki Lighthouse** (檜野崎灯台). Just before the park, you'll find the **Toruko-Kinenkan Museum** (トルコ記念館; ☎ 065-0628; 1025-25 Kashino, Kushimoto-chō, Higashimuro-gun; admission ¥250; ☎ 9am-5pm), which commemorates the sinking of the Turkish ship *Ertugrul* in 1890.

Backtracking about 1km towards the bridge, there are small English signs to the **Japan-US Memorial Museum** (日米修交記念館; ☎ 65-0099; 1033 Kashino, Kushimoto-chō, Nishimuro-gun; admission ¥250; ☎ 9am-4pm Tue-Sun), which commemorates the visit of the US ship *Lady Washington* in 1791, a full 62 years before Commodore Perry's much more famous landing in Yokohama in 1853. There is a lookout just beyond the museum from which you can see the magnificent **Umi-kongō** (海金剛) formations along the eastern point of the island.

If you're without your own transport, the best way to explore Kii-Ōshima is by renting a cycle at Kushimoto station (per four hours/full day ¥600/1000, discount for JR ticket holders), but be warned that there are a few big hills en route and these bikes are not performance vehicles. Otherwise, there are buses from the station, but take note of schedules as departures are few and far between.

**Misaki Lodge Youth Hostel** (みさきロッジユースホステル; ☎ 62-1474; fax 62-0529; 2864-1 Shionomisaki, Kushimoto-chō; per person dm exd meals/minshuku incl 2 meals from ¥4410/7350) is the best place to stay in the area. It's in a good position, on the southern side of the cape overlooking the Pacific. It's also a *minshuku*, offering large rooms and two meals. Take a Shiono-misaki-bound bus from Kushimoto station (20 minutes) and get off at Koroshio-mae.

Kushimoto is one hour from Shirahama by JR *tokkyū*, 3½ hours (¥6280) from Shin-Osaka.

*Futsū* services are significantly cheaper but take almost twice as long.

## NACHI & KII-KATSUURA

那智・紀伊勝浦

The Nachi and Kii-Katsuura area has several sights grouped around the sacred **Nachi-no-taki** (那智の滝), Japan's highest waterfall (133m). **Nachi Taisha** (那智大社), near the waterfall, was built in homage to the waterfall's *kami* (Shintō spirit god). It is one of the three great shrines of Kii-hantō, and it's worth the climb up the steep steps to get there. Next to the shrine, **Sanseiganto-ji** (山青岸渡寺) is a fine old temple that is well worth a look.

The most atmospheric approach to the falls and the shrine is the fantastic tree-lined arcade of **Daimon-zaka**. To get to Daimon-zaka, take a bus from Nachi or Kii-Katsuura stations, and get off at the Daimon-zaka stop (ask the bus driver to drop you at Daimon-zaka and he'll point you in the right direction from the stop). The way isn't marked in English, but it's roughly straight uphill just in from the road. From the bus stop to the shrine is roughly 800m, most of it uphill. It's fine in winter, but in summer you'll get soaked, so consider doing it in reverse (check bus schedules carefully before setting out).

Daimon-zaka takes you up to the steps at the base of the shrine. After visiting the shrine, walk down to the falls. At the base of the falls you will find **Nachiyama-oku-no-in** (那智山奥の院), where you can pay ¥200 to hike up to a lookout that affords a better view of the falls.

The **Nachi-no-Hi Matsuri** (Fire Festival) takes place at the falls on 14 July. During this lively event *mikoshi* are brought down from the mountain and met by groups bearing flaming torches.

Buses to the waterfall and shrine leave from Nachi station (¥470, 25 minutes) and from Kii-Katsuura station (¥600, 30 minutes). Buses to the Daimon-zaka stop leave from Nachi station (¥330, 15 minutes) and from Kii-Katsuura station (¥410, 20 minutes).

## Sleeping

There are a few places to stay near Nachi station and Kii-Katsuura station.

**Hotel Ura-Shima** (ホテル浦島; ☎ 0735-52-1011; www.hotelurashima.co.jp in Japanese; per person from ¥11,235 incl 2 meals; ♿) Laying claim to an entire peninsula in Katsuura-wan, this vast hotel-*onsen*

complex is either a lot of fun or an overpriced tourist trap, depending upon your mood. It's got two fantastic baths built into caves looking out over the Pacific, and two others located high atop the peninsula, reached by the longest escalator we've ever seen – we half expected to come out on the South Col of Everest. The fun of the baths is offset by uninspiring food, ageing rooms, and the noisy announcements in the hallways.

## Getting There & Away

Nachi and Kii-Katsuura (the stations are only two stops apart) can be reached by JR Kii main line trains from Shin-Osaka station (*tokkyū*, ¥6700, 216 minutes; *futsū*, ¥4310, 332 minutes) and from Nagoya station (*tokkyū*, ¥7510, 213 minutes; *futsū*, ¥3920, 327 minutes). *Futsū* are significantly cheaper but take almost twice as long.

## SHINGŪ 新宮

☎ 0735 / pop 34,000

Shingū functions as a useful transport hub for access to the **Kumano Sanzan**, the three major Shintō shrines of the Kii-hantō. The three shrines are Kumano Hayatama Taisha, Kumano Hongū Taisha (opposite) and Nachi Taisha (left).

There's a helpful **information office** (☎ 22-2840; ♿ 9am-5pm) at the station.

**Kumano Hayatama Taisha** (熊野速玉大社) is actually in Shingū itself. It's a 15-minute walk northwest of Shingū station. The shrine's **Boat Race Festival** takes place on 16 October. Another shrine worth looking at is **Kamikura-jinja** (神倉神社), which is famous for its **Otō Matsuri** (6 February), during which more than 1000 people carrying torches ascend the slope to the shrine. The shrine is a 15-minute walk west of the station.

**Station Hotel Shingū** (ステーションホテル新宮; ☎ 21-2200; fax 21-1067; station@rifnet.or.jp; s/d/tw from ¥4900/9000/10,000; ♿), a small business hotel, has decent Western-style rooms. It's 200m southeast of the station. The whitish building is visible from outside Shingū station. Ask for a room in the *shinkan* (new wing).

A two-minute walk north of the station, **Hase Ryokan** (長谷旅館; ☎ 22-2185; fax 21-6677; r per person with 2 meals ¥6300/7350; ♿) is a comfortable and reasonable choice for those who prefer Japanese-style accommodation. Call from the station and someone will collect you, or ask at the information office for a map.

There are several restaurants near the station. For something nicer, get the folks at the information office to draw you a map to **Ajino-sankin** (味のさんきん; ☎ 22-2373; sashimi around ¥1500; ♿ 11am-1.30pm & 5.30-9.30pm Mon-Sat), which offers excellent sets of locally caught sashimi. It's about a 20-minute walk (approximately 2km) from the station. It has no English menu, however there are some pictures on the menu. Try the *sashimi teishoku* (¥1200). Look for the relatively large white signboard. It is located on the 1st floor of a business hotel.

The JR Kii main line connects Shingū with Nagoya station (*tokkyū*, ¥6990, three hours) and Shin-Osaka station (*tokkyū*, ¥6810, four hours).

There are buses between Shingū and Hongū, about half of which make a loop of the three surrounding *onsen* (Watarase, Yunomine and Kawa-yu). See under Hongū (below) for details.

## HONGŪ 本宮

Hongū itself isn't particularly interesting but it makes a good starting point for the *onsen* nearby. Hongū is also home to **Kumano Hongū Taisha** (熊野本宮大社), one of the three famous shrines of the Kumano Sanzan. The shrine is close to the Ōmiya Taisha-mae bus stop (the buses listed in this section stop there).

Buses leave for Hongū from JR Gojō station and Kintetsu Yamato-yagi station in the north (¥4000, 283 minutes), Kii-Tanabe in the west (¥2000, two hours) and Shingū in the southeast (¥1500, 80 minutes). Shingū is the most convenient of these three access points (departures are most frequent from there). Most Hongū buses also stop at Kawa-yu, Watarase and Yunomine *onsen* (in that order), but be sure to ask before boarding. Keep in mind that departures are few in any direction, so jot down the times and plan accordingly.

## YUNOMINE, WATARASE & KAWA-YU ONSEN

☎ 0735

These three *onsen* are among the best in all of Kansai. Because each has its own distinct character, it's worth doing a circuit of all three. There are several ryokan and *minshuku* in the area, but if you are on a tight budget it's possible to camp on the riverbanks above and below Kumano Hongū Taisha. See Hongū (above) for transport details.

Note that you can walk between the three *onsen* in this section relatively easily. The tunnel at the west end of the village at Kawa-yu connects to Watarase Onsen (the total journey is a little less than 1km). From Watarase Onsen, it's about 3km west along Rte 311 to reach Yunomine.

## Yunomine Onsen 湯峰温泉

The town of Yunomine is nestled around a narrow river in a wooded valley. Most of the town's *onsen* are contained inside ryokan or *minshuku* but charming little **Tsubo-yu Onsen** (つぼ湯温泉; admission ¥250; ♿ 6am-9.30pm) is open to all. It's right in the middle of town, inside a tiny wooden shack built on an island in the river. Buy a ticket at the *sentō* next to **Tōkō-ji** (東光寺), the temple in the middle of town. The *sentō* itself is open the same hours as the *onsen* and entry is ¥300; of the two baths at the *sentō*, we suggest the *kusuri-yu* (medicine water; ¥380), which is 100% pure hot-spring water.

While you're at Yunomine, try your hand at cooking some *onsen tamago* – eggs boiled in the hot water of an *onsen*. There is a pool of hot-spring water just downstream from Tsubo-yu for cooking. The shop across from the temple sells bags of five eggs for ¥200. Put them in the water before you enter the bath and they should be cooked by the time you get out.

## SLEEPING

Yunomine has plenty of *minshuku* and ryokan for you to choose from.

**Minshuku Yunotanisō** (民宿湯の谷荘; ☎ 42-1620; r per person incl 2 meals ¥7500; ♿) At the upper end of the village, this simple *minshuku* is exactly what a *minshuku* should be: simple, clean and welcoming. The food is very good and there's an excellent *onsen* bath on the premises.

**Ryokan Yoshino-ya** (旅館よしのや; ☎ 42-0101; r per person incl 2 meals ¥8550; ♿) Located very close to Tsubo-yu, this is a slightly more upscale place with a lovely *rotemburo*. It's fairly new and the location can't be beat. Like Yunotanisō, it's a friendly and well-run spot.

## Kawa-yu Onsen 川湯温泉

Kawa-yu Onsen is a natural wonder, where geothermally heated water percolates up through the gravel banks of the river that runs through the middle of the town. You can make your

own private bath here by digging out some of the stones and letting the hole fill with hot water; you can then spend the rest of the day jumping back and forth between the bath and the cool waters of the river. Admission is free and the best spots along the river are in front of Fujiya ryokan. We suggest bringing a bathing suit unless you fancy putting on a 'naked *gaijin*' show for the whole town.

In the winter, from 1 December to 28 February, bulldozers are used to turn the river into a giant *rotemburo*. Known as the **Sennin Buro** (仙人風呂; admission free; ☎ 24hr), the name is a play on the word for 'thousand', a reference to the fact that you could just about squeeze 1000 bathers into this open-air tub. It's a lot of fun and you can dazzle locals by jumping into the main flow of the river to cool off.

#### SLEEPING

**Pension Ashita-no-Mori** (ペンションあしたの森; ☎ 42-1525; fax 42-1333; ashitanomori-kawayu@

za.ztv.ne.jp; r per person incl 2 meals ¥7500; ☎) This is in a pleasant wooden building with a good riverside location. Rooms are adequate in size and well maintained. It's got its own private *onsen* bath. Inside baths are all *onsen* as well.

**Fujiya** (富士屋; ☎ 42-0007; fax 42-1115; www.fujiya.co.jp/english/index.html; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥15,900; ☎) Next door, this is a more upmarket ryokan with tasteful rooms: spacious, clean and tastefully decorated. For a very civilised place to stay after a day in the river baths, this is the spot. Needless to say, it's got its own private *onsen* bath as well.

#### Watarase Onsen 渡瀬温泉

This *onsen* (admission ¥700; ☎ 6am-9.30pm) is built around a bend in the river directly between Yunomine Onsen and Kawa-yu Onsen. It's not as interesting as its neighbours, but does boast a nice collection of *rotemburo*. Baths get progressively cooler as you work your way out from the inside bath. Buy tickets from the

machine outside the change room. The *onsen* itself has a restaurant, but you'll find better choices at the adjoining Watarase Onsen Sasa-yuri Hotel (わたらせ温泉ホテルささゆり), which has a restaurant with a picture menu.

## ISE-SHIMA 伊勢志摩

The Ise-Shima region, on Mie-ken's Shima-hantō, is most famous for Ise-jingū, Japan's most sacred Shintō shrine. The shrine is located in Ise-shi, the main city of the region. Ise-Shima also encompasses the tourist mecca of Toba and some pleasant coastal scenery around Kashikojima and Goza. Ise-Shima is easily reached from Nagoya, Kyoto or Osaka and makes a good two-day trip from any of these cities.

#### ISE 伊勢

☎ 0596 / pop 137,000

Although the city of Ise-shi is rather drab, it's worth making the trip here to visit the spectacular Ise-jingū. This is arguably Japan's most impressive shrine; its only rival to this claim is Nikkō's Tōshō-gū, which is as gaudy as Ise-jingū is austere.

#### Sights & Activities

If you have some time to kill in town after visiting the shrines, take a stroll down atmospheric **Kawasaki Kaiwai** (河崎界隈), a street lined with traditional Japanese houses and shops. It's a little tricky to find; start at the Ise City Hotel (see p437), cross the street, go down the side street next to Eddy's Supermarket (yes, that's the name), and take a left down the street just before the canal; Kawasaki Kaiwai parallels this canal, on its west side.

#### ISE-JINGŪ 伊勢神宮

Dating back to the 3rd century, Ise-jingū is the most venerated Shintō **shrine** (admission free; ☎ sunrise-sunset) in Japan. Shintō tradition has dictated for centuries that the shrine buildings be replaced every 20 years with exact imitations built on adjacent sites according to ancient techniques – no nails, only wooden dowels and interlocking joints.

Upon completion of the new buildings, the god of the shrine is ritually transferred to its new home in the Sengū No Gi ceremony, first witnessed by Western eyes in 1953. The wood from the old shrine is then used to reconstruct

the torii at the shrine's entrance or is sent to shrines around Japan for use in rebuilding their structures. The present buildings were rebuilt in 1993 (for the 61st time) at a cost exceeding ¥5 billion. They'll next be rebuilt in 2013.

You may be surprised to discover that the main shrine buildings are almost completely hidden from view behind wooden fences. Only members of the imperial family and certain shrine priests are allowed to enter the sacred inner sanctum. This is unfortunate, as the buildings are stunning examples of pre-Buddhist Japanese architecture. Don't despair, though, as determined neck-craning over fences allows a decent view of the upper parts of the buildings. You can also get a good idea of the shrine's architecture by looking at any of the lesser shrines nearby, which are exact replicas built on a smaller scale.

There are two parts to the shrine, **Gekū** (Outer Shrine) and **Naikū** (Inner Shrine). The former is an easy 15-minute walk from Ise-shi station; the latter is accessible by bus from the station or from the stop outside Gekū (below). If you only have time to visit one of the shrines, Naikū is the more impressive of the two.

Smoking is prohibited throughout the grounds of both shrines and photography is forbidden around the main halls of both shrines.

#### Gekū 外宮

The Outer Shrine dates from the 5th century and enshrines the god of food, clothing and housing, Toyouke-no-Ōkami. Daily offerings of rice are made by shrine priests to the goddess, who is charged with providing food to Amaterasu-Ōmikami, the goddess enshrined in the Naikū. A stall at the entrance to the shrine provides a leaflet in English with a map.

The main shrine building here is the Goshōden, which is about 10 minutes' walk from the entrance to the shrine. Across the river from the Goshōden, you'll find three smaller shrines that are worth a look (and are usually less crowded).

From Ise-shi station or Uji-Yamada station it's a 12-minute walk down the main street to the shrine entrance.

#### Naikū 内宮

The Inner Shrine is thought to date from the 3rd century and enshrines the sun goddess,

### THE KUMANO KODŌ, KII-HANTŌ'S ANCIENT PILGRIMAGE ROUTE & NEWEST WORLD HERITAGE SITE

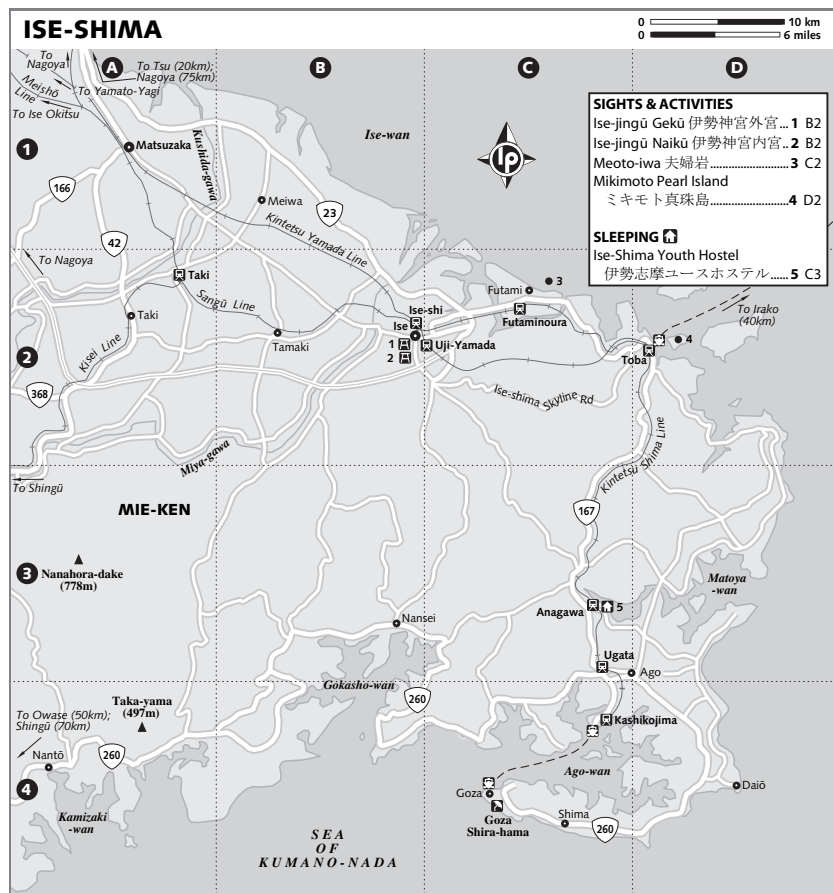
From the earliest times, the Japanese believed the wilds of the Kii-hantō to be inhabited by *kami*, Shinto deities. Three of the most powerful deities of the region are enshrined in three famous shrines: Hongū Taisha in Hongū, Hayatama Taisha in Shingū and Nachi Taisha in Nachi Katsura, all of which are located in present-day Wakayama-ken. Together they are known as the Kumano Sansha – the three shrines of Kumano.

Japan's early emperors made regular pilgrimages to these shrines to petition the deities for power, prosperity and health. The route they followed from Kyoto, via Osaka, Kii Tanabe and over the inner mountains of Wakayama, is known today as the Kumano Kodō – the Old Road of Kumano. The retired emperor Go Shirakawa Jōko performed the pilgrimage no less than 33 times each time with an entourage of about 1000 retainers and 200 horses. Over time, the popularity of this pilgrimage spread from nobles to common folk and yamabushi priests (wandering mountain ascetics). Indeed, it became so popular that the route was sometimes referred to as the Ari Kumano Mōde – the Kumano Ants Pilgrimage. Eventually, the way was paved with stones and graded with well-laid flagstone steps.

In 2004, the 'Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range' were granted Unesco World Heritage site status. This new World Heritage site includes the Kumano Kodō and other traditional pilgrimage routes in Wakayama-ken, Mie-ken and Nara-ken. Local governments are now madly scrambling to exploit the tourist potential that this new status confers on their districts, and every footpath and flagstone in sight is being trumpeted as part of the famous Kumano Kodō.

Despite this, plenty of the actual, original route remains passable. While it's possible to walk all the way from Kii Tanabe on the west coast of Wakayama to Nachi Taisha shrine on the east coast, it's better to start from Hongū. From there, it's a two-day hike over mountainous terrain to the shrine at Nachi, overlooking beautiful Nachi falls. There is a private camping ground midway, but many hikers opt to camp along the route at spots of their own choosing. Additional information about the Kumano Kodō is available from the Wakayama Tourist Board.

If you just want a quick taste of the route, combined with a visit to one of the three main shrines, we recommend the incredibly atmospheric Daimon-zaka approach to Nachi Taisha.



Amaterasu-Ōmikami, who is considered the ancestral goddess of the imperial family and the guardian deity of the Japanese nation. Naikū is held in even higher reverence than Gekū because it houses the sacred mirror of the emperor, one of the three imperial regalia (the other two are the sacred beads and the sacred sword).

A stall just before the entrance to the shrine provides the same English leaflet given out at Gekū. Next to this stall is the Uji-bashi, which leads over the crystal-clear Isuzu-gawa into the shrine. One path leads to the right and passes Mitarashi, a place for pilgrims to purify themselves in the river before entering the shrine.

The path continues along an avenue lined with towering cryptomeria trees to the

Goshōden, the main shrine building. As at Gekū, you can only catch a glimpse of the top of the structure here, as four rows of wooden fences obstruct the view. If you're tempted to jump the fence when nobody's around, think again – they're watching you on closed-circuit TV cameras not so cleverly disguised as trees!

A better view of the shrine can be had by walking around the shrine to the left (north) and standing near the Mishinenomikura, the sacred rice storehouse that is No 20 on the shrine map. Here, you can see a large section of the shrine, and on sunny days the cypress wood of the shrine gleams almost as brightly as the gold tips of its roof beams.

To get to Naikū, take bus 51 or 55 from bus stop 11 outside Ise-shi station or the stop

on the main road in front of Gekū (¥410, 12 minutes). Note that bus stop 11 is about 100m past the main bus stop outside Ise-shi station (walk south on the main street). Get off at the Naikū-mae stop. From Naikū there are buses back to Ise-shi station via Gekū (¥410, 18 minutes from bus stop 2). Alternatively, a taxi between Ise-shi station/Gekū and Naikū costs ¥2000 to ¥2500.

## Festivals & Events

Since Ise-jingu is Japan's most sacred shrine, it's not surprising that it's also a favourite destination for *hatsu-mōde* (first shrine visit of the new year). Most of the action takes place in the first three days of the year, when millions of worshippers pack the area and accommodation is booked out for months in advance.

The **Kagurai-sai Matsuri**, celebrated on 5 and 6 April, is a good chance to see performances of *kagura* (sacred dance), *bugaku*, *nō* and Shintō music.

## Sleeping

**Ise City Hotel** (伊勢シティホテル; ☎ 28-2111; fax 28-1058; 1-11-31 Fukiage; s/tw ¥6510/13,650; ♾) This is a good business hotel with small, clean rooms and a convenient location less than 10 minutes' walk from the station. Some staff members speak a bit of English. To get there from Ise-shi station, take a left (east) outside the station, walk past a JTB travel agency, take a left at the first traffic light, and cross the tracks. You'll see it on the left.

**Hoshide-kan** (星出館; ☎ 28-2377; fax 27-2830; 2-15-2 Kawasaki; r per person incl/excl 2 meals ¥7500/5000; ♾) Also in Ise-shi, this is a quaint wooden ryokan with some nice traditional touches. Go straight past Ise City Hotel, and it's on the right (there is a small English sign). It's about 400m from the rail tracks.

**Ise-Shima Youth Hostel** (伊勢志摩ユースホステル; ☎ 0599-55-0226; fax 0599-55-3319; ise@jyh.gr.jp; 1219-82 Anagawa, Isobe-chō; r per person incl breakfast from ¥4620; ♾) Built on a hill overlooking an attractive bay, this is a great place to stay for budget travellers. It's close to Anagawa station on the Kintetsu line south of Ise-shi (only *futsū* trains stop). Walk east out of the station along the waterfront road; it's uphill on the right.

## Eating & Drinking

**Daiki** (大善; ☎ 28-0281; meals from ¥1500; ☎ 11am-9pm) Our favourite place to eat in Ise-shi bills itself

as 'Japan's most famous restaurant'. Bluff and bluster aside, it's a great place to sample seafood, including *ise-ebi* (Japanese lobsters), served as set meals for ¥5000; ask for the *ise-ebi teishoku* and specify *yaki* (grilled), *niita* (boiled) or *sashimi* (raw). Simpler meals include tempura *teishoku* (tempura set meal; ¥1500). It's outside and to the right of Uji-Yamada station; there's a small English sign reading 'Kappo Daiki'.

**Kawasaki-gura** (河崎蔵; ☎ 29-1872; 2-13-12 Kawasaki; ☎ 10am-late Thu-Mon) You'll find more choices along the atmospheric Kawasaki Kaiwai street. This is a good place for a quick pick-me-up. Located inside an old *machiya*, this coffee shop serves good coffee (¥450) and rare tofu cheese-cake (¥450). It's 300m from the southern end of the street (the station end). Look for the stones and wooden bench on the right; it's next to a car park.

**Tamaya** (球家; ☎ 24-0105; 2-17-23 Kawasaki; ☎ 7pm-midnight, closed Mon; E) Nearby, you'll find an excellent bar-restaurant in an old *kura*. This is a friendly spot for a drink or a light meal. It's just down a narrow street off Kawasaki Kaiwai on the left as you walk north (look for a white-and-red sign on a utility pole that reads 'Tamaya The Lounge').

At Naikū you'll find plenty of good restaurants in the Okage-yokochō Arcade, just outside the shrine (when walking from the bus stop towards the shrine, look to the left and you will see the covered arcade).

In the arcade **Nikōdōshiten** (二光堂支店; ☎ 24-4409; 19 Ujiimazaike-chō; ☎ 11am-4pm, closed Thu) is a good place to try some of the local specialities in a rough, roadhouse atmosphere. *Ise-udon* (thick noodles in a dark broth; small/large bowl ¥420/570) is the speciality. For a bigger meal, try the *ise-udon teishoku* (*ise-udon* with rice and side dishes; ¥1000). The restaurant is 200m from the shrine end of the arcade, on the right in a three-storey building (look inside for the simple interior). It's 100m north of the arcade entrance. If this doesn't suit, there are many choices along the arcade, and most display food models out front to help you choose.

## Getting There & Away

There are rail connections between Ise-shi and Nagoya, Osaka and Kyoto on both the JR and the Kintetsu lines. For those without a Japan Rail Pass, the Kintetsu line is by far the most convenient way to go. Note that there are two stations in Ise: Ise-shi station and Uji-Yamada station. They're only a few hundred metres

apart and most trains stop at both. We recommend using Ise-shi station for the destinations and accommodation described in this section.

Kintetsu fares and travel times to/from Ise-shi include Nagoya (*tokkyū*, ¥2690, 81 minutes), Osaka (Uehonmachi or Namba stations, *tokkyū*, ¥3030, 106 minutes) and Kyoto (*tokkyū*, ¥3520, 123 minutes).

### FUTAMI 二見

The attractions here are the **Meoto-iwa** (Wedded Rocks). These two rocks are considered to be male and female and have been joined in matrimony by *shimenawa* (sacred ropes), which are renewed each year in a festival on 5 January. The rocks are 1.5km from the station. The shrine is on the shore opposite the rocks. Futami is reached from Ise by JR (*futsū*, ¥200, 10 minutes). Get off at Futaminoura station.

### TOBA 鳥羽

The serrated coast of the Shima-hantō is perfect for the cultivation of pearls and Toba is one of the main centres of Japan's pearl industry. It's also a popular spot for city folk to soak up a bit of coastal ambience. The two main attractions here are Toba Aquarium and Mikimoto Pearl Island. There's no denying that Toba is touristy, but it can be a lot of fun if you're in the mood.

**Toba Aquarium** (鳥羽水族館; Toba Suizoku-kan; ☎ 0599-25-2555; 3-3-6 Toba; admission ¥2400; 🕒 9am-5pm) has some interesting fish and marine mammal displays and some good shows. It would make a good destination for those with children or if the rain puts a damper on outdoor activities. It's about 10 minutes' walk southeast of the Kintetsu or JR Toba stations; it's on the seafloor, across the main road (Rte 42).

**Mikimoto Pearl Island** (ミキモト真珠島; ☎ 0599-25-2028; 1-7-1 Toba; admission ¥1500; 🕒 9am-4.30pm) is a monument to Kokichi Michimoto, who devoted his life to producing cultured pearls. The demonstration halls show all the oyster tricks from growing and seeding to selecting, drilling and threading the finished product.

There is also a room from which you can watch a boat drop off the *ama* (women pearl divers) in their white outfits. There are several thousand *ama* operating in these areas – but despite efforts by regional tourist organisations to make you think they're after pearls, they are actually after shellfish or seaweed. The island is across a bridge about five minutes' walk south-east of Kintetsu or JR Toba stations.

**Ise-wan Ferry Co Ltd** (☎ 0599-26-3335; www.isewanferry.co.jp/index1.htm) has ferry connections from Toba-ko port to Irako on Atsumi-hantō in Aichi-ken (¥1500, 55 minutes). Boats leave from Ise-wan ferry terminal. Toba can be reached from Ise in 16 minutes by both the Kintetsu line (*kyūkō*, ¥320) or the JR line (*futsū*, ¥230). Toba is the terminus of the JR line; the Kintetsu line also stops here (and continues all the way south to Kashikojima).

### AGO-WAN, KASHIKOJIMA & GOZA

英虞湾・賢島・御座

A short train ride south of Ise-shi, Ago-wan is a scenic bay festooned with islands and inlets. Kashikojima, the main island in the bay, is the terminus of the Kintetsu line. From Ise-shi station, a *futsū* costs ¥670 and takes about 56 minutes. There is no JR service. Kashikojima itself is probably of little interest to foreign travellers as it is dominated by large resort hotels, but it's the jumping-off point for exploration of the bay.

Those in search of peace and quiet might want to take a ferry to Goza on the other side of the bay (¥600, 25 minutes). The ferry terminal is right outside Kashikojima station (buy your tickets from the Kinki Kankōsen office near the terminal). The ride is a good way to see the sights in the bay. There are also sightseeing boats that do a loop around the bay for ¥1500.

Goza is a sleepy fishing community with a fine white-sand beach, Goza Shirahama. There are small signs in English from the ferry pier to the beach; just follow the main road over the hill and across the peninsula. The beach is mobbed in late July and early August but almost deserted at other times.

If you'd like to stay in Goza, there are plenty of *minshuku*, some of which close down outside of summer. **Shiojisō** (潮路荘; ☎ 0599-88-3232; fax 0599-88-3233; Goza Shirahama Kaigan; r per person incl 2 meals from ¥7500), just off the beach (look for the sign reading 'Marine Lodge Shiojisō' in English), is one of the better *minshuku*.

### SOUTH OF KASHIKOJIMA 賢島以南

If you want to continue down the Kii-hantō from here, backtrack to Ise-shi and take the JR line to Taki and switch to the JR Kisei main line. This line crosses from Mie-ken into Wakayama-ken and continues down to Shingū on its way round Kii-hantō, finally ending up in Osaka's Tennō-ji station.

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