

A walk in the ancients' shoes

Yamanobe Road 山の辺の道

A road running north and south along the eastern edge of the Nara Basin, connecting Mount Miwa in Sakurai City and Mount Kasuga in Nara City.

It is said to be "the oldest road in Japan" because it is the oldest road to be mentioned in the Chronicles of Japan.

It is a road of about 10 km in length from Omiwa Jinja Shrine in Sakurai City to Isonokami Jingu Shrine in Tenri City, and is known as a particularly beautiful hiking course.

Mountains rise gently in the east, and the entire Nara Basin can be seen to the west.

Walking along a path through rice fields and orchards, visitors will come across a number of shrines and ancient burial mounds. The scenery along the way is mentioned in many Waka (Japanese poems), and the landscape that impressed people of the past enough to write of it in poems still remains to this day.

(Tips on walking)

Most of the roads are limited to pedestrians, and cars are not allowed.

As hills are uncommon, you can safely walk without special gear.

There are drink vending machines along the way.

Although uncommon, there are also restaurants.

Due to their low numbers, we suggest you take along something to eat and snack at locations with a good view.

Though the total distance is 16km, one day is not enough time to see the full route.

We recommend going from Sakurai station,

then walking along the Yamanobe Road to Yanagimoto station.





Worship Hall 拝殿

Reconstructed in 1664 Important Cultural Property

Generally, at a shrine, the building where the object of worship (believed to contain a deity itself) is supposed to rest is called the “inner shrine” (Honden).

Prayers are offered from a “worship hall” building towards the inner shrine.

Usually, visitors come to pray right in front of the offertory box located at the entrance of the worship hall.

However, since Omiwa Jinja Shrine reveres Mount Miwa itself as a deity, there is no inner shrine. By revering nature itself as a deity, it retains the shape of Shinto at its inception.



A fairytale setting with a solemn atmosphere

Omiwa Jinja Shrine 大神神社

Construction predates historical record

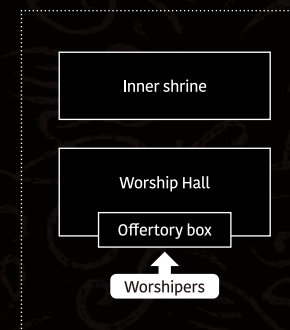
A traditional shrine that appears many times in ancient myths.

It is said to be the oldest shrine in Japan. Mount Miwa was worshiped as a deity, and still retains this form of primitive Shintoism.

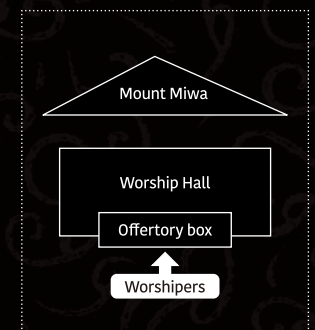
The shrine's grounds are large, with several places to see dotting the foot of Mount Miwa.

It is a good idea to take your time to visit each location while soaking in the power of Mount Miwa and the faith of the common people, unchanged for thousands of years.

General Shrines



Omiwa Jinja Shrine





Mount Miwa 三輪山

Mount Miwa has never been subject to logging due to its sacred status, and retains its forests untouched from thousands of years in the past. Visitors can climb the mountain. The journey takes about one hour each way. As the mountain is a sacred site, eating, drinking, photography, and using mobile phones are prohibited. Some worshipers climb barefoot to better feel the power of the mountain. Foreigners can climb the mountain under the following conditions.



If accompanied by a Japanese guide or able to speak Japanese fluently.
If carrying a cell phone with regular Japanese service.



Mitsutorii (Three Unified Torii) ミツ鳥居

This Torii archway is an important point which separates the divine Mount Miwa and the worship hall. As the object which takes the role of the inner shrine, it is now viewed as sacred itself. A Mitsutorii is also called "Miwa Torii"; a unique Torii symbolizing the primitive faith of Omiwa Jinja Shrine.



Eggs and Sake

In the "Nihon Shoki" (written 720, the oldest chronicles of Japan's history), there is a tale that the deity of Omiwa Jinja Shrine - Omononushi - once appeared here in the form of a snake. Accordingly, offerings of Sake and chicken's eggs are placed around the grounds, as they are believed to be the snake's favorite foods.



Omiwa Forest Observatory 大美和の杜展望台

This observatory is situated at a high point that offers a beautiful view of mountains and the 32.2m Torii that rises over Sakurai Town. The three seemingly-small hills to the left are Mount Miminashi, Mount Unebi, and Mount Kagu from right to left. These three together are called the "Yamato Sanzan" (meaning Yamato three mountains) and are written in poems (tanka) from more than 1000 years ago. To quote one verse,

"Mount Kagu was fond of Mount Unebi
and fought with Mount Miminashi.
As it has been since the age of deities,
even now men fight over a single woman."

The beautiful sunset here is perfect for contemplating ancient times.

Access	Train 8 minutes from Sakurai Station Fare ¥140		
	JR Sakurai Station	Bound for Nara 3 minutes	Miwa Station
Sightseeing duration	2 hours - 4 hours		
Address	1422 Miwa Sakurai, Nara Prefecture		
Tel	0744-42-6633		

Origin of Sake Brewing — Birthplace of Sake Brewing —

During the reign of Emperor Sujin, 10th emperor of Japan (around the 3rd century), a sickness fell upon the land. One night, Omononushi - deity of Omiwa Jinja Shrine - appeared in the troubled emperor's dreams to command him to engage in "reverential worship". The emperor had Takahashiikuhi-no-Mikoto brew a batch of sake of the highest order, and it was then presented to the deity as an offering. With that, the sickness abated, leaving the land in peace. Omononushi had accepted their offering of hospitality. Owing to these events, Takahashiikuhi-no-Mikoto was enshrined as the deity of brewers at Ikuhi Jinja Shrine, an auxiliary shrine at Omiwa Jinja Shrine. From ancient times and continuing even now, the connection between Omiwa Jinja Shrine and sake runs deep. Sake offered to the deities is sometimes called "miwa", and Makura kotoba (the poetic epithets used in Japanese ancient poems) for the word "miwa" is called "umazake", meaning "delicious sake".



Sake-Matsuri November 14

Held every year around the time sake brewing begins across Japan, this festival offers prayers to the shrine's deity. This deity has been worshiped with reverence since ancient times as the god of brewing, and people pray for safety and security in the brewing of the new sake. Breweries and sake makers from across Japan come to attend this ceremony. At the festival, four miko ("shrine maidens") perform a kagura (sacred theatrical dance) called "Umazake-miwa-no-mai," created from a song sung when Takahashiikuhi-no-Mikoto presented the divine sake to the Emperor Sujin. Other events within the shrine grounds include exhibitions of Sake by famous breweries from across the country as well as complimentary cask sake. The day before, the massive o-sugidama ("great cedar spheres") hanging in the outer shrine and worship hall are taken down and replaced with fresh green ones. These spheres weigh around 200 kg and measure 1.5 m in diameter, and are the symbol of the deity of brewers. After the festival, Japanese breweries and sake makers nationwide are given shirushi-no-sugidama ("marking cedar spheres," a sake brewery symbol) and red gohei (staves decorated with strips of paper acting as talismans for safety in brewing).

Origin of Somen Noodles

— Birthplace of Somen —

Somen, a cool and delicate food

Many foreigners are familiar with soba, udon and ramen noodles, but very few foreigners know about Somen. Somen is a white noodle made from wheat flour. It is similar to pasta, but has a lower diameter of less than 1.3mm. It is usually soaked in ice water and eaten cool. The noodles themselves do not have a flavor. One simply dips them in the sauce and enjoys the cool noodles sliding down the throat. Sometimes it is put into a hot soup just like udon. This is called “nyumen” . It is delicious whether cold or warm. It is hard to find anywhere other than Miwa, so try it out there!



Miwa, the birthplace of Somen

Tales from more than 1200 years ago tell us that Somen was made for the first time by a clan of Shinto priests who were the descendants of the Deity of Omiwa. The method of making Somen spread among the common people.

Somen noodles are still made with traditional manufacturing methods. Scenes of Somen drying are now renowned as a part of winter. Thinner noodles require more polished technique, and thus they are more expensive. Also, longer aging of noodles grants better texture, making aged noodles higher in quality.

Production method

1



Mix flour with water and salt and knead.

2



Stretch the dough into fat strings.

3



Add oil and continue to stretch into strings.

4



Drape the noodles between two poles.

5



Hang the poles with draped noodles someplace high.

6



Take care to prevent the noodles from sticking together, and stretch them to two meters in length.

7



Dry them in the sun.

8



Cut the noodles to length.

9



Pack into wooden boxes. That's it!



Sai Jinja Shrine 狭井神社

This Shrine is known as a shrine of healing, and there is a well behind the left side of the worship hall. The water that gushes from it has been called "medicinal water" from olden days, and it is said that drinking it heals sickness. Even today, many pharmaceutical companies place great faith in it. Many of the lanterns along the approach were donated by pharmaceutical companies. The custom of using medicinal water when first making medicines also lingers today.



Genpian 玄賓庵

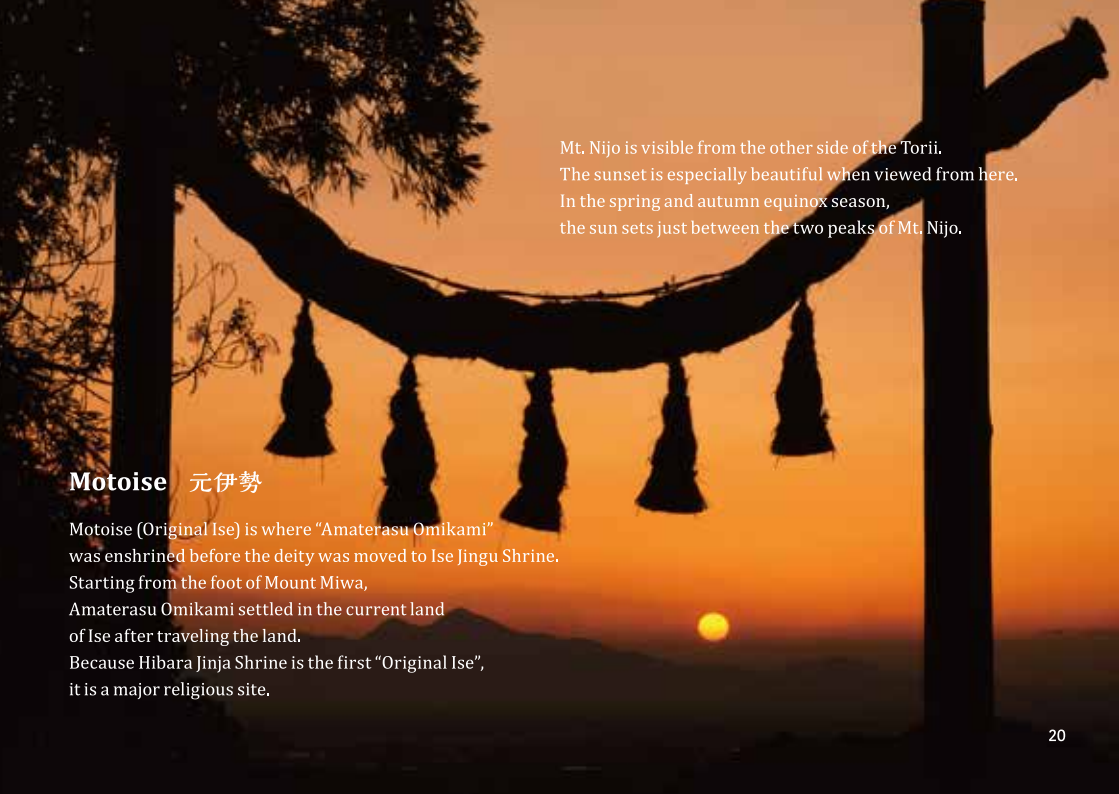
Established in 782

The high monk Genpin served the emperor once before living here in rejection of earthly life. It is a serene temple isolated from the world, and visitors will immediately see why he built a hermitage here. The garden is beautiful, though small. It also features a statue of Fudo Myoo which is an important cultural property.

Hibara Jinja Shrine 桧原神社

Date of construction unknown

Within the shrine grounds - reminiscent of the ancient rituals held there - an Iwakura (large stone location of divine manifestation) and a Shinza (location of divine residence) made of wood from the Sakaki tree (Japanese cleyera) can be found. As with Omiwa Jinja Shrine, the shrine is characterized by its lack of a main hall.



Mt. Nijo is visible from the other side of the Torii. The sunset is especially beautiful when viewed from here. In the spring and autumn equinox season, the sun sets just between the two peaks of Mt. Nijo.

Motoise 元伊勢

Motoise (Original Ise) is where "Amaterasu Omikami" was enshrined before the deity was moved to Ise Jingu Shrine. Starting from the foot of Mount Miwa, Amaterasu Omikami settled in the current land of Ise after traveling the land. Because Hibara Jinja Shrine is the first "Original Ise", it is a major religious site.

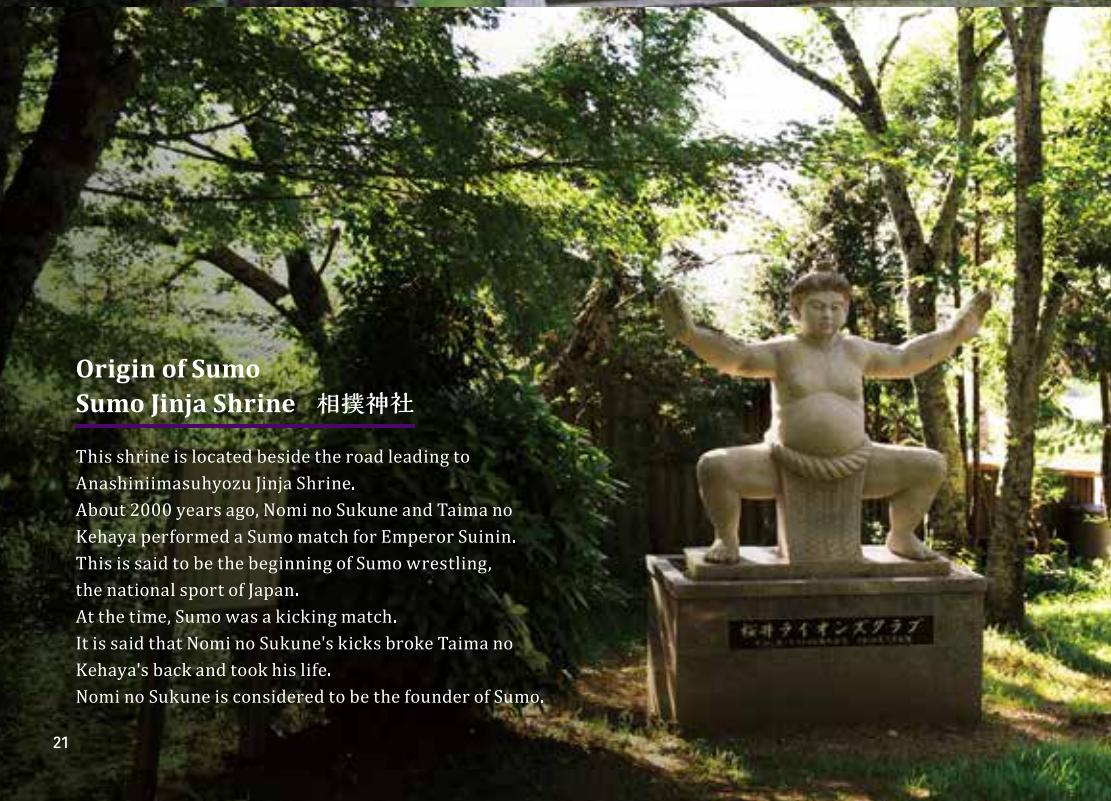
Anashiniimasuhyozu Jinja Shrine 穴師坐兵主神社

Climbing a gentle hill about 300m to the east of the mountain brings visitors to the verdant shrine grounds. This beautiful shrine is nestled where the hill meets the mountain. Its vicinity is shrouded in tranquil silence. The shrine's atmosphere gives visitors the feeling that deities might appear when they pray quietly in solitude.



Origin of Sumo Sumo Jinja Shrine 相撲神社

This shrine is located beside the road leading to Anashiniimasuhyozu Jinja Shrine. About 2000 years ago, Nomi no Sukune and Taima no Kehaya performed a Sumo match for Emperor Suinin. This is said to be the beginning of Sumo wrestling, the national sport of Japan. At the time, Sumo was a kicking match. It is said that Nomi no Sukune's kicks broke Taima no Kehaya's back and took his life. Nomi no Sukune is considered to be the founder of Sumo.

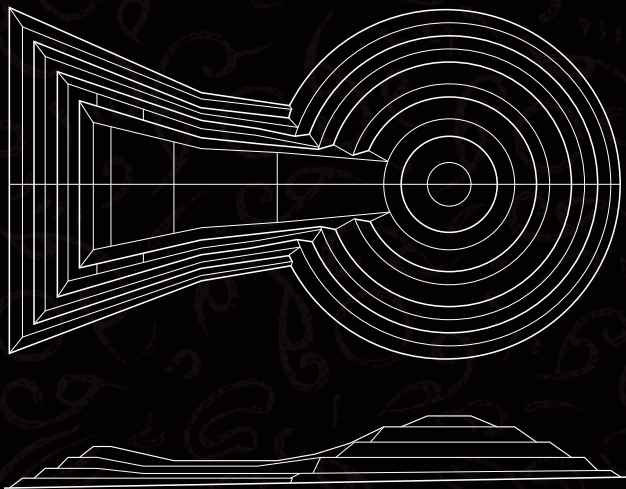


Yamato's Burial Mounds

A Kofun burial mound refers to a tomb with a mound of soil over the top. These mounds were actively built as tombs for high-ranking and powerful individuals in East Asia. In Japanese history, it generally refers to a tomb built in Japan from the middle of the 3rd century to the 7th century. Here in Yamato, visitors can spot numerous keyhole-shaped burial mounds. There are over 2,000 burial mounds in the Yamato area - from those along Yamanobe Road in Oyamoto, Yanagimoto, and the Makimuku burial mound cluster, the Miyake burial mound group to the West, and others.

Circular shaped ancient tombs with rectangular frontage

This is one of the ancient tomb shapes. Specifically, a keyhole shape. These were first made in the Yamato area in the middle of the 3rd century and spread all over Japan. They were built until around the beginning of the 7th century, and the spread of the manufacturing method for this type of tomb is an evidence of the expanding power of the Yamato Dynasty.



Structure

The circular part is viewed as the rear. The dead are buried near this summit. Stones are spread over the steeply-inclined hill section. The entire tomb may be surrounded by a moat. The coffins were sealed tightly with stones and clay. There are also cases where many copper mirrors surround the coffin to ward off evil. It is said that subordinates who served the king were buried alive. However, Emperor Suinin is said to have abolished this martyrdom in the 4th century, pitying the poor subordinates. "Haniwa" clay dolls shaped like people and animals came to be buried instead.



Burial Mounds at Yamanobe Road

There are very large, ancient tombs of past emperors and influential people along the Yamanobe Road. Visitors are not allowed inside the tombs in order to preserve them, but can approach the surrounding moats. Just image the scenery here when the tomb was built over 1000 years ago.



Hashihaka Burial Mound 箸墓古墳

Constructed in the mid-3rd century

This tomb is one of the oldest of the keyhole-shaped burial mounds. It is designated as the tomb of Yamatototohimomosohime no Mikoto (Princess Yamatototohimomosohime). It may also be the grave of "Himiko", the queen of Yamataikoku.

Overall length 280m Maximum height 30m
Front side width 130m Rear circle diameter 160m

Tomb of Emperor Keiko 景行天皇陵

Constructed in the late 4th century

This tomb is held to be the burial place of Emperor Keiko, the 12th Emperor. It is the seventh largest in Japan.

Overall length 310m Maximum height 25m
Front side width 170m Rear circle diameter 168m



Shimanoyama Burial Mound



Miyake Burial Mound Group 三宅古墳群

The Miyake burial mound group is a set including the 200m-long Shimanoyama Burial Mound (built between the end of the 4th century and beginning of the 5th) and ranging across three towns in the Shiki District of Nara Prefecture. Its use mainly flourished from the latter half of the 5th century to first half of the 6th century. Including smaller burial mounds, a total of 17 have been discovered. The name Miyake derives from the word "Miyake (pronounced the same way but using different Chinese characters)" which refers to locations established under the direct jurisdiction of the Yamato Dynasty. The king ordered agricultural operations at Miyake, accumulated wealth, and constructed the burial mounds. Influential people from those Miyake are buried in these burial mounds. This Miyake system of direct jurisdiction spread across Japan and became the forerunner of local administration.



Tomb of Emperor Sujin 崇神天皇陵

Constructed in the late 4th century

This tomb is believed to be the resting place of Emperor Sujin, the 10th emperor.

Overall length 242m Maximum height 31m
Front side width 100m Rear circle diameter 158m

Teranomae Burial Mound



Hyoutanyama Burial Mound





Chogakuji Temple 長岳寺

Established in 824

Founded by Kūkai, the founder of the Koyasan Shingon sect of Buddhism. On passing through the large gate and walking up the gravel approach with azalea hedges on both sides, visitors arrive at the oldest bell tower gate in Japan. The spacious temple grounds are home to numerous, culturally-significant buildings and statues and seasonal flowers that bloom throughout the year.



Amitabha triad 阿弥陀三尊

Created in 1151

Important cultural property

The bold sense of scale and realistic expressions show a style unlike the delicate, graceful Buddhist statuary of the era, and it is said to be the forerunner of the Kamakura Period style (such as Unkei and Kaikei). It is also known as the oldest sculpture to use eyes made of crystal.

Address	508 Yanagimotocho, Tenri City, Nara Prefecture
Tel	0743-66-1051



Takenouchi / Kayo Moated Settlements

竹之内・萱生 環濠集落

14th - 16th century

A village surrounded by a moat to protect residents from external enemies. The village is still inhabited.

It is said that it originated during the Muromachi Period (1336-1573). The moat was filled with earth, but parts of it still remains to this day.

Takenouchi Village



Many of the buildings in the village also date back to an earlier period, and the roads are designed like a maze to prepare for enemy attacks. It would be a great idea to walk around the village.

Takenouchi Village



Yatogi Jinja Shrine 夜都伎神社

A small shrine standing quietly in the mountains. It features a thatched roof, which is unusual in this area. It is an old-fashioned rustic shrine that almost looks like a scene out of a folk tale.



Uchiyamaeikyuuji Temple Ruins 内山永久寺跡

Founded in the 12th century, this temple received special treatment second only to Todaiji, Kofukuji and Horyuji Temple. It was called the "Nikko Toshogu Shrine of the West" and drew many worshippers. In the latter half of the 19th century the temple was abandoned due to the Haibutsu Kishaku movement ("abolish Buddhism and destroy Shākyamuni" , an ideology of destroying Buddhist temples, images, and texts, and forcing monks to return to secular life during the Meiji Restoration period). Now it is just a field, with only a lake and stone monument indicating what it used to be. Visitors will be struck by the Buddhist teaching that "All worldly things are transitory" from what remains of the temple.



A legendary sword existed here

Isonokami Jingu Shrine 石上神宮

This is one of the oldest shrines in Japan.
The grounds are home to free-roaming, beautiful chickens that are held to be messengers of the deities.
The shrine venerates the location where the legendary sword "Futsunomitama no Tsurugi" - said to have been used by an emperor to unify Japan - is believed to be.
For many years, it did not have an inner shrine.
An excavation was carried out in 1874, and uncovered an actual sword.
The shrine where the sword currently rests is now treated as the inner shrine.

Worship Hall 拜殿

National treasure Relocated in 1081

It has been said that Emperor Shirakawa (reign 1073-1087) donated a building that was located in the imperial palace in Kyoto as Isonokami Jingu Shrine. It is the oldest existing worship hall of its type.



Izumo Takeo Jinja Shrine

Worship Hall 出雲建雄神社 拜殿

National treasure Established in 1137

This worship hall was relocated from Uchiyamaeikyuj Temple in 1914.

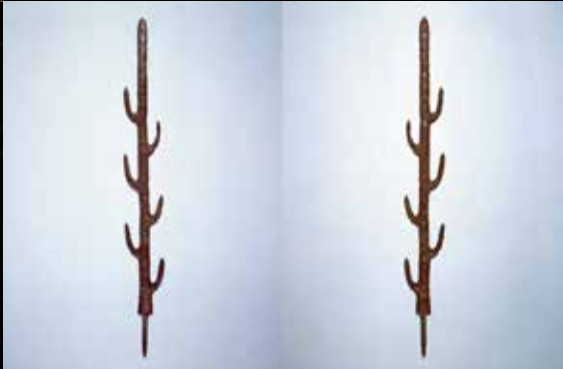
It is precious as a relic of now-lost Uchiyamaeikyuj Temple, and is designated as a national treasure.



Shichishito (Seven-Branded Sword) 七支刀

National treasure Created in 369
Not shown to the public

Total length 74.8 cm. One of a few legendary swords that actually exists. It is mentioned in Nihon Shoki (The Chronicles of Japan) from the 8th century, and is assumed to have been a gift from Paekche (an ancient Korean Kingdom). It is believed to have been used as a symbolic, ceremonial item and not as a weapon.



Hours	5:30 - 17:30 (Sunrise / sunset)		
Admission fee	Free		
Access	<div>26 minutes by bus from Sakurai Station Fare ¥430</div> <div><div>JR Sakurai Station</div><div>Bound for Nara 14 minutes</div><div>Tenri Station</div><div>Bus Stop Tenri Station Platform 1</div><div>Isonokami Jingu Mae</div><div>Isonokami Jingu Shrine</div><div>Nara Kotsu Bus bound for No. 28 Kokudou Hari or No. 29 bound for Hari Interchange 7 minutes</div><div>5 minutes on foot</div></div>		
Sightseeing duration	1 hour - 2 hours		
Address	384 Furucho, Tenri City, Nara Prefecture	Tel	0743-62-0900

Origin of Japanese Poetry — Birthplace of Japanese Poetry —

Man'yōshū

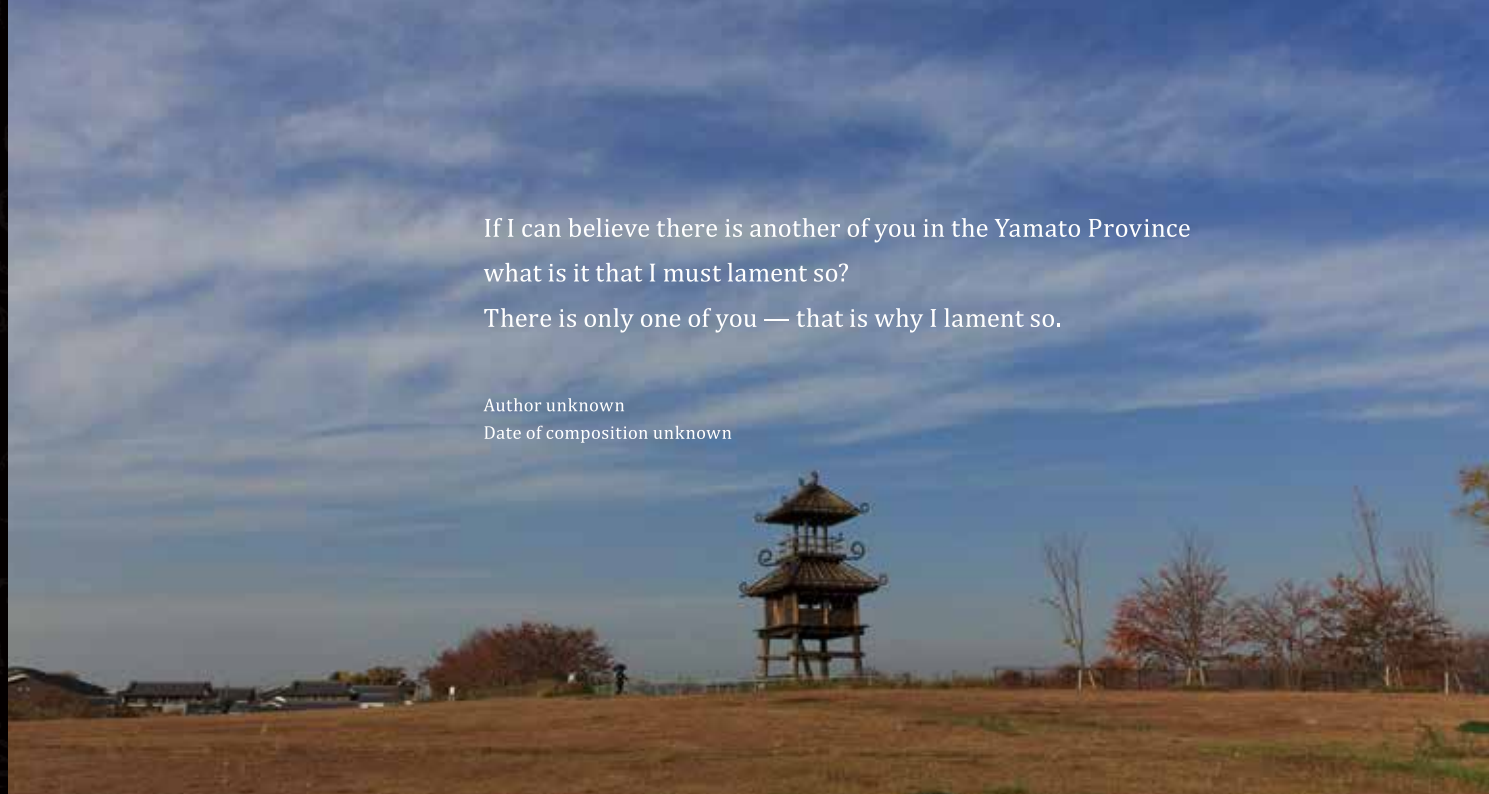
The Man'yōshū is Japan's oldest book of poetry, a collection of verse composed between the 5th century and latter half of the 8th century. Thought to have been completed after 759, it features over 4,500 works composed by people of various stations in life, from the Emperors and their nobles to minor officials and soldiers. The opening verse was composed in the Yamato region along with approximately 240 other works, and many poetic monuments can still be found in Yamato to this day. We'd like to introduce you to a few of these poetic monuments found along the Yamanobe Road.

If I can believe there is another of you in the Yamato Province
what is it that I must lament so?

There is only one of you — that is why I lament so.

Author unknown

Date of composition unknown



Why do the clouds hide Mount Miwa so,
that lonely threshold?
People are what they are,
but how I wish clouds at the least would show their kindness.

Princess Nukata composed in the latter half of the 7th century

