

# 鎌倉 Kamakura

## Home to the first shoguns

Kamakura makes for an enjoyable side-trip from Tokyo. The city lies 45 km to the south-west of the capital, about an hour's travel, and it can be done as a day trip. But ideally spend a night or two, as too quick a visit will no doubt have you saying, 'I wish I could stay longer'.

Kamakura is not such a large city today with a population of 174,114 [as at 01 Dec. 2009]. However, it was once a military and political stronghold. Kamakura played a pivotal role in Japanese history and witnessed the rise of the warrior class (*samurai*) under Minamoto no Yoritomo. Indeed, the very period of history when this occurred is named after the city, Kamakura.

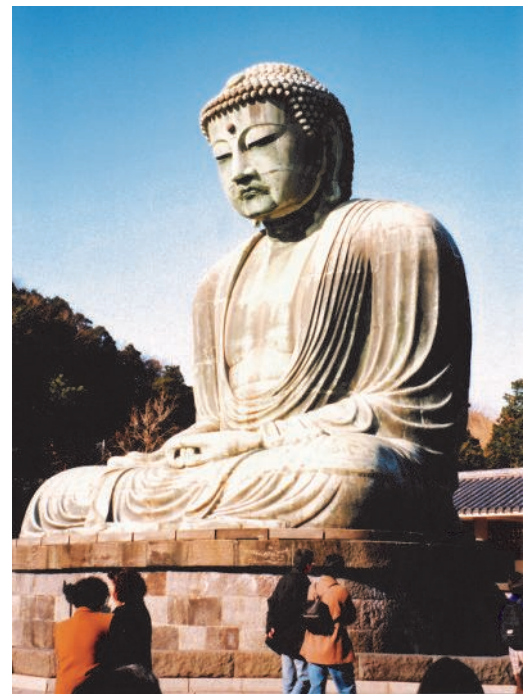
The Kamakura period can be said to extend from 1180 when Yoritomo

Many historical sites remain. Buddhism widened its influence during the Kamakura period. Previously it had been popular only among the aristocracy. Leaders of the Kamakura shogunate patronised Buddhist temples; Zen Buddhism in particular was favoured by the samurai. There are many temples in Kamakura that date back to this time. But one of the most famous sites is the Shinto shrine, Tsurugaoka Hachiman-gu, which was the Minamoto family's tutelary shrine. From the steps of this shrine, you get a good view back over the city of Kamakura. Today there are height restrictions on buildings to protect the atmosphere of the city.

Its natural environment adds to the city's atmosphere. Kamakura sits on Sagami Bay and is surrounded by hills. This once made it easy to defend as the shogunal headquarters, but today the city is favoured for its location and temperate climate. Its proximity to Tokyo has seen it become a rather exclusive residential area.

Kamakura is a popular destination all year round and

for tourists there is much to see and experience. Hasedera is an ancient temple built in 736 and is famous for its 'eleven-headed' Kannon which is 9.18m high. However, it is the Great Buddha or Daibutsu in nearby Kotokuin Temple which has become the face of Kamakura. The Daibutsu



The Great Buddha, Daibutsu, at Kotokuin

dates from 1252 and it too was once housed within a structure, but at the end of the 15th century a tsunami washed the building away.

Hasedera, Kotokuin and the Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine are must-sees on most itineraries and can be busy with people. It is worthwhile visiting some of the quieter temples in the hills, too. As you step into the forested surrounds you can appreciate a more tranquil side of Kamakura.

Kamakura recently made the headlines when US President Barack Obama, during his first official visit to Japan in mid-November 2009, mentioned his memories of seeing the Great Buddha as a child and enjoying green tea ice cream. This resulted in strong sales of green tea ice creams in Kamakura well into the colder weather of late autumn!

\*There is some debate about what year the Kamakura period should start: some say 1180, the date Yoritomo established his headquarters, others say 1185 when Yoritomo's forces defeated the rival Taira family, yet others 1192 which coincides with the dates of the Kamakura shogunate (1192-1333) The usual dates given are 1185-1333.



Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine was the guardian shrine of the Minamoto family. It has been at its present site since 1180.

made what was then a small seaside village into his headquarters\*. Kamakura had become the centre of political power by the time Yoritomo was granted the title of shogun in 1192. The Kamakura period lasted until 1333 when the Kamakura shogunate was destroyed.

### For more information about Kamakura

The **Kanagawa Prefectural Tourist Association** has good information about the main temples, shrines, gardens and museums, including access details and maps. [www.kanagawa-kankou.or.jp/index-e.html](http://www.kanagawa-kankou.or.jp/index-e.html)

**Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO)** as always has good information. It has a suggested one-day trip to Kamakura. JNTO has launched its **VISIT JAPAN 2010** campaign. You can find all this at [www.jnto.org.au](http://www.jnto.org.au).