

Nara – home to Australia’s first Japanese sister-city



Nara is the ancient capital of Japan. The prefecture was once called Yamato no Kuni, and the term Yamato 大和 is another word for Japan, giving an idea of the importance of the region within Japanese culture.

It is in this very ancient part of Japan that we find Yamato-Takada, which in 1963 became the sister-city of Lismore in northern New South Wales, the very first sister-city relationship between Japan and Australia.

The links between Nara prefecture and Australia have played an important role in the friendly ties between Australia and Japan.

Sister-cities born

It was thanks largely to the efforts of Catholic priest, Father Paul Glynn, that Yamato-Takada and Lismore became sister-cities. Fr Glynn was originally from Lismore. While he was serving as a missionary in Nara City, he became friends with the then Mayor of Yamato-Takada, Senzo Nakura, and he had the idea to establish the sister-city link. His brother, Fr Tony Glynn, was later instrumental in establishing the

Canberra-Nara sister-city relationship, formalised in 1993.

Yamato-Takada

The city lies in the north-west of Nara Prefecture in the Nara or Yamato Basin. With a population of 72,500 today, it flourished during the Edo Period (1600-1867) as a temple town around Senryuji Temple. The city is now known for producing textiles.

Yamato-Takada has been inhabited since prehistoric times with archaeological digs across the city showing early habitation. There are ancient keyhole burial mounds in the north of the city; such burials were only accorded to people of high status. The city is also in an area where rice field agriculture was born.

Much to see in the area

Yamato-Takada is surrounded by sites connected to Japan’s earliest history within easy reach.

In the nearby city of Sakurai, the Omiwa Shrine (b) is one of the oldest in Japan and notable for not having a main sanctuary with a sacred object (*shintai*) in it, instead the mountain is the object of veneration.

One of Japan’s first UNESCO World Heritage sites is Horyuji, a large temple complex that has some of the world’s oldest wooden structures

dating from the 7th and 8th centuries.

Even older are the ruins in the Asuka region. Asuka was once the site of several imperial palaces, hard to imagine when you visit the quiet village it is today. There, the Ishibutai kofun tomb (d) dates from the 7th century; the granite boulders forming the ceiling of the tomb have been exposed by erosion.

Yoshinoyama (c) are the hills to the south of the Yamato Basin. While they also have several important historical sites, today the area is known as one of the most beautiful locations to see cherry blossoms in spring.

Nara city is of course well worth a visit for anyone with an interest in Japan. It is home to UNESCO World Heritage sites including Kasuga Grand Shrine famous for its lanterns (e). The city continues to explore its long history including building reconstructions from its early heyday as Heijo-kyo, Japan’s first capital city, such as the imperial palace Suzakumon gate (a), rebuilt in 1998. Constant companions for the traveller in Nara’s expansive park are the hundreds of deer, which are considered messengers of the gods and are free to roam.

JNTO travel information on Nara and its many attractions:

www.jnto.go.jp/eng/location/regional/nara/index.html

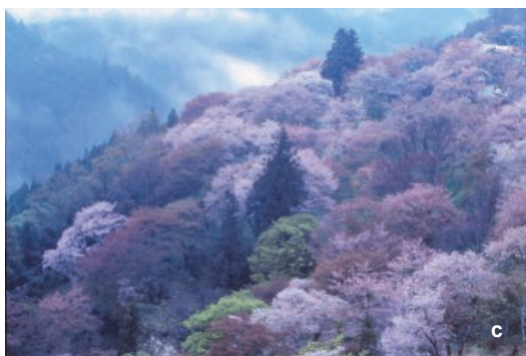


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