

Narai-juku



Narai-juku was one of the post towns on the Nakasendo highway ruled by the Edo Shogunate. It was situated midway between Kyoto and Edo (now called Tokyo). As the buildings have been kept very much the same since the Edo period, it was designated as a Cultural Asset in 1978 and is maintained by the government grant system.

The conservation area is about 200m wide and 1 km long north to south, which consists of Kanmachi (uptown), Nakamachi (midtown) and Shimomachi (downtown). You can see that the buildings in Narai-juku have overhanging second floors and eaves. It is said that the structure was made to liven up the town and now makes it unique among the post towns. The once wooden rooftops have been replaced with more weather resistant steel sheets.

In the Edo period, Narai-juku flourished by providing travelers accommodation and transport facilities. It was once called "Narai of a Thousand Houses." At the time, resting in Narai-juku was especially refreshing for travelers crossing the highest pass on the Nakasendo highway, Torii Pass, which is to the south of Narai.

Narai-juku Attractions



Two Hundred Jizos (A on map)

Some two hundred stone Buddhist images stand in an orderly line. Deceased travelers with no one to tend their graves were brought together in this place. Their peaceful and rich expressions, washed by the wind and snow of many years, calm our minds.



Virgin Mary Jizo (B on map)

A statue of a headless Virgin Mary taking care of a child is enshrined in the graveyard of Taiho-ji. However, it has borrowed the name and figure of Jizo. The sad histories of hidden Christians are deeply etched in the image.



Water Fountains (* on map)

These were water sources for travelers passing through Narai-juku. They were also important water supplies for Narai villagers. Though only six are left, these water fountains are still in common use nowadays.



The Nakamura House (X on map)

This was the residence of a wealthy comb wholesaler, Rihei Nakamura, back in the Temp period (1830-1844). It would still be recognizable to travelers back then because of how well it has been preserved. The house and garden are open to the public.



Shizume Jinja (Δ on map)

The god of this shrine was invited to relieve a plague that spread throughout Narai-juku; shizume in English means to relieve. Since it is located at the entrance of Torii Pass, travelers often pray for safe journeys there. An annual festival is held on August 11th and 12th of each year.



Kiso Ohashi (E on map)

A large bridge in the shape of a Japanese drum crosses Narai River. It is considered to be one of a few large bridges without bridge support in Japan. Kiso Ohashi was built entirely with hinoki cypress that was more than 300 years old. Evening light-up from April to early November.



Hirasawa



Many woodworking and lacquerware craftsmen once lived in Kamimachi (uptown) and Shimomachi (downtown). However, due to the large number of travelers in the area, they moved north to Hirasawa where they could concentrate on their work. Since Hirasawa has appropriate weather conditions and an abundance of forest resources for making lacquerware, it quickly became the home for Kiso lacquerware.

Winning Medals of the Nagano Winter Olympics in 1998

These were finished with the painstaking skills of Kiso's artisans. They are now in a standing exhibition at the Kiso Technical Art Museum for Living.

