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Important Preservation Districts for Groups of Traditional Buildings
Naraijuku on NAKASENDO
Kiso Valley

Travel Guide
Narai-juku Tourist Association: http://www.naraijuku.com/
History of Preserving Narai-juku

Narai-juku is the longest post town in Japan, gradually descending along the Narai River. Narai-juku stretches approximately one kilometer along the old Nakasendo Road, with Shimeine shrine at the foot of the Toji Pass marking the end on the Kyoto side.

To preserve Narai-juku, which was prompted by the issue of relocation of the Nakamura Family residence, a highly regarded private residence in the 1800s, out of the post town, a pioneering movement for preserving the old streetcape was launched through a public-academia-private sector initiative in 1969 with a view to reconfirming, passing down to the next generation, and protecting the historic assets in the immediate surroundings.

Thereafter, in accordance with the Report on the Survey for Old Streetcape Preservation published in the wake of the establishment of Japan’s Preservation Districts for Groups of Traditional Buildings program, an ordinance to preserve them was enacted. Narai-juku was designated as an Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings in 1978. This accolade is undoubtedly a result of the citizens’ extraordinary efforts to develop their own community.

After Narai-juku was designated as an Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings, it went on to receive numerous awards, including the Handmade Hometown Award by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism in 1989; the Handmade Hometown Grand Prize in 2005; Japan Top 100 Beautiful Historical Sites in 2007; and the Flower Tourism Award by the Japan Travel and Tourism Association in 2009. The citizens’ passion for preserving the region by leveraging its streetcape has been handed down from generation to generation. In 2018, the Kiso road was designated a Japanese Heritage site as “The Old Trade Route of Kisoji: Preserver of the Mountain and Survivor of Time.”

The beautiful Kiso road with its Narai-juku historic Post Town

During the Edo era (1603-1868), the Nakasendo Road was one of the main routes linking Edo (the old name of Tokyo) and Kyoto. The eleven local villages from Niekawa-juku to Magome-juku on the route called Kisoji (Kiso road) are well-known sighting spots. Particularly in Narai-juku, the view of the old street in the area has been maintained and the houses, built using unique local techniques, are of historical and academic value. Visit this small village in the mountains and feel the atmosphere of old Japan!
Food in Narai-juku
Simple yet pleasant gourmet meals prepared with local produce

Souvenirs found in Narai-juku
Fine articles created through mastery of skills handed down by local predecessors from generation to generation

Soba
Soba has traditionally been one of the best-known production centers of soba noodles in the Shinshu district. Soba made of buckwheat grown in a cool climate and thanks to clear fresh water has body and umami on top of a rich flavor.

Goheimochi
Goheimochi is a baked rice cake with sauce made from sesame or walnuts that gives a sweet and savory flavor combined with a savory flavor. Goheimochi is a local specialty, which certainly stimulates your appetite. Its taste in shape from area to area.

Magemono
Magemono, which is known as a local specialty of Narai-juku, is made by filling a lid-shaped gate of Kiso or Sawara crepe to form round and oval-shaped strips to assemble them into a container. It has a history of over 400 years in Kiso’s Narai-juku. Magemono containers are popular as they help prevent rice from going bad and rice tastes good even when eaten cold.

Oyaki
Oyaki is a local specialty made by baking it. It was named for its long and narrow shape, and it is a favorite of both the elderly and young, for both. Stuffed with locally-grown vegetables or rice, Oyaki delights with its good taste.

You may completely feel like a traveler in the Edo period
Let’s go walking along the Torii pass

Kiso shikki (Lacquerware)
The origin of Kiso lacquerware is said to date back to more than 900 years ago. In the Edo period, lacquerware using Kiso hibuse byssus garnered popularity as souvenirs from travels. The Kiso shikki industry thrived rapidly in the Meiji period. Since then, Kiso shikki has been known as one of the most prestigious centers of lacquerware. Kiso shikki is an officially recognized traditional craft in Japan.

Narai-juku Official Goods
Japanese washable, postcards and clear folders designed by Kyoko Yuzawa. Paper-cutting artist Tome are also available at the Tourist Association’s member shops in Narai-juku.

An approximately 6-kilometer mountain track connects Yabuhara-cho and Narai-juku along the Kiso Kaido route. For travelers wearing straw sandals in the Edo period, it was known as one of Nakasendo Road’s hard- est routes. Today, it is popular as a trekking course filled with rich verdure. You can view the Ontake mountain to the west and the Kiso-kumade mountain to the east from atop and there are a number of stone tablets inscribed with haku poems by numerous poets, such as Basho Matsuo, or stone Buddhist images along the ancient road. The Torii pass is a historical site, which was the battlefield for the Kiso and Takeda clans during the age of provincial wars, and the Fuji in the western pass, Kuzunomiya traveled through the pass when she got married at the end of the Edo period.

The route is designated as Nakasendo Route as part of Nagano Prefecture’s Shiminohi Hiking Course

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Dedication
Reverend Walter Weston, often called the “father of the Japanese Alps,” is among those who have walked the Torii Pass.

“At the village we engaged a pack-horse, and forthwith began to climb the steep winding road that goes over Torii-ji, crossing the watershed already spoken of at a height of 4,000 feet. The pass goes a little to one of the large torii (sacred gateway), as familiar to travellers in Japan, that opens its arch. As the traveller is now connected with the idea of approaching to some sacred spot, such as temple or shrine, this one has its reason: i.e., the fact that it leads, through a score of miles away, to the feet of the holy mountains Ontake, whose dark serrated ridge, streaked with snow, now one sees standing out boldly against the clear blue sky.”

The manuscript and illustrations for the Japanese Alps’

*Torii Pass is a famous spot in the mountainous region (Shiminohi - Nagano),

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