

Nara Prefectural

English brochure for Asuka-mura
in-bound promotion student guide tour

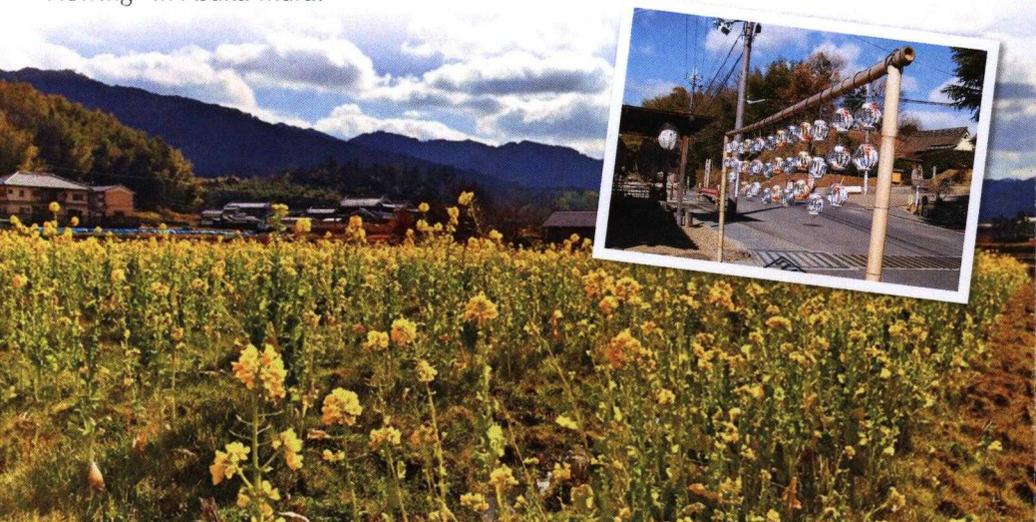


University

History and
Culture of Asuka-mura

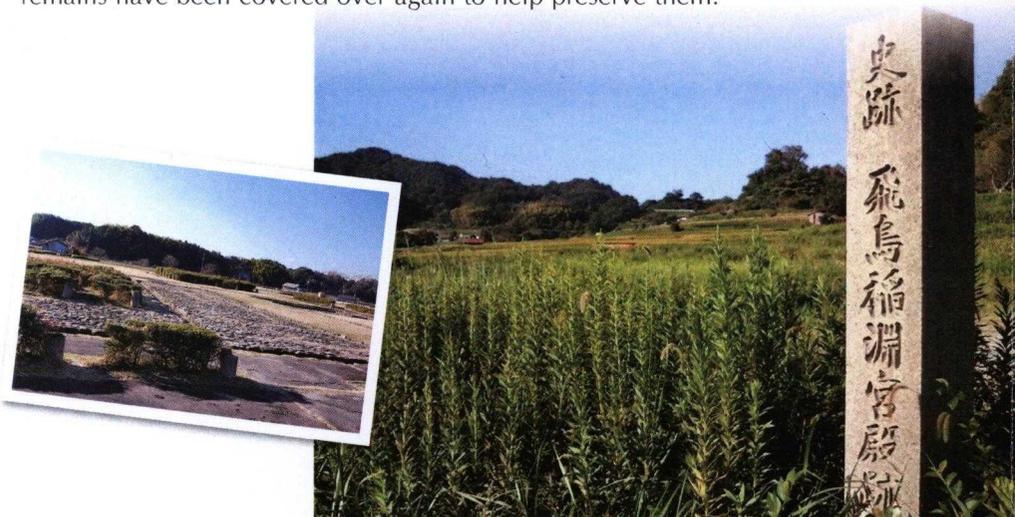
1. Guidance for Asuka-mura (Asuka village)

Asuka-mura is located in the corner of the southeastern area of the Nara basin. In July 1956, Asuka-mura was created as one village by uniting three older villages in Takaichi-gun: Sakaai-mura, Takaichi-mura, and Asuka-mura. The population of Asuka-mura was 5,782 as of January 30, 2015, the gross area is 24.08 km², and many parts are covered by farmland and forest. Asuka-mura is well-known as a historical and archeological place in Japan because old palaces and many ancient artifacts of the Asuka era were found there. The Asuka period created the foundation of the Japanese central governing system. From the historical point of view, Asuka-mura is called the "homeland of the Japanese mind". This historical cultural heritage and the natural environment integrate to form the basis for "Historical Viewing" in Asuka-mura.



2. Capital City of Ancient Japan

In the Asuka period, Asuka-mura was an ancient capital city called "Asuka-kyo" (kyo means "capital"). It was said to be the beginning of the building of the nation of Japan. From the Suiko Emperor Period at the end of the 6th century to the Tenmu Emperor Period at the end of the 7th century, several palaces of emperors were built in Asuka-mura. These palaces of the Asuka period are called Asuka-kyo (capital) or Asuka-kokyo (old capital). Asuka-mura has many ancient historical spots. Den Asuka Itabuki miya ato (the Itabuki palace remains) are a main attraction of Asuka-kyo, along with many other remains, such as the remains of the Kawaradera temple, the Asukadera temple, the Asuka Pond craftsman's studio, the Asuka-kyo capital palace pond, the Sakafune Stone, the Mizuochi, and the Asukano Kiyomihara palace which was owned by emperor Tenmu and empress Jitou. Some of these remains have been covered over again to help preserve them.



3. Asuka River

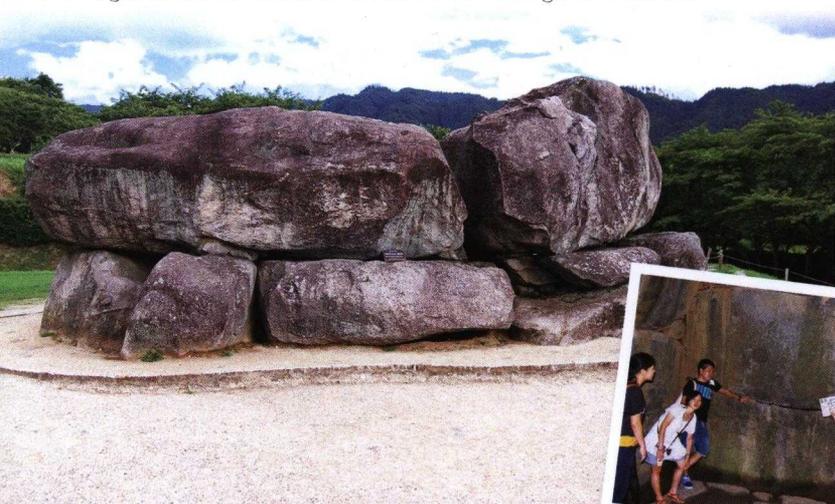
The Asuka River starts in the Takatori mountain area which is part of the Ryumon mountain range. The stream goes through to the west of Mt. Inabuchi and goes near

the hill of Amakashinooka and the side of the Fujiwara palace. The river continues across the center of Kashihara city and merges into the Yamato River at the center of the Nara basin. Thus, it runs through the Asuka area which has many historical remains such as those of the Asuka palace, old Buddhist temples, and a Shinto shrine. In ancient times, people composed many poems about this river, and many were included in the "Manyoshu," a very famous 8th century anthology of poetry. The Asuka River flows around two Shime-nawa (sacred ropes), which were meant to protect this village in the old days. People believed that the Mezuna (female rope) in the headstream caught the happiness from the river, and the Ozuna (male rope) in the downstream conjured evil spirits away from the down side of the river.



4. Ishibutai Tumulus

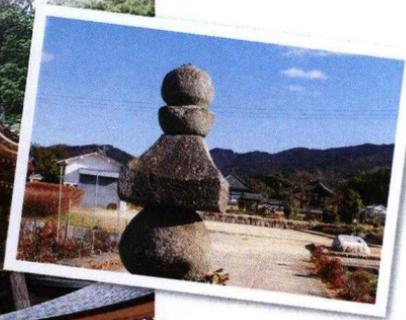
The Ishibutai Tumulus is a stone tumulus in Shimanoshou, Asuka-mura, and it is one of the biggest tombs in Japan. It was built in the early 7th Century. This stone tomb is the symbol of Asuka-mura. This tomb is called "Ishibutai," which means stone stage, because a mound of earth once surrounded this ancient tomb has eroded away over time, and the ceiling stone of the tomb has a very smooth top surface. A horizontal stone chamber made by piling up a total 30 big and small pieces of granite is exposed. The area where "Ishibutai" is located is called Shimanoshou, and it used to be owned by the Soga family. There was also a garden built by Sogano Umako who seized great political power at that time; therefore, it is thought that this tumulus is the tomb of Sogano Umako.



5. Ancient Tomb and Historical Remains

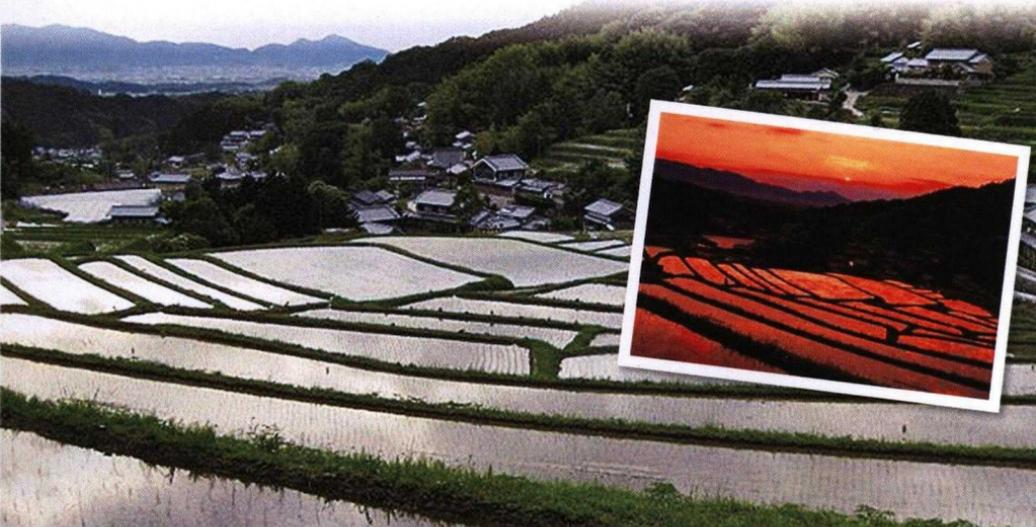
Asuka-mura has a rich historical background because it used to be the ancient capital of Japan. In fact, Asuka still has much of the original scenery and beauty of old Japan. The culture created in the Asuka era still remains in Japanese life and can be found in the culture, customs, and art of modern Japan. The Asuka-mura has several ancient tombs such as the Ishibutai tumulus which is thought to be the tomb of Sogano Umako, the Takamatsuzuka tumulus, and the Kitora tumulus. Many of these are imperial mausoleums. The Asuka-mura also has ancient Buddhist temples. Many of which have a long history such as the Asuka-dera which was the first full-scale Buddhist

temple in Japan, the Oka-dera and the Tachibana-dera. Asuka-mura is also famous for many stone works such as the Kameishi (turtle stone), the Saruishi (monkey stone), the Sakafuneishi (sakafune stone), and the Nimenseki (double-faced stone). In addition, the remains of the Den Asuka Itabuki Miya (Asuka Itabuki palace) and the Asuka Ike Koubo (Asuka Pond craftsman's studio) were restored, and they are now sightseeing spots that retain the atmosphere of Asuka era.



6. Tanada (terraced paddy rice fields) and the Owner System

The Inabuchi area in Asuka-mura is famous for its tanada, or terraced paddy rice fields, located in the headstream of the Asuka River. This area is called the Okuasuka kannabi no sato (the sacred land of deep Asuka). Many ancient poets wrote about this area for poem books, such as the "Manyoshu." The tanada area of Inabuchi has been selected as one of the 100 nationwide best terraced paddy rice fields, and it is a tranquil scene when it is covered by blossoms of pink Chinese Milkvech or yellow Rape flowers in the spring, and by golden colored ears of rice and the blossoms of red Equinox flowers in the autumn. Because of the aging population problem in Japan, it has been difficult to maintain these terraced paddy rice fields. Thus, in 1995, a new business method was started: the rice field owner system. The owner system of tanada in Asuka-mura has been working very well because of the association and bonding between local farmers and owners. The owners can experience cultivating rice and vegetables side by side with the farmers.



7. Kakashi (scarecrow) and Higanbana (Equinox flower)

A kakashi (scarecrow) contest and a Higanbana (Equinox flower) festival are held in the Inabuchi area of Asuka-mura every September. Each year they have a different theme for the scarecrows in the contest, so visitors can enjoy seeing a variety of scarecrows. Many people admired the scarecrows during the 19th annual contest in 2014. At the same time, there is an Equinox flower festival in the Inabuchi and Ishibutai tumulus area, and tourists can enjoy seeing the blossoming Equinox flowers as they walk along the scarecrow display road. Many tourists visit

the equinox flower festival and stay to see the lantern corridor after the lanterns are lit after dark. These are now popular annual events in Asuka-mura in September.



8. Special Products from Asuka-mura

The "Asuka" brand has been promoted by Asuka-mura, and new products are being developed under this brand. Asuka-brand products are made with local crops and materials and create a story or episode with a sense of "Asuka." The Asuka brand has become known for its original high quality products. Some new products that have been introduced to the market are "Kodaimaigohan" (ancient rice) which is harvested in Asuka, "Asuka curry" which is made with Yamato brand chicken and Asuka vegetables, and jams that are made from the local variety of strawberry called "Asuka Ruby."



9. Home Stay Program

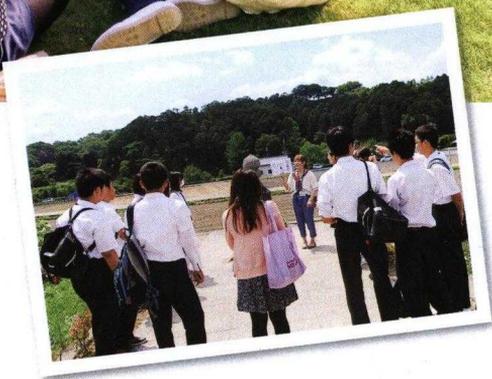
The Association of Asuka New Tourism operates a "Home Stay Program" for junior high school students and other students. They accept students or foreign students who are on their school trips. This program is supported by the local business offices, including local farmers, and the students of Nara Prefectural University. The association provides many programs such as an agricultural and family business experience, a Japanese historical culture experience, a local food cooking experience, and a Japanese drumming experience. The associated families now total over 100, and they have accepted over 2,000 students. The Association has welcomed many guests from places overseas including China, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Australia.



10. Asuka Rekishi Tankentai (Asuka historical exploring tour party)

guided by the students of Nara Prefectural University

In Asuka-mura, the historical tours have been conducted by the students of Nara Prefectural University. The students aim to help the guests understand the history of the area as easily as possible using a friendly relaxed presentation style. The students call themselves the Rekishi Tankentai (historical exploring party) because they make people feel interested in the historical issues and bring out the excitement of the historical events. These tours are an optional plan of the home-stay program for the middle school students. Five years have already passed since these tours were started, and already students from over 10 schools have been guided. The Asuka Rekishi Tankentai got the top award from the Nihon Kanko Shinko Kyokai (Japanese Tourist Promoting Association) in 2014.



Asuka-mura is a place called "Home-land of Japanese mind", and it remains many original Japanese scenery.

I would be very much appreciate if you feel a touch of Japanese ancient enchantment through this Asuka-mura brochure.

By Professor. Kenichi Asoh

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