

Nakasendo Trail: Yabuhara - Narai

Introduction

Narai and Yabuhara are two old post towns on the Nakasendo trail – an ancient road used by Samurai to travel between Kyoto and Tokyo during the Edo Period. A walk between the towns makes for a good half-day outing (if you leave early) and combines well with one of our city walks. This four-step-guide explains a schedule which has been tried and tested by guests. To avoid any unwanted surprises, we strongly recommend you verify the train departure and arrival times via www.hyperdia.com. Matsumoto Backpackers wishes you a pleasant day. Questions? Please approach one of our staff members.

Step ①

For this trail, we recommend you take an early train to make the most of your day. The first local train for Nakatsugawa leaves at 7:41 and arrives in Yabuhara at 8:46. If you take this train, we suggest you pack some food and drink the day before. Should you wish to first take a city walk and then do the trail, you could opt for the 12:18 train instead – this one arrives in Yabuhara at 13:31. A return ticket morning costs 1340¥.

Step ②

Upon exiting the station at Yabuhara, there will be a large sign in the parking lot. This sign outlines the Nakasendo Trail and also the Yabuhara – Narai section. Follow the signposted route through the centre of Yabuhara. Don't forget to peek into side-streets in Yabuhara, as there are some beautiful old houses and shrines hidden away there. There is also a temple just after the train track underpass. Follow the road up the mountain (you can at some point opt for the 'old road', but we recommend continuing along the path) until you reach the Japanese Torii gateway at the Torii-toge Mountain Pass (1900m). Keep your eyes open for serows (furry Japanese goat-antelopes) and monkeys in the woods.

Step ③

Continue the path and follow it as it leads down the mountain and into the centre of Narai. Again, keep your eyes open for serows and monkeys. Narai consists of a wide street which eventually transforms into a narrower street. The entire street is lined with houses dating back hundreds of years. Off this main street, there are numerous shrines worth visiting. The street is also lined with souvenir shops selling quality keepsakes and local handcrafts. Additionally, there are numerous eateries where soba, ramen, and other dishes are served. For a snack, try “gohemochi” with sesame. The train station is located at the far end of the main street, so a stroll through it will get you there.

Step ④

After spending some time in Narai, take a train back to Matsumoto using the return ticket you purchased earlier. Note that there are only a few trains a day – missing one means waiting another 1.5 hours for the next. If you took the morning train, we suggest aiming for the 13:25 service, which arrives in Matsumoto at 14:15. If you took the afternoon train, we recommend taking the 16:56 back, which arrives in Matsumoto at 17:41.