



nileGUIDE

ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP

Adventure Tokyo: Kamakura

Kamakura, 1 Day

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Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: Kamakura, the former capital of Japan, showcases some of the country's most impressive shrines, temples and monuments in a beautiful natural setting. Only an hour away from Tokyo, it may be the most popular day trip from the megalopolis for locals and foreigners alike. As such, it's best avoided during national holidays and some weekends. Nevertheless, it's an easy and fulfilling adventure that shouldn't be missed, especially if you want to get out of the urban grind for a day. The sheer number of temples ensures you'll get your fill of cultural sites, but don't even try to see them all in a day.

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - Kamakura

DAY NOTE: While most visitors to Kamakura enter the city through Kamakura station, your adventure takes you a little bit off the beaten path. Get off one stop before Kamakura, at Kita-Kamakura station. From here, you will start a hike (really, more of a walk) through the mountains surrounding the historic city, dotted on the way with many temples and shrines. You'll have time to explore all the temples you want on the way. Head west out the station and you'll find plenty of area maps to get your bearings. First, take a left down the road until you hit Jochi-ji. Stop and admire this small temple's stunning grounds and spooky caves. From there, head back to the road and walk just a little further. Soon, you'll find the trail head on your right. Walking along this trail, you'll find many small temples and shrines to explore or just take a quick look at. After about 2km, follow the signs for the Daibutsu (Great Buddha) and soon you'll see a sign advertising a mountain cafe down a trail on your right. Stop at this beautiful, forest-shrouded retreat for drinks and nibbles, then get back on the trail. After a little more pleasant, rugged walking, with some great vistas and photo opportunities of the town and sea below, you'll eventually descend many stairs, ending right next to the Kotoko-in Temple. This is where the Daibutsu (the second-largest Buddha statue in Japan) lives. Don't miss this most-important monument, and the opportunity to enter his belly for a measly 20 yen. From there, follow the crowd down the road a bit to Hase-Dera Temple nearby. It houses a massive wooden statue of Kannon. It's also famous for its gardens, especially the hydrangeas, and provides another opportunity for some great views of the town and sea. Since you're a little outside of Kamakura proper at this point, take the clanky, quaint Enoden line from Hase station to Kamakura. Here, walk the city proper's historic streets, shopping for such goodies as wooden sandals and tsukemono (Japanese pickles) on your way to Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine. Don't miss the wonderful ponds here, but be careful – the shrine is said to be bad luck for unmarried couples. From there, it's an easy walk back to Kamakura station.



Kamakura

A visit to an ancient capital

Day 1 - Kamakura



QUICK NOTE

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contact:
tel: +81 467 22 3350
(Kamakura Tourist
Information)

location:

1 Kamakura

DESCRIPTION: Just about one hour south of Tokyo by train, Kamakura offers a treasure-trove of Japanese history and culture. The city was Japan's capital for about 150 years (1185-1333), and today there are still some 70 historic temples and shrines, many with an exquisite garden attached

One hour southwards by train
from Tokyo
Kamakura-shi 248-0025

to it, to discover and explore. Kamakura's biggest attraction is the Daibutsu or Great Buddha, which dates back to 1252. Kamakura also encompasses beaches and mountains for those who prefer to laze in the sun or trek in the crisp air of autumn. © wcities.com

Kamakura Snapshot

Local Info

Introduction

51km(32 miles) S of Tokyo

If you take only one day trip outside Tokyo, it should be to Kamakura, especially if you're unable to include the ancient capitals of Kyoto and Nara in your travels. (If you are going to Kyoto and Nara, I would probably choose Nikko, below.) Kamakura is a delightful hamlet with no fewer than 65 Buddhist temples and 19 Shinto shrines spread throughout the town and surrounding wooded hills. Most of these were built centuries ago, when a warrior named Yoritomo Minamoto seized political power and established his shogunate government in Kamakura back in 1192. Wanting to set up his seat of government as far away as possible from what he considered to be the corrupt Imperial court in Kyoto, Yoritomo selected Kamakura because it was easy to defend. The village is enclosed on three sides by wooded hills and on the fourth by the sea-- a setting that lends a dramatic background to its many temples and shrines.

Although Kamakura remained the military and political center of the nation for a century and a half, the Minamoto clan was in power for only a short time. After Yoritomo's death, both of his sons were assassinated, one after the other, after taking up military rule. Power then passed to the family of Yoritomo's widow, the Hojo family, who ruled until 1333, when the emperor in Kyoto sent troops to crush the shogunate government. Unable to stop the invaders, 800 soldiers retired to the Hojo family temple at Toshoji, where they disemboweled themselves in ritualistic suicide known as seppuku.

Today Kamakura is a thriving seaside resort(its population is 172,000), with old wooden homes, temples, shrines, and wooded hills-- a pleasant 1-day trip from Tokyo.(There's also a beach in Kamakura called Yuigahama Beach, but I find it

unappealing; it's often strewn with litter and unbelievably crowded in summer. Skip it.)
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Restaurants Insights

Restaurants

Inexpensive

In addition to the suggestions listed, a simple restaurant at **Hase Temple**, described above, serves noodles, beer, and soft drinks, with both indoor and outdoor seating. It offers a great view, making it a good place for a snack on a fine day.

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Things to Do Insights

Attractions

Keep in mind that most temples and shrines open at about 8 or 9am and close between 4 and 5pm.

Around Kamakura Station

About a 10-minute walk from Kamakura Station, **Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine**(tel. 0467/22-0315) is the spiritual heart of Kamakura and one of its most popular attractions. It was built by Yoritomo and dedicated to Hachiman, the Shinto god of war who served as the clan deity of the Minamoto family. The pathway to the shrine is along Wakamiya Oji, a cherry tree-lined pedestrian lane that was also constructed by Yoritomo back in the 1190s so that his oldest son's first visit to the family shrine could be accomplished in style with an elaborate procession. The lane stretches from the shrine all the way to Yuigahama Beach, with three massive torii(traditional entry gate of a shrine) set at intervals along the route to signal the approach to the shrine. On both sides of the pathway are souvenir and antiques shops selling lacquerware, pottery, and folk art.(I suggest you walk to Kamakura Station via Komachi Dori, a fun pedestrian shopping lane that parallels Wakamiya Oji to the west, and return via Wakamiya Oji.)

At the top of the stairs, which afford a panoramic view toward the sea, is

the vermilion-colored shrine with its small shrine museum, not worth the ¥100(85¢/40p) admission. However, you can get your fortune in English for ¥100 by shaking out a bamboo stick with a number on it and giving it to the attendant. You can also buy a charm to assure good luck in health, driving a car, business, or other ventures. Shrine grounds are always open, free to the public.

Although it's a bit out of the way, it might pay to visit **Zeniarai-Benten Shrine**(tel. 0467/25-1081), about a 20-minute walk west of Kamakura Station. This shrine is dedicated to the goddess of good fortune. On the Asian zodiac's Day of the Snake, worshippers believe that if you take your money and wash it in spring water in a small cave on the shrine grounds, it will double or triple itself later on. This being modern Japan, don't be surprised if you see a bit of ingenuity; my Japanese landlady told me that when she visited the shrine she didn't have much cash on her, so she washed something that she thought would be equally as good-- her credit card. Fittingly, admission is free. Open daily 8am to 5pm.

Murder & Betrayal at Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine-- As you ascend the 62 steps to the vermilion-painted shrine, note the **gingko tree** to the left that's thought to be about 1,000 years old. This is supposedly the site where Yoritomo's second son was ambushed and murdered back in 1219; his head was never found. Such stories of murder and betrayal were common in feudal Japan. Fearful that his charismatic brother had designs on the shogunate, Yoritomo banished him and ordered him killed. Rather than face capture, the brother committed seppuku. When the brother's mistress gave birth to a boy, the baby was promptly killed. Today, the lotus ponds, arched bridge, pigeons, and bright vermilion sheen of the shrine give little clue to such violent history.

Around Hase Station

To get to these attractions, you can go by bus, which departs from in front of Kamakura Station(take any bus from

Kamakura Snapshot continued

platform no. 1 or 6 to the Daibutsuen-mae stop). Or, for a more romantic adventure, you can go by the **JR Enoden Line**, a tiny train that putt-putts its way seemingly through backyards on its way from Kamakura Station to Hase and beyond. Since it's mostly only one track, trains have to take turns going in either direction. I suggest that you take the bus from Kamakura Station directly to the Great Buddha, walk to Hase Shrine, and then take the Enoden train back to Kamakura Station.

Probably Kamakura's most famous attraction is the **Great Buddha** (tel. **0467/22-0703**), called the Daibutsu in Japanese and located at **Kotokuin Temple**. Eleven meters (36 ft.) high and weighing 93 tons, it's the second-largest bronze image in Japan. The largest Buddha is in Nara, but in my opinion, the Kamakura Daibutsu is much more impressive. For one thing, the Kamakura Buddha sits outside against a dramatic backdrop of wooded hills. Cast in 1252, the Kamakura Buddha was indeed once housed in a temple like the Nara Buddha, but a huge tidal wave destroyed the wooden structure-- and the statue has sat under sun, snow, and stars ever since. I also prefer the face of the Kamakura Buddha; I find it more inspiring and divine, as though with its half-closed eyes and calm, serene face it's above the worries of the world. It seems to represent the plane above human suffering, the point at which birth and death, joy and sadness merge and become one. Open daily from 7am to 6pm (to 5:30pm in winter). Admission is ¥200 (\$1.65/85p) for adults and ¥150 (\$1.25/65p) for children; your entry ticket is a bookmark, a nice souvenir. If you want, you can pay an extra ¥20 (15¢/10p) to go inside the statue-- it's hollow.

About a 10-minute walk from the Daibutsu is **Hase Kannon Temple (Hasedera)** (tel. **0467/22-6300**; www.hasedera.jp), located on a hill with a sweeping view of the sea. This is the home of an 11-headed gilt statue of Kannon, the goddess of mercy, housed in the Kannon-do (Kannon Hall). More than 9m (30 ft.) high and the tallest wooden image in Japan, it was made in the 8th

century from a single piece of camphor wood. The legend surrounding this Kannon is quite remarkable. Supposedly, two wooden images were made from the wood of a huge camphor tree. One of the images was kept in Hase, not far from Nara, while the second was given a short ceremony and then tossed into the sea to find a home of its own. The image drifted 483km (300 miles) eastward and washed up on shore but was thrown back in again because all who touched it became ill or incurred bad luck. Finally, the image reached Kamakura, where it gave the people no trouble. This was interpreted as a sign that the image was content with its surroundings, and Hase Kannon Temple was erected at its present site. Note how each face has a different expression, representing the Kannon's compassion for various kinds of human suffering. Also in the Kannon-do is a museum with religious treasures from the Kamakura, Heian, Muromachi, and Edo periods.

Another statue housed here is of **Amida**, a Buddha who promised rebirth in the Pure Land to the West to all who chanted his name. It was created by order of Yoritomo Minamoto upon his 42nd birthday, considered an unlucky year for men. You'll find it housed in the Amida-do (Amida Hall) beside the Kannon-do to the right. Also of interest is the **Kyozo**, with rotating book racks containing sutras (if you give the book racks a spin, it's considered just as auspicious as reading the sutras). **Benten-kutsu Cave** contains many stone images, including one of Benzaiten (seated, with a lute).

As you climb the steps to the Kannon-do, you'll encounter statues of a different sort. All around you will be likenesses of **Jizo**, the guardian deity of children. Although parents originally came to Hase Temple to set up statues to represent their children in hopes the deity would protect and watch over them, through the years the purpose of the Jizo statues changed. Now they represent miscarried, stillborn, or aborted infants. More than 50,000 Jizo statues have been offered here since the war, but the hundreds or so you see now will remain only a year before being burned or buried to

make way for others. Some of the statues, which can be purchased on the temple grounds, are fitted with hand-knitted caps and sweaters. The effect is quite chilling. Hase Temple is open daily 8am to 5pm (to 4:30pm in winter); admission is ¥300 (\$2.50/£1.25) for adults, ¥100 (85¢/40p) for children.

Free Sightseeing Guides

University students of Kanagawa Prefecture volunteer their time to guide foreign visitors in Kamakura as a way to practice their English. You'll find them most weekends outside the east exit of Kamakura Station from about 10am to noon, available for tours on a first-come, first-served basis. To make sure you have a guide, or to reserve for another day of the week, e-mail kamakuraguide@hotmail.com at least 2 weeks in advance, stating your name, country, number of people in your group, time and date of your request, and phone number of your hotel in Japan. Although the service is free, you should pay for the student's transportation and meal, if applicable.

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Travel Tips

Planning a Trip

Getting There

Take the **JR Yokosuka Line** bound for Zushi, Kurihama, or Yokosuka; it departs every 10 to 15 minutes from the Yokohama, Shinagawa, Shimbashi, and Tokyo JR stations. The trip takes almost 1 hour from Tokyo Station and costs ¥890 (\$7.40/£3.75) one-way to Kamakura Station. From Shinjuku, take the JR Shonan-Shinjuku Line 1 hour to Kamakura for the same price.

Visitor Information

In Kamakura, there's a **tourist information window** (tel. **0467/22-3350**; www.city.kamakura.kanagawa.jp; daily 9am-5:30pm, to 5pm in winter) immediately to the right outside Kamakura Station's east exit in the direction of Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine. It sells a color brochure with a map of Kamakura for

Kamakura Snapshot continued

¥200(\$1.65/85p); there's also a free map(in both English and Japanese), but it's not always in stock. Ask here for directions on how to get to the village's most important sights and restaurants.

Orientation& Getting Around

Kamakura's major sights are clustered in two areas: **Kamakura Station**, the town's

downtown with the tourist office, souvenir shops spread along Komachi Dori and Wakamiya Oji, restaurants, and Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine; and **Hase**, with the Great Buddha and Hase Kannon Temple. You can travel between Kamakura Station and Hase Station via the **Enoden Line**, a

wonderful small train, or you can walk the distance in about 20 minutes. Destinations are also easily reached by buses departing from Kamakura Station.

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