

## Enjoying the Beauty of Nature<sup>\*</sup>

When the spring arrives and the fields and mountains are trimmed with pink cherry blossoms, one should not miss a chance to go hiking with friends and enjoy what nature has to offer. Whenever I finish my week of working silently in front of my computer for five days, I am eager to spend the weekend enjoying the green mountains, clean air and bird song? I fondly remember when SHIEN-ATR provided us with an excellent opportunity to hike in the ancient Asuka kingdom.

On April 7, 2001, SHIEN-ATR took us on a tour of Asuka, the once prosperous capital of Japanese history. Asuka is located in Nara prefecture, near the two famous ancient capitals of Nara and Kyoto. Asuka was the capital of Japan about 1,400 years ago, and it remained the center of politics and culture for roughly one century.

At that time, Asuka was an international city and a center of exchange of knowledge and technology from other countries. When Buddhism was introduced from China and Korea, many temples were built in Japan and the Japanese culture of nobility was formed. The signs indicating the origins of Japan remain in evidence today. As you wander through Asuka, you may see the 7th temple in Western Japan, which is famous for yakuyoke, meaning “good that drives away evil.” You can also view a Buddha of gold and bronze, the oldest in Japan. As well, Asuka is the site of Tachibana Temple, the birthplace of Shoutokutaishi, who wrote the first Japanese constitution in 604.

Walking in these historic footprints and sitting under the blossoming cherry trees, how can one not be astonished by the achievements of the ancients? Having reached the top of Amakashi-no-oka hill and having viewed all of Asuka, we felt quite carefree and happy!

Asuka, the ancient kingdom, made for a truly unforgettable trip.



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