

■ KAMAKURA, JAPAN

Bamboo may not strike you as an obvious barrier against evil. But standing inside the protective embrace of 2,000 unbending green stalks at Hōkoku-ji Buddhist temple, it's easy to buy into the Shinto belief. In Kamakura, south of Tokyo, this venerable grove of skyscraper Moso stalks was planted to ward off wicked spirits and has served its role for countless years, earning Hōkoku-ji the nickname 'Bamboo Temple'.

The canes shoot dizzyingly skywards, reaching their highest point – around 20m – in June. In their midst it's eerily quiet, apart from the rustle of leaves above. And it's dark, with only occasional shafts of sunlight cutting through the shade to illuminate mossy stone Buddhas. The effect leaves you feeling as though you are centuries, rather than a mere hour, from Tokyo. And it seems as if nothing, no matter how malevolent, could pierce the solitude. *Inside Japan* (0117 370 9751, www.insidejapantours.com) has an eight-day 'Modern and Ancient Capitals' package, with three nights in Kamakura and four in Tokyo, from £1,544pp, B&B, including Heathrow flights to Tokyo Narita, transfers and Tokyo subway pass. Entrance to the Hōkoku-ji (2-7-4 Jomyo-ji) costs £1.60.

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