

Shonantei Tea House

The Shonantei tea house is the L-shaped building in the lower garden, built more than 400 years ago. It has been designated as an Important Cultural Property. Shonantei was built by tea ceremony master Sen no Shoan (1546–1614), adopted son of Sen no Rikyu (1522–1591), one of the greatest masters of the “way of tea” (*chado* or *chanoyu*).

In addition to its shape, which is ingenious for a tea house, Shonantei features a wonderfully quirky “moon-viewing veranda” (*tsukimidai*), which faces in the opposite direction of the moon. While this placement precluded a direct view of the moon in the sky, its design enabled those within to enjoy the moon’s reflection in the still waters of Golden Pond.

While the tea house has primarily served its stated function throughout its history, it was also purportedly used as a temporary hideout by a historical figure. Iwakura Tomomi (1825–1883), an influential statesman who contributed significantly to Japan’s shift from a traditional to modern society, took refuge here after supporting a policy that displeased the emperor.