

Ikutokusen Spring

The site where Shikinaen stands was originally chosen because of this natural fresh water spring, called the Ikutokusen, that fills the pond and provides water. Like the many sacred springs that dot the Okinawan landscape, the spring is believed to have divine power. The handsome curved stone entry path from the main gate leads visitors to this spring, which is enshrined in a semicircular niche of finely worked coral limestone. To this day, the water remains clear, and is home to *shimachisujinori*, an edible water grass, and creatures such as crabs. Two stone monuments display inscriptions in praise of Ikutokusen, written by Chinese envoys who visited in the early nineteenth century. The stone walls of the artful winding path leading from the spring to the palace building itself subtly transition from a sophisticated style with carefully shaped and fitted irregular hexagonal stones to a natural arrangement of unworked stones, overgrown with vegetation sprouting through the interstices. The path prepares visitors to mentally leave the boundaries of their everyday world.