

Stone Bridges and Garden Features

Shikinaen was a place for outdoor relaxation and entertainment in beautiful natural surroundings. As is typical of the Japanese gardens that influenced its design, visitors were encouraged to stroll along the looping paths, which climb and fall with the terrain, to appreciate plants, flowers, and distant hillsides in the changing seasons, and to boat or to cross bridges to small islands where they could find shelter and refreshment in fine pavilions overlooking the scenery. The two largest arched stone bridges, or *ishibashi*, which lead to the central wooded island, are Chinese in design and allow boats to pass underneath. Made of coral limestone, one is formal while the other is rustic in appearance, made of weather-beaten rocks brought from the seashore. A third stone bridge, which leads to the island on which the Hexagonal Hall (Rokkaku-do) stands, is also finely worked and so small it can be called “miniature,” able to be crossed in a few steps.

The wooden Hexagonal Hall is the second pavilion to stand in this location and is also modeled after Chinese prototypes. With deep sheltering eaves, it can be entirely opened to the breeze. In contrast to the typical Ryukyuan red tiles of Udun Palace and other buildings, the roof tiles are charred black in imitation of traditional Chinese black-glazed tiles. An octagonal hall once stood beneath the narrow, carved-stone waterfall outlet (*taki-guchi*), which releases overflow from the pond through a cascade into a cool shaded valley. The Fune-ageba is a stone slipway at one end of the pond for launching pleasure boats and storing them when not in use. A third garden pavilion can be found at the highest point of the garden, the Kankodai overlook. This hexagonal pavilion was built during the Taisho Period (1912–1926), on the site where tents had formerly been erected for Chinese delegates to rest toward the end of their visits. They would be shown the expansive vista of the farms, villages, and hills of southern Okinawa, the ocean nowhere in sight, to remind them that Ryukyu was not a small kingdom.