

## **Mausoleum of Emperor Meiji**

Emperor Meiji was born on November 3, 1852 and ascended the Chrysanthemum Throne at the age of fifteen. He is credited with the creation of modern Japan through the active encouragement of industrial, social, educational, political, and military reforms. He promoted engagement with the outside world after more than 200 years of almost total isolation under the previous samurai government. For such a major historical figure, his final resting place is quietly understated. Built atop the ruins of warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi's (1537–1598) Fushimi Castle, the mausoleum of Japan's 122nd emperor is a peaceful spot of quiet contemplation.

Though most imperial tombs are purely symbolic installations, the Mausoleum of Emperor Meiji is unusual in that the emperor's remains are actually buried here. Keeping with Buddhist tradition, Japanese emperors were cremated after death starting with Emperor Tenmu (?-686), but Emperor Meiji's promotion of new alternatives extended even to his death rites. The tomb itself is behind a number of torii gates. The two-tiered burial mound is square at the base, circular on top, and covered with *sazareishi*, small sacred stones that are said to have the power to grow into great boulders. Such stones are referenced, appropriately, in Japan's national anthem, "Kimigayo."

The kilometer-long avenue that leads to the tomb was built in great haste following the Emperor's death, and it twists to follow the contours of the old castle moat. It is a quiet, leisurely walk. Another more direct approach was built later, ending in 230 stone steps that locals now use for exercise.