

Heian Jingu Shrine celebrates the legacy of the ancient capital of Kyoto with ornate architecture and beautiful gardens open to the public. The shrine is a 5:8 scale replica of one of the innermost parts of Heiankyo, the imperial capital of Japan for more than one thousand years.

Discover Heiankyo and the rich cultural heritage of Kyoto while exploring Heian Jingu and its landscape gardens.

Heian Jingu Shrine

Heian Jingu was built in 1895 to coincide with celebrations marking the 1,100th anniversary of the founding of Heiankyo, the imperial capital of Japan from the late eighth to mid-nineteenth centuries. It enshrines Emperor Kanmu (737–806), the first emperor of the Heian period (794–1185), and Emperor Komei (1831–1866), the last emperor to rule from Heiankyo.

Modeled on an ancient capital

The shrine is atypical in that it is modeled on a part of the ancient capital known as the State Hall of the Imperial Palace, or Chodoin complex, that was the administrative part of the city and the place where the emperor presided over state affairs. The shrine's ornate halls and buildings are arranged symmetrically around a spacious, graveled courtyard. Several of these, including the Daigokuden (outer hall of worship) and the Otenmon Gate (main gate), are designated Important Cultural Properties of Japan. The bright vermilion buildings stand out against the white gravel of the courtyard and the lush, surrounding greenery.

Gardens to explore

The four landscape gardens covering an area of 30,000 square meters behind the shrine exemplify Japan's identification with nature and the appreciation of its beauties. Each garden is built in a different style, but all are carefully integrated into a seamless whole. They are open to the public and can be covered in approximately 40 minutes if time is limited. Entrance is from within the courtyard inside the shrine and requires a small fee.

A symbol of revitalization

Heian Jingu was constructed when the Kyoto economy was suffering and its population declining, partly as a result of the capital being transferred to Tokyo. The shrine was one of several projects planned to celebrate the city's long history and encourage economic

growth. It opened the same year that a large industrial exhibition was held in the city to showcase new technologies and attract new industries. In the years that followed, the economy began to improve and the population recovered. Kyoto became a grand city once again and Heian Jingu is a lasting symbol of its rebirth.

Getting to the shrine

Heian Jingu Shrine is in the Okazaki area of Kyoto, within walking distance of Higashiyama Station (10 minutes) on the Tozai Subway Line and Jingu-Marutamachi Station (15 minutes) on the Keihan Line.

The Gardens of Heian Jingu

The gardens of Heian Jingu are designated a National Site of Scenic Beauty. The four stroll gardens are each influenced by a different period of history: the Heian period (794–1185), Kamakura period (1185–1333), Momoyama period (1568–1603), and Edo period (1603–1867). They feature beautiful wooden structures relocated from the Kyoto Imperial Palace, interesting design features, and are designed to be enjoyed at a leisurely pace, with places to sit, rest, and enjoy the scenery.

Seasonal blooms

Flowers bloom in the gardens throughout much of the year. Cherry trees in each of the four gardens bloom mostly in April. Among the different cherry species is a strain of double-petaled weeping cherry called *yaebeni shidare* which produces pendulous blooms much deeper in color than more frequently seen varieties. Plants that flower at other times of the year include irises, azaleas, plum trees, wisteria, and water lilies.

Wildlife

Each garden is a habitat for wildlife, from birds and butterflies to fish, turtles, and other pond life. The rustic, pond-side teahouse in the Middle Garden or the roofed bridge spanning the pond in the East Garden are convenient vantage points for observing the flowers and wildlife. Herons, kingfishers, Japanese white-eye warblers (*mejiro*), and great tits are among the birds that visit the gardens.

The works of a prominent landscape designer

The gardens were created between 1895 and 1981. The South Garden (1981) is the most recent addition. The West (1895), Middle (1895), and East (1916) gardens were designed significantly earlier by prominent Kyoto landscape designer Ogawa Jihei VII (1860–

1933). He is renowned for his use of rocks and water in his landscaping and is considered a pioneer of the modern Japanese garden. The gardens of Heian Jingu include some of the earliest examples of his work and were revolutionary in their conception, drawing water from a nearby canal to create uncommonly large ponds.

Gardens with a touch of history

Signs in the gardens provide information in English on the plants, wildlife, and design features while introducing historical details about Kyoto and Japan. The gardens introduce visitors to aspects of Kyoto's history: the fate that befell the city after the capital was transferred to Tokyo after 1868, the construction of the late-nineteenth-century canal that feeds the garden ponds, and the launching of the first hydroelectric powered tram to serve the city.

Festivals and Events at Heian Jingu

Events and festivals are held at the shrine throughout the year. The largest is the Jidai Matsuri (Festival of the Ages), the highlight of which is a large procession from the Kyoto Imperial Palace to Heian Jingu. The procession features hundreds of people dressed in the costumes of the eighth to nineteenth centuries. The festival is held each year on October 22, and the procession starts at noon.

Other annual events include Noh drama in June, performed at night and illuminated by flaming torches set up around the grounds. Tickets are required for the event and typically go on sale in April.