

The Gardens of Heian Jingu

There are four beautiful landscape gardens at Heian Jingu with large ponds, flowing streams, stepping-stones, and elegant wooden structures relocated from the Kyoto Imperial Palace. Flowers blooming in season create picturesque scenes year-round, and the gardens are designed with ample places to sit for enjoyment at a leisurely pace. If time is limited, the 30,000-square-meter gardens can be seen in approximately 40 minutes.

The Shrine and Its Origins

Heian Jingu Shrine celebrates Kyoto's legacy as an ancient capital and enshrines the first and last emperors to rule from the city. Kyoto was the imperial capital of Japan for more than one thousand years, from 794 to 1868, and was known as Heiankyo. The shrine is modeled on the State Hall of the Imperial Palace (Chodoin) complex, one of the innermost parts of Heiankyo, where the emperor presided over state affairs. The shrine buildings are 5:8 scale replicas of the buildings of the original State Hall complex. Despite being built to a smaller scale, the shrine complex is impressive, from the entrance through an enormous vermillion gate, to the vast courtyard enclosed by ornate buildings.

The shrine was founded in 1895 to coincide with celebrations marking the 1,100th anniversary of the founding of Heiankyo. It enshrines Emperor Kanmu (737–806), the 50th Emperor of Japan and the founder of the capital. Emperor Kanmu began his reign at Heijokyo, an earlier capital on a smaller scale, in Nara. He decided a larger, more impressive capital was necessary as the government and the court grew in power. He selected what we now call Kyoto as the new site and ordered construction to begin in 793. In 794, the court moved to the new capital and named it Heiankyo. This marked the beginning of the period of history known as the Heian period (794–1185), a peaceful period in which art and literature flourished. Emperor Kanmu reigned for 25 years (781–806), and is highly regarded for his contribution to the growth of the government through implementation of new laws, encouragement of learning, and support of trade and exchange with the Asian mainland. He is considered the founding father of Kyoto and is enshrined in the Honden sanctuary, behind the Daigokuden worship hall.

The last emperor to rule from the old imperial capital, Emperor Komei (1831–1866), is also enshrined at Heian Jingu. He reigned for 21 years (1847–1866) as the Edo period (1603–1867) drew to a close and is recognized for his contributions in laying the foundations for the Meiji Restoration, the major social and political reform that spurred industrialization and fostered the modernization of Japan. With the Meiji Restoration, the capital was transferred to Tokyo and Heiankyo became Kyoto.

Heian Jingu pays homage to the ancient city of Heiankyo and the role the capital played

in Japanese history, as the seat for 72 of the long line of Japanese emperors.