

The Venerable Maple Tree

More than 300 Japanese maple trees surround Amida Temple, joining hundreds of others that turn the valley gold, orange, and red during the autumn months. The most famous tree is an 800-year-old specimen that stands between a waterfall and the steep path leading to the main hall. It has been listed by the city of Kyoto as a Natural Monument.

Maple trees generally have a lifespan of only 200 years. Priests at Amida Temple put this specimen's longevity down to two factors: its location at the bottom of a steep valley and its proximity to a nearby stream. The valley protects the tree from strong winds and typhoons, while the stream provides the water by which maples thrive.

The tree is, however, showing its age. Its main trunk has divided into three sections, each coated in thick layers of moss. Some of the upper branches lean on neighboring trees, and supports have been used to secure a number of the weaker limbs.