

Shuheki-en Garden, Sanzen-in Temple

Unlike Yusei-en Garden, Shuheki-en Garden is meant to be viewed from a sitting position indoors. The garden features a pond with a number of small islands and a low hill. A stone pagoda stands partway up the slope. The optimal location for admiring the garden and the landscape is from a seated position on the tatami mats toward the back of Kyakuden Hall, the guest hall that was formerly the residence of the temple abbots. This spot provides a panorama of the garden with a full view of the pond, islands, and stone lanterns framed by the wooden veranda. A window also includes a clear view over the valley of Ohara through a design technique known as a “borrowed landscape.”

Sanzen-in Temple was established between 782 and 806, though it is not known who first designed the garden. Records do show, however, that Kanamori Sowa (1584–1657), a tea ceremony master, redesigned the garden during the Edo period (1603–1868).

Shuheki-en means “the Garden That Gathers Green,” though its sweeping maple trees are at their most beautiful in the autumn. The placement of rocks, landscaping, and water features are also key features for visitors to enjoy while sampling green tea and traditional Japanese sweets in Kyakuden Hall.