

Yuseien Garden, Sanzen-in Temple

Yusei-en roughly translates to “Garden of Clarity.” The garden takes its name from a line in a poem by Zuo Si (250–305), a Chinese poet of the Western Jin Dynasty who wrote, “Mountains and water have clear notes of their own.”

Yusei-en Garden dates to the Muromachi period (1336–1573) and is laid out in a traditional style best enjoyed by strolling along its gravel paths. The thick moss covering the ground is punctuated by cedars, as well as maple trees that take on stunning shades of yellow and red in autumn. The garden surrounds Ojo-Gokurakuin (Amida Hall), which dates from 986. The pond beside the hall has a number of small islands, some of which are connected to the garden with stone bridges.

While trees and plants lend natural beauty to the garden, there is also a strategy to the layout, including the clever use of rocks and water features that help create a sense of flow as visitors move through it. Though it is not known who the original designer was, Yuseien was modified by tea ceremony master, Kanamori Sowa, (1584–1657) during the Edo period (1603–1867). The garden has since undergone a restoration that was completed in 2019.