

Kanrantei and Matsushima Bay

Kanrantei in central Matsushima offers a splendid view of the bay. In fact, the building's name is inspired by the vista, as *kanran* means "to watch the rippling of the water."

The structure itself was not originally built in Matsushima but is thought to have been built in Kyoto on the grounds of Fushimi-Momoyama Castle, the home of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), the powerful unifier of Japan. Hideyoshi himself presented the building to Date Masamune (1567–1636), the first lord of the Sendai domain (which encompassed today's Miyagi Prefecture). However, it was his son Tadamune who carefully chose the building's current location. The raised promontory was an ideal spot to view the moon reflected on Matsushima Bay, with some of the bay's 260 islands in the background. Moon-viewing parties are still held here in the autumn, along with illumination events that light up the red and gold maples after dark.

During the Date family's rule, only honored guests such as visiting lords, princesses, and special envoys had the privilege of lodging on Kanrantei's grounds, which used to include 10 additional buildings. Today, the building's two main rooms are used as tea rooms, which are open to the public. Visitors can sit on the tatami floors and sample a cup of green tea and traditional sweets, while taking in the view of the bay and the cool sea breeze.

A highlight is the lavish Goza no Ma room, where the *tokonoma* (raised alcove) and sliding doors are covered with a vibrant painting of Matsushima's pines, done directly on gold leaf. The current paintings are reproductions of the Edo-period (1603–1867) originals, which are preserved at nearby Zuiganji Temple.

The view is considered one of the "Three Most Scenic Spots of Japan." Matsushima Bay was also admitted to the *Most Beautiful Bays in the World in 2014*, the first bay in Japan to become a member.

The entrance fee is ¥200 for adults, and tea and sweets are available for ¥500–700. Just behind Kanrantei is the Matsushima Museum, where visitors can see seasonal exhibitions of treasures that once belonged to the Date family.