

Karamon Gate

The black and gold Karamon Gate was built in 1628 at Zojoji Temple in Edo (now Tokyo). Like the Butsuden (Buddha Hall), the gate was donated to Kenchoji Temple in 1647 during the large-scale reconstruction of the temple.

Zojoji Temple was closely affiliated with the powerful Tokugawa shogunate, and the Karamon Gate was originally the entrance to the mausoleum of the wife of the second shogun, Tokugawa Hidetada (1579–1632). The grand scale of the gate and its opulent combination of black lacquer and elaborate gilding were hallmarks of edifices built by the Tokugawa.

The undulating roof is high in the middle and curved at both ends, in a style known as *karahafu*. This is the most formal style of roof and is often used for the most important gates at temples, shrines, and castles in Japan. The Karamon has four pillars, two on one side of the doors, and two on the other.

At Kenchoji, the Karamon serves as the main entrance to the Hojo, which was traditionally the living quarters of the abbot. The gate is strictly reserved for use by the emperor and imperial envoys. All other visitors, including the monks themselves, use the side entrance to the Hojo.

The gate is designated an Important Cultural Property and was restored in 2011.