

Introduction to Ryotanji Temple

Ryotanji Temple was founded in 733 CE and is a Zen Buddhist temple of the Rinzai sect, located north of central Hamamatsu close to the banks of the Iinoya River. The temple structures exemplify several aspects of traditional Zen temple design, such as the stately gable of the priests' quarters and the vermilion color of the multistory founder's hall pavilion. All six of the main buildings are protected as Important Cultural Properties. Ryotanji is the ancestral temple of the Ii family, a prominent Japanese family that traces its roots to the year 1010 and includes a number of important figures throughout Japanese history. The garden at Ryotanji was built one generation after the family had overcome dire circumstances that threatened their survival, as a place that successive generations would be able to return to, to pay respects to their ancestors.

Today, Ryotanji is well-known for that garden, located behind the main hall, which was nationally designated a Place of Scenic Beauty in 1936. The garden was designed by renowned artist and aristocrat Kobori Enshu (1579–1647), who also designed a large number of other notable Japanese gardens.