

## **Myokenji Temple**

### **[TEA & ART]**

Myokenji Temple is one of the oldest and most influential Nichiren Buddhist temples in Kyoto, having been founded in 1321 and officially recognized by the imperial court 13 years later. The temple is noted especially for its four small but well-maintained gardens that dot the grounds and can all be viewed by paying the ¥500 temple entrance fee.

The Shikai Shodo Garden is situated in front of the Chokushimon Gate, which is opened only for imperial envoys. The garden was designed to express the Lotus Sutra, on which the teachings of the Nichiren school are based and which preaches the possibility of salvation in this life as well as in the next. The three stones stacked together on the left side represent a waterfall from which water spreads into the ocean, represented by white sand, symbolizing the spread of the Lotus Sutra around the world.

The Bamboo Spot Garden features bamboo trees growing out of deep green moss. The trees are cut and allowed to grow back every year, making for an ever-changing landscape. The garden's design is thought to have been based on a set of paintings created by the master painter Ogata Korin (1658–1716) that are held by the temple.

The Korin Kyokusui Garden, centered on a pair of sturdy pine trees, is also associated with Ogata Korin, whose family were patrons of Myokenji. Based on the same set of paintings as the Bamboo Spot Garden, it replaced a garden thought to have been created by Korin himself but lost to a fire that destroyed the temple in 1788.

The Five-Colored Camellia and Red Pine Garden includes, besides the two flora in its name, maple trees, hydrangeas, lilies, and a variety of other flowering plants. The round element by the veranda is a *suikinkutsu*—an upside-down clay pot through which water drips into a small pool, producing a gentle splashing sound said to relax the senses.