

Introduction to Okayama Korakuen Garden

Okayama Korakuen is regarded as one of the three “great gardens” of Japan. The spacious garden, situated at the rear of Okayama Castle, was first constructed by Ikeda Tsunamasa (1638–1714), the fourth lord of the Okayama domain. The garden was a source of relaxation and place of leisure for the Ikeda family through the generations they served as lords of the domain, and its scenic beauty has been carefully preserved. The inner and outer garden stretches over 14 hectares, the result of gradual expansion continuing until the end of the Edo period (1603–1867). Ownership of Korakuen was transferred from the Ikeda family to Okayama Prefecture in 1884 and the garden has been open to the public ever since. Although many of the buildings within Korakuen were destroyed by fires during World War II or damaged in natural disasters, a number of the structures have been restored based on historical documents. When strolling through the garden today, visitors can appreciate various recent innovations as well as features that are parts of Korakuen’s historical legacy.

Korakuen is special for the wide range of landscapes it presents. It is a stroll garden, dotted with buildings of various kinds and other points of interest. The view from the east side of the Enyo-tei tea house is bright and expansive, opening out on the garden’s lawns, pond, and dramatic borrowed scenery of Mt. Misao beyond it. There is a meandering stream and diverse groupings of trees and plants, all tied together in a harmonious whole. During the Edo period, the resident daimyo lord is thought to have taken pleasure in viewing the grounds from within the buildings. Today, visitors can enjoy the same views by standing at the front of the buildings. The tea houses and other structures are open to the public at certain times during the year. The stroll garden, a style of garden that developed during the Edo period, is designed in such a way as to enhance enjoyment of the sights and sounds of nature while walking along its paths, around a pond, and up and down its hills.

Okayama Korakuen is located in Okayama, the capital of Okayama Prefecture. The garden offers beautiful scenery throughout the year, with particular highlights in each season. Cherry blossoms are the feature of spring spanning late March and early April, and irises in June and lotuses in July are the attractions of summer. The onsite rice paddies are planted in the spring, tended in the summer, and harvested in the fall. Autumn, when the foliage of the garden turns to striking hues, is one of the most

popular times to visit. Come winter, the garden's colors are more somber, on rare occasions touched by snowfall.

Access

The Main Gate to the garden is on the northwest side of the grounds, a 15-minute bus ride from Okayama Station. Korakuen can also be accessed via the South Gate, located a five-minute walk across from Okayama Castle.