

History

At the start of its construction in 1687, Okayama Korakuen was covered with rice paddies and vegetable fields. At that stage of its history, it was called Gokoen, meaning “rear garden,” as it lay behind the castle. The pleasure-oriented aspects of the garden were slowly developed over the years to include a Noh stage, buildings, ponds and various aesthetic touches under the direction of the daimyo lords. Between 1692 and 1699, work focused on the expansion of what is now the East Outer Garden. In 1700, the garden expanded to the area where the current Gaienkan is located at the north end of the site, which was considered complete for the time being.

With each ruling daimyo lord, the garden was further modified to reflect their individual tastes. Ikeda Tsunamasa (1638–1714) built the Noh stage and Ikeda Tsugumasa (1702–1776) oversaw the building of the six-meter-high artificial hill, Yuishinzan, at the center of the garden, along with a channel to connect the pond in front of the Renchiken Rest House to Sawanoike Pond.

In 1871 the garden was renamed Korakuen. Ownership of the garden was transferred from the Ikeda family to Okayama Prefecture in 1884 and opened to the public. From the 1920s onwards, Korakuen was maintained as it was designed during the Edo period (1603–1867). It was designated a National Site of Scenic Beauty in Japan in 1922 and a Special Place of Scenic Beauty in 1952.

In 1934, the garden suffered extensive damage from a powerful typhoon and in 1945 further destruction in World War II air raids. Thanks to the local community and the preservation of historical documents, the garden was successfully reconstructed and its heritage sustained. In 1940, the vista which the Enyotei House faces was declared an official Scenic Zone by Okayama Prefecture, protecting the landscape arrangement for posterity. The restoration of the Korakuen Noh Stage was completed in 1958, followed by the Enyotei House in 1960.

In 2000, Okayama Korakuen celebrated its 300th anniversary and the excavated former dock ruins were opened to the public in 2014.