

History of Ritsurin Garden

Ritsurin Garden was originally a part of the estate of the Matsudaira family, the lords of the Takamatsu domain, who inherited its site from the Ikoma family, rulers of Sanuki province (present-day Kagawa Prefecture). First constructed in 1642, the garden was maintained and enjoyed by the Matsudaira over more than 200 years until 1868. Following the Meiji Restoration of that year, the system of domains ruled by the shogunate (warrior-led government) was replaced with a Western-style centralized government and the Matsudaira lost their status as lords. Ritsurin Garden was turned into a park and opened to the public in 1875. A symbol of Takamatsu and one of the city's most popular sights, Ritsurin is now recognized as one of the best-preserved Edo-period (1603–1867) gardens in Japan.

The garden was built in the *kaiyu* or stroll garden style, popular among high-ranking samurai during the Edo period, and features a series of carefully composed views that the visitor can admire in succession while walking through the garden. At Ritsurin, many of these views focus on a pond or small hill. The garden has approximately 1,400 pine trees, and artistically placed rocks dot the grounds. Another distinctive feature is the use of *shakkei* (“borrowed scenery”), a technique of garden design that takes advantage of natural features outside the garden to create a sense of expanse. At Ritsurin this background is provided by Mt. Shiun to the west, which appears to be towering over the garden when seen from certain angles. One such view can be taken in from Hiraiho Hill.

Ritsurin Garden consists of the original daimyo garden, or South Garden, and the North Garden, built in the Meiji era (1868–1912). It can take up to two hours to tour the vast grounds in their entirety, and visitors can enjoy different aspects of the scenery in every season. The cherry blossoms in spring and the red and yellow foliage in autumn in particular attract numerous visitors.