

Kō-an

Unlike Jo-an and Gen-an, the tea house called Kō-an was not designed by Oda Uraku. Rather, it is a modern design by Masao Nakamura and the Kyoto Traditional Building Technology Association, and it was built in 1986, more than a decade after Urakuen opened. Although the two historical tea houses are usually closed to visitors, Kō-an is the venue for Urakuen's tea service and regularly hosts large tea gatherings of up to 20 people.

Kō-an was named in honor of Meitetsu's president at the time, Takeda Kōtarō (1916–1991). The name plaque that hangs in the building's entryway was created by Jimyōsai (1938–), the fourteenth head of the Omotesenke school of tea and successor to the man who inscribed the plaque for Gen-an.

Kō-an has two reception rooms. The main room (*hiroma*) has an area of 15 tatami mats, or roughly 24 square meters—quite large when compared to intimate tea houses like Jo-an. One part of its large, central tokonoma alcove bears special mention: the ceiling of the alcove is made of reused planks of cedar that date to the early eighth century.

The smaller room (*yoritsuki*) is 8 tatami mats (13 m²) in size and is used primarily as the waiting area for tea gatherings held in the main room. Although gatherings are not usually held in the smaller room, it has the necessary features: a sunken hearth (*ro*) and a tokonoma alcove. Compared to the tokonoma in the main room, the one in the small room has a rustic air. The right-hand pillar is crafted from a log of red pine that retains its bark except for a small wedge carved from the bottom. This triangular slice is a decorative touch called a “bamboo face” (*takenomen*) because it is shaped like a fresh bamboo shoot. One of the alcoves in Gen-an also has this feature.

The path that leads to Kō-an passes a stone washbasin with a hidden musical device known as a *suikinkutsu*. The pebbles surrounding the washbasin conceal a buried ceramic jar that creates a hollow space in the earth. When water is poured from the dipper onto the pebbles, droplets drain through and fall into the jar, resonating like the notes of a koto.