

Kuchu Teien Observatory, Umeda Sky Building

(target: 500–750 ww, actual: 652)

The Kuchu Teien (“Sky Garden”) links the twin towers of the Umeda Sky Building at the very top, more than 170 meters above the ground. Its futuristic architecture and appearance are designed to inspire visitors to “look to the stars.”

Journey into the Sky

The Kuchu Teien experience begins at the Departure Gate on the third floor of the Umeda Sky Building, where the walls are covered with quotations about the sky from classical literature—ranging from the *Rig Veda* and *Gulliver’s Travels* to Miyazawa Kenji’s *Night on the Galactic Railroad*. The first elevator ride takes visitors to the building’s 35th floor, adorned with cloud-covered “sky walls.”

Next come the tube escalators, ultramodern corridors of steel and glass that are visible from the ground far below. They cross some 40 meters of open space between the towers to reach the restaurants, bars, and souvenir shop of the 39th-floor Sky Lobby.

Above the Sky Lobby on the 40th floor is a circular gallery with 360-degree views of Osaka. Visitors can stroll around the gallery to find their preferred angle, then take a seat and admire the view. A cafe on this floor serves light meals, fresh-roasted coffee, and a wide selection of beers.

Finally, on the rooftop is the Sky Walk, an open-air circular gallery with the best views of all. To the north lies the Yodogawa River and an expanse of city that stretches to the mountains beyond. Osaka Bay to the west is especially picturesque at sunset, and Osaka’s bustling southern neighborhoods light up the scene after dark with their neon nightscapes.

From a Shining Future . . .

Futurism is the dominant theme throughout the upper reaches of the Umeda Sky Building. The inner walls of the 40th-floor gallery explain the philosophy behind the building with panels that trace humanity’s dreams of the sky, from ancient ziggurats and pyramids up to modern times and beyond. The Sky Building itself, completed in 1993, is positioned just two-thirds of the way through the timeline, which continues with

space elevators, orbiting habitats, and finally, self-supporting cities in the sky.

The observatory section at the top was hoisted up from the ground on four wire ropes, a never-before-attempted construction method. Its open inner circle is lined with gleaming panels of glass to evoke the space left by a departing starship. This hypothetical interstellar vehicle is never depicted in any of the concept art, but there is related imagery throughout the Kuchu Teien interior, even on individual light fixtures, that hints at a possible design.

. . . to a Fondly Remembered Past

By contrast with the forward-looking Kuchu Teien, the basement of the Umeda Sky Building holds a nostalgically reenacted slice of the past called Takimi Koji (“Waterfall-Viewing Alley”). This retro restaurant row is modeled on the 1920s ambience of Hozenji Yokochō, a well-known backstreet in southern Osaka’s Dotonbori district. Eye-catching memorabilia like an early three-wheeled car and a life-sized diorama of a classic 1950s living room set the stage for establishments serving typical Osaka cuisine. Even the restrooms recall the past: they are modeled after traditional-style public bathhouses, complete with paintings of Mt. Fuji on the tiled walls.

The neighborhood around the base of the Umeda Sky Building is of particular interest to architecture buffs and urbanists. Just northeast of the building stands the Wall of Hope, a 78-meter-long, 9-meter-high block of leafy foliage designed by renowned contemporary architect Ando Tadao. West of this, to the building’s north, is New Satoyama, a native-species-only concept garden with small patches set aside for local kindergarten and elementary students to grow their own vegetables and rice. Southeast of the building, the Island Garden is designed to serve as a “natural oasis” amid the high-rise architecture, with sights including a small “reverse waterfall” that flows from bottom to top and a larger waterfall that can be seen from inside Takimi Koji.