

Joeiji Temple Garden (Sesshutei)

Sesshutei is a renowned strolling garden on the grounds of Joeiji Temple. It is famous for its *karesansui* dry landscape features which include stone arrangements representing islands, mountains, and waterfalls. The garden is believed to have been designed by Sesshu (1420–1506), a Zen Buddhist priest who was one of Japan's most prominent ink wash landscape painters. Sesshu used strong lines and variations in shading to create a sense of depth in his landscapes, and the shapes, arrangement, and scale of the stones at Sesshutei impart a similar effect.

The garden is designed around a central pond similar in shape to the Chinese character for "heart." Stones are arranged in the water to resemble islands in the shapes of a turtle and a crane, auspicious animals representing good fortune and longevity. Stones are also located around the pondside and in clusters across the gently undulating lawns that surround the pond. Trees are absent from the central grounds of Sesshutei, distinguishing it from typical strolling gardens. Their absence keeps the focus on the stone arrangements, which in turn add depth and enhance the perceived scale of the garden.

The extensive grounds include forested mountainsides and three additional ponds, one of which is a breeding ground for the forest green tree frog. The species is native to Japan and spawns in trees and plants overhanging water. Between April and July visitors can spot the frog's foamy nests hanging from branches around Shimei Pond. A loop trail leads around the central garden and past Shimei Pond. It takes approximately 30 minutes to complete. Near the pond, a side trail leads up the mountainside to a worship hall dedicated to Bishamonten, one of the Four Heavenly Kings who guard the cardinal directions of the world from evil.

There is a small fee for admission to the garden. On weekends and holidays, matcha is sometimes served in the teahouse beside the Main Hall. In autumn, parts of the garden are illuminated at dusk for visitors to enjoy the fall colors.