

Okayama

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1 Koraku-en-mae bushalte

2 Tickets

3 Hoofdingang

Situated on an island in the middle of the Asahi River, once only accessible by boat (there are now three bridges), this exceptional garden was created in 1700 by the daimyo of Okayama, Ikeda Tsunamasa. Anxious to have a place near his castle where he could relax, receive guests, and practice riding and archery, he spent no less than 14 years perfecting the garden. Today, Koraku-en is considered one of the three finest gardens in Japan, the others being Kairaku-en in Mito and Kenroku-en in Kanazawa.

It is not exceptionally large (13ha), but it is beautiful, varied, and in flower throughout the year, changing color with the seasons. A kaiyu (stroll garden), it is filled with wide lawns, hills, ponds, and tea houses, with paths winding in between, as well as a 640m-long stream of pure water, making the garden pleasantly cool in summer. Although since the Meiji era the former fields and rice paddies have been replaced by lawn, there is still a working tea plantation. The plums (ume) gathered in the garden are used to make a sweet wine called umeshu. Every January 1 and 3, to celebrate the New Year, the Japanese cranes that are raised here are released to fly over the garden—with a wingspan of nearly 3m, they are a spectacular sight.

4 No theater

5 Enyo-tei

The main pavilion, from where the lord enjoyed the view of the garden and its “borrowed landscape” (shakkei) of Mount Misao in the background.

5 Kayo-no-ike

A superb weeping cherry tree droops over Kayo Pond (Kayo-no-ike), which is fed by a waterfall. In summer, a myriad of big white lotuses bloom here. In the middle of the water sits a huge granite rock, (7.5m high and with a circumference of 20m). It was moved here three centuries ago, having been cut into 90 pieces to make it easier to transport. As you continue, you pass the remains of the jetty where the daimyo moored his boat when coming from the castle, now covered by a thicket of bamboo.

6 Zuidingang

7 Tickets

8 Renchi-ken

Bar en restaurant

9 Yuishin heuvel

Uitkijkpunt

10 Irisveld

11 Ryu-ten

Paviljoen waardoor riviertje stroomt met een bedding van gekleurde keien.

12 Kako-no-ike

Vijver met waterval.

13 Ume grove

Boomgaard met Japanse pruimelaars.

14 Cherry tree grove

Boomgaard met kerselaars.

15 Chishio-no-mori Grove

Esdoornbos, Chishio betekent 'verschillende keren verven van stof'.

16 Rijstvelden

17 Theeplantage

18 Okayama Castle

Built by the daimyo Ukita Hideie in 1597, Okayama Castle is also known as U-jo, “Crow Castle,” because of its black wooden walls. Black was synonymous with strength and sobriety, white with wealth and splendor. The one exception here is the gilded shachi (mythical fish protecting the building from fire) at the corners of the roofs. A flatland castle (built on a plain), it is protected on the east side by the Asahi River. Unfortunately, the castle did not withstand the bombing of World War II and in 1966, was rebuilt in reinforced concrete. The engineers even installed an elevator in the keep. The interior houses objects (armor, swords, lacquerware) that belonged to the Ukita and Ikeda clans. Apart from the stone base, the only part of the castle that is now original is the Tsukimi turret in the northwest corner of the enclosure.

19 Sawa-no-ike

At Sawa Pond (Sawa-no-ike), the largest in the garden, look for carp swimming between the small islands covered in green pines and white sand.

S Shiroshita Station

H Hotel Excel Okayama

O Okayama Station

Wandeling