

1. Kakumeikan Hall

Located near Okayama Korakuen's Main Gate, the Kakumeikan Hall currently serves as a hall for various meetings and events. The house is also connected by corridors to surrounding buildings including the Enyotei House and the Eisho-no-ma Room.

The current building was constructed in Iwakuni, Yamaguchi Prefecture, in 1892 and was relocated to Okayama Korakuen in 1949 after the original building was destroyed in the 1945 air raids. The original building, dating from the seventeenth century, featured a thatched roof and had several different rooms to accommodate guests and family members of the daimyo lord when they visited the garden.

After ownership of the garden was transferred to Okayama Prefecture in 1884, the building was named Kakumeikan, or "crane cry house," because the cries of the Crane Aviary can be heard there. During the Meiji era (1868–1912), the building was refurbished with a large hall the size of 150 tatami mats that could be used to host large groups of people. Between 1884 and 1909, the hall was used for the Okayama Prefectural Assembly.

The current building is similar to the previous one in terms of proportions, but it features a tiled roof and was constructed in the style of a traditional samurai residence.

2. Enyotei House

In the Edo period (1603–1867), the Enyotei House was the main building the daimyo lord would visit when at Korakuen. The current building is a reconstruction completed in 1960 based on historical documents and drawings preserved from the Edo period after the original was destroyed in an air raid in 1945, at the end of World War II.

The wood and other materials used in the current structure were brought in from other locations around Japan, including Nara Prefecture. The floors are covered with tatami mats, and the sliding shoji panels open up on two sides of the house, framing the landscape of the garden. The daimyo would often sit before the tokonoma alcove, which afforded the best position for viewing the garden. Corridors attach the Enyotei House to the Kakumeikan Hall and the Eisho-no-ma

Room, which adjoins the Korakuen Noh Stage. Located close to the garden's main gate, the building is only open to the public at selected times of the year.

The Enyotei House offers a view of the garden landscape framed by the open shoji. The house was built to align with this specific viewpoint and serve as a place of peace and calm. The view from the house is itself protected by building regulations established by the prefecture that restrict construction of buildings outside the park. The regulations to protect the landscape were pioneering and inspired similar efforts in other parts of Japan. In 1940, Okayama Prefecture declared the view an official Scenic Zone, a designation that protects the vistas enjoyed by daimyo lords of centuries past for future generations of garden visitors.

The view from Enyotei House encompasses the garden's large lawn, Sawanoike Pond, and Yuishinzan Hill with Mt. Misao in the background. This view is considered shakkei, or "borrowed scenery," incorporating the landscape beyond the garden grounds into its composition and deepening the sense of depth of the garden. When the harvest moon (the first full moon of autumn) rises between late September and October, it can be observed over the mountains from the Enyotei. Kayonoike Pond and the Nishikigaoka woods can be seen to the right from both inside and outside the house. A triangular rock partially hidden behind a bush is located outside the east side of the building and indicates the spot at which the same view as within the house can be observed.

Attached to the Enyotei House is a four-and-a-half tatami-sized tea room known as Riniken. The original building was destroyed along with the Enyotei House in the 1945 air raids and later restored. For the restored tea room, the painting of a dragon on the ceiling of the original structure was redone by Nihonga (Japanese-style) painter Ikeda Yoson (1895–1988), a leading artist of the Taisho (1912–1926) and Showa (1926–1989) eras. Yoson also painted the backdrop of the Korakuen Noh Stage. The dragon painting can only be seen when the Enyotei House is open to the public.

3. Noh Stage

Noh, a traditional form of theater that showcases classical Japanese drama and dance, is performed on an open-air stage at Okayama Korakuen Garden. Surrounding buildings including the Eisho-no-ma and the Suminagashi-no-ma serve as seating for the

audience; these structures are connected by corridors to other significant buildings in the garden including the Enyo-tei House and the Kakumei-kan Hall.

The outdoor Korakuen Noh Stage offers visitors the opportunity to experience the art form the way it was originally staged. In the past, noh performances were often held on the grounds of temples and shrines, but today it is more common for the stage and audience seating to be provided within a single building.

The daimyo lord who built the garden, Ikeda Tsunamasa (1638–1714), enjoyed watching noh performances and sometimes performed the art himself for the enjoyment of the families of his retainers and folk of the castle town/domain. However, his successor Ikeda Tsugumasa (1702–1776) was not as interested in noh theater and reduced the size of the surrounding buildings. In 1945 the garden, stage, and auxiliary buildings were destroyed in an air raid. The current stage and garden are the result of a project, undertaken and completed in 1958, to reconstruct these features based on their eighteenth-century configuration.

Traditionally, noh was performed in front of an old pine tree, which was said to be the abode of the gods. Most noh stages today, including the one at Korakuen, continue this tradition by featuring an image of a pine tree on the wall behind the stage. Artist Ikeda Yoson (1895–1988), a skilled Nihonga (Japanese-style) painter of Okayama, painted the tree for the rebuilt Korakuen stage as well as the accompanying young bamboo thicket.

To the left of the stage is the *hashigakari*, a diagonal bridge connecting the backstage to the main stage. It can be used to emphasize the entrance of the actors as if they are coming from a faraway place. Three small pine trees placed in order of ascending height stand along the bridge, further enhancing the appearance of depth. A bed of white pebbles surrounds the stage to reflect the light and better illuminate the actors onstage. Facing the stage across the pebbled area is the Eisho-no-ma, the room where the lord and people in attendance would sit.

Noh and Kyogen (comic interlude) performances continue to be held several times a year at Korakuen, which also hosts performances by noh schools from other parts of Japan.

4. Eisho-no-ma Room

Eisho-no-ma Room looks out onto the Korakuen Noh Stage. Along with the surrounding buildings facing the stage, it was used for entertaining guests and viewing performances. The room is connected by corridors to the surrounding buildings including the Enyotei House and the Kakumeikan Hall.

A building known as the Suitei, built in 1691, became the prototype for what would eventually become the Eisho-no-ma Room. At that time, the tatami room at the Suitei was used for Noh dance performances, as daimyo lord Ikeda Tsunamasa (1638–1714) personally practiced the art. The Eisho-no-ma dates from 1707, when, 12 years after the construction of a Noh stage at nearby Okayama Castle, a stage was added at Korakuen. After suffering severe damage in a World War II air raid, the Noh stage was rebuilt in 1958. The Eisho-no-ma was restored in 1967 along with the Suminagashi-no-ma, another viewing room on the west side of the stage.

The seat on the tatami in front of the tokonoma alcove, where the daimyo lord customarily sat to view performances, directly faces the old pine tree picture at the back of the Noh stage. If other guests were present, they would sit according to their rank, with the lord at the center. Guests invited to watch Noh performances here included the lord's family members.

When the sliding doors of the Eisho-no-ma Room are open, visitors can enjoy the serene sight of Kayonoike Pond with the Nishikigaoka woods in the background.

5. Kayonoike Pond

The lotus pond on the south side of the garden beside the Enyotei House and the Eisho-no-ma Room is called Kayonoike. From mid-June to August, it is filled with the large white flowers of ittenshikai lotus, which can reach up to 30 centimeters in diameter. Lotus flowers open in the morning at dawn and close their petals soon after noon. The small Eishobashi Bridge traverses the center of the pond; at one side is the large Odateishi Stone. At the north end of the bridge is a splendid weeping cherry tree and at its south end maple trees. The Nishikigaoka woods that form the backdrop of the pond are filled with many different species of trees and plants. The water of Kayonoike Pond travels via underground pipes from the garden's meandering stream and Sawanoike Pond and cascades into the pond over a splendid arrangement of rocks.

6. Odateishi Stone

The massive granite rock on the bank of Kayonoike Pond is 7 meters high, taller than Yuishinzan, the nearby artificial hill. The Odateishi Stone displays the joints revealing where it was split with wedges into more than 90 pieces before being moved and reassembled in the garden. At the front of the stone the cracks where the rock was split are fine, testifying to the high level of stonemasonry skill of the time. At the back the gaps are deeper and more visible, suggesting the difficulty of breaking the stone apart.

7. Nishikigaoka Woods

Nishikigaoka woods is a woodland on high ground behind the Kayonoike Pond, and is one of the spots in the garden that best showcases seasonal change. The grove once included many species of trees but today features mainly Japanese cedars and other evergreens, assuring it is green, even in winter. A cherry tree blossoms in spring and the maples of the grove on the verge of the pond lend the garden color in autumn. Although surrounded by city, the grove attracts many wild birds. Paths within the grove lead to the thatch-roofed Moshōan Rest House, Shitennoji Temple, and another small temple called the Jizodo.

8. Ofunairi Dock Site

Okayama Korakuen is located on an island across the Asahi River from Okayama Castle. The Ofunairi was the inlet and landing dock on the island that was used by the daimyo lords of the Edo period (1603–1867) when they visited the garden by boat from the castle, entering from the special gate originally built for them (Onari Gomon). The site of this former entrance is located on the shore just behind the garden's southern perimeter.

During the 1800s the inlet gradually filled in with sediment transported by the river. The Onari Gomon was relocated eastward to the location where the current South Gate stands today. During the Taisho era (1912–1926) when the garden's outer promenade was constructed, the inlet was entirely filled in and the entrance closed for good.

The remains of the dock and stone staircase (gangi) leading up to the Onari Gomon were excavated in 2012 based on Edo-period historical maps and opened

to the general public for viewing in 2014. In addition to the staircase, traces of the pathway that led to the gate are still visible to this day.

9. South Gate

Okayama Korakuen's South Gate is one of three official garden entrances. It is located close to the site of the Ofunairi inlet and dock, which was once the exclusive entrance to the garden used by the ruling daimyo lord.

The South Gate commands a spectacular view of Okayama Castle, which can be reached in five minutes by crossing the Asahi River on the pedestrian-only Tsukimi Bridge. The view is best from the nearby cafe or the canteen located outside the South Gate. The South Gate and the Main Gate are the most frequently used, while the East Gate is open only occasionally.

In spring, many visitors enter the garden from the South Gate to enjoy the large cherry blossom trees, which form a tunnel stretching into the garden.

10. Renchiken Rest House

The Renchiken Rest House is located at the southern side of the garden and is visible to the right after entering the South Gate. The building's facade has not changed since it was restored after being damaged in a 1934 typhoon; it was one of the few buildings in the garden that survived the bombing raids of World War II.

The rest house was particularly favored by daimyo Ikeda Tsunamasa (1638–1714), who first built the garden and would often stop here to enjoy his breakfast and to admire the lotus flowers that once grew in the small pond in front.

The granite bridge that crosses the pond, now stocked with koi carp, has been a key design element since the garden was first built. The bridge changes direction midway in a V-shape that resembles the Japanese hiragana character for “ku.” The east room of the building, which is currently used as a cafe, features a circular window metaphorically representing Buddhist cosmology that frames the garden view.

Visitors to Renchiken can enjoy picturesque views of the garden's ponds, rolling landscape, and pine grove. Directly in front of the house is a small pond, which

acts as a waterway linking Sawanoike Pond to the northern end of the garden flowing past the foot of Yuishinzan Hill and emptying into Kakonoike Pond on the eastern side of the garden.

This house and others in the garden are open to the public in monthly rotation and the facilities can be rented by advance reservation.

11. Yuishinzan Hill

This six-meter-high artificial hill was constructed by Ikeda Tsugumasa (1702–1776), whose father, Tsunamasa, began construction of the garden over the period between 1686 and 1700. The hill, which gave the mostly flat garden more three-dimensional interest, is located in its center, next to Ryuten Rest House and overlooking Sawanoike Pond. It can be seen from most parts of the garden.

The north side of the hill facing Sawanoike Pond features red and white azaleas and other colorful plants. The rocks on the eastern slope of the hill are strategically placed to resemble a flowing waterfall, a striking sight both from the top and foot of the hill.

To give the hill a mountainous feel, the rugged stones lining the pathways on its east side were placed to mimic a mountain path and contrast with the smooth stones on the north side. Yuishindo is a shelter on the east side of the hill where people can sit to rest.

12. Ryuten Rest House

On the east side of Yuishinzan Hill, the Ryuten Rest House provided the daimyo lords a rest spot when strolling around the garden. The building was restored after flood damage in 1934 and was one of the few structures in the garden to survive the 1945 air raids.

The four walls of the ground level are completely open and straddle a stream flowing through the two-story structure—a rare sight in a Japanese garden. Planted in the stream are six rocks of varying sizes and colors arranged in an intentionally asymmetrical way to guide the water elegantly through the building. Other contrasting elements are harmoniously juxtaposed: the differently sized flooring on the two sides of the stream and the contours of the building's pillars, which are rounded on the outside and squared on the inside. The pillars are

slender enough not to obstruct the view they so elegantly frame. To maintain the unobstructed view, the ceiling hatch leading to the second floor is located in the center of the building and has no fixed staircase.

Unlike many buildings in the garden, the Ryuten Rest House is open daily to visitors. The gentle breeze flowing through the structure is especially pleasant on a hot summer's day.

13. Yatsubashi Bridge and Japanese Irises

The Yatsubashi Bridge is a bridge consisting of eight planks that zig-zag over the stream (*kyokusui*) that meanders through the garden just south of the Ryuten Rest House. It is flanked by purple and white Japanese “rabbit-ear” irises (*kakitsubata*), which grow in water near the bridge and bloom in early May.

The combination of the bridge and the shallow-flowered irises is inspired by a poem in *The Tales of Ise*, a tenth-century classic of Japanese literature, in which the protagonists stop to rest at a marsh with an eight-planked bridge. The poem itself was inspired by the Japanese irises that were in bloom in the marsh, and the five verses of the poem begin with the five syllables that make up the flower's name: “ka,” “ki,” “tsu,” “ba,” and “ta.” The poem incorporates this wordplay while expressing the longing for their families that the travelers feel while far away on a journey.

14. Kakonotaki Falls

The waterfall on the east side of the garden, surrounded by dense woods, feeds into Kakonoike Pond. The trees stretch along the path leading eastward from the wisteria trellis near the South Gate to Kakonoike at the southern end of the garden. The trees are tall and the foliage dense.

The pathway follows a narrow stream like a mountain cascade, with rocks strategically placed to calibrate the speed and strength of the flow. The powerful sound of the waterfall fills visitors' ears as they descend to the pond.

When the garden was first built, the waterfall and pond were surrounded by mountain cherry trees and flowering shrubs that bloomed in bright profusion from one season to the next. Kako, the name of the waterfall—and originally the name of a shelter that stood here to admire the landscape—means “a variety of

flowers.” The name serves as a reminder that this was once a place where flowers flourished.

15. Kakonoike Pond

The pond into which Kakonotaki Falls empties is Kakonoike. The banks are smooth and hollowed out and a small grassy island rises in the center (Nakajima). The outflow of the pond is the origin of the meandering stream (kyokusui) that winds through the garden before emptying into the Asahi River.

The name of the pond, Kako, means “a variety of flowers.” When the garden was first built, the waterfall and pond were surrounded by mountain cherry trees and shrubs that bloomed from one season to the next and which could be enjoyed from a small shelter called the Kako. Although neither the plants nor the building survive, the name serves as a reminder of the past. Today the pond is surrounded by other foliage; a dense grove of trees lines the pathway that leads to the pond.

16. Chasodo Tea House

Initially known as Rikyudo, this structure was moved to Okayama Korakuen from the villa of a high-ranking official around 1887. The tea house was named after Sen no Rikyu (1522–1591), whose name is often given to tea houses because of his founding influence on Japanese tea culture and traditions. The structure was destroyed during World War II and was rebuilt in 1961. In addition to Sen no Rikyu, the tea house is dedicated to Eisai, also known as Yosai (1141–1215), the Okayama-born priest who was credited with bringing tea seeds to Japan from China. The tea house is available for rent for tea (chanoyu) gatherings.

17. Chishionomori Grove

The approximately 100 maple trees at Chishionomori Grove turn lush green when they bud in spring. When the weather cools in autumn, the foliage changes vivid auburn and vermilion. “Chishio” evokes the way cloth, dipped into dye multiple times, turns into ever-more vivid colors, just as do maple leaves with the deepening of autumn. The grove is located near Kakonoike Pond and across the garden path from the Benzaitendo Temple and the Nishino Inari Shrine.

18. Shinden Rest House

Near the northwest end of the garden, the Shinden Rest House features a room the size of 10 tatami mats from which visitors can enjoy a panorama of the garden. The building faces the Seiden Fields, where rice and other plants are grown, and overlooks the garden's tea plantation.

The house was built in the first half of the nineteenth century and was initially known as Shin Goten before being changed to Shinden; both names mean “new palace.” The location at the perimeter of the garden means that when the shoji panels are open, those inside can appreciate the garden at one end of the house and the scene outside the garden at the other. Originally the scene was mainly countryside, but after World War II, as the city began to grow, the surrounding bamboo thicket was kept high to conceal the view of high-rise buildings outside the garden.

This house and others in the garden are open to the public in monthly rotation and can be rented with advance reservations.

19. Tea Plantation

Okayama Korakuen's tea plantation has been a key component and mainstay of the garden since its beginnings. The tea plants cultivated here have not undergone selective breeding and have maintained their original taste for four centuries. During the Edo period (1603–1867), the daimyo lords would often enjoy the slightly bitter flavor of the tea made with leaves plucked and prepared from these plants.

The plantation originally consisted of scattered tea plants, but was organized in beautifully manicured rows in the Taisho era (1912–1926). The current arrangement is harmonized with the hedges on the embankment behind them, which are trimmed in elegant, wave-like lines resembling mountains behind the garden. The tea plantation has played an important role at Korakuen, both in producing tea that is made for daily consumption in the garden and in replicating a typical rural scene within the garden.

The Tea Picking Festival takes place in the garden on the third Sunday of May and visitors can join in and help harvest tea leaves. An annual event since 1956, the festival features members of the Tea Picking Dance Preservation Society from Mimasaka—a city in Okayama Prefecture famed for its tea—harvesting tea leaves and performing a tea-picking dance performed in traditional Japanese farming kimono.

Located next to the tea plantation is a tea house cafe where visitors can enjoy the view of Okayama castle and Sawanoike Pond.

20. Seiden Fields

The Seiden Fields currently consist of nine plots: six rice paddies and three plots to grow plants including Oga lotus and peonies. These fields represent the legacy of the rice paddies that once occupied the garden on a larger scale for the practical cultivation of rice.

The current rice paddies were created at the end of the Edo period (1603–1867) on the model of the Chinese Zhou Dynasty land-division system. In that system a square piece of land is divided into nine plots; eight are allocated to separate families for the cultivation of rice for their own use and the ninth, the center plot, is managed jointly. The system is based on highly regarded Confucian principles; at Korakuen, the system is represented on a small scale, but in 1670 the Ikeda clan applied it on a larger scale to create rice fields in what is now Okayama Prefecture's city of Bizen.

Okayama Korakuen's annual Rice Planting Festival has been celebrated at the garden since 1962 and takes place at the rice paddies on the second Sunday of June. Rice planting is done by hand during the festival by workers and volunteer visitors, and the fruits of their labor are harvested later in the year, usually in October.

21. Sawanoike Pond

The largest body of water in the gardens, the Sawanoike Pond occupies the center of the grounds and features three islands: Nakanoshima, Minoshima and Jarijima.

On the east side of the pond, on Nakanoshima Island, is the Shimajaya Rest House; it is reached via a small bridge. Under daimyo lord Ikeda Tsunamasa (1638–1714), the Buddhist chapel known as Benzaitendo was located on Nakanoshima; during the tenure of his son, Tsugumasa (1702–1776) it was moved to the present location in front of Chishionomori Grove.

Minoshima Island has the open-air Tsuridono Pavilion, while the smallest island, Jarijima is covered with white sand and pines. The two stone posts between the

islands of Nakanoshima and Minoshima mark what was once the border between Jodogun and Minogun, two former counties of Okayama Prefecture.

22. Yuga Shrine and Nishino Inari Shrine

These neighboring shrines in the northern part of the garden were worshipped by the daimyo lords of the Ikeda family. Yuga Shrine was relocated in 1872 from the Ikeda residence in Tokyo, while Nishino Inari Shrine has been on the grounds since 1786. The former is a branch shrine of Yuga Daigongen. Yuga Daigongen Shrine, located on nearby Mt. Yuga in Okayama's Kurashiki area, is known for its syncretistic Buddhist-Shinto tradition devoted to protection against evil and bad luck. Yuga Daigongen was regularly frequented by the lords of Okayama who succeeded Ikeda Tsunamasa (1638–1714). The branch shrine was built at the Ikeda family's Edo (now Tokyo) residence in 1840. Beyond the stone torii gate are two small structures, the worship hall in front and the main sanctuary, covered with a cypress bark roof, behind it.

Built during the tenure of Ikeda lord Harumasa (1750–1818), Nishino Inari Shrine has been in the garden since the days when the daimyo lords would regularly visit the garden. During the tenure of Ikeda Narimasa (1773–1833), a festival was held to which residents of the castle town were invited. The garden was decorated with ornaments and people were allowed to enter and visit the Inari Shrine. It is believed that tens of thousands of people joined the festivities.

23. Jigendo Temple

The Jigendo Temple at Korakuen is located near the western end of the tea plantation and was constructed in 1697 by Ikeda Tsunamasa (1638–1714). It was dedicated to peace and stability among members of the Ikeda family and harmonious relations with the people of the Okayama castle town.

The entrance to the temple was once flanked by two 110-centimeter Nio guardian statues. The statues were restored in 2000 and moved into the permanent collection of the Okayama Prefectural Museum. The temple hall, currently empty, once enshrined two statues: a 1-meter-high and a 50-centimeter-high statue of Kannon, bodhisattva of compassion. After the transfer of the garden to Okayama Prefecture in 1884, the statues were returned to the Ikeda family and are now kept in two different temples in Okayama.

Although the main temple building is empty, some original features can still be found in the temple compound. One is the 4-meter high Eboshi-iwa, a composite rock in the shape of an eboshi, the tall, rounded headgear traditionally worn by members of the Heian court (794–1185). Similar in composition to the garden's Odateishi Stone, the Eboshi-iwa consists of 36 pieces of granite that were once a single stone.

24. Pine Grove

The pine grove across the path from the Gojusan-tsugi Koshikakejaya Rest House on the north side of the garden represents one of three pine groves that have been part of the garden since its beginnings. There are approximately 240 red pine (*Pinus densiflora*) and black pine (*Pinus thunbergii*) trees in the entire garden, 100 of which are found at this grove.

After World War II, most of the pine trees in the garden were wiped out by an infestation of bark beetles. The grove was replanted in the 1950s and the trees here have been growing strong and healthy ever since. An unobstructed view of this area is the adjacent Gojusan-tsugi Koshikakejaya Rest House. Since pines are evergreens and have a long lifespan, they have long been treasured as symbols of longevity.

25. Gojusan-tsugi Koshikakejaya Rest House

Located across from the pine grove at the garden's north end, the Gojusan-tsugi Koshikakejaya is a rustic-style, thatched roof shelter with seats facing the pine grove and open on one side. A picturesque view of the garden grounds with Okayama Castle in the background, can be found through the bamboo latticework of the shelter's back wall. This feature of the garden was added in the early 1870s. The lattice-work is intended to have the effect of making the garden both hidden and visible at the same time.

Gojusan-tsugi Koshikake, or "bench of the 53 stations" gets its name from a horizontal plaque (*hengaku*) with fan-shaped pictures representing the 53 stations on the Tokaido Road attached to the back wall. The 53 stations were rest areas along the major highway people traveled in those times between Kyoto and Edo (now Tokyo).

26. Kankitei Rest House and Horseback Riding Grounds

Okayama Korakuen was not only a garden for the daimyo lords to enjoy the scenery; it was also a place for practice and training in the martial arts. The Kankitei Rest House faces the middle of an approximately 180-meter-long stretch known as the baba (riding track) on the north side of the garden. We can imagine the lords, including Ikeda Tsugumasa (1702–1776) and his grandson Ikeda Harumasa (1750–1818), practicing horsemanship and archery here.

Several buildings were constructed for spectators of martial arts including horseback riding and archery; at the Kankitei Rest House the lords would watch equestrian activities performed by their retainers, who would be allowed to see the garden as a reward for their skillful horsemanship. It was a place where retainers could establish a relationship with their lord.

The rest house is one of the few buildings in the garden that was largely undamaged in the World War II air raid. In the spring, the riding track is lined with magnificent cherry blossoms.

This house and others in the garden are open to the public in monthly rotation and can be rented with advance reservations.

27. Kansui Saikyoken Rest House

The small thatched-roof structure located at the northern end of Sawanoike Pond takes its name from the word “kansui,” the soft green color of the evergreen pine grove behind the building, and “saikyo,” a delicate sound alluding to the calm waters of the nearby pond. When the sliding doors on the southern side of the house are open, the room looks out over the landscape of Sawanoike Pond with Yuishinzan Hill and Okayama Castle in the distance.

This house and others in the garden are open to the public in monthly rotation and can be rented with advance reservations.

28. Red-crowned Cranes and the Crane Aviary

Okayama Korakuen has been home to a diverse range of crane species since the Edo period (1603–1867) including red-crowned, white-naped, and hooded cranes. These birds were kept in captivity but were able to roam the garden during the day. The cranes disappeared from Korakuen at the end of World War II, but two

new red-crowned cranes were donated to the garden in 1956 by Guo Moruo, a Chinese poet, archaeologist, and politician who had spent his high school years studying in Okayama before the war. A poem by Guo can be found inscribed next to the aviary that conveys his reasons for the gift.

The two cranes Korakuen received were both female, but the city of Kushiro in Hokkaido—which is active in the preservation of red-crowned cranes—was able to help the birds successfully breed by introducing them to male cranes. Thanks to breeding efforts in partnership with Kushiro, Okayama is now home to the largest number of red-crowned cranes bred in captivity in all of Japan.

The Crane Aviary can be found at the north side of the garden near the Main Gate. There are currently eight red-crowned cranes, six of which can be observed in the open-air aviary. Between September and February, the cranes are released on selected days and are free to roam and fly around the garden. They are also released during a celebratory event on New Year's Day as a sign of good luck. While strolling the garden grounds, it is not uncommon to hear the occasional call of one of the cranes.

29. Archery Range

The Archery Range or Yumiba is located at the northern tip of the garden and was used by the daimyo lords to practice martial arts and host events at which their retainers could display their skills. Afterwards, retainers were allowed to enjoy the garden as a reward: Korakuen was a place where the lord and his retainers could establish bonds of trust.

The range has a thatched-roof shooting gallery facing the target zone. The Kanshatei Rest House, which is adjacent to the gallery, now houses a souvenir shop but was once the spot where the daimyo lord would observe the archery. Visitors can also enjoy a tea break at the launching area. Another souvenir shop and restaurant are located north of the Main Gate.

Archery is no longer practiced here, but reminders of the place's former role can still be seen. For instance, on the far-left end near the target area is a small indentation which marks the spot where a judge would be posted to announce the accuracy of the shots.

Today the Archery Range can be found near the Main Gate of the garden behind the ticketing office.

30. View from Enyotei House

The view from the Enyotei House is protected by building regulations set by the prefecture; construction of buildings outside the park that block or mar this view is restricted. The effort to protect the landscape of a public garden was a pioneer to similar efforts around Japan. The house commands a fine view of major features of the garden including the lawn, Sawanoike Pond, and Yuishinzan Hill, as well as the borrowed scenery (shakkei) of Mt. Misao in the background.

The harvest moon (the first full moon of autumn) observed from this location rises behind Mt. Misao and the other mountains in the background between late September and October.

The house is open several times a year. The frame afforded by the open shoji sliding panels gives the landscape a sense of depth. The best position to take in the landscape of the garden is in front of the tokonoma alcove facing the sliding panels. When the panels are open, the Kayonoike Pond and the Nishikigaoka woods can also be seen to the right from within the house. A triangular rock partially hidden behind a bush is located outside the east side of the building, indicating the spot at which the same view as from within the house can be observed.

31. View from Renchiken Rest House

The Renchiken Rest House sits on the shore of a small pond filled with colorful koi carp and features a granite bridge that arcs like the Japanese hiragana character for “ku.” The view includes the rolling landscape with expanses of water and varying levels of lawn as well as the pine grove that overlooks Sawanoike Pond, the largest body of water in the garden. From inside the house, this view is framed by a large, circular window metaphorically representing Buddhist cosmology. The same view can be enjoyed from inside the building at the attached cafe.

32. View from Yuishinzan Hill

This six-meter-high artificial hill is the highest observation point in Korakuen, and affords views over the garden grounds. From the top of the hill, the strategically placed rocks on the slope on the north side resemble a waterfall. The north side is a fine vantage point for viewing the entirety of Sawanoike Pond and

its three islands, as well as the Enyotei House to the west at the end of a narrow path straight through the lawn. To the east are the Seiden Fields where rice and other plants are grown. To the south of the hill are the Ryuten Rest House and the Cycad Garden, which is filled with *Cycas revoluta* palms.

33. View from Ryuten Rest House

The four walls of the Ryuten Rest House are completely open to its surroundings. The supporting pillars are slender enough that they do not obstruct the view in any direction.

Visible to the east are the Chishionomori Grove and the Cherry Tree Grove where a number of maple and cherry trees bring color to the garden in autumn and spring. The front of the house commands an almost complete 180-degree view of the garden's lawn. The Cycad Garden filled with *Cycas revoluta* palms as well as the Yatsunashi Bridge leading into the iris garden can be seen from the south side. On the south side is the garden's *kyokusui* (meandering stream), its current a contrast to the slow-flowing rivulet that runs through the house. To the north are the Seiden Fields beyond them the rows of manicured tea shrubs of the tea plantation. Also in view is the rocky back side of Yuishinzan Hill, along with a large rhododendron bush flowering in white and surrounding a cascade-shaped stone arrangement.

34. View from Shinden Rest House

The view from the Shinden Rest House focuses on the garden's rice paddies located southwest with the tea plantation on the righthand. This area, known as Seiden Fields, is where rice and other plants are grown. Beyond the fields and paddies, the Sawanoike Pond, Ryuten Rest House, and Yuishinzan Hill can all be seen.

The slightly elevated structure of the house gives visitors a better vantage point than outside at ground level. For the best view from outside the house, find a spot that aligns with the four sliding doors of the rest house.

35. View from Gojusan-tsugi Koshikakejaya Rest House

The window of the Gojusan-tsugi Koshikakejaya Rest House provides framed views of Okayama Castle across the river from the garden. The thatch-roofed

shelter is one of the most popular spots to look out over the garden. The bamboo lattice of the back wall breaks up the scene, framing a landscape of both close and distant elements. The house is a long, rectangular structure completely open on the side facing the path, giving visitors an unobstructed view of the adjacent pine grove.

36. Introduction to Okayama Korakuen Garden

Okayama Korakuen is regarded as one of the three “great gardens” of Japan. The spacious garden, situated at the rear of Okayama Castle, was first constructed by Ikeda Tsunamasa (1638–1714), the fourth lord of the Okayama domain. The garden was a source of relaxation and place of leisure for the Ikeda family through the generations they served as lords of the domain, and its scenic beauty has been carefully preserved. The inner and outer garden stretches over 14 hectares, the result of gradual expansion continuing until the end of the Edo period (1603–1867). Ownership of Korakuen was transferred from the Ikeda family to Okayama Prefecture in 1884 and the garden has been open to the public ever since. Although many of the buildings within Korakuen were destroyed by fires during World War II or damaged in natural disasters, a number of the structures have been restored based on historical documents. When strolling through the garden today, visitors can appreciate various recent innovations as well as features that are parts of Korakuen’s historical legacy.

Korakuen is special for the wide range of landscapes it presents. It is a stroll garden, dotted with buildings of various kinds and other points of interest. The view from the east side of the Enyo-tei tea house is bright and expansive, opening out on the garden’s lawns, pond, and dramatic borrowed scenery of Mt. Misao beyond it. There is a meandering stream and diverse groupings of trees and plants, all tied together in a harmonious whole. During the Edo period, the resident daimyo lord is thought to have taken pleasure in viewing the grounds from within the buildings. Today, visitors can enjoy the same views by standing at the front of the buildings. The tea houses and other structures are open to the public at certain times during the year. The stroll garden, a style of garden that developed during the Edo period, is designed in such a way as to enhance enjoyment of the sights and sounds of nature while walking along its paths, around a pond, and up and down its hills.

Okayama Korakuen is located in Okayama, the capital of Okayama Prefecture. The garden offers beautiful scenery throughout the year, with particular highlights in each season. Cherry blossoms are the feature of spring spanning late March and early April, and irises in June and lotuses in July are the attractions of summer. The onsite rice paddies are planted in the spring, tended in the summer, and harvested in the fall. Autumn, when the foliage of the garden turns to striking hues, is one of the most popular times to visit. Come winter, the garden's colors are more somber, on rare occasions touched by snowfall.

Access

The Main Gate to the garden is on the northwest side of the grounds, a 15-minute bus ride from Okayama Station. Korakuen can also be accessed via the South Gate, located a five-minute walk across from Okayama Castle.

37. History

At the start of its construction in 1687, Okayama Korakuen was covered with rice paddies and vegetable fields. At that stage of its history, it was called Gokoen, meaning “rear garden,” as it lay behind the castle. The pleasure-oriented aspects of the garden were slowly developed over the years to include a Noh stage, buildings, ponds and various aesthetic touches under the direction of the daimyo lords. Between 1692 and 1699, work focused on the expansion of what is now the East Outer Garden. In 1700, the garden expanded to the area where the current Gaienkan is located at the north end of the site, which was considered complete for the time being.

With each ruling daimyo lord, the garden was further modified to reflect their individual tastes. Ikeda Tsunamasa (1638–1714) built the Noh stage and Ikeda Tsugumasa (1702–1776) oversaw the building of the six-meter-high artificial hill, Yuishinzan, at the center of the garden, along with a channel to connect the pond in front of the RENCHIKEN Rest House to Sawanoike Pond.

In 1871 the garden was renamed Korakuen. Ownership of the garden was transferred from the Ikeda family to Okayama Prefecture in 1884 and opened to the public. From the 1920s onwards, Korakuen was maintained as it was designed during the Edo period (1603–1867). It was designated a National Site of Scenic Beauty in Japan in 1922 and a Special Place of Scenic Beauty in 1952.

In 1934, the garden suffered extensive damage from a powerful typhoon and in 1945 further destruction in World War II air raids. Thanks to the local community and the preservation of historical documents, the garden was successfully reconstructed and its heritage sustained. In 1940, the vista which the Enyotei House faces was declared an official Scenic Zone by Okayama Prefecture, protecting the landscape arrangement for posterity. The restoration of the Korakuen Noh Stage was completed in 1958, followed by the Enyotei House in 1960.

In 2000, Okayama Korakuen celebrated its 300th anniversary and the excavated former dock ruins were opened to the public in 2014.
