

Okayama Korakuen

A *Daimyo* Garden Full of Charm

Okayama Korakuen with Okayama Castle in the background



Okayama Korakuen is a classic *daimyo* (feudal lord) garden, built around 300 years ago.

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OKAYAMA Korakuen, located in Okayama City, Okayama Prefecture, is a large garden with an expansive landscape that makes full use of the vast site area extending over 144,000 square meters. Construction of the garden on the opposite side of the river from Okayama Castle began in 1687 at the order of Ikeda Tsunamasa, the second feudal lord of the Bizen-Okayama domain (present-day Okayama Prefecture), and was mostly completed in 1700. While some small changes were made to cater to the taste of successive feudal lords, the garden has largely retained its original appearance until today, with no

significant changes made since the Edo period (early seventeenth to mid-nineteenth centuries). One characteristic feature of Okayama Korakuen is its lawns. These verdant lawns impart a sense of freedom. Okayama Korakuen is a *kaiyu*-style garden (a garden with circulating paths) with a large pond, Sawa-no-ike, in the center, as well as a *tsukiyama* (artificial hill) and a teahouse, all connected by footpaths and waterways that allow visitors to view the changing scenery from a variety of angles. A 640-meter-long water channel called “*kyokusui*” winds through the garden, wide in some places, narrow in others. Visitors can enjoy the various sights of the flowing water reflecting the flowers that bloom in each season or the colors of autumn foliage.

Looking out from the north side of Sawa-no-ike Pond toward the six-meter-high Yuishinzan Hill, visitors can appreciate a view unique to Korakuen Garden. In the background is the keep of Okayama Castle, a magnificent sight characteristic of a *daimyo* garden. “In spring, the area is covered with fresh green foliage, and white and red azaleas bloom in profusion on Yuishinzan Hill,” says a spokesperson for Okayama Korakuen.

At the foot of Yuishinzan Hill stands an unusual two-storied building called “Ryuten,” constructed at the end of the seventeenth century and used as a rest house. The quaint structure has no walls and only thin pillars on the first floor, while



Exterior of Ryuten Rest House

All photos: Courtesy of Okayama Korakuen Garden

Yuishinzan Hill



six rocks of beautiful colors are scattered throughout a water channel that runs through the center of the building, with wooden floors on both sides. Viewed through the pillars from inside the building, the garden is as beautiful as a painting on

a folding screen.

Okayama Korakuen has many other highlights besides. It is a place full of charm where visitors can enjoy the varied beauty of the Japanese garden. 



Interior of Ryuten Rest House