



# Mohri Garden

A Japanese Garden in the Heart of Tokyo

**Mohri Garden is located in a representative complex in Tokyo's Roppongi district. Built some 350 years ago, it has a long history, but a redesign early this century retained the beauty of a traditional Japanese garden while at the same time offering modern appeal.**

**KATO KYOKO**

**R**OPPONGI Hills is a complex that opened in 2003 in the Roppongi district of Tokyo's Minato Ward. The centerpiece of the complex is a 54-story building housing facilities including offices, an art museum, observation decks, restaurants and shops. Nestled amid these modern surroundings is Mohri Garden, a traditional Japanese garden with vestiges of a garden belonging to a mid-seventeenth century daimyo residence. The site was formerly the principal residence of the Chofu clan, a branch of the Choshu domain

in modern-day Yamaguchi Prefecture, and the garden's name, "Mohri," derives from the family name of the feudal lord of the domain. The original garden was gradually lost with the changing times, but when Roppongi Hills was built, it was reborn as a new Japanese garden based on traditional elements, reusing old trees and stones that were found on the site.

The garden has a distinctive stepped structure that takes advantage of the topography of the space between the buildings, where water flows gently from small waterfalls and mountain streams into a large pond. Cherry trees, large ginkgo trees, and camphor trees have been planted so that visitors can enjoy the cherry blossoms in spring and the changing hues of autumn leaves in fall.

Created following the tradition of Japanese gardens, Mohri Garden also has noteworthy features that only an urban garden can offer. From first glance, the space seems to coexist with the glass exterior of the modern buildings around it. The urban





Mohri Garden with *Kin no Kokoro* (Golden Heart) by Jean-Michel Othoniel




Mohri Garden in spring



Mohri Garden illuminated

landscape of skyscrapers and surrounding office buildings sometimes reflected in the pond also create interest. This is especially impressive in the evening when the lights start to go on in the office buildings. Before the spread of new coronavirus infections, during the cherry blossom and winter seasons illuminations the whole garden lit up, producing a modern space. In 2013, a heart-shaped metal sculpture by the eminent French contemporary artist Jean-Michel Othoniel titled *Kin no Kokoro* (Golden Heart) was installed at the edge of the pond, displaying a fusion of contemporary art with the aesthetics of a traditional Japanese garden. The latest advances in science and technology too are evident in the Space Medaka swimming in the garden pond. The *medaka* (a kind of killifish) are descendants of those born aboard the Space Shuttle *Colombia* in July 1994, the first vertebrates to mate and hatch in outer space.

While Japan has many traditional gardens, Mohri Garden's location in the heart of the metropolis, as well as its adherence to tradition alongside modern elements, may offer a model for the Japanese garden in the twenty-first century. 



Mohri Garden in the Roppongi Hills complex