

A Temple's Autumn Colors Bring Comfort

Yokoku-ji temple, founded some 1,200 years ago on the side of a mountain in Nagaokakyo City, Kyoto Prefecture, is a famous spot for viewing the autumn colors.

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Hana-chozu water basin covered in green moss and decorated with multi-colored maple leaves

ESTABLISHED in 806, the Buddhist temple Yanagidani Kannon Yokoku-ji stands amid trees on a mountain slope in Nagaokakyo City, Kyoto Prefecture. Sacred water (*okozui*), said to have come from the prayers of the high priest Kukai (774-835) in 811, still springs forth in the temple grounds. Believed to have a wondrous power to heal eye diseases and other ailments, the miraculous water attracts many pilgrims.

The beauty of the temple grounds, which showcase the natural topography of the surrounding area, has recently been popularized via the internet. Five *chozu-sha* (water basin pavilions) are dotted around the temple grounds for visitors to purify

their hands. Recently, the *hana-chozu*, water basins decorated with seasonal flowers and leaves, have been a hit with young people, who take striking “Insta-worthy” photos to post on social media. Hana-chozu were introduced to the temple by Kusaka Shun’ei, the present temple abbot, who says he “wanted temple visitors to enjoy the seasons through all five senses and to experience a feeling of peace.”

Yokoku-ji temple is especially beautiful in November each year when the maple trees in the temple grounds turn red and yellow. During “Momiji Week” (Autumn Maple Week) from mid-November to early December, the hana-chozu are decorated with maple leaves at different

Autumn leaves viewed from the upper floor of the Kami-shoin study



Yokoku-ji temple viewed through colorful autumn leaves



stages of changing color, some still green, some just beginning to change, and some in full autumn colors, in a vibrant range of shades.

During Momiji Week, the Kami-shoin study, normally closed to the public, is open for viewing. The two-storey Kamishoin Study was built at the turn of the twentieth century as a tea-ceremony house for entertaining special guests. From the upper floor, visitors can look out over the Jodo-en garden, a scenic garden bursting with a tapestry of autumn colors that constantly delight.

As autumn deepens, Yokoku-ji temple, with its atmosphere of solemnity and serenity, is blanketed in the gorgeous gradations of autumn foliage from green to yellow to red, bringing comfort to the hearts of many people. 🍁



Hana-chozu decorated with maple leaves at different stages of changing color, from green to yellow through orange and red, and showing the shadows of maple leaves above