



Japanese Gardens

Tokyo, Kyoto, Hikone, Nara & Kanazawa

5–16 November 2026 (MM 224)

12 days • £8,830

International flights not included

Lecturer: Yoko Kawaguchi

A study of the evolution of Japanese gardens through the centuries.

A chance to appreciate the relationship of gardens to the Japanese way of life.

From Kyoto's wealth of exquisite temple gardens to Tokyo's hill-and-pond gardens.

Time in each city to explore other aspects of Japanese culture.

Fine examples of 'borrowed scenery' at Nara, with its Buddhist temples and deer park, and Hikone Castle on the shore of Lake Biwa.

Japanese gardens possess an aura of timelessness, against which the cycle of the seasons unfolds its pageantry. Throughout the 1,600-year-old Japanese tradition of creating gardens, the chief consideration has consistently been the depiction of a landscape. This approach to design was firmly established with the earliest gardens during the fifth and sixth centuries under the expertise of architects and artisans from Korea and China, who introduced their scholarly taste for the elegant pond garden. From the continent, a variety of sacred landscapes deriving from Buddhist as well as Chinese religious cosmographies entered Japanese culture; Mt. Sumeru, the centre of the universe according to Buddhist legend, has frequently been represented through the centuries, as have been the Taoist Islands of the Blessed Immortals.

Above all, the Japanese took the Chinese tradition of landscape gardens and transformed it into an expression of their love for their own native natural landscapes. Verdant mountains sloping down to the sea; waterfalls and streamlets; rugged shores and shingle beaches; an ever-varying coastline of inlets, coves and jutting promontories – have provided a beloved subject matter. Trees and shrubs are carefully selected and arranged to create a seasonal palette, while ponds symbolise the sea, and the rocky outcrops set within them reflect the self-image of the Japanese as an island people.

The idea of landscape links together the two major types of Japanese garden: the pond garden, on the one hand; and the rock garden on the other, a style that emerged



Japanese Garden, by Mortimer Menpes, publ. 1901.

during the 15th century, in which serene and contemplative spaces are enhanced by the symbolic representation of water through the use of gravel. In the latter half of the following century, the great tea master Sen-no-Rikyu sought to reproduce the ambience of forest glades for his tea rooms. Lack of space has never been considered an inhibiting factor, and through the judicious choice and symbolic placing of stones and plants, beautiful panoramic vistas have been created in the tiniest of gardens.

This tour presents a variety of superb gardens from all periods of Japanese history, from the aristocratic 'paradise'-style temple gardens and the enigmatic Zen Buddhist rock gardens of Kyoto, to the borrowed castle scenery at Hikone and the tea gardens of Kanazawa, to the amalgamation of these styles in the imposing gardens of the samurai elite in Tokyo.

Itinerary

Day 1: Tokyo. The tour begins in Tokyo with lunch in the hotel. (Flights from London are not included. There is an airport transfer to meet the recommended flight from London. Your room is available from 3.00pm on 4th November – see Practicalities). In the afternoon, visit the Imperial Palace (formerly Edo Castle), and the reconstructed East Palace Garden. First of two nights in Tokyo.

Day 2: Tokyo. At Edo, the daimyo (feudal lords) built grand residences with vast gardens. The 17th-century landscape garden Koishikawa Korakuen reflects their sumptuous, eclectic tastes. Nezu Kaichiro's collection of Far Eastern arts is well presented in the eponymous museum, which has a delightful wooded garden dotted with teahouses (subject to confirmation due to exhibition schedules). In the afternoon, visit Kiyosumi: a superb, late 19th-century landscape garden built for Iwasaki Yataro, founder of the Mitsubishi conglomerate.

Day 3: Kyoto. Bullet train to Kyoto (luggage by road, same-day service). In the afternoon, visit the 14th-century Tenryu-ji, a Zen Buddhist temple and its panoramic pond garden with a 'dragon-gate' waterfall. First of five nights in Kyoto.

Day 4: Kyoto. Morning visit to Ginkaku-ji (Temple of the Silver Pavilion), whose pavilion overlooks an elaborate dry-landscape garden featuring an enigmatic flat-topped conical mound. The superb garden at Chishaku-in resembles an unfolding landscape scroll painting. Optional afternoon visit to the Miho Museum (subject to confirmation due to exhibition schedules), designed by I.M. Pei and harmoniously integrated into a forested nature reserve.

Day 5: Kyoto. Ryoan-ji's walled stone garden, with its 15 boulders, is one of Japan's most abstract gardens. Nearby, the garden of Kinkaku-ji (Temple of the Golden Pavilion), a shogun's villa later turned temple, retains aspects of the 'paradise' style. In the afternoon, visit the large walled temple compound of Daitoku-ji, many of whose sub-temples possess notable examples of dry-landscape gardens. One of the finest is at Daisen-in, a miniature landscape heavily influenced by Chinese ink-brush paintings.

Day 6: Nara. A full-day excursion to Nara, first capital of Japan (AD 710–794), modelled on the Tang capital of Chang'an (Xi'an) in China. The 12th-century Joruri-ji has a rare surviving example of a 'pure land' temple garden with a pagoda and hall with nine golden Buddhas. Much of Nara is parkland dotted with ancient temples, including Todai-ji which contains an arresting monumental bronze Buddha.

Day 7: Kyoto. Nanzen-ji is distinguished by its massive gate and quarters of the abbacy (Hojo), which contain fine 17th-century painted screens (fusuma) by Kano Tan'yu. Together

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continued

with its sub-temples, it sits in important dry-landscapes created by the eminent 17th-century tea master and garden designer Kobori Enshu. Nearby Murin-an boasts a landscaped pond garden, a masterpiece of the late 19th-century garden designer Ogawa Jihei VII.

Day 8: Hikone, Kanazawa. Drive to Hikone, on the shores of Lake Biwa, and its two adjoining parks Genkyu-en and Rakuraku-en. Genkyu-en is a famous feudal landscaped garden incorporating the view of the early 17th-century keep at Hikone Castle. Continue to Kanazawa, an attractive city which retains much of its old character. First of two nights.

Day 9: Kanazawa. Kenroku-en, one of Japan's finest strolling landscape gardens, was created for the powerful local feudal lord of Kagawa. It has a superb view of its pine trees trained with rope in readiness for winter. The elegant villa Seasonkaku, which sits in the grounds, was built for the widow of the 12th-century lord and has wonderful courtyard gardens.

Day 10: Kanazawa, Tokyo. Bullet train to Tokyo (luggage by road, next-day service). The afternoon is dedicated to the Tokyo National Museum, which occupies several buildings in Ueno Park and houses some of the finest Japanese art in the world. The main gallery (Honkan) traces the development from prehistoric, sculptural earthenware to exquisite paintings and decorative objects of courtly patronage. First of two nights in Tokyo.

Day 11: Tokyo. The 18th-century Rikugi-en offers superb views over its lake. There is free time to explore the colourful, traditional Japanese area surrounding the Asakusa Kannon Temple. Take a local boat down the Sumida River to Hama-rikyu, originally a tidal garden and hunting lodge belonging to the Tokugawa Shogunate and now a peaceful retreat in the heart of the metropolis.

Day 12: Tokyo. The tour ends after breakfast. Independent departures. (Flights to London are not included – there is an airport transfer in time for the recommended direct flight back to London – see Practicalities).

Lecturer

Yoko Kawaguchi. Writer and cultural historian specialising in the relationship between Japan and the West and also Japanese gardens.

Brought up in the United States, Canada and Japan, she holds an MA from Kyoto University, and has undertaken postgraduate research at Newnham College, Cambridge. She also lectures on the reception of Japanese culture abroad and the perception of Japanese women in the West. Her publications include *Butterfly's Sisters: The Geisha in Western Culture*, *Japanese Zen Gardens* and *Authentic Japanese Gardens*.

Practicalities

Price, per person. Two sharing: £8,830. **Single occupancy:** £10,840. *International flights are not included.*

Included: high-speed rail travel (first class) from Tokyo to Kyoto and from Kanazawa to Tokyo; private coach for excursions; hotel accommodation as described below; breakfasts, 8 lunches and 7 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions; all tips; all taxes; the services of the lecturer and tour manager.

Flights: international flights between London and Tokyo are not included in the price of the tour. We will send recommended flight options from London when they are available to book. At the time of going to print the cost of a World Traveller (economy) seat with British Airways is c. £1,050.

We provide airport transfers to meet the recommended return flights from London. For those not taking the recommended flights, airport transfers can be arranged for an additional cost.

Accommodation. Royal Park Iconic Shiodome, Tokyo (royalparkhotels.co.jp/ic/tokyoshiodome/): 4-star hotel in the redeveloped district of Shiodome with well-appointed but compact rooms. **Tokyu Hotel, Kanazawa** (tokyuhotels.co.jp): excellently located 4-star, in walking distance of the city's former samurai district. **Hyatt Regency, Kyoto** (hyatt.com): an elegant hotel within walking distance of the National Museum.

The night of 4th November 2026 is included in the price of the tour to allow for early check-in on Day 1.

How strenuous? A good level of fitness is essential. Unless you enjoy entirely unimpaired mobility, cope with everyday walking and stair-climbing without difficulty and are reliably sure-footed, this tour is not for you. A rough indication of the minimum level of fitness required is that you ought to be able to walk briskly at about three miles per hour for at least half an hour, and undertake a walk at a more leisurely pace for an hour or two unaided. The tour involves a lot of walking in gardens. Average distance by coach per day: c. 44 miles.

Group size: between 10 and 22 participants.