

A Historical Walk Around Kyoto

Photo by Masayoshi Masuda



Autumn Leaves in Tofukuji Temple

Tofukuji Temple is located in the southeast of Kyoto, near Sanyo Chemical's Head Office. It is one of the most famous places to see beautiful autumn leaves in Japan. It consists of 25 buildings in a widespread area of approx 165,000 m². The wooden bridge shown in the photo, called Tsuten Bridge, was constructed across a small valley inside the temple. A lot of people go there to see this representative view of the temple from the middle to the end of November. Some other temples temporarily open for night views; however Tofukuji Temple does not open at night. Morning is a great time to enjoy the autumn leaves in this temple.

The Origin of Three-Finger-Leaf Maple Trees Planted in Tofukuji Temple

Three-finger-leaf maple trees in this temple are famous among Japanese tourists because most of Japanese maple trees have five to seven finger leaves.

This type of maple can be traced to the establishment of the temple, even though its original buildings were unfortunately burned. This temple was established in 1236 by a Japanese regent, Kujo Michiie (1193–1252). As a first chief priest of the *Rinzai* sect of Zen Buddhism, he designated Enniben (1202–1280) who came from China. Enniben studied Zen Buddhism in Japan and China. He planted three-finger-leaf maple trees in this temple which were brought from China.

Different Types of Gardens for Zen Meditation

During the period between the 10th and 13th centuries, Japanese culture was influenced by various imported products such as copper money, silk fabrics, and ceramics including tenmoku tea bowls. Zen Buddhism itself was also introduced from India through China. Tofukuji Temple is considered to be one of the major Zen temples in Kyoto. There are different types of gardens in this temple as they are important to practice Zen meditation.

About 2,000 Maple Trees Growing There

About six hundred years ago, cherry trees were cut down because the cherry blossoms attracted rowdy visitors who disturbed the monks in meditation. However, they kept the three-finger-leaf maple trees which the first chief priest, Enniben planted.

Nowadays, there are not only the three-finger-leaf maple trees but also a lot of Japanese maple trees growing there.

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