

A Historical Walk Around Kyoto

Photo by Masayoshi Masuda



Jonangu Shrine

In Jonangu Shrine, there are five beautiful gardens with about a hundred types of trees and flowers such as plum trees, cherry trees, azaleas and wisterias featured in the Genji monogatari (the Tale of Genji*). The gardens include waterfall, ponds and a dry landscape garden. You can enjoy viewing various flowers blooming seasonally, while having green powdered tea (*matcha*) at the Japanese teahouse in one of the gardens.

* The oldest full-length fictional love story by a noblewoman. It is based on noble life in the Heian Period (794-1191).

Reproducing Heian Period Game

A noble poem writing game of the Heian Period (794–1191) is reproduced at this shrine. It is held twice a year, on April 29 and November 3. It is started from 14:00 and takes for an hour.

In the game, participants, dressed in full kimono, sit along a narrow stream. When sake on a small boat with a shape of bird is floated down the stream from one player to another, the receiving player must compose a poem before it arrives. If the player can't do it by that time, one must drink the sake as a penalty.

This festival called Kyokusui-no-en or Kyokusui-no-utage is introduced from China. This festival also attracts a lot of people, who can see court dance and music.

Why Was Jonangu Shrine Established?

The date of establishment is unknown. However, this shrine has existed for more than 1,200 years. The emperor and nobles considered that the direction southwest of the Kyoto Imperial Palace, the area where this shrine's located, must be a demon's gate based on Japanese geomancy (similar to feng shui). Therefore, this shrine has been used to pray for protection of Kyoto since the capital of Japan was transferred to Kyoto in 794 by Emperor Kammu (737-806).

Nowadays, Japanese people visit this shrine and pray for safe travel, safe construction or moving to a new home in auspicious directions.

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