

A Historical Walk Around Kyoto

Photo by Masayoshi Masuda



Ohara in Autumn

Nestled in a mountainous valley area northeast of the ancient capital along the Takano River, Ohara is a small farming village that since 1949 has been incorporated within Kyoto City.

Sanzen-In Temple

Ohara is best known for Sanzen-In Temple and is a popular place for viewing autumn leaves in November. This temple is of the Tendai school of Japanese Buddhism and was founded by the monk who introduced this school of Buddhism to Japan at the beginning of the 9th century.

Ojo-Gokuraku-In (Amida Hall) which was built in 1148 houses a rare statue of three Buddhas sitting side by side. Amida Nyorai, the central figure of this national treasure, is also known as the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life.

Here in the garden during autumn the green colors of the various kinds of moss can be seen contrasting with the red and yellow colors of the turning maple leaves making this a popular destination at this time of year.

What are the Statues of the Children?

Among the moss in the garden there are cute little stone statues that look like children blissfully enjoying the soft green landscape. Takashi Sugimura (1937-) is the Japanese sculptor who created these Warabe Jizo statues. Warabe means child and Jizo is an enlightened being that postpones Buddhahood and protects children. As with much art, the meaning of these sculptures of enlightened children is subjective. They do, however, seem well connected to the temple and to nature by adding a feeling of pure innocence to the garden.

Autumn Leaf Festival

Momiji Matsuri (もみじ祭) at this temple is a festival named after the Japanese maple trees because they are a main attraction to the Ohara area during this season.

The deity Fudo Myo-o is central to this festival. While Jizo protects children, Fudo Myo-o frightens children toward the path to enlightenment. The angry look on his face, like a scolding parent, shows them that he is serious.

Here at Konjiki Fudo-Do from October 28 until November 28, participants can burn small cedar sticks in a sacred fire. This practice is connected to Fudo Myo-O whose flaming light represents purification of the mind by burning all material desires.

By Donald Reynolds