**Kitaoka Nature Park**

This lush park, which is situated at the foot of Mt. Hanaoka, has a fascinating history. It once was the site of Myogeji Temple, a family temple established in 1642 to commemorate Hosokawa Tadatoshi (1586–1641). In 1871, in the wake of the Meiji government’s decree ordering the separation of Shinto and Buddhism, the temple was abandoned. A Hosokawa family home stood here until it was destroyed in an air raid during World War II. To one side of the gate are the remains of the temple’s dry landscape garden (*karesansui*), which feature larger rocks representing islands in a “sea” of pebbles. *Karesansui* gardens are quite rare in Kumamoto.

A path leads to a stone staircase in the southwest corner of the garden; this staircase leads up the mountain to a *karamon* Chinese-style gate. At the foot of the staircase, on the landing halfway up, and in the clearing at the top are a total of 66 stone *toro* lanterns, which were presented by the family’s retainers.

Through the gate is a rectangular clearing containing three burial shrines. Left to right, these belong to:

* Hosokawa Mitsunao (1619–1650) the fourth head of the Hosokawa clan; built Myogeji Temple.
* Hosokawa Tadatoshi (1586–1641), the third head of the Hosokawa clan, father of Mitsunao.
* Chiyohime (1597–1649), wife of Tadatoshi.

The wives of most of the daimyo lords were buried in Edo (Tokyo), where they were required to reside as hostages of the shogun. As the adopted daughter of shogun Tokugawa Hidetada (1579–1632), however, Chiyohime was given the privilege of being buried alongside her husband.

Each mausoleum is divided into two parts, with the worship hall (*haiden*) at the front and the mausoleum (*tamaya*) at the back. Each mausoleum contains a large five-ring pagoda (*gorinto*), though these cannot be seen, as the doors are kept shut. The stone monuments running around the edge of the clearing are for the retainers who committed ritual suicide when their lord died after obtaining permission to do so. Tadatoshi had 19 of them, while Mitsunao had 11.

There are more graves further up the hill. A gate on the left of the clearing leads into the bamboo forest.