

Giant Sawara Cypress

Tree of the Gods

This *sawara* cypress (*Chamaecyparis pisifera*) is around 300 years old. Boasting a circumference of 5.5 meters and a height of 41 meters, its dimensions are no less impressive than its age. Because it is highly resistant to rot, *sawara* makes excellent timber for wall cladding and bathtubs. The local Kiso forest authority calculates that this particular tree would provide enough wood to make 300 bathtubs!

Can you see the arm-like branches curving upward on either side of the trunk a couple of meters above the ground? Such trees are known as *kamoigi*, literally “the-gods-reside-here” trees. Once upon a time, it was believed that the gods liked to sit on these upturned branches. Since the divinities in question were mountain gods and the half-man, half-bird *tengu*—both of them fickle and mischievous—woodcutters traditionally kept their distance from such trees, seeing them as a source of bad luck. This tree particularly deserves respect because it is a *ryokamoigi*, a tree with upturned branches on both sides!