

## **Nagi Trees in Sharikura Natural Forest**

Five large nagi trees (*Nageia nagi*, or Asian bayberry) in a clearing in Sharikura Natural Forest mark the site of the former Shohoji Temple, built in 718. There are said to have been around 15 small temple buildings in the forest, but they burned down around 950. A small worship hall and a bell tower, both built more recently, stand among the trees.

These five nagi trees are said to be over 800 years old. Local legends claim that the largest tree, located next to the bell tower, was brought back from India as a sapling by the revered priest Gyoki (668–749), who raised funds to build Todaiji Temple in Nara. Gyoki is thought to have planted the tree when he founded Shohoji Temple.

Nagi trees are often found on the grounds of temples and shrines. The leaves are thick, with vertical veins that are difficult to tear. This strength made them popular as talismans against bad luck and symbolic of the bonds between couples. Visitors can access the trees by following a bamboo-lined path next to Sharikura Civic Hall.