

## **Nagase Shinmei Shrine**

The mountainside Nagase Shinmei Shrine is surrounded by a sacred grove of trees, which is thought to be the domain of the divine and separates the shrine grounds from the secular world. Such groves were often subjects of worship in ancient Japanese animism, and that is likely to have been the case here too; the trees at Nagase Shinmei are thought to be significantly older than the shrine itself. The grove includes several giant horse-chestnut trees (*tochi*; *Aesculus turbinata*) and cedars, as well as maples, ginkgos, and camellias.

Nagase Shinmei Shrine is dedicated to the sun goddess Amaterasu, the most important of the deities in the Shinto pantheon. Like other Shinmei shrines throughout Japan, it is a subsidiary of Ise Grand Shrine, the main sanctuary dedicated to the worship of Amaterasu. The Nagase shrine was founded in its present form in the later years of the Edo period (1603–1867), which was a time of political and cultural upheaval when pilgrimages to Ise were extremely popular as a means of searching for salvation or meaning in life, or escaping from everyday hardships.