

The Sagara Family

The Sagara family ruled the Hitoyoshi Kuma region continuously for nearly 700 years after being appointed to govern Hitoyoshi by the Kamakura shogun Minamoto no Sanetomo (1192–1219). They were patrons of Buddhist culture, and adopted new practices and technologies in line with the times. Their measured rule and contributions to economic growth through public works such as irrigation systems brought prosperity and stability to the region. This stability has sustained a rich cultural heritage and protected cultural properties on par with some of the country's ancient capitals, such as Kyoto.

Properties and artwork of significant cultural value at locations throughout the Hitoyoshi Kuma region tell the story of the Sagara family. They include Buddhist imagery from the Nara period (710–794) and sites of worship such as Aoi Aso Jinja Shrine, which dates back to the ninth century. The Sagara rule did not begin until the twelfth century, but the existence of these and many other cultural assets from the Nara and Heian (794–1185) periods are a testament to the family's commitment to preserving local culture.

Most of the Sagara family members were buried at Ganjoji Temple. The temple was built in 1233 by Sagara Nagayori (1177–1254), the founder of the family. Visitors can also explore the site of Hitoyoshi Castle, from where the Sagara family ruled Hitoyoshi Kuma. In addition to stone ramparts with original sections from the late sixteenth century, the reconstructed parapets, battlements, and gates convey a sense of the castle as it appeared between 1589 and 1871.