

## **Shoryuji Castle Park**

The Shoryuji Castle Park in Nagaokakyo is built on the site of a castle that was linked to several historical figures and important events in sixteenth-century Japan. Shoryuji Castle was the newlywed home of the warlord Hosokawa Tadaoki (1563–1646) and Hosokawa Gracia (1563–1600). The story of Gracia's romance, conversion to Christianity, and tragic death have made her a beloved figure that has been featured in novels, television dramas, movies, and video games. The city park at the former castle site is surrounded by a moat and castle walls with turrets. The grounds contain a strolling garden and a keep-like structure with an exhibition space where visitors can learn about Shoryuji Castle and its former inhabitants.

### *The Original Castle*

It is said that Shoryuji Castle was built in the mid-sixteenth century to protect important river trade routes and Kyoto's southwestern border. It was named for the nearby Shoryuji Temple. The castle was occupied by forces loyal to the Miyoshi family, and in 1568, it was conquered by the warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) and given to his retainer Hosokawa Fujitaka (1534–1610). In 1571, Shoryuji Castle was substantially upgraded using the most advanced architectural techniques of the time, including stone wall fortifications, clay tiling, and a main keep after which Nobunaga later designed his own grand Azuchi Castle.

### *Romance and Tragedy*

In 1578, Hosokawa Fujitaka's eldest son, Tadaoki, married Tama, the daughter of Akechi Mitsuhide (1528–1582), another retainer of Oda Nobunaga. The ceremony took place at Shoryuji Castle, and the newlyweds lived there for two years before Tadaoki was appointed lord of Tango Province in the north of present-day Kyoto Prefecture. However, in 1582, Akechi Mitsuhide betrayed Nobunaga and attacked him at Honnoji Temple, which resulted in Nobunaga's death and made Tama the daughter of a traitor. About ten days later, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), the general who inherited Nobunaga's position, led his army against Mitsuhide's forces in the Battle of Yamazaki. Hideyoshi's troops overpowered Mitsuhide's soldiers and pursued them as they retreated to Shoryuji Castle. Mitsuhide had to flee from the north gate in the night, but was killed soon after.

Tadaoki kept his wife Tama hidden in a small village until Hideyoshi ordered his retainers to move their families close to his castle in Osaka, essentially turning them into political

hostages to ensure continued loyalty. While in Osaka, Tama secretly converted to Christianity and took the name Gracia. In 1600, two years after Hideyoshi's death, one of his former generals attempted to seize the hostages, including Gracia, to prevent their family members from defecting to the army of a rival general Tokugawa. A samurai wife in that time period would be expected to commit honor suicide rather than let herself be used against her husband, but Gracia's Christian faith considered suicide to be a sin, which prevented her from taking action herself. Instead, her husband's retainer ended her life, set fire to the mansion, and followed her into death. Ever since then, Hosokawa Gracia has been regarded as a fascinating and tragic historical figure.

### *Castle Park*

Fragments of the north gate's stone walls, earthworks, and some remains of the moat are all that is left of the sixteenth-century Shoryuji Castle. In 1992, the site was converted into a public park, and the administration building was designed to look like a castle keep. The new moat around the park is lined with azaleas that bloom bright red in spring. Enclosed within the walls are a koi pond, cherry and maple trees, a small bamboo grove, and statues of Tadaoki and Gracia, Shoryuji Castle's famous couple. On the second floor of the keep-like administrative building is an exhibition room showing diagrams of the original castle, an illustrated timeline of important events, some excavated items, and a video about Gracia's life with English subtitles. The lively Nagaokakyo Gracia Festival, held on the second Sunday of November, includes a recreation of her wedding procession to the Shoryuji Castle Park.