

温泉

[ONSEN]

Experience Japanese Hot Springs

Like the hot water that issues from the ground, many cultural elements have sprung out from the use of onsen, or hot springs. In recent years, the springs have become recognized by modern medicine for its soothing and rehabilitative properties.



Introduction

Japan is a chain of volcanic islands, so it is no surprise that hot springs can be found all over the country. There are roughly 150 hot spring sites, with 14,000 individual springs. These natural treasures have been used by many, not only for therapeutic use, but also as a place to socialize and relax. Bathing in hot springs first became popular in Japan more than 1,000 years ago. It was originally limited to aristocrats, but spread to the warlords when it was discovered how effective the springs were in healing battle wounds. Following the establishment of peace and stability during the Edo Period, the custom of bathing in hot springs was adopted by the hard working farmers. It was the most pleasant and economical way they could relax and recover from the rigors of their lives.

Some of the best hot spring resorts are in areas of great natural beauty, thus making them a great travel destination. Hot springs, or "onsen," come in all shapes and sizes. Some are like health spas, and provide a variety of wellness activities in addition to their healing waters. Others are simple, no-frills public baths that cater to locals who stop by after work for a scrub and a soak. With a little research you'll be sure to find an onsen resort near your city, and your travel agent may even

have package trips available that include accommodation and transportation if you are looking for an overnight stay. When traveling the countryside, just look for the onsen symbol: ♨. They are a godsend for campers and the perfect way to end a day of hiking or skiing.



What is "Onsen?"

Hot springs, or hydrothermal springs, may be volcanic in origin or simply ground water that has seeped deep into the earth's crust and become warmed by the rocks near the mantle. Some contain "fossil water", water that has been trapped in an aquifer for over 1000 years, and is often highly saline. According to Japan's "Hot Spring Bill," passed in 1948, a hot spring must have at least one of the following properties:

- 1) The water temperature exceeds 25 degrees centigrade at the source.
- 2) The water contains at least one of 19 compounds or minerals as listed, in requisite amounts per 1 kilogram of hot spring water.

There are many different kinds of hot springs:

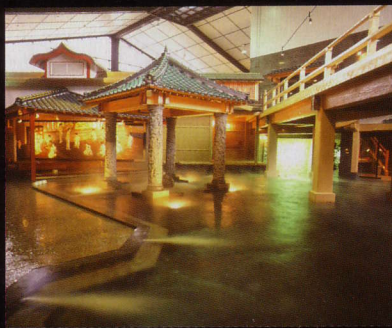
Simple Springs	The most common type. Its temperature is higher than 25°C, and has less than 1 gram of compounds or mineral elements per kilogram of water. Its mildness makes it perfect for long term rehabilitations.
Carbonate Springs	Similar to the simple spring, but carbonated. It has less than 1 gram of radical carbon and other mineral elements per kilogram, and are often low in temperature. Carbonate springs are considered effective for circulatory and neurological disorders, and women's health.
Salt Springs	Second in abundance to simple springs, salt springs have more than 1 gram per kilogram of compound or mineral elements. If the water contains between 1 and 5 grams of salt, it is considered a weak salt spring. 5 to 10 grams makes it a regular Salt Spring, and those with over 10 grams are strong salt springs. The high salt content helps the body to maintain warmth long after bathing, so it is often called "Atsu no yu" (Warmth water)
Sodium Sulfate Springs	Basic, bitter springs with a high sodium sulfate content, recommended for arteriosclerosis and rheumatism.
Iron Springs	There are two different kinds of iron springs, carbonate and green vitriol. When the water is boiled, the iron oxidizes and turns a reddish brown. The vitriol springs contains iron sulfate and is strongly acidic.
Acidic Springs	Indigenous to Japan, and found mainly in volcanically active areas. These springs have a high hydrogen ion content, making them strongly acidic and often irritating. They have been used to treat infections of the skin such as athlete's foot.
Sulfur Springs	Contains sulfhydryl ions or hydrogen sulfide, and smells like rotten eggs. May be bathed in or drunk, for treating many disorders.
Radium Hot springs	These contain a certain amount of radium, radon or thoron, which are moderately radioactive and thought to be good for digestive disorders or rheumatism.



Hakone Kowakien Yunessun

How to Use Onsen

1. Enter the changing room through the appropriate entrance: for Women or for Men
2. Remove your clothes and put them in the basket or locker provided. Take only the small wash towel.
3. Keeping your privates covered with the wash towel, enter the bathing area, closing any door behind you.
4. Wash or rinse your body briefly using the showers / faucets before entering the first time. There are stools and basins available for use at the faucets.
5. Soak in the pool, being careful not to get too hot.
6. Wash your body at the faucets.
7. After your last dip in the Onsen, DO NOT rinse again.



Ibusuki Hakusuikan

Onsen Etiquette

Here are a few onsen rules. When taking a bath, please remember the following:

- * Remove footwear at the entrance (genkan). Put them into cubicles, if provided.
- * Do not wear bathing suits, or any article of clothing in the bath (unless otherwise specified).
- * First, wash your body briefly before entering the tub. After soaking in the tub, clean your body

Tips for Onsen

Onsen bathing is a part of Japanese culture, and a lot of its custom. You don't need to be an expert to enjoy the springs, but if you familiarize yourself with the local way, you might enjoy the springs even more.



TIP 1

Just because the hot springs are good for you doesn't mean you should overdo it. Try not to bathe more than 2 to 3 times a day, about 30 minutes each time including washing time. That's about 10 minutes actually spent in the water, with the water temperature above 40°C. If the water is below 40°C, then it is okay to soak longer.

Lukewarm, low mineral content water is better for longer soaks. If the temperature is high, then

don't go straight into it, but warm yourself up before you go in by scooping the water with the basins provided and pouring it over yourself several times (It is always nice to do so anyway, for others in the bath, so that they know you've cleaned yourself).



Kinugawa Park Hotels



TIP 2

The hot springs not only contain beneficial minerals but the water pressure and buoyancy is also thought to be good for the body. Try floating in the water-this is believed to relax you by simulating the environment inside a mother's womb. By warming up, your pores open and clear out, allowing the minerals in the water to be absorbed. Bathing in the hot springs not only relaxes you, but also balances your nervous system.



TIP 3

Onsens are essentially a public bath, and you will probably want to clean yourself before you leave it. Note, however, that the minerals don't get absorbed by the skin for about 6-7 hours. Therefore if you clean yourself, rinse with hot spring water using the basins or take one last dip after cleansing.



TIP 4

Some hot springs are good for bathing and for drinking. The water contains minerals that are thought to stimulate the metabolism. Be careful, make sure that the water is officially fit for consumption, and use the faucet that is designated for drinking. Take your time, and try to sip it slowly over 30 to 50 minutes. Saline, carbonate,



Yamadaya

sodium bicarbonate, and radium spring waters are good to drink before a meal. Hot spring water should be consumed on an empty stomach, and not before sleeping.

