



Japan's

FIVE BEST OONSENS

Onsen bathing has been a family tradition for centuries in Japan, but how do you choose the right facility?

LYNN GAIL



Mahatma Ghandi once said, "There is more to life than increasing its speed". A remedy to decelerating today's fast paced lifestyle can be found bubbling away under Japan's crusty volcanic surface in the shape of an onsen, a natural therapeutic hot spring. Like a, 'please slow down' sign, the onsen can turn back the clock as it soothes away modern day stresses. Whether you've slipped out of your civvies to slide into the restorative waters of an onsen for the first time or

not, choosing one to suit your personal needs can be a little daunting. With more than 30,000 natural springs and around 3,000 onsen resorts throughout Japan, the choices are endless. For starters, there's outdoors, indoors, public, private, and mixed. Add: varying mineral components, hot-spring temperatures, health merits, and location, and you might find yourself in deep water. To soak away any confusion, here are some of Japan's best onsens.



FUJI KAWAGUCHIKO ONSEN

Imagine reclining in your own private hot spring to watch snow falling over Mt Fuji as you unwind in water rich in calcium sodium sulphate minerals. Reputed to relieve muscle pain, alleviate high blood pressure, gout and rheumatism, these waters rejuvenate from head-to-toe as you switch off under the eye of Japan's most iconic mountain. Book one of the five Japanese-style rooms equipped with a private onsen. Add to your onsen 'vacation' by trying the air bubble baths or sit under an utaseya – a waterfall pelting hot spring water. www.konansou.com

KASATSU ONSEN

Sing your heart out on a scenic plateau 1200m above sea level in Gunma Prefecture. One of Japan's most famous hot springs, Kasatsu Onsen boasts the largest free flowing water volume in the country. Not only is its water unrivalled, having a high acidity content

producing superior antibacterial affects, visitors can also indulge in a tradition which pays respects to the gods. Before bathing, guests face a small shrine to pray for rejuvenation. The water is naturally too hot to comfortably bathe in, and as a pre-bathing exercise, the water is stirred using long planks to bring the temperature down to around 48deg. before entering. Inhaling the steam while stirring and singing customary songs has in own therapeutic and an uplifting effect as it stimulates deeper breathing. www.kusatsu-onsen.com

ARIMA ONSEN

Spend a day or more in Arima Onsen in Kobe, one of Japan's oldest and most important spa towns and submerge yourself in one of the many private or public baths. With roots dating back over 1300 years, this ancient spa town is reputed to have the highest quality of hot spring water. Select the bath to cure your ailments. According

to scientific studies, the town has three types of hot springs, the Kinsen and two types of Ginsen. The Kinsen contains high levels of iron and half again the salt found in sea water. Add naturally heated water and these compounds treat chronic neuralgia and arthritis. Extremely popular among women, Kinsen hot springs moisturise the skin, resulting in a desired youthful glow. Carbonic water and the minute quantities of radium are the components of Ginsen. Carbonic water is known to boost blood circulation and metabolism, while the radium promotes cell activation, treats fatigue and boosts immunity. In a town where seven out of nine natural components have a healing effect, it's akin to visiting your favourite GP, but without prescribed medication. visit.arima-onsen.com/

SHIOSAI NO YADO SEIKAI

You won't need a shell to listen to the waves gently lap the shore

at Shiosai Onsen. Whether you decide to book a room, furnished with an open-air bath sourced by hot spring water, overlooking the serene Beppu Bay, or one of two large public baths, you'll find the ocean in tickling reach of your toes. On the eighth floor you can choose to submerge yourself in the sodium chloride spring. Sodium chloride is noted to relieve stress, treat myalgia, motor dysfunctions and digestive tract problems. The spectacular view alone is an antidote to any stress fuelled lifestyle. For a total mind-body experience, treat yourself in the Shiosai Spa Kaizuki and enjoy a holistic treatment, restoring mind, body and skin. www.seikai.co.jp

KUROYU (NYUTO) ONSEN SPA

For a complete off the beaten trail onsen experience follow the Sada River in Nyuto Mountain to reach Kuroyu Onsen. Enclosed by beech forest, the property embodies a getting 'back to nature' concept. Rustic cedar huts are edged by hot running springs surrounded by rich rugged mountains. It's a place to embrace stillness and reconnect with the inner self. The property's hot spring contains just simple sulphur, but its effects are far reaching, treating a number of ailments including, hypertension, rheumatism, diabetes, and infertility. Kuroyu Onsen's ethos is to maintain an atmosphere akin to ancient traditional hot spring bathing, so guests can absorb nature's gifts in a mountainous landscape, away from the bustle of inner city life. www.kuroyu.com

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info@mydiscoveries.com.au
www.mydiscoveries.com.au
1300 404 606

