



# Welcome to *ONSEN!!*

A guide for enjoying  
Japanese hot springs





In Japan, there are thousands of hot springs that are used to make public baths known as *Onsen*. There is a Japanese phrase *Hadaka-No-Tukiai* or “Naked Communication” which refers not only to bathing itself, but also to the way in which people speak with one another at the *onsen*. All barriers are broken: age, nationality, cultural background: One can communicate freely in the atmosphere of the *onsen*. *Onsen* is truly one of Japan's unique cultural experiences.

# 湯



# Welcome to *Onsen*

## The Japanese Love *Onsens*

For Japanese, bathing is not only for cleaning, but to refresh the body and spirit. Baths come in several types, including house baths, *Sentô* (simple public baths), and *onsen*. The popularity of the *Onsen* means they play a central role in Japanese domestic tourism. On weekends or vacation, Japanese people often go on an *onsen*-trip not only to relieve their fatigue but to enhance their mutual relationship with family, friends and co-workers.

## What is *Onsen*?

There are laws in place that regulate the definition, protection, etc. of an *Onsen*. According to these laws, an *Onsen* is defined as hot water and water vapor that springs from the Earth either naturally or from artificially-bored holes. The water temperature needs to be higher than 25°C. However, meeting other conditions, the water can be cooler and still be authorized as an *Onsen*.

## History of the *Onsen*

Japan is a volcanically active country, and as such, *Onsen* have been used since olden times and are mentioned in Japanese legends and mythologies. Descriptions are found in renowned Japanese texts such as; *Kojiki*, *Nihonshoki*, and *Manyôsyû*. During the Kamakura and Sengoku era (12th-17th century), records indicate that the *samurai* healed their wounds there. In the Edo era (17th-19th century), the culture of *onsens* spread to common people. In the Meiji era (early 20th century), scientific



studies began and by the Shôwa era (mid 20th century) the medical benefits of *Onsen* were proven. Through the years, more and more people come to use *onsens* for different reasons. Today people enjoy them not only for medical treatment but also for sightseeing, socializing, and leisure. *Onsens* are a multipurpose place to have a great time.



One of the reasons that *Onsens* are popular is because of the various health benefits people enjoy when using them.

Soothing your skin, easing stiff shoulders,

and relaxing your muscles are just some of these effects.

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# Effects of *Onsen*

## Why are *Onsens* Effective?

The minerals contained in *Onsen* water have various effects. People call this effect *Tôji* (hot spring healing, or balneotherapy).

A person can feel the effects of mineral water by bathing or by drinking.

Only some *Onsen* are equipped to handle drinking water however, so please check the general guidelines or drinking permission statement before drinking the *Onsen* Mineral Water. Please do not drink from the bath water itself.

Generally, there are three different types

of “rests” that can be appreciated at the *onsen*. They are as follows:

**Rest for recreation:** recovering from fatigue and becoming refreshed.

**Rest for health:** keeping a healthy condition and preventing against ailments

**Rest for medical treatment:** recuperation from ailments

Additional benefits include:

### ①Physical Effects

The thermal energy stimulates your nervous system and your circulatory system. The water pressure activates your

cardiopulmonary functions.

The buoyancy makes it easy for the physically handicapped to bathe as well.

### ②Chemical Effects

The minerals are absorbed through your skin into your body and provide various benefits.

### ③Change-of-Air Effects

A feeling of freedom from daily life as well as a comfortable atmosphere and natural view can refresh the spirit.

### ④Change-of-Condition Effects

By visiting the *Onsen* routinely, you can appreciate better health and improve your condition.

## Ailments Treated by the *Onsen*

*Onsen* is recommended for people who have the following ailments and/or conditions:

Neuralgia, sore muscles, arthritis, stiff shoulders and joints, motor paralysis, bruises, sprains, poor digestive tract, poor circulation, fatigue, and general poor health.

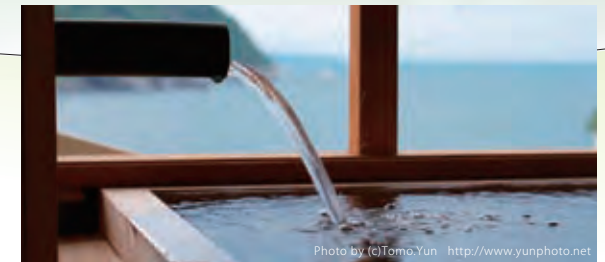


Photo by (c)Tomo.Yun <http://www.yunphoto.net>





*Onsen Ryokans* are Japanese style accommodations which are equipped with an *onsen*.

There are various *ryokans* ranging from the homey atmosphere of a Bed and Breakfast, to the luxury of a resort hotel.

※The following is a general introduction, local conditions may differ.

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## Enjoying an Onsen Ryokan

### Okami-san

*Okami-san* is the name given to a female who owns and operates a *Ryokan*. At some *Ryokan*, the *Okami-san* will personally welcome you, as well as serve you your meals. It is their goal to provide you with the spirit of hospitality.

### Wa-situ

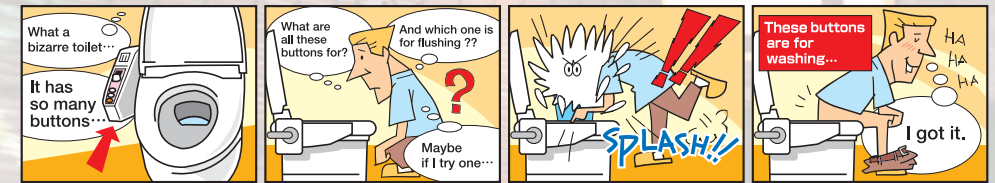
*Wa-situ* are traditional Japanese-style rooms. They are commonly furnished with *tatami* mat flooring. Shoes and slippers should not be worn on any *tatami* mat

surface, however slippers are provided for use elsewhere in the *Ryokan* including lobbies and hallways.

### Other Slippers

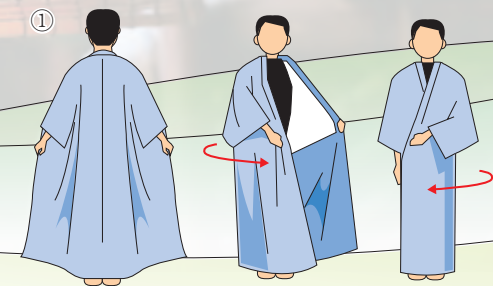
Guests are requested to use specially designated slippers when entering the restrooms. These slippers are located at the entrance of the restroom and require changing from one pair to another. Please do not use these restroom slippers for any place other than the restroom.

### Beware of Splash



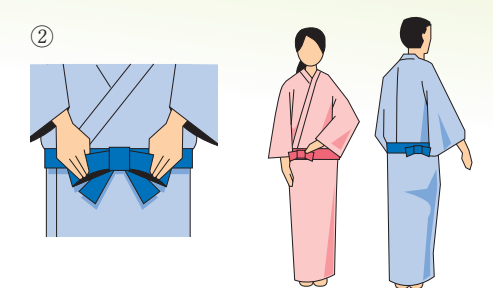
### Yukata and Haori

In your room, you will find a *yukata* (informal *kimono*), an *obi* (*kimono* belt), and a *haori* (a short coat to wear over the *kimono*). Please feel free to use these items. Several sizes are provided with your room, and additional sizes may be available at the front desk.



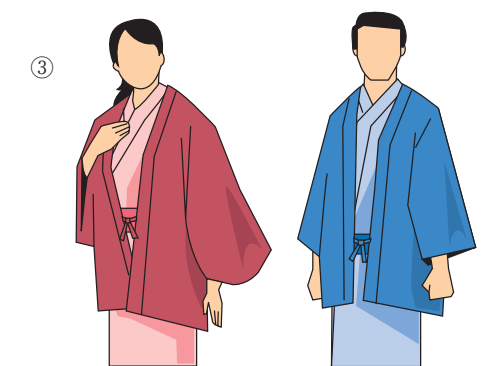
### Towels

Though some *ryokans* have towels at the *Daiyokuzyô* (the public bath place), generally you will take the ones provided with your room. There are several sizes of towels; the small ones are used for washing and are taken with you into the shower and bathing area. The large ones are for drying and are left in the dressing area.



### How to Wear Yukata

- ① Fold the left side of the *yukata* over the right side. Adjust the length.
- ② Put the *obi* (the belt) on and fasten it in on the front side of your waist. It's also fashionable for men to fasten it in the back.
- ③ If you feel cold, you can put the *haori* on over it like a jacket.





Manners to enjoy the *onsen*.



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# Manners at the *Onsen*

## With *Yukata* and Towels

Before leaving your room, place valuables in the safe and take the key with you.

Wearing *yukata* and *obi* take your towels to the *Daiyokuzyô* (a great public bath place).

## The *Onsen* for Men and Women

A *daiyokuzyô* is generally separated for men and women. Chinese characters are written on the entrance curtains: “男” (man) and “女” (woman) will indicate the appropriate side to enter. Some *onsens* switch the men and women's bath sides at

certain times. For this reason, please pay attention when entering.

## Lockers and Baskets

A dressing room is behind the curtain. Please take your slippers off before entering. Lockers and baskets are provided for your clothes. Some locker keys have a strap that goes on your wrist. This may be worn when entering the baths. You may also bring toiletries with you, but they should be left in the shower area. It is recommended they be kept in a small waterproof bag.

## Guideline for bathing

### First, wash your body

All guests are expected to wash themselves before entering the bath at individual washing points. They have faucets, movable shower heads, and stools. Feel free to use shampoos, hair rinses, and soaps which are provided.

### Rinse yourself thoroughly

Please rinse all soaps and conditioners off before entering the bath.

### Entering the bath

Please be careful before entering a bath. The water temperature is about from 37°C to 42°C. Your body may need time to adjust to this temperature. Even though it seems to be too hot, you may not add cold water.

## Do not put your towels in the water

You are generally required to set your towel off to the side of the water, or place it on top of your head while bathing. In the latter case, this also helps to prevent a rush of blood to the head.

## Types of baths

*Onsens* come in many types and shapes including “*Uti-buro*” and “*Roten-buro*.” *Uti-buro* is an indoor bath, and *roten-buro* is an outdoor. Jacuzzi, sauna, and others are parts of *uchi-buro*. Some *onsens* have “*Denki-yu*,” (an electric bath), that provide the effect of a good massage.

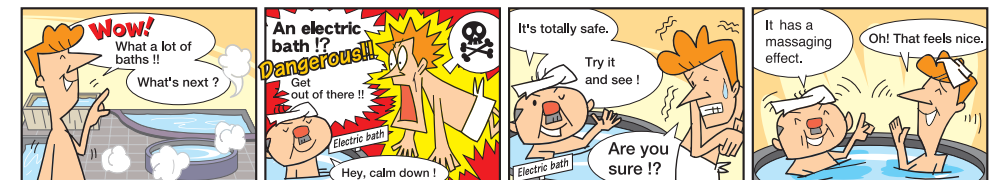


## Keep the Bath Clean!

No swimsuits are to be worn in the baths; however glasses and wrist-keys are allowed. You may also bring a small towel into the

bathing area, but it should not touch the bath water. Additionally, hair should be tied up and kept out of the bath to avoid loose strands from falling in.

## Electric Bath

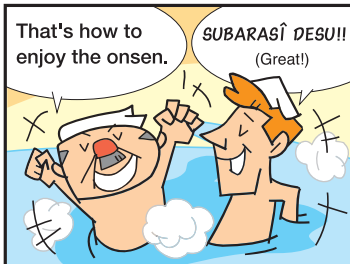
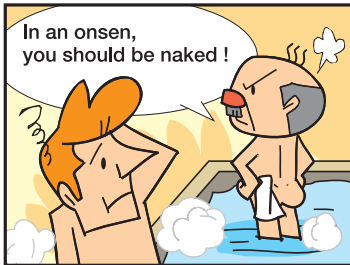




# Let's Go to the *Onsen*!

At first, you may have troubles understanding proper etiquette when visiting the *Onsen*. However, the most important point is to enjoy yourself without bothering others. Consideration for others is part of the joys of *Onsen*!

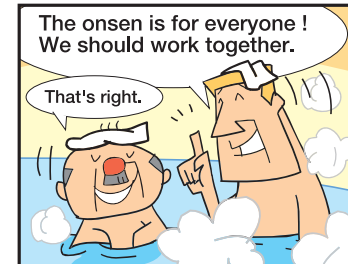
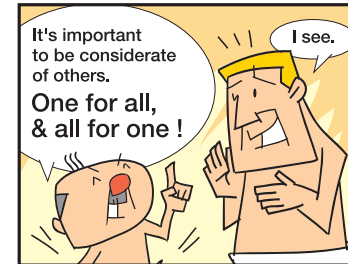
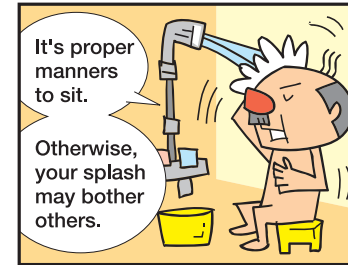
## No Swimsuit



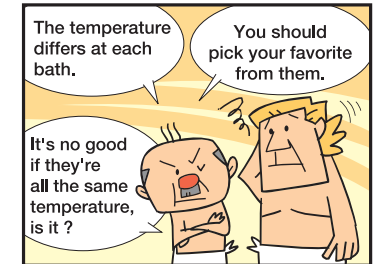
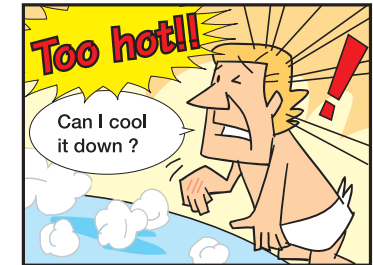
## Towel on Your Head



## Spirit of Consideration



## It is Hot Enough?



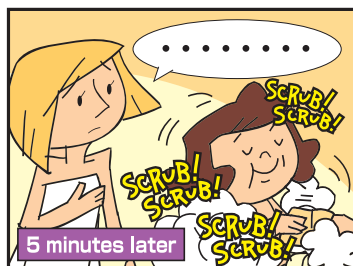




### Wash Your Body Thoroughly



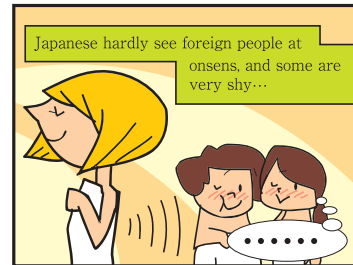
1 minute later



5 minutes later



### Place of Social Relationship

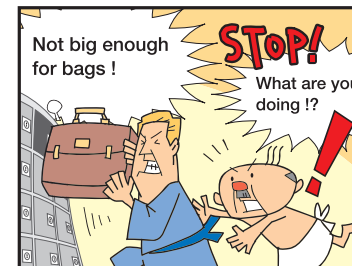
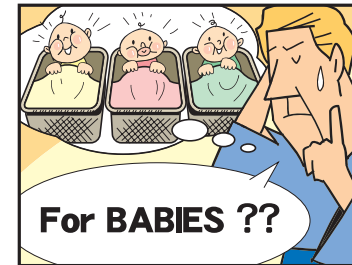


Are you local ?

Where are you from ?

What's your name ?

### Basket and Locker



Not big enough for bags !

STOP!

What are you doing !?

Lockers are only for valuables and baskets are for clothes.

They are not for Babies. OK ?

### "Ashi-yu" (Foot-Bath)



What's this ?

It's an "ashi-yu" (foot-bath).

Very easy to enjoy.

You can rest your feet while talking with your neighbors.

Time for me to be going.

I should too.

Oh, no !

Don't forget to bring towels to the "ashi-yu."



# Onsen Terms

The following is an introduction to the various words and phrases often used at the *Onsen*.

**Dai-yoku-zyō** (lit. the Great Public Bath Place) includes the dressing area, the shower area and the bathing area. Generally separated for men and women.

**Utiburo** indoor bath

**Rotenburo** outdoor bath

**Datui-zyo** the dressing area

**Arai-ba** the shower area

**Kake-yu (or Kaburi-yu)**

The act of pouring *Onsen* bath water on yourself before entering the bath. This is recommended so your body can acclimate to the heat of the *Onsen* water. It can also help prevent a temporary rise of blood pressure that often accompanies a sudden entry into a hot bath. It is customary to begin with your feet and continue upwards, little by little, until you reach your head. After this process, it should be easier to enter the bath

**Naga-yu** taking a bath for a long time

It is advised that you do not spend too much time in one bath to avoid *Yu-atari*

**Yu-atari** is the bad influences of *Naga-yu*. *Naga-yu* can lead to a temporary rise in blood pressure, an increase in heart rate, and dizziness. It is advised to take several breaks outside of the bath in order to prevent these conditions.

**Utase-yu**

An area of onsen where the water falls down from a high place. The water is meant to fall onto your shoulders, back, and waist to provide a massaging effect.

**Ne-yu**

A long bath where one can lie down

**Nuru-yu**

A bath where the temperature is kept below 37°C (usually around 36°C). This bath is advised if normal bath temperatures are uncomfortable. Additionally, longer baths are possible at this temperature.

**kyakusitu-Roten-buro**

This type of *roten-buro* is a private bath equipped to a hotel room. It is for the private use for the guests of that room only.

Let's speak Nihon-Go!

Nihon-go means the Japanese Language.

The following is an introduction to other Japanese words and phrases you can use at the *onsen*. Have fun and try them out!

**"Goku-raku, Goku-raku"** (It's Heaven!)

Fundamentally, *Goku-raku* means heaven in Buddhist terms. However, People can simply use the word to express great comfort. It seems that, by enjoying *Onsens*, people feel as if they are in heaven.

**"I Yu Dana"** (Hot springs are great!)

**"I Kimoti"** (It feels nice.)

**"Atui"** (hot)

**"Tumetai"** (cold)

**"Subarasi"** (fantastic)

**"Tanosī"** (fun)

**"Onsen-wa, hazimete-desu"**

(This is my first time to an *Onsen*)

**"Onsen-ga, daisuki-desu"** (I really like *Onsen*!)

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# We love *onsens*, too.

Foreigners who live in Japan have become big fans of *onsens*.

A hot spring is like a pub



Amanda Harlow

Going to a hot spring in Japan is like going to a pub in England - it's the place where the locals go to relax and be themselves. So you can visit Japan and just see the tourist sights - but to meet real Japan it's essential to take off your clothes, slosh that water around and get naked! My big hope is that the G8 world leaders will take the plunge together and REALLY communicate because that's what *onsen* are all about.

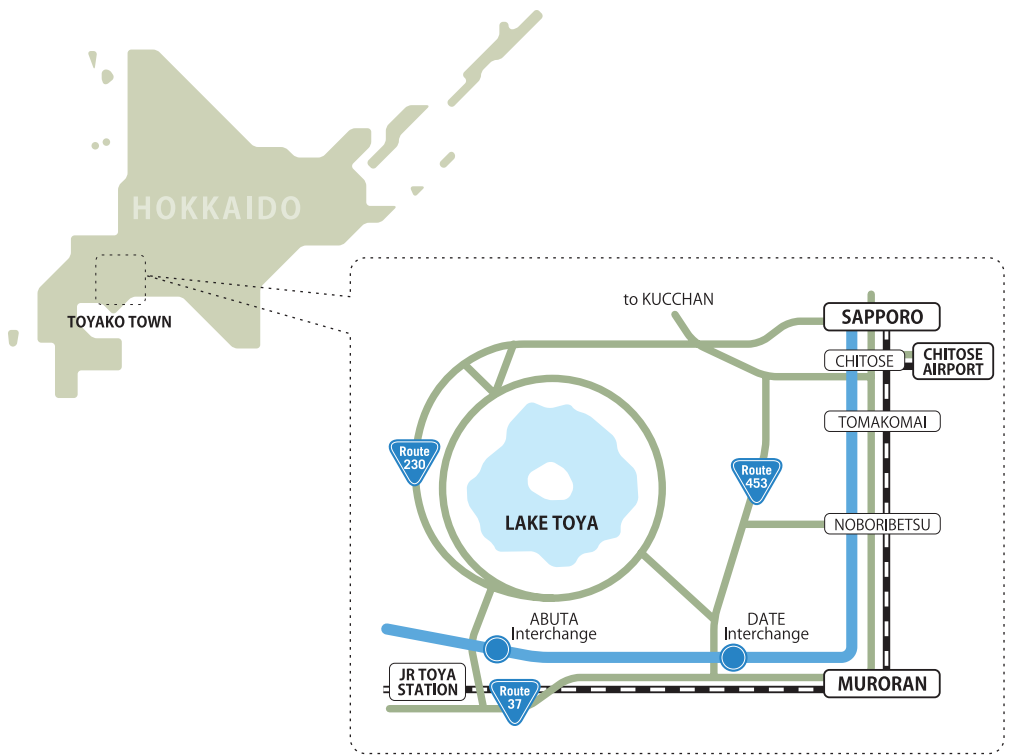
Don't miss out on the Japanese hot spring



Martin Y. Triche

It's easy for any visitor to Japan to fall in love with the food, people, and culture, no matter the length of their stay. One thing tourists often miss out on, though, is the simple delight that is the Japanese hot spring. Some might be a bit timid when it comes to the idea of stripping down and hopping in a bath full of people you've never met, but it's amazing how quickly that bashfulness disappears once you slip into the water. A nice little soak can do wonders to erase the fatigue from a long day of work (or sightseeing), and will leave you feeling relaxed and refreshed. So what are you waiting for? Take the plunge!





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