

The Snowscape of Ginzan Onsen, Filming Location of the TV Drama *Oshin*

Ginzan Onsen hot springs is the filming location of the Japanese serialized morning television drama *Oshin*.¹ The traditional Japanese inns that line both banks of the Ginzan River were built from about 1910 to the 1930s. We interviewed Sasahara Kenichiro, head of the Ginzan Onsen Association, about its nostalgic snowy winter scenery. (Text: Morohashi Kumiko)

The serialized morning television drama *Oshin* aired from April 1983 to March 1984. In Episode 2, the main character *Oshin*, now in her 80s, visits a hot spring area deep in the snow of Yamagata Prefecture without telling her family where she was going, just as if she had run away from home, where she reflects on her life. Filming locations where the story starts at Ginzan Onsen. The many scenes shot at the snow-covered Ginzan Onsen are impressive. The scene where the young *Oshin* visits her working mother was also filmed at Ginzan Onsen.

Oshin was a long-running TV drama of about 300 episodes that aired in more than 60 countries around the world and became very popular. Even today, many people come from overseas to visit Ginzan Onsen and look for traces of *Oshin*.

Sasahara says, “Since *Oshin* was broadcast in many countries, the name of Ginzan Onsen, which was one of its filming locations, has become known internationally. These days, visitors are making it even more popular on social media, and all of a sudden, even more people from outside Japan have been coming.”



In winter, Ginzan Onsen bustles with tourists from overseas

Photo:PIXTA



Photo: Obanzawa City Office

This hot spring resort town still appears as it did more than 100 years ago.



Photo: PIXTA

The gas lamps appear as they did in the old days

January and February are especially bustling with overseas visitors. The warm orange glow of the gas lamps against the white snow piled up on the nostalgic streets is an attractive sight.

“Many of our visitors from overseas have never seen snow before, and they find the nighttime scenery especially beautiful. Some even say it reminds them of the food stalls in the animated film *Spirited Away*.”

Spirited Away, a Japanese animated feature film directed by Miyazaki Hayao and released in 2001, is acclaimed around the world and has won several international awards. Although it is said that there was no specific model for the film’s setting, Sasahara says that fans visit the area because the atmosphere of the town in the film resembles their impression of Ginzan Onsen.

Ginzan Onsen is in Obanzawa City, Yamagata Prefecture, which is located on the Sea of Japan coast in

the Tohoku region, the northernmost part of Japan’s main Island. Silver mining started here in the 15th century, and under the direct control of the then-Tokugawa Shogunate, the city was developed in the first half of the 17th century and called Nobesawa Ginzan (“Nobesawa Silver Mine”). Hot springs were discovered during the development of the silver mine, thus the name Ginzan Onsen (“Silver Mine Hot Springs”).

Sasahara explains. “The town of Ginzan Onsen has looked the way it is today since the 1910s. The buildings back then had been considerably damaged by flooding of the Ginzan River. Carpenters, plasterers, and joiners competed with each other to restore these buildings, and transformed them into the multi-story Western-style wooden structures that exist today.”

At that time, they also built the gas lamps, cobblestone roads, and bridges, and Ginzan Onsen took on its current appearance.


“Even during the snowy season, try taking a stroll. Since the paths are made of cobblestones, you should wear winter boots or other non-slip footwear. Take a moment to enjoy the winter sights, including the gas lamps, the streets, the night scenery, and the snowscape of the hot spring resort area.” 



Photo: PIXTA

The snowy landscape makes one feel as if lost in a storybook world.

1. A television drama broadcast by NHK from April 1983 to March 1984. It depicts the life of Oshin, a young girl born into a poor farming family, from the modern era to the postwar period and through to the present day. Average viewer ratings over a year of broadcast were high, at 52.6%, with a top viewer rating of 62.9% (November 12). The series was also aired overseas and received high viewer ratings in some countries.