

# HIGHLIGHTING *Japan*

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FROM HOT SPRINGS TO ART:  
JAPAN'S BATH CULTURE

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TO ART: JAPAN'S BATH  
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Featuring formulas that replicate the scent and sensation of Japan's best hot springs, bath salts make bathing at home a joy

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A young Frenchwoman has made it her mission to show travelers to Japan how to achieve the peak sento experience

For most Japanese, finding themselves in hot water is one of the surpassing joys of life.

Whether they're immersed in hot springs out in the wilderness or in a tub at home, soaking away the aches and cares of the day is integral to the culture. In this issue, we show how Japan's bathing culture evolved, how deep it goes, and how to submerge yourself in The Way of the Bath.

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As they soak, bathers at sento (public bathhouses) can also contemplate fantastic murals by painters like Kiyoto Maruyama



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**ON THE COVER**

From Hot Springs to Art: Japan's Bath Culture  
Photo: © Stephanie Melanie

## JAPAN-U.K. SUMMIT MEETING



On January 10, 2019, during his visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, attended a summit meeting with the Rt Hon Theresa May MP, Prime Minister of the U.K. On the occasion of this summit meeting the two leaders issued a “Japan-U.K. Joint Statement.”

The two leaders shared the view that since Prime Minister May’s visit, cooperation between Japan and the U.K. has developed at an unprecedented pace, that Japan and the U.K. have established the closest relationship ever before since the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, and that Japan and the U.K. need to fulfill leading roles in fora such as the G20, these days, facing challenges against universal values including rules-based international order and free trade.

The two leaders shared the view that at this year’s G20, Japan and the U.K. would lead the growth of the global economy by promoting free trade and innovation, achieving at the same time both the economic growth and the disparity reduction, and that they would cooperate on contributing to addressing the environmental and global issues, such as climate change and plastic waste in the ocean.

The two leaders shared the view that Japan and the U.K. will cooperate on WTO reform.

With regard to cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, Prime Minister Abe welcomed the U.K.’s increasing engagement in the region. The two leaders also shared the view that they would work on further strengthening Japan-U.K. cooperation vigorously in the fields such as (i) maritime security, (ii) quality infrastructure and (iii) telecommunications infrastructure including 5G, toward realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Prime Minister Abe stated that Japan-U.K. security cooperation has developed significantly since Prime Minister May’s visit to Japan in August 2017, including calls at Japanese ports by British Royal Navy ships, and that the cooperation between Japan and the U.K., important partners on the security front, is opening a new chapter. Furthermore, the two leaders shared the view that the Fourth Japan-U.K. Foreign and Defense Ministerial Meeting (“2+2”) would be held in Japan this spring, that British Royal Navy ships would call at Japanese ports, and that the two countries would strengthen cooperation related to addressing “ship-to-ship transfers” by North Korea.

Prime Minister Abe stated that while the ultimate decision regarding the U.K.’s withdrawal from the EU lies with the British people the so-called “no deal” exit must be avoided. He also stated that Japan fully supports the draft Withdrawal Agreement between Prime Minister May and the EU, which aims to ensure legal stability for businesses operating in the U.K. by establishing the transition period. Prime Minister Abe appreciated Prime Minister May’s strong will and efforts to obtain approval from the Parliament for the draft Withdrawal Agreement. In response, Prime Minister May expressed her gratitude for Prime Minister Abe’s support and stated that the current draft Agreement is good for Japanese businesses.

With regard to the North Korea situation, the two leaders shared the view that it is necessary to fully implement the relevant United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions in order to achieve the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement (CVID) of all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles of all ranges by North Korea. Furthermore, Prime Minister Abe also asked for Prime Minister May’s understanding and cooperation towards an immediate resolution of the abductions issue, and obtained the support from Prime Minister May.





# From Hot Springs to Art: Japan's Bath Culture

In this land where hot springs abound and Buddhist teachings on cleanliness reach far and deep, perhaps it was inevitable that bathing would become something of a religious experience. The Japanese will go to great lengths for a satisfying soak, everywhere from high-class *onsen* resorts to public baths to the humble *ofuro* at home. In this issue, we reveal how taking to the waters helped shape Japan's body politic, some remarkable *onsen* to explore, and how the Japan Self-Defense Forces provide sorely needed comfort to disaster victims in the form of bathing facilities with multi-ton tubs. We also explore the realm of the *sentō* (public baths) and how special bath salts can transform your own tub into a mini-*onsen*.

# REDISCOVERING THE MULTIFACETED ATTRACTIONS OF JAPANESE BATHING CULTURE

*Besides writing essays and books about everyday topics such as food and lifestyles, essayist Yoko Kishimoto is also a board member of the Japan Sento Culture Association. Kishimoto shares her thoughts on how bathing and sento public baths are integral to life in Japan.*

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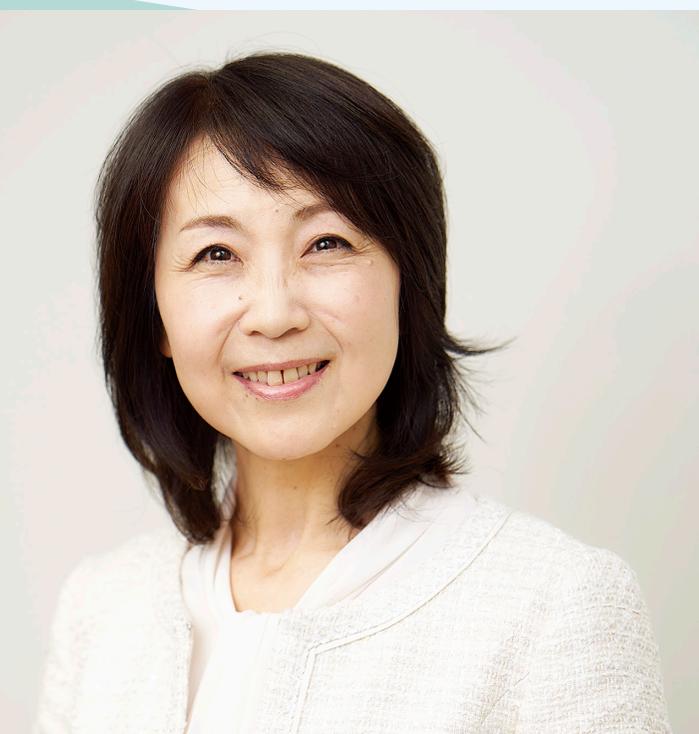
**TAMAKI KAWASAKI**

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## **What role does bathing play in Japan?**

Bathing has been a norm in Japanese daily living because of the country's hot, humid climate and the dust from volcanic ash. Bathing is said to have two roles: maintaining cleanliness, which is also linked to the idea of religious purification, and promoting health.

The history of bathing in Japan is deeply connected to Shinto and Buddhism. Starting with the preexisting Shinto concept of *misogi*, or purification, the subsequent Buddhist practice of ritual bathing—



Yoko Kishimoto, essayist and board member of the Japan Sento Culture Association



known as *saikaimokuyoku*—made cleansing the body part of religious practice. Temples provided bathing facilities for the public. While the original intent was not to rid the body of dirt, through this practice people discovered the physical and preventative benefits of cleanliness.

From ancient times to the Middle Ages, the mainstream form of bathing was the steam bath, somewhat like the bathing facilities widely seen in Europe such as the sauna-style public bathhouses, spas for recuperation, and herbal baths. *Onsen*, or hot springs, had a long history as places for farmers to rest their tired bodies. In mountainous or seaside areas the natural environment dictated the local bathing culture; people would bathe in rivers, lakes, or make steam baths using raw wood and seaweed.

During the Edo Period (1603-1867) *senjo*, or public bathhouses, developed in urban areas. Initially, a *senjo* was something between steam bathing and bathing in hot water, in which steam came off a shallow basin of hot water. Eventually the amount of hot water used for bathing increased and evolved into today's bathing style, in which people immerse their bodies in plenty of hot water.

Japanese-style bathing is defined by frequency, water temperature and duration. Immersing your body in hot water—approximately 41 to 43 degrees Celsius—for a long time on a daily basis is considered particularly effective. Busy contemporary Japanese people's tendency to watch TV or read books

while taking a long bath at home seems to indicate that they are destressing through bathing, and instinctively feel that it soothes their nerves.

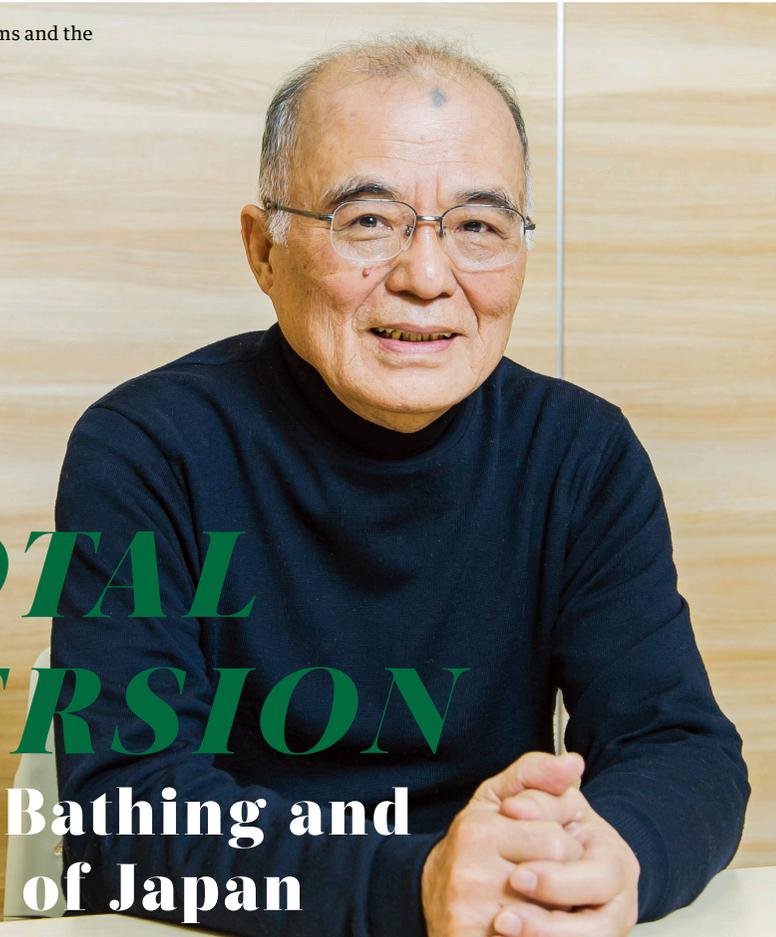
### **What are your thoughts on *senjo* and *onsen*?**

Japanese *senjo* and *onsen* have great cultural significance. Not only the facilities but also how people behave at these places manifests a culture that expresses the Japanese spirit. It is not an overstatement to say that the entire experience is a type of cultural heritage. Japanese baths are places for communication among family members and local communities, and also places to learn manners. Thinking about the person who will use the bath next encourages people to keep it clean and orderly. In public bathhouses open to everyone, people experience *hadaka no tsukiai*, or “naked communication,” with other bathers of all ages. This is also the world of good old Japanese *giri to ninjo*, or “heart and conscience.” *Senjo* still function as places that encourage communication within local communities, even though homes started to come equipped with their own baths in the late 1960s.

The public bath facilities also offer opportunities to enjoy the arts. Roofs in the Chinese cusped-gable style with coffered ceilings became popular after shrine carpenters applied their building techniques to *senjo* construction following the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923. Nearly a hundred years of Japanese art is concentrated in *senjo* buildings. Patrons can experience a mix of varying artistic styles in *senjo*, from small Japanese-style gardens and verandas to tile art, sculptures and woven-bamboo clothes baskets. Each craft shows the skills and playfulness of the artisans, housed in buildings that vary from a traditional shrine architectural style all the way to art deco style structures.

The number of *senjo* are slowly declining due to the spread of home baths, soaring fuel prices and a lack of successors to take over existing facilities. However, the attractions and value of *senjo* are being rediscovered, and these institutions are regaining customers. I would love to have visitors to Japan go to a *senjo* to experience firsthand the above-mentioned art and architecture, as well as the Japanese spirit and behavioral culture of caring for and giving way to each other. These tangible and intangible aspects are at the heart of *senjo* culture. **7**

Koushi Shimokawa, expert on public customs and the history of bathing



# TOTAL IMMERSION

## Buddhism, Bathing and the Rise of Japan

### TAKAYOSHI YAMABE

*Buddhism was pivotal in spreading bathing customs to urban areas of Japan through the baths that temples provided to the public, and Buddhism and bathing culture were in turn integral in the development of the Japanese state. Historian Koushi Shimokawa, an expert on public customs and the history of bathing, provides insight into this unusual form of influence.*

ACCORDING to historian Koushi Shimokawa, Buddhism strongly influenced the popularization of baths in Japan's urban areas, and Buddhism and the bathing culture it inspired went on to do much more. A religion born in India, Buddhism came to Japan from Mainland China via the Korean Peninsula, brought from Baekje—a kingdom in southwestern Korea—to Japan in the year 538, as part of official negotiations between the two lands. The Imperial Court, which was at the center of Japanese politics and administration, sought to stabilize national polity under the teachings of Buddhism. They also constructed temples around the country, spreading Buddhism throughout Japan.

“Within the teachings of Buddhism are ‘the virtues of ablutions,’ which encouraged pouring cold or hot water over the body or immersing oneself in baths to wash away worldly uncleanness,” Shimokawa explains. “Buddhist virtues denote particularly good actions, and a sutra about bathing at temples notes that performing this virtue dispels the ‘seven illnesses’ and allows the bather to obtain the ‘seven merits.’”

The great public bath of Todaiji Temple is an Important Cultural Property



“With this in mind,” he continues, “the priests of temples not only purified themselves but also gave the public the opportunity to bathe, giving rise to a custom of ‘virtuous bathing.’ Monks assisted in the baths as part of their training. The great public bath at Todaiji Temple, a World Heritage Site, is thought to be the birthplace of the practice, and a place where both monks and the public performed ablutions.” Shimokawa also notes that these public baths brought about the custom of bathing.

“Of course, people bathed in natural hot springs before that time, and hot spring bathing makes appearances in regional records of local history and customs, such as the *Izumo Fudoki*, published in 733,” Shimokawa notes. “Japan’s native Shinto religion also had the custom of pouring water on the body for purification. Permanent bathing facilities were built in urban areas far from hot springs. From surviving materials on the topic, it appears that Todaiji Temple’s public bath is the oldest.”

While it is unclear exactly when Todaiji’s public bath was completed, Shimokawa believes it was between when construction of the temple began in 745 and when the department in charge of construction was abolished in 789. It is worth noting that baths in that era were similar to Turkish baths, where patrons could warm themselves in a

steam-filled room, or pour cold or hot water over themselves. Both differed from the modern method of partially or fully immersing the body in bathtubs.

At the time, the Imperial Court issued nationwide legislation and worked to build a national political system, including managing land and the family registers of residents. The concept of avoiding disaster and striving for national stability through the power of Buddhism was one of the major pillars of spirituality. Temples had the duty to spread Buddhism far and wide, and bathing was an important measure for gaining popular support. Before long, many temples besides Todaiji were offering virtuous bathing as well.

“Bathing was also beneficial for the public, since cleansing the body in baths helps prevent infectious diseases and has significant benefits for overall health,” Shimokawa explains. “Many felt that this was a tangible example of the benefits that could be gained in this world through observing Buddhist teachings.”

The popularity of the baths among the public facilitated the acceptance of Buddhism and also helped prepare the way for a new political system. Who knew that the humble bath is so deeply linked with Japanese leadership and policy? **7**

## Digging Your Own Outdoor

# Riverside Hot Spring



1

YUKIKO ISHIKAWA

*There are thousands of hot springs all throughout Japan. Kiriake Onsen in Nagano Prefecture is particularly noteworthy and fun because you can dig your very own onsen bath right by the river.*

**A**KIYAMAGO in Sakae Village is hidden away in a mountainous area on the northernmost tip of Nagano Prefecture. Suzuki Bokushi, a writer and merchant during the Edo Period (1603-1867), made detailed notes about the unusual practices and culture in the area in his *Akiyama Travel Notes*.

There are six *onsen* (hot springs) in the area. One is Kiriake, situated in the remotest part of Akiyamago where the Zako and Uono rivers meet, known as one of the country's most unusual hot springs because you have to dig your own bath. (Many of the inns and other accommodations in the area rent shovels to guests.) The hot spring looks like a normal river at first glance, but the waters are steamy—roughly 54 degrees Celsius. You build your own bath while cooling the water to the desired temperature with the icy river water.

Looking closely at the river, you'll see spots surrounded by rocks or deeper areas where you can immerse your whole body. Most likely prior visitors made these baths. If you step into those areas, you may be surprised at the sudden heat. Visitors walking around the river discover that parts of the river have significant differences in temperature. It's best to find a spot that is relatively warm and dilute it to your preferred temperature, but then digging and customizing the bathing space is part of the fun of this hot spring. Since this is a free-running river there is no fee involved, but remember that there are also no changing rooms.

"There is no one managing the area, but the village office, tourist association and hotel staff help out by laying down wood chips to make an easier path to the river," states Akihiro Shirahama of the Sakae Village Akiyamago Tourism Association.



- 1 Located in the remotest part of Akiyama, Kiriake is one of the area's thirteen villages. When the weather is cold, steam rises from the surface of the river
- 2 Said to resemble piles of cloth, the columns of the Nunoawayama cliffs were formed by hardened magma, and some are more than 1.5 meters wide
- 3 Visitors can get the temperature of their bath just right by shoveling sand from the riverbed, which allows cold water to flow in
- 4 Hot spring water can be seen bubbling up in various spots throughout the river

It's advisable to contact the tourist association beforehand to check river conditions. From April to May, the river floods due to snow melt, so it isn't possible to bathe until the end of May.

Bathing at Kiriake is also impossible on rainy days and when Shibusawa Dam conducts scheduled water releases. During the summer many families come to play in the river, and bathing while enjoying the green leaves or snow is also lovely. The most popular season is the fall foliage season, though, when you can soak while viewing the beautiful red and yellow leaves—a perfect way to enjoy autumn in Japan.

“There aren't many hot springs where you get to build your own bath, and sometimes even spot wild monkeys or raccoons,” says Shirahama. “From the top of the bridge that crosses the Zako and Uono rivers there is also a great view of twin waterfalls. Getting there can be difficult, but buses are available if you make a request in advance. It's a singular experience that is worth the trip.”

Not far from Kiriake Onsen you can see the magnificent Nunoawayama cliffs, formed by magma between seven hundred and eight hundred thousand years ago. When approaching the mountain, keep an ear out for the loud roar from the winds that almost sound like a waterfall.

The wonderful natural scenery and unique bathing experience make Akiyama a must-visit for adventurous travelers and *onsen* fans. **7**

# FAMOUS ONSEN IN THE COUNTRY OF HOT SPRINGS

While the regions of Japan may have vastly different climates, from Hokkaido to Okinawa they all have one thing in common—onsen, or hot springs. In fact, there are over three thousand onsen areas in the country, and vast legions of people seek them out to soak and relax. Here are three select onsen from among Japan's many renowned natural hot springs.

## KATSUMI YASUKURA

THE Hot Spring Law enacted in 1948 defines what an *onsen* in Japan is supposed to be. Specifically, the term *onsen* refers to hot water, mineral water, water vapor or other kinds of gas (excluding natural gas with hydrocarbon as a primary component) discharged from underground, with a water source collection point temperature of 25 degrees Celsius or higher, or that contains a certain amount of at least one of the substances the government specifies (such as free carbon dioxide, radon or radium salts).

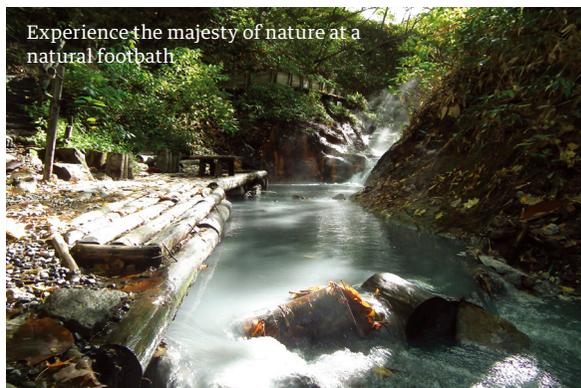
According to Ministry of the Environment research conducted in 2016, Japan has over three thousand *onsen* resorts, one of the world's biggest concentrations. Blessed with so many volcanic hot springs, rich groundwater from the rainy climate, and Japanese people's traditional fondness for bathing, it's no surprise that Japan is an *onsen* paradise. Here are three remarkable *onsen* resorts that vividly represent the characteristics of their respective regions.



### Noboribetsu Onsen

Located on the Pacific coast of southern Hokkaido, Noboribetsu boasts a 160-year history, making it the oldest *onsen* among Hokkaido's 245 hot springs according to the Ministry of the Environment's 2016 research. About ten thousand tons of hot water with temperatures of between 45 to 90 degrees Celsius at the source gush up out of the ground every day. Visitors to the town can enjoy *onsen* with nine different types of spring water, including a sulfur spring and a sodium bicarbonate spring. The Oyunuma River, flowing out of Oyunuma Lake in Noboribetsu, is a rare natural footbath, and the virgin forest growing along the river adds to the scenic landscape.

A popular "demon fireworks festival" takes place every year on Thursday and Friday evenings from June to July, attracting many tourists. During the event, the legendary Yukijin demons, said to reside in *jigoku no tani* (the Valley of Hell), shoot handheld fireworks into the night sky to ward off evil influences.

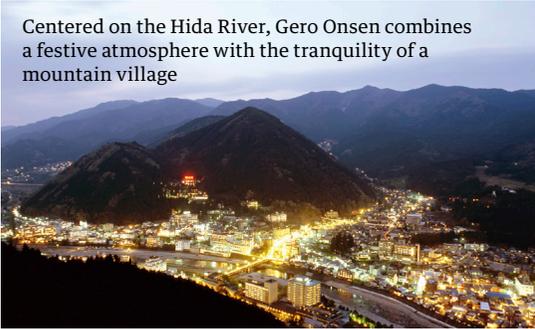


Experience the majesty of nature at a natural footbath



Yukijin demons set off handheld fireworks to ward off evil influences, and pray for happiness and health

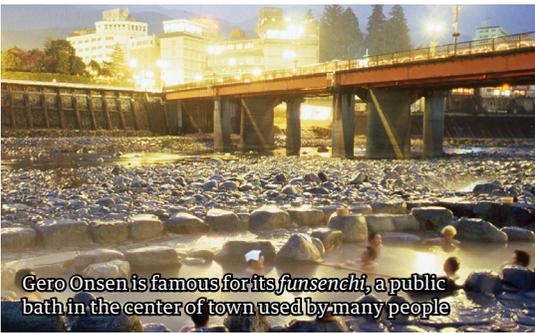
Centered on the Hida River, Gero Onsen combines a festive atmosphere with the tranquility of a mountain village



## Gero Onsen

Situated in central Gifu Prefecture, Gero Onsen has almost a thousand years of history. Legend has it that an injured heron led villagers to the hot spring's location. The *onsen* is known for its jet ponds along the scenic Hida River, which offer an outstanding natural atmosphere and no fences. There are also free footbaths scattered around the resort town.

Popular attractions in Gero Onsen include bath-hopping using *yumeguri tegata*, a ticket that can be used up to three times at any participating *onsen* hotel, along with fireworks shows on Saturday nights from January to March. Called *hanabi monogatari*, this spectacular pyrotechnic show portrays Japanese events and customs throughout the four seasons using fireworks. Since Gero is a simple alkaline hot spring, its waters act as a natural soap, and it is nicknamed *bijin no yu* (hot spring of beauty) for its health and beauty-boosting effects.



Gero Onsen is famous for its *funsenchi*, a public bath in the center of town used by many people

## Arima Onsen

This hot spring resort is in Kobe, Hyogo Prefecture, on Mount Rokko. Arima Onsen appears in mythological stories, and records show that over fourteen centuries ago the emperor at the time stayed there. During the Warring States Period (1467-1590), the great general Toyotomi Hideyoshi carried out extensive renovation work in Arima.

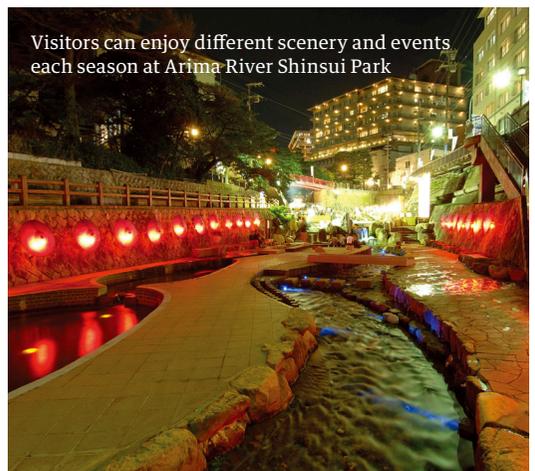
Arima's waters contain seven of the nine substances the Ministry of the Environment designates as effective for medical treatment. Even globally it is rare for a single hot spring to have so many diverse chemical components. Of the three types of *onsen* in Arima, the most famous is the *kinsen*, or Gold Spring, a high-temperature ferruginous sodium chloride spring also known as "red water" because it turns rusty red when it meets the air. The water source is within the grounds of Arima Tenjin Shrine, which enshrines the same god as the famous Kitano Tenmangu Shrine in Kyoto. At the spring's source the golden water is a steaming 100 degrees Celsius, steadily gushing up from 185 meters underground, but cooled to around 40 degrees for bathing. Various seasonal events also draw visitors, such as cherry blossom festivals, riverside parties and summer festivals.

The allure of an *onsen* depends on its history, scale, the surrounding landscape and the quality of the springs. Learning about various *onsen* and finding the perfect one adds to the fun of a visit to Japan's famous hot springs. ▮

The incredibly hot Tenjin Sengen water source is located within Arima Tenjin Shrine



Visitors can enjoy different scenery and events each season at Arima River Shinsui Park



# JAPAN SELF-DEFENSE FORCES BRING COMFORT TO DISASTER VICTIMS

KATSUMI YASUKURA

Bathing support sets like this take a team of six people about three hours to construct, and the latest models are equipped with amenities like massaging shower heads

*The Japan Self-Defense Forces play many roles in disaster areas: saving lives, supplying water and food, transferring necessary supplies and more. Among their many tasks, the one that provides immense comfort to disaster victims and earns the most vocal appreciation is bathing support.*

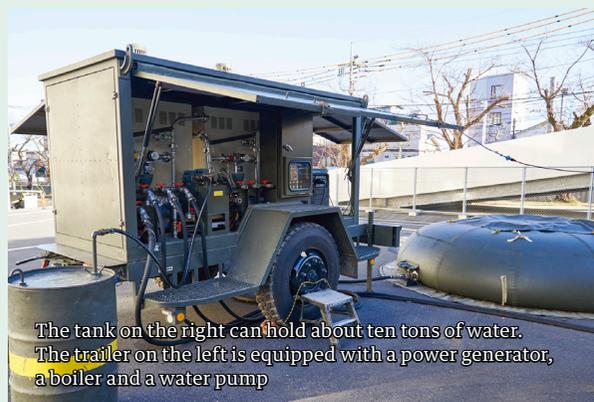
WHEN basic services stop due to major disasters, victims in the devastated areas suffer many inconveniences and indignities. The lack of clean water, food, bathrooms, proper sleeping spaces and bathing facilities causes great stress. To ease those difficult living conditions, the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) offers bathing support services upon request from local government in affected areas.

According to Major Masakazu Hashimoto of the JGSDF public relations office, bathing support was

first supplied in the areas that were affected when the Isahaya Flood—which killed over seven hundred people—struck in 1957. Since then, JGSDF Logistical Support Regiments have been equipped with outdoor bathing sets and can offer baths in disaster areas whenever needed. Water supplied from local reservoirs is prepared using the JGSDF's water purification system. A specialized boiler is used to heat the water for baths, which are set near sewers so the water can be drained through pipes made out of tent fabric. In most cases, the baths are situated in schools or parking lots of local government facilities used as evacuation spots.

The Nerima Camp in Tokyo has one of these outdoor bath sets. The tent has a changing room, five showers, space for washing, and a massive bath filled with 3.7 tons of hot water kept at 41 to 42 degrees Celsius. The entrance features a *noren* fabric curtain and flags with Nerima-no-Yu (Nerima Bath) written on it to give it a bathhouse-like feel.

Major Ryosuke Izumi, leader of the First Logistic Support Regiment, says: "When it gets crowded we can adjust things like bathing times depending on



The tank on the right can hold about ten tons of water. The trailer on the left is equipped with a power generator, a boiler and a water pump

gender ratios and numbers, or increase the lighting and add additional showers. Depending on needs we can also offer support for the elderly and infants by adding steps and handrails to the baths as well.” The *noren* and flags differ depending on where each regiment is based. Including this location name or nods to local specialties allow people to tell which self-defense team is offering support.

“We try our best to ensure that people feel as comfortable as possible in our care,” says Tetsuya Umino, a First Lieutenant and platoon leader. “We remove hair and dirt from the baths, supply clean, hot water, and prepare shampoo and soap with the help of local governments. In the changing rooms, we use fast-drying diatomite bathmats and mop the space from time to time to keep it dry. In certain cases, we provide lockers for valuables, baths for infants, and waiting rooms for families.”

The smiles and thank-you cards from users are the greatest motivational boost for the self-defense



Leader of the First Logistical Support Regiment Major Ryosuke Izumi (left) and First Lieutenant and platoon leader Tetsuya Umino (right)



Keeping the baths clean and providing proper supplies is an important part of providing bathing support



Thank-you cards from children are great for the morale of the Japan Self-Defense Force members providing bathing support

officials providing this bathing support. “I was pleased to receive comments like ‘I felt so revived,’ ‘My child smiled again,’ and ‘I felt so relaxed,’” Major Izumi states. “Depending on the needs of the local government, we will continue to offer bathing support when disasters occur. We love to help people feel clean, and to offer assistance and hope through our care.”

Military groups outside of Japan do offer bathing support in disaster areas, but they tend to be shower booths in simple containers. Massive baths like those the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force provides are unheard of.

Keeping this essential part of Japanese culture alive for people in dire situations shows the dedication of the men and women of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force to those they serve. 17



The *noren* curtains change depending on where each regiment is based. From the top there's the "Nerima-no-Yu" curtain from the North Eastern Army 1st Division Logistic Support Regiment, the "Yamagata Hanagasa-no-Yu" curtain from the North Eastern Army 6th Division Logistic Support Regiment and the "Kyou-no-Yu" curtain from the Middle Army Logistics Regiment



Yasuhiro Ishikawa—known as “Dr. Bath”—is the head of PR at Bathclin Corporation. In addition to handling media relations, he spends time speaking in Japan and overseas about the virtues of bathing.

# BATH SALTS: THE HEALTHY INSTANT UPGRADE TO HOME BATHTUBS

KATSUMI YASUKURA

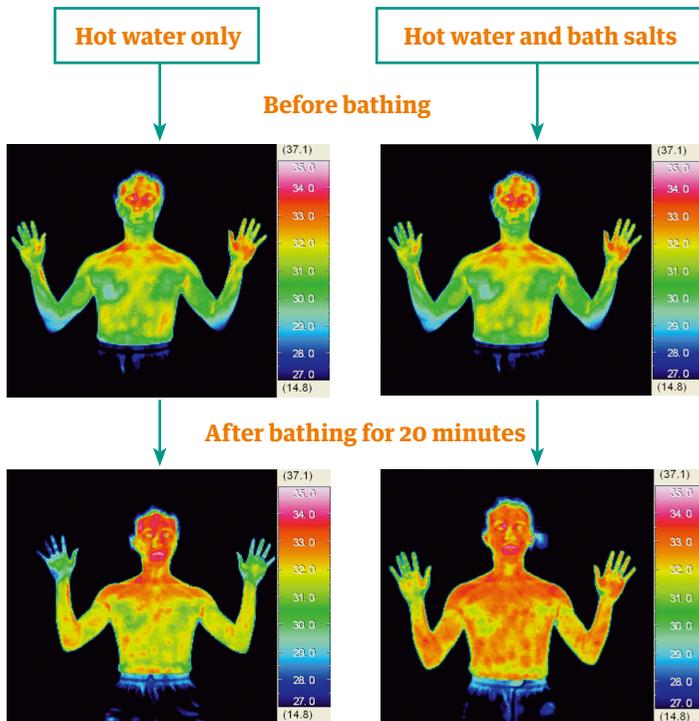
*The Japanese love to soak in hot springs and the tub at home, so it's no surprise that they're big fans of bath salts. Yasuhiro “Dr. Bath” Ishikawa, the head of PR at Bathclin Corporation—the first company to manufacture bath salts in Japan—speaks about the history and characteristics of this bath-time enhancer.*

**T**HE first bath salts in Japan were marketed in 1897. According to Yasuhiro Ishikawa of Bathclin Corporation, however, that product was a fluke. “At the time, the company’s flagship product was herbal medicine for women containing sixteen natural remedies, an infusion that had a body-warming effect. A worker happened to suggest that steeping the leftover ingredients and using them to infuse bathwater might also have a warming effect. After trying it out, they found this infusion helped bathers retain body heat and healed rashes. When



Bathclin products first went on sale in 1930, packaged in tin cans. The packaging changed throughout the years and was remarkable for its labels, which were designed by a master of Taisho Romanticism art, Takabatake Kasho

## THE HEAT RETENTION EFFECTS OF BATH SALTS



Measuring skin surface temperature after bathing in 41 degree water for 5 minutes. There is a distinct difference in heat retention when using bath salts in the case of baths lasting 20 minutes. (Research by Bathclin)

founder Jusha Tsumura heard about this, he refined the formula and began selling the result as bath salts. At the time, however, the majority of consumers were public bathhouses, not families with tubs at home.”

In 1930 they began selling the bath salt product known as Bathclin, which combines hot spring salts and pleasing fragrances, expanding the market still further. The number of homes with indoor baths rose during the postwar period of rapid economic growth, and with commercials urging consumers to “get the hot springs experience in your very own home” the product became a huge hit.

Other companies entered the market, and bath salts began to evolve and diversify. With products boasting everything from carbon dioxide gas to medicinal, cooling and skincare enhancers, consumers were soon able to choose bath salts for home use based on their own preferences and needs. Of them all, the type that dominated the Japanese bath salts market were hot springs-inspired bath salts.

“Bathclin Corporation began to sell a series inspired by famous Japanese *onsen* in 1986,” explains Ishikawa. “From among the many hot springs all over Japan, we carefully selected famous waters that were possible to replicate, eliminating any with

high levels of sulfur, salt, acid or high alkaline content that could damage bathtubs. One big hit was our version of Hokkaido’s Noboribetsu Karurusu Onsen, which has cloudy water. No other company in Japan had been able to re-create it before.” The catchphrase from Bathclin’s early ads became even more of a reality.

Japanese people now spend less time soaking in the bath than before. According to a study by chemical and cosmetics company Kao Corporation, bathing times have shortened from 11.5 minutes a day in 2005 to 9.7 minutes in 2017, or roughly 16 percent less. There also appears to be a trend prevalent among younger generations to shower instead, because they find bathing a chore. In response to this, Ishikawa says: “Showers do clean the body. However, they aren’t as effective in raising body temperature to boost immunity, prevent illnesses, maintain mental and physical health, and ensure good sleep.

“Moreover,” he continues, “staying hydrated, bathing in certain water temperatures and for set times can activate immune cells and increase heat shock proteins which delay the production of lactic acid. Top athletes have shown interest in the positive effects of bathing. People who are used to showering should soak in a bath at a temperature that feels comfortable for them for ten minutes.” Using bath salts will make bathing more fun and increase the benefits, Ishikawa advises. 

*Sento painters are artists who specialize in adorning the walls of bathhouses. Currently only three people remain in this distinctively Japanese profession. Kiyoto Maruyama, who boasts an impressive 66-year career as a sento painter, is one of those three. While wielding his brushes at a bathhouse in Tokyo, Maruyama took the time to speak about his art.*

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**YOKO KOIZUMI**

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Kiyoto Maruyama boasts a 66-year career as a *sento* painter

# An Ephemeral Art

## DECORATING THE WALLS OF PUBLIC BATHHOUSES

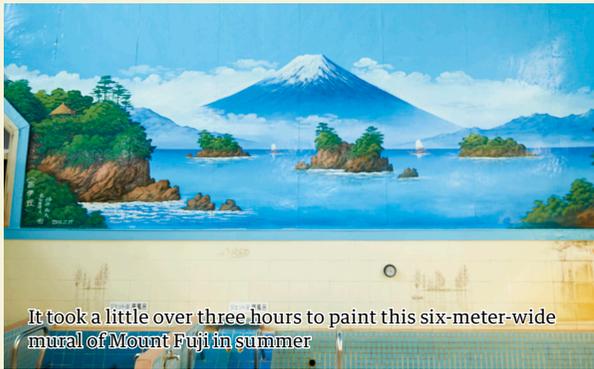
“**B**ATHHOUSE painting began in the first year of the Taisho Period (1912-26) at Kikaiyu, which was in the Kanda-Jimbocho area,” says Kiyoto Maruyama. “Kikaiyu’s owner, who thought the wall was too drab, asked a painter to draw Mount Fuji on it. That painting became famous, and the spread of its popularity brought about the birth of the profession of *sento* painters.”

Kiyoto Maruyama intimately knows the history of the painting style known as bathhouse painting or scenery painting. Born in 1935, at eighty-three he is the oldest *sento* painter in Japan and an expert among experts who has painted between 10,000 and 12,000 murals over the course of his 66-year career.

“My uncle—the late Kikuo Maruyama—made

billboards at an advertising agency specializing in public bathhouses,” he notes. “Since I liked painting pictures, I got into the profession at the age of eighteen.”

With the birth of *sento* paintings, a new business of putting up advertisements for businesses and neighborhood shops underneath the paintings was born. Advertising agencies would provide one free painting per year in return for allowing them to place advertisements there. Maruyama was a full-time painter for one such advertising agency, although this business has declined along with the decrease in the number of public bathhouses. Nowadays bathhouse owners commission the type of image they want painted.



It took a little over three hours to paint this six-meter-wide mural of Mount Fuji in summer



Maruyama uses a custom-made palette that contains only five basic colors, which he combines to create all the other colors he needs



Maruyama is able to create surprisingly beautiful paintings without the use of a rough sketch



"I want to teach her everything I can about the art of bathhouse painting," Maruyama says of his apprentice, Mai Katsumi

While Mount Fuji is the most iconic image for bathhouse murals, there were *senzo* with artwork of the Seto Inland Sea, lighthouses, Buddhist goddesses and other auspicious designs. Paintings of anime characters were popular in the 1970s, Maruyama adds, reminiscing on the originality of individual bathhouses.

Since the murals are always in contact with hot water and exposed to bright lights and sunlight, the colors fade and the paint tends to peel quickly. Because of this, they are repainted every three to four years, and each new painting goes over the previous one. In other words, this artwork is fated to disappear. "While this is sad, it also has a uniquely Japanese romantic feel to it," Maruyama comments.

Maruyama mostly paints blue seas and skies, white clouds and fresh green leaves, but he only prepares five colors: white, red, yellow, black, and ultramarine blue. He creates every other hue on his custom-made palette while standing in front of his enormous 5.4 by 6.3-meter canvas, and generally finishes a single painting in around three and a half hours.

Maruyama doesn't make a rough sketch on the wall or even create one on paper. He simply reproduces the scenery in his head. There is only a single word to describe the process—magnificent.

Seriously studying Maruyama's every brushstroke is Mai Katsumi, his first apprentice.

"I'm impressed by his uncompromising and ambitious stance on painting. He's easygoing and kind but savvy—personality traits that show in his paintings," says Katsumi about a charmed Maruyama. He teaches his apprentice everything he knows, and smiles fondly as he mentions how he especially wants to teach her how to paint leaves and clouds. If you ever have the chance to admire one of Maruyama's paintings in person, be sure to take a close look at his subtle brushwork on such elements.

"It's been fun to be able to do this for so long, so I've never once thought it to be unpleasant," he notes. "And it's a job you can be active in all your life, you know? I'm glad I chose this profession."

Maruyama also gets requests to paint murals in private houses, retirement homes and other places, and he pursues related activities such as workshops and events. His happiest moment in the midst of this incredibly busy life was when he painted a bathhouse mural side-by-side with his granddaughter and apprentice. "That was only possible because this is a job I can keep up my entire lifetime," acknowledges Maruyama, with the biggest smile on his face. **7**

Sento journalist Stephanie Crohin

Spreading throughout Japan from the early Edo Period (1603-1867), Japanese people have loved sento public baths. As the popularity of hot springs grows, these baths have also caught the attention of many international visitors. French sento journalist Stephanie Crohin gives tips about Japanese bathing manners for travelers.

KATSUMI YASUKURA

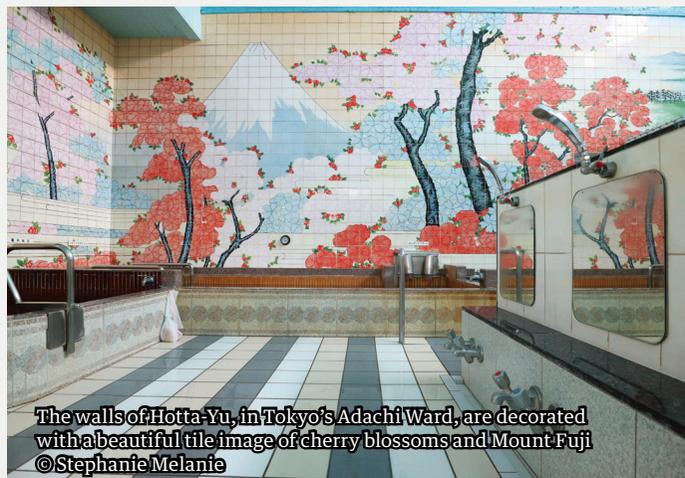
# PUBLIC BATHS 101 FOR VISITORS TO JAPAN

STEPHANIE Crohin first discovered the charms of Japanese public baths in 2008 while she was an exchange student at Rikkyo University in Tokyo. “A friend who was writing an essay about public baths invited me,” she recalls. “In France, it isn’t customary to bathe with others, and since my spoken Japanese wasn’t great at the time I was nervous at first. But the regulars and the owner were very kind to me. After that, I understood that *sento* are places that provide warmth and relaxation to people, and began to visit more often.”

In 2012, Crohin returned to Japan and began visiting more public baths. She began going to *sento* throughout Japan and posting information on her website and Instagram. In the end, she became an independent “*sento* journalist” and reports the wonders of public baths to non-Japanese speakers on English websites and via social media. She has published books on the subject, appeared in various media, and has also given lectures and planned

public bath tours for people studying abroad in Japan. As an aficionado, Crohin is the perfect person to ask about proper *sento* bathing manners.

“First, you remove your shoes,” she says. “Then you pay at the counter and go to the changing room. Remove your clothes and go to the bath area, but



The walls of Hotta-Yu, in Tokyo's Adachi Ward, are decorated with a beautiful tile image of cherry blossoms and Mount Fuji. ©Stephanie Melanie

## HOW TO ENJOY SENTO?



1. Remove your shoes and pay.



2. Remove your clothes in the changing room. Be sure to bring along a small towel when you enter the bathing area and say *konnichiwa* (hello).



3. Take a stool and bath basin to wash your body.



4. Enter the bath and enjoy your soak, but keep your towel out of the water.



5. After getting out of the bath, dry yourself before returning to the changing room.

make sure to bring a small towel with you. Also, be sure to say *konnichiwa* (hello) when entering. By entering with a greeting, you can get close with the other people in the bath,”

The next step, she relates, is to take a stool and basin and find a spot by the showers to wash yourself before you enter the bath. “In Japan it is customary to get clean before entering, since other people bathe in the same bathtub,” Crohin advises. “While you bathe, it is bad manners to put your towel into the bathwater. Lastly, when exiting the bathing space, make sure to dry yourself quickly so you don’t drip water all over the changing room floor.”

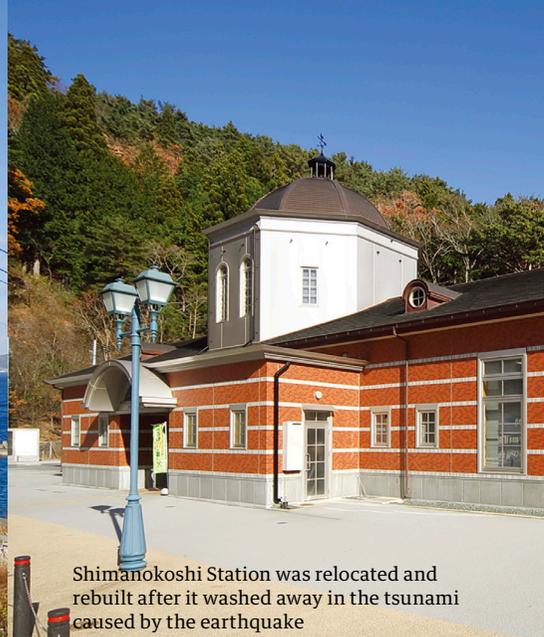
The common factor among all the rules is to not disturb others. “A public bath is a place where people share space and time, so it is necessary to consider their comfort as well. While tattoos are often a concern for visitors from abroad, as long as it is a fashionable tattoo (and not a gang symbol), it usually isn’t an issue at most *sentos*.”

Crohin hopes more people will enjoy Japan’s public baths while minding their manners. “Popular hot springs resorts are nice, but *sentos* have their own individual charms that should not be missed,” she notes. “You can get close to the locals, who may share some secret spots to visit or foodie tips that aren’t posted on the Internet. The artistic murals of Mount Fuji, castles or traditional dances painted on the walls of the baths are also a must-see. The exteriors of some public baths showcase traditional Japanese architectural skills used in Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines and are worth a look. If you visit a public bath that doesn’t suit you, just try a different one. Every bath has unique traits, and there will surely be one that you like.”

Despite having so many charms, the price of visiting a *sentos* is extremely reasonable: in Tokyo as of the end of 2018, for example, it was just 460 yen. Crohin emphasizes that you get more than you pay for, so why not take a bath during your trip to Japan? **▼**



The Sanriku Railway also stops at Horinai Station, which has an elevated platform to help prevent damage from tsunami



Shimanokoshi Station was relocated and rebuilt after it was washed away in the tsunami caused by the earthquake

# CONNECTING SANRIKU,

## KATSUMI YASUKURA

*The Sanriku Railway resumed limited operations just five days after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, and had restored all the rail lines in the north and south sections by 2014. In March 2019, a new line will connect the ends of the north and south—Kamaishi and Miyako—covering the entire Sanriku area in Iwate Prefecture. Two railroad men share their stories of the challenges involved in restoring train operations and passing down memories of the aftermath.*

**O**N March 11, 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake devastated the Pacific coast of the Tohoku region. Just five days after the quake, however, the Sanriku Railway in Iwate Prefecture had restored service between Rikuchunoda and Kuji stations on the North Rias Line. Atsushi Tomite from the passenger services division, who surveyed the situation after the earthquake, reflects on the situation at the time.

“While we were checking the damage along the rails three days after the earthquake, we saw many people walking along the tracks that the tsunami had not washed away,” he

says. “Our company president decided that we had to restart the trains as soon as possible, understanding that they were looking for people and to obtain necessary items but couldn’t use the national highways, which had been buried in debris. So we ran free train services as a part of reconstruction assistance.”

Sanriku Railway trains gradually extended operations to cover the distance they once traveled before the disaster, thanks to the mighty efforts of the railway staff as well as cooperation from the Japan Self-Defense Forces, who were assigned to assist their efforts after the railway appealed to the mayor of Miyako City. As it

steadily recovered, the Sanriku Railway must have given hope to those struggling to rebuild their lives after the earthquake.

In 2013, the popularity of national public broadcaster NHK’s TV drama *Ama-chan*, which was set in areas along the Sanriku Railway lines, boosted the number of visitors. In April 2014, both the North and South Rias lines were fully restored, which brought the railway completely back to pre-earthquake operations.

There will be even more good news this spring. “The JR Yamada Line, which connects the Sanriku North and South Rias lines, was entirely out of service due to the tsunami. However, Sanriku



Sanriku Railway is headquartered at Miyako Station. The station building was used as a base of operations following the earthquake

# CONNECTING PEOPLE

Railway will take over operations after JR completes restoration work on the line. This line will make a fresh start as the Sanriku Railway Rias Line on March 23, so the 163 kilometers between Sakari Station in Ofunato City and Kamaishi, Miyako, and Kuji Station will be connected by rail,” Tomite shares enthusiastically.

Sanriku Railway is also keen to use the knowledge gained from the earthquake to prepare for natural disasters by passing the knowledge down to younger generations. “The Disaster Education Train started in June

2012, mainly aimed at elementary to high school students,” explains planner Mamoru Nihashi from the passenger sales department. “This special train ride is dedicated to disaster prevention study. Using photos and slowly passing by train through the areas affected, we explain what it was like when the earthquake happened as well as the current state of the reconstruction, in addition to discussing future issues with students. Our staff and local residents serve as guides. Every victim feels differently about the earthquake depending on their experience, and each has views about issues that should be addressed.”

While the content of the study program varies slightly depending on the guide, Nihashi believes it is important to deliver this message as-is. “In the end, every guide sends a message that they hope students will bravely

take on future challenges and understand the importance of knowing about disaster prevention,” he says. “They also cultivate an awareness for the large number of people nationally and internationally who cooperated to restore the lines, and the importance of bonds with friends and family.”

The railway plans to operate the Disaster Education Train on the new section connecting the North and South Rias lines as well. “While this new section is still in the Sanriku area, geographical features, damage from the disaster, and the current state of reconstruction are not the same. We’ll carefully investigate and expand the earthquake learning program,” concludes Nihashi.

The Sanriku Railway’s speedy recovery and efforts to connect people, preserve memories and pass along knowledge make it a railway with great heart. 





*Yamaha's Duet with YOO is an AI designed to ensure that anyone can play and enjoy a piano duet. This music technology incorporates an AI that analyzes the player's performance in real time and provides expert accompaniment to spur its human partner's musical and creative abilities.*

## AN AI ACCOMPANIST EVEN AVID MUSICIANS CAN APPRECIATE

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**BIFUE USHIJIMA**

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**D**UET with YOO is a piano installation that accompanies people as they play the piano. Even “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” played with one finger and one note at a time is transformed into a gorgeous piece thanks to this accompaniment. Duet with YOO will also slow down, play boldly or softly, and otherwise adjust to match the player’s tempo, power and tone.

The musical accompaniment is provided via a self-playing piano, Disklavier™, but it doesn’t sound automated. This is because the Duet with YOO AI “listens” to and instantly analyzes its human partner’s performance, predicting and adjusting its own playing based on that data. The AI Music Ensemble System Yamaha developed that YOO uses places greater importance on the

musician’s enjoyment of the piece rather than simply supplying technical precision.

“There are already keyboards that light the keys up to guide you, but we wanted to create a more interactive experience,” says Minako Shintake, Yamaha’s marketing representative for the YOO project. “It’s more fun if you can get excited through performing with an accompanist that can turn things around even if you make a mistake. We wanted everyone to experience that joyful music making, even if they had never played the piano before. We developed a system that would intuit the player’s intentions and simulate very human fluctuations in the music rather than focusing on a technically precise system.”

Duet with YOO is made for beginners, but at the start of development the researchers did not have beginners in mind, according to Akira Maezawa, the technical development engineer who was in charge of creating the YOO AI. “My hobby is



- 1 The Duet with YOO piano installation allows users to play along with a YOO, your very own AI partner
- 2 The Scharoun Ensemble Berlin performed with an AI modeled after one of the twentieth century's greatest pianists, Sviatoslav Richter
- 3 Even children who are only just learning to play piano one note at a time can enjoy performing with Duet with YOO
- 4 The Ensemble of the Future exhibition showcased a performance of musicians accompanied by Yamaha's AI

playing the violin, and I wanted an accompanist when practicing by myself at home,” he says. “The more advanced a player you are, the clearer your intentions for your performance are, so rather than something like a metronome which would only count out a rhythm, I wanted to create an accompanist that could match and follow the intent and inflection of my playing.”

Based on the many playing patterns it learned, the AI can create nuanced performances from fast and upbeat to slow and somber, allowing it to replicate a wide variety of music.

The engineers also wrestled with the issue of how close to the person's playing the AI should get. “It would feel strange if it matched every note played, and the musician wouldn't enjoy the experience of playing with an ensemble,” Maezawa explains. “In the end, we decided the AI should keep some degree of autonomy. The fun of playing in an ensemble is the give-and-take between performers, the feeling

of ‘Listen to this!’ when you have a solo and ‘I’ve got your back’ when your partner has one. We set parameters that allow the AI to come forth and shine or hold back when appropriate, so the player can enjoy playing.”

Yamaha has taken its AI accompanist system—loaded with the performance data of Sviatoslav Richter, one of the twentieth-century's greatest pianists—and connected it to a self-playing piano to give players the sensation that they're in an ensemble with the Berlin Philharmonic. That means the technology enables players to perform virtually alongside their favorite musicians if the latter's performance data is available.

“Some people are afraid that AI will take away human jobs, but AI systems like YOO can inspire us to find new awareness,” Shintake says enthusiastically. “We hope to keep providing people such experiences as this, which can lead to new means of expression and music.” 

# ON THE BOARD

## JAPAN'S FIRST FOREIGN FEMALE SHOGI PROFESSIONAL



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### TAMAKI KAWASAKI

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*Poland's Karolina Styczyńska became the first foreign-born female professional shogi (Japanese chess) player in February 2017. She learned about the game from a Japanese manga, and played shogi on the Internet before arriving in Japan. She spoke about her passion for shogi, her progress and her goals.*

**R**ANKED as a women's 1-kyu professional *shogi* player, Karolina Styczyńska has gained attention as the game's first and only foreign female pro. Since her childhood she's liked to puzzle things out and play competitive board games, and was the only student in her elementary school to enter a chess tournament.

She discovered *shogi* at the age of sixteen while reading a Japanese manga. She began playing online, refining her skills against competitors of various ages and nationalities from the world over. Thoroughly entranced by the game—which resembles chess and yet is completely different in nature—she entered European online tournaments and nurtured her growing ambition to become a master player.

In 2011, professional Madoka Kitao—currently

ranked women's 2-dan—extended an online invitation to Styczyńska to visit Japan. At the age of nineteen she traveled here for the first time, just after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. Now fluent in Japanese, Styczyńska smiles as she remembers those early days. “My family was worried, because at the time I couldn't speak the language, but I felt that I'd be all right as long as I had *shogi*. I was staying with Madoka Kitao, going to Shogi Kaikan (Shogi Hall) every day to play. Thinking back, it was a pretty surreal experience.”

Styczyńska returned to Poland, and after graduating from university there was admitted to Yamanashi Gakuin University in Japan as a third-year student. She continued to pursue her ambition to become a professional *shogi* player.

In 2017, during her second year of graduate school, she was promoted to 2-kyu, achieving her



- 1 Women's 1-kyu professional *shogi* player, Karolina Styczyńska
- 2 A satisfying click accompanies every movement of Styczyńska's pieces
- 3 Styczyńska says she just can't help but love *shogi*

goal of becoming a professional. She wrote her master's thesis on the internationalization of *shogi*, and after graduation played in an international tournament in Los Angeles in 2018—an event intended to popularize *shogi* overseas. As the game's first foreign female *shogi* professional, she's playing a huge role in popularizing the game worldwide, including introducing the rules of *shogi* in English on her website and publishing *International Shogi Magazine*.

In addition to playing official matches, Japanese *shogi* professionals are involved in diverse activities to spread the popularity of their game, including teaching *shogi* workshops, writing books and participating in various events. Styczyńska is currently under contract to a Japanese corporation that sponsors her—another noteworthy item on her resume, since she is the first female *shogi* player to earn corporate sponsorship. As a non-Japanese *shogi* professional, she also teaches courses on the game in English. “I'm very busy, but I love *shogi* so it never feels like a burden to me. It's fun, because I can play *shogi* every day and make a living,” she says happily.

She also declares that *shogi* is an art, and feels most fulfilled when she makes a great or elegant move. Styczyńska speaks passionately when describing the game. “The great appeal of *shogi* is being able to capture your opponent's pieces and place them back on the board,” she says. “This aspect of gameplay provides far more variables than chess, and makes it more interesting, because even when you get into trouble you can still find a way to come back and win. There is even aesthetic beauty in the way a *shogi* piece is placed. As you become a better player, you begin to see the shortest and most aesthetically pleasing paths to victory. It's an instinctual thing—I can't really explain it.” She has picked up boxing to improve her stamina, necessary to endure long matches.

Although the lifestyle and food in Tokyo are far different from those in her home country, Styczyńska says she's finally getting used to them. When asked what she liked about Japan, she mentions safety and the advanced railway system. But with a smile, she notes that *shogi* is the best thing about Japan. As to her ambitions, Styczyńska says: “I never imagined that I'd become a professional *shogi* player in Japan. But that's why life is so interesting, because you never know what the future holds. I just want to become a better player and be promoted to 1-dan, so this year I'll work 150 percent harder.” 

# FRESH AND CLEAN: CREATING A NEW TOILET CULTURE

**BIFUE USHIJIMA**

*First launched in Japan in 1980 and marketed in the U.S., Europe, Asia and Oceania since the late 1980s, the TOTO Washlet® electronic bidet continues to gain loyal customers who want to stay fresh and clean after one of the body's most basic functions.*



**R**INSING off after using the toilet is now a custom so prevalent that many Japanese people feel they cannot live without it. In 2015, thirty-five years after the device launched, cumulative global shipments of TOTO's Washlet reached forty million units, thanks to the developer's many ingenious adjustments.

TOTO LTD. (then called THE TOYO TOKI CO., LTD.) actually imported and sold an American product called the "Wash Air Seat" over a decade before the Washlet was released in 1980. The Wash Air Seat was a device developed for individuals who had difficulty wiping themselves using toilet paper due to hand injuries or excretion-related diseases. Medical professionals such as urologists were their main sales target.

Foreseeing an expansion in market demand, TOTO started developing a different, more user-friendly product in 1978, with the ambition of creating a "new toilet culture."

During product development, the developers uncompromisingly pursued comfort and usability. They learned from the feedback of many Wash Air Seat users, who noted issues such as inconsistent water temperature and discomfort due to unstable shower direction. Since there was no actual data about sitting on toilet seats, they set up a laboratory within the company and studied the positioning of the buttocks to gather data. With the help of more than three hundred company employees they also searched for the best water temperature for washing, testing different temperatures at 0.1°C intervals.

This research revealed that a seat temperature of 36 degrees Celsius, water temperature of 38 degrees, and a shower angle of 43 degrees created the optimal experience. These figures remain nearly unchanged nearly forty years after the initial product release.

To stabilize the temperature of water and hot air, which was the most difficult problem, they



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- 1 TOTO's first washlet, which went on sale in 1980
- 2 Yoshinori Kuwahara, TOTO LTD. PR Department
- 3 The Air In Wonder Wave washlet utilizes air-filled drops of water to leave you feeling fresh and clean
- 4 The new luxury NEOREST Series perfectly combines design and functionality

introduced integrated circuit (IC) microcomputer controls. According to Yoshinori Kuwahara of the company's public relations department, there is a famous anecdote about introducing ICs. "Initially we consulted with consumer electronics manufacturers about it, and they stubbornly insisted that ICs were too delicate to use in places they might get wet. However, a member of the development team had an epiphany when he was walking outside. Coming across a traffic light, he realized it was an electronic device that worked despite getting wet in the rain. So we consulted with a traffic light manufacturer instead, and were thus able to bring the idea of a microcomputer-controlled toilet to reality."

After the device debuted in 1980, the number of Washlets sold gradually increased. With sales in overseas markets still growing steadily, TOTO plans to start operating their fifth Washlet production plant in Thailand in 2020, which will be their third

overseas plant after one each in Malaysia and China. They plan to push their overseas expansion forward.

For models destined for use overseas, the design and look of the Washlet is given even more weight than in Japan. "Unlike Japan, where toilets are put in separate rooms, in Western and other Asian countries it is common for the sink, bath and toilet to be located in the same room," Kuwahara explains. "In this type of bathroom the toilet can be seen from all sides, so it is important for it to blend in and not disturb the aesthetics of the room."

The key to product promotion is the rising number of international visitors to Japan. Though many of them are deeply impressed with the cleanliness of public toilets in Japan, once they experience the comfort of a Washlet, they want to use one daily. "We want to gain more TOTO fans all over the world, with the intent to make Japan an international showcase," Kuwahara says about the company's vision. **7**

# The Aizu Railway : Connecting the City with Nature and History

YUKIKO ISHIKAWA

*The Aizu Railway is a vital means of transportation for residents of the Aizu area in Fukushima Prefecture, but it offers much more than that, running direct routes between Aizuwakamatsu City in Fukushima and Asakusa in Tokyo as well as fun tourist services such as the Oza Toro View train and Topsy Train.*



**T**HE Aizu Railway—a joint public-private venture funded by Fukushima Prefecture, seventeen local municipalities in the Aizu region, and various corporate bodies and individuals—operates the 57.4-kilometer route between Nishi-Wakamatsu Station and Aizu-Kogen-Ozeguchi Station in Fukushima Prefecture. Thanks to a track-sharing arrangement with the Yamanote Railway and Tobu Railway, you can also travel between Aizu and two famous sightseeing spots—Nikko in Tochigi Prefecture and Asakusa in Tokyo—without switching trains. Rising by five hundred meters during the run between Nishi-Wakamatsu and Aizu-Kogen-Ozeguchi, the ride delights passengers with stunning views that change with the seasons as the train traverses urban areas, countryside and mountains.

One notable characteristic of the Aizu Railway is the unusual nature of many of its stations. For example, the stationmaster at Ashinomaki-Onsen Station happens to be a cat called Love, whose duties include greeting arriving trains from a bench on the

platform and making rounds outside the station. Love and his colleague Peach (the facility manager cat) have many fans.

Yunokami-Onsen Station is a rare example of a station with a traditional thatched roof. The station's refined appearance makes it a worthy spot to begin a visit to historic Ouchi-juku, a former lodging town with rows of pretty thatched roof residences. There are many more sites worth a visit, such as nearby Tono-Hetsuri, a cliff formed through a process of erosion and weathering over a million years and dotted with oddly-shaped rocks.

To enjoy the Aizu Railway's charms to the fullest, however, you should book a ride on the Oza Toro View train. Oza Toro is a combination of two Japanese words, *ozashiki* (a tatami room for entertaining guests) and *torokko* or cargo train. This special two-car train has a car with observation and *ozashiki* seats, and another with *torokko* seats. The observation seats are higher up than usual train seats and recline, so you can appreciate the scenery in a totally relaxed state of body and mind. The *ozashiki* tatami seats have a



- 1 This is the third Okawa Bridge, one of Aizu Railway's many picturesque views. This iron bridge spans the Aga River between Ashinomaki-Onsen Station and Yunokami-Onsen Station.
- 2 Ouchi-juku is about ten minutes from Yunokami-Onsen Station by car. This former lodging town has rows of residences with traditional thatched roofs.
- 3 To-no-Hetsuri is a designated Natural Monument of Japan. It also features a wooden bridge leading to a temple enshrining a statue of the deity Kokuzo Bosatsu, which is closing during winter.
- 4 The special *ozashiki* seats of the Oza Toro View train feature a recessed floor which turn into heaters called *kotatsu* in winter. Warm and comfy, it's the perfect place to curl up for a nap.
- 5 Many people visit Ashinomaki-Onsen Station for a chance to meet Love, the stationmaster seen here resting on a bench

recessed floor under a table, which in winter are turned into *kotatsu*—traditional heated tables with a cover on top and a heater underneath to keep you toasty warm and cozy.

The *torokko* carriage is open-air from spring to fall, allowing you to experience the full glory of Aizu's clear air and beautiful nature up close. You can choose from these three seat types when booking.

As a tourist train, the Oza Toro View makes short stops to show off the views en route (except in winter, when it merely slows down). There are three iron bridges, two between Ashinomaki-Onsen-Minami Station and Yunokami-Onsen Station and another one between Yunokami-Onsen and To-no-Hetsuri Station. From the bridges you'll have magnificent views of Wakasato Lake, Fukasawa Valley and the Aga River.

The "Tunnel Theater" is another fun and unusual service. Inside the three tunnels between Ashinomaki-Onsen Station and Yunokami-Onsen Station, a projector attached to the train displays

animations on the tunnel walls, ensuring that small children can enjoy the ride without being scared of the darkness and rumbling sounds.

"We're always thinking of new ways to entertain our passengers," says Koji Watanabe, sales section manager of Aizu Railway's General Affairs and Planning Department. "While the Aizu Railway offers easy access to and from Tokyo, the number of people living along the line was declining, so we introduced the tourist train to boost the number of passengers and introduce them to the region's charms. We're thrilled that it has become so popular.

"We also have tourist trains for different seasons such as the Topsy Train, with all-you-can-drink sake service in winter, and the Beer Train, with all-you-can-drink beer in summer," Watanabe adds. "The flower-viewing Ohanami Train in spring is also popular. We would love to have many people travel with us."

The Aizu Railway clearly operates with a spirit of fun and hospitality as it connects the city, nature and history of Aizu. 



# KATSUURA BIG HINA DOLL FESTIVAL

The Katsuura Big Hina Doll Festival takes place yearly in the seaside town of Katsuura, Chiba Prefecture. One of the most dramatic examples of the Hina Matsuri (Girl's Day) celebrated nation-wide on March 3, the festival runs for two weeks between February and March, displaying approximately thirty thousand *hina* dolls sent in from all around the country on massive tiered stands throughout the town.

The festival's highlight is the collection of *hina* dolls at Tomisaki Shrine. The rows of 1,800 dolls arrayed along the sixty stone steps leading up to the main shrine are a captivating sight. The colorful and characteristically Japanese atmosphere of this seasonal festival is particularly striking after dark when the dolls are illuminated.

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