

Tucked into the western side of Mt Nyutozan, just a whisper from the Tazawako ski fields, the Nyuto Hot Springs region is an outdoor purist's dream. At the base of the mountain the midnight blue waters of Lake Tazawa, presided over by the golden statue of Princess Tatsuko, are replenished by both hot springs and spring snow melt. At more than 400m deep, the lake features heavily in a South Korean reality TV show, inspiring fans to visit.

Other onsen worthy of a visit:

Kuroyu Hot Springs, running a close second in the 'ancient onsen' stakes Ganiba Hot Springs, which takes its name from the crabs that live in the nearby mountain stream. Yikes!

Keep that modesty towel handy ...

Taenoyu Hot Springs, for Japanese sophistication, popular with the ladies

Jan Jones, Product Manager with Japan Holidays and another confirmed furo-holic, has lost count of the number of times she's visited Japan, though she laughs that it's 'more than fifty'. Drawn to the onsen culture and still finding new pleasures since first visiting in 1989, she's enjoyed the hospitality of countless onsen.

"I love the different faces of Japan, from cherry blossoms in April to outdoor onsen surrounded by snow in January," she says from a Hachimantai thermal spring blanketed in a fresh snowfall.

When pressed to name her favourite, she chooses a near 500 year old establishment run by the 29th successive generational line of one family. Kamigoten ryokan straddles the banks of the Hidaka River in Wakayama Prefecture at Ryujin Hot Springs. Bathers have flocked to Ryujin onsen for hundreds of years, making it one of the most famous 'beautifying' hot springs in Japan. Also, for those inclined towards hysteria, it's said that the waters may provide relief. Presumably this ensures that this particular onsen attracts its fair share of those hailing from the lunatic fringe.

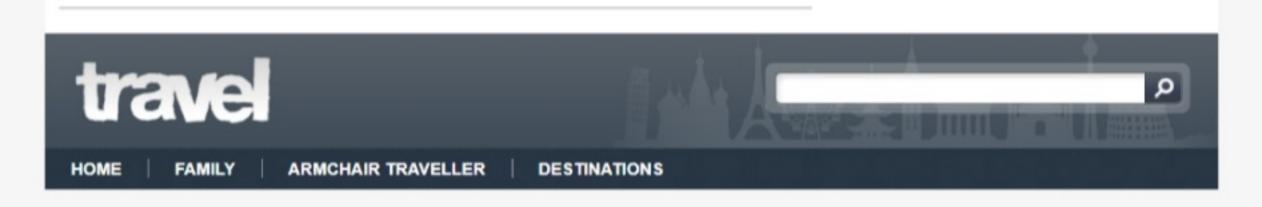
As for those purported healing properties of the onsen, I'm willing to take the chance that it's nothing more than steam and bubbles. Naked strangers all, we contemplatively soak in the sulphuric waters, each lost in our own reflective thoughts.

However, despite advice to soak no more than ten minutes at a time, I can't help myself, and stay well beyond my 'use by date'. Retreating reluctantly to my futon before dawn breaks the spell, I fall into the deep slumber of one totally relaxed, albeit somewhat wrinkled, traveller.

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User comments

Interesting read Fiona . I think I would want to spend more than 10 minutes as well. Claudette H



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