**Onsenji Temple**

Onsenji Temple, located in Gero’s hills, is dedicated to Yakushi Nyorai, the Buddha of medicine and healing, who is said to have led the local people to discover Gero’s hot spring. According to local legend, a strong earthquake in 1265 stopped the flow of water from the hot spring at nearby Mt. Yugamine. Afterward, local residents began to notice an egret flying above the Hida River every day. They decided to follow the bird, which seemed to be injured, and eventually found it soothing its wounds in a natural hot spring. Under a hillside pine tree where the egret had stopped to rest, the people discovered a statue of Yakushi Nyorai. From then on, they believed the Buddha had taken the shape of an egret in order to show them a new hot spring source. The fact that the newly discovered hot spring was on flat land instead of high in the mountains made it easily accessible. Gero was eventually recognized as one of the top three hot spring towns in Japan, and it became a popular resort destination, attracting visitors who wished to cure their ailments by bathing in the hot spring. Thankful visitors can go to Onsenji Temple to pay their respects to Yakushi Nyorai.

Onsenji Temple’s spacious grounds are most majestic in autumn, when the bright red maple leaves are illuminated at night. The temple is located on Mt. Nakane, at the top of a 173-step stone staircase leading up from Jizodo Hall in the hot spring district, affording visitors a panoramic view of the district and the wider town of Gero. Visitors suffering from physical ailments may want to stop by the Yukake Yakushi statue in front of the main hall, a figure said to cure illness. Visitors pour warm water on the same part of the statue that is ailing them, and pray for a cure.