

The town of Zao is more than just an onsen and ski resort—all throughout Zao are marks of the town's 1,900-year history. Near the center of town, for example, is a cluster of shrines located at the top of a long set of steep, narrow stairs. Stone lanterns line both sides of these treacherous stairs, and recently jokes have been written on them to entertain the weary and the elderly as they climb.

The city contains many small stone monuments. In order to facilitate new construction, five of these commemorative stones were moved to a single location. One of these is known as the Yuna Seki, or Yuna Stone. The Yuna Seki is said to commemorate the story of a man who died with his mistress, who was a bath-attendant or *yuna* (at the time, bath attendants were essentially prostitutes). His wife was distraught at their passing and built the stone statue of the *yuna* to commemorate them.

Most recently the town tourism board has erected stone pillars carved with Japanese traditional poetry (*waka*) written about Zao Onsen. These can be seen throughout the town, along with much older stone monuments. Some of these monuments have been standing so long that their inscriptions are weathered away.