

## Recharge at Kusatsu Onsen!

Having spent a day in the great outdoors, it is time to relax in one of Kusatsu's natural hot spring baths, commonly known as *onsen*.

Bathing has been a major part of Japanese culture since antiquity, and Kusatsu Onsen's baths are a fantastic chance to dip your toe (and more!) into this essentially Japanese cultural experience. Do not just take our word for it either—Japan's major travel agents have voted Kusatsu Onsen the number-one *onsen* in Japan for over fifteen years in a row.

The bountiful waters drawn directly from the Yubatake hot spring fields naturally contain acid, sulfur-containing aluminum sulphate, and chloride, with pH values between 1.7 and 2.1, and temperatures varying between 51 and 94 degrees Celsius. An iron nail placed in the hot spring would be reduced to rust in just nine days. But do not worry, the centuries-old *yumomi* method of cooling the water makes it perfectly safe for everyone to enjoy, and the accompanying ceremony is now a local attraction, with regular demonstrations enlivened by folk songs.

The rich mineral content of Kusatsu's waters have become known for their metabolism-boosting effects and as a natural way to promote more beautiful skin. The hot springs are also said to be beneficial for a variety of conditions, including muscle pain, bruises and sprains, fatigue recovery and more. Said to cure basically everything except lovesickness, you are bathing in good company—even the leaders of the Tokugawa shogunate during the Edo period (1603–1867) ordered barrels of hot spring water to be delivered to Edo Castle.

Take a deeper look into three of Kusatsu Onsen's famed hot spring baths.

### Gozanoyu

Located in the center of Kusatsu Onsen overlooking the iconic Yubatake hot spring fields, Gozanoyu has been loved and enjoyed by bathers looking to relax in its natural waters for over 1,000 years.

The main building was re-created in April 2013, using Japanese turn-of-the-century architecture with Japanese cedar wood *totonbuki* roofs and wall plaster characteristic of the early Meiji period (1868–1912). Back then the whole township would relocate to the warmth of the *onsen* during the harsh wintertime.

Built with traditional techniques and harmonious natural materials, a visit to Gozanoyu is like stepping back in time.

Inside the *onsen* itself there are two stone and wooden baths, both constantly filled from two springs: the Yubatake spring with acidic sulfur and Bandai spring with acidic chloride sulphate, the latter said to be beneficial for neuralgia, joint pain, and burns among other conditions. Visitors can try both types of hot spring water, as the baths are available for men and women on alternating days.

Also inside the building are two Japanese-style halls for bathers to unwind and rest after soaking in the waters. The great hall is over 100 meters square with good views of the Yubatake hot water fields and is free for all visitors to Gozanoyu to use. The middle hall is available for rent at 2,000 yen per hour, for those who want a more private *onsen* experience with friends and family.

Be sure not to miss out on Gozanoyu's exclusive "Yukata de Sanpo" course, where both men and women can dress in a stylish light cotton kimono, for an authentic Japanese *onsen* adventure. The three-hour experience includes the full set-up with robes, sandals, and a handy bag, with a free dressing service on hand to make sure you look your best. Photo opportunities and a suggested walking course around the Kusatsu area help you to make the most of your visit.

Available all year round, take the opportunity to don traditional Japanese clothing and enjoy the atmosphere of Kusatsu town and Gozanoyu in the time-honored fashion. The course costs 2,500 yen and includes entry to Gozanoyu.

#### Gozanoyu

Opening hours: 7:00 am–9:00 pm (entry closes at 8:30 pm) \* may change according to season

Prices: Adults 600 Yen, Children 300 Yen (ages 3–12)

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