

Soaking It Up: Hot-Spring Bathing

The hells are the product of volcanic activity that has been going on under the area for millennia. Gases and underground water are heated by the magma and rise to the surface to escape from the earth as hot mud, water, or steam. The hot spring water used in the baths of the many hotels, traditional inns, and public bath facilities is heated in the hells. The acidity from the sulfur in the water has a sterilizing effect that is good for treating skin diseases, and is considered efficacious for muscle pain, fatigue, and overall health. An undebatable fact is that the hot baths are incredibly relaxing after a day on the move or trekking in the mountains. One of the public baths, the Kojigoku Onsen, is a charming, traditional building on the site of a bathhouse that opened in 1731, and like Unzen's other public facilities, has no restrictions on visitors with tattoos. Visitors are asked to follow traditional Japanese bathing practices, such as washing outside the bath.