

Life in Unzen: A Lot of Heaven and a Little Bit of “Hell”

Life in the midst of “hells” has its ups and downs, and anyone living here learns to deal with both the benefits and the disadvantages. Complex arrangements of pipes can be seen all over the hot spring fields, since they not only supply the hotels and public spas with bathwater, but are also used to heat mountain spring water that is piped to the hotels and circulated in a natural heating system. Water from the hot springs is also used in making the batter of *yusempei*, a tasty, crispy, not-too-sweet local version of the ubiquitous *senbei* rice crackers. *Onsen tamago*, eggs that are cooked in the steam gushing from the earth, are another popular snack. But while the sulfuric atmosphere is harmless, it is extremely corrosive, and people learn to deal with corroded concrete, car finishes tarnishing, metal parts such as water faucets rusting, and the lifespans of electrical appliances being considerably shortened. Locals soon learn that there are consequences to living in a heavenly location with its own “hells.”