

Yunotsu Onsen

The *onsen* (hot springs) of Yunotsu are said to have been discovered more than 1,300 years ago. According to legend, these healing waters were first noticed by a traveling Buddhist priest, who witnessed an old raccoon dog tending to a nasty cut by soaking in a pool of steaming water. This tale was supposedly told as far away as Kyoto in the Heian period (794–1185), but Yunotsu's springs only began attracting visitors in the fourteenth century, when the settlement became a popular destination for convalescence.

Ryokan inns were built here in the Edo period (1603–1867) to house sailors whose ships docked at Yunotsu's flourishing port. The hot springs continued to support the town after the opening of a railway station in 1918 dealt a fatal blow to the shipping industry and the shuttering of the Iwami Ginzan silver mine in 1923 depressed the region further. Today, Yunotsu is the only hot spring town in Japan to be designated a Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings, and it continues to host two *onsen* baths. Motoyu is the more traditional of these, featuring two small tubs, one cooled to 42°C and the other filled with almost unbearably hot, 46°C–47°C water. Outside the bathhouse is a tap that dispenses “drinkable *onsen* water”—an acquired taste, but supposedly good for your health, as long as you limit yourself to a single cup. Yakushiyu, the other bath, is more accommodating for first-timers and has a rooftop terrace that offers a view over the town.