

Gero Onsen Overview

Gero is located in Gifu Prefecture, in the middle of Japan's main island of Honshu. The town is a two-hour train ride from Nagoya Station, making it an accessible day trip for visitors based in Nagoya. The praises of Gero's hot springs were first sung by Banri Shuku (1428–1498?), a Zen monk who claimed Gero was one of the best hot spring towns in Japan. Nearly two centuries later, Confucian scholar Hayashi Razan (1583–1657) made the same claim, leading Gero to gain widespread renown.

Gero is best known for its district lined with hot spring resorts, foot baths, souvenir shops, and restaurants. Many visitors come to Gero to try the free foot baths dotted around town or to stay in a traditional *ryokan* inn and enjoy the local cuisine. Communal bathing in hot springs has been a popular pastime and health ritual for thousands of years, and visitors still come to Gero in the hope of curing physical ailments.

There is more to Gero, however, than just bathing. For a start, it is home to the Mineichigo site, where Jomon-period (10,000–300 BCE) artifacts have been excavated. These artifacts, along with antiquities discovered in other parts of the country, are on display at the Gero City Museum. Gassho Village, another site worth visiting, is an open-air museum featuring 10 *gassho-zukuri* houses. *Gassho* means “praying hands”—the name refers to the houses' construction, which is thought to be in the shape of hands pressed together in prayer. Visitors can spend the whole day in Gassho Village seeing the preserved homes, eating local cuisine such as *ayu* (sweetfish) skewered and grilled over charcoal, and trying their hand at making *washi* paper or pottery in traditional craft workshops. Hot spring enthusiasts can learn about the history and science behind the baths at the Onsen Museum, a family-friendly destination featuring hands-on exhibits. For nature lovers, Osaka Falls, a natural beauty spot with no fewer than 216 waterfalls, is a 30-minute drive from central Gero.