

Sukayu Onsen: Relaxation in a High-Acidity Hot Spring

At an elevation of 890 meters, Sukayu Onsen is surrounded by forests of beech, oak, birch and fir. It is accessible by road even during the snows of winter, although access is restricted at night.

People have been soaking in the waters at Sukayu since 1684, when a hunter from Yokouchi (on the outskirts of present-day prefectural capital Aomori) followed a deer he had injured into the forest and discovered it nursing its wound in the hot spring. The original name of the hot spring was in fact Shika no Yu, or “deer springs,” which over time morphed into Sukayu.

Until the beginning of the Taisho era (1912–1926), Sukayu was a seasonal hot spring with only a simple hut for shelter. The water had such high acidity levels that bathers are said to have worn white undergarments and sedge-woven hats to protect their skin while they soaked.

Sukayu Onsen is now a large *ryokan* inn, but the wooden structure still retains the retro atmosphere. Famous for its huge *sennin-buro* (“thousand-person bath”), a mixed bathing facility made of *hinoki* cedar, it also has smaller separate bathing facilities for men and women.