

Audio Guide: Great Howling Hell

The most active of the Unzen hot springs also has the most intimidating name: Daikyokan Jigoku, or “Great Howling Hell.”

Recall that Unzen was once a center of Buddhist spirituality and that the monks drew inspiration from their religious texts when naming their surroundings. This is another example. Traditionally, the Great Howling Hell is one of 16 realms where sinners are sent to be tortured by demons. It does not take much imagination to understand why the Great Howling Hell earned its name. The sound of hot gas escaping from the volcanic vents can sound like wailing from the underworld, especially at night.

The springs here are particularly hot and acidic now, but this was not always the case. The hot springs have been slowly moving from west to east. The Kyū-Hachiman Jigoku or “Old Hachiman Hell” has stopped emitting gas altogether, and the Gensei Marsh, a former *jigoku*, has turned into a beautiful marshland. It is likely that over time the Great Howling Hell will become more peaceful as well.