

Sawando Onsen

An old highway network connected various parts of the country with the city of Kamakura, the seat of political control during the Kamakura period (1185–1333). Sawando was the post town that stood on this highway network at the crossing between the provinces of Hida and Shinshu (present-day Gifu and Nagano Prefectures, respectively).

Onsen means “hot spring,” and development of hot-spring facilities at Sawando started in 1998 when construction of the Abo Tunnel through the Northern Japanese Alps tapped into a previously unknown source of geothermally heated water. The water is clear, smells faintly of sulfur, and remains at around 70°C even as it is piped 7 kilometers down the mountains to the baths.

Sawando Onsen has also become a transportation hub for the tourist areas of Kamikochi, the Norikura Kogen highlands, Shirahone Onsen hot springs, and the town of Nagawa, due to its central location in the southeastern foothills, where it serves as the gateway to Chubusangaku National Park. Many hikers travel from here through to the Kamikochi highland valley area and the Northern Japanese Alps.