

Ueki Onsen

Kumamoto has many hot springs, but two things make the waters of the town of Ueki Onsen special. First, the water is alkaline, which gives it a smooth and syrupy feel on the skin and promotes cleansing of the skin from deep within the pores. Second, every one of the dozen or so hot-spring inns at Ueki gets its hot water from a different source, so the water in each has subtly different qualities.

Ueki is compact, walkable, and well suited to an *onsen meguri* (hot-spring crawl) to try out the various baths. Visitors can buy a discount ticket for access to all the baths in the town. All the inns have *rotenburo* outdoor baths; some have foot baths, and an increasing number have private baths, which is something of a Kumamoto tradition.

The inns at Ueki make a conscious effort to differentiate: some are woody and traditional, others metallic and modern, others hotel-like, while still others have separate cabins. Food is a major attraction, with a focus on local delicacies like horsemeat sashimi and seasonal fruit.

Daytime activities for visitors in Ueki include visits to ancient tumuli, picking fruit at local farms, and cycling the 30-kilometer cycle path. In the summer, firework displays are held along the river that bisects the town.

Three buses a day make the 21-kilometer trip from central Kumamoto to Ueki. The staff of the inns pick up overnight visitors at the bus stop.