

Umi Jigoku and Kannawa's Medicinal Springs at the Beginning of Japan's Modern Period

By the late nineteenth century, Kannawa had become a destination of some significance for hot spring bathing. Although Kannawa was a small village, with just 563 people according to the 1885 *Bungo no kuni Hayami gunsonshi* (Bungo Province Hayami Region and Village Journal), approximately 3,000 people used the local baths for medicinal purposes every year. About one-fourth of residents rented rooms to these travelers as a side business; the record lists 34 lodging facilities among 139 total buildings. It is believed many visiting bathers were farmers who came to rest and recuperate after a season of hard work in the fields.

In the early twentieth century, entrepreneur Senju Yoshihiko purchased the property around Umi Jigoku with the intention of piping its water to local inns for use in hot spring baths. Senju's land manager Utsunomiya Noritsuna (1889–1973) had another idea: to take visitors to see the bubbling hot springs for a small fee. In this way, Umi Jigoku's founders transformed a pool of scalding water, once considered a dangerous nuisance and waste of valuable land, into a tourist attraction and business asset.

This development, along with similar projects around Kannawa, is believed to have spurred the village's growth as a hot spring destination. By 1919, about 170,000 bathers visited every year.