

## Umi Jigoku's Transformation into a Tourist Destination

Umi Jigoku was long viewed as a dangerous nuisance. Before the twentieth century, it was an open pool with no surrounding barriers that was called a *jigoku* (hell); a daunting sight and serious safety risk. It also tended to overflow during rains and damage nearby crops.

Railway engineer Senju Yoshihiko, however, saw the steaming pool as a resource. In the early 1900s, he purchased the surrounding land for 12,000 yen, an exorbitant sum at the time, and installed pipelines to transport the hot spring water to the baths at local inns. His land manager, Utsunomiya Noritsuna (1889–1973), experimented with another idea: charging admission to come and view the pool. This proved lucrative, and the *jigoku* attracted about 100 visitors daily. Senju then proposed building a garden to improve the surrounding scenery. Together, these two men transformed Umi Jigoku from a local hazard into a tourist attraction.

Umi Jigoku's success started a *jigoku* trend. As other entrepreneurs were inspired to create their own themed “hell” attractions, Kannawa Hot Springs and Beppu came to be known for its many hot spring pools. By 1937, the area had ten such pools (some of which are now gone). These steaming pools brought visitors and also supplied hot spring water to the inns, which in turn attracted more visitors to the hells, creating a synergy that accelerated Kannawa's growth as a travel destination.

The hell attractions and hot spring baths even spurred innovation in the transportation industry. During Beppu's early years as a tourist attraction, rickshaw drivers and horse-drawn carriage operators were inundated with customers, but getting to and around Kannawa took considerable time. Roundtrip travel between local inns and Blood Pond Hell is said to have taken an entire day! Moreover, Kannawa's rural roads were ill-equipped for heavy traffic.

This situation changed after 1924 when Beppu's roads were improved to accommodate a visit by Prince Hirohito (who later became emperor). Aburaya Kumahachi (1863–1935) took advantage of the improved infrastructure by founding the Kamenoi Bus Company in 1928 and launching sightseeing buses with the nation's first onboard female tour guides. Kumahachi's initial four buses carried more than 500 people per day to the various hell attractions. Other bus operators later joined in, and at the industry's peak, these buses together transported more than 1,500 people daily and more than 500,000 annually. This success inspired the idea of charging a low-priced, set bus fare for one day of travel along the hell route, with the option of getting off and on as many times as passengers wished. This type of “day pass” ticket is now common at tourist

destinations throughout Japan.

Umi Jigoku's founders and other entrepreneurs, like Kumahachi, pioneered the Kannawa and Beppu tourism industries. They cultivated a thriving hot spring resort with numerous tourist attractions and built an efficient transportation network that was the foundation for Beppu's public transportation today.