

How long have Beppu's hot springs been called "hells"?

The word *jigoku* (hell) has likely been used to describe Beppu's scalding hot spring pools since the Heian period (794–1185), although no record specifies the term's exact origin. Experts believe the word *jigoku* is derived from the Buddhist term *Ennetsu-jigoku* (burning hell), one of the eight hot hells in the Buddhist tradition. In the centuries since, *jigoku* has often been used as a general term for places resembling a common image of hell, with hot gases, scalding water, and the like.

The *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* (Historical Record of Japan over Three Imperial Reigns) states that Beppu's Mt. Tsurumi had a major eruption in 867, releasing hot gases that took many lives. The tenth-century *Ojoyoshu* (Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land), a widely read Buddhist text, included vivid illustrations of the Buddhist hells, establishing a shared visual vocabulary throughout Japan. These two influences likely linked Beppu's hells and the Buddhist concept of hell in people's minds, leading to the *jigoku* naming used in Beppu today.