

### **Shizukuishi's Hot Springs (*Onsen*)**

The Shizukuishi region has a wide variety of *onsen* (hot springs). Taking a soak is delightful at any time of year, but it can be especially enjoyable in winter after a long day of skiing or snowboarding. Some of the following *onsen* are located inside hotels and inns (*ryokan*), while others are standalone facilities. Most of them welcome day visitors as well as overnight guests.

Visitors who have never bathed in a Japanese *onsen* should be aware of some simple rules before going. Everyone is expected to wash and rinse the whole body before entering the water. It is not acceptable to wear clothing or a swimsuit into the water. The facility will usually provide a small towel for washing, but this is left on the side of the tub, never brought in the water. These days, the vast majority of *onsen* have separate bathing areas for women and men, but it is generally acceptable for young children to accompany a caregiver of either gender in the baths. Many *onsen* will not accept guests with tattoos, so it is best to check in advance. In some cases, small tattoos may be covered with a bandage before entry, or it may be possible to reserve a private bath.

### **Oushuku**

This small *onsen* village has been popular as a hot-spring destination for more than 450 years. There are a variety of places to stay, ranging from modern hotels to traditional family-run inns. According to legend, the hot springs were discovered during the late sixteenth century, when a man saw a Japanese bush warbler soaking its injured leg in the water. Local residents then began bathing in the springs. The area became so well known that eventually members of the local ruling families began visiting, too.

Today, the Oushuku area has its own mascot character inspired by the original tale about the bird: Kekiyokichi, a chubby bush warbler who loves hot springs. Oushuku is also home to the small but pretty Outaki waterfall, which is an easy walk from most accommodations in the area.

### **Amihari**

Located at the Kyukamura Iwate Amihari Onsen Hotel, this facility sits at the base of Mount Iwate, making it very convenient for skiers who come to the nearby slopes. There are several baths, including an outdoor one with panoramic views from an altitude of 760 meters.

### **Minami Amihari Arine**

Day visitors are welcome at this *onsen* in the Yukotan no Mori Inn. The baths were designed to blend in with the surrounding forests.

### **Shizukuishi Takakura**

Located at the Shizukuishi Prince Hotel, this *onsen* welcomes day visitors as well as hotel guests. The outdoor bath offers impressive views in all seasons, while a pond with colorful Japanese carp next to the baths adds to the ambience.

### **Hashiba**

This facility is for day visitors only; there is a campground next door. It is part of the Shizukuishi Anekko Roadside Station (Michi-no-Eki) complex, which also houses several restaurants and gift shops. Guests may choose either Japanese- or Western-style baths.

### **Goshoko**

One need not stay overnight to take advantage of these hot-spring baths in the Hotel Hana-no-yu. The indoor and outdoor baths offer impressive views of nearby Lake Goshu and Mt. Iwate.

### **Genbu**

This tranquil hot-spring complex is near the Kakkonda River, and the water is unusually mild. Several of the accommodations are open to day visitors.

### **Tokan Iwate**

Day visitors are welcome at this *onsen* in the Genbu Furetei Inn. There are four outdoor baths overlooking the Kakkonda mountains, including two that can be reserved in advance for private use.

The following two hot-spring areas are closed in the winter months due to heavy snow:

### **Kunimi**

Two Japanese-style inns in this *onsen* area, Ishizuka Ryokan and Morisanso, are open to day visitors. The ravine location is not accessible to tour buses and there is no cell phone service, making it ideal for anyone seeking solitude. The mineral-rich water is an unusual emerald-green color.

### **Takinoue**

This secluded *onsen* at the Ryukanso Inn welcomes day visitors. It is surrounded by a beech forest and is close to the impressive Torigoe waterfall.