

Kikuchi Onsen

The Kikuchi Onsen spa district extends across the eastern side of the city of Kikuchi, offering eight spa hotels and inns as well as an information center near Kikuchi Park. Each spa has a distinctive range of baths, which are kept at a temperature of 43–45°C. The hot spring water in the area is clear, virtually odorless, and alkaline, with a pH level of at least 9.0. Its properties make the skin feel smooth and slightly slippery after bathing, somewhat like after the application of skin toner. Drinking the water is possible in places, and some of the hotels and inns use it for cooking. All spas in Kikuchi Onsen welcome daytime bathers, who can purchase a ¥1,500 “bath-hopping” ticket that includes access to any three of the eight facilities.

Kikuchi has been a health and wellness destination since the 1950s, when the discovery of the hot spring sparked resort development. The town had flourished as a commercial hub during the Edo period (1603–1867). At that time, it was the last major population center on the western side of the Kuju Mountains along the road that connected what is now Kumamoto Prefecture with Oita Prefecture on the other side of the mountain range. This mercantile legacy endured into the postwar period, when the flow of customers from throughout the Kumamoto area to Kikuchi’s shopping streets helped the spa district flourish.