

Ryo'unkaku Ryokan

Ryo'unkaku is a historic *ryokan* inn in the Matsunoyama Onsen hot springs area. The three-story wooden structure of the main building, constructed in 1938, was registered as a Tangible Cultural Property in 2005. The inn is an excellently preserved example of snow-country architecture for the period. Its longevity is particularly impressive considering it has survived three major earthquakes and the punishing weight of heavy snowfalls year after year.

Still in operation today, the inn has many unique architectural features. When it was constructed, the owner commissioned a group of skilled carpenters for the interiors, giving each of them free rein over one of the 14 guestrooms. They competed to demonstrate their skills, resulting in elaborately carved transoms, sliding doors with the delicate interlocking woodworking known as *kumiko*, and idiosyncratic flourishes like Go and shogi boards affixed to the ceiling. In the main lobby, auspicious shapes are worked into the dark wood floors. These cleverly carved inserts, called *fushikakushi*, disguise flaws, such as spots where knots were removed from the timber.

The retro charm of early twentieth-century architecture and unusual flourishes of craftsmanship make Ryo'unkaku a unique snow-country experience.