

Kyounso

Keeping it in the family

Takahashi Takako is the proprietress of Kyounso, one of three hot-spring inns in Matsukawa Onsen, a village near the Matsukawa River that flows below Mt. Iwate in Towada-Hachimantai National Park. She runs the inn with her husband Toshihiko, who is the business manager. What makes this cluster of inns so unusual is the fact that they were all established by members of the same family.

Toshihiko's great-grandfather Sueji was instrumental in developing the first and most downriver of the three hot springs in Matsukawa, where the inn Shofuso is currently situated. The place was beautiful, but inaccessible by road.

In the next generation, Toshihiko's grandfather Fukujiro worked as a subcontractor for the local sulfur mine. Always a lover of the mountains, Fukujiro was inspired by a visit to Nikko to set up a hot-spring inn of his own. He acquired the right to use some land owned by the Forestry Agency, and discovered a hot spring there. When it proved difficult for him to develop the spring himself, local authorities took over the project. Although Fukujiro died in 1953 at the relatively young age of 57, the village built a subsidized "people's inn" (*kokumin shukusha*) there with hot-spring baths and a campsite, which opened in 1960.

Toshihiko's father Nakaei wanted to follow in the footsteps of Sueji and Fukujiro and keep developing the area. He collaborated with Takako's aunt Uwano Harue, and they opened the third local inn, Matsukawaso, in 1961. In 1980, Toshihiko purchased the "people's inn" that had been the brainchild of his grandfather Fukujiro from the village, and relaunched it as Kyounso. In this way, a single family had its hand in all three of Matsukawa Onsen's hot-spring inns.