

Kyounso

Bathing among boulders

The exterior of the main building of Kyounso is Western in appearance, with tall, narrow windows and hints of an Alpine chalet. Inside, however, it is geothermally heated but thoroughly Japanese in design, with tatami-mat rooms and shoji panels. “The original design was Western both inside and out, but I prefer the traditional Japanese style, so I asked the architect to renovate the interior,” Takako explains.

Kyounso has 28 rooms. Of these, just five, located in the older wing behind the main building, are set aside for long-stay, self-catering *toji* guests. Enthusiasts of the traditional hot-spring cure now represent only about 10 percent of the inn’s guests. As well as those who come mainly for the hot-spring baths, the number of people who visit to enjoy climbing or backcountry skiing on Mt. Iwate (2,038 m) and Mt. Hachimantai (1,614 m) has been rising. Incidentally, both mountains are listed in *One Hundred Mountains of Japan*, a 1964 classic in which mountaineer Fukada Kyuya described his favorite 100 summits; it became a bestseller following praise for the book from Prince Naruhito, who became Emperor of Japan in 2019.

Situated on a terrace overlooking the forest, Kyounso’s mixed outdoor bath is the symbol of the inn. It incorporates a number of large boulders, including a vertical one rising from the middle of the bath. It was built in 1982 by a garden designer, hence the striking arrangement of rocks and the resemblance to an ornamental pond in a classic Japanese garden.