

## Kunimi Onsen Mori Sanso

### An inn for tired climbers – and their pets

Some of the hot-spring inns in Towada-Hachimantai evolved as therapy destinations; others evolved with a focus on hiking. At an altitude of 860 meters on the side of 1,868-meter-high Mt. Akita-Komagatake, Kunimi Onsen Mori Sanso falls clearly into the second category.

Mori Ryo, grandfather of the current proprietor, Mori Soichi, discovered the hot spring in the early 1930s when he was out hiking with a friend, and erected the first structure in 1939. Since there was no road then, all the necessary materials had to be carried uphill on people's backs through the remote, densely forested terrain.

“It was such a slog to get up here that at the beginning, we didn't get any ordinary guests, just super strong and healthy people who loved hiking,” says Soichi.

The road was built and buses started running in 1963, when Soichi was five years old. That diversified Mori Sanso's customer base, as people started coming for the hot springs as well as for hiking. As transporting food became easier, the inn erected a large three-story building equipped with a dining room that served meals to supplement the original single-story lodge for self-catering guests.

Mori Sanso has three baths: a couple of single-sex indoor baths and a small outdoor mixed bath that can accommodate five people. Interest in the mixed bath has risen recently, Soichi says. The inn has no rules about how customers choose to enjoy it – naked, or wearing a towel or *yuamigi* (but never a swimsuit!). Mori Sanso also boasts two special baths for pets with dermatitis.

The vast majority of people come for the hiking, though there are still a few long-stay *toji*-style guests. “It was always my grandfather's ambition to serve hikers, and I'm proud to be here at the entrance to the trail. The hikers fill their water bottles with spring water before setting off for the summit, then take a nice hot bath, clean their boots, or have a rest on their way back down,” he says.

Soichi feels no pressing need to expand. In fact, he says, he wants to keep things just as they are, in

particular the friendly family atmosphere.