

Fuke no Yu

Not all outdoor baths are created equal

Abe Tosuke, the 14th-generation head of Fuke no Yu, was something of a philanthropist. Eager to turn Hachimantai into a popular destination, he had trails built to the summit of Mt. Hachimantai and made other improvements to the surrounding area. Tosuke was also instrumental in securing national park designation in 1956 for Hachimantai. He enjoys the honor of having a forest in the park, Tosuke Forest, named after him.

Abe Kyoko, the proprietress of Fuke no Yu, sees Tosuke as a man ahead of his time. “I believe that people should eat well, bathe in the hot springs, go hiking, and breathe good fresh air. The key to health lies in combining all those things. In seeking to create a Hachimantai where you could do all that, Tosuke was a pioneer,” she says.

This holistic attitude is reflected in the outdoor baths of Fuke no Yu, for which Kyoko has coined a new term. In her lexicon, there are *rotenburo* (outdoor baths), and then there are *yatenburo* (wild outdoor baths). The “wild” baths at Fuke no Yu sit in the middle of the valley, a good 200 meters from the *ryokan*, providing 360-degree views of the surrounding mountains. In line with Kyoko’s “bathing theme park” ambitions, these present a unique variety of mixed bathing options, including two square wooden baths (*masuburo*), four tubs made from old miso barrels (*taruburo*), and a rock-lined bath with loose pebbles covering its floor (*iwaburo*).

The food served at the *ryokan* is also in line with Kyoko’s wellness philosophy. Additives are scrupulously avoided; local ingredients are championed, such as Hachimantai pork, locally grown vegetables, and mountain vegetables; and wait staff introduce all the dishes with a description of their stated health benefits.