

## Tsuru no Yu

### A hot spring fit for a feudal lord

The oldest of the six buildings that make up Tsuru no Yu is the *honjin*, which dates from the end of the Tokugawa shogunate. Long and low, with a thick thatched roof, it resembles an old guardhouse, and was originally built for the retainers of the Satake daimyo. Inside, the rooms have sunken *irori* hearths and there is no glass in the main windows, just shutters. One of the rooms even has graffiti carved into a wall pillar celebrating Japan's victory in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895).

The *shin-honjin* is built on the footprint of the original “primary inn,” where the Satake daimyo himself used to stay. If you are a guest at the inn, it is well worth going up to the second floor of the *shin-honjin* to inspect the watercolor paintings hanging in the corridor. Highlights include pictures of an aristocratic lady dressed in a diaphanous robe and having her back scrubbed by a man in a thick blindfold; people trekking to Tsuru no Yu, the nobles on horseback and the farmers on foot, but both groups carrying their rice and bedding with them; and the hills around the hot spring completely denuded of trees, which in the past were chopped down for firewood. The daimyo would have stayed at the back of the building for security reasons, making his way to a private bath via a covered bridge that crosses a stream.

The inn has eight baths: indoor, outdoor, and women-only. The large mixed outdoor bath, lined with boulders and greenery, is the most impressive. As you relax in the milky water, you can feast your eyes on the landscape, a pleasure to view in all seasons. A cleverly designed entrance, using steps and a screen of tree trunks and a strategically placed rock, makes it possible for women to enter the bath submerged up to their necks. The sheer size of the bath and the opacity of the water also mean that it can be enjoyed by a large number of people of both sexes, just like in the old days.