

Ibusuki, a Land of Hot Springs

Ibusuki has one of the highest concentrations of hot springs in Japan, with over 1,000 known springs. These include various types of hot springs, as well as the globally unique sand baths (*sunamushi onsen*). It is no surprise that “Ibusuki” was once written with characters meaning “town of abundant springs.”

Ibusuki’s many natural hot springs are the result of its volcanic surroundings. Ibusuki sits within the Ata Caldera, the remnants of a massive volcanic eruption that occurred some 100,000 years ago. The caldera is pocked by several smaller craters from major eruptions, some occurring as recently as 6,300 years ago. Mt. Kaimondake, the city’s iconic cone-shaped mountain, is itself an active basalt stratovolcano. The same heat and pressure that have created so many volcanoes bring mineral-rich groundwater boiling to the surface. For centuries, people have used this abundant hot water for bathing and cooking.

Historical records indicate Ibusuki was a hot spring destination at least as far back as the early 1500s. The Portuguese merchant Jorge Álvares, one of the first Europeans to visit Japan, mentions Ibusuki's hot springs in his 1546 *Report on Japanese Matters*. In the 1600s, the lords of the local Shimazu family built private villas in Ibusuki to take advantage of its numerous springs.

One such lord established bathing facilities that are known locally as Tonosama-yu, or "The Lord's Bath." Dating from 1831, the baths survive today in two incarnations. Although the villa that once surrounded the baths has been lost to time, the original basins and some tilework remain as Cultural Properties of Ibusuki. An adjoining public bath welcomes bathers

who come to soak in waters that were once enjoyed by samurai lords.

Ibusuki is the consummate hot spring haven. Whether you prefer historic baths, like Tonosama-yu, or brand-new facilities with saunas and pools, like

Healthyland, whether you are seeking a wide oceanside view or a leafy mountain bower, a clear chloride spring or a pungent sulfur bath, Ibusuki has a hot spring to suit any soak.