There are many hot springs in Japan and their distribution roughly matches the distribution of volcanoes. Most hot springs are fed by rainwater seeping underground and heated by close proximity to magma below the volcanoes. The content of dissolved materials varies among hot springs depending on the dissemination of underground water and the composition of the surrounding rocks. The result is different types of hot springs such as simple thermal hot spring with low mineral content, sulfurous springs, mineral springs, and hot baths that enable a sensory or relaxing effect, as well.

Hot springs are blessings from volcanoes

**Column**

**Benefits of Hot Spring**

Hot springs provide many medicinal benefits such as recuperation and disease prevention through the effects of the mineral salts contained in the water, and the psychological benefit of reliving the stress of daily life, and placing oneself in a natural environment. The Japanese are big fans of hot spring baths. The history of hot spring use is well established. As a matter of fact, there is a record related to hot springs in "Kojiki" (The Records of Ancient Matters), the oldest history book in Japan written in the eighth century. Hot springs serve many purposes besides bathing. Not only are they used as a source of heat for raising animals and cultivating plants, but they are also utilized to heat buildings using heat pumps. In the town of Sanketsu, farmers use hot springs to cultivate tomatoes in large-scale plantation houses.

**Lake Shikotsu Hot Spring**

The only settlement on the shore of Lake Shikotsu. The area was planned systematically after the area was designated a national park, therefore accommodations were made to blend in with the forests, giving the area a tranquil appearance. This hot spring emerged as a result of boiling in 1974 and is a bicarbonate (sulphate) spring. It is not far from Shikotsu Nature Park of Wild Red (p.19). The red railway bridge spanning the Chise River near by is the oldest railway bridge remaining in Hokkaido.

Lake Toya Hot Spring

A hot spring emerged upon the eruption of Mount Usu in the early 20th century and has been developing as a hot spring district on the lakeshore, helping to promote the growth of this town along with Mount Usu (p.8-9). There are chloride springs and bicarbonate (sulphate) springs. There are hand baths and foot baths in over a dozen localities. Also, if you stroll down the promenades of Nishiyama craters and Konpira craters, you can closely observe the ravages of the eruption in 2000.

**Noboribetsu Hot Spring**

One of the most representative hot springs in Japan, Noboribetsu was known by the Ainu for a long time. The government officials working in Hakodate began bathing there for therapeutic purposes at the end of Edo era. The amount of spring water exceeds 10,000 tons per day, and a total of 11 various types of springs, including sulfur, hydrogen sulfoide, and iron springs can be enjoyed. For this reason, it is also a place where research in the remedial use of hot springs, from a modern medical perspective, has been taking place. Jigokudani Valley and Oyuruma, still vigorously releasing volcanic gases and boiling water, are located near the hot spring district. There are branches along the river flowing out of Oyuruma, where you can take a natural foot bath.

Jozankei Gorge Hot Spring

A chloride spring with abundant water, large enough to establish a district. It was discovered by a monk from Oyakama Prefecture, Jozan, in 1866. Situated in the suburbs of Sapporo, it has been a place for relaxation for the locals for a long time. There is a promenade along the Toyo-cho River extending 2.5km in the upper section of the hot spring.

Kitsuyuwa Hot Spring

Kitsuyuwa is a sulfur spring situated to the east of Lake Toya facing the Ozora River. A promenade extends from the hot spring along the stream, and there is a foot bath where you can walk through the stream of warm water. There is also a ski area close by.

Karuruzawa Hot Spring

A sulfate hot spring situated about 10km north of Noboribetsu. It was the first place to be designated a national health resort in Hokkaido in 1957, and its therapeutic atmosphere still remains. The name Karuruzawa was taken from the famous sea, Karlbad (Karlovsky Vary) in Czech Republic, for the springs' similar levels of radium.

**Hot Spring Festival and Other Events**

- **Shikotsu-Shikanai International Yuki-gassen (snowball fight)**: A tournament based on a simple yuki-gassen developed. The number of participating teams is increasing yearly, and the European Championship game was held recently in Finland.

- **Lake Shikotsu Ice Festival**: A local event by residents evolved into the leading festival of Chinese Many ice sculptures standing along the lake are lit up in the evening, which creates a fantastic atmosphere.

- **Noboribetsu Spa Hot Festival**: Once a year, when the lid of the "Hell" at Jigokudani Valley opens, "the King of the Hell" appears with many demons. Noboribetsu Hot Spring is full of festive cheer with many floats on this theme and portable shrines carried through the streets.