

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, chloride spring, sulfur spring, and acidic spring. Their bathing effects vary as well.

Hot springs are blessings from volcanoes

Natural footbath in Oyunuma River (Noboribetsu Hot Spring)

Fumes in Jigokudani Gorge (Noboribetsu Hot Spring)

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 relieving 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 Soubetsu, farmers use hot springs to cultivate tomatoes in large-scale plantation houses.

Highlights of the Major Hot Springs



Jozankei Gorge Hot Spring



Marukoma Hot Spring

Footbath in Lake Toya Hot Spring

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 boring in 1974 and is a bicarbonate (salt) spring. It is not far from Shikotsuko Nature Path of Wild Bird (p19). The red railway bridge spanning the Chitose River nearby is the oldest railway bridge remaining in Hokkaido.

Marukoma Hot Spring and Ito Hot Spring are both located on the north shore of Lake Shikotsu. They have both bicarbonate and sulfate springs.



Ito Hot Spring

Noboribetsu Hot Spring

One of the most representative hot springs in Japan. Noboribetsu was known by the Ainu for a long time before 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 sulfide, 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 Oyunuma, still vigorously releasing volcanic gases and boiling water, are located near the hot spring district. There are benches along the river flowing out of Oyunuma, where you can take a natural foot bath.

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 (p8-9). There are chloride springs and bicarbonate (salt) springs. There are hand baths and foot baths in over a dozen locations. Also, if you stroll down the promenades of Nishiyama craters and Konpira craters, you can closely observe the ravages of the eruption in 2000.



Jozankei Gorge Hot Spring

A chloride spring with abundant water, large enough to establish a district. It was discovered by a monk from Okayama Pre-

fecture, Jozan, in 1866. Situated in the suburbs of Sapporo, it has been a place of relaxation for the locals for a long time. There is a promenade along the Toyohira River extending 2.5km in the upper section of the hot spring.



Kitayuzawa Hot Spring

Kitayuzawa is a sulfur spring situated to the east of Lake Toya facing the Osaru 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.

Karurusu Hot Spring

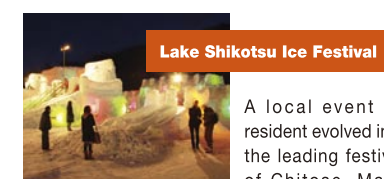
A sulfate hot spring situated about 8km north of Noboribetsu. It was the first place to be designated a national health resort in Hokkaido in 1957, and its therapeutic atmosphere still remains. The name Karurus was taken from the famous spa, Karlsbad (Karlovy Vary) in Czech Republic, for the springs' similar levels of radium.

Hot Spring Festival and Other Events



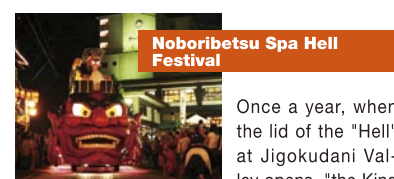
Showa-Shinzan International Yukigassen

A tournament based on a simple yukigassen (snowball fight) 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 resident evolved into the leading festival of Chitose. Many ice sculptures standing along the lake are lit up in the evening, which creates a fantastic atmosphere.



Noboribetsu Spa Hell 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.