



JAPAN INFORMATION
AND CULTURE CENTER
在米国日本大使館広報文化センター

TEACHING TUESDAY

ONSEN ETIQUETTE

Onsen are Japanese hot springs, located throughout the country due to Japan's volcanically active geology. The history of onsen goes back over 3000 years and there are over 2300 nationally recognized onsen. Buddhist monks helped popularize the onsen after 552 BCE, with integrated rituals of bathing in their daily practice. In fact, the oldest hotel in the world is the onsen ryokan Nishiyama Onsen Keiunkan. In order to be called an onsen, the water must contain at least one of 19 designated chemical elements and be 25 degrees Celsius or warmer before being reheated. There are different categories depending on water temperature.

Onsen are wildly popular not only for tourists but for Japanese as well. They provide a great place to relax and unwind, as well as to break down social barriers between people. There are indoor and outdoor, mixed gender and separate, public and private, and generally all different kinds of onsen. But if you're going to an onsen, here a few things to know:

- 1) Undress completely. It may be embarrassing for those unused to public nudity, but most onsen do not allow bathing suits.
- 2) Bathe before entering the bath. Onsen are for soaking and relaxing only. Before getting in, be sure to clean yourself using the allocated stools.
- 3) In gender separated onsen, make sure enter the correct side. Women's sides are generally marked with red cloth over the door, and men with blue. Sometimes this switches depending on the time of day!
- 4) Use the small towel for modesty when out of the onsen, but when in the onsen place the towel on top of your head or by the side of the water.
- 5) Stay hydrated! Onsen can be dangerous if you're in them too long, so make sure to keep drinking water and get out if you feel dizzy. Rest for half an hour after getting out.