



Onsen Etiquette & First-Timer Checklist

Everything you need for a relaxed first soak in a Japanese hot spring. Rules vary by bath, so follow any signs and staff instructions.

Before you go

- ☐ Check the bath's tattoo policy on its official site. If tattoos aren't allowed, look for a tattoo-friendly bath, a private (kashikiri) bath or a room with its own bath.
- ☐ Check opening hours and whether towels are included or for rent.
- ☐ Pack a small towel, a large towel, and a hair tie if you have long hair.
- ☐ Bring some cash (coins are handy for lockers and vending machines).
- ☐ Check which entrance is which: ■ = men, ■ = women. Curtains (noren) are often blue for men and red for women, but colours can swap between days.

In the changing room

- ☐ Take off your shoes where shown and use the shoe lockers.
- ☐ Undress fully. Swimsuits are not worn in most onsen (swimsuit parks like Yuunesun are the exception).
- ☐ Leave valuables and your large towel in the locker or basket.
- ☐ Take only your small towel into the bathing area.

Before you soak

- ☐ Sit on a stool at the washing station and wash and rinse your whole body thoroughly.
- ☐ Rinse off all soap and shampoo before you get in the bath.
- ☐ Put the stool and bowl back neatly for the next person.

In the bath

- ☐ Keep your small towel out of the water. Fold it on your head or set it on the edge.
- ☐ Tie up long hair so it does not touch the water.
- ☐ Enter slowly and quietly; no swimming, splashing or diving.
- ☐ Keep voices low. No phones or cameras in the bathing area.
- ☐ Don't stay in too long. Get out, cool down and drink water between soaks.
- ☐ Skip the bath if you have been drinking alcohol, and follow posted signs about who should not bathe.

After your soak

- ☐ Pat yourself mostly dry with your small towel before returning to the changing room, so the floor stays dry.
- ☐ Many people don't rinse off after a mineral spring; it's your choice.
- ☐ Drink water. A bottle of cold milk from the vending machine is a classic onsen treat.

Ryokan basics

- ☐ Take off shoes at the entrance and use the slippers provided; take slippers off on tatami.
- ☐ Yukata: wrap left side over right (right over left is for funerals).



- ☐ Meal times are usually fixed. Tell the ryokan about dietary needs when you book.
- ☐ Ask whether your room or the inn has a private bath you can reserve.

Useful phrases

- ☐ **Tat■ wa daij■bu desu ka?** Are tattoos OK?
- ☐ **Kashikiri buro wa arimasu ka?** Do you have a private bath?
- ☐ **Taoru wa arimasu ka?** Do you have towels?

Find onsen, ryokan and tattoo-friendly baths by prefecture at northwestwa.com/japan-directory.
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