

We asked travel writer Yumi Yamaguchi about Quality Japanese Inns and Hotels

[No. 1]

Photography/ Yuko Iida Text/ Aya Kiyono

Japan Historical Stay

Q

We'd like to stay at a traditional Japanese inn with a strong feel of history... (JQR)

Luxury hotels are very nice but right now we're in the mood for something traditionally Japanese. Genuine Japanese that is, not "Japanese-style." And not somewhere that's brand spanking new either, but rather a place that a stylish kimono-clad woman of advanced years would be at home in strolling about under a sunshade, so to speak. Somewhere that the excellence of Japanese tradition can be thoroughly absorbed through the skin, eyes and palate. Could you recommend anywhere like that?

A

I recommend the
Bansuiro Fukuzumi.

(Yamaguchi)

The marvelous thing about this place is being able to stay in a building listed as an important cultural property. It really is very unusual to be allowed to do that. The hot spring water in the inn's grounds is also very good, so this place is perfect for people who enjoy both fine architecture and hot springs.

Travelers and customers taking the waters have patronized this inn since it was established in 1625

The word 'history' can carry a variety of connotations. It can be a synonym for 'old,' meaning 'over a long passage of time.' Or it can have a warmer nuance, telling a tale of a time filled with the happenings and feelings of the people who lived through it. We naturally think of the latter category when talking about the inn that travel writer Yumi Yamaguchi recommended, the Bansuiro Fukuzumi. The inn was founded in 1625 in the hot spring town of Hakone-Yumoto, in a secluded area known as "Yuba (hot spring field)" that is still reasonably close to the busy Hakone-Yumoto Station.

According to Yumi Yamaguchi, "Fukuzumi has a very long and interesting history which overlaps with the history of Japan itself. In the waters at Fukuzumi and in this building, which is listed as a cultural treasure, you can

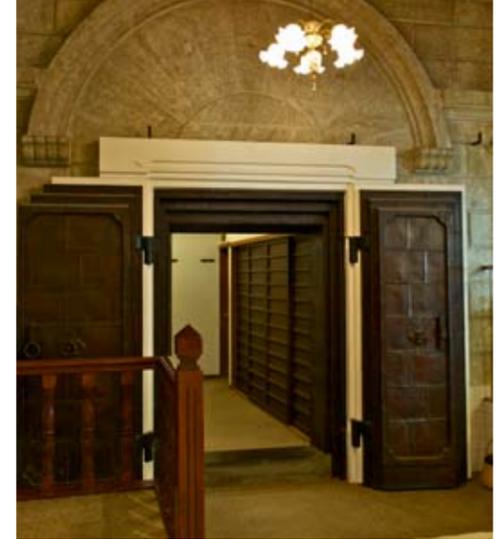
immediately sense why the Hakone area has become so beloved,". Masae Fukuzumi, the tenth-generation owner, had to rebuild twice in succession after the inn burned down in the early Meiji period (late nineteenth century). Learning a lesson from this, he installed heavy metal doors in the entrance of the older Bansuiro building and newer Kinsenro. These buildings were selected as important national cultural properties and also chosen for the "One Hundred Selected Buildings in Kanagawa". There is nothing at all ostentatious about the exterior, which was inspired by the old Shinbashi Station, or the interior details, but close study of the particulars allows you to recognize the full extent of the craftsmanship and its careful execution. We felt a mysterious sense of serenity at being in this building, with its combination of traditional Japanese architecture and Western design.

According to the sixteenth-generation current family head, Haruhiko Fukuzumi, Masae Fukuzumi was a great man, respectfully called "Old Man Fukuzumi" by Prince Arisugawa Taruhito, and revered as "Teacher" by the man who could be called the godfather of

Bansuiro, statesman Takayoshi Kido. Yukichi Fukuzawa, educator and founder of Keio University, was a man of learning who enjoyed new things and a patron of the Fukuzumis, and reportedly looked forward to conversations with Masae. Yumi Yamaguchi stated that "when Yukichi Fukuzawa went to nearby Tonosawa on a tour of the hot springs and found it an ordeal because of the bad roads, he proposed building new roads. Masae promptly responded to this appeal. He handled building a new road that later became National Route 1, and the fifth and sixth stages of the Hakone Ekiden. When you look at it like that, it's easy to understand what an important figure Masae was for Hakone." You might call him "the man who brought cultural enlightenment to Hakone." The inn has ownership of several hot spring sources, and the springs have flowed freely for four centuries without ever once drying up. Stay in a building that oozes Meiji era ambience, immerse yourself in the soft, plentiful hot waters, and feast on delicious food—this is how many travelers have enjoyed the comforts of this inn over the centuries.



The older building was constructed in the early Meiji era. Carpenters and joiners of Odawara in Kanagawa prefecture prided themselves on having the highest technical standards in Japan. The sliding screen latticework is richly varied, with a different pattern in each room. Straight lines and curves—Japanese and Western styles sit comfortably together to create a beautiful harmony in every nook and cranny.



Entrance to the Kinsenro as seen from the lobby. An eye-catching combination of heavy iron fire doors set in the beautiful ooya-ishi volcanic tuff stone arch.



Daylight filters through latticework to fill the room with soft light. Tatami floor matting and decorated screen doors stand out in the light. This extremely simple interior is a blissfully peaceful space. Turn off the electric lights and you'll feel like you are back in the time when it was built.



A spiral staircase reminiscent of the Rokumeikan, the famous Meiji era building in Tokyo, leads to the guest



Luxuriate in the soft, silky water that stimulates circulation and keeps your feet warm until morning. An outdoor bath was recently added to the Sensu no yu bath.

Hakone-Yumoto Onsen Bansuiro Fukuzumi

Yumoto 643, Hakone-machi,
Ashigarashimo-gun, Kanagawa-ken
Telephone 0120-292301
Two meals / One night's accommodation
from 18,900 yen (plus tax, service included) per person
Check-in 15:00, check-out 11:00
URL www.2923.co.jp/

Yumi Yamaguchi

travel writer. Author of Teikoku Hotel · Wright kan no nazo (Mysteries of the Imperial Hotel and Wright Buildings), Shueisha Shinsho; Kieta shukuhaku meibo-hotel ga kataru senso no kioku (A register of vanished hotels: Memories of war that hotels can tell us), Shichosha; Tabi no mado kara (Window scenes from my travels), Chihaya Shobo, and others.