

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

[No. 4]
Photography/Yuko Iida, Text/JQR

Japan Premium Stay



Q I dream of staying at a fancy ryokan. Where would you suggest for my first visit to one?
(Female, 35, system engineer for a major computer company)

I want to stay at a luxury ryokan where celebrities have sojourned, but I feel awkward. I long to indulge in the luxury of a delicious kaiseki multi-course meal, an elegant room, a hot spring with water from the source, and a gorgeous garden. But I worry that it will turn out to be a stressful experience.



Fumiko, waitress

A **You need not worry at the popular Asaba.** (Yamaguchi)

Most people feel awkward about staying at a luxury ryokan, but the management of a good ryokan knows the art of putting guests at ease. Asaba is a member of the French Relais & Châteaux group and is often frequented by overseas visitors. Also the setting of a novel, Asaba is much-loved by many. I recommend you take the plunge and discover the secret of its popularity.

Enjoy the Extravagance of a Japanese Ryokan Established in 1489

I walk up the gravel path sprinkled with water. The noren curtain hanging over the entrance flutters in the fresh May breeze. Beyond the open lobby is a panoramic view of a large lake and greenery stretching to Mount Amagi. From the moment I stepped into the entrance, I had a hunch that this was a good inn. First of all, I was amazed that the interior was not over-decorated and was kept immaculate. The atmosphere was dignified – a fine balance between tension and tranquility.

Fumiko, the waitress, greeted me with a warm smile and led me to the Hagi-no-ma guest suite with two rooms, one measuring eight tatami mats in size and

the other six. As befitting a top-class ryokan, the spacious accommodations had a semi-open air bath, a toilet, wash basin, and a wide verandah. I was impressed with the elegant layout. Fumiko explained that the inn once had 26 guest suites, but some were combined to make 17. It was time for a brief rest. The view of the wonderful garden from the verandah was quite soothing. A stream flowed through a tapestry of moss and shrubs accented with a garden lantern. To think, this view was all mine. I ended up lingering too long, because I wanted a bath in the open-air tub. A long soak in the hot spring water, which flows from the source, refreshed my body and my soul.

The sumptuous 12-course kaiseki dinner served in my room was made from seasonal and local produce. I was surprised to be served sweetfish, which

was just in season, and to have it charcoal-grilled before me. I savored every morsel. Everything was delicious. With a total of eight kitchen staff, and only 40 guests at full capacity, the meals served at Asaba are truly luxurious. The many repeat visitors who come to enjoy the scrumptious food are a testament to the quality. Overlooking the lake with its gentle breezes is the Gekkeiden Noh stage, where performances of classical Japanese theater (Noh and Kyogen) and classical Japanese music (flute, biwa [Japanese lute], koto [Japanese zither], wadaiko [Japanese drums] and gagaku [court music]) are held several times throughout the year. Enjoy a night immersed in Japanese culture, satiated with delicious food. My next stay will definitely coincide with a stage performance.



(上) The 2,000m2 lake has a Noh stage, Gekkeiden, where Noh, Kyogen and other performances are held several times a year. (Right) Grilled sweetfish, a seasonal delicacy.



Each of the 17 suites has its own distinct atmosphere and layout. Beds are available in two of the suites, so you can request either Japanese or Western style accommodations.



Look out over the lush garden from the Hagi-no-ma guest suite. Ring to make a reservation. Asaba will accept requests to make your stay as comfortable as possible.



Take a luxurious soak in the shiny bath filled with hot spring water from the source. Relax in the chairs on the verandah and enjoy the seasons at this excellent location.



Asaba

3450-1 Shuzenji, Izu, Shizuoka
Tel: 0558-72-7000
<http://www.relaischateaux.com/>
37,950-78,900 yen per night per person including two meals (tax and service inclusive)

* The staff speak English.
* Children under seven not allowed.

[Access]

- By train
30 minutes from Shinkansen Mishima Station to Shuzenji Station on Izuhakone Railway. Seven minutes by taxi from Shuzenji Station.
- By car
60 minutes from Tokyo on the Tomei Expressway to Numazu. 50 minutes from Numazu on Route 136.

* Asaba is a member of the Relais & Châteaux exclusive collection of the finest hotels and restaurants around the world.

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.