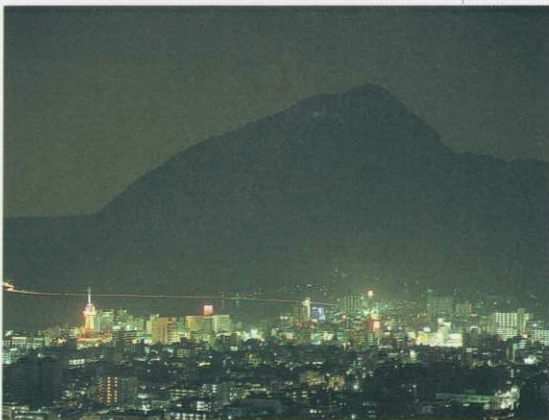


Beppu— Hot Springs and Bamboo Bends

Story and photos by Bill Tingey

For anyone who is tempted out and shrine shy after a long sojourn in Japan, the island of Kyushu has a number of interesting and diverse attractions to entice the traveler. Fukuoka Bay in the north is especially noted for its rare migrant and common resident sea birds and waterfowl. Further to the west, Nagasaki has a number of reminders of its colorful history and associations, particularly with Holland, the newest being a recreation of a Dutch community going under the name of Huis Ten Bosch.

Then there is Kumamoto with its stately castle and panoramic Suizenji-



Spa steam characterizes the cityscape

koen garden complete with miniature Mt. Fuji; Sakurajima in the south with its own billowing volcano; and for those who yearn for the pastoral, the high rural plateau at the foot of Mt. Aso is also worthy of inclusion in any itinerary to cover the island. Even the trains serving all of these locations are notable for their color, variety and design, undoubtedly ranking them among the world's best.

However, the hot spring spa of Beppu is something different again. Boasting some 3,795 individual spouts producing 100,000 kiloliters of hot water a day, the cityscape is characterized by the plumes of steam rising from between the buildings. Bathing in these waters is said to be effective in the treatment of a number of ailments, although in some cases, the color of the water and the smell may deter even the most adventurous. Indeed, some springs are so hot and pungent that they bear names such as Chinoike-jigoku, literally a "hell" pool filled with blood-red water simmering at a temperature close to boiling point and reputedly 165 meters deep. It's certainly not something to dip even a big toe in.

Nevertheless, there are in fact eight distinct spas within the area that are decidedly far less hostile, and a visit to any



The characterful entrance to the Takegawara spa bathhouse

An intriguing item of bamboo ware from Beppu



one of them is certain to be a relaxing as well as an invigorating experience.

If, however, the Takegawara spring is your choice, you will also be treated to a spectacle from the past. The building was erected in the early part of this century and still has many of its original features. As a public bathhouse, it also offers hot "sand baths." For one of these, a bather is entirely buried up to their neck in thermally heated sand, making for a somewhat comical sight.

But this building also alludes through its name to Beppu's other main attraction. Takegawara actually means "bamboo tile" and the tiles were originally made of bamboo. This tree grass has always been abundant in the area and the stream of visitors to the spas helped to foster a craft which reputedly started during late medieval times. The demand for household basketry gradually increased and in time there was even a demand for more decorative pieces, too.

Beppu is now one of Japan's major bamboo centers, producing everything from toothpicks to agricultural basketry on the practical side, while a whole range of decorative goods is also available that may cost anything from a few hundred to several hundred-thousand yen and is crafted by named artists.

Although much of the bamboo work is of a traditional nature, some is more modern and highly inventive, such as

Beppu is located on the Nippo Line between Kokura and Oita, where there is an airport served by regular domestic flights. Beppu can also be reached by ferry through the Inland Sea.

A large selection of bamboo ware is available at the **Kishima Bamboo Gallery**, where there is also a very comprehensive museum devoted to bamboo. Tel: (0977) 25-7776.

Beppu bamboo ware can also be purchased at the **Japan Traditional Craft Center**, Minami-Aoyama, Tokyo. Tel: (03) 3403-2460.



at the Yu no Mori Tanimoto Inn where it has been used for a large spacecraft-like feature looming high above the entrance hall.

Added to the fact that bamboo comes in a number of different varieties and finishes, the approach adopted by craftpersons in Beppu is as diverse and as flexible as the material itself, a fact which is born out by the enormous variety of goods available.

Sun-bleached bamboo is, however, one of the more individual types of processed bamboo used in Beppu. Culms are cut in late autumn and early winter, and cleaned before being sun-bleached by standing groups in wigwam fashion in the strong winter sunlight. The culms are then split into appropriate widths and woven up into the most intriguing baskets and dishes which have a highly graphic quality

defying their three-dimensional reality.

Ultimately, the bamboo ware of Beppu is as interesting and as diverse as the island of Kyushu itself and both this spa and its bamboo demand a great deal more attention than they are currently afforded.



(In cooperation with the
JAPAN TRADITIONAL
CRAFT CENTER)

TABLE TALK

KABARA



Last summer was abnormally cold and the Japanese rice harvest was the lowest in postwar history. As an urgent measure, the government decided to allow emergency imports of rice. These imports were mixed with home-grown brandname rice before being put on the market causing quite a stir among consumers even before the rice went on sale, and leading to major social unrest which might best be described as the "Heisei Rice Uproar."

In particular, Thai rice was singled out for attack, and for days the mass media was consumed with this issue. Perhaps the protest from the everyday consumer came as a shock to Thailand—the top world rice exporter. What came to the fore was the close-mindedness of the Japanese toward things that are different—indeed a very thought-provoking event.

The interesting thing though is, amid all the commotion, restaurants that

serve Thai rice have managed to enjoy a continuous popularity with customers.

KABARA is one restaurant where top-rank chefs hired from first-class Bangkok hotels are given full reign to display their skills. Since opening, it has maintained itself as a high-class Thai restaurant distinguished by its fine taste, minus the spicy aroma or loud ethnic decor that are the characteristic of most Southeast Asian restaurants. Instead a composed atmosphere with a touch of chicness can be found. The best part is the full menu of rich traditional Thai dishes.

In Thai cuisine, one dish that is especially famous is thom yum kung. This is a shrimp soup made from nam pla (a sauce made from pickled fish), wild lime leaves, the typical Southeast Asian herb lemon grass, coriander leaves and other ingredients. So delicious is the soup that it is known, in line with French bouillabaisse and Chinese shark fin soup, as one of the world's three major soups. The soup is mild yet moderately spicy, and if you begin with it, you will come to appreciate the multi-layered taste of Thai cuisine.

Almost as famous as thom yum kung is the Thai curry called kaeng which comes in red, yellow and green and is eaten over rice. For those who cannot handle spicy curries, kaeng cooked in coconut milk is more mild.

Then there is rice and noodles which are typical menus of Thai cuisine. When served, be sure to eat the noodles with the nam pla placed at your table. Together, you can also add a dash of crushed peanuts, granu-

lated sugar and vinegar with red peppers to a flavor of your liking.

Although Thai cuisine is known as one of the spiciest in the world, there are also dishes that are not hot so you can sit back and relax. In fact, pineapple fried rice Thai style and omelettes with mince meat are tastily sweet.

Order a variety of dishes and you will come to see that there are many different flavors to Thai cuisine. Made with raw spices and herbs, the dishes are sweet and sour, and strong in fragrance. The fine taste that comes with such stimulating spiciness has indeed taken the foreigner captive. It is strange how after working up a good sweat and leaving the restaurant with a full stomach, one can't help but miss the spicy flavor all over again.

Hori Yoshimichi
Editor-in-chief

KABARA

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(03) 3498-0699

Hours: 6:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m.; closed Sunday

Spring Rolls: ¥1,200

Spicy Gelatine Noodle Salad: ¥1,600

Thom Yum Kung (shrimp soup): ¥2,400

Green Curry with Coconut Milk: ¥1,600

Pineapple Fried Rice: ¥1,400

