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## Travel

# Make it an Arima day

If you want the real onsen experience but are short on time, one of Japan's oldest hot spring towns is just a day trip away.

Text: Carla Avolio Images: Arima Hot Springs Tourism Association & Buddhika Weerasinghe

A charming village only 30 minutes from the heart of Kobe, Arima Onsen is one of Japan's oldest hot spring towns, with over 1,300 years of history. Legends have it that emperors, revered monks, and daimyos have been visiting Arima since the 6th century, seeking rejuvenation in the famed mineral springs.

For today's visitors, the most popular activity is still to enjoy a soak in the spring-fed baths dotted across town. But be warned: hot water can be stressful for the body, so authorities recommend a maximum of three baths per day and avoiding alcohol beforehand.

So to get the most out of your day at Arima, here's the battle plan: Find two or three baths you want to visit, intersperse these with sightseeing activities, then wind down with a drink at the end of the day.

Arima's compact layout means it can be explored entirely on foot, so it's a breeze to take in the local museums, temples, hot spring sources, parks and shops. Just make sure you visit the tourist information office to pick up the **Kobe Welcome Coupon** brochure, which contains excellent discounts for many of Arima's services.

### Bathing

The healing power of Arima's hot springs is legendary. Indeed, Japan's Ministry of the Environment states that the water contains seven out of the nine ingredients said to be effective in treating medical conditions. The most economical way to experience this is to visit the town's two public baths, which feature the two main types of hot spring water.

**Kin no yu** is home of the "golden" or *kinsen* water, which is stained a rich

orange from large amounts of iron. The bathhouse (8am–10pm, ¥650, 20% off with a coupon) has two piping-hot pools – 42°C and 44°C. It's wise to enter these hot baths slowly. Outside, a large foot spa can be enjoyed free of charge and you can fill your bottle with medicinal drinking water from the Taiko Hot Spring.

A 10-minute stroll down cobblestone streets leads to the "silver" or *ginsen* waters of **Gin no yu** (9am–9pm, ¥550, 20% off with coupon). Here, visitors can enjoy soaking in a crystal-clear pool set against a wall of smooth river stones, or relaxing in a fragrant wooden steam room. Bathers can experience water from both carbonic acid and radium springs.

Many hotels and ryokan also open their baths to the public. For utter luxury try **Goshobo** – one of Arima's oldest ryokan – where the bath flows from indoors to outdoors. Only a partial wall



### Arima Cider Teppo Water

No trip to Arima is complete without a taste of the town's signature drink – Arima Cider. The elegant, clear bottles, with the retro metal cap and label depicting a cannon, are stocked in fridges everywhere in town, including the public bathhouses. Unlike the traditionally apple juice-based ciders from Europe, Japan's ciders are clear and non-alcoholic, with a taste and fizziness most similar to Sprite. The bubbles in Arima Cider are known to pack a punch. It's said that back when the bottles were sealed with corks, the drink's carbonation would make them pop open like cannons. As arguably Japan's first cider, Arima Cider has its origins when townsfolk began drinking from the local spring by adding sugar to the naturally salty water. Today, although Arima Cider no longer contains onsen water, it's still a fine way to quench your thirst after a hot bath.



separates males and females, so couples can chat while remaining modestly submerged in the orange kinsen water (11am–2pm, ¥1,575 includes face towel).

**Arima Grand Hotel** is the quintessential onsen hotel experience. Guests lounge around in yukata robes day and night. This 228-room hotel is great for groups; friends can spend a day in the hotel's numerous baths, and then top it all off with a round of karaoke (10:30am–9pm, ¥3,500, including ¥2,000 credit redeemable for food in hotel; reservations essential for karaoke).

### Sightseeing

You'll need at least two hours rest between baths, so why not cool off in the museum- and temple-rich area that lies between the two public baths. **Taiko no Yudonokan** (9am–5pm, ¥200, 50% discount with coupon) houses the actual bathtub used by Hideyoshi Toyotomi, the 16th century ruler who famously loved Arima. **Onsen-ji Mishoshi-an** (9am–5pm, ¥100) explores the history of Arima and the important figures who helped the town develop. Directly opposite Kin no yu, the **Arima Toys & Automata Museum** (9:30am–6pm,

¥500, up to 50% discount with coupon) is a wonderland of European wooden toys that kids will love.

If you don't mind braving the cold, take a walk to the several hot spring vents scattered around town. See steam dramatically rising from **Tenjin Spring** or, in the south-east of town, feel cold water gushing from **Tansan Spring**, from which water is drawn to make Tansan Senbei crackers.

### Eating and Drinking

Tansan Senbei – strangely named “Carbonic Acid Cake” due to the use of carbonated spring water – are a light, delicious treat that, together with Arima cider, are the town's signature items. For something a little more substantial, **Bar Nurnberg** opposite Kin no yu sells snacks such as sausages and thick, hand-cut chips. Finally, enjoy a drink at the end of the day at **Sake Ichiba**, a cosy standing only bar on the main street where around 50 wines, beers and sakes are sure to keep you warm long into the night.



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