



Visiting the hot springs is an important part of Japanese culture | Photo source Ha Chan

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JAPANESE ONSEN BATH EXPERIENCE BECOMES VIRTUAL

● TRAVEL & TOURISM

Some public bath and hot springs establishments are recreating onsen and sento experiences for those at home

Spotted: Since quarantine rules have been put in place in Japan, onsen and sento public baths have lost the majority of their customer base. Arima Onsen and Kosugiyu are amongst those public baths that are getting creative in order to resolve this, with a virtual experience that recreates the relaxation of the hot springs within the home.

To help people to relieve quarantine stress, Arima Onsen, who have closed 90 per cent of their inns, have recorded 20-minute videos from five of its 31 locations and uploaded them to a YouTube channel. The idea is for viewers to feel like they are in an onsen, and with virtual reality headsets they can enjoy an immersive experience with sounds of running water, falling cherry blossom petals and breeze amongst bamboo stands, all from the comfort of their homes and wherever they are in the world.

The Kosugiyu bathhouses have also come up with a similar solution, producing hour-long clips that provide a bather's-eye view of water flowing into a brimming bath. These videos have been viewed over one million times and have received many positive messages from viewers.

Arima is expecting three more inns to join the programme, with the hope that of all the onsen will eventually take part, and Kosugiyu has seen more than 50 public baths joining in, with more uploading clips on a daily basis.

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Takeaway:

Relaxing in a hot spring is an important part of Japanese culture. Studies have shown that 98 per cent of Japanese people visit them at least once a year, and therefore having the option to recreate this experience at home could prove popular. Maintaining beneficial cultural norms safely throughout the COVID-19 lockdown could play an important role in general mental and physical wellbeing.