

# AJISAI TEMPLE KOGEN-IN AND SNOW MONKEY PARK, NAGANO

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I spent two nights in Ajisai temple in Iiyama, Nagano. I enjoyed much the atmosphere in and outside of the temple. It is located in a hill next to ski center with nice view down to the village. Everything was so green! The place and the people made me relaxed and after night full of fresh air and nature sounds I felt energized (what I'm usually not in the mornings). Family was very hospitable and the kids were sweet. It was easy to take contact with everyone and even the kids, who were a bit shy at first, started to play with me. I also learned some new things about Buddhism, could attend morning pray and ate every day delicious food made in temple. The prayer was even written open to me! We only had small language barrier that kept me asking very hard questions.



Rooms are simple and guests sleep on futon. Or on two futon like I did... I was travelling with a person on a wheelchair and even though the temple is not very accessible, the family helped us to get over too high steps. In the mornings we got delicious and filling breakfast and in the evenings delicious and even more filling dinner. I didn't take a photo of the first dinner which had awesome filled vegetables and lot of other things. Actually both dinners had so many side dishes that I didn't eat rice at all. In this temple eating meat is also okay, but I loved the amount of vegetables I've been missing in my Asian trip so much. Even the "sashimi" on the photo was actually made of some vegetable. They also asked if I eat everything and I believe they would have made delicious dinner even though I would have had some restrictions.



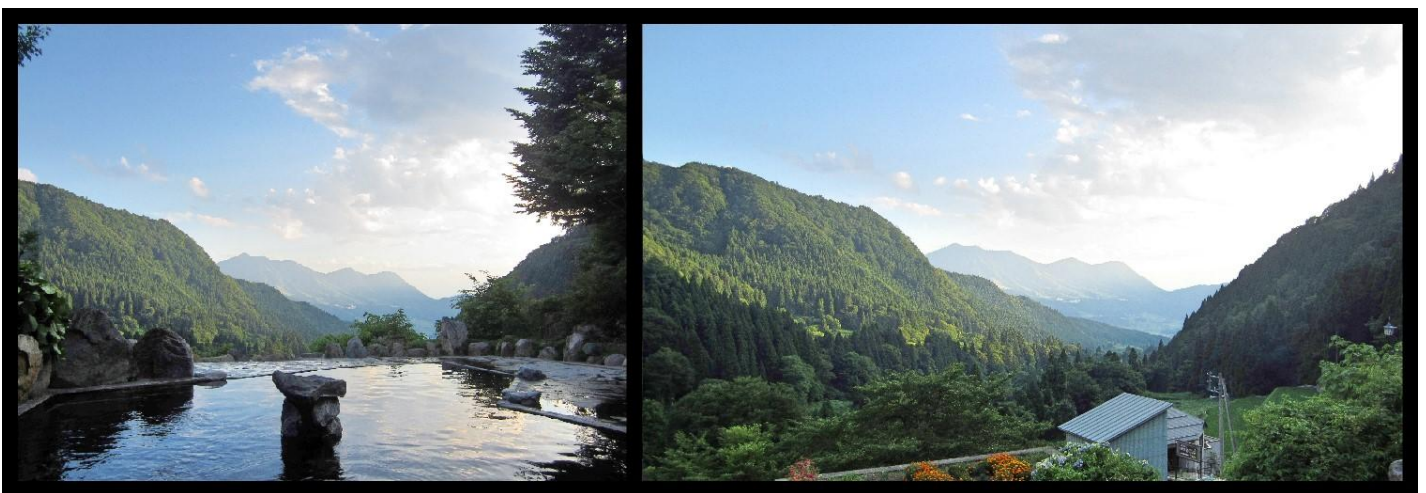




During the stay I went to Snow Monkey Park to see monkeys which I like a lot. During the summer season the park is not that full of people, the peak season is winter when one can see monkeys taking the bath in the hot spring. Now they stayed mostly away from it – it was hot enough without taking a bath. But it was nice to see the monkeys just relaxing, taking a nap, cleaning each other, wandering around. I could have been sitting there for an hours just enjoying the nice weather and following the life of monkeys. They are used to be near people but one still shouldn't go to touch or feed them. They are not pets even though especially the smallest monkeys make me feel like playing with them. The park is not big but it is nice in the middle of the nature. To get there one has to walk 1.6 kilometers but the road is easy and nice in the middle of the forest. Of course I don't know the condition of the road during the winter time. On the way there are also some information about life of monkeys.



Near the temple is onsen (Japanese hot spring, public bath) for the people. It is basic one with one inside and one outside pool. Near the area there are also other onsens and one of those have a stunning view from the outside pool. Only thing that made the bath a bit complicated was that the shower were in the other building with inside pool. I went at first outside pool and after I got ready I realized I have to dress up again to get to the other building to have a shower. And then after shower to dress up again that I can go to outside pool. Yukata would be good in here!



I really enjoyed the atmosphere of the places (temple, city, park...) and the nature that was surrounding us all the time. During two nights stay I didn't find anything to complain about. I mentioned that the room in the temple is very simple so it didn't make me feel like staying there very long during the day. But I don't even want to spend my holiday trip inside of my room anyway, so it really was good enough for sleeping. Also the people who want to stay in a temple probably are not looking for a hotel room with extremely big bed and all the fancy things. In a temple things are honestly what they are. Not trying to be very fancy but good enough to make guests comfortable. For some people nocturnal sounds can be problem but for me those are just energizing. I really would like to sleep there every night! Thank you!