

Izumi Kuwano in the grounds of Tamanoyu, where guests can enjoy flowers and other seasonal delights



## SERIES

*Yamato  
Nadeshiko*

# The Quintessence of Hospitality

Located in Oita Prefecture, on Japan's southern island of Kyushu, Yufuin is one of Japan's best-known *onsen* (hot spring) resorts and attracts 3.8 million tourists every year. Of the countless *onsen* inns around Yufuin, Tamanoyu is one of the most popular. Established in 1953, the inn is renowned for its outstanding hospitality, beautiful gardens, and exquisite food. *The Japan Journal's* Osamu Sawaji went to talk to **Izumi Kuwano**, president of Tamanoyu and current chairperson of the Yufuin-Onsen Tourism Association.

## What makes Yufuin so special?

**Izumi Kuwano:** Many *onsen* towns around Japan are little more than a collection of hotels, inns and gift shops. Here in Yufuin however, those facilities are mixed in with houses where regular people live, rice paddies and fields, as well as lots of unique cafés and galleries. The town is really compact too, so you can walk anywhere. We also have beautiful natural scenery, with stunning views of Yufu-dake mountain, which towers over the town, and the surrounding

countryside. On top of all that, we have a full calendar of cultural events all year round, including film, art and music.

Tourists also come to Yufuin from outside Japan, particularly countries such as South Korea and China. Overseas visitors often comment that Yufuin is a really charming town. We even get repeat visitors coming over for a second or third time.

## When you welcome guests to Tamanoyu, which aspects of hospitality do you particularly focus on?

I think that giving guests a sense of the current season in Yufuin is a key part of hospitality. For instance, we always have decorations linked to seasonal events in the inn and serve dishes made from local seasonal ingredients. That might include vegetables grown by nearby farmers, seafood from the waters around Oita or the local specialty Bungo beef, which is reared right here in Oita Prefecture. More unusual ingredients include *sasanaba* mushrooms, which we use in dishes in the fall. These have an extremely rich aroma, so they're something of a delicacy like truffles.

As members of staff, we also try to maintain a

sense of distance so that our guests feel more relaxed. Rather than bombarding our guests with detailed information about their meals or the gardens, we just make sure that we can answer any question that our guests may ask. We often get asked about the flowers in our gardens for instance, so we all spend time reading books and learning about flowers.

Overseas guests tend to be most impressed by the plants and flowers in our gardens. They really enjoy looking out at the gardens while eating or drinking in our bar.

## You took over from your father in 2003. Have you made any changes from a feminine perspective at Tamanoyu since then?

Whereas my father planted lots of trees around the grounds to create a woodland feel, I have planted lots of flowers instead. As I mentioned a moment ago, we like to use flowers to give our guests a sense of the current season. I like drinking too, so I created a bar area where women can feel comfortable having a

drink, even if they're on their own. As a mother myself, another thing I wanted to do was create somewhere for children to come and stay. That's why we've done things like putting more children's picture books in our lounge areas.

## What is your vision for Tamanoyu in the future?

We currently have seventeen rooms spread across our 10,000m<sup>2</sup> grounds here at Tamanoyu. Over the next few years, we are hoping to reduce the number of rooms by around two so that we can have more greenery. We want to create spaces in which guests can listen to music, read books, drink a cup of tea, or just come together and experience the unique culture

of Yufuin.

As people are getting more and more health conscious these days, we also want to help our guests stay healthy. For instance, we are thinking of offering healthy food options and working with the local hospital in Yufuin to provide preventive medicine support services.