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From balneotherapy to Zen meditation, Japanese hotels embrace authentic healing practices





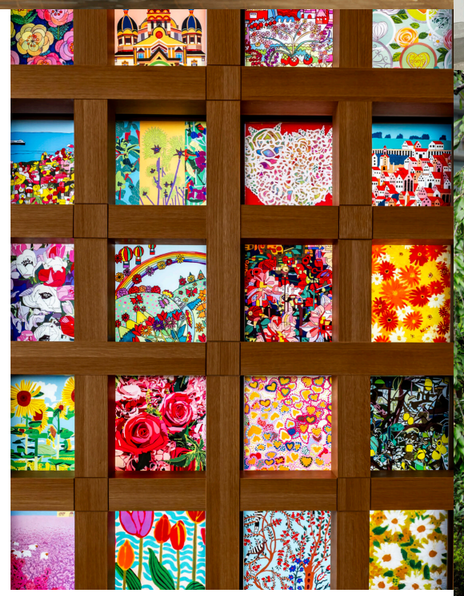






PHOTOGRAPHS: AMAN; HOTEL THE MITSUI KYOTO; IMPERIAL HOTEL, KYOTO; KOMBU HOUSE, TOYAMA; PASONA GROUP INC; WATAYA BESSO, SAGA

Clockwise from below: Hall Kimi at The Pasona Natureverse Retreat; onsen at Amanemu; Wataya Besso's exterior; sea bream dish at Ren in the Imperial Hotel, Kyoto; courtyard garden at Hotel The Mitsui Kyoto; restored machiya Kombu House



Beneath the streets of Gion, restoration and balance are the focus of The Spa at the **Imperial Hotel, Kyoto**, the ancient Japanese capital's newest historic landmark. Located inside the restored 1936 Yasaka Kaikan – a nationally important building reopened in spring 2026 as part of the new hotel – the spa is inspired by the spirit of hospitality and the refined aesthetic of Gion Kobu, Japan's most prestigious geisha district. Signature experiences begin with a monkō incense-appreciation ritual and the sound of Japanese bells, easing guests into treatments, from sound meditation to hot-stone massage.

Designed by architect Shigeru Ban and opened this summer on Awaji Island in the Seto Inland Sea, luxury wellness resort **The Pasona Natureverse Retreat** has launched a four-day programme focused on sleep. Twenty three of its 57 rooms feature high-tech sensor beds that monitor sleep vitals and adjust automatically to move guests into the optimal position for better rest. The data gathered is used by the medical team to create bespoke wellness plans that also utilise thalassotherapy, shiatsu, herbal-steam baths and Zen meditation, as well as the hotel's plant-based and low food-mile restaurants – steered by chefs with no fewer than six Michelin stars between them.

Deep rest is also the focus of the Onsen Healing Journey Retreat offered at **Hotel The Mitsui Kyoto**, one of the few hotels in the ancient city with its own hot spring source. The one- or two-night stay is based on a bespoke programme crafted by the spa concierge that variously includes guided breathing with singing bowls, a unique Japanese mugwort steam bath and a camellia oil treatment by Kazurasei, a historic Kyoto firm beloved by Kyoto geisha. The complementary menu leans heavily into fermentation. In December, sister property **Hotel The Mitsui Hakone** will open in the Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park, with interiors by Yabu Pushelberg and a thermal spring spa fed by the hotel's own source in Kowakudani Onsen.

A decade after putting Mie prefecture on the map for global travellers, **Amanemu** has deepened its connection with its locale with the introduction of a wellness programme inspired by the Shikinen Sengu renewal ritual that takes place at nearby Ise Jingu – Japan's most important Shinto shrine, dedicated to the sun goddess Amaterasu. The three-night Essence of Tokowaka retreat utilises yoga, acupuncture and moxibustion to guide the body and mind through cycles of renewal aimed at restoring balance and energy circulation. Guests recalibrate in the stunning setting of Amanemu's vast spa complex, with its two large, open-air onsen naturally heated to 36-42°C.

Luxury ryokan **Wataya Besso** in the hot-spring town of Ureshino in Kyushu's Saga prefecture has been transformed into a cutting-edge "onsen longevity" complex, by its dynamic third-generation owner, Yoshimoto Kohara. Reviving the ancient tradition of onsen resorts as centres of healing, the ryokan's yakuhaku programme also embraces Ureshino's 500-year history of tea cultivation in its preventative-medicine programmes curated by experts in Eastern medicine and medicinal ingredients.

Kombu kelp is the surprising inspiration for an immaculately restored private machiya lodging, with a bar and spa salon, opened in Toyama prefecture on the Sea of Japan coast. Located on a historic trade route that brought kelp from Hokkaido to ports across Japan – and gave rise to Toyama's rich dashi and kelp-based cuisine – **Kombu House** in Takaoka City sleeps five and offers a wellbeing programme that includes kelp baths and seaweed beauty treatments combined with kombu-themed cuisine, dashi cocktails and kelp-infused craft gin in its Kombu Bar.

CONTACTS BOOK

Imperial Hotel, Kyoto
imperialhotel.co.jp/en/kyoto
The Pasona Natureverse Retreat
thepasona.com
Hotel The Mitsui Kyoto and
Hotel The Mitsui Hakone *hotelthemitsui.com*
Amanemu *aman.com*
Wataya Besso *wataya.co.jp/en*
Kombu House *kombuhouse.net*