



# MAEBASHI FOCUS

Coordinator for International Relations (CIR) Newsletter



I first experienced an onsen during a high school senior class trip when we stayed at a ryokan in Hakone. I became a huge fan of onsen ever since then, but when I visited Takaragawa Onsen last October with others and Ikaho Onsen this March with a friend, I still felt some discomfort. I may simply prefer to bathe alone, but I also suspect bath culture is less prominent in Hawaii than it is in Japan. Perhaps the reason for the discomfort I felt lies in the possibility that this custom of bathing doesn't exist in Hawaii.

Many people in Hawaii take showers, and I gather that very few take baths. Natural onsen and community baths are also hard to find. Many people around me say that being completely naked in the same space with strangers would feel horribly awkward, and even more so with one's family or friends. Even my uncle, who has been to Japan multiple times, is not keen about onsen. Apparently, he loses all will to bathe in one upon remembering that everyone's private areas are swishing in the same water. On the other hand, some Japanese people feel that a shower alone is not enough to relieve stress and fatigue. Bathing in an onsen with friends is not embarrassing; rather, one is able to talk about topics normally difficult to bring up. After hearing these opinions, I felt a strong cultural difference between Hawaii, where people usually wear more revealing clothing, and Japan, where many people feel no shame towards bathing in public. Very interesting, wouldn't you say?

