



JAPAN'S TASTY SECRETS

*Local food that
satisfies the world's most
demanding eaters*

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You like Japanese food?

Think you've already tried the best that Japan has to offer? It might be time to think again.

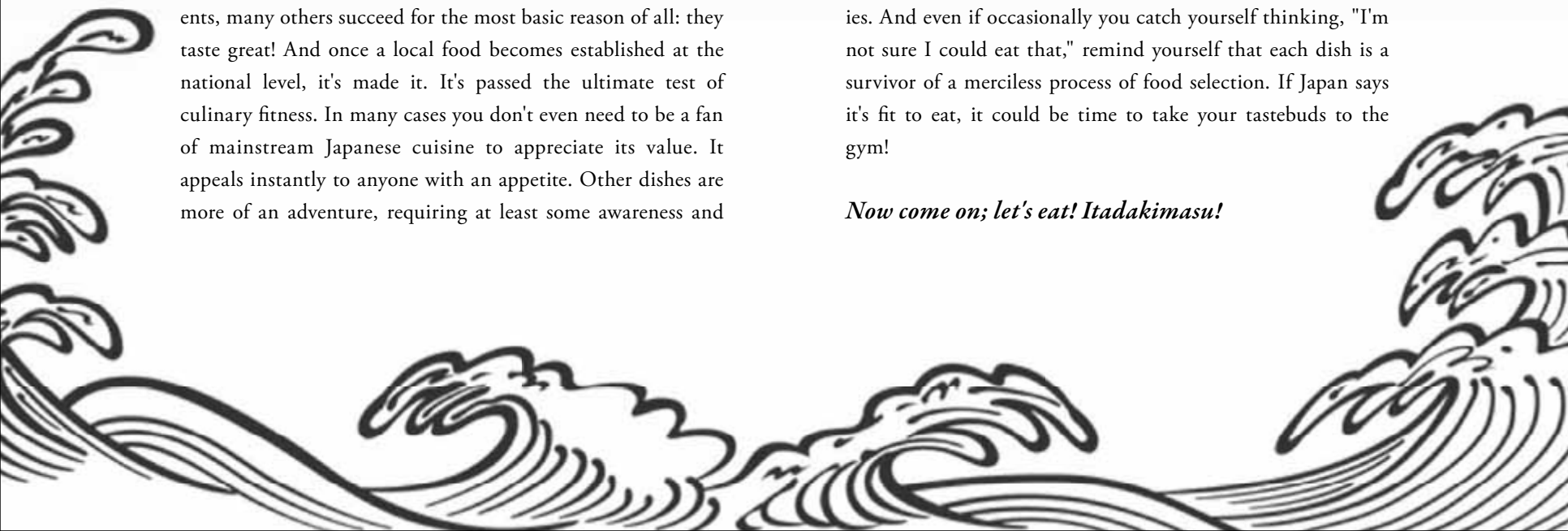
Japan is packed with delicious dishes. All over the country people are constantly cooking up new ways to satisfy a nation's hunger for culinary perfection. Hundreds of gourmet treats come and go, some starting out as a local favorite and then sweeping the land. Occasionally a food fad will last, or maybe the nation grows to love a local delicacy over a period of years. The greatest success stories are rewarded with a place in the nation's heart.

While various dishes are popular for showcasing local ingredients, many others succeed for the most basic reason of all: they taste great! And once a local food becomes established at the national level, it's made it. It's passed the ultimate test of culinary fitness. In many cases you don't even need to be a fan of mainstream Japanese cuisine to appreciate its value. It appeals instantly to anyone with an appetite. Other dishes are more of an adventure, requiring at least some awareness and

appreciation of Japanese ingredients and their applications. And one or two delicacies may strike you as extreme cuisine: enjoyable only by those whose palate is completely attuned to the full range of tastes and textures found in Japan, surely the world's most diverse culinary culture.

That easy-to-extreme diversity is evident even in our initial selection of local cuisines loved all over Japan—but you probably won't have to read long before something gets your mouth watering. Our second selection focuses on food that has won a loyal local following in the region where it originated. Here, too, you will find many dishes that can be—or already are—cherished across regional or national boundaries. And even if occasionally you catch yourself thinking, "I'm not sure I could eat that," remind yourself that each dish is a survivor of a merciless process of food selection. If Japan says it's fit to eat, it could be time to take your tastebuds to the gym!

Now come on; let's eat! Itadakimasu!





Hokkaido
Tohoku
Kanto
Chubu
Kansai
Chugoku
Shikoku
Kyushu
Okinawa

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Hokkaido | 17 Ishikawa Prefecture | 33 Okayama Prefecture |
| 2 Aomori Prefecture | 18 Fukui Prefecture | 34 Hiroshima Prefecture |
| 3 Iwate Prefecture | 19 Yamanashi Prefecture | 35 Yamaguchi Prefecture |
| 4 Miyagi Prefecture | 20 Nagano Prefecture | 36 Tokushima Prefecture |
| 5 Akita Prefecture | 21 Gifu Prefecture | 37 Kagawa Prefecture |
| 6 Yamagata Prefecture | 22 Shizuoka Prefecture | 38 Ehime Prefecture |
| 7 Fukushima Prefecture | 23 Aichi Prefecture | 39 Kochi Prefecture |
| 8 Ibaraki Prefecture | 24 Mie Prefecture | 40 Fukuoka Prefecture |
| 9 Tochigi Prefecture | 25 Shiga Prefecture | 41 Saga Prefecture |
| 10 Gunma Prefecture | 26 Kyoto Prefecture | 42 Nagasaki Prefecture |
| 11 Saitama Prefecture | 27 Osaka Prefecture | 43 Kumamoto Prefecture |
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| 16 Toyama Prefecture | 32 Shimane Prefecture | |

Local dishes
loved by
the nation

Hokkaido

Map No.1

Hokkaido



Northern delights

Uni-ikura-don

*Rice bowl with
sea urchin and
salmon roe*

Hokkaido is renowned for its excellent seafood, especially uni (sea urchin) and ikura (salmon roe, often known as "red caviar"). These two delicacies, simply arranged on top of cooked rice in a generous-sized bowl, offer a superb contrast of textures and flavors. The firm globes of salty salmon roe complement the rich, melt-in-the-mouth softness of the sea urchin. Other favorite toppings for seafood rice-bowl dishes include crabmeat and scallops freshly caught off the coast of Hokkaido.

Hokkaido

Map No.1

Hokkaido



Curry so good you can spoon it up

Soup Curry

Is it soup, or is it curry? Who cares when this creation, originally concocted in Sapporo 30 years ago, tastes so smooth? As with ordinary chicken curry, chicken legs are cooked up with a hodgepodge of vegetables such as potatoes, carrots, or bell peppers. To this is added a broth made from beef, pork, chicken meat and vegetables — with a spoonful of miso stirred in to give it extra special zest.

Iwate

Map No.3

Tohoku



Cool noodles

Morioka Reimen

Chilled noodles

This dish was introduced to Morioka in 1954 by an immigrant from the north of the Korean Peninsula who opened a restaurant in the city. Alongside Korean barbecue, he served chilled Korean-style noodles, which soon became popular in the area. The semi-transparent noodles have a firm, al-dente texture and are served with plenty of savory broth made by boiling down beef and chicken.

Iwate

Map No.3

Tohoku



These spicy noodles are anything but flat

Morioka jaja-men

Morioka-style flat noodles

This dish of wide, flat noodles originated in northeast China and is said to have first gained popularity in Japan as a fast food served at outdoor stalls in the city of Morioka. The noodles are topped with a sauce of ground meat fried up with miso, along with slivers of cucumber and chopped scallions. You mix this up thoroughly and season with grated ginger, vinegar, garlic, and chili oil — extra zest guaranteed.

Miyagi

Map No.4

Tohoku



A better beef

Gyutan-yaki*Grilled beef tongue*

Compared with beef sirloin, the tongue is considered healthier because it is lower in calories and fat. Cut into thick slices and grilled until it is soft, the meat is usually seasoned simply with salt. Sendai was the first city in Japan where this dish was developed. There are many restaurants serving it, typically accompanied by rice cooked with barley grain, along with a bowl of beef tail soup.

Tochigi

Map No.9

Kanto



Scrumptious dumplings

Utsunomiya Gyoza*Meat dumplings*

Utsunomiya is not just the capital of Tochigi Prefecture; it's Japan's gyoza dumpling capital. Local people spend more on gyoza (Chinese jiaozi) dumplings than anywhere else in Japan. Tochigi is also Japan's largest producer of nira (garlic chives). These pungent greens are finely chopped, mixed with cabbage, garlic and ground pork, then wrapped in thin skins of rolled-out dough to form crescent-shaped dumplings. These may be pan-fried, boiled in water, or deep-fried.

Akita

Map No.5

Tohoku



Wok-fried sensation

Yokote Yakisoba*Stir-fried noodles*

This variation on the theme of stir-fried noodles was developed soon after the end of World War II in the city of Yokote, Akita Prefecture, as an afternoon snack for local children. Wheat flour noodles are wok-fried, seasoned with a sweetened Worcester-style sauce, then topped with a fried egg. The noodles are straight, rather than crinkly, and each serving comes with a relish of soy-pickled vegetable known as Fukujin-zuke.

Gunma

Map No.10

Kanto



Yummy yaki-manju

Yaki-manju*Grilled skewered dumplings*

Wheat flour is allowed to ferment in sake; this dough is formed into small dumplings, which are skewered, daubed with a sweet-savory miso-based sauce, then grilled over hot charcoal. Yaki-manju are a tradition dating back more than 150 years. To this day they are a popular snack food sold at street stalls on special occasions, such as cherry blossom parties or summer festivals.

Saitama

Map No.11

Kanto



Recession-proof grilled meats

Yakitori / Yakiton*Skewer-grilled chicken or pork*

In Higashi-Matsuyama, the specialty is morsels of pork skewered, dusted with salt, and grilled (much like yakitori chicken), then seasoned with a special miso mix made with a blend of over 10 spices. It's a custom that dates back to the 1950s, when stalls began cooking pork head meat mixed with chopped scallions as a more affordable substitute for chicken.

Kanagawa

Map No.14

Kanto



Pleasure in simplicity

Yokosuka Kaigun-kare*Yokosuka Navy curry*

Curry was introduced to Japan in the late 19th century. It soon gained massive popularity in the form of kare-raisu (curry with rice), a dish that was adopted by the Japanese naval base in Yokosuka. Incorporating meat and vegetables, it provided good nutritional balance and was easy to prepare. Besides being served at restaurants in the city, Yokosuka Navy Curry is now sold in packages for preparing at home.

Tokyo

Map No.13

Kanto



Tokyo-style hot-plate pancake

Monja-yaki*Griddle-fried mixed pancake*

This is the Tokyo equivalent to okonomi-yaki ("anything you like" pancakes), which are a specialty of Kansai and Hiroshima. The batter for monja-yaki is more liquid than for okonomi-yaki, and the seasonings (such as Worcestershire sauce) are mixed into the batter rather than added after cooking. Originally a between-meals snack food, monja-yaki is prepared on a wide metal hotplate in front of the diners, and is normally eaten with a small metal spatula.

Shizuoka

Map No.22

Chubu



Fried firm and flavorful

Fujinomiya Yakisoba*Fujinomiya fried noodles*

What makes the pan-fried noodles in Fujinomiya different is their firm texture. First they're given a special steam treatment, and then cooked over a hotplate with slivers of cabbage and pork oil cake. For extra flavor, just pour on the Worcestershire sauce and garnish with a sprinkle of powdered fish (sardine or mackerel).

Osaka

Map No.27

Kansai



Whatever—it's delicious

Okonomi-yaki*"Anything you like"
pancakes*

Okonomi-yaki originated in the Kansai region around Osaka during the early 20th century as a snack food for children served at simple food counters. Sliced scallions and other ingredients were mixed with a basic wheat-flour batter and cooked over a griddle. After World War II, the dish caught on widely in the region. It acquired the name okonomi-yaki ("grilled whatever-you-like") because a wide variety of ingredients were used in addition to scallions, including meat, fish, shellfish and cabbage.

Osaka

Map No.27

Kansai



Is anything as Osakan as octopus?

Tako-yaki*Grilled octopus dumplings*

A time-honored custom in the Osaka area is to cook wheat-flour batter in special metal hot plates with small semicircular recesses. Morsels of cooked beans, konnyaku jelly, pickles or other leftovers might be added to give extra flavor. The batter is scooped and turned while cooking to form little savory spheres. The standard filling these days is small cubes of octopus meat. Tako-yaki is an ever-popular snack food sold from street stalls.

Hyogo

Map No.28

Kansai



Tako-yaki with a twist

Akashi-yaki*Akashi-style octopus
dumplings*

The tako-yaki (grilled octopus dumplings) prepared in Akashi differ from those in Osaka in that the dough is cooked much softer and the hot plate is made of copper. The grilled octopus dumplings are served on small wooden boards, with a thin, runny Worcester-style sauce.

Hyogo

Map No.28

Kansai



Superlative steak

Kobe-gyu Suteki*Kobe beef steak*

Famous throughout Japan, Kobe beef is now known around the world for its marbled appearance and tender, melt-in-the-mouth texture. Only superior meat from Japanese black steer reared in Hyogo Prefecture can be classified as Kobe Beef.

Hiroshima

Map No.34

Chugoku



Crêpe-style creations

Hiroshima Okonomi-yaki

*Hiroshima-style
"anything you like"
pancakes*

What makes Hiroshima-style okonomi-yaki distinctive is that the dough is first cooked into thin, crêpe-like pancakes, and the other ingredients are then stacked on top. Along with meat and vegetables, noodles are often added too, producing a thick, highly substantial pancake. This is usually slathered with plenty of thick, sweet-savory Worcester-style sauce.

Nagasaki

Map No.42

Kyushu



No ordinary noodles

Champon and Sara-udon

*Noodles in broth; crispy
fried noodles*

These two noodle dishes are both made with special noodles unique to Nagasaki. For champon, seasonal ingredients such as seafood and vegetables are pan-fried in lard, then added to a broth made from chicken and pig bones. The noodles are then cooked in this soup. For sara-udon, the noodles are fried crisp in oil, then covered with a topping of seafood and other ingredients in a thick sauce. Both recipes show a strong Chinese influence.

Fukuoka

Map No.40

Kyushu



Salty, spicy, special

Karashi-mentaiko

Spicy Alaska pollack roe

Introduced from the Korean Peninsula, this is a specialty of Hakata. The roe of the Alaska pollack is salted and marinated in a liquor spiced with red chili pepper and other seasonings. Mentaiko is eaten in many ways such as in ochazuke (rice drenched in green tea), as a filling in rice balls, or as a seasoning for spaghetti.

Nagasaki

Map No.42

Kyushu



Hamburger heaven

Sasebo Burger

Sasebo is a port city in Nagasaki Prefecture that is home to a US naval base. Around 1950, local people were taught how to make American hamburgers, and then adapted the recipe to produce their own variations, using ingredients that were available locally. This was how the distinctive Sasebo-style burgers were created. One feature is that the burgers should always be made to order, not prepared ahead of time.

Kumamoto

Map No. 43

Kyushu



School noodles

Taipien*Dry noodle soup*

Taipien is a soup containing harusame (cellophane noodles) that has become so popular in the region that it appears on school lunch menus. Pork, shrimp, squid, cabbage, carrots, onions, spring onions and other vegetables are sautéed, then poured over dry harusame. This is then covered with a soup stock simmered from chicken bones and pork bones.

Kagoshima

Map No. 46

Kyushu



Swish those strips

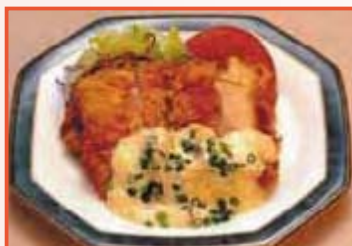
Kurobuta no Shabushabu*Black hog shabu-shabu*

Kagoshima's specialty Berkshire black hogs have meat that is delicate and tender, with a fine texture. Because they are raised on feed containing sweet potatoes, the meat is light and tasty—savory, flavorful and sweet. Cooked in the shabu-shabu way, briefly swished around in a piping-hot broth, then dipped in soy sauce, this is the best way to enjoy the real taste of Kagoshima pork.

Miyazaki

Map No. 45

Kyushu



Deep-fried delight

Chicken Nanban*Marinated deep-fried chicken*

This dish of batter-fried chicken was developed by a restaurant in Nobeoka City. The idea of garnishing it with tartar sauce was added later by a restaurant in Miyazaki City. The recipe calls for chicken meat to be dipped in a batter of wheat flour and eggs and deep-fried until it is crispy. Then it is marinated in a sweet-and-sour sauce, and seasoned with the tartar sauce.



L

ocal favorites:
a taste of
place



Now that we've whetted your appetite, let's take a closer look at some delicious dishes that are intimately linked with the region they come from.

Hokkaido

Map No.1

Hokkaido



Mutton masterpiece

*Jingisukan**Genghis Khan barbecue*

Strips of mutton that has been marinated in a specially prepared sauce are cooked on a helmet-shaped, conical metal griddle, with the lid tapering upwards to a point in the middle. Sheep farming developed in Hokkaido for wool, and this style of cooking was developed as a way to appreciate the delicious flavor of the meat. Usually it is served with a selection of vegetables and/or bean sprouts.

Hokkaido

Map No.1

Hokkaido



A fishermen's classic

*Chanchan-yaki**Chanchan fry-up*

For this classic fishermen's recipe, you need one salmon (gutted) and a whole atka mackerel, along with cabbage, mushrooms and other favorite vegetables. Chop, mix and fry over a hotplate, then add a miso-seasoned broth and simmer until it's done. You can prepare it at home or enjoy it in a local restaurant. But chanchan-yaki tastes best when it's cooked on a hot iron plate over an open fire right on the seashore.

Hokkaido

Map No.1

Hokkaido



Salmon hot pot

*Ishikari-nabe**Ishikari hot pot*

The name of this seafood hot pot comes from the Ishikari region of Hokkaido. The recipe was developed by local fishermen who prepared it on their boats. Chunks of salmon are simmered with a variety of ingredients, such as tofu, konnyaku jelly, Chinese cabbage, and onions in a broth flavored with savory miso. As a further seasoning, a pinch of sansho pepper is usually added.

Aomori

Map No.2

Tohoku



Seafood stew

*Ichigo-ni**"Strawberry" stew*

The name of this seafood stew derives from its color. Sea urchin and abalone are placed in hot water or a savory dashi broth and brought to a boil. This is seasoned with salt and a little soy sauce, and sprinkled with finely chopped green shiso herb. The pink of the sea urchin is thought to evoke the color of strawberries in the dawn mist. An essential dish on formal occasions in this part of Japan.

Aomori

Map No.2

Tohoku



Broken cracker soup

*Sembei-jiru**Wheat cracker soup*

A soup made with Nanbu-senbei, thin wheat crackers that are a traditional specialty of the Nanbu region of Tohoku. Seasonal vegetables and mushrooms are pan-fried, then cooked in a chicken broth seasoned with a dash of soy sauce. The crackers are broken into pieces, added to the soup and simmered some more. Nanbu-senbei crackers are also eaten on their own as a popular snack in this part of Japan.

Iwate

Map No.3

Tohoku



Delicious damaged dumplings

*Hittsumi**Torn dumpling stew*

Wheat flour is mixed with water, kneaded into a dough and left to stand for an hour or two. It is then rolled out into thin sheets, which are torn by hand into small pieces. These are cooked together with seasonal vegetables as a stew, and flavored with soy sauce. There are various local names for this soup, such as suiton, tsumire, tottenage, or hatto. But the common name is hittsumi (literally "torn") dumpling stew.

Iwate

Map No.3

Tohoku



The noodles keep coming!

*Wan-ko soba**Soba noodles in many small bowls*

This is a style of eating soba (buckwheat) noodles that is traditional to the cities of Morioka and Hanamaki. The noodles are served in small lacquered bowls (wan-ko), in portions not much bigger than a mouthful, which you season with a little soy sauce and some zesty condiments. The server will keep refilling your bowl and urging you to eat more. Every year, contests are held to see who can eat the most servings of wan-ko soba in a fixed time.

Miyagi

Map No.4

Tohoku



Goosey, chewy, yummy

*Zunda-mochi**Sticky rice with mashed green beans*

Mochi (pounded sticky rice) is a very popular traditional food in Miyagi. The prefecture has more than 50 different ways of eating it, of which zunda-mochi is the best known. Edamame (young green soybeans from the pod) are boiled, then mashed to a paste and sweetened with sugar, with a little salt to taste. The pounded sticky rice is covered with a layer of the green soybean mash: this is zunda mochi.

Miyagi

Map No. 4

Tohoku



Savory salmon and rice

Harako-meshi

Salmon roe rice

A specialty of autumn in Miyagi, this dish is made from salmon caught in local rivers. First thin slices of salmon are simmered in a broth prepared from soy sauce, sake, mirin (sweet rice liquor), and sugar. The broth is then used to cook the salmon roe. Finally the salmon and roe are scattered over rice that has been cooked in the same savory broth. Harako is another word for ikura (salmon roe).

Akita

Map No. 5

Tohoku



Super stretch noodles

Inaniwa Udon

Inaniwa udon noodles

Inaniwa udon noodles are made not by cutting the dough, but by stretching it. Because the noodles are fine, they do not take much time to cook. They have a nice chewy texture and slip down the throat very easily. In winter, they are usually eaten in hot broth, or added to hot pots. In the heat of summer, they are eaten chilled with a dipping sauce. They are refreshing and satisfying all year round.

Akita

Map No. 5

Tohoku



Dumpling on a stick

Kiritanpo-nabe

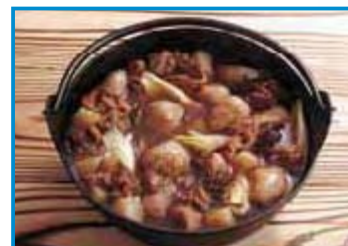
Cut tanpo hot pot

Freshly boiled rice is pounded to a paste, applied to thick skewers of Akita cedar wood, and then grilled over an open charcoal fire. These cylindrical dumplings (known as tanpo) are cut into smaller portions, then simmered in a bubbling hot pot prepared from the meat of Hinai chicken (a local breed of fowl for which the prefecture is famous). Other ingredients in kiritanpo-nabe include burdock, mushrooms, scallions, and seri (water dropwort) herb. The broth is seasoned with soy sauce.

Yamagata

Map No. 6

Tohoku



From the communal cauldron

Imo-ni

Simmered taro yam

For more than 300 years it has been a local custom for friends to hold outdoor gatherings at which they sit around a large cauldron and eat this dish. The basic ingredients are taro yam, konnyaku jelly, and scallions, simmered together in a broth. Other ingredients vary according to locality. In inland areas, beef is added, and the broth is seasoned with soy sauce. Along the coast (the Shonai region), pork is used, with miso as a seasoning.

Yamagata

Map No. 6

Tohoku



Chunky cod stew

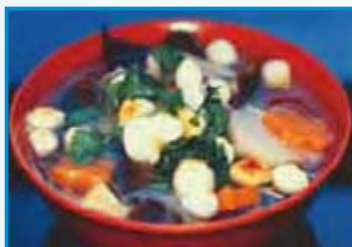
*Dongara-jiru**Dongara stew*

This is a winter dish, prepared from gray cod. The fish is cut into large chunks, including the bones and also the head and innards. To this are added scallions and tofu that have been cooked with miso, and iwa-nori (rock laver seaweed) is used as a seasoning. Adding daikon radish and sake lees makes the stew even more warming. In Yamagata, this is a dish that is often cooked at home.

Fukushima

Map No. 7

Tohoku



Auspicious country cuisine

*Ko-zuyu**Ko soup*

This clear soup is an essential dish served on auspicious occasions, such as at the new year, and at other ceremonial gatherings. It is made from dried scallop holdfasts, which are softened in dashi stock. Other ingredients include wheat gluten croutons (mame-fu), shiitake mushrooms, carrots, taro yams, kikurage fungus, and konnyaku jelly noodles. It is seasoned with soy sauce, salt, and sake, and should be served in bowls of red lacquer produced in Aizu-Wakamatsu.

Fukushima

Map No. 7

Tohoku



Choice pickled herring

*Nishin no sansho-zuke**Herring with
sansho pepper*

A traditional way to prepare herring so that it can be eaten year-round. The fish are first opened, cleaned, and dried. Then they are layered with leaves of sansho pepper in between and pickled in a liquor prepared from soy sauce, sake, vinegar, and sugar. In the old days, special ceramic serving bowls for pickled herring were used in the Aizu-Wakamatsu region, and were an integral part of a bride's trousseau. They are still produced by local ceramics craftsmen.

Ibaraki

Map No. 8

Kanto



Classic winter fish dish

*Anko-ryori**Anko dishes*

According to an old saying there are two classic winter hot pot dishes in Japan: pufferfish in the west of the country and anglerfish in the east. It is commonly said that apart from the bones, the whole of the anglerfish can be eaten. The best-known recipe is anglerfish hot pot, but other dishes include prepared anglerfish with a vinegar dressing and "mud broth" (using only the fish and vegetables, without adding any water).