

Food (long version)

Ise-Shima is proud of its fresh seafood and local dishes. The seafood has been deemed good enough for the imperial family since ancient times. However, it is possible for everyone to enjoy Ise-Shima's specialties these days.

The Japanese spiny lobster, or *Ise-ebi* in Japanese, is a specialty of Ise-Shima. Important food for auspicious occasions, its curved back and whiskers are a symbol of longevity. Fall and winter is the best season for Japanese spiny lobsters.

Delicious Ise-Shima abalone, caught by female divers known as *ama*, have been famous for a couple of thousand years. Two thousand years ago, Princess Yamatohime-no-mikoto, the founder of the *jinja* (Shinto shrine) complex Ise Jingu, is said to have declared the abalone of Kuzaki in Ise-Shima food fit for the deities. It can be enjoyed in a variety of ways. Slices of raw abalone sashimi have a chewy texture. Abalone grilled over a fire in an *ama* diver's hut, or in a restaurant, are softer and more delicate. Steamed abalone has a rich umami taste and is best paired with Japanese sake. Summer is the main season for abalone.

There are also many kinds of oysters. Creamy Matoya oysters are one winter delicacy. As the name suggests, they are farmed in Matoya Bay. Iwagaki oysters, on the other hand, are large oysters that can be eaten in the spring and summer months.

Furthermore, in spring, seasonal specials include red sea bream, and *wakame* and *hijiki* seaweed. Turban shells, horse mackerel, and conger eels are plentiful in summer. In the fall, sea bream, and Japanese Spanish mackerel are at their best. Sea cucumbers, blowfish, and seaweeds like *nori* are harvested in winter.

Tekonezushi was traditionally eaten for lunch by fishermen from Shima. Freshly-caught fish were sliced and soaked in sweetened soy sauce, then mixed with rice by hand. More recently, it has become a local specialty of Ise-Shima, a homemade dish served at celebrations and to guests.

Ise udon has been eaten by pilgrims visiting Ise Jingu for a long time. It is a dish consisting of soft, thick *udon* noodles served with a slightly sweet black sauce. Ise udon noodles are boiled for an hour to make them much softer. It is thought that the noodles were boiled like this to make it easier for tired travelers to eat and digest them.

Traditional sweets were developed for pilgrims visiting Ise Jingu. Visitors today can also enjoy these treats.

A more modern specialty of Ise-Shima are seafood burgers. Toba's "Toburgers" contain approved local ingredients such as Japanese spiny lobster and oysters. A wide range of Toburgers is available at various restaurants. Shima's bonito burger features a patty of crispy battered bonito, topped with shredded cabbage and served on a bun.

Daiozaki is also known for producing dried bonito. Even now, it is still produced using traditional methods by various companies. The fish are slowly smoked over a fire pit—a process that requires much time and patience. It is then used to make cooking stock or eaten as a snack that pairs well with Japanese sake.

The sacred *shinsen* meals offered to the deities at Ise Jingu are thought to be the origins of *washoku* (Japanese traditional cuisine). Both *shinsen* and *washoku* include a wide variety of foods such as rice, fish, seaweed, and seasonal fruits and vegetables. In Ise-Shima, visitors can enjoy a rich food culture, one which has been greatly appreciated for centuries.