

## ***Hamo* Daggertooth Pike Conger Eel**

### **Hofu gives a new lease of life to a traditional Kyoto delicacy**

The daggertooth pike conger (*hamo*) is a species of eel that grows up to two meters long. An aggressive animal with a pointed head, large mouth, and sharp teeth, it lives close to shore and is found in large numbers in the nutrient-rich waters at either end of the Inland Sea. Yamaguchi ranks in the top five places in Japan for its *hamo* catch, with Hofu having the biggest catch in the prefecture.

Traditionally, however, most of the *hamo* caught in Yamaguchi were sent to Kyoto, where the fish was prized by the aristocracy. Even today, *hamo* remains a must-have dish during Kyoto's Gion Festival in August. It is prized for its rich umami and for being fattier than fugu (pufferfish) without being oily.

### **An old favorite. A new start.**

In the early 2000s, the city of Hofu decided to stake a claim to its native fish and develop *hamo* into a local specialty to attract foodie pilgrims. The *Tenjin-hamo* brand was created and twelve local restaurants formed the Hamo-juku School to study techniques for cutting the fish—which has 1,200 bones!—and develop tasty new recipes.

Proximity to the sea means that *hamo* from Hofu is unusually fresh. Collaboration among restaurants, meanwhile, guarantees an unusual level of skill, creativity, and innovation among local cooks. Recent Hamo-juku initiatives include the application of nose-to-tail principles to *hamo* so that every part—from the swim bladder to the liver—can be eaten.

*Hamo* has now established itself on Japan's gourmet map. People come to Hofu not just to see Hofu Tenmangu Shrine and visit the historic residences of the Mohri clan, but also to feast like lords on delicious eel.

## **TENJIN-HAMO EEL QUICK FACTS**

- *Hamo* has 1,200 bones. As a result, it's very hard to prepare.

- *Hamo* is so difficult to prepare that Hofu fishmongers used to give it away for free.
- *Hamo* was a popular seasonal delicacy with the Kyoto aristocracy.
- *Hamo* season is from mid-May to mid-September—precisely when fugu is not available.
- *Hamo* in Hofu is far less expensive than in Kyoto—and fresher too.