

***Hamo* Daggertooth Pike Conger Eel**

A fish that's as difficult to prepare as it's delicious to eat

A Technical Challenge

The daggertooth pike conger eel, or *hamo*, has an astonishing 1,200 bones. Despite being a seasonal delicacy for Kyoto aristocrats, *hamo* was seldom eaten by ordinary families because few people had the know-how or equipment to cook it for themselves. To prepare *hamo*, you first need an unusually large, heavy, and expensive knife. This special knife is around thirty centimeters long, six centimeters wide, and made of two kinds of steel. You must then cut the bones with extreme precision, making eight cuts per centimeter to crush the bones and render them edible. Since the *hamo* season lasts only five months a year, practice time is limited and mastering the technique takes five years or more. Even the most expert cook needs around 15 minutes to cut the bones and prepare a single daggertooth pike conger eel.

The Full Monty

During *hamo* season from Mid-May to mid-September, restaurants in Hofu serve a full-course *hamo* meal with ten courses, eight of which feature *hamo*. During this meal, each guest will consume an entire fish. *Hamo* shabu-shabu, when you briefly swirl the fish in a pot of simmering water to cook it, offers a wonderful contrast of textures—soft white flesh, chewy collagen-rich skin, and crisp vegetables as well. It is also a feast for the eye, with the flesh swirling and swelling like a many-petalled peony as it cooks.

True gourmets will also appreciate *hamo* sashimi, a very labor-intensive dish. To make it possible to eat *hamo* raw, the cook has to make a series of diagonal cuts into the body and extract the bones with pincers. The restaurants in Hofu have also worked together to develop unique regional recipes such as fried *nanban*-marinated *hamo*, *hamo* swim bladder, and raw *hamo* liver with sesame oil and salt.