

## **Hiroshima *Okonomiyaki***

*Okonomiyaki*, literally meaning “cooked as you like,” is a savory, fried pancake-like dish popular across Japan. A large part of its appeal, besides its robust flavor, is the enjoyment of gathering in a casual restaurant to take turns cooking it atop a scorching hot *teppan* plate. Though the dish is also associated with the Kansai region, it is particularly beloved in Hiroshima, where its history is entwined with the city’s postwar recovery.

In Hiroshima, *okonomiyaki* restaurants number well over a thousand and can be found both as stand-alone shops and clustered together in locations such as Okonomimura (“Okonomiyaki Village”). This three-story establishment, which retains the atmosphere of the 1960s, consists entirely of *okonomiyaki* stands.

Hiroshima *okonomiyaki* is distinguished from other regional styles by its thin batter base, upon which ingredients are built up in layers rather than mixed together. Meat, seafood, egg, noodles, and vegetables are key ingredients, and the cabbage is piled far higher than in other types of *okonomiyaki*. These basic features aside, there is great freedom for diners to add whatever they like, as the name of the dish indicates.

This “free” approach to the dish derives from its origins as something eaten by Hiroshima’s citizens as they tried to rebuild their lives immediately after the war. Originally a traditional children’s snack called *issen yoshoku* (“one-coin Western food”), the dish was adapted and came to be eaten by people of all ages, with ingredients consisting of whatever was at hand. The dish was dubbed *okonomiyaki*, and soon had a special sauce concocted for it. Stalls and small restaurants serving *okonomiyaki*, often run by war widows, sprang up around the city and formed an important part of the recovering local economy.