

Fishing at Lake Ashi

Lake Ashi contains several species of edible fish, including rainbow trout, black bass, and brown trout, but it is best known for *wakasagi* (Japanese pond smelt). Introduced to Hakone in 1918 from Lake Kasumigaura in Ibaraki Prefecture, *wakasagi* are raised in local fisheries from March to May.

When the fishing season starts on October 1, the first catch is blessed by the priests of Hakone Shrine and presented to the emperor in Tokyo, as has been customary since 1955. This first happened after Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru (1878–1967) visited Lake Ashi to attend the unveiling of Hakone Shrine's Torii of Peace, a sacred gate built in 1952 to celebrate the signing of the Treaty of San Francisco that ended the Allied occupation of Japan. It is said that Yoshida enjoyed the fish he was served on that occasion, and eventually arranged for it to be presented at the imperial court.

About 3 tons of Lake Ashi *wakasagi* is produced annually. The fish is served mainly at local restaurants, where you can savor it grilled, deep-fried or as tempura.