

Izakaya Culture in Toyooka

The *izakaya*—Japan’s answer to the gastropub—is a fun and casual place where people can come to drink and eat with friends and colleagues. Adding an *izakaya* visit to your travels is a great opportunity to learn more about local cuisine and spirits, and the best way to enjoy it is by ordering a variety of dishes to share.

Downtown Toyooka happens to be home to a number of great *izakaya* serving up a variety of food options, including everything from fresh sashimi and *yakitori* to ramen and *soba* noodles. You’ll also find a wide variety of fresh seafood thanks to the town’s proximity to the Sea of Japan, as well as dishes made with Tajima Wagyu beef. Other seasonal favorites to try include *hamo*, a species of conger eel, which is a popular summer staple and is usually served grilled, raw, or in a *nabe* hot pot. Then there’s *shiro ika* (swordtip squid), which in summer is served raw as sashimi or fried tempura-style, and *hotaruika* (firefly squid) in early spring.

If you’re stuck on what to order, try some other general *izakaya* staples, including *kara-age* (fried chicken), *edamame* beans, tempura, *tamagoyaki* (Japanese rolled omelette), *yakitori* grilled chicken on skewers, and an assorted sashimi platter. If you are lucky and find regional specialties on an *izakaya* menu, don’t hesitate to order and enjoy your *izakaya* experience like a local. As for drinks, try seeing what local *sake* is available at your *izakaya* of choice. Other standard drinks include draft beer, highballs (a mix of whisky and soda), and *shochu* (a distilled liquor made from rice, barley or potatoes).