

Izushi Sara Soba

Izushi *sara soba* is a staple item in Izushi, the town that counts almost 50 restaurants that serve these delicious *soba* buckwheat noodles. What makes Izushi *soba* different? The difference is in how it is served, using many small plates (*sara*; generally five per order). This style is unique to this area and is a fun and photogenic way to eat the noodles. Before being served, Izushi *soba* is cooked, rinsed in cold water, and strained. Because the dish was traditionally considered more of a snack between meals rather than a full course meal, it was served on these small plates. People customarily ordered *soba* by saying how many plates they wanted to eat, then adding the condiments and dipping it into the sauce directly.

The origin of Izushi *sara soba* dates back to the Edo period (1603–1867) when the lords from both the Matsudaira clan of Izushi domain and the Sengoku clan of the Ueda domain in Shinshu (present-day Nagano Prefecture) switched territories in 1706. A *soba* maker moved along with the Sengoku clan and settled in Izushi, where the Shinshu technique of making *soba* was incorporated into Izushi's *soba*-eating style, resulting in what is known today as Izushi *sara soba*. Around the end of the Edo period, the *teshio-zara* (salt plate) style began, where *soba* noodles were sold by street stalls on small individual plates. When Izushi porcelain ware was later developed, *soba* began to be served on these small white plates. The current style of Izushi *sara soba* was established in the 1940s, and the number of restaurants specializing in this dish has continued to increase to this day.

Today, the typical condiments served with these noodles are *negi* (Welsh onion), wasabi, *tororo* (grated mountain yam), and a raw egg. Although five plates is the typical order for Izushi *sara soba*, diners can always opt to order more plates if they are still hungry. The meal is usually concluded with *soba yu*. A container of the still-warm water used to boil the *soba* noodles is served. This *soba yu*, mixed with the remains of the dipping broth in the dipping cup, makes for the perfect end to the meal. An adult, goes the local saying, can finish enough servings of *sara soba* to stack as high as the length of one's chopsticks.