

【Chichibu's All-Star Snack: Miso-Potato】

Miso-potato is a humble food with simple goals. Its ingredients—steamed potatoes, tempura batter, and miso sauce—are common in Japanese cooking, but in Chichibu they have been combined into a delicious, prize-winning local specialty with an engaging history.

In the mid-twentieth century, local farmers would eat a small meal known as *kojūhan* (“small lunch”) during mid-morning or mid-afternoon breaks. *Kojūhan* typically consisted of foods like miso-potato, which were easy to prepare, satisfying, and unpretentious.

A half-century later, the *kojūhan* tradition had almost died out. In 2007, a poll conducted by the regional revitalization initiative determined that half of all people over the age of 50 had never even heard the term. The organizers offered a free *kojūhan* sampling event, where portions of traditional *kojūhan* dishes were distributed. Miso-potato was very popular. The dish brought back fond memories for older people who knew the dish already, and those who tried it for the first time wanted to know where they could buy it. Two years later, miso-potato won the grand prize in Saitama Prefecture’s competition for “B-class gourmet cuisine” (*bii-kyū gotōchi gurume*), cheap and hearty dishes that often have regional associations. Soon, it began appearing in restaurants, convenience stores, and supermarkets all over the Chichibu region.

While the taste can vary slightly depending on where it is prepared, miso-potato typically consists of soft, flaky bites of potato coated in crisp tempura batter and covered with a salty-sweet miso sauce. To ensure the dish’s quality and authenticity, the Chichibu Chamber of Commerce and Industry requires sellers to be certified. As of 2019, there are 44 locations registered. Miso-potato is particularly popular in local *izakaya*, Japanese-style bars that serve small dishes to share over drinks.