

About the City of Obama

Obama is a city located on the Sea of Japan in Fukui Prefecture. Fukui borders four other prefectures: Kyoto, Shiga, Gifu, and Ishikawa. The city's coastal location has provided Obama with a bountiful supply of seafood for centuries. Its natural harbor also made it a hub of trade connecting Japan with China, Korea, and the rest of the Asian continent. Obama is a small city, with a population of approximately 30,000 and occupying 233.1 square kilometers, but it has had a profound influence on Japanese food culture, particularly through its role as part of historically important Wakasa.

Wakasa is the ancient provincial name for this and the surrounding regions, and is still used to describe the area. Wakasa is considered to be one of only three known "miketsukuni," or provinces that supplied foodstuffs to the court during the Nara period (710–794). The remains of a large-scale salt manufacturing operation dating to the seventh century were found in Wakasa. Wooden shipping tags found in the remains of Heijo Palace in Kyoto show that provisions like salt and sushi were regularly sent from Wakasa to the ancient capital. During the Edo period (1603–1868), the region was famed for its *aimono* cured and dried fish, primarily made with Wakasa willow flounder (*karei*) and horsehead tilefish (*guji*). Obama is still well known for its *aimono* products.

Kyoto's influence on Obama

Trade with other regions and the close connection with Kyoto through the Saba Kaido ("Mackerel Road"), a series of routes used to transport fish to the ancient capital, had a lasting influence on Obama culture. While goods from Obama were sent to Kyoto, knowledge and customs were brought back via the same routes for over 1,500 years. Centuries-old mythical creatures called *shishi*, which formerly appeared in Kyoto festivals, are still featured in Obama's summer festivals. Architectural styles brought from Kyoto can still be seen in buildings such as the old teahouses of Obama's former geisha districts. Post towns sprung up along trade routes leading to and from the city. Traveling traders also spread the influence of Buddhism in the region, and many temples and Buddhist statues can be found in Obama and along the roads to Kyoto. Even the first elephant to set foot in Japan was brought into the country and transported to Kyoto through Obama Port in the fifteenth century.

In 2015, the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs designated the region a Japan Heritage site for the importance of its cultural heritage as a link between the sea and the ancient capital.