

Sushi

Nare-zushi

Nare-zushi, the precursor to modern sushi, is prepared by combining salted fish with cooked rice and allowing it to ferment. This style of fish preparation has origins in various parts of Southeast Asia where freshwater fish were used in rice-paddy aquaculture systems. The first written record of sushi in Japan dates back to the latter half of the eighth century. According to an important Japanese historical text, the *Engishiki*, freshwater fish such as sweetfish (*ayu*) and crucian carp (*funa*) were common types of sushi during the Heian period (794–1185). Archaeological evidence shows that shellfish and snapper *nare-zushi* from Wakasa was sent to the emperor's residence, Heijo Palace. *Nare-zushi* rice was solely used for its role in the fermentation process, and only the flesh of the fish was eaten.

Hannare-zushi and modern sushi

Sushi changed dramatically in the Muromachi period (1336–1573) with the emergence of a new style of sushi called *hannare-zushi*. This was eaten when the preparation was fresher, after only a few days to one month of fermentation. At this stage, the fish had just begun to sour and the rice had not yet turned mushy from lactic acid fermentation. This marked the first time in history that a combination of fish and rice was eaten as sushi. Modern sushi, which is made from vinegared rice and raw fish, gained popularity in the nineteenth century.

Sushi in Obama today

In Obama, herring sushi and mackerel sushi are local specialties. Herring sushi is prepared by soaking dried herring fillets overnight in *togijiru*, the starchy water drained off when washing rice. The fillets are then stacked in layers with koji, salt, daikon radish, carrot, and *takanotsume* chili peppers. A weight is placed on top, and the herring is left to age for approximately two weeks. Herring sushi is a popular dish during New Year celebrations in Obama. Mackerel sushi is usually prepared in the *oshi-zushi* style: A large amount of rice is pressed into a box with a layer of fish, rather than being formed into individual oblong balls by hand and topped with fish. The block is then cleanly cut into individual pieces. *Oshi-zushi* is sold at shops in Obama, and the Kitchen

Studio at the Miketsukuni Wakasa Obama Food Culture Museum offers visitors the chance to learn how to make mackerel *oshi-zushi*.