

Sushi

Nare-zushi

The precursor to modern sushi, *nare-zushi* is prepared by combining salted fish with cooked rice and allowing it to ferment. This style of fish preparation has origins in 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 eighth century. In *nare-zushi* the rice was used solely for its role in the fermentation process; only the cured 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 that stage, the fish has just begun to sour and the rice has not yet turned mushy. 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, mackerel sushi and herring sushi are local specialties. Herring sushi is prepared by soaking fillets of dried herring overnight in *togijiru*, the starchy water drained off when washing rice. The herring fillets are then stacked in layers with koji, salt, daikon radish, carrot, and chili peppers (*takanotsume*). 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 and topped with a layer of fish fillets. The block is then cut cleanly into individual pieces. *Oshi-zushi* is sold at local shops, and the first-floor Kitchen Studio offers visitors the chance to learn how to make mackerel *oshi-zushi*.