

Regional Cuisine

Mackerel

Traditionally, mackerel has been a major food source and an important trade product for Obama. Because mackerel spoils easily, it must be handled appropriately. It used to be common for mackerel to be grilled on the beach, immediately after it was brought ashore, so that it would last longer. The fish is usually marinated in soy sauce and ginger before it is grilled, and the grilling brings out its flavor. Skewered and grilled mackerel is a popular dish at Obama's Gion Matsuri, an annual summer festival. Local residents also eat mackerel during other celebrations, or around the New Year holiday, whereas people in other parts of Japan tend to eat sea bream on such occasions. Sushi made with grilled mackerel is another popular dish from the region. The grilled fish is also made into a soup called *namagusajiru*. The broth is made with the bones and head, and the soup contains pieces of the fish, tofu, green onions, daikon radish, carrots, and other vegetables. *Namagusajiru* is eaten during special occasions and ritual gatherings such as funerals. Another dish, called *nuta*, is made from mackerel and locally grown green onions, and is commonly eaten during festivals and at memorial services.

Kodai Sasazuke and *Isaza*

Other Wakasa Obama specialties include *isaza* (ice goby) and *kodai sasazuke*, pickled yellowback sea bream preserved in wooden casks. Ice goby are small freshwater fish that are caught in spring, between March and May. They have been consumed in the region since the Sengoku period (1467–1568), and are commonly eaten alive as a delicacy or served cooked in eggs. *Kodai sasazuke* is made by packing sea bream fillets flavored with salt, vinegar, and *sasa* bamboo into cedar casks. This aromatic preserved fish was first produced during the Meiji era (1868–1912), and approximately one million barrels are now produced annually. *Kodai sasazuke* is recognizable by the red dots on the packaging certifying that it is registered for Japan Geographical Indication, much like Kobe beef and other specific regional products.

Sweets

Wakasa Obama produces two local seasonal sweets made from adzuki bean paste. The round, gelatinous *kuzu manju* is a cool confection favored in summer. Its translucent outer layer is made from the powdered root of the kudzu plant and has a very mild

flavor, which is complemented by the slightly sweet bean paste filling. *Kuzu manju* are chilled in water and are delicious served in glass or crystal. They are cool and refreshing, and are thought to be good for digestive health. The other sweet is a winter treat made with adzuki bean jelly and locally called *detchi-yokan*. It has a fainter sweetness than its counterpart, *mizuyokan*, and is also smoother. The main ingredients in *detchi-yokan* are adzuki beans and agar, and because it contains no preservatives, it is typically not made during the warm summer months. It is served in rectangular slices.