

## A Key Ingredient

Awamori is a key ingredient in several traditional Okinawan dishes and delicacies. One of the most popular is *rafute*, a dish of stewed pork simmered in awamori. Alcohol in the awamori softens the pork as it cooks and adds a luxurious fragrance. An unusual Okinawan delicacy called *tofuyo* is a type of fermented tofu made by soaking the tofu in awamori and red *koji* mold. It is intensely flavored, with a taste and texture similar to cheese.

The Ryukyu Kingdom's relationship with China had a great influence on its cuisine. When Chinese envoys visited the Ryukyu kings, they brought pigs, ingredients from the Asian continent, cooking techniques, and chefs. The kingdom's court cuisine developed as a way to entertain these important guests, but eventually influenced the everyday cooking of the Ryukyuan people. Other ingredients reached the kingdom via its flourishing trade with Japan and other Asian nations. Since World War II, a number of ingredients and dishes from the United States have been incorporated, further enriching Okinawa's food culture.

Awamori remains both an ingredient in Okinawan cuisine and a perfect accompaniment to it. Today, awamori can be found almost everywhere Okinawans meet to eat, drink, and socialize.