

Ishikawa Cuisine: The Soul of the Prefecture

Food in Ishikawa is regarded as some of the best in the country. The local cuisine benefits from the area's rich culinary heritage, fertile land, and access to abundant fishing grounds in the Sea of Japan.

During the Edo period (1603–1867), present-day Ishikawa was part of the Kaga domain, the richest domain in all of Japan. The ruling Maeda family's emphasis on hospitality, influenced by their devotion to the tea ceremony, led them to promote the area's culinary culture. The Maedas also encouraged the work of master artisans, whose dedication and skill influenced the region's chefs.

Visitors can enjoy Ishikawa cuisine at restaurants, farm stays, markets, and English-language cooking classes.

The finest local ingredients

Ishikawa's tables abound with fresh seafood. The quality and diversity of the area's catch is due to its position at an intersection of warm and cold currents of the Sea of Japan. Snow crab (*zuwaigani*), sweet shrimp (*amaebi*), and amberjack (*buri*) are among the prefecture's most famous winter catches. Other local seafood delicacies include squid (*ika*), oysters (*kaki*), sea bream (*tai*), pufferfish (*fugu*), and blackthroat seaperch (*nodoguro*).

Vegetables from the Noto and Kaga areas feature widely in local dishes. They include sweet potatoes, radishes, lotus root, and other tubers, as well as Okinawan spinach (*kinjiso*), Japanese parsley (*seri*), and cucumbers.

Noto beef is farmed in low quantities and refers only to meat from Ishikawa-bred Japanese black wagyu cattle. The beef's delicate flavor and balanced fat marbling are attributed to the high-calorie diet and stress-free environment provided the animals.

Salt is produced near the tip of the Noto Peninsula, an area that historically provided all the salt used in the Kaga domain. Visitors to these farms can see traditional salt-production methods and try parts of the process.

Kombu kelp, used throughout Japan in dashi stock and in Ishikawa to wrap sashimi and *kamaboko* fish cakes, was among the ingredients that came to the area via *kitamaebune*. These ships brought goods to ports along the Sea of Japan coast.

Kaga-ryori: Haute cuisine Ishikawa-style

Kaga-ryori is the name for the local cuisine of Ishikawa, often presented in lavish multi-course, *kaiseki*-style meals.

Jibu or *jibu-ni* is a stew of poultry (usually duck) and vegetables simmered in dashi. *Jibu-ni* is found in both high-end *kaiseki* courses and home cooking around the prefecture. Steamed, stuffed sea bream and boiled or stewed, preserved *gori* (small river fish) are other common Kaga-ryori dishes.

Kaga-ryori is more than a collection of trademark recipes. Every touch in restaurants serving fine Kaga-ryori is distinctively Ishikawa. Local crafts that feature prominently in restaurants include Kutani ware ceramics and Wajima lacquerware. It is common for servers to wear *Kaga-yuzen* kimono.

Sushi through the seasons

Quality seafood from the Sea of Japan and the refined culinary culture have created a thriving sushi scene in Ishikawa. Sushi in Kanazawa began with pressed *oshizushi* served at festivals. *Nigiri*, the fish-atop-rice style most common today, has been served in the area for about one hundred years.

Like Kaga-ryori, Ishikawa sushi focuses on seasonal, local ingredients prepared with attention to detail. Winter favorites are crab, sweet shrimp, and amberjack. Spring features whitefish such as flounder and Japanese halfbeak (*sayori*), summer brings abalone and squid, and autumn highlights include blackthroat seaperch (*nodoguro*) and filefish (*kawahagi*).

Much of the high-quality rice and vinegar used in sushi restaurants is made in the prefecture.

Ishikawa's markets: Feast for the eyes

Omicho Market in Kanazawa has been the city's largest for about 300 years. Roughly 200 stalls sell seafood and farm produce from around the prefecture, from freshly picked vegetables to bunches of pristine Ruby Roman grapes. Omicho Market has many restaurants selling sushi, seafood rice bowls, and a range of other Ishikawa specialties.

Wajima has had a morning market for around a thousand years. It operates daily from 8 a.m. to noon, and normally attracts over 200 stalls. Many local residents do their grocery shopping here. The stalls sell fresh seafood, fruit, vegetables, dried fish, and many other local products. Local snacks include *egara manju*, rice cakes filled with sweet bean paste. Wajima lacquerware is also available.