

Togakushi Soba

The history of soba in Togakushi dates back to the Heian period (794–1185), when it served as provisions for monks undergoing ascetic training in the mountains. Made from buckwheat, soba originally bore little resemblance to its present-day noodle form: the soba flour was simply mixed with water, making a dough that could be easily carried during a day of training. It is believed that eventually this soba dough started to be used to make grilled dumplings, *soba-mochi*.

In the Edo period (1603–1867) the technique of making noodles was introduced to Togakushi by a monk from Edo (present-day Tokyo). Soba noodles began to be served to visiting pilgrims staying at the *shukubo* worshipers' inns, and over time this became the custom at *shukubo* throughout Togakushi.

Today, soba noodles in Togakushi are usually served in five looped portions on a bamboo tray. This serving style is known as *botchi-mori*, and is unique to Togakushi. One theory for the origin of this practice is that the five portions represent the five shrines of Togakushi. Togakushi's soba chefs have traditionally used soba grown and produced locally in Togakushi. The bamboo trays on which soba is served are made entirely by hand, in the local craft known as Togakushi *takezaiku*.

Soba restaurants are easy to find in Togakushi. Many of them are located in the area near Chusha Shrine.

* Note that slurping soba noodles is an integral aspect of soba etiquette, as it is said to add to the taste.