

Dazaifu Food Culture

Mokkan wooden tablets give us valuable insight into the food culture of eighth-century Dazaifu. Based on the information inscribed on tablets excavated in Dazaifu and Nara, the ancient capital, we have a good idea about what was consumed during this time.

Foodstuffs, similar to the ones displayed here, were likely served at the “plum blossom party” in early 730. High-ranking officials were served the rich and varied spread on the left, while the more modest fare on the right was for lower-ranking participants.

The menu for the most important guests included dried cuts of pheasant and salmon; *ayu* (sweetfish) sushi; abalone steamed in sake; various types of pickles; sea bream, squid, and other types of sashimi; and *kusamochi*, a traditional spring confection made from sweetened, pounded rice and the leaves of Japanese mugwort. Similar foodstuffs can still be found in Japanese *teishoku* (set meal) restaurants today.

A few guests can be seen raising sake cups in the party diorama. Sake played a pivotal role at the party—as it does today at *hanami* parties celebrating cherry blossoms—and likely helped fuel the creativity of the guests as they crafted their poetry.