

### ***Ama* Divers**

The *ama* female divers who harvest shellfish and seaweed from beneath the waves have for centuries played an important role in the Ise-Shima region. They are trained from an early age to free-dive, remaining submerged without breathing apparatus for long periods as they harvest the ocean floor.

One of their most important catches is abalone. *Ama* follow strict rules to conserve this precious seafood resource and protect their livelihood. For long periods surrounding the spawning season (usually from September 15 to December 31), harvesting abalone is forbidden, and the divers use a special caliper to ensure the specimens they select are larger than the minimum size of 10.6 cm.

*Ama* traditionally decorate their gear with a pair of symbols called *seiman* and *doman* as talismans to watch over them as they work. The *seiman* is a star shape drawn in a single stroke, symbolizing a diver's safe return. The lattice-shaped *doman* represents many eyes keeping watch against evil spirits. Chief among those is the dreaded *tomokazuki*, a doppelganger-like creature who manifests as a diver and lures unwary *ama* into danger.