

Conger Eels

Conger eels (*anago*) are common in the waters off the Munakata coast. The area yields the highest volume of conger eels (*anago*) in Fukuoka, and most of the catch is landed at the port of Kanazaki. The eels thrive in the warm waters of the Tsushima Current, which flows north past Munakata, along the west coast of the Japanese archipelago. Rich phytoplankton blooms thrive in the warm water, bringing with them small fish, shrimp, and crabs that migrate with the current. Conger eels feed on these small marine creatures.

The eels are caught in long tube traps (about 1.5 meters long) partially submerged on the seabed where they feed. Each trap can hold five or six full-sized eels, each up to a meter long. Undersized eels are able to escape through holes, so only the more mature eels are caught. The eels are kept alive in tanks until they are ready to be sold.

The main variety caught around Munakata is the whitespotted conger (*Conger myriaster*). It is smaller than a freshwater eel, with smooth brown skin and a line of white spots along each side of the body. The eels develop firm flesh by swimming against the strong currents off the coast of Munakata.

The fishing season for whitespotted conger eels runs from May to November. From late July to the end of September, restaurants in Munakata serve conger eel as sashimi, tempura or as grilled eel fillets. Conger eel-flavored rice crackers are widely available at souvenir shops in the area.