

Food and Drink

Amami Oshima has a unique culinary culture that reflects its history, religion, and traditions.

Keihan

This is perhaps the most iconic dish of Amami Oshima, said to have been served to entertain officials from the Satsuma domain over 400 years ago. *Keihan* begins with a bowl of white rice, which is served with a communal pot of chicken-based broth and toppings that can include shredded chicken, thin strips of omelet, shiitake mushrooms, citrus zest, green onions, seaweed, and pickled papaya. The traditional way to dine is self-service, with each diner placing their choice of toppings on the rice and adding broth until it submerges the ingredients. The custom is to have several smaller helpings rather than a single large one.

Salted Pork

Pork became part of the local diet as a result of influence from China (via the Ryukyu Kingdom), and *shiobuta* (salted pork) remains a local favorite. Until the mid-twentieth century, pigs were raised at home and eaten at festival times—particularly at the New Year—and the leftover portions of meat were preserved in salt. Today, *shiobuta* is commonly available at supermarkets and butcher shops. The pork is soaked in water overnight and served in stews or stir-fried.

Kasha mochi

Kasha mochi is a glutinous rice cake made of rice flour, mugwort leaves, and brown sugar. It is wrapped in shell ginger leaves, which give the cake a delicate aroma. The leaves are removed before eating.

Miki

Miki is a traditional fermented beverage made from rice, sugar, and sweet potatoes, and is similar to a thin yogurt. In the past, it was used in rituals performed by *norō*

priestesses, and was made at home as an offering for the gods. It is believed to be healthy and good for digestion, and is available in various forms in local produce shops and supermarkets around the island.

Kubiki Tea

Also available in supermarkets and local shops are mesh bags full of wood cuttings. These are taken from the evergreen shrub known as *kubiki* in the local dialect (*tsurugumi* in Japanese; *Elaeagnus glabra*). Boiling these cuttings to make an herb tea has been an Amami tradition since ancient times. The beverage is thought to aid circulation, high blood pressure, and colds, and to stimulate the immune system.

Brown Sugar Shochu

This is a popular distilled beverage made of malted rice and brown sugar. *Shochu* is produced from rice, barley, sweet potatoes, or other ingredients in many areas of Japan, but only breweries in the Amami Islands are permitted to produce *shochu* from sugarcane. The drink ranges from 12 percent to 44 percent alcohol, and flavors vary. On Amami Oshima, it is traditionally served diluted with room-temperature water, but nowadays is also enjoyed on the rocks or with other mixers.