

Funazushi

Funazushi is a traditional fish dish that has been served in Omi Province (present-day Shiga Prefecture) since the Heian period (794–1185). It is a type of *narezushi*, fermented fish, which is the oldest form of sushi. *Funazushi* is made from the round crucian carp (*Carassius auratus grandoculis*), a species of fish that lives only in Lake Biwa and its connected waterways.

Making *funazushi* is a time-consuming process that has remained unchanged for hundreds of years. The fish are scaled and cleaned, but their bodies and bones are left intact. They are then filled with salt to preserve the meat and aged for a few months. After that, the salt is replaced with cooked rice and the fish are stacked together in large containers filled with cooked rice; the containers are placed in water. Over time, lactic acid bacteria in the rice dissolves the bones and ferments the fish. The technique originated in the days prior to refrigeration out of the need to preserve and store raw fish for later use.

Funazushi is stuffed with egg, cut into pieces, and served cold. Seeing the entire fish, including the head, laid out on a plate and garnished with a small amount of edible fermented rice can be quite surprising for newcomers to the city. However, it is the sharp, acidic smell of the dish that is most noticeable. At first, there is a strong taste of vinegar, but over time, the tartness and the salt give way to the subtler flavors of the egg. The fish has a soft texture unlike any other kind of sushi.

Funazushi is eaten by itself as an accompaniment to sake, or is served over rice with hot water. The strong flavor pairs well with alcohol, much like blue cheese and wine.