

Shokado Bento

The Japanese style of serving food artistically arranged in a bento box has gained popularity around the world. A widely used type of box, square in shape and divided into four equal sections, is known as “Shokado Bento.” It is named after Shokado Shojo (1584–1639), a Buddhist monk, artist, and calligrapher who lived in Yawata almost four hundred years ago. Shojo would convert wooden boxes that farmers used for carrying seeds into containers for his paints and tools. To make the boxes more attractive, he added a light coat of lacquer and ink paintings with nature themes.

The idea of using this type of box to serve food was born in 1933, when the founder of the famous Japanese cuisine restaurant Kitcho attended a tea function in Yawata. He was inspired by a lacquered box in the style favored by Shojo and decided to adapt it for his restaurant, giving it the name “Shokado Bento.” The divided box makes it possible to artfully arrange the food while separating the dishes to preserve their distinct flavors. Now Shokado bento boxes have become popular throughout Japan and can even be found abroad. The Yawata branch of the restaurant, Kyoto Kitcho Shokado, is located next to the Shokado Art Museum and serves fine Japanese cuisine in this distinctive style of bento box.