

## **Flavors of Shodoshima**

Shodoshima is the second-largest island in the Seto Inland Sea and has a population of just under 30,000. It benefits from a relatively warm and dry climate and clean groundwater. These weather conditions, along with Shodoshima's location in the eastern part of the sea, near its busiest shipping lanes and the mercantile city of Osaka, historically contributed to making the island a major food producer. The comparatively calm Inland Sea has been crucial in trade since ancient times, connecting Osaka with Kyushu as well as with faraway lands including the Korean Peninsula and China.

Three of Shodoshima's most notable products are soy sauce, thin wheat noodles called somen, and olives. The soy sauce and somen industries have their origins in salt production, which flourished on the island in medieval times. During the Edo period (1603–1867), however, the salt industry on Shodoshima declined due to overproduction in other regions, collapsing demand. The islanders decided to pursue alternative uses for their salt, which became an ingredient in soy sauce and wheat noodles. As both products were made from early on in the Osaka region—soy sauce in Wakayama and somen in Nara—their adoption on Shodoshima was hardly surprising. The island's beneficial position in the Inland Sea trade made it easy to source ingredients such as soybeans and wheat from western Japan, and the proximity to Osaka meant that demand never dried up.

Olive trees were first planted on Shodoshima in the Meiji era (1868–1912), when the Japanese government chose the island as a test site for growing imported crops because of the presumed suitability of the local climate. This decision proved successful, and Shodoshima eventually became known as the olive capital of Japan. Olive plantations cover much of the island's hillsides and, along with the sea beneath, make for a scenic landscape that is sometimes described as Mediterranean.