

## Shodoshima Soy Sauce: An Aromatic Tradition

The production of soy sauce on Shodoshima began in the latter half of the Edo period (1603–1867), when a nationwide oversupply of salt forced local producers to pursue alternative means of subsistence. The industry experienced its greatest period of prosperity around the turn of the twentieth century, when up to 400 soy sauce breweries operated on the island. About 20 of these remain in business today. Most of the breweries are located in an area called Hishio no Sato, where the unmistakable aroma of soy sauce wafts over the neighborhood. In addition to selling their product directly to customers, some of the breweries operate small museums and cafes. Guided tours of the facilities are also available.

Shodoshima soy sauce is fermented in wooden barrels called *koga*, in which the microbes that give the product its distinctive taste live. Though most factories elsewhere now make their soy sauce in stainless steel tanks, the brewers of Shodoshima have kept to their *koga*, of which there are about 1,000 on the island. That is thought to be around half of all such barrels still in use throughout Japan. Soy sauce is used extensively in Japanese cooking, including in the making of *tsukudani*, which is small pieces of seaweed, fish, or vegetables simmered in soy sauce, sugar, and mirin (sweet cooking wine). A popular condiment often eaten with rice, *tsukudani* is made by a number of local companies and is widely available on the island.