

Shodoshima *Somen*: Noodles in the Wind

Somen are thin wheat noodles considered a specialty of summer, when they are typically eaten cold, dipped in savory sauce. According to local lore, *somen* first arrived on Shodoshima in 1598, when an islander returning from a pilgrimage to Ise Grand Shrine (in present-day Mie Prefecture) brought with him noodle-making techniques acquired in the Miwa area of what is now Nara Prefecture. Though usually enjoyed in summer, *somen* are traditionally made in winter, when the freshly cut and pulled noodles, several meters long, are dried on racks under the open sky, in the cold wind blowing in from the Seto Inland Sea. Noodle-making began as a supplementary source of income for local farmers, who had time on their hands outside of the growing season, and developed into an industry in its own right during the Meiji era (1868–1912). There are currently some 150 *somen* factories on Shodoshima, where the local noodle-makers' union stipulates that its members must use sesame oil (rather than the more common rapeseed oil) in the production process. This measure was taken to support the island's sesame oil business, which developed alongside the *somen* industry and retains a nationwide presence.