

## **Birthplace of Sanuki Udon Noodles**

The first meal that visitors sit down to after arriving in Kagawa is usually a bowl of Sanuki udon noodles. Named after Sanuki province, the name of the area until 1871, these wheat noodles are thick, chewy, and can be eaten hot in soup broth, cold dipped in savory sauce, or in a wide range of other ways. Udon restaurants, most of which allow customers to personalize their meal, are usually busiest from morning to lunchtime, when Kagawa residents of all ages tend to stop by for a quick and tasty meal.

The Takinomiya area in the town of Ayagawa styles itself the birthplace of Sanuki udon. According to legend, the noodles were introduced to this area by the Buddhist priest Kukai (774–835), a native of Kagawa who studied in China for two years and brought back a wealth of knowledge—including how to make udon. Some sources claim that Kukai shared his noodle secrets with his nephew Chisen, who then served udon to his family in Takinomiya. Whatever the case, these ninth-century noodles were not lengthy like modern-day Sanuki udon, but rather short, flat bits of dough made by mixing flour with salt water. These bits were then boiled and served in a savory sauce.

The dish was gradually improved upon, and by the Edo period (1603–1867) noodles much like those eaten today were being served to pilgrims from all over Japan who passed through Takinomiya on their way to the renowned Kotohiragu Shrine. Conscious of the significant role udon has played in local history, the people of Takinomiya express their gratitude to Kukai, Chisen, and other noodle pioneers and pray for continued prosperity in an annual ceremony on April 24, when udon, soy sauce, and other noodle-related food items are offered to the deities at Takinomiya Tenmangu Shrine.