

***Ikinari Dango* Sweet Potato Dumplings**

The origin of the name of the snack food *ikinari dango* (“spur-of-the-moment dumplings”) is said to come from the fact that it can be made in advance, rapidly heated, and served to unexpected visitors. Traditionally, people in Kumamoto always had a stock of *ikinari dango* ready just for such occasions.

A slice of sweet potato is covered with a layer of sweet red bean paste and wrapped in rice-flour dough. It is then steamed for a couple of minutes and served piping hot. Traditionally, red beans were expensive and therefore served only on special, often auspicious, occasions.

There are a number of variations on the *ikinari dango* theme. The dumpling can be made with different kinds of sweet potato, with white bean rather than red bean paste, or even with chestnuts, another specialty of Kyushu. *Ikinari dango* are one of the three great local specialties of Kumamoto, along with mustard-stuffed deep-fried lotus root (*karashi renkon*) and horsemeat sashimi (*basashi*).