

***Shingoro* (Grilled Rice Balls with Miso)**

These rice balls are coated with miso mixed with ground sesame and seasoned with sugar, sake, and mirin, before being roasted over charcoal. They were traditionally eaten to celebrate the first rice harvest each autumn, and are the Shimogo region's best-known treat.

According to legend, *shingoro* is named after a local man credited with inventing it during the Edo period (1603–1867). At that time, people of the town offered rice cakes to the gods in thanks for the harvest, but being unable to afford the more expensive glutinous rice required to make *mochi* cakes, Shingoro came up with the idea of coating regular rice balls with seasoned miso to create his own offerings.

The dish uses a distinct type of local miso which is mixed with the crushed seeds of *egoma* sesame, known in Shimogo as *junen* (lit., ten years). *Junen* miso promotes good health; it is said that those who eat it increase their life span by 10 years. To make *shingoro*, soft, cooked rice is made into small balls which are spiked onto a bamboo skewer before brushing on the *junen* miso mixture. Typically the balls of rice are roasted over charcoal and eaten while warm. *Shingoro* are available at shops in Ouchi-juku and selected restaurants in the area.

Like many towns and cities in Japan, Shimogo has its own lovable mascot. Shimogoro is a cheerful little miso-covered rice cake with arms, legs, and a tail. The name Shimogoro is a combination of Shimogo and *shingoro*, the town's signature treat, which inspired the character.