

Dining at an Izakaya

As one of Japan's top sake-brewing regions, Aizu-Wakamatsu offers plenty of places to relax with a drink. One of the best ways to enjoy local hospitality is by visiting an *izakaya*, a full-service restaurant that typically offers a wide variety of beverages and food items. All ages are welcome, and it is not unusual to see children dining there with their families.

Upon entering, you will be greeted and seated at a table on flooring or at a low table on tatami mats, in which case you will be asked to remove your shoes. After being handed a wet towel to cleanse your hands, the server will give you time to look over the menu, before coming back to take orders. *Izakaya* food tends to be simple and filling. It often includes seasonal specials using local produce, as well as favorites such as *yakitori* (grilled chicken on skewers) or *karaage* (fried chicken). Menus also usually feature some dishes suitable for vegetarians, and there is typically a range of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks to try, including the area's prizewinning sake.

Dishes served at *izakaya* are generally meant to be shared among everyone at the table. This allows each member of the group to enjoy a variety of tastes. Finally, don't forget to follow Japanese custom and say "*Kanpai!*" (Cheers!) as you raise your glass and toast to a good time in Aizu-Wakamatsu.