

Wajima Morning Market

Every morning from 8:00 a.m., Asaichi (“morning market”) Street near Wajima Port is a hive of activity. Temporary stalls line both sides of the street to sell farm produce from the countryside and the morning’s catch from the seas around Wajima. Stall holders call out to customers inviting them to sample their wares. For over a thousand years, the market has been a meeting place for residents from the mountainous inland and the bountiful coastal areas. Wajima Morning Market (Wajima Asaichi) started in the Heian period (794–1185), evolving from the bartering that took place at shrines on festival days. Over time, Wajima Morning Market grew to be one of the three largest daily markets in Japan. The market now covers a 360-meter stretch of Asaichi Street, with around 200 stalls.

The women of the market

Women bring freshly picked produce from their farms and gardens, spreading them out on cloths on the ground. They arrive early and leave after their own harvest has been sold. The majority of stall owners are also women, who grow farm produce, or salt and preserve seafood. Until a few years ago, stalls were passed down only from mother to daughter, but today the rules are more relaxed.

Local flavors

Much of the seafood is preserved—salted and dried, or pickled—for easy transport. Locally caught fish including *fugu* (pufferfish), mackerel, and *nodoguro* (blackthroat seaperch) are salted and dried to preserve the flesh and concentrate the flavor. A typical local product is *ishiru*, a fish sauce used locally in place of soy sauce. Sardines or mackerel are salted and fermented for a year or more to make the distinctive sauce. Each family follows its own recipe.

Toward the future

With the convenience of supermarkets and online shopping, fewer customers do their daily food shopping at the morning market, and some stalls have started to trade on weekends only. Farming or fishing and running a market stall is a life that few of Wajima’s young residents want to pursue. But there are signs of growth. Short-term and pop-up stalls are available to encourage new business, bringing young artisans and entrepreneurs to the market.

Asaichi Morning Market is open from 8:00 a.m. to noon every day, with occasional closures on Wednesdays. Free barbecue facilities are provided at a rest area nearby, to cook fresh fish purchased at the market.