

## Toyama Rice

Rice was historically the main source of prosperity in what is now Toyama Prefecture, and it remains the backbone of the area's agriculture as well as the staple of its culinary culture. Toyama faces the Sea of Japan to the north while mountains rise in the other three directions. Several rivers fed by mineral-rich water from the mountains flow toward the sea through sweeping, fertile plains. Along with the region's hot, humid summers and cold winters, this environment is considered ideal for rice cultivation.

In mountainous Tateyama, where some of the rivers nourishing the plains below originate, Toyama rice can be savored in many forms. *Onigiri* (rice balls) are popular with hikers and are an ideal on-the-go meal. Shops and restaurants near Tateyama Station, such as Shitaka and Aoki, serve them wrapped in nori seaweed or, as is customary in Toyama, enveloped in *tororo kombu* (kelp seasoned with vinegar and shredded into thread-like strips).

Aoki also offers a "lava curry," a dish it created with the help of the nearby Tateyama Caldera Sabo Museum. The dish features Toyama rice molded into shapes resembling geological features on Mt. Tate and doused with curry to mimic lava flows from the volcano.