

## Longtooth Grouper Hot Pot

The white, slightly translucent flesh of the longtooth grouper is cooked at the table alongside vegetables and other ingredients in a hot pot dish known locally as *kue nabe*. The dish is associated with the waters off Wakayama Prefecture, which provide a habitat for the longtooth grouper (*kue*). Restaurants and accommodations in the town of Yura offer *kue nabe* using wild-caught grouper, considered a delicacy for its texture, flavor, and rarity.

The flesh of the *kue* has a distinctive yet mild flavor and a firm texture. It is lean and moist and separates into large flakes. In *kue nabe*, the vegetables and grouper are cooked in kombu broth and served with a dipping sauce. The sauce is typically a blend of soy sauce and ponzu, a citrus-based condiment. It is customary to add a little *momiji oroshi* (grated daikon and chili) and some finely chopped scallion to the sauce before dipping the cooked ingredients. Appetizers and small side dishes are also served with *kue* hot pot meals and often feature the skin and innards of the fish parboiled, deep fried as tempura, or simmered with butter, soy sauce, and other ingredients.

Longtooth grouper can live to around 40 years of age and exceed 1 meter in length, with some of the largest weighing 50 kilograms. Its rarity is partly a result of its growth rate, which is slower than other more prevalent and commonly eaten fish species such as amberjack. Whereas it takes around 5 years for amberjack to reach full maturity at around 80 centimeters (8–10 kg), it takes 20 years for longtooth grouper to become fully grown at around 100 centimeters (15–30 kg). Demand for *kue* outweighs supply, and the fish commands a premium at auction. Many of the largest longtooth grouper are sold to fine-dining establishments in the major cities outside of Wakayama.

*Kue nabe* and other multi-course meals of longtooth grouper, which include *kue* sashimi, are offered at select restaurants and accommodations in Yura. All longtooth grouper cuisine requires an advance reservation.