

## **Food Culture in Gamagori**

The coastal location and natural environment of Gamagori have fostered a vibrant culinary culture. The city is on the coast of the sheltered and shallow Mikawa Bay, the source of a diverse array of seafood and the home of the only deep-sea fishing fleet in the region. On land, a crescent-shaped range of low mountains borders the city on three sides, contributing to a mild and sunny climate considered ideal for growing fruit such as mandarin oranges and strawberries. The Gamagori area is also a major producer of Mikawa beef, a well-regarded local brand of wagyu. Dishes made with locally sourced ingredients are served at a wide range of restaurants in the Takeshima area, including those on the premises of the Gamagori Classic Hotel and Hotel Takeshima.

### *Bounty of the sea*

The calm waters and sandy shores of Mikawa Bay provide a favorable habitat for the *asari* (Japanese littleneck) clam, a roughly 4-centimeter-long

burrowing bivalve that figures prominently in the food culture of Gamagori. In late spring and early summer, large crowds descend on the Takeshima shore to dig for these clams. Although they are fairly common throughout the country, nowhere are the clams found in greater numbers than in Mikawa Bay, the source of approximately 48 percent of all *asari* caught in Japan. *Asari* are often used as an ingredient in miso soup, but in Gamagori, they are paired with thick udon noodles, wakame seaweed, and a seafood broth in a popular dish called Gamagori Udon.

On the other hand, deeper waters beyond the bay are the source of many less familiar types of seafood eaten in Gamagori. The city's four-vessel deep-sea fishing fleet, the only one of its kind in Aichi Prefecture, provides a steady supply of fish such as *mehikari* (bigeyed greeneye), named for its striking green eyes and treasured for its soft white flesh, and *nigisu* (deep-sea smelt), which has a thin, elongated body and blueish flesh with a short window of freshness, and is thus rarely eaten outside of areas where it is fished. Two other deep-sea species considered delicacies are *akaza-ebi*, a prawn-like small lobster that grows up to 25 centimeters long and has soft, mildly sweet flesh with a softer texture than the more common

*Ise-ebi* (Japanese spiny lobster), and *takaashi-gani* (Japanese spider crab), the largest crustacean on Earth, which can have a leg span of up to 3.8 meters. Deep-sea fish can generally be ordered at restaurants around Gamagori as sashimi, grilled, or deep-fried, but catches are relatively small, and not all species are available at all times.

### *Brand-name beef*

Mikawa beef is a brand of wagyu noted for its tenderness. It is produced in the part of Aichi Prefecture that includes Gamagori. Although the brand originated in 1990, raising cattle for beef has a long history in the area.

Meat designated as Mikawa beef must come from cattle raised on one of nearly 60 certified farms in Mikawa and be graded 4 or 5 on Japan's five-tier quality grading scale. Mikawa beef is commonly eaten as steak or thinly sliced in sukiyaki and shabu-shabu.

### *Fun with fruit*

Fruit farming in Gamagori benefits from the area's comparatively warm

climate and ample sunshine. Warm ocean winds blow in from the south year-round, part of a climate that nourishes fruit such as *mikan* mandarins, strawberries, grapes, and melons. Gamagori is noted particularly for the *mikan* grown in the hills around the city, including Gamagori Orange Park, where mandarins can be picked to eat right away or take home from October to December. Strawberries are available at the Orange Park from January to May, melons from June to late September, and grapes from late June to mid-September.