

Delicacies of Ibusuki: Seafood

Ibusuki is located on the southern coast of Kyushu, where the Kuroshio Current brings rich fish stocks up from the tropics. At the city's five fishing ports, fishermen use trawling, gill nets, and single-line methods to bring in about 100 species each year. In addition, an annual average of 70 metric tons of fish are farmed at deep, sheltered harbors like Yamagawa Bay. This combination of variety and abundance makes Ibusuki a seafood destination with two standout local specialties: *hongarebushi* and *nanohana kanpachi*.

Hongarebushi

Dried bonito, or *katsubushi*, is an essential ingredient in Japanese cooking. The dried fish is used to make dashi stock, a core component of many Japanese dishes, and paper-thin flakes of it are added to everything from tofu to *takoyaki*.

The process of making *katsubushi* is long and laborious. First, the bonito

is cut into fillets and carefully arranged in a basket for stewing. The fillets are then simmered at over 90 degrees Celsius for several hours, toughening the meat and sealing in umami-rich components. Next, each fillet is manually deboned and then repeatedly smoked and cooled over several weeks. This process dries the fish out and prevents harmful bacteria from developing. When the process is complete, the once tender fillets of fish have become blackened, rock-hard sections called *arabushi*. These *arabushi* can then be shaved into bonito flakes.

The slightly acidic taste of *arabushi* is preferred in some regions of Japan, but an additional step can be added to achieve a rounder, more complex flavor. Applying a beneficial fungus to *arabushi* and sun-drying it causes the outer layer to ferment, softening the aroma and bringing out its umami.

This fermented fish is called *karebushi*.

Ibusuki produces an especially high-grade *karebushi* called *hongarebushi*, which is repeatedly fermented and dried up to four times for even more

depth of flavor. *Arabushi* takes about 20 days to produce, and *karebushi* takes about two months. In contrast, making *hongarebushi* can take up to half a year. Around 70 percent of Japan's *hongarebushi* comes from Ibusuki.

Ibusuki Nanohana Kanpachi

Greater amberjack (*kanpachi*) is a firm whitefish commonly eaten as sushi or sashimi. Although wild-caught *kanpachi* is available, most of the *kanpachi* served in Japan is farmed. The country produces about 24,000 metric tons annually, and more than half of it comes from Kagoshima Prefecture.

The shape and characteristics of Yamagawa Bay create a natural harbor that is well suited to aquaculture. A long, curved promontory acts as a natural breakwater, and its nearly vertical banks leave no shallows in which steep waves can form. Unlike harbors that result from wave erosion or sediment deposition, Yamagawa Bay was formed when groundwater came

into contact with a pocket of magma. The resulting explosion left a large crater that later collapsed and filled with seawater, forming a protected bay.

Nearly a hundred net cages occupy the bay's deep, calm waters, where about 370,000 *kanpachi* are raised. Each spring, wild fry are caught and moved to the enclosures to be raised until they reach the ideal weight of about 3.5 kilograms (a period of about two years). These fish are sold under the brand name "Ibusuki Nanohana Kanpachi."

Ibusuki Nanohana is distinguished by its ecologically friendly farming style.

Typically, farm-raised fish are overfed to fatten them, and the resulting waste and uneaten food can pollute the ocean environment. The fisheries of Yamagawa Bay soften the ecological impact by adding microorganisms to the feed that help break it down. They also feed their fish only three times a week to reduce the amount of uneaten food. *Kanpachi* produced this way are said to taste fresher and less fishy.