

Kikkoman's quarterly intercultural forum for the exchange of ideas on food

SPOTLIGHT JAPAN: Japan's Edible Wild Plants 4
JAPANESE STYLE: *Ohitashi* _____ 6

DELECTABLE JOURNEYS:
Aomori Senbei-jiru _____ 5

KIKKOMAN TODAY _____ 8



THE JAPANESE TABLE

Food Byways: Japan's Mackerel Highway

by Masami Ishii

Our 2013 Feature series traces Japan's traditional food byways.

In this first installment we follow the old route by which mackerel was conveyed inland from the coast.



Food Byways: Japan's Mackerel Highway

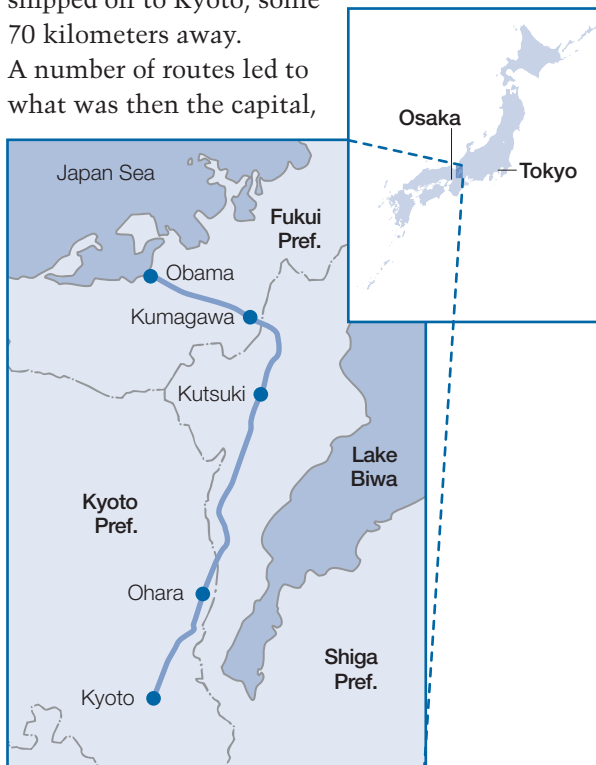
Mackerel Bay

Surrounded by oceans, Japan has always enjoyed the bounty of the sea. Today, thanks to transport technology for frozen and refrigerated foods, fresh fish are sold almost everywhere in Japan. However, in the days when goods were transported overland primarily by foot, it was not easy to sell fish in markets distant from the coast, and so it had to be preserved by salting or drying before being shipped inland.

The happy outcome of these constraints, however, is the country's extensive fish cuisine. Fukui Prefecture's Wakasa Bay is well known for the quantity and diversity of its seafood, which includes flounder and small sea bream; but it is especially known for its abundant mackerel, called *saba* in Japanese. Mackerel spoils relatively quickly, but is delicious either grilled or simmered, and has long been part of the popular diet.

Fukui's city of Obama, located at the head of Wakasa Bay, was a castle town during the Edo period (1603-1867) and has long prospered as one of the most important fishing ports on the Japan Sea. Mackerel caught in the waters of the sprawling bay would be brought to the docks early in the morning and lightly salted, then immediately shipped off to Kyoto, some 70 kilometers away.

A number of routes led to what was then the capital,



Tracing the course of the *saba kaido*



Traditional Japanese houses line the old *saba kaido* through Kumagawa village.

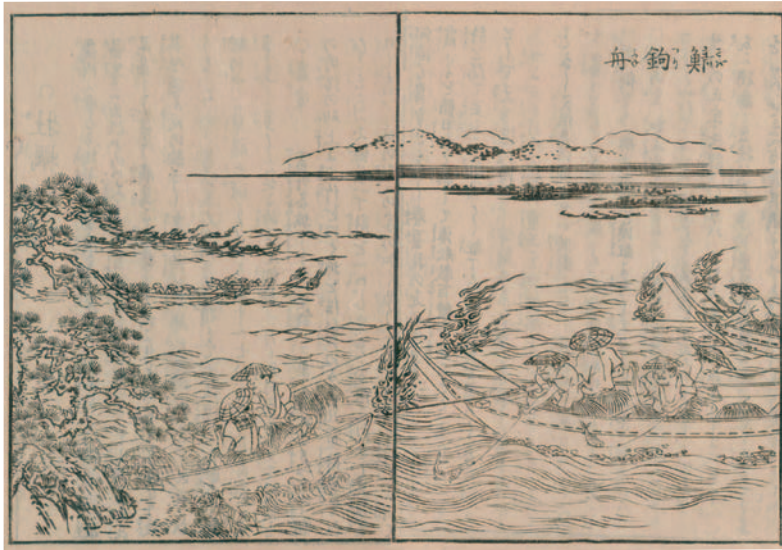
but the primary route was the Wakasa highway, which went from Obama through the villages of Kumagawa, Kutsuki and Ohara, before arriving at the imperial capital.

Journey to Kyoto

Until railways were established in the early twentieth century, goods were carried by foot in loads of 40-60 kilograms by highway carriers known as *kaido-kasegi*. This was hard work, but relatively lucrative, since all one needed was stamina and a length of rope to tie up one's load. Over the centuries, the Wakasa highway route came to be known as the "Mackerel Highway" (*saba kaido*). By the time the carrier would reach Kyoto a day and night after leaving Obama, the salt would have penetrated the mackerel to just the right degree; or in scientific terms, the salt would have reacted with the protein of the fish to produce amino acids, producing a fine taste of umami.

At the end of its journey, the mackerel was rinsed sparingly to remove salt and marinated in vinegar to produce what is famous today as *saba-sushi*. This is the history that lies behind the numerous shops in Kyoto known for their mackerel sushi. *Saba-sushi* is especially good in the spring, when the mackerel is rich in fat. *Saba-sushi* came to be part of the festive fare traditionally eaten during the city's Aoi Festival, celebrated May 15. In due course, *saba-sushi* shifted from a quite ordinary dish to a luxury dish eaten only on special occasions.

The *Wakasako*, a record written in the mid-eighteenth century by a local merchant named Itaya



Mackerel fishing during the Edo era (1603-1867), an illustration from the book *Nihon-sankai-meisan-zue* (1754). Courtesy National Diet Library digital archives



Grilled *saba-sushi*: Grilled *saba* and green perilla leaf atop sushi rice.

Ichisuke, depicts a sense of what those times must have been like. When mackerel fishing was at its height in the Wakasa region, the account says, a single fisherman could hook 200 fish in a night. During the O-Bon summer festival, which honors ancestral spirits, it became customary to present split-open, salted mackerel (*sashi-saba*) as gifts, thus fueling a lucrative market. Salted mackerel were shipped to the Kanto (Tokyo plateau) area as well, and so a huge amount was processed for market. The record also tells us that, while Wakasa was well known for its dried flounder, it was mackerel to which it owed its prosperity.



Saba-sushi is enjoyed during Kyoto's Aoi Festival; shown here is the festival's traditional procession.

The Heritage of the Highway

Today, mackerel sushi and the heritage of the “Mackerel Highway” are again playing a role in the economic prosperity of Obama and nearby towns. A special plaque has been affixed in the street of a local shopping district in Obama that marks the beginning of the famous highway, while the nearby Mackerel Highway Museum exhibits photographs, pictures and artifacts recalling its heyday. The Miketsukuni Wakasa Obama Food Culture Museum, located on the coast, features interactive exhibits where visitors learn about the history of Obama's food culture.

In Kumagawa, a stopover on the Mackerel Highway, the former Kumagawa Village Office was renovated to house the Wakasa Mackerel Highway Kumagawa-juku Museum as a monument to the time when the town prospered as a major post-town along the highway. Every house once made *saba-sushi* in large quantities for special occasions and during the New Year. Today, preservation techniques have improved and nowadays a lighter flavor is preferred, using less vinegar. Even though time-honored recipes are being passed on, it is becoming more difficult to perpetuate the traditional flavors.

Grilled *saba-sushi* (*yaki saba-sushi*), grilled mackerel on sushi rice, is now popular. The people of Obama recommend that the sushi container be kept upside down, so that oil from the fish does not seep into the rice. Grilled *saba-sushi* is also sold at gift shops in Tokyo airports, and is served on planes. Today, some vacuum-packed mackerel products are made with mackerel from Norway, since the local catch may not always be as abundant as it once was. Perhaps now, a new “Mackerel Highway” for the global age is in the process of being created. ◆

cover

Kyoto is known for its *saba-sushi*. *Saba-sushi* is wrapped in *konbu* (kelp), which adds umami to the sushi, but is removed when eating. To keep *saba-sushi* from drying out, it is packed in bamboo sheath, whose bactericidal properties keep the sushi fresh longer.

Author's profile

Masami Ishii was born in 1958. He graduated from Tokyo Gakugei University in 1980 from which he later received his Masters degree in Japanese language education in 1984. Prof. Ishii specializes in Japanese literature and folklore, and he has been teaching at Tokyo Gakugei University since 1993. He has authored many books and publications such as *Tono Monogatari-e-no-Goshotai* (An Introduction to Tales of Tono) and *Mukashi-banashi-to-Kanko—Kataribe-no-Shozo* (Folktales and Travel—a portrait of a storyteller).



Japan's Edible Wild Plants



A selection of *sansai* (from left):
tara-no-me, *kogomi*, *seri*



Tempura made with *sansai*

Sansai are part of nature's bounty

Japanese enjoy picking edible wild plants from early spring into summer every year, a practice known as *sansai* gathering. *Sansai* collectively refers to edible wild plants growing in fields and mountains.

Humans have gathered edible wild plants for centuries, some of which were later bred and improved for domestic cultivation. The Japanese, however, have always regarded such edible plants as part of nature's bounty, and have a particular appreciation for the natural taste and fresh appearance of wild greens.

During the seventh century, court nobles gathered edible wild field plants in the spring, a tradition referred to as "medicine hunting." *Sansai* were indeed considered a medicinal food that was good for the health, and such plants supplemented the diet that was lacking during cold winter months. During the Edo era (1603-1867), *sansai* provided sustenance during times of famine, and thus it was natural that various ways of preparing *sansai* were devised through the centuries.

Typical spring *sansai* include *tara-no-me* (fatsia sprouts), *seri* (water dropwort) and *kogomi* (fiddle-head fern). *Tara-no-me* are leaf buds of a deciduous shrub and have an exquisite scent; they may

be prepared as tempura, or boiled and eaten with dashi and soy sauce (*ohitashi*), as well as boiled and mixed with dressings or sauces (*aemono*). These sprouts contain considerable dietary fiber and support digestion.

Seri possesses a strong aroma, and its white stems have a crisp texture. It, too, is eaten as *ohitashi* or *aemono*. The carotene and vitamin C in *seri* supports the immune system and prevents colds. *Kogomi* may be enjoyed by simply boiling with a bit of salt, or prepared as *tempura*. *Kogomi* contains high levels of vitamin A, which is beneficial to the eyes and skin.

The annual variety and yield of Japan's *sansai* varies from year to year. When seeking *sansai*, it is essential to gather only *sansai* in season that are ready to eat, to pick only as much as one can eat, and to take care not to uproot the plants. After shaking off any dirt from the gathered greens, they may be wrapped in newspaper to carry home, where they can be prepared and enjoyed. Recently, tours and inns have been targeting those who have never experienced the pleasures of gathering *sansai*: a local guide leads groups into fields and mountains to identify and pick plants; afterwards, they are prepared and eaten together. ●



Gathering edible wild plants



Ohitashi

Perspectives on
Japanese cuisine

Ohitashi is a boiled vegetable salad dressed with dashi and soy sauce. It can be made with any selection of green vegetables, *sansai* edible wild plants, or mushrooms. This particular

recipe calls for *mizuna*, Japanese water greens. The blanching method described here preserves the color of the vegetables.



Ohitashi made with *mizuna*

Mizuna no Ohitashi

Serves 4

9 kcal Protein 0.7 g

- 150 g (5 oz.) *mizuna** (1 C after boiling, gently squeezed)
- Salt
- 3 T dashi stock
- 1 1/2 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- *Katsuobushi*, dried shaved bonito



1. Cut a cross-shaped incision in the *mizuna* roots; (photo a) to allow the *mizuna* to boil evenly; wash and drain.
2. To ensure the greens are evenly cooked, first hold the *mizuna* by the stalks and immerse the roots in a pot of lightly salted boiling water for 5 seconds (photo b). Then boil the entire bunch for 1 minute. Drain immediately, place in cold water and squeeze out excess moisture.
3. Mix dashi and soy sauce to make the dressing.
4. Marinate the *mizuna* in 1 1/2 T of the dressing for 10 minutes.
5. Gently squeeze out excess liquid, and cut off the roots of the *mizuna*, then cut into 4 cm- (1.5 in.-) pieces.
6. Place in serving dish with dressing poured on top; garnish with *katsuobushi*.

* Other greens may be substituted; watercress is an excellent option.

Note: The amount of dashi stock and soy sauce can be adjusted to taste.

DELECTABLE JOURNEYS

Aomori *Senbei-jiru*

Senbei-jiru originated in the northern prefecture of Aomori, in the city of Hachinohe. Also known as wheat-flour wafer soup, *senbei-jiru* is a stew of chicken, vegetables and mushrooms, and includes locally produced wafers called *nanbu-senbei*.

The soup is usually seasoned with soy sauce, but miso may also be used. The baked *nanbu-senbei* are made of flour, salt and baking soda, and have a unique texture that does not dissolve easily. These *senbei* are white in color and do not have much flavor, but they absorb the delicious soup broth while maintaining some firmness.

Nanbu-senbei probably evolved from *mugi-senbei* wheat-flour wafers, which were enjoyed as a staple food and later came to be eaten with stewed dishes during the early 19th century. When *nanbu-senbei* for soups were made commercially available in the late 1950s, *senbei-jiru* quickly became a popular home recipe.

Aomori





GRILLED MACKEREL WITH GRATED APPLE-DAIKON SAUCE

Grated daikon with soy sauce is a traditional Japanese condiment that actually functions as a sauce. In this recipe, apples provide the sweetness, vinegar the acidity, and ginger and rose pepper add a wonderful piquant accent to this typical Japanese “sauce,” making it ideal for Western dishes.

Serves 4 246 kcal Protein 23.5 g Fat 13.3 g (per person)



● Mackerel

- 2 fillets of mackerel, total about 440 g / 1 lb.
- 2 t Japanese *arajio* salt*; if unavailable, use 1 1/2 t table salt
- 1/2 apple, cored and skinned, about 100 g / 3.5 oz.
- 1 T rice vinegar; other vinegars can be used
- 3 T grated daikon, lightly squeezed to remove moisture
- 2 T grated ginger
- 1 T + 1 t Kikkoman Soy Sauce, or to taste
- Rose peppercorns, 10 per serving, roughly chopped
- Daikon sprouts for garnish

1 On the skin-side of the mackerel, lightly cut several slits at 7-8 mm/ 1/3 in. intervals. Sprinkle most of the salt onto the fillet side, and a little onto the skin. Cut each fillet in half. Set aside in the refrigerator for 30 minutes with fillet side facing down.

2 Grate the apple and mix with vinegar to avoid discoloration, then add the daikon, ginger and soy sauce. Taste and adjust the amount of the soy sauce to tone down the sweetness if desired.

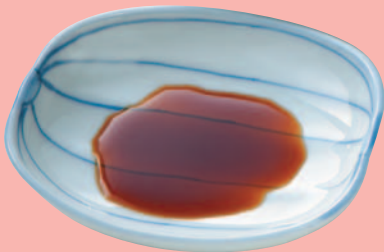
3 Wipe the mackerel dry with a paper towel. First grill skin-side down; then turn over and grill the skin, for a total of about 10 minutes or until the fish is lightly roasted.

4 Place grilled mackerel on a plate and pour the grated-mixture sauce over the fish. Sprinkle the rose pepper over the mackerel and garnish with daikon sprouts. Serve with additional soy sauce and vinegar on the side.

* *Arajio* facilitates removal of liquid from ingredients. The amount of salt in the recipe does not equal the total intake amount.

1 C (U.S. cup) = approx. 240 ml; 1 T = 15 ml; 1 t = 5 ml

Recipe by Michiko Yamamoto



SMOKED SALMON PRESSED SUSHI



◆ Smoked Salmon

Makes 8 appetizer servings 286 kcal Protein 13.3 g Fat 2.5 g (per person)

- 2 stackable pie-pans* (18 cm/8 in. diameter)

- 2 C *japonica* rice
- 2 C water**

Sushi vinegar

- 3 T vinegar
- 2 t sugar
- 1/3 t salt

- 100 g / 3.5 oz. julienned daikon
- 1/4 C julienned carrot
- Salt

Sweetened vinegar

- 2 T vinegar
- 1 T sugar
- 1 T dashi stock
- 1 t Kikkoman Light Color Soy Sauce
- Salt

- 20 slices of smoked salmon

- Kikkoman Soy Sauce to taste

1 Cook rice and let it stand for 10 minutes, then place in a bowl. Mix sushi vinegar ingredients and pour over the rice, then fold in gently to make sushi rice. Allow to cool.

2 Sprinkle the julienned daikon and carrot with a pinch of salt. Allow to sit for 5 minutes, and when they become soft, squeeze to drain off excess liquid. Mix the sweetened vinegar ingredients, then add to the daikon and carrot, and mix well.

3 Using plastic wrap, line one pie-pan. Drain the daikon and carrot strips, and divide into two even portions. Place one portion of the strips onto the pan and spread out evenly.

4 Completely cover the bottom of the pan with 10 smoked salmon slices.

5 Spread half of the rice over the layer of smoked salmon. Cover the rice with plastic wrap, and then place the second pan on top of the plastic wrap; press down steadily and evenly to flatten the rice.

6 When rice is flattened, discard the plastic wrap covering the rice and cover the pan with a large plate. Invert the pan to remove the sushi. Discard plastic wrap; cut the sushi into 4 pieces. Repeat steps 3 to 6 to make one more pan of sushi.

7 Place the sushi on individual plates, and serve accompanied with soy sauce if desired.

* It is recommended to use stackable pie-pans with rims wider than their bases. This way, two pans of the same size can be used to press the sushi rice, making it easier to flatten the rice evenly.

** Adjust the amount of water based on how dry the rice is, and according to the desired firmness of the cooked rice.

Recipe by Kikkoman Corporation



Production Begins at New Kikkoman Food Factory



Saitama Kikkoman Corporation's new factory

A new food factory operated by Saitama Kikkoman Corporation began production in December 2012 in Kuki City, Saitama Prefecture. The new factory is the production center for Kikkoman's *Uchi-no-Gohan* series of quick and easy seasonings for Japanese dishes. These are the core products in the company's "quick and easy seasonings" category, which has seen growing demand. The new facility has an annual production capacity of some 30 million items, and will also enhance production capabilities and enable the manufacture of high value-added products.

The *Uchi-no-Gohan* seasonings series was developed in 2002 as a new category of products designed specifically for home cooking; nationwide sales began in 2003. With these seasonings, homemade dishes can be made using only a frying pan. The simplicity of this product has made it very popular.

Unlike retort-packaged food products, Kikkoman's seasonings permit hands-on enjoyment of cooking in that

they require adding one or two additional ingredients before stir-frying, such as seasonal vegetables or meat. A separate packet of soy sauce is included with the seasonings, reflecting our wish that users may enjoy the aroma of soy sauce when it is added in the final step. This product series aims to inspire a variety of everyday home-cooking experiences, with soy sauce as the key to its authentic flavor.

Today, an increasing number of households consisting of working couples and singles are simplifying their dietary habits with less time for cooking and preparing family meals; yet more people prefer to eat at home to save money. As a casual and convenient addition to the family menu, these products are the perfect response. The *Uchi-no-Gohan* seasonings not only address Japan's current societal trends, they are being embraced by both younger and older generations.

As we strive to introduce new value, Kikkoman maintains an uncompromising attitude toward quality. The *Uchi-no-Gohan* series features the highest quality ingredients and serves up authentic flavors, thanks to the inclusion of Japanese dashi stock and soy sauce, which add natural umami without chemical seasonings or artificial colors.

Kikkoman will continue to develop products that promote balanced nutrition while spreading happiness to dinner tables. Through our reliable and meticulous manufacturing methods, we will also continue to introduce innovations in dietary habits that address not only individual needs and different cultures, but which will support both the physical and mental health of our customers. ●



Uchi-no-Gohan seasonings series. These are added to fresh meat or vegetables to create a complete stir-fried dish. From left: *Kiyabetsu no Goma Miso Itame* (cabbage stir-fried with sesame and miso seasoning); *Sukiyaki Niku Tofu* (sukiyaki-style beef with tofu); *Nasu no Niku Miso Itame* (eggplant stir-fried with meat and miso).