



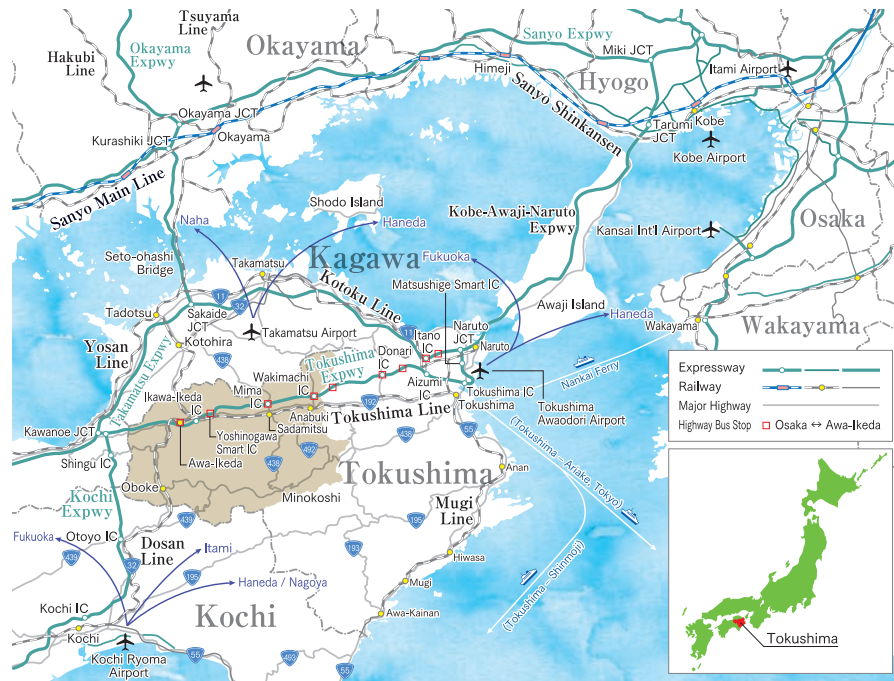
Savor Japan: Explore Regional Flavors certification logo

A thousand years, a hidden hamlet. — Going deep into the valley. Going back in time.

Western Tokushima, Shikoku NISHI-AWA Shangri-la

Savor Japan: Explore Regional Flavors

Dwelling on slope land amidst severe natural conditions, the people of Nishi-Awa have survived through wisdom and ingenuity. Follow in the footsteps of the ancestors who made this territory their Shangri-la.



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●Go here for Nishi-Awa tourism info: <http://nishi-awa.jp/english/>



Nishi-Awa
Mt. Tsurugi / Yoshino River Tourism Zone



About “Savor Japan: Explore Regional Flavors”

The Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has initiated a program in which efforts to make effective use of regional flavors, the primary industries that produce them, and other local resources, such as attractive tourist destinations. These efforts, being made to entice foreign tourists to visit these destinations, are recognized under the label “Savor Japan: Explore Regional Flavors”. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the first applications were submitted in 2016, and five of the forty-four regions that applied nationwide were selected. One of those regions is the Nishi-Awa region of Tokushima Prefecture. Sora-no-sato, an association deeply involved in efforts to promote tourism in this region, submitted an application and received recognition as “Nishi-Awa: Shangri-la”.



Savor Japan: Explore Regional Flavors

Western Tokushima, Shikoku

NISHI-AWA Shangri-la

Nishi-Awa is a region consisting of two cities and two towns in Tokushima Prefecture: Mima City, Miyoshi City, Tsurugi Town, and Higashimiyoshi Town, respectively.

The villages in the mountainous part of Nishi-Awa are perched midway down the slope land, and the scenery — a harmonious mix of mountains, fields, stonework, *koeguro*, and houses — is an indelible Japanese landscape that has been called “Shangri-la”.

This region’s unique traditions and culture, brimming with wisdom and ingenuity, is a treasure of Nishi-Awa that has been handed down from their ancestors.

The people of Nishi-Awa have survived by living among steep mountains and rivers that often flood their banks. They venerate mountain and water spirits, and have respect for nature, with a desire to share in the bounty that the water and land can provide. The riverside and mountainside are often different after a storm. The residents live in close proximity, relying on each other while savoring the joys of days that are tranquil from dawn till dusk. To prepare for house construction on slope land, stone walls are built to retain the dirt. Rocks and dirt flow downward, and this lifestyle requires a lot of time and effort to raise the ground when this occurs. The process of creating a village — building stone walls, constructing houses, and laying roads — is a cooperative effort, and the local deity’s providence is, of course, appreciated as well. The villagers also cooperate with weeding, harvesting the straw used for compost and bundling it into bales called *koeguro*. The distinctive environment produced by these conditions now has nostalgic value as an indelible Japanese landscape.

Nishi-Awa also utilizes a technique passed on from generation to generation called “slope land agriculture” that is rare worldwide. Because the land is unsuitable for growing rice, local varieties of buckwheat, along with native species of wild tea and local vegetables, and other grains are grown instead. Another valuable legacy, is the traditional cuisine that is made from these unique local ingredients such as buckwheat porridge, *dekomawashi*, and *hirarayaki*.

Villages where such distinctive scenery, traditions, and culinary culture can be experienced are found throughout Nishi-Awa. A lifestyle full of the wisdom and ingenuity of their ancestors, eating the simple, flavor-rich food of these villages, and interacting with their inhabitants, will provide you with an unforgettable life-enriching experience.



Slope Land Agriculture System



In the mountainous part of Nishi-Awa, techniques for farming on slopes rather than on terraced farmlands and other flat horizontal surfaces have been handed down from generation to generation. Storms can cause mudslides on sloping land. Thus, dried straw bundled and made into *koeguro* is laid between furrows in the fields to minimize mudslides, or used to create ridges along the slope's contours. Traditional farming implements called *sarae* are used to dig up the land and protect it. *Koeguro* are conical bales of straw that is harvested and bundled in fall. In addition to preventing mudslides, they are used as compost for treating the soil in spring, and

their presence has come to symbolize the slope land agriculture system in Nishi-Awa. These farming techniques, which use natural circulation and do not impact the land, are a legacy of the people's ancient ancestors from over a thousand years ago. Furthermore, slope land is unsuitable for growing rice, hence a wide variety of crops in smaller amounts are cultivated, including buckwheat, millet, sorghum, *kokibi*, and other grains as well as traditional vegetables and edible wild plants. The products of this region consist of local varieties harvested and preserved with great care by the people's ancestors — a storehouse of precious genetic resources.



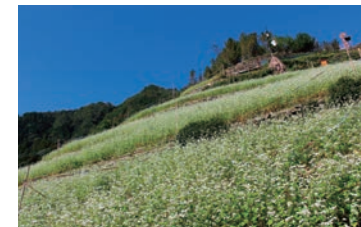
Buckwheat of the Iya Region

Buckwheat (soba) noodles in the Iya region are made without the use of binders, making them distinctively shorter than normal buckwheat noodles. Local buckwheat from Iya has an excellent aroma and is highly valued.

"Local Dish Soba-Rice Porridge"

Buckwheat: Continuously Protected by the Community

The *Awa Chronicle* instructs readers to "Plant in barren ground, feed with ash..." Buckwheat was easy to cultivate and yielded bountiful crops even without the use of fertilizer, making it well-suited to the poor quality mountain soil. Additionally, buckwheat has a relatively quick harvest time and can be harvested within 65 to 90 days, and consequently is valuable as a summer crop that remains an important product in mountain areas to this day. Buckwheat is normally sown around mid-August in high-altitude regions. The best seeds can be selected by using a winnowing fan on good seed stock consisting of small seeds. It is vulnerable to moisture damage, and therefore should be grown in fields with good drainage. Shoots emerge after about five days, then the plants flower at around 25 days, with ripe fruit at approximately 70 days. Losses due to birds, animals, and insect pests often occur, but the crop is ready for harvest just after the middle of October.



"Buckwheat, which can be harvested soon after cultivation, has been a valuable food ingredient."



The harvested buckwheat is not eaten only as noodles. It is also eaten as "sobaneri", which is buckwheat flour with salt kneaded with boiling water and used to make dumplings or glutinous buckwheat cakes. "Soba-Rice Porridge" is a unique local dish that uses soba instead of rice and is said to have been made by nostalgic warriors who had escaped during wartime from the capital city (Kyoto) to this region where rice - a staple of the Japanese diet - could not be obtained. Soba-Rice is made from salt-boiling brown buckwheat, drying it in the shade, and grinding it with a mortar or foot mortar to remove the husks. It is eaten as a porridge with sweet potato, vegetables, chicken, and other ingredients added.



Dekomawashi

Goshu potatoes, firm tofu called *iwadofu*, *konnyaku*, and other ingredients are put on a skewer and cooked over a hearth fire to make this *dengaku* dish. To prevent scorching it is turned while it cooks, reminding people of the spinning head of puppets used in Awa Ningyo Joruri puppetry called a *deko*, which is a traditional craft in Tokushima — hence its name, which means “spinning *deko*”.

These potatoes are normally eaten after cooking them on a grill or hot plate without peeling the skin.



Goshu Potatoes

Goshu Potatoes: A Growing Part of Life in the Mountains

According to records, these potatoes reached the Higashi-Iya region from the village of Kamoyama (present-day Nishisho, Higashimiyoshi) in 1860, and they rapidly became a part of mountain life.

Like regular potatoes, which prevented starvation during European famines and sea voyages, Goshu potatoes are a reliable food that can be grown even on slope land with poor quality soil. They keep well and can be stored in large amounts in cellars dug beneath houses.



Goshu potatoes are smaller than regular potatoes, producing half

the crop yield and being prone to disease. However, they have an intense flavor and are unspeakably delicious when eaten with miso or other condiments. They also resist softening when stewed, making them ideal for *oden* and other stewed dishes, and have become popular as a signature product of the region.

According to local residents, these potatoes don't have the same flavor and texture if they are planted on flat ground.

They are also known by a variety of local names: *iya-imo*, *goshu-imo*, *goshi-imo*, *nido-imo*, *oku-imo*, *iyafudo*, *hodo-imo*, etc. There are white and red varieties, sold under the brand name “Gempei Imo” after their association with The Tale of Heike.



Wild Game

“The consumption of wild game is connected with the preservation of farms and forests.”



Protecting Farms with Delicious Meat Dishes

The forests of Nishi-Awa are full of diverse creatures. The wild birds and animals that live there have been an important source of protein for sustaining mountain food practices. In recent years, however, birds and animals that strip tree bark, eat bamboo grass, and infest farmers' fields have become a serious problem.

Thus, in order to revitalize the natural environment by making effective use of the birds and animals that are caught, Tokushima Prefecture is working on widening the availability of, “Jibie Wild Game” and expansion of consumption.

Restaurants that provide wild game and dishes made from ingredients produced in Tokushima gain recognition as “Delicious! Jibie Wild Game Restaurant”.

There are three locations in Nishi-Awa where wild game is processed.



Select Ingredients Produced by Nature in Nishi-Awa



Awa Odori Chicken

These chickens, are shipped in larger amounts than any other JAS-approved local chicken breed in Japan. They are carefully raised for many years at the main production center in Nishi-Awa.



Halal Wagyu Beef

Wagyu beef is distinctive for its mild, sweet flavor, and tender marbled texture. Raising these high-quality, halal-certified cattle is made possible by an environment enriched by the Yoshino River.



Sake

The sake uses the area's natural ingredients, creating an exquisite taste revered by aficionados. The country's first local sake made with LED yeast is also sold here in Nishi-Awa.



Strawberries

Year-round strawberries — developed by breeding summer-autumn strawberries with Sokusei Strawberry— are cultivated in Nishi-Awa by making use of the cool climate conditions in the mountains. Tourist-oriented strawberry farms have also been established.