



- Explore the regions -



An appetizing and colorful set of Ryukyu dishes includes *tofuyo* (second from left, front row, orange sauce), an Okinawan delicacy made by fermenting *shimadofu* with rice *koji* mold and *awamori*. © Okinawa Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Entertaining and Enduring Food Culture

Throughout the nearly 500 years of the Ryukyu dynasty (1429–1879), Okinawa flourished as it came under varying influences from the cultures of China and Southeast Asian countries involved in trade. Among its attractions, including craft and architecture, is what you can eat here.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of Okinawa food culture is the prevalent use of pork, boiled to remove excess fat. Also unique to Okinawa is a cuisine of *shima-yasai*, vegetables native to the subtropical climate, immersed in a rich stock of pork or bonito with ingredients like seafood, seaweed,



Okinawa food culture, notable for its singular ingredient, is said to begin and end with pork, rich in vitamin B1 and more. Traditional cuisine uses every part of the pig—feet, ears, stomach—so that nothing is thrown away and everything is made delicious. Indispensable for Okinawan food is boiled pork belly: used not only for *rafte*, braised pork belly (left), but also for a topping on Okinawa wheat noodles (right).

or tofu for a feast delighting both eye and palate.

A traditional food culture featuring whole, natural edibles and bringing out rich flavors, Ryukyu cuisine has long attracted attention as a fine diet for health and longevity.



Carrot *shirishiri* gets its name from the sound of grinding (for julienne).

Distinct Drink: Awamori

Another ingredient essential to Okinawan cooking is *awamori*. Unlike sake, which is brewed, *awamori* is distilled (like *shochu*) with long-grain indica rice and black *koji* mold essential for distillation of Japanese comestibles. However, *awamori* production differs from *shochu*: the latter undergoes a two-step distillation, while *awamori* is made with a simple “whole koji preparation” that brings out the ingredient’s unique character. Varietals aged for three or more years are called *kusu* and have a sweet aroma particular to indica rice, with delicious differences in flavor and scent for each brand.

Also noteworthy is *awamori* history: possibly the first distilled rice liquor in Japan, going back perhaps more than 600



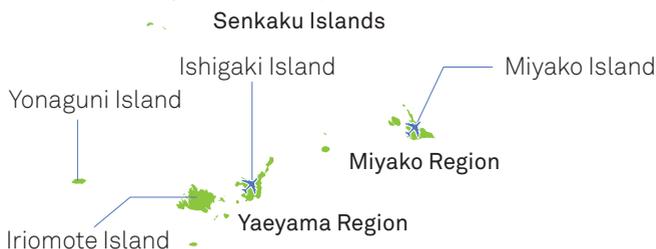
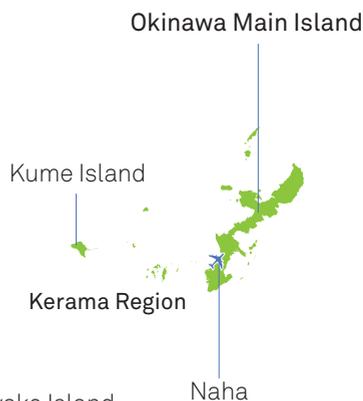
Colorful shellfish unique to Okinawa, Makishi Public Market, Naha.

years. With the sad loss of distilleries during the war, some koji was also destroyed, which threatened production. One day, however, discovered under the rubble was a straw mat that had covered steamed rice during

fermentation. The mat contained black koji and therefore brought awamori-making back to life.

With a long history and varied culture, a visit to the subtropical paradise of Okinawa offers not only unique dining on tasty

Getting There: ANA serves Okinawa (Naha) from many cities across Japan, including Tokyo (Haneda and Narita), Osaka (Itami and Kansai), Nagoya (Chubu), Sapporo (New Chitose), and Fukuoka.



food and drink but a savory sense of local delicacies that are as authentic as they are entertaining and memorable.



Karakara is a vessel for *awamori*, named for the rattle of the ceramic ball inside.



Umibudo (“sea grapes”) is tasty algae named for resembling the fruit. © Okinawa Convention & Visitors Bureau.



Okinawa distilleries offer unique *awamori* brands. Maturation takes half a year to a year, and varietals aged for three or more years are called *kusu* (“old liquor”). © Okinawa Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Looking Ahead

The next theme of Get to Know Okinawa is Culture and Souvenirs, set for June, featuring the colorful charm of Okinawan textiles, ideal as take-home gifts.

Handy URL

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