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「Nara's Food Culture」 <http://www3.pref.nara.jp/foodculture>



Nara, A Slow Food Capital

Nara, the Birthplace of Japanese Food Culture

Kakinoha-zushi



Nara

Nara was the site of Japan's capital, Heijō-kyō, established in 710. At the time, the city flourished as the political and cultural heart of the land. The capital's bustling population required that a steady supply of food and resources be brought from all over Japan.

While Nara is now famous for its historic shrines and temples, it was also known as a "food capital."



Nara's Traditional Sushi, "Kaki-no-ha-zushi"

When you think of sushi, "nigiri sushi," a globally recognized Japanese dish may come to mind. However, among the many types of sushi, "leaf-wrapped sushi" is something you may encounter for the first time when traveling in Japan. In fact, throughout the country various kinds of sushi and even sweets are wrapped in leaves.



Kaki-no-ha-zushi is a traditional dish from Nara, where mackerel is placed on rice and wrapped in persimmon leaves.

It is believed to have been created in the 1600s. The dish originated in the southern part of Nara, near the Yoshino River, where local families prepared it as a special treat for summer festivals.

Sushi was made as a festival feast using fish that was rare in Nara and rice that was precious at the time.

Nara is far from the coast and salted mackerel had to be transported by traveling merchants before the advent of trains and cars.



Why Wrap Sushi in Persimmon Leaves?

Why did people begin wrapping sushi in persimmon leaves? The answer is clear: persimmon trees were abundant in Nara. Famous for its persimmons, the region naturally utilized the large, green leaves of these trees for wrapping sushi.

The leaves of shibugaki (astringent persimmons) are particularly prized for their flexibility and vibrant color. They also contain tannins, known for their antibacterial properties. It's likely that people discovered from experience that wrapping food in these leaves helped preserve it.



Where Did the Mackerel Come From?

When Kaki-no-ha-zushi was first created, it took around two days to transport salted mackerel from the southern seas to Nara. Merchants used riverboats and then crossed mountains on foot with the salted fish.

Which Leaf-wrapped Sushi Is Best?

Traditionally made at home, Kaki-no-ha-zushi is now available year round at stores throughout the prefecture. While the classic version uses mackerel, today you can also find variations featuring salmon and other fish. We recommend making taste-comparisons of the different versions of Kaki-no-ha-zushi to find your favorite.

In October and November, look for Kaki-no-ha-zushi wrapped in autumn-red persimmon leaves—a visually stunning and delicious seasonal treat.



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