

◆ Hirosaki ◆

Eight local culinary specialties

Here at Hirosaki you can try a variety of truly delicious dishes, so make sure you do try the local cuisine

Hirosaki, a city with heavy snowfalls, magnificent nature and fresh marine products

The city of Hirosaki in Aomori Prefecture is located between 40°12' and 41°33' north latitude, which is the almost the same latitude as that of New York, Beijing, Rome, and Madrid. When winter comes, truly cold weather sets in, and both Hirosaki and the areas surrounding it are well known in Japan as places with particularly heavy snowfalls. As the city is surrounded by sea in three directions, fishing has been one of the main occupations of the population from the ancient times, and fresh marine products are available here through the year.

Another advantage of the city's location is its proximity to Shirakami Mountain Range, a place one can find truly beautiful untouched nature, which has been designated as the World Natural Heritage.

The city is also close to other magnificent natural locations, such as the Ou Mountain Range stretching from the north to the south in Aomori Prefecture, which is often called "the backbone of Japan".



Cultural climate of Hirosaki that has been fostered in the history

Hirosaki has prospered for about 400 years as a center for politics, economy, and culture of the Tsugaru region (the western part of Aomori Prefecture).

The Hirosaki Castle, which served as the center for the political life of the area, still exists. It is a main tourist attraction of Hirosaki with its awesome views: cherry blossoms in Spring and snowy landscape in Winter.

Being a port, Hirosaki has also prospered through marine trade, absorbing various cultural elements through its connections with various other countries.

According to one theory, the traditional performing art of Tsugaru-jamisenn style Hirosaki is famous for has also come to the area through its trade with Asia.

Today Hirosaki proudly stands as the largest producer of apples in Japan, but as far as we know, apple cultivation in the area all started from an apple seedling, which was brought here by a missionary, who came to live in Hirosaki from Indiana, U.S.



Gastronomic culture of Hirosaki handed down from the times long past

As Hirosaki is located near the sea, local cuisine has developed with an emphasis on products of the sea.

And that is only natural, since for people having to survive during harsh winters, when both things and foodstuffs became scarce, marine products and especially fish with its high nutritive value has always been one of the best-cherished treats of all.

Also, many remains of paddy fields of the Yayoi period (300 BC - AD 250) have been discovered in Hirosaki and the areas surrounding it, proving that people have been actively producing rice at the time.

And rice is still used in abundance in the traditional cuisine of the region today, and in addition to its role as the staple food, people of Hirosaki also make confectionery, keepable foods, and much more from it.



Traditional cuisine of Hirosaki filled with wisdom of how to pass severe winters

In Hirosaki with its harsh cold climate and extensive snowfalls, food is usually seasoned with a lot of salt, which raises the blood pressure enabling people to withstand cold weather, and there is a strong preference for warm soups, which warm the body right up to the core.

People of Hirosaki carefully protect their traditional cuisine filled with ingenious knowledge of how to pass severe winters, passing it from generation to generation as their hometown taste.

In restaurants of Hirosaki city we can even now enjoy the delicious traditional cuisine - not only in winter, but through the year.

As during the winter both things and foodstuffs become scarce, people of Hirosaki devised cooking methods allowing them to use every part of the ingredient that only can be used, and many ways to preserve their foodstuffs. A good example is the herring, which is the fish mainly caught in the sea around Hirosaki, which is dried making it a keepable food.

In Hirosaki people use the bones and skin of cod, which has always been a real treat during the winter season, to make various dishes. Vegetables were dried or pickled so as to enable people to keep them for a long time, eating little by little.

Restaurants offering traditional Hirosaki cuisine



創作郷土料理の店 菊富士 F-4
Kikufuji Creative Local Specialties
Address 1 Sakamoto-cho, Hirosaki-shi
Open hours 11:00-15:00, 17:00-22:00 (Last order: 21:00)
Closed on no scheduled holidays
Hirosaki traditional cuisine offered:
●Kenoshiru ●Jappajiru ●Kaiyakimiso ●Tsugaru soba
●Hirosaki Igamenchi ●Nanban-no-isshezuke
●Bamboo Shoot Dengaku (only in spring)



津軽居酒屋 わいわい H-5
Waiwai Tsugaru Izakaya
Address 1-3-15, Omachi, Hirosaki-shi, Ekimae-Kanayo Building, 1F
Open hours Sunday-Thursday 17:00-24:00 (Last order: 23:30)
Friday-Saturday 17:00-1:00 (Last order: 24:30)
Closed on no scheduled holidays
Hirosaki traditional cuisine offered:
●Kenoshiru ●Jappajiru ●Kaiyakimiso ●Hirosaki Igamenchi
●Tara-no-koae ●Bamboo Shoot Dengaku (only in spring)



津軽三味線ダイニング 響 F-4
Hibiki Tsugaru Jamisen Dining
Address 126, Dotemachi, Hirosaki-shi, Hirosaki Park Hotel, 3F
Open hours 17:00-22:00
Closed on Monday
Hirosaki traditional cuisine offered:
●Kenoshiru
●Kaiyakimiso
●Hirosaki igamenchi



津軽居酒屋 けん太 E-4
Kenta Tsugaru Izakaya
Address 11-2, Kajimachi, Hirosaki-shi
Open hours Monday-Thursday 17:00-1:00 (Last order: 24:30)
Friday-Sunday 17:00-2:00 (Last order: 1:30)
Closed on never
Hirosaki traditional cuisine offered:
●Kenoshiru ●Jappajiru ●Kaiyakimiso ●Tsugaru soba
●Tara-no-koae (Seasonal) ●bamboo shoot dengaku (only in spring)



津軽居酒屋 あどはだり F-5
Adohadari Tugaruji Izakaya
Address 2, Sumiyoshi-cho, Hirosaki-shi
Open hours 14:00-24:00 (Last order: 23:30)
Closed on the first and the third Tuesday of each month
Hirosaki traditional cuisine offered:
●Kenoshiru ●Jappajiru
●Kaiyakimiso
●Tsugaru soba

The locations of the restaurants are marked on the Hirosaki Guide Map.

Traditional cuisine cooked for the Japanese New Year

Salty

Kenoshiru ーケの汁

Available: all year

Kenoshiru is a soup made with various ingredients processed so as to be preserved for a long time (Japanese radish, carrots, burdock, various mountain herb delicacies, tofu, konnyaku, etc.), which are then finely chopped into 5mm cubes, boiled, and seasoned with a lot salt and dark-brown miso, creating a taste with a rich depth of flavor.

Soup gains even more flavor if left for a day or two.

It is a traditional dish eaten during the New Year celebrations in the Hirosaki Region and the area around it, and in the old days people would make it in large cauldrons, reheat and eat for many days afterwards.

In each family and restaurant the ingredients differ, and these subtle differences are one more aspect of the dish that is very enjoyable.

The peculiar name of the soup is said to be a corrupted form of the original name "Kayu-no-shiru" (rice porridge broth).



Using a shell of a large scallop instead of a stewpot

Salty

Miso-seasoned ingredients baked in a shell (Kaiyakimiso) ー貝焼味噌

Available: all year

The name of this dish comes from the way it is cooked - using a shell of a large scallop instead of a stewpot.

The way it is served and eaten is also quite unique.

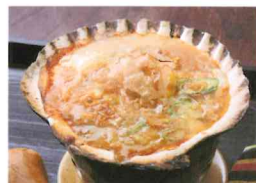
First you put scallops, white-fleshed fish, tofu, and other ingredients in a shell that serves as the stewpot, and then add a broth richly seasoned with salt and bean paste.

Finally, you add some fresh egg mixed with onion and boil it.

In the old days, when eggs were a real treasure, this local culinary specialty used to be a special food only cooked for mothers after childbirth or for the sick, to provide much-needed nourishment.

It is said that the large shells used instead of stewpots were also a treasure passed from generation to generation in the family.

These shells were perceived as so important an heirloom that some women even took them to the husband's family after marriage as trousseau (which in Japan is called "yomeiri-dogu" (literally, "tools of the entering bride").



Home-style dish made from cuttlefish legs and vegetables

Is seasoned after being served

Hirosaki Igamenchi ー弘前いがめんち

Available: all year

Hirosaki Igamenchi is a local culinary specialty showing the ingenuity of people of Hirosaki, who learned how to use the ingredients wasting nothing that can be utilized. This dish utilizes the parts of cuttlefish - a real treasure in the old days - that were left after making sashimi or stewed foods, that is, the legs.

To cook Hirosaki Igamenchi is very simple.

First, legs of the cuttlefish are tapped with a large knife until they become of a shape resembling minced meat, next they are mixed with wheat flour and all the vegetables at hand, made into cutlet-like shapes, and roasted on a griddle with large amount of oil.

Hirosaki Igamenchi is a dish one can season to taste, and it has been passed from generation to generation as the "taste of mother's cooking", slightly different in every house as a popular traditional food of Hirosaki.



A New Year's dish with vegetables, etc. dressed with salted cod roe

Slightly salty

Codfish dressed with salted cod roe (Tara-no-koae) ー鱈の子和え

Available: all year

In Japan, dishes, in which various seasoning substances are mixed with the main ingredients are called "Aemono", dressed dishes.

In Hirosaki and areas around it two ways of dressing have been practiced from the ancient times: the so-called "Tomo-ae", which means that the fish meat and fish livers are mixed, and "Ko-ae", when the roe is mixed with the fish meat.

Tara-no-koae is one of the latter, and is a traditional dish made to celebrate the new year.

Vegetables seasoned with sake, soy sauce, sugar, konnyaku cut in small pieces, and cod roe are stir-fried on a pan, after which tofu and green onion are also added to the pan. The dish has smooth taste and is well liked by children.



One-pot dish using every piece of the fish

Salty

Jappajiru ーじゃっぱ汁

Available: November-March

Jappajiru is a traditional winter dish that is highly popular among the locals. It is a one-pot dish (the variety called in Japanese 'nabe'), in which all the parts that get usually thrown away when cooking fish such as the head, bones, skin, and entrails are cut to the easily eatable size and cooked together with vegetables.

This dish is a true gem of the wisdom of people of Hirosaki, who really know how to put whatever is at hand to the most effective use.

The rich broth made with the head, bones, and skin of the fish gives a taste so thick and rich, one simply cannot create if only the meat of the fish is used.

The soup is thickly seasoned with salt and bean paste, and is savored together with the bones covered with fish meat, which is said to be the most delicious part.

The peculiar name of the soup, Jappa-jiru, is said to derive from the word 'zappa' that is used to describe the unnecessary parts of the fish, while 'jiru' or 'shiru' mean soup.



Unique buckwheat noodles made adding soybeans to buckwheat flour

Salty

Tsugaru Buckwheat Noodles ー津軽そば

Available: all year

Tsugaru Buckwheat Noodles is a type of buckwheat noodles cooked in a way that is fairly uncommon even in Japan.

As the cooking process is highly time-consuming, for some time there were fears that the dish and the way to make it would be forgotten and disappear out of the traditional repertoire of Hirosaki cooking.

But as a result of efforts of enthusiasts, who conducted research reading old documents and asking in houses with long traditions, the recipe has been resurrected and we can eat this amazing dish once more.

First, buckwheat flour, which is what Japanese-style buckwheat noodles are made from, is kneaded on water into a ball shape and left for a night, after that the dough is kneaded once again with ground soybeans (or soybean juice) added, which is then used to make noodles.

The resulting buckwheat noodles have peculiar texture and feeling on the tongue easily breaking on the teeth, and have faint sweet flavor of soybeans.



A preserved food made with the local specialty-green pepper

Slightly hot

Green peppers pickled in a bottle (Namban-no-issshozuke) ー南蛮の一瓶漬

Available: all year

"Namban" is a word meaning red pepper.

"Issho" is a measure unit that was used in Japan in the old days, and in present terms is 1.804 . (or 0.477 gallon).

In Hirosaki, a snowy country with cold climate, people have been growing and harvesting red pepper from the ancient times and knew how to preserve it for a long period of time and use it to make their food delicious.

The name of the dish has its roots in the fact that formerly bottles of one sho in size were used to make the dish.

To make the dish we simply need to mix finely chopped red pepper with soy sauce and bacteria used for fermentation in sake brewing process (rice malt), and then put the resulting mixture away for storage.

As days go by, the mixture ferments becoming tastier and tastier.

It also loses its pungency and is a dish that goes well with alcoholic beverages. It is also used as a seasoning with other dishes, making rice, pickled vegetables, tofu, and other products and dishes taste really fine.



Dish made of mountain herb delicacies heralding the advent of the spring

Is seasoned after being served

Dengaku with bent bamboo shoots ー根曲がり竹の田楽

Available: May-June

In Japan, bamboo shoots are called "takenoko", which literally means "bamboo's children" and the vegetable is widely used in the culinary culture. Bamboo shoots are used in tempura and other Japanese dishes and is a much loved foodstuff.

Bamboo, which grows wild in Hirosaki and areas surrounding it, is a variety called "bent bamboo" or "small bamboo", which is different from the moso bamboo that is commonly used in Japanese cooking.

In Hirosaki, there are many dishes using bamboo shoots of this bent bamboo peculiar to the region, and one particular cooking method that is known best and results in a fresh tasting dish is a technique called "dengaku."

In dengaku, unpeeled bamboo shoots are boiled for just a little while and then roasted. This technique preserves the fragrance and the flavor of bamboo shoots best and is an ingenious way to make food truly delicious. The aromatically prepared bamboo shoots are then peeled and eaten basted in sauce based on miso.

