

Hakodate Makombu

The starting point of the Kombu Road

Over 90% of Japan's kombu kelp comes from Hokkaido, and around 30% of that kombu comes from Hakodate, making Hakodate **the top kombu producer in Japan by both volume and revenue**.

Of the over 10 different species of kombu are found in Hokkaido, makombu (*Saccharina japonica*) is particularly prized. Caught along the stretch of Hakodate's coastline from the Tsugaru Strait to Funka Bay, makombu has long been favored by chefs, particularly in the Kansai region, for being thick, wide, and able to produce clear broth (dashi) with a luxurious, rich flavor.

Centuries ago, Hakodate's makombu was shipped from Matsumae to Tsuruga in Fukui Prefecture before being delivered to Kyoto and Osaka. Later, in the Edo Period (1603-1868), it was transported directly from Shimonoseki to Osaka along the western circuit of the Kitamae-bune shipping route, which passed through the Seto Inland Sea. That route became known as the "Kombu Road," with Hakodate in southern Hokkaido as the starting point.

But because Hakodate's makombu did not have a unified name—it was named for each area where it was picked, such as Shirokuchi-hama, Kurokuchi-hama and Hombaori-hama—it was less well known than kombu from places like Rishiri, Hidaka and Rausu. Most people didn't even know that those brands of makombu came from Hakodate.

To increase the renown and recognition of Hakodate's makombu, five fisheries in Hakodate (Hakodate City Fishing Cooperative, Zenikamezawa Fishing Cooperative, Toi Fishing Cooperative, Esan Fishing Cooperative and Minamikayabe Fishing Cooperative) came together with the Hakodate City government to promote **Hakodate Makombu** as a Hakodate-wide brand from 2017.



Hakodate

Makombu

Brands and where they come from



Shirokuchi-hama

Characteristics

Caught along the coast of Minamikayabe, this kelp grows in waters that receive plenty of nutrient salts and minerals from river water. As a result, it has a luxurious taste and produces a clear stock. Its name, meaning “white cut surface” in Japanese, comes from the white color that appears when dried pieces of this kelp are cut. It’s also called Kenjo-kombu (Japanese for “kelp of nobility”) as the Matsumae clan served it to the Imperial Court and shogunate during the Edo period (1603-1867).

Where it’s found

Along the coast from the Kameda Peninsula and Minamikayabe to Cape Choshi on the eastern side of the Oshima Peninsula

Main areas where it’s caught

Ofune, Usujiri, Yasuura, Kakkumi, Osatsube, Kinaoshi

Kurokuchi-hama

Characteristics

Caught in the cold current between Cape Choshi and Cape Shiokubi, stock made from this kelp is clear with a delicious flavor. Like Shirokuchi-hama, this kelp is named for the color that appears when a dried piece is cut—this one means “black cut surface” in Japanese. Kurokuchi-hama reportedly has a slightly higher salt content than Shirokuchi-hama, but its richness has earned it an similarly high reputation for quality to Shirokuchi-hama.

Where it’s found

Along the coast from the Kameda Peninsula and Cape Choshi to Cape Shiokubi on the eastern side of the Oshima Peninsula

Main areas where it’s caught

Todohokke, Esan, Kobui, Shirikishinai, Hiura, Higashitoi

Hombaori-hama

Characteristics

Caught where the warm and cold currents mix* between Cape Shiokubi and Cape Tachimachi, this kelp has a comparatively light flavor and produces a clear, beautiful stock. Its name in Japanese refers to the fact that the pieces are big and long enough to fold. There are two kinds: an offshore type that is long and wide and a coastal type that is narrow and thick.

Where it’s found

Along the coast from the Kameda Peninsula and Cape Shiokubi to Mt. Hakodate (Cape Tachimachi*) on the eastern side of the Oshima Peninsula

Main areas where it’s caught

Oyasu, Ishizaki, Zenikamezawa, Uga (the common name for an area covering part of Shinori Town and Nesaki Town**), Nesaki, Hakodate

* Oishi, Keiichi (1987). *Kombu no Michi* (Kelp Road). Daiichishobo

** Hakodate City Government Archives (compilation). *Hakodate Shishi Zenikamezawa-hen* (Hakodate City Archives Edited by Zenikamezawa), 1998.