

Reading and Talking

“Hyoutan Age” from Sendai

Sendai in Miyagi Prefecture is famous for small round sponge cakes with custard filling that are called “Hagi no Tsuki”, and for “Sasakama” bamboo-leaf-shaped fish-paste cakes. There is also “Hyoutan Age” (“gourd fry”) balls of deep-fried fish-paste. The two balls on one stick look like a gourd. You can eat it like a corn dog, with or without tomato ketchup. Abe Kamaboko stores in Sendai sell Hyoutan Age for 250 yen a stick. Now, for a short time, you can buy them online at <https://www.abekama.co.jp/shop/>. A packet of six costs 1,600 yen.

(96 words)

Have you ever eaten a stick of Hyoutan Age in Sendai?

↳ Yes, I have. (--When and where did you eat it? / How was it? / Do you think convenience stores should sell Hyoutan Age?)

↳ No, I haven't. (--Do you think Hyoutan Age tastes good? / Do you buy fried chicken or french fries at convenience stores?)

Have you ever eaten Hagi no Tsuki sponge cakes?

↳ Yes, I have. (--Did you buy them yourself? / Do you like any other dessert with custard in it? / Do you like “anko” sweet red bean paste?)

↳ No, I haven't. (--Do you like custard? / Do you like “Shuu Kuriimu” cream puffs?)

Do you like “Amerikan Doggu” corn dogs?

↳ Yes, I do. / Kind of. (--Have you eaten one recently? / Do you put ketchup on it? / Have you ever made corn dogs?)

↳ No, I don't. (--How come you don't like them? / Have you eaten a hot dog recently? / Do you like doughnuts?)

(May 15, 2020)

More information

“Hyoutan Age” from Sendai

Sendai is the capital of Miyagi Prefecture and, with a population of over 1,000,000, it's the largest city in the Tohoku region. Local specialties include small round sponge cakes with custard filling called “Hagi no Tsuki” (Harvest moon over bush clovers), and “Sasakama” (Bamboo-leaf-shaped fish-paste cakes).

There's also “Hyoutan Age” (literally “gourd fry”) balls of fish-paste that are steamed, then dipped in a slightly sweet batter and deep-fried. The two balls on one skewer give them the shape of a gourd, hence its name. Like a corn dog, you can eat it as is, or add tomato ketchup. Abe Kamaboko stores in Sendai sell Hyoutan Age for ¥250 a stick, and locals and visitors alike can be seen eating them on the street. One Abe Kamaboko branch sells more than 4,000 sticks on a busy day.

Traveling is discouraged during the pandemic, but from May 20, Abe Kamaboko is selling Hyoutan Age online for a limited period at <https://www.abekama.co.jp/shop/>. Packets of six (¥1,600) are delivered frozen. Use a microwave and then a toaster oven to make them ready to eat.

(184 words)

(May 15, 2020)

Reading and Talking

A new way to wash rice

Here is a way to wash rice without using your hand. “New Tsumetaku Mai” is a plastic container. You put the rice inside and close the lid. There is a hole in the lid, and you add water through the hole to wash the rice inside. Then turn the container upside down to drain out the water. The container shows you how much water you should add to cook the rice. Add the water, and pour the rice and water into your electric rice cooker. New Tsumetaku Mai is sold at kitchen stores or online for 1,000 yen.

(104 words)

What do you think about “New Tsumetaku Mai”?

↳ I think it’s great. / I think it’s OK. / It doesn’t sound so good. (--How come you think so? / Do you have nail extensions or decorations? / Have you bought something on impulse recently?)

What kind of cutting board do you use at home?

↳ I use a [wooden cutting board / plastic cutting board / silicone cutting board / XXX]. (--Why did you choose that type? / Is it easy to keep it clean? / Do you clean your cutting board with “hyouhakuzai” bleach?)

Do you buy regular rice or “musen mai” no-rinse rice?

↳ I buy regular rice. (--How do you rinse rice? / How many “gou” cups of rice do you cook at a time? / Have you ever tried “musen mai” no-rinse rice?)

↳ I buy “musen mai” no-rinse rice. (--Do you sometimes buy regular rice? / Do you buy instant microwave rice packs?)

↳ I don’t buy rice. (--How come you don’t buy rice? / How often do you eat rice?)

(May 15, 2020)

More information

A new way to wash rice

Rinsing is an important preliminary to cooking rice. If you have delicate or fashionable nails, however, or if it's winter and you don't enjoy plunging your hand into freezing cold water, rinsing rice may be a challenge.

Here is a new piece of kitchen equipment that allows you to rinse rice without using your hand. "New Tsumetaku Mai" is a plastic container. You put the rice inside and close the lid. There is a hole in the lid, and you put your kitchen faucet over it and turn on the water. The water swirls and rinses the rice in the container. Then turn the container upside down to drain out the water.

The container shows you how much water you should now add to cook the rice. Add the water, and pour the rice and water into your electric rice cooker. New Tsumetaku Mai can rinse from one to three "gou" of rice. It's sold by Kakusee, a company in Niigata Prefecture, and it's available at kitchen equipment stores, or at online stores such as Rakuten and Amazon, for ¥1,000.

(186 words)

(May 15, 2020)