

# Japanese Olympians: From Hokkaido to Fukushima

Japan has had a long history with the Olympics, especially for being the first Asian city to host the Olympics in 1964. The Tokyo 2020 Games was in fact the fourth Olympics held in the country — making Tokyo the only Asian city to host the Summer Games twice.

What sets this year apart from the rest is when Japan rewrote their Olympic record for most golds and total medals won despite several pre-games favourites underperforming. To be precise, all 47 of Japan's prefectures have produced Olympic gold medalists, after karateka Ryo Kiyuna became the first Okinawa Prefecture native to earn gold with his victory in the men's kata division.

Including team sports and team events, Kiyuna, 31, is the 229th Japanese national to win a gold medal at a Summer or Winter Games. In fact, Kiyuna's achievement was the final piece in the puzzle to see Olympic gold medals earned by people from all 47 prefectures.

Certainly the Japanese athletes are more than about wins and losses. As a retrospective to the games this year, let's take a look at some of the prefectures of those athletes who have graced the sporting stage. After all, in a country where every town has their own specialty dish, there's no shortage of unique meals to try and what better way to see the country than following your appetite?

## More than just sushi and tempura

With 47 prefectures — including 43 traditional, two urban (Osaka and Kyoto), one territory (Hokkaido) and the Metropolis of Tokyo — each has a strong and independent identity, with food forming a strong part. Mainly, it was ingredients from Tokyo as well as the three northeastern prefectures of Fukushima, Iwate, and Miyagi, were used in dishes every day.

But all 47 prefectures will contribute something to the menu. Let's look at some parts and the specialities it carries.

### ***Hokkaido and Tōhoku***

The island of Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost region, has plenty of farming land and is well known for dairy and potatoes. The prefectures of Tōhoku (on the mainland) embrace the cooler temperatures and are known for fruit and some unusual dishes including beef tongue — along with noodle competitions.



*Hokkaido, also the birthplace of miso ramen, has the ideal winter-warmer — Hokkaido ramen.*  
Photo: [Japanese Cooking 101](#)

### **Miyagi**

Located about 300 kilometers northeast of Tokyo, sits Miyagi and if you're visiting its capital city *Sendai*, then beef tongue is the dish to sample. Called *gyutan*, it is grilled after being aged, so it is rich in flavour and soft to the bite.

In autumn, the dish that is famous is *imoni* — large pots of stew with pork, miso, and taro roots cooked outside, often by the river.



*Imoni* — a taro and meat soup eaten traditionally in the autumn in the Tōhoku region of Japan. Yamagata Prefecture in particular is famous for its *imoni*, but other prefectures in the region also have their own different varieties. Photo: [Food Atlas](#)

### **Fukushima**

Served on special occasions like New Year, the southernmost prefecture of Tōhoku region is known for its *kozuyu*, a clear soup made with dried scallops, konyaku jelly and noodles. Each family has their own recipe, which is passed down through the generations.



### **Iwate**

The second-largest Japanese prefecture is known for its *wanko soba*. Served in small bowls as a nod to a time when they once ran out at a festival, you can stack the bowls up as you go and when you're done, place a lid on top to signal you're done.

*Wanko Soba* — Soba is served in small bowls, or *wanko*, and is repeatedly refilled until the diner has had enough. Photo: [Japan Travel](#)

## Other Japanese dishes served to Olympians

One of the five competition-winning menu items is cold *somen* noodles, a classic dish eaten in Japan's hot summer months. While it is common to soak noodles in light soup stock with condiments, the noodles will be served with chicken and vegetables with tomato juice to help athletes get the nutrition they need.

Even *oden*, a standard winter menu item, was served. The dish, normally eaten as a hot pot, will be served in a chilled soup with tomatoes and other summer vegetables along with more typical ingredients such as processed fishcakes.

For dessert, *zunda de panna cotta*, using sweetened mashed green soybeans from northeastern Japan is also provided. The two other selected dishes are *zangi* deep-fried salmon, originating on the northernmost main island of Hokkaido, and toasted bread with peaches, ham and cream cheese.

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