

■ お弁当

The ^{べんとう}お弁当 has a long history in Japan. The word was first heard in the Kamakura Period around 800 years ago, apparently originating from a Chinese word meaning 'convenient'. Traditionally ^{べんとう}お弁当 contains rice and ^{おかず}おかず, side dishes. The most basic ^{べんとう}お弁当 is called ^ひ日の丸 (rising-sun flag) ^{べんとう}弁当 because it is made up of white rice with a red ^{うめぼし}うめぼし, pickled plum, in the middle. Children and adults alike take their ^{べんとう}お弁当箱, lunch box, from home wrapped in an ^{べんとうつつ}お弁当包み (cloth mat). An ^{べんとう}お弁当 lovingly made by a wife for her husband is called ^{あいさいべんとう}愛妻弁当. If you can't take an ^{べんとう}お弁当 from home, you buy one with ^{べんとうだい}お弁当代, lunch money; ^{べんとう}お弁当 is the most sold item in Japanese ^{コンビニ}コンビニ (convenience stores). When travelling by train, the Japanese look forward to buying an ^{えきべん}駅弁 which contains the specialty of a particular region. Picking up on this, some airlines have recently been promoting their flights by offering ^{からべん}空弁!

There are ^{べんとう}お弁当 for special occasions, eg. ^{はなみべんとう}お花見弁当, and deluxe ^{べんとう}お弁当 called ^{まく}幕の内弁当, which originated from the practice of eating between the acts of a play when the ^{まく}幕, curtain, was down. And finally, when you eat your ^{べんとう}お弁当 early because you're hungry and can't wait, you ^{はやべん}早弁する!