



STARS  AND STRIPES<sup>®</sup>

# A Taste of Okinawa

The 3 'R's to good eating –  
Restaurants,  
Reviews & Recipes

**4-page pullout**





VIEW VIDEO

# A stroke of luck with delicious imokinton

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA,  
STRIPES OKINAWA

With the return of fall, grocery stores stock up on sweet potatoes and seasonal snacks with satsuma-imo (sweet potato) flavors. These purple root vegetables are considered the aki no mikaku, or taste of autumn in Japan.

In Okinawa, the obsession with all things sweet potato is deeply intertwined with the history of the islands.

Prior to the crop's introduction to the mainland, sweet potatoes were first imported to the Ryukyu Kingdom from China in 1605 by Noguni Sokan. Okinawa's soil, which drained well, was well-suited for the cultivation of the crop.

Today, you'll find sweet potatoes in many dishes and sweets in Okinawa, including tempura and ice cream.

In particular, beniimo, or red potato, is especially popular. Its vibrant color makes it a great ingredient for many dishes. However, yellow satsuma-imo also proves to be a delicious ingredient you shouldn't overlook.

A recipe you might enjoy if you're a sweet potato fan is imokinton. Kinton is a kind of Japanese sweet that molds some paste of food such as satumaimo (sweet potato), ingenmame (kidney beans), and kuri (chestnuts) into a ball shape. As the name suggests, imokinton is rounded balls of sweet potato paste.

According to Shokuiku Daijiten, a website dedicated to health and food, the name "kinton" originally referred to some round sweets imported from China. Some say the original kinton was similar to wonton.

Now, kinton is spelled as "金団." The letter

"金" means gold, and "団" means a group or a block. Since balls in yellow can be associated with fortune, kinton is now recognized as food to be served up for New Year celebrations.

Wagashi Japanese sweets shops also stock imokinton and other varieties like chestnuts and bean-flavored kinton. You may even find kinton perfected by Japanese pastry cooks in the shape of beautiful flowers or fruit.

Although it is too early to celebrate a new year, I decided to try making one because I saw so many yellow sweet potatoes on the shelf at a supermarket in my neighborhood.

The recipe I followed looked simple and easy to understand on paper, but it turned out painstaking in some ways. Pureeing the paste until it gets smooth took a lot of effort. Plus shaping the paste into balls was very challenging as well. My "kinton" ended up having some creases and wrinkles, far from the smooth and beautiful ones you would find at Japanese sweetshops. Nonetheless, the good flavor of my creation was surprising.

The texture felt soft like gelato and the potato's sweetness wasn't overwhelming and different from other sugary sweets. Although my presentation of the food was not satisfying, I was happy with my first try of kinton, at least in terms of how it tasted.

If you are an artistic type and confident in your dexterity, I would recommend that you try molding the paste into nice flowers and leaves. Even if not, this is still worth a try since the simple recipe will let you enjoy the nice sweetness and possibly bring good luck for fortune.

Imokinton pairs nicely with some green tea and other warm beverages, perfect for welcoming the fall season. Enjoy!

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## Ingredients

- Sweet potato (500g)
- Milk (100cc)
- Sugar (60g)
- Butter (80g)
- Dry Gardenia flower (one piece)
- Chestnuts to garnish (or sesame, dried fruits, etc.)



## Recipe

1



Peel skin off sweet potatoes and dice them.

2



Soften the diced sweet potatoes by microwaving or boiling them.

3



Boil gardenia in a pot of water. To enhance the yellow color, you can boil gardenia with sweet potatoes in a pot. (If you microwave sweet potatoes, you can boil them in a pot and add in the colored liquid to the mixture of sweet potatoes, butter, and sugar.)

4



Mix sweet potatoes, butter and sugar, and then mash (You can also add salt or mirin/sweet cooking rice wine to fine tune the taste).

5



Add in milk and mix ingredients further. Mix in yellow liquid from the boiling gardenia (about two teaspoons or more).

6



Puree the mixture.

7



Pick up some dough and wrap it with saran wrap before forming a ball. Repeat the process until you have made several dough.

8



To finish, top each ball with a garnish. I chose pre-cooked chestnuts.

いただきます! (Itadakimasu) Bon appetite





## Gen a real gem on Okinawa

Offering authentic Japanese and Okinawan cuisine at a reasonable price, Gen was recognized in Stripes’ Best of the Pacific 2013 as the best restaurant to experience the local culture on Okinawa. Owner and Head Chef Naoki Tsukayama highly recommends the “Fish Garlic Butter Combo,” a popular dish among American customers. Tsukayama and his staff make you feel at home, so stop by and enjoy a delicious meal. Gen is located across from Camp Foster’s fire station. Just look for shi-shi dogs on a traditional Okinawan tile roof outside Foster’s Fire Station Gate.

### RESTAURANT INFO



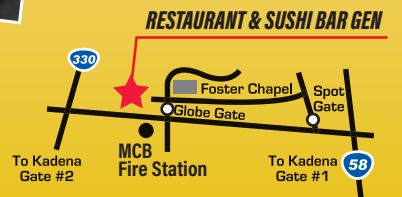
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# A Taste of Okinawa



## Tasty food, great drinks, fun events at Sidelines

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### RESTAURANT INFO





# Stone-oven-baked pizza, pasta, spare ribs and more

Have you heard of Pizzeria MARINO, renowned for our delicious cuisine in Okinawa? At Pizzeria MARINO, you can savor a wide variety of dishes, including stone-oven-baked pizzas, pasta, cheese fondue, and spare ribs. Our freshly baked pizzas are a must-try, offering a unique and irresistible flavor that you won't find anywhere else. Treat yourself to one of our set menus and choose your favorite pizza and pasta combination for an unforgettable dining experience. At Pizzeria MARINO, we're here to give you a taste of home that will leave your tastes begging for more. We can't wait to serve you!



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# A Taste of Okinawa



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Lunch

Hours: 11:00-

Lunch Steak Set ¥1,980-

Seafood & other menus are widely available. All sets come with soup, salad, bread or rice, tea or coffee.

Dinner

Hours: 17:00-

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3-1-25 Sonda, Okinawa City / TEL (098)933-5731

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Four Seasons Teppanyaki Steak House in Awase and Urasoe will not only dazzle you, but also tingle your taste buds! Watch as our talented chefs slice, dice and cook up your entrees right at your table. It's more than a meal, It's a special event! Our restaurant is the perfect place to relax, unwind and simply enjoy some foodie fun with your family, friends or that special someone. If you haven't had the pleasure of enjoying Japanese teppanyaki, come in for a visit! We promise that you won't be disappointed, so what are you waiting for? Reservations recommended.

RESTAURANT INFO