

Ama in Shima Peninsula



Shima Peninsula has the Highest Number of *Ama* in Japan.

As they work in the sea, *ama* treasure the natural environment of the ocean; they have maintained a sustainable harvest of these resources for more than 3000 years.

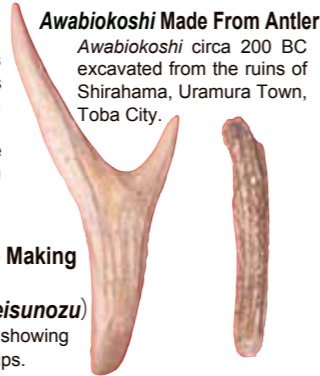
3000 Years of Continuous Diving —The Long History of Ama

Ama tools, *awabiokoshi*, used to pry abalone from the reef and remove them from their shell, were excavated from ruins here of the Jyomon (14,000 – 300 BC) and Yayoi (300 BC – AD 300) Periods. Thus, it is certain that divers existed in the Shima Peninsula thousands of years ago. By the 8th century, it became clear that these divers were female, because the word *ama* (for female divers) was written in literature. Later, in the 18th century, *ama* images were drawn in *Ukiyoe* prints. Even today, *ama* play an important role; they offer marine delicacies, such as abalone, to the Ise Jingu Shrine. Thus, the unique *ama* culture has been handed down for more than 3000 years.



Wooden Tablet

This wooden tablet was excavated from the ruins of Heijyoukyou (Nara Palace, 745 AD). The tablet states that abalone were sent to Nara from Nakiri, Shima-City.

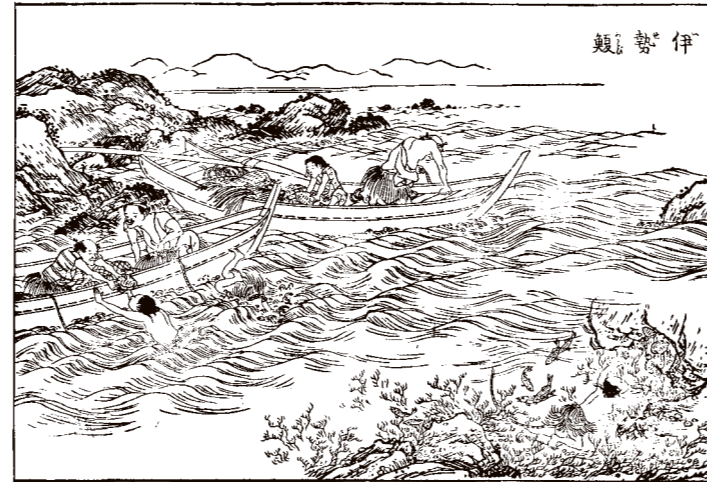


Awabiokoshi Made From Antler

Awabiokoshi circa 200 BC excavated from the ruins of Shirahama, Uramura Town, Toba City.

Picture of *ama* of Ise Making Abalone Strips

(*Isenoama Noshioseisunozu*) *Ukiyoe* from Edo Period showing *ama* making abalone strips.



Book of Japanese Special Local Products of Japan During the Edo Period (1799) (*Nihonsankaimensanzue*)

The first painting of *ama* working in the sea. At the time, Shima was considered part of Ise.



Mie Prefecture Fishery Illustration (1883) (*Miekensuisanzukai*)

This illustration of *ama* warming themselves around a fire was produced for a fishery exhibition.



Post Card from Taishou Period or Early Showa Period
Ama became a tourist attraction in the Taishou Period and early Showa Period.

Wish for a Big Catch and Talismans —Deeply Religious *Ama*

Ama hold festivals for the sea god at the start and middle of the fishing season, praying for a big catch and safe diving. Although most prayers are for a big catch, the wild sea that brings its bounty is not always calm and gentle. *Ama* believe that there are many dangerous evils hidden in the sea. Thus, *ama* seek out the help from god and pray for safe diving.



Hama Matsuri (Beach Festival) (Fuseda, Shima-City)



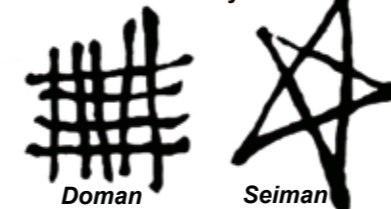
Most *ama* festivals are held in early summer, at the start of the fishing season. They pray to the sea god for a big catch and safe diving.

Shirongo Matsuri (Shirongo Festival) (Sugashima, Toba-City)



Shiokake Matsuri (Seawater Pouring Festival) Waguooshima, Shima-City

Talisman Symbols



"Doman" (Monk's Amulet, Kuji – Nine-hand seal) and "Seiman" (a single stroke star symbol) are the unique talisman symbols worn by the *ama* of Shima peninsula.

Ama Numbers

Currently, there are about 2,000 *ama* in 18 prefectures in Japan. Of those, 761 *ama* are on the Shima peninsula, Shima-City and Toba-City, in Mie prefecture (2014). However, most of these *ama* have reached an advanced age; their average age is more than 65 years old.

• Ama reside in 18 prefectures in Japan.

Mie Pref.

• There are 761 *ama* in Shima peninsula (505 *ama* in Toba-City, 256 *ama* in Shima-City).

Location	Count
Osatsu	108
Fuseda	33
Katada	36
Mujisaki	1
Nakiri	20
Dalosaki	1
Nata	7
Azena	4
Shijima	11
Shironosaki	1
Kouka	14
Anori	17
Kou	2
Senga	0
Adako	8
Sengakatako	4
Uramura	3
Uramura	3
Arashima	8
Omura Island	1
Sugashima	60
Waguura	50
Kamishima	63
Toba	79
Toshi Island	79
Ohama	0
Meotoiwa	1
Ukushima	1
Rock Island	1
Momotori	1
Ozukumijima Island	1
Yoroiisaki	1
Kuzaki	56
Ijika	66
Gozasaki	8
Goza	15
Koshika	14
Wagu	50
Funakoshi	25

Ama Culture International Steering Committee
Sea-Folk Museum, Shima City Museum of History and Folklore

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Ama in Shima Peninsula



Ama are female breath-hold divers who gather abalone, sea urchin and seaweed.

As they work in the sea, *ama* treasure the natural environment of the ocean; they have maintained a sustainable harvest of these resources for more than 3000 years.

“Let’s register *ama* culture as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage!”

Funado and Kachido —Fishing Methods

Funado is one style of *ama* diving; one *ama* works together with one boatman, the *Tomae*. *Kachido* is another style in which *ama* work alone. They may swim from shore to the fishing site, or take a boat to the site as a group. Usually, *funado ama* dive deeper in the sea than *kachido ama*.



Funado Ama

Kachido Ama Riding Together



Kachido Ama from Shore



Breath-Hold Diving, The 50-Second Battle —Ama Fishing Methods

Ama are breath-hold diver fisherwomen who gather abalone, turban snails, sea urchins, sea cucumbers and seaweed without SCUBA equipment. Diving depths are usually 3-4 meters; however, it depends on the *ama*. Some *ama* dive 20 meters down to the bottom of the sea. The dive time is 50 seconds at most.



Isomegane (Goggles), Isonomi (Chisels) and Wetsuits —Ama Tools

After the era of naked diving, and an era of diving in a white outfit, *ama* started to wear wetsuits to protect themselves from the cold, around 1960. Because wetsuits make them buoyant, *ama* wear a weight belt of 5-6 kg around their waist.



Ama Before Early Meiji Period



Ama From End of Meiji Period to Early Showa Period



Modern Ama Wearing Wetsuits

Important tools for *ama* are goggles to see better in the water and help find prey, and chisels to pry abalone from rocks. There are many different types of chisels. A beach bucket was used to hold the catch, but now a ring float is more common. The ring float has a net attached and provides a support for a quick break between dives. Another important tool for *ama* is a lifeline that connects them to their ring float. Other tools include a beach towel and fins.



Abalone

Rich Bounty of the Sea —Large Ama Prey Items

Four types of abalone make up the primary catch of *ama*: *Haliotis discus*, *H. gigantea*, *H. madaka* and *H. diversicolor*. *Ama* also harvest turban snails, sea cucumbers, sea urchins and rock oysters. In addition, *ama* gather brown seaweeds: *wakame*, *hijiki*, *arame*, *kayamonori* (*kenori*, *mugiwara*) and *iroro*, as well as red seaweeds: *tengusa* and *funori*.



Turban Snails



Wakame



Sea Cucumbers



Sea Urchins



Ama Gathering Hijiki



Ama Goya — Ama Hut

Kamado (Fire Pit) —Known today as the Ama Goya (ama hut)

Ama's biggest enemy is the cold. *Ama* still use a fire pit called “*Kamado*” or “*Hiba*” placed in the middle of the *ama* hut. Before and after diving, *ama* sit by the fire to warm their bodies down to the core. The *ama* hut is a very important place. They take naps, chat with *ama* friends and eat meals in the *ama* hut.

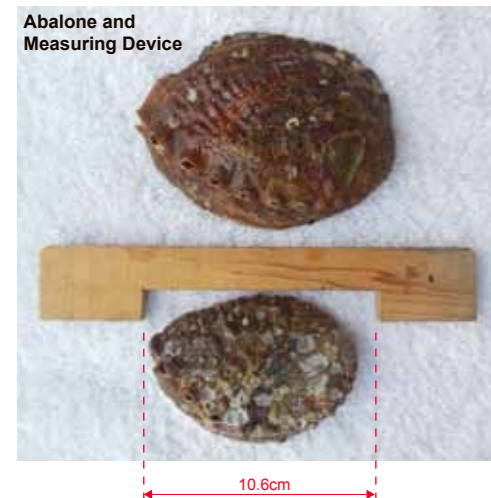
Promise Not To Take It All —Many Fishery Restrictions

Abalone smaller than 10.6 cm cannot be taken, and *ama* strictly obey this rule. *Ama* do not take small *sazae* (turban snails), sea urchins or sea cucumbers.

Moreover, because seaweeds are a major food source for abalone and turban snails, *ama* restrict their harvest of seaweed to designated seasons, number of days and location.

Rules and regulations include:

- Size
- Season
- Number of days per season
- Hours per day
- Marine preserves (no-take zones)



Abalone and Measuring Device

10.6cm