■お弁当(べんとう)

The お弁当(べんとう) 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 お弁当(べんとう) contains rice and おかず, side dishes. The most basic お弁当(べんとう) is called 日(ひ)の丸(まる) (rising-sun flag) 弁当(べんとう) because it is made up of white rice with a red うめぼし, pickled plum, in the middle. Children and adults alike take their お弁当箱(べんとうばこ) , lunch box, from home wrapped in an お弁当包(べんとうつつ)み (cloth mat). An お弁当(べんとう) lovingly made by a wife for her husband is called 愛妻弁当(あいさいべんとう). If you can't take an お弁当(べんとう) from home, you buy one with お弁当代(べんとうだい) , lunch money; お弁当(べんとう) is the most sold item in Japanese コンビニ(convenience stores). When travelling by train, the Japanese look forward to buying an 駅弁(えきべん) which contains the specialty of a particular region. Picking up on this, some airlines have recently been promoting their flights by offering 空弁(からべん)! There are お弁当(べんとう) for special occasions, eg. お花見弁当(はなみべんとう), and deluxe お弁当(べんとう) called 幕(まく)の内弁当(うちべんとう), which originated from the practice of eating between the acts of a play when the 幕, curtain, was down. And finally, when you eat your お弁当(べんとう) early because you're hungry and can't wait, you 早弁(はやべん)する!

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