

Times Capsule

Vol. 7: Food

Seasons to taste: Decades of delectable discovery

Perhaps the most well-known and well-loved Japanese tradition is washoku: Japanese cuisine, from multicourse *kaiseki ryōri* to cheap *B-kyū* fare and local delicacies. And there's no better place in the world to enjoy a wide range of fine dining than in Tokyo, which has of late been home to an impressive number of Michelin-starred restaurants.

Over the decades, The Japan Times has served a variety of food- and drink-related features, reviews, interviews and recipes. We've explored the chef's kitchen and the home pantry, ate at high-end sushi counters and under the tracks, drank at *izakaya* and hole-in-the-wall bars, and visited breweries and distilleries.

Gochisō-sama deshita.



The Times Capsule series will post topics related to sustainability that we have covered during the 125 years of The Japan Times.

Brand history & Archives

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'One of the Great Joys of Living in Japan'

Culinary Adventures in Tokyo Restaurants

By FREDERICK HARRIS

One of the great joys of living in Japan is unfortunately lost to most foreigners living here. The world of Japanese cooking offered in tiny restaurants located around the corner from almost every one of our homes, would delight the most sophisticated of gourmets and usually please the man who has to have his meat and potatoes.

Not expecting many foreigners, these places have made little or no effort to speak English (many of them do not even have menus in Japanese).

The language used in ordering is very often strange, and some Japanese do not even know all the "in" phrases necessary to be recognized as a person who knows his way about. However, many of the restaurants opening in the Roppongi or Akasaka areas have English speaking people who are more than willing to find a helping hand in introducing you to the varieties they have to offer.

Whereas Chinese restaurants tend to show very complete menus, serving almost every conceivable dish from the particular region which they specialize, the Japanese menu is comparatively limited.

If the Japanese restaurants offered the complete range of fish, meat, fowl, and vegetable dishes from any particular region, the list would be as long as any restaurant from Shanghai or Peking.

The following is a short description of the different types of restaurants which offer their treats in Tokyo. Actually you can probably find a good selection of each in that geographical pleasure area known as "Roppongi."

Sushi
The most famous of Japanese style restaurants, and the type which has the most fasci-

ated taste raw fish. Sushi is a method of preparing rice. Sashimi is raw fish, or any other raw meat or chicken. The rice is prepared with sugar, vinegar, and a touch of salt. The goodies then go on top vary from a type of fried egg to raw sea urchins.

I have taken friends who won't eat raw fish to Sushi shops, and they enjoyed themselves eating such delicacies as cooked shrimp, cooked scallops, a sweetened fried egg, various salad vegetables, caviar, a type of fish cake, manzo, pickled fish (similar to pickled herring) etc. The type of sushi that is eaten in *disuka* uses very little raw fish.

Of course for those who enjoy that subtle texture and wonderful taste of raw fish, the variety offered would make anyone happy. My favorite being the most popular *Chu Toro*, which is the fatty part of the tuna.

Yakitori
Probably the most popular of the counter type restaurants is the *Yakitori* form, a Japanese version of Bar-b-que chicken, but really much more than that.

The *Yakitori* shop displays a limitless variety of select cuts of chicken and in some shops, duck. These delicacies, little pieces of white meat, liver, gizzard, etc., are sometimes served by themselves and at other times alternately placed on a serving stick with various vegetables.

Most of the servings are given to the customer on a stick which is used to spear the piece similar to Shishkabob. They are grilled over hot coals and are either coated with a spicy sauce or liberally salted. The customer usually has his pick of two.

Many shops serve seasonal vegetables barbecued in the same manner. A very special flavor is the Matsutake mushroom grilled in a *Yakitori* shop.

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Oden

The one type of shop which foreigners never seem to venture into is an *Oden* shop. This type of food is also seen very often on street stalls. Your Japanese host will seldom take you into an *Oden* shop, as it is considered one of the cheapest common forms of eating.

Cheap it is, it is probably the least costly of any restaurant food. But it is not at all common, as some of the varieties offered are very good eating. Basically *Oden* consists of either different types of fish cakes, vegetables, hard boiled eggs, potatoes, small octopus, or just about anything else which can be boiled.

The secret of the taste is the sauce that the different ingredients are boiled in. Behind the counter of an *Oden* shop, there are large vats of this sauce which is always boiling at a constant temperature.

The sauce is never emptied, but continually added to it. The flavor is always improved with the added ingredients, but not necessarily added to a soup stock that a cook may use, but never removed.

The daily ingredients are usually listed on wooden plants behind the counter and are ordered three or four at a time. A little bit of hot mustard should

be added to the plate for an extra tangy taste.

Kori-yori or Nomiya
Literally small restaurants or drinking places, these small restaurants usually with a counter and a few tables, can vary from very expensive eating establishments to real cheap places dishing out some hot food.

The good ones, and there are many, boast some of Japan's most chefs, who have spent 10 years or more as apprentices before they are allowed to serve the customers. Not only so, they excel at cooking, but artists in their own right. Many of the dishes served are really masterpieces of design.

The daily fare of these restaurants usually varies from day to day. Most of the cuisine is prepared with sea food and vegetable, and one never knows what will appear as the chef is offering in the early morning bar.

Specialty Restaurants
These are the places which specialize in a particular type of item such as a restaurant which serves only sardines served in 12 or more different ways.

There are many interesting establishments which serve food cooked in the style of some area in Kyushu, Hokkaido, elsewhere. Some of these restaurants even bring the way of cooking from these faraway drinking places. Many small cities to serve and great customers in their home area and a few tables, can vary from very expensive eating establishments to real cheap places dishing out some hot food.

A very popular specialty establishment is the kind which specializes in country style cooking. Most times this means a variety of mountain grown meats, which are served in a atmosphere similar to that found in a farmhouse.

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