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Osteria Sincerita: An Italian restaurant born of adversity

Destination Restaurants

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The Akayu Onsen area, in Yamagata Prefecture, is home to 11 *onsen ryokan* (hot spring inns). Unlike typical hot spring towns, at first glance it has the air of a residential neighborhood. Situated in one corner is Osteria Sincerita, an inn-restaurant (with just three guest rooms) that opened in April 2023 as an annex of the onsen ryokan Yamagata the Takinami. Behind the creation of Osteria Sincerita is the story of a venerable ryokan that overcame adversity.

The original Takinami was an onsen ryokan founded over a century ago. Facing financial hardship after the Great East Japan Earthquake, the owners eventually applied for civil rehabilitation in order to reorganize and renovate. Toru Iwasa, the designer of Satoyama Jujo in Niigata Prefecture, a Destination Restaurant of 2022, came on board as

creative director, and in August 2017, Takinami was reborn as Yamagata the Takinami.

Six years later, Osteria Sincerita and its restaurant, Stanza della Sincerita, were built in what was once the location of the inn's large bath area. For non-staying diners, the dinner menu is priced at ¥33,000 (\$220). One night's stay with two meals ranges from ¥77,000 to ¥110,000.

Prior to joining Osteria Sincerita, chef Makoto Harada had been earning accolades as owner-chef of the Italian restaurant Il Riposo in the Niigata Prefecture city of Sanjo. At the time of the restaurant's 10th anniversary, he was making plans to expand into Tokyo, but with the COVID-19 pandemic he decided to give up the project.

"Of course, the pandemic was a factor," he said, "but as planning progressed, I also felt a certain discomfort about creating cuisine in Tokyo and realized I wanted to work in a regional area after all." It was then that an offer came from Osteria Sincerita, and he decided to relocate to Akayu.

When the location changes, so does the cuisine. While Niigata and Yamagata are adjacent prefectures, their culinary cultures are quite different. On today's gastronomy scene, the practice of modifying local dishes has become widespread — and Harada, too, often draws inspiration from dishes rooted in the Okitama basin, which includes Akayu. An example is



Yamagata dashi, made from chopped summer vegetables such as eggplant and cucumber, combined with kombu seaweed. Harada's version is made with winter vegetables and combined with risotto. He also created a lighter version of *imoni*, a traditional Yamagata stew made with taro root and meat, preparing it in the style of *noppe* soup from Niigata Prefecture and serving it for breakfast. While his dishes are Italian, there are strong undertones of Japanese — and specifically Yamagata — cuisine.

Harada was particularly impressed by the food culture disseminated by Harunori Uesugi — the Yonezawa domain daimyo extolled as a wise ruler in the Edo Period — to help people endure severe environmental conditions. Uesugi recommended edible wild plants as emergency provisions in a time of famine, and promoted carp farming (which he is said to have originated in the castle moat) as a secure source of protein in winter. And today, these ingredients appear in new forms in the restaurant's course menu.

Harada explained: "Niigata is a carp-producing area, too, but most of the carp are the colorful *nishikigoi* raised as ornamental



fish. In this area, people used to build ponds next to their houses and raise carp, and today it's such a common food that it's sold in supermarkets." Thus, even the humble carp that Harada transforms into splendid cuisine for guests' enjoyment has a complex history. Visitors to Osteria Sincerita are sure to be moved by the ingenuity and vitality of Yamagata Prefecture's people, who have overcome famine, war and disaster and continue to live life to the fullest.



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Sincerita

MIEKO YOSHIMURA
GOVERNOR OF YAMAGATA PREFECTURE



I am very pleased that Osteria Sincerita has been selected as a Destination Restaurant. Yamagata Prefecture is a treasure trove of fine food and drink, blessed with seasonal fruits, exceptional beef nurtured by its climate and landscape, and a wide range of sake and wines. At Osteria Sincerita, diners can savor the deep, natural flavors of vegetables and fruits, as well as premium ingredients such as Yonezawa beef, experiencing the bounty of Yamagata's seasons with all five senses. I warmly invite you to visit Yamagata to enjoy its outstanding cuisine and beverages, while also discovering its magnificent natural surroundings and distinctive spiritual culture.

TAKAO SHIRAIWA
MAYOR OF NANYO CITY



I would like to extend my sincere congratulations on being selected for The Japan Times Destination Restaurants 2025. Nanyo is known for Akayu Onsen, with a history of more than 930 years, as well as for its abundant harvests of high-quality fruit nurtured by the region's natural environment. As mayor, I take great pride in seeing a local restaurant receive this recognition. I believe the honor reflects the restaurant's dedication to expressing the appeal of local ingredients in each dish with assured skill and genuine passion. I sincerely hope the restaurant will continue to draw many visitors to Nanyo as a destination well worth the journey.



Destination Restaurants 2025

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Times Gallery



Yemeni Ambassador Adel Alsunaini meets with Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike during the Ambassadors' Night celebration organized by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF YEMEN



The FIFA World Cup trophy is presented to the president of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire, Alassane Ouattara, at the Presidential Palace in Abidjan on Feb. 3. EMBASSY OF CÔTE D'IVOIRE



Kosovo Ambassador Sabri Kicmari and his wife experience the classic 18th-century kabuki play Kagamiyama Kokyo no Nishikie at the National Theatre in Tokyo. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO



The Canadian Embassy's Sirine Hijal and Canadian artist Eric Chan, aka Eepmon, at the embassy's exhibition "Digital Worlds: The Generative Art of Eepmon," on view until May 12. EMBASSY OF CANADA



Female ambassadors and charges d'affaires meet with Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi to exchange views on global challenges, regional cooperation and women's leadership in diplomacy. EMBASSY OF MEXICO



At the 2026 St. Patrick's Day launch, Ambassador Damien Cole welcomed Irish-Japanese actor Shannon Mahina Gorman, elder sister Leia and father, Victor. EMBASSY OF IRELAND



An SCCIJ luncheon with former BOJ Gov. Masaaki Shirakawa was joined by Swiss Ambassador Roger Dubach and over 80 other guests at the Shangri-La Hotel, Tokyo. SCCIJ



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