JAPAN: Flavors of Culture

From sushi and soba to Kaiseki, Japanese cuisine is a celebration of tradition, art, and global exchange. Explore all that Japan has to offer on this tour made possible by Suntory and additional supporters of The Culinary Institute of America’s Japanese Studies program.
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With morning mist hanging over a field of YOUNG GREENS, a Japanese master chef and a LOCAL GROWER discuss flavor profiles and harvest schedules...Bidders jostle for position at Tsukiji Market’s famed TUNA AUCTION...FRESH TOFU is cooled, cut, and packed off to area restaurants...Craftsmen pound and finish high-performance JAPANESE KNIVES, continuing traditions reaching back to the hand-forged SAMURAI swords of earlier eras...WAGYU is rushed to the market from a distant, southern island for the most discriminating URBAN PALATES...KOMBU sun-dries along the coast of Hokkaido, destined for future pots of savory DASHI...Shinkansen express ticket holders jam into popular NOODLE shops for inviting BOWLS OF MISO-INFUSED BROTH and CRISPY PORK...Lacquered BENTO BOXES are artfully filled with tastes of the season...AROMATIC perilla flowers are slipped into PREMIUM SAKE...In a 400-year-old kitchen, a fire of BINCHO-TAN is stoked and readied for skewers of IMPECCABLY FRESH FISH...Hungry office workers pour into OKONOMIYAKI stalls as evening unfolds in Osaka...GREEN TEA is meticulously brewed and served in a RYOKAN to guests who have come seeking THE BALM OF NATURE and the comfort of hot springs...The brilliant autumn colors of a branch of JAPANESE MAPLE animate a course in an exclusive Kyoto Kaiseki restaurant...smoky sticks of YAKITORI and cold beer fuel appetites in LATE-NIGHT TOKYO...
Tour Details

Departure: Tuesday, August 29, 2017
Return: Friday, September 8, 2017

We leave the U.S. on Tuesday, August 29 and arrive at Tokyo Narita airport in mid-afternoon on Wednesday, August 30 in time to get settled in our hotel in the Asakusa area of Tokyo. Then we’ll enjoy a dinner of classic Kanto-style Kabayaki BBQ eel at a restaurant that is the epitome of “shitamachi” or “downtown” aesthetics of old-school Edo.

The next morning, we will have a trip orientation at the offices of Suntory, the lead sponsor of the CIA’s Japanese Studies program and this tour. We’ll then visit the famous Tsukiji market founded in 1923, and now the largest wholesale food market in the world. Lunch will follow at Sushi Tama, where we will learn techniques from the pros and try our hand at making nigiri. The afternoon will include a visit to Sarashina-Horii soba shop, founded in 1789 and currently run by Chef Yoshinori Horii, eighth generation chef-owner. A visit to Chef Naoyuki Yanagihara’s School of Traditional Japanese Cuisine will be another learning experience. Along the way, we’ll see a Kaijiru shi knife demonstration and will end the day at Tokyo Mid Town, where we’ll tour the collection at the Suntory Art Museum and enjoy dinner at one of the area’s restaurants.

On Friday, we will start the day at Kappabashi—a mecca for kitchen supplies for all Tokyo food businesses. We’ll stop at Ninben, a supplier of the dried fish flakes that are essential to dashi, on our way to Mie Terrace, a boutiques shop featuring the food, craft, and other products of Mie Prefecture. We’ll have lunch there with students from a high school culinary program in Mie. Later we’ll tour the legendary food floor of Takashimaya and visit the restaurants of three top chefs before enjoying dinner at Sogo, a restaurant that fuses the traditional concept of Shojin ryori, or vegan Buddhist cuisine, with the sensibility of a modern chef. The Team of Japan Chefs who participated in the CIA’s 2010 Worlds of Flavor Conference, Japan: Flavors of Culture, will join us here for a reception.

Saturday morning finds us taking an early flight from Tokyo to Fukuoka. Our first stop will be at a Wagyu beef farm, where we will discover the ways these special cows are cared for, and where we will enjoy lunch. We’ll then proceed to the Nakamura Culinary School where we’ll experience the foods and flavors of the Yakuzen Expo before heading out to a dinner of yakitori, a specialty of the region.

On Sunday, we’ll start the day with a breakfast of ramen, visit a local food manufacturer and supplier of Japanese dishes for consumers, and tour and dine for lunch at a producer of all-natural seasonings, dashi packs, and soy sauce. After lunch, we will travel by bullet train to Kyoto, where we’ll experience an authentic Kaiseki dinner at Takeshigerou and enjoy the company of additional 2010 Team of Japan Chefs.

The next day includes a trip to the pastoral Kyoto coast and countryside and lovely terraced rice fields. We’ll learn about rice fermentation and visit a traditional-method vinegar brewing company.

Tuesday is a day of Kyoto exploration. We’ll visit the 400+ year-old Nishiki Market and the Iyemon Café, one of Japan’s most prestigious tea houses, which is on a mission to emphasize the importance of tea to modern lifestyles. Chef Kunio Tokuoka, of the famed Kitcho restaurant and a good friend of the CIA, directs the café menu. The rest of the afternoon is free for you to explore Kyoto on your own—visit temples, explore food or craft shops, or just enjoy the history and culture of this lovely historical city.

Wednesday we visit a Kyoto vegetable farm before taking a bus to Osaka. On our way, we’ll visit Suntory’s globally acclaimed Yamazaki whiskey distillery, and finish the day with a casual dinner where we’ll grill our own local Wagyu and experience the region’s beef sukiyaki hot pot.

On Thursday, we’ll be based at the world-renowned Tsuji Culinary Institute, the home school of Chef Murashima, our chef-instructor for the Advanced Cooking: Japanese Cuisine class at the CIA. Our day will include a visit to Kuromon Market and we’ll enjoy a final dinner of Okonomiyaki, one of the country’s favorite comfort foods, before heading back to the U.S. on Friday.
Japan’s stature and influence in the culinary world have risen meteorically in recent years. Washoku (traditional Japanese cuisine), a social custom handed down from generation to generation that expresses Japanese people’s respect for nature, was designated by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2013.

Tokyo now has more three-star Michelin restaurants than Paris. The aggregate number of Michelin-starred restaurants in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka speaks impressively to the depth and breadth of excellence in contemporary Japan’s culinary landscape. Michelin, a French-operated company often accused of a French bias in its restaurant ratings, has been among the loudest voices in calling attention to the global significance of culinary Japan. Top chefs in North America and Europe—who have come to greatly admire Japanese culinary traditions, passion for ingredients, and mastery of technique—have been effusive in their praise for the country and the inspiration it can offer the Western culinary world. But inspiration is found not only in the rarified world of Japanese Kaiseki and starred restaurants. The care with which seasonal vegetables are selected and prepared for market shelves, soba noodles are formed and cut in neighborhood restaurants, rice is handled in the home, and gifts of fruit and wagashi are wrapped for giving, speaks to a reverence of food, flavor, and design that pervades the culture.
What is Kaiseki?

Kaiseki is a form of hospitality and fine taste that is to be savored with all the senses.

Kaiseki, which evolved from the spirit of wabi in cha-no-yu (tea ceremony), is a comprehensive and sensory art form combining the appreciation of season, space, light and shadow, scent, scroll paintings, teacups, and etiquette.

While it was originally intended to enhance one's appreciation for tea, kaiseki cuisine is also often served outside of the context of a tea ceremony or its accompanying meal in top restaurants led by the country's most accomplished chefs. Modern kaiseki cuisine has become mostly available at high-end Japanese restaurants, while its menu has grown ever more creative and elaborate to meet contemporary preferences. This can be thought of as an adaptation in Japanese hospitality which reflects modern aesthetics. However, regardless of the techniques and ingredients employed—or the setting—the spirit infused in meal preparation remains constant.
The Essence of Japanese Cuisine

Excerpts from Soul of Japanese Cuisine
Hiroo Chikaraishi and Izumi Okabe 2010

Dash

Umami is a taste that is of paramount importance in Japanese cuisine. The Japanese have discovered three major umami sources including glutamic acid in konbu, inosinic acid in bonito flakes and dried sardine, as well as guanylic acid in dried shiitake mushrooms. The source of the umami taste, glutamic acid contained in konbu and vegetables, is an amino acid, while on the other hand inosinic acid in bonito and meats as well as guanylic acid found in mushrooms are nucleic acids. Blending konbu with bonito flakes, or blending konbu with dried shiitake mushroom both combine the umami taste of amino acid and nucleic acid origin, giving the final product a further enhanced taste. This is the exact reason for using a awasedashi, or mixed stock.

Tools

Tools should fit well into the user’s hand, work easily and remain sturdy and aesthetic at the same time. They should facilitate the process of food making. No matter how machine technology evolves, the feeling of dependability of a familiar hand tool used over long years should not be lost. If that feeling is neglected, then the dishes may simply reduce to mere items of food that is bland, uninteresting, and lack human touch. The tools used in Japanese cuisine are carefully specialized to carry out the role of infusing aesthetics into ingredients. As an example, Japanese knives have excellent blades that make sharp cuts without disrupting the material’s fibers. They are a key tool that gives rise to the beautiful shape, color, and taste of foods like sashimi.

Tableware

There is probably no other country with such a wide variety of tableware as Japan. Japanese cuisine is not only meant to be eaten; it should be enjoyable to the eyes and give a sense of the season. Unique table manner, such as the use of chopsticks and the practice of holding wooden bowls, teacups, and other dishes in one hand while eating fostered the creation of many shapes and sizes of tableware. Japanese tableware comes in a wide variety such as ceramics, lacquer ware, glassware, bamboo ware, silver ware, and copper tableware, in a diverse range of shapes, sizes, and production techniques. When preparing a dish, equal thought is given to the aesthetics of the dish and the tableware upon which the food is placed, making the two intimately linked.
Selected highlights from the itinerary

Tsukiji Market

The origins of Tsukiji started in 1923 just after the Great Kanto earthquake razed Tokyo. The market we know today was completed in 1935. Around 1,800 tons of fish, 1,160 tons of fruits and vegetables, and 1.8 billion yen trade hands here every day, making Tsukiji the largest wholesale food market in the world.

Mie Terrace

Mie Terrace is a pop-up artisanal food, craft, and art fair featuring over 1,100 different products all produced in Mie Prefecture, roughly halfway between Osaka and Tokyo. The terrace also has a café and event space, which has featured sake producer tastings and much more. Matsuzaka beef, oysters, and Ise soy sauce are on display at the shop.

L’Effervescence

This is the restaurant of Shinobu Namae, one of Japan’s brightest culinary stars. The restaurant focuses on modern gastronomy based on Japanese terroir and European techniques. Prior to opening his own restaurant, Chef Namae worked with Michel Bras in Laguiole, France and Hokkaido, Japan, and with Heston Blumenthal at the Fat Duck in London, England.

Nakamura Culinary School and Nakamura International Hotel School

Japan emerged from WWII in despair, but this didn’t stop four young cooks from establishing a cooking school to make the most of what little rationed food they had. Nakamura Culinary School now boasts more than 10,000 alumni in various food industry fields. The Hotel School opened its doors in 1991.

Suntory and Yamazaki Whiskey Distillery

This is the birthplace of Japanese whiskey. Yamazaki’s site in Osaka has unique access to high-quality mineral water and is situated in a humid climate perfect for aging whiskey in barrels. Some of the rarer casks are made of Japanese oak, which helps the whiskey develop aromatics that are distinctly Japanese. Suntory is the generous sponsor of the CIA’s Japanese Studies program.

Tsuji Culinary Institute

Take a tour of Japan’s largest culinary institute and the CIA’s partner institution for the Advanced Cooking: Japanese Cuisine class. This is also the home of Murashima-Sensei, already beloved by CIA students and faculty alike! See how your counterparts in Japan are working to become rising stars in the food world.
This culinary tour was specifically designed for CIA students who register for the Fall 2017 Advanced Cooking: Japanese Cuisine class. The Japanese tour and fall Japanese studies program in Hyde Park are made possible by a leadership grant from Suntory, together with additional support from the members of the Japanese Studies Leadership Council and other supporters. All in-country travel, hotels, site visits, meals, and faculty leadership and staff support costs that are part of the official itinerary will be paid for by the program’s supporters and the CIA. Students participating in the tour are only responsible for international airfare to Japan and any miscellaneous, personal expenses. Students who wish to take the tour are asked to sign a pledge that they’ll complete the full semester of classes in the 2017 Advanced Cooking: Japanese Cuisine program upon their return to the CIA in New York.

For questions, please contact:

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