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, September 10, 2019
Return: Friday, September 20, 2019

Draft Itinerary – Subject to Change

We will leave the U.S. on Tuesday, September 10th, and arrive at Osaka Kansai International airport in mid-afternoon on Wednesday, September 11th, in time to get settled into our hotel in the Namba area of Osaka. We’ll have a short orientation that evening and then enjoy a casual dinner of okonomiyaki.

The next morning, we will be based at the world-renowned Tsuji Culinary Institute (TCI), the home school of Chef Murashima, our chef-instructor for the Basic and Advanced Japanese Cuisine courses that are a part of the concentration at the CIA. Our day will include a presentation from Mr. Tsuji about the history of Japanese cuisine to set the tone for the tour. We will have a bento box lunch and we’ll also engage in some hands-on cooking demonstrations at TCI. Then we will visit the shopping area for kitchen tools and table top wares (Doguyasuji) and a “depa-chika”, a department store basement food marketplace. Dinner will be Yakiniku and Sukiyaki hosted by ZEN-NOH, our Japanese Studies Leadership Council member.

The following day we will take a field trip outside of Osaka to the town of Iga in Mie Prefecture to visit one of the last families making traditional Donabe – Nagatani-en. A visit to the temples in Nara will be a part of this day as well. Once back in Osaka, you will have free time to enjoy dinner on your own with suggested places around the local market place.

Saturday, we will pack up and load our bus to head to the pastoral Kyoto coast and countryside. We will visit the beautiful Ine Bay, have a quick picnic lunch, then view the lovely Kamiseya terraced rice fields. We’ll learn about rice fermentation and visit a traditional-method vinegar brewing company. Dinner will be a make our own Japanese hand rolls with an Italian twist. We’ll check into our Kyoto hotel at the end of this long day.

The next day will include a visit to Yamazaki Whiskey Distillery visit, hosted by our Suntory supporters. We are also planning a visit a bamboo shoot field and a tea field. Back in Kyoto, this night we will enjoy an authentic kaiseki dinner at Minokichi Honten Takeshigero.

Monday is a day of Kyoto exploration. We’ll start with a traditional wagashi demonstration at Toraya Confectionery and then have a special Junsei tofu lunch at Nanzenji Temple. After lunch you will have free time for the afternoon and evening to visit the 400+ year-old Nishiki Market, visit temples, explore food or craft shops, or just enjoy the history and culture of this lovely historical city. Dinner will be on your own.

The next day, we will pack our things and then we will have a wonderful rice porridge breakfast at Hyotei, a 450-year old, 3 Michelin Star restaurant, with Chef Takahashi at the helm. Then we will board the Shinkansen train to Tokyo, where we will arrive and check into our hotel. Lunch will be on your own. You can pick up a bento box at the train station to eat on the train or at your leisure. The afternoon will include a museum and/or temple cultural visit. For dinner this and the next night, we will split into two groups to enjoy traditional omakase sushi and tempura dinners in small groups.

Wednesday we will visit a Tokyo fish market, then visit Kaijirushi for a talk about Japanese knives and a demonstration on knife sharpening and maintenance. The afternoon will include lunch and culinary presentations and dinner will again be sushi or tempura, the groups switching from the night before.

Thursday will be our final day in Japan. We will start the day traveling to the Kikkoman Soy Sauce Manufacturing facility in Noda, where we will tour the facility and learn the history of soy sauce brewing. We’ll have a lunch of unagi on the way back to Tokyo, then visit the headquarters of Suntory, lead sponsor of the CIA’s Japanese Studies program and this tour, where we will have a presentation from a Suntory executive. We’ll have some free time in the afternoon before our final group dinner.

Friday is departure day back to the U.S. Your flights can depart from Tokyo Narita or Haneda airports.
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

Dashi

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, inoicnic 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

Kikkoman Brewery Tour

Kikkoman was established in 1661 as a soy sauce and seasoning manufacturer. The company sells soy sauce to more than 100 countries and its brand name is widely known in the USA and many other countries around the world. The brewery visit includes a tour of the brewery and a lecture on fermentation and the cuisine of soy sauce. Kikkoman is a member of the Japanese Studies Leadership Council.

Nagatanien (Donabe Maker)

Established in 1832, Nagatanien has carried on tradition and techniques of Iga-yaki (Iga ware) under the spirit of ”makers must be the real user”. The seventh generation of Nagatanien is devoted to creating pot ware with consideration of lifestyles which evolve along with civilization. In 2011, ”Noborigama (climbing kiln)” and ”Taishokan” and in 2014, ”Omoya (main building)” and ”Bessou (villa)” were registered as National Tangible Cultural Properties. ”Noborigama (climbing kiln)” was in operation since the establishment of Nagatanien in 1832 until the 1970’s. It is said that this climbing kiln (16 multi-chambered climbing kiln) is the only existing one of this scale in Japan.

Minokichi Honten Takeshigero

Takeshigero is the main store of the well-established Kyoto cuisine restaurant Minokichi which has a history of more than 300 years. Located in a bamboo grove, Takeshigero is part of the specific cultural and natural settings of Kyoto, which offers a unique experience of Kyoto cuisine and Japanese culture.

Rice Terraces and Iio Jozo Vinegar Production

Iio Jozo is a rice vinegar producer with a history of more than 120 years. Since its establishment, the company has been producing vinegar, keeping through the years the traditional methods of production. Iio Jozo is the only vinegar producer in Japan, which has developed a closed production cycle - from growing rice in its own fields through the production of sake to the final product.

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 2019 Japanese Cuisine Concentration. The Japanese Cuisine Concentration and tour 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. Nearly 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 responsible for international airfare to Japan, transportation to and from airports in the US and in Japan, 3 meals, and any miscellaneous, personal expenses. Students who take the concentration must participate in the tour as a part of the Concentration Curriculum.

For questions, please contact:
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