



**From Kansai International Airport (KIX) to Kyoto**

- 75 minutes by Kansai Airport Express Haruka train
- 100 minutes by airport bus

**From Narita International Airport (NRT) to Tokyo**

- 55 minutes total by Keisei Skyliner train (to Ueno) and JR train (to Tokyo)
- 60 minutes by JR Narita Express train
- 70 minutes to 2 hours by airport bus

**To Kyoto:** 2 hours 15 minutes by Tōkaidō Shinkansen Nozomi train



On the covers are *karakami* designs evoking Kyoto's seasons in nature.

**Cover, clockwise from top right:**

Wind: The autumn breeze stirs brilliant leaves just as they are about to fall.

Flower petals: Petals from cherry blossoms flutter down in spring.

Wildflowers: Tender shoots and verdant new greenery spring forth in this design from a classical cotton-print pattern.

**Back:** The austere beauty of straight wood grain, nature's own art, is a reminder of the craft traditions that emerged from Kyoto's forests.

# KYOTO

Journeys into Culinary, Cultural, and Historic Landscapes



**D**estination Kyoto—the endlessly alluring “capital of a thousand years,” where history lives on, faithfully preserved and passed down. But the expressions of “Kyoto” are varied and wide: deep forests, winding valleys, fertile fields, rushing waters flowing north into bountiful seas, and captivating coastlines. The land yields rich harvests and sustains time-honored craft traditions.

Kyoto’s food culture aims to satisfy all five senses. We introduce establishments that draw on tradition and modernity, and visit producers with connections to the soil that go back generations.

The shifting seasons invigorate and enliven the landscape, amplifying the charm of journeys in this multifaceted region.

**This page:** *Karakami* paper printed with a cloud pattern.  
**Opposite page:** View over Kyoto rooftops. The Yasaka Pagoda, a symbol of the city, is said to have been built by Prince Shōtoku after he saw it in a dream. Tracing its origins to the Asuka kingdom of the sixth century, it was rebuilt in the fifteenth century. Throughout the city, the pulse of distant history beats within the streets of today.







**Opposite page:** Weeping *itozakura* cherry trees are on the cusp of blooming at Kyoto Gyoen National Garden. Cherry blossoms fill the landscape around Kyoto from late March to early April. Japanese cuisine celebrates the blooms too, in decorative garnishes and seasonal *wagashi* sweets.

**Above:** Azure seas and rippling mountain ridges make for a stunning landscape across the bay at Miyazu. The Amanohashidate “Bridge to Heaven” sandbar that separates the Asokai lagoon from the ocean is one of Japan’s “three scenic wonders.”





**Above:** Many of Kyoto's historic shrines and temples are places of seasonal beauty. At autumn's peak, the path leading up to Kōmyōji Temple sanctuary in Nagaokakyō is wreathed in glorious foliage, its paving stones covered with a carpet of red and gold.

**Opposite page:** Snow blankets the thatched roofs of houses in Miyama-chō in the city of Nantan. This district of *minka* farmhouses, some built more than 200 years ago, has been designated a Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings.





# Kyoto Cuisine: Its Origins and Traditions

The hospitality and service of a long-established *ryōtei* are highlights of any visit to Kyoto. Every dish demonstrates pride in generations of history and a reverence for quality.



## Inheriting and displaying a millenium-old aristocratic tradition

*Shikibōchō*, an art that emerged within the Heian court around the tenth century and became a single tradition by the twelfth, involves carving fish or fowl following a sequence of movements thought to have auspicious meaning. The ritual is performed using knives and *mana* chopsticks; the food is never touched with the hands. The Ikama school of *shikibōchō* has a distinguished history, having been performed for the royal family and passed down through thirty generations to this day.

In the Meiji era, transmission of the *shikibōchō* ritual was granted to the Konishi family of Mankamerō, an establishment founded in 1722 as a sake brewery that became a *ryōtei* restaurant around 300 years ago. Today Masakiyo Konishi serves as tenth-generation owner of Mankamerō carrying on the tradition of *yūsoku ryōri* cuisine and the thirtieth-generation head (*iemoto*) of the Ikama school.

The term “*yūsoku*” refers to the rules and conventions established for rituals and annual events celebrated by the court and aristocracy since the Heian period (794–1185). In the court, special celebrations called *sechie* were held to mark the transition from one season to the next. The cuisine served on these occasions, called *yūsoku ryōri*, was preceded by performance of the *shikibōchō* ritual. Scrolls and other documents preserved by Mankamerō include detailed records of major banquets held and the dishes served as expressions of power, testifying to the role of the Ikama school in sustaining those traditions.

Mankamerō is the only place where meals are still served in this way. Masakiyo Konishi explains: “*Yūsoku ryōri* refers to the highly refined dishes served at the *sechie* celebrations within the court. Today, while the style has been preserved, the dishes are arranged in a more contemporary way based on Kyoto cuisine. The meal presented here represents the theme of Setsubun (the beginning of spring) and plum blossoms.



**Opposite page:** *Yūsoku ryōri* served at Mankamerō. After a wooden *oshiki* tray is brought out and a purifying cup of sake is served, the *uibashi* course begins. The gold-lined lidded *hōraku* pot holds a mixture of rape-blossom greens, *akagai* (ark shell), and *torigai* (cockle) meat dressed with vinegar-laced *su-miso* sauce.

**Top of page:** Precious scrolls and documents passed down at Mankamerō record *yūsoku ryōri* dishes and ways they were served. **Above:** The *nimonowan* simmered dish, evoking plum blossoms and early spring, consists of a cake of tofu made with cod milt (*kumoko*) topped with daikon and carrot cut in plum-blossom shapes.





**Left:** The *dai no mono* course is served on a stand with three curling "cloud legs" used for auspicious occasions. Spring delicacies placed on the gilded bamboo-sheath plate include a sushi nugget topped with a camelia leaf, steamed abalone, miso-marinated stem lettuce, boiled shrimp, egg roll, and flounder roll.

**Below left:** The *takiawase* course features stewed duck with bamboo shoots garnished with *mizuna* greens and a fragrant sprig of *kinome* prickly ash.



The meal begins with the "first bite" (*uibashi*), served on a freshly made plain wood *oshiki* tray lined with fine-quality *washi*; the chopsticks that accompany it are wrapped in paper and tied with a special hemp cord in the manner of an offering made at a shrine. Next to be served is the *nimonowan*, or simmered dish, presented in a lidded bowl. The *dai no mono* (dish on a stand) course that follows, served on a plain wood *shimadai* three-legged stand, consists of seasonal tidbits on a gilded bamboo-sheath platter accompanied by a couple of narcissus. The *takiawase* dish of simmered vegetables is then served on a stemmed stand.

Kyoto is filled with famous *ryōtei* restaurants, but only at Mankamerō can one experience this solemn and special performance of aristocratic culinary arts, as if invited to an auspicious celebration of the turning of the seasons in the palace.



**Mankamerō**  
387 Ebisu-chō,  
Inokuma-dōri Demizu-agaru,  
Kamigyō-ku, Kyoto  
Noon to 3 PM and 5:30 to 9:30 PM  
Closed Wednesdays and first  
and fourth Tuesdays  
[www.mankamerou.com](http://www.mankamerou.com)

**Top:** Masakiyo Konishi performs the Ikama school *shikibōchō* ritual begun in the Heian period. He wears the traditional attire consisting of a *kariginu* tunic with sleeves tied up, *hakama* trousers, and an *eboshi* cap. Before the carving begins, he purifies the area where the wooden cutting block is set.

**Center row, right:** The implements used in the Ikama school ritual. Even household kitchen knives trace their beginnings to swords; in a nod to this, the knives used in the ritual are called "knife swords." The metal *mana* chopsticks are beautifully decorated with mother-of-pearl inlay and sharkskin.

**Center row, left:** Preserved along with the knives and chopsticks are 45 books detailing the steps of the *shikibōchō* ceremony, with clear instructions for how to carve several hundred kinds of fish and fowl. Today, the *shikibōchō* ceremony can only be seen on rare occasions, such as when special offerings are presented at shrines.

**Bottom:** This picture scroll documents the menu of the banquet held on the occasion of the emperor's visit to Tokugawa Iemitsu at Nijō castle in 1626. Near the center of the lower scroll is the name of Ikama Shōemon, the head of the Ikama school at that time, identifying him as the *hōchōnin* carver who orchestrated the large team of cooks in preparing the meal. The 10-meter-long scroll lists 75 dishes served to the guests on *sanbō* elevated trays throughout the five-day feast.





## Honoring the Season and the Omotenashi Spirit

While retaining innumerable cultural customs that are quintessentially Japanese, including cuisine that has been passed down through the generations, many Kyoto establishments demonstrate remarkable flexibility as they meet changing times with new forms of *omotenashi*, the tradition of hospitality marked by close attention to detail. One such place is *ryōtei* Kikunoi, a venerable restaurant run by Yoshihiro Murata, one of the people involved in achieving the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage designation for *washoku*. Kikunoi's culinary plans for spring exemplify its distinguished presentation of *omotenashi*.

Located to the north of Kōdaiji temple, Kikunoi welcomes distinguished guests from all over Japan and abroad to its elegant buildings and gardens. Aspects of *omotenashi* hospitality are evident throughout the premises, carefully thought out by third-generation owner Murata, who continues to challenge himself while carrying on longstanding customs in his cuisine.

Observing the tradition of *sechie* court ceremonies and various events of the seasons is an integral part of expression in Japanese cuisine. With that in mind, Murata is always seeking new ways to convey the *omotenashi* spirit unique to Kikunoi. He says, "There are numerous *ryōtei* in Kyoto, and their styles differ greatly. Some follow the aesthetic principles of *wabi* simplicity, while others prioritize refinement and elegance. Kikunoi aims for *kirei-sabi*, a style that's simple, but not to the point of austerity, and that is also lively and enchanting. This principle applies to everything from the building and gardens to the decor and choice of vessels."

Served in a tatami room decorated for the Hinamatsuri festival (also known as the Peach Festival) in March, Murata's menu on the following pages reflects the Kikunoi style in every regard, rendering Kyoto spring in dainty bowls and heirloom vessels.

Part of a spring menu at Kikunoi, this *chirashizushi* "scattered" sushi evokes a verdant hill in spring, aptly served in a rustic square bowl by Kanjiro Kawai.



Understanding the menu

Ingredients, vessels, customs, and consummate care



**Sakizuke** (amuse-bouche)  
This first dish is prepared with extra attention to the time of year or the seasonal festival close at hand, as well as the overall theme of the multicourse banquet. Here, the feel of very early spring is expressed by the ingredients and the presentation: white cod-milt paste suggesting snow covers an *ume* apricot.

**Hassun** (tray of seasonal delicacies)  
This course embodies Kikunoi’s style most vividly. Served in a vessel carefully chosen for the occasion, the March *hassun* is sweet and dainty in celebration of the Hinamatsuri festival. The design of the two-tiered box was inspired by elegant boxes used by the nobles of the Heian period.



**Nimono** (simmered dish)  
This precisely composed dish features clam, a favorite in Hinamatsuri celebrations. Decorating the festive lacquer bowl are seven lines representing longevity of seven decades. The soup is slightly thickened with *kuzu* (Japanese arrowroot) for a touch of heartiness to warm the spirits during chilly early-spring weather.



**Yakimono** (grilled dish)  
Tilefish, fatty and flavorful in spring, is coated with grated *karasumi*, grilled, and garnished with candied kumquats. Generally, dishes are served in individual portions, but the *yakimono* may be presented all together in one vessel to be passed around among the party, generating a change of pace in the multicourse meal.

An exquisitely presented spring feast at Kikunoi

Kikunoi’s menu not only lists the dishes that compose the meal, but also expresses the *omotenashi* spirit of the host. These details reveal how he has designed the feast and intends to entertain guests. One might assume that a *ryôtei*, being a formal Japanese restaurant, features mainly well-known, traditional dishes. That is not the case under Yoshihiro Murata. He reviews his menus

A Menu for Yayoi\*

**Sakizuke**  
“Kakure-ume” (Hidden Apricot) featuring a Japanese apricot and cod milt, garnished with a peach blossom  
..... Served in an *arashu*-red footed bowl with gold cloud motif

**Hassun**  
Bamboo shoot, squid, and *udo* spikenard tossed in Kyoto-style white-miso sauce flavored with *sanshō* leaves; baby octopus; bracken fiddleheads; *udo* cut like flower petals; whitebait-topped sushi; rape blossoms seasoned with Japanese mustard sauce; lily bulbs cut like flower petals; salmon roe; deep-fried Japanese butterbur buds with miso  
..... Served in a *yūsoku-kaioke* two-tiered box

**Mukozuke**  
—Sea bream and Spanish mackerel sashimi with an assortment of garnishes  
..... Served in an *akae* overglaze-enameled square bowl by Chikushun Kawase  
—Young tuna sashimi with dabs of Japanese mustard  
..... Served in a slip-decorated Mishima round bowl  
—Two dipping sauces: jellied *ponzu* citrus-and-soy sauce, and soy sauce with egg yolk

**Nimono**  
Deep-fried clam dumpling, finely chopped *wakame* seaweed, bracken fiddlehead, carrot-and-*daikon*-radish knot, *udo* cut like petals, and *sanshō* leaves in *kuzu*-thickened soup  
..... Served in a *shichisenju* seven-striped bowl

**Yakimono**  
Grilled tilefish coated with grated house-made *karasumi* mullet roe accompanied by candied kumquats  
..... Served on a Shino-style square plate by Rosanjin Kitaoji

**Kuchinaoshi**  
Strawberry sorbet with a hint of *wasabi*  
..... Served in a Kobiki white-glazed cup with handle

frequently, incorporating new flavors and novel ideas. He explains, “Clients have varying tastes, so I try to alter my dishes accordingly, from the ingredients and seasonings to the choice of tableware and its arrangement. I planned this menu as a Hinamatsuri banquet for a group of female guests.”

The numerous courses feature many spring ingredients. The *sakizuke*, which is similar to the French amuse-bouche, and the *hassun* both represent early spring and the Hinamatsuri doll festival, while the *mukōzuke* appetizer and ensuing simmered and grilled dishes highlight ingredients at peak flavor. Later courses present dramatic changes of mood through vessels that vary greatly in style.

**Kuchitori**  
—Squid, shallots, and red *komnyaku* jelly dressed with a sauce of vinegar and miso  
—Shrimp egg-yolk sushi with seasoned egg-yolk crumbles in place of sushi rice  
—Plantain lily seasoned with *tosazu* sauce made of vinegar, soy sauce, and dashi stock  
—Chopped yam dressed with dried sea-cucumber ovaries and *ponzu*  
—Firefly squid and wakame seaweed dressed with an egg-yolk-and-vinegar sauce and topped with *myōga* ginger bud  
—Broad beans and deep-fried tofu dressed with black pepper and a tofu-based sauce  
..... Served in six assorted *choko* cups

**Shiizakana**  
Spiny lobster dredged in egg yolk, deep-fried, and simmered in a white-miso broth, with *yuba* soy-milk skin, snow peas, and *sanshō* leaves  
..... Served in an Oribe-style bowl by Rosanjin

**Gohan**  
*Chirashizushi* with minced and seasoned shrimp, conger eel, salmon roe, omelet, bracken fiddleheads, ginger cut like flower petals, *udo*, *kintoki* red carrots, shiitake mushrooms, broad beans, green peas, snow peas, and *sanshō* leaves  
..... Served in a square bowl by Kanjiro Kawai

**Tomewan**  
Puréed spinach soup seasoned with white miso and garnished with peach-blossom-shaped *fu* wheat gluten, Japanese butterbur buds, and Japanese mustard  
..... Served in a small *arashu*-red soup bowl

**Mizumono**  
—Roasted-barley-flour ice cream sprinkled with powdered Hatchō miso  
—Crème-brûlée-style sponge cake  
..... Served on a yellow Kōchi plate

\*On Japan’s old lunar calendar, the third month of the year was known as Yayoi. Meaning “new life,” it is used today to indicate March and to convey a poetic sense of spring.



**Kuchitori** (assorted delicacies)  
This assortment presents small portions arranged in little cups that allude to articles associated with the Hinamatsuri, such as a *hichigiri* sweet rice cake, a turban shell, and a paper lantern. A sprig of blossoming peach adds a light touch.



**Gohan** (rice)  
Kikunoi also pays scrupulous attention to the serving of rice, cooking it in a broad-brimmed *hagama* pot to the perfect timing for each party. Here, sushi rice serves as a bed for a generous heap of seafood and vegetables to make *chirashizushi* “scattered” sushi.



**Mizumono** (seasonal dessert)  
The last note to a banquet generally features seasonal fruits, but here Kikunoi instead offers a Western-style dessert. The house-made gâteau is served with ice cream made from a combination of Japanese and Western ingredients.







Kikunoi's *hassun* trays present food in two-tiered boxes modeled after traditional court-style containers used to store decorated shells for the game of *kai-awase* shell-matching game. Tastes of spring include tidbits dressed with miso sauce flavored with *sanshō* leaves, white-bait-topped sushi for the March 3 Hinamatsuri doll festival, and rape blossoms seasoned with Japanese mustard sauce.



# Behind the scenes of a singular experience

Kyoto’s *ryōtei* restaurants showcase the essence of Japanese beauty and delights for the palate. Murata says, “A *ryōtei* is not only a place to relish a meal, but also a haven where guests can spend a few hours away from their daily routines, in *zashiki* rooms tastefully appointed with seasonal decorations and in a style unique to each establishment. Our clients come with high expectations, so we do our utmost to give them full satisfaction.” Guests are received at the restaurant, a stately and elegant building, in accordance with family precepts laid down by the founder and carried on in Kikunoi style.

All aspects of the *ryōtei* are designed with the guests’ pleasure in mind, from the well-tended gardens, water-sprinkled entrance, and the aroma of incense to graceful service by *nakai* waitresses, *zashiki* tatami rooms, hanging scrolls, flowers, cuisine, and vessels. Murata continually checks all these elements, never resigned to standard ways and traditions. Under his direction, a team of more than 20 chefs works in the kitchen, while the waitstaff led by proprietress Kyōko Murata serves guests and takes on tasks behind the scenes.

Kikunoi also has longstanding relationships with contractors who support the restaurant behind the scenes. Among them are builders, landscape gardeners, paperhangers, and potters.

The proprietor, with his unwavering convictions, and the professional team, who show unflagging dedication and expertise, join forces to create the singular and beautiful Kikunoi experience that gives guests delights for all five senses.

Far right: A pair of carved-wood standing *hina* dolls is displayed in the *wakidoko* side alcove. These family heirlooms were crafted by Ichimu Yokoyama.  
Right: The Aoi room represents Kikunoi’s *kirei-sabi* style. The room and tokonoma alcove are in the *shoin* style of residential architecture, which originated in the Muromachi period (1336–1573).



**Kikunoi**  
459 Shimokawara-chō,  
Shimokawara-dōri Yasaka  
Toriimae-sagaru,  
Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto  
<https://kikunoi.jp/en>



Vessels for the Yayoi spring menu are ordered during the winter. Before production begins, sketches and scale models are made based on Murata’s ideas.



Each month’s menu is planned a month ahead, and suitable vessels are selected according to its theme. For a special menu, precious vessels and articles may be used.



From 8 AM till around 11 AM the cleaning staff uses brooms and cloths instead of a vacuum cleaner to remove every last speck of dust.



A male attendant, who is also in charge of checking in guests and laying out their shoes, starts cleaning the garden and watering the plants at 9 AM. Landscape gardeners come a few times a year to prune the trees and shrubs.



Kyōko Murata (pictured) and her daughter Shiho are in charge of flower arrangements and other room preparations, which must be finished by 11 AM. They sometimes rearrange the decor and even change their kimono attire to suit the purpose of their guests’ gathering.



Incense is lit half an hour before guests are due to arrive, subtly perfuming the room and enhancing a sense of calm—part of the meticulous preparations made with *omotenashi* spirit.



**Yoshihiro Murata**

The third-generation owner of Kikunoi, which was founded in 1912. Through his involvement with the Japanese Culinary Academy as well as the All-Japan Food Association, Murata was one of the leading figures in the promotion of *washoku* for inclusion on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list. He is a leading spokesman for Japanese cuisine around the world and has garnered a total of seven Michelin stars for his three restaurants in Kyoto and Tokyo.





## Chapter 2

# Scenes and Tastes to Explore and Experience

Wherever you may go, the land, the climate, and history will shape your food experiences. The culinary memories created in Kyoto will keep you coming back again and again.

“Kyoto by the sea” is dotted with distinctive port towns. The *funaya* boathouses of Ine (above photos) hug the shoreline, creating a scenery like no other. At Miyazu, the dynamic landscape towers over the Amanohashidate land bridge (on page 5) crossing the bay. Maizuru (at right) is known for the natural beauty of its coastline and the historic red-brick warehouses at its harbor.



## Blessed by the ocean’s bounty

The Tango Peninsula, at the northernmost part of Kyoto Prefecture, juts into the Sea of Japan. Fishing ports around the peninsula draw on a wealth of seafood resources from season to season. Along with Himi in Toyama and the Gotō archipelago in Nagasaki, the Tango region has one of the three great fishing harbors for *kanburi* winter yellowtail in Japan.

The port of Ine, at the tip of the peninsula, upholds this reputation. In the wintry chill of an early December morning, boisterous flocks of seabirds announce the return of the fishing boats to harbor, carrying a prize catch of the yellowtail for which Ine is famous. Fattened by the frigid northern seas around Hokkaido, *kanburi* roam south in this season and are captured in set nets located 500 meters offshore from Ine.

The typical winter yellowtail brought to port this particular day in December (photo at upper left) is about 8 kilograms. The fishermen are a bit chagrined, as yellowtail can weigh twice as much: “This morning’s fish are on the slim side,” they say. The daily



**Top left:** Fish are unloaded and sorted at the Ine port.  
**Top right and above:** Auction and shipping at Miyazu Port and Maizuru Port. As the auctioneer raises his voice to start the bidding, buyers signal their bids with hand signs, settling sales in the blink of an eye. The calm atmosphere belies the underlying tension.  
**Below:** Freshly caught fish await buyers. From left, sea bass, yellowtail amberjack, sea bream.







average haul can include some 500 yellowtail weighing 10 kilograms each, and the port explodes with excitement and activity when there is a bumper catch of 10,000. With the help of specialized equipment and brisk, efficient work by hand, the catch is sorted and packed within a matter of 20 minutes, and the delicious cargo shipped to markets in different parts of Kyoto and around the country.

The chance to savor fresh seasonal offerings at their peak is one of the special pleasures of the traveler. *Kanburi shabu-shabu*

hot pot, made with succulent, thin-sliced winter yellowtail, has become an essential seasonal dish for lovers of fine food visiting the Tango region. Charoku Bekkan, a Japanese inn and restaurant in Miyazu with a three-hundred-year history, offers the hot pot to diners as “snow-garnished yellowtail,” with a generous helping of freshly grated *daikon* radish added to the broth, reminiscent of softly falling snow. The delicate astringency of the *daikon* is phenomenal alongside the fatty richness of the yellowtail, a balm to the palate and the appetite.

**Opposite page:** For yellowtail *shabu-shabu*, the thinner the flesh, the more delectable the result. The chef’s skill shines in these practically transparent slices. **Above, top to bottom:** Charoku Bekkan’s main-course dishes include yellowtail simmered with daikon radish for a subtle blend of flavors; the toasty crunch of grilled yellowtail collar complements the lush, juicy flesh; yellowtail sashimi combines firm dorsal flesh and tender belly meat to showcase the distinct textures and flavors; *koppegani*, female snow crab laden with richly flavored roe, is another cold-weather delicacy.

## Hallmark fish from Kyoto waters

Top-quality fresh fish, a prominent feature of Kyoto cuisine, come on the market with the changing seasons. Three of the most noteworthy are introduced here.

### Japanese cockle (Tango *torigai*) April–June

Tango *torigai* cockles are farmed only around the Kyoto bays of Maizuru and Miyazu. Cultivated over an entire year, they reach a diameter of 10 centimeters—larger than wild-caught cockles from the Pacific Ocean and elsewhere. The flesh is firm and substantial, with a distinctive sweetness.



### Kyoto mackerel (*Kyō-sawara*) October–December

*Sawara* mackerel caught in the waters of Kyoto and weighing 1.5 kilograms or more bear the moniker “Kyō-sawara.” In season, *Kyō-sawara* are fat and luscious; their flesh is soft and sweet. Delicious as sashimi, grilled, or seared, *Kyō-sawara* may also be marinated in miso to make *saikyō-zuke*.



### Red sea bream (Tango *guji*) October–December

Tango red sea bream from Miyazu and Ine, specially handled for freshness, are a hallmark Kyoto fish. The pale-colored flesh, with a faint sweetness and a refined taste, is prized for grilled and steamed dishes as well as clear soups. This fish is integral to Kyoto cuisine.



**Charoku Bekkan**  
2039-4 Shimasaki, Miyazu, Kyoto  
Tel. 0772-22-2177  
[www.charoku.com](http://www.charoku.com)



## A feast of summer vegetables

*Kyō-yasai*, or Kyoto vegetables, are traditionally grown only in this region. While other areas throughout Japan also have their own noteworthy produce varieties, Kyoto's vegetables are by far the best known. Though eaten as daily fare, they have a gourmet cachet as ingredients for high-class Kyoto cuisine, perhaps because they are grown in rich soil fed by the Kamo, Katsura, and Takano rivers. Let's take a look at the tasty, nourishing summer goodness raised on these generous waters.

Subtly sweet, dense-fleshed baby turnips are a must for Kyoto cuisine.

Tanba black soybeans, served as *edamame*.

A very meaty eggplant, succulent when cooked with oil. Also used for Kyoto pickles.

Typical scallion used for everything from noodle toppings to hot-pot cookery.

A juicy, mild variety of chili pepper. Delicious either simmered or grilled.

Slightly sharp greens, mostly used for Kyoto pickles.

These carrots are red to the core. Simmering brings out the tender sweetness.

Not as sweet as most *kabocha* squash. Good in all kinds of Japanese dishes.

Fresh, water-crisp greens, perfect for both salads and *nabe* hot pots.

Very mild chili peppers, for tempura, grilling, stir-frying, and more.







## Pure waters and clean flavors



**Top:** Morika, a specialist shop close to Arashiyama, makes its tofu with local underground water from Sagano. Its slight hardness, gentle taste, and lack of odor make this water ideal for tofu that showcases the slightly sweet natural flavor of the soybeans. After being deep-fried twice in high-quality refined vegetable oil, the soft, fluffy tofu readily absorbs flavoring. **Right:** Senmaruya has specialized in *yuba* since its establishment in 1804. They use a time-honored traditional method, making every piece individually by hand. The dining area offers the perfect place to try a *yuba* hot-pot lunch.

**Morika**  
42 Saga Shakadō  
Fujinoki-chō, Ukyō-ku, Kyoto  
Tel. 075-872-3955  
9 AM–5 PM  
Closed Wednesdays and  
irregularly on Tuesdays

**Senmaruya Honten**  
541 Yaoya-chō,  
Sakaimachi-dōri Shijō-agaru,  
Nakagyō-ku, Kyoto  
Tel. 075-221-0555  
10 AM–6 PM (for shopping),  
10:30 AM–3 PM (for lunch)



Kyoto lies in a river basin surrounded by mountains and is blessed with an abundant supply of natural underground water. People in Kyoto instinctively know the differences in taste and temperature of the water from these springs. Places famous for their water quality can be found around the city, and many households and restaurants still use well water to this day. The easy availability of excellent groundwater is a well-established part of Kyoto life and culture.

The tofu and *yuba* (the thin skin that forms when soymilk is boiled) made in Kyoto are remarkable for their mild taste and creamy texture, much of which is owed to the quality of the water used in making them. The long history of *shōjin ryōri* in the many Buddhist temples in the city, which developed the vegetarian dishes served to the priests, also helped make soy-based foods like *yuba* and tofu beloved staples of local culinary culture.

While Kyoto cuisine is often associated with *kaiseki ryōri*, the multicourse meals served at *ryōtei* restaurants, this is not the only culinary tradition in the city. *Obanzai* is the simpler daily household fare, seasoned with a light hand and focused on bringing out the natural flavors of the ingredients. Even ordinary dishes like these express Kyoto's understated elegance and refinement.

Kyoto is known for its cold winters, and hearty comfort foods like *yudōfu* (silken tofu heated in kombu stock and eaten with

Inside Ichihime Shrine is the Amano Manai, a water basin that draws on one of the famously pure springs of Kyoto. Spring water is also a favorite for making tea at *chanoyu* gatherings.



flavorful accompaniments), and *ankake* (dishes with a *kuzu*-thickened sauce flavored with broth) are indispensable standbys. For *yudōfu*, water, kelp-based stock (*kombu dashi*), and tofu come together to weave a rich yet delicate flavor. In *yuba* dishes made with *kuzu* starch, the sauce is made a little thicker as the cold nights draw in, and the recipe can be varied to taste to suit the season. These simple yet sophisticated dishes offer a glimpse of the Kyoto dinner table—subtle, delicate, and refined.



### Simple cooking, heightened tastes

**From left:** *Yudōfu* is heated in pure Kyoto water flavored simply with a sheet of kombu. It is best enjoyed with a squeeze of citrus and a drizzle of soy sauce. *O-age no taitan* is made by rapidly heating sugar and deep-fried tofu; when the sugar melts, *kombu dashi* is added and brought to a boil, then simmered with a little light soy sauce. The tofu is briefly seared over direct heat before being served with *myōga* chiffonade. *Yuba* in *kuzu* sauce is prepared by bringing *kombu dashi*, sugar, and *yuba* to a boil with a little light soy sauce. The *yuba* is then topped with a *kuzu*-thickened sauce and garnished with finely chopped *shiitake* mushrooms simmered in a sweet-savory broth.



## Harbingers of Kyoto's four seasons

Many foods harvested or foraged in Kyoto and the surrounding lands are celebrated for heralding the season. These seasonal offerings have long been part of the region's culinary scene.

### Spring

#### Sea bream (*tai*)

Sea bream reach peak flavor in the *sakura* (cherry blossom) season, when they are getting ready to spawn. Called *sakura-dai*, these sea bream are prized for their fragrance and firm yet tender flesh. Those caught in the Akashi Strait are especially sought-after in Kyoto.



#### Bamboo shoots (*takenoko*)

Bamboo shoots are a favorite spring delicacy in Kyoto, although diverse varieties are in season at different times of the year. Many Kyoto families simmer boiled bamboo shoots with *wakame* seaweed or dress them with miso and vinegar, keeping them on hand to enjoy throughout springtime.



#### Edible wild plants

Newly emerging butterbur buds (*fukinotō*), rape blossoms (*nanohana*), aralia shoots (*taranome*), and bracken fiddleheads (*warabi*) are among the wealth of wild edible plants enjoyed in spring. To counter any bitterness or astringency and bring out their aromas and textures, they are often deep-fried as tempura.

### Autumn

#### Matsutake

The handsome, aromatic *matsutake* is the mushroom Kyoto chefs esteem most highly. Brimming with moisture and earthy flavor, they thrive in the Tanba Sasayama mountains of Hyogo Prefecture, an area of deep mists and temperatures that drop low at night and rise high during the day.



#### Chestnuts

Along with *matsutake* mushrooms, chestnuts from Tanba are an important autumn crop respected nationwide for their high quality. These nuts, large, solid, and sweet, are often enjoyed steamed with rice and as a standard ingredient of *wagashi* sweets, as well as in simmered dishes.



Partaking of foods as soon as they come into season (*hashiri*), when they are at their peak of flavor and fullness (*shun*), and later, when their season is nearly finished (*nagori*) is part of the sensibility championed by Kyoto cuisine—indeed, by Japanese culinary tradition. Conger eel, at their best in summer, become a *nagori* treat in autumn, with their fatty richness after spawning and heading into winter hibernation.

### Summer

#### Summer vegetables

Distinctive Kyoto vegetables known as *Kyō-yasai* include the Kamo eggplant (*Kamo nasu*), Manganji chili peppers (*Manganji tōgarashi*), and purple *edamame* (*Murasaki zuki*) introduced on pages 24–25. These tasty, unusual vegetable varieties all come into season in summer.



#### Sweetfish (*ayu*)

Freshwater fish have always been prized in Kyoto, even though obtaining fresh seafood is easier now than it once was. Sweetfish, enjoyed for their refreshing flavor and the slight bitterness of their entrails, come into season in summer. When grilled over charcoal, the soft flesh and crispy skin are a delectable treat.



#### Conger eel (*hamo*)

Another rich but restorative taste of summer in Kyoto is conger eel. The pure white flesh is soft and flavorful, and eminently palatable once the many tiny bones in the flesh have been cut small with a knife specially designed for the purpose.

### Winter

#### Winter vegetables

Root vegetables and leafy greens like Chinese cabbage become sweet when the weather turns cold. Kameoka, known for its Shōgoin turnips (foreground of photo), has thick morning mists and large day-to-night temperature fluctuations that make the roots dense and smooth. The harvest peaks in December.



Shōgoin turnips are thinly sliced and salted down in winter for “senmaizuke” pickles, a ubiquitous presence on Kyoto tables.

#### Warming-up foods for winter

Rich in fat and collagen, soft-shelled turtle is a mainstay of Kyoto cuisine for hot pot, *zōsui* rice porridge, and soups. Game from the mountains of Kyoto (page 42) is in season from autumn to winter as well. These are dishes for keeping one's energy up in cold weather.

## Into the homeland of Japanese tea

Tea fields stretch up toward heaven on the hillsides of the Uji tea-producing town of Wazuka. Wide diurnal temperatures create thick mists that protect against strong sunlight. Along with good drainage and air circulation, Wazuka has ideal conditions for cultivating aromatic, *umami*-rich tea. The Ishitera Tea Fields are Kyoto Prefecture's first designated Scenic Asset; they are also registered as a Japan Heritage site.



## A refreshing sip on the banks of the Uji River

### Matcha “Taikō-san”

Ground from the finest tea raised by Tsūen-contracted grower Keiichi Fukui, this *matcha* has deep, rich flavor with no bitterness.

## World-famous Tsūen tea

### Gyokuro “Fujitsubo”

The highest-quality green leaf tea, *gyokuro* should be brewed carefully at lower temperatures to bring out its keen fragrance and full body.

The town of Uji, on the southern outskirts of Kyoto, is believed to be the birthplace of tea in Japan, the site where matcha powdered green tea was first ground from the leaves of plants grown with Chinese seeds.

In the breezy month of May, tea fanciers anxiously await the year’s new tea in Uji. Of the many renowned tea shops in town, the oldest is Tsūen, established more than 850 years ago. Located at the east end of the Uji Bridge, Tsūen has served for generations as bridge-keeper, offering tea to those who cross. Today, twenty-fourth-generation proprietor Yūsuke Tsūen shows us to a tea farm by the briskly flowing Uji River, famous as the setting for the last chapters of *The Tale of Genji*.

Mild climate and morning mists from the river are especially good for growing tea. “The sandy soil along the river lets roots extend straight down and leaves grow broad and tender, which is perfect for *matcha*,” explains Tsūen. Hilly fields higher up tend to have clay soil, which makes for a more robust plant as well as stronger taste. With its variety of growing conditions, Uji boasts a wealth of different teas. Tsūen says, “Every tea grower and merchant in Uji is proud of the heritage here. In order to ensure the different tastes that customers have come to love over our long history, we’ve refined our blending techniques.”

So what are Tsūen tastes? “After picking the leaves, we go light on the steaming and high-fire dry-finishing to let the subtle original flavor shine through,” Tsūen tells us.

### Hōjicha “Azumaya”

Less-astringent green tea leaves blended with stems from *matcha* tea are roasted for a toasty bouquet and pleasant aftertaste.



**Above:** There’s nothing like a cool cup of tea on a hot summer’s day, and *gyokuro* is the perfect fragrant choice for chilling. Here’s the Tsūen secret: Fill a teapot with ice, add plenty of leaves, and pour hot water directly over leaves and ice.

**Right:** The Sannoma viewing deck on the Uji Bridge, where Tsūen’s tenth and eleventh generations drew river water for warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s tea-ceremony gatherings.

**Far right:** Healthy green plants at Keiichi Fukui’s tea farm.



The Tsūen brand has enthusiasts all over the world. The company makes regular shipments to clients as far away as the Cayman Islands. Tsūen himself says he has rediscovered his tea through the eyes of foreign tea lovers who take *matcha* with milk, latte-style, or mix it in cocktails. “I have heard of a doctor in the United States who drinks *gyokuro* at bedtime. In Japan, people generally avoid green tea before sleeping because of the caffeine, but preparing it at a low temperature brings out the theanine instead, which is a relaxant.” To be sure, the *gyokuro* he serves us is initially stimulating, and then the whole body unwinds into a state of calmness.

Tsūen’s twenty-fourth-generation proprietor, Yūsuke Tsūen, greets customers with free tea he prepares in a kettle on the storefront brazier. In new-tea season he serves hundreds of cups daily.



**Tsūen**  
1 Uji Higashiuchi, Uji, Kyoto  
9:30 AM to 5:30 PM  
Tel. 0774-21-2243  
[www.tsuentea.com/shop/index.html](http://www.tsuentea.com/shop/index.html)





## A ritual to awaken the senses

**Left page:** A scroll hanging in the tokonoma alcove bears the Zen phrase "Peace, from a single bowl of tea."  
**Right:** Soft light illuminates the tea room as the host prepares the tea. This tea house is a reconstruction of one originally built for the tea master Shōkadō Shōjō (1584–1639) by Kobori Enshū (1579–1647). Its name, Kan'unken, means "tea house floating in the clouds."



Beautiful landscapes steeped in history, with sites close at hand that offer insight into the essence of Japanese culture: This is the special attraction of Kyoto, which reveres its traditions and faithfully passes them down. Yawata, just south of the city where the three waterways of Katsura, Uji, and Kizu rivers converge, is one such spot. From ancient times through the early modern era, the region prospered as a strategic transportation hub. Thanks to its tea plantations, it has been a center for the dissemination of tea culture since the early seventeenth century.

Over the centuries since the drinking of powdered green tea was first introduced, the distinctive tradition known as the tea ceremony—*chanoyu*—developed into a kind of ritual. The host and guest follow a sequence of prescribed actions and exchanges that transform the simple drinking of a bowl of tea into an experience that brings host and guests together in an atmosphere of harmony and enjoyment. The host selects the utensils for serving the tea specifically for the occasion and arranges the items displayed in the tokonoma with the guests in mind. The guests enjoy the tea and





#### Left page

**Top left, bottom center:** A quiet tension prevails as the flowing movements of the ritual unfold. **Bottom left:** Burning charcoal gives off a pleasant warmth. **Top right:** *Hanabira* ("flower-petal") *mochi* symbolizes the celebration of a new year. **Right center:** Hama no Kaze ("shore breeze") *matcha*, made from Yawata tea, tastes crisp and bright. **Bottom right:** A dove-shaped incense container evokes the divine messenger of Iwashimizu Hachimangū Shrine, a National Treasure in Yawata City.

#### Right page

**Left:** *Rōbai* wax plum and a camellia bud emerge from a wall-hanging vase, stirring thoughts of spring. **Top right:** The shadows cast on the *shōji* window impart a quiet mood. **Center right:** Freshly wetted stepping stones await the guests' arrival. **Center left:** Guests rinse their hands and mouths at a stone basin, purifying mind and body before entering the tearoom. **Bottom:** Within Shōkadō Garden, some forty varieties of bamboo create a picturesque landscape.

savor their host's consideration and hospitality. *Chanoyu* distills the Japanese aesthetic that prizes thoughtfulness toward others and emphasizes harmony in action, association, and material culture.

As the steps of the tea making unfold, the mind grows calm; the breathing settles. In the tranquil atmosphere, the five senses are imperceptibly awakened to the quiet sound of water simmering in the kettle, like breeze blowing through pine trees; the rising and fading of the kettle's steam; rays of sunlight filtering through the window, the occasional burst of birdsong. While all these phenomena are part of our everyday lives, we experience a flash of awareness of their beauty in such fleeting moments.

*Chanoyu* combines multiple facets of Japanese culture, bringing together the architecture of the tea room, the horticulture of

*chabana* flowers and gardens, the arts of calligraphy and painting, and the crafts of ceramics, lacquerware, metalwork, and woodworking. The development of *chanoyu* has further refined these practices through the sophisticated aesthetic sensibility fostered in Kyoto's cultural milieu. Its effect on cuisine and *wagashi* sweets is similar: The *kaiseki* cuisine for which Kyoto is known traces its roots to meals designed to help guests more fully appreciate the tea at formal gatherings, and exquisite confections reflecting the season were created especially for the tea setting. The subtle shapes and flavors integrate elements of traditional culture, and they give tangible expression to the spirit of hospitality.



The garden features the thatched-roof Shōkadō hermitage, a designated Cultural Property; Izumibō Hall; and three teahouses. The museum offers regular events where visitors can experience the way of tea first hand.

**Shōkadō Garden and Art Museum**  
43-1 Yawata Ominashi, Yawata, Kyoto  
<https://shokado-garden-art-museum.jp/eng>





## Discovering sake in Kyoto

**Far right:** “Sake Seduction,” a refreshingly tart cocktail, combines a cherry-blossom-infused Takumi *junmai daiginjō* sake from the Kyōhime Shuzō brewery with *matcha*-infused Tamagawa *junmaishu* (*yamahai*) from the Kinoshita Shuzō brewery.

**Right:** The “New Era” pairs the rich umami flavors of Tamagawa spontaneous-fermentation *junmaishu* (*yamahai*) with the sharp sweetness of Chidori-su rice vinegar to create a delicate piquancy.

**Bottom right:** A flight of three different types of sake. Ask the bartender for tips and recommendations.



## A dramatic setting for an array of sake

Sake has been enjoying a surge in global popularity recently—in fact, in 2024, Japan’s sake-making traditions were added to UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage list. In addition to the central role it has long played at festivals, weddings, and other rites of passage, sake is also a cherished part of daily life in Japan. Though it can be enjoyed around the world, nothing compares to tasting it where it’s made, surrounded by the natural environment and cultural heritage that shaped it.

Kyoto is home to two of the three major Shinto shrines sacred to the god of sake—Matsuo Taisha and Umenomiya Taisha shrines. Long famous for its sake, today Kyoto ranks second out of all the prefectures in production volume. With more than 40 breweries, most of them clustered in and around the Fushimi area to the south of the city, Kyoto is home to both large-scale producers and boutique breweries crafting “local sake,” or *jizake*. The moderately hard water of the region brings forth a wide range of flavors, from fruity and complex sakes to light, easy-drinking brews.

For those eager to explore the full range of what sake has to offer, Bar Ryōzen, inside the Banyan Tree hotel in Higashiyama, is the ideal starting point. The sophisticated interior, dominated by elements of bamboo, wood, and stone, showcases the meticulously curated selection of bottles lining the walls. The serene atmosphere sharpens the senses, allowing for a heightened appreciation of the nuanced flavors and aromas. Expert bartenders offer personalized recommendations, pairing tasting combinations with stories of the rich history and culture of *nihonshu*. It is an experience that is sure to become a cherished memory of Kyoto.

Banyan Tree Higashiyama Kyoto overlooks the city. Its concept combines traditional *ryokan* hospitality with hot-spring relaxation. The symbolic wooden eaves at the entrance, and the *noh* stage with a bamboo forest as backdrop, offers an unforgettable setting for a Kyoto stay.



**Banyan Tree Higashiyama Kyoto  
Bar Ryōzen**  
7 Seikanji Ryōzan-chō,  
Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto  
[www.banyantree.com/japan/  
kyoto/dining/bar-ryozen](http://www.banyantree.com/japan/kyoto/dining/bar-ryozen)





## Tradition and innovation at an esteemed Kyoto brewery

Sake brewing in Japan has a long history; in fact, evidence suggests that an alcoholic drink made from rice was being consumed as early as the third century BC. In Kyoto, sake goes back as far as the city itself. It was originally produced on the grounds of the emperor's palace after the capital moved here in the eighth century. Breweries emerged over time, and a rich culture of sake production developed in Fushimi and the surrounding area south of the palace.

Sake is produced in every one of Japan's 47 prefectures, with considerable variation between regions. The key factor behind this diversity is the quality of the water. Fushimi, a scenic area that was once a favorite location for the villas of the court nobility, offers the perfect conditions: abundant, high-quality water. Natural springs in the foothills of the mountains provide water that is low in iron and balanced in potassium and calcium, producing soft, subtle sake praised for its "feminine" qualities.

Masuda Tokubee Shōten, founded in 1675, is one of Fushimi's oldest breweries. The brewery sits close to the gently flowing

The two-story wooden building (page 38 bottom), a historic landmark dating from the mid-nineteenth century, is where the brewing takes place. The process starts with steaming the rice, which is grown specifically for making sake. *Kōji* is added to the steamed rice, and then the *shubo* (yeast starter) is prepared to culture the *kōji* and yeast. Next comes the fermentation mash (*moromi*). It is a complex, hands-on undertaking that requires great care and expert judgment at every step from the *tōji* and rest of the team.

Kamo and Katsura rivers along the historic Toba Kaidō road, its tiled roof and wooden buildings testimony to its heritage. "Sake from Fushimi has always been intertwined with Kyoto and its life," says Masuda Tokubee (pronounced *tob-koo-bay*), the fourteenth-generation owner. "From cuisine to sake cups and interior decor, traditional ceremonies, even the way people behave . . . Sake is a cherished part of the tradition of refined living in this city."

The sake-making process is a venerable craft carried out by skilled artisans. Central to the process is *kōji*, a mold that converts starch into fermentable sugars. The complex, labor-intensive brewing process is traditionally carried out in winter, under the guidance of a master brewer known as the *tōji*. The result is a drink that highlights the qualities of the key ingredients—rice and water.

While maintaining its centuries-old methods, Masuda has also tried to be a pioneer among breweries. It was the first in Japan to make sparkling *nigorizake*—a carbonated, unfiltered brew produced in 1964 that has started to gain international attention. The brewery also led the way in long-term aging of *jun-mai daiginjō* in ceramic jars and in developing low-alcohol sake. Even as it honors the proud customs that have sustained it for 350 years, the brewery and its sake continue to evolve.

The brand name "Tsuki no Katsura" is taken from an Edo-period poem by a court noble. The rich umami and slight sharpness of this sparkling *nigorizake* deserve the sobriquet "the champagne of sake."

**Masuda Tokubee Shōten**  
135 Shimotoba Nagata-chō,  
Fushimi-ku, Kyoto  
<https://tsukinokatsura.co.jp/en>







**Opposite page:** A *zazen* session at Ryōsokuin is available for groups of 20 or more, by reservation only. The deputy head priest also provides instruction in English.

**Above:** Beautiful greenery and serenity pervade the front garden of the *hōjō* abbot's chamber at Ryōsokuin.

**Below:** This *shōjin ryōri* meal features a simmered dish of seasonal vegetables, flavorful dried *daikon* radish, and pickles to eat with rice porridge. Soy-based ingredients such as tofu are a valuable source of non-animal protein.

## Savor a morning of quietude

For anyone feeling overwhelmed by the hectic pace of modern life, *zazen*, the Zen seated meditation practice that seeks to cultivate inner calm and concentrate the mind, is worth a try. Though it may seem difficult for beginners, there is a temple that will patiently take you through the process, step by step.

Under the guidance of Tōryō Itō, deputy head priest at Ryōsokuin, founded in 1358 as a subsidiary of the Kenninji Temple, participants begin by learning how to sit. Itō says, “Adopting a good posture releases tension from the body, and giving awareness to our breath allows us to let go of distracting thoughts and gain a sense of being at one with nature.” After an hour of meditation, participants are invited for a walk through the lush greenery of the temple gardens, followed by a service of *matcha* green tea. Upon request, a breakfast of rice porridge, prepared in the

*shōjin* tradition, can be served. Such moments of peaceful retreat await in your travels to Kyoto.

As dietary habits diversify worldwide, Japanese cuisine has soared in popularity, in part for its health benefits. Gaining particular attention is *shōjin ryōri*, often considered Japan's vegetarian or vegan cuisine. The elements of *shōjin* are derived from ascetic Buddhist monks' meals, with its principles eschewing all animal products and the “five pungent vegetables” (garlic, leeks, *negi* and *rakkyō* scallions, and chives). At root is the Buddhist precept forbidding killing—but vegetables also give their lives, and no part of them should go to waste.

Turning awareness to the food in front of you, and giving thanks for life as you eat: Cultivating such a state of mind in everyday life is another way to reach a sense of inner peace.



**Ryōsokuin**  
591 Komatsu-chō,  
Yamato-ōji-dōri Shijō-kudaru,  
Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto  
Tel. 075-561-3216  
<https://ryosokuin.com>



# Flavors rich in local colors



## Hearty game from Kyoto’s woodlands

Tanba, in the northwest part of Kyoto Prefecture, is known for its abundant local foods, from *matsutake* mushrooms to brand-name Tanba beef. Wild animals flourish in these forested mountains, and hunting for food is a well-established part of Tanba’s culinary culture, so visitors can enjoy rustic game like venison and boar.

One of the region’s biggest draws is the village of Miyama, famous for its impressive collection of thatched-roof houses. Among these houses is Youluly, a reservations-only restaurant and inn where game is a fixture on the menu. Highlights include locally sourced venison and *Kyō-jidori* chicken, a Kyoto specialty. Ingredients from the hills and fields are regularly featured, including edible wild plants (*sansai*) in the spring and *ayu* sweet-fish from nearby streams in the summer. “We are blessed to live on foods sourced from the local environment,” says owner Leo Umesao. “We use ingredients that are available to us on the day, and take time cooking them to bring out their natural flavor.”

**Above:** Owner Leo Umesao was born and raised in this old thatched-roof farmhouse. He converted the interior into an atmospheric restaurant and inn where he and his wife Yuri serve a constantly changing menu built around seasonal offerings. Visitors can enjoy bucolic views alongside the flavorful country-style cuisine. One recent menu included shoulder of venison, *cha-wan-mushi* made with local *Kyō-jidori* chicken, and fried tofu cooked over an open *irori* hearth.

**Right:** This *nabe* hotpot features venison and game in season, simmered in a stock made from chicken and bonito flakes.



**Youluly**  
15 Morisato Sano-mae,  
Miyama-chō, Nantan, Kyoto  
Tel. 0771-76-0741  
Noon to 2 PM, and from 6 PM  
Closed irregularly; by reservation only  
<https://youluly.umesao.com>



At the Yantan café, *chajiru* is served in a *matcha* bowl, with plenty of vegetables and seasonal variations to ensure it hits the spot whatever the time of year: *Mochi* (sticky rice) in the winter and fresh *sōmen* (thin cold noodles) in the summer.

## Nourishment and energy in a bowl

Ujitawara has prospered for centuries as a center of Kyoto’s brandname *Uji-cha* tea cultivation. Today, more than 100 plantations still grow the famous tea in the Yuyadani district, where the atmosphere is redolent with history and tradition.

Yuyadani is also the home of *chajiru*, a soup made with tea that has been enjoyed in the area since the Edo period. Originally a lunch for workers in the tea fields, *chajiru* has been handed down as a nourishing local take on Japan’s beloved miso soup. It’s easy to prepare and bursting with flavor: Simply pour hot, strong tea into a bowl filled with miso and other ingredients. The aroma and gentle tartness of the tea combine with the *uma-mi* of the miso to create an invigorating soup that makes an ideal winter warmer—and provides a quick energy boost at any time of year.

**Sōen Kōyūan Yantan**  
21 Yuyadani Obana, Ujitawara-chō, Tsuzuki, Kyoto  
Tel. 0774-46-8864; 10 AM to 5 PM (March–October), to 4 PM (November–February); closed Wednesdays and Thursdays  
[www.yantan.jp](http://www.yantan.jp)

## Homestyle sushi, festive and unique

The coastal Tango region in northern Kyoto Prefecture not only brings in seafood from the Sea of Japan, but is also blessed with the bounty of the mountains and fields. These diverse flavors come together in *Tango barazushi*, a local variety of homestyle sushi topped with ground mackerel, shredded egg, *kamaboko* fish cake, red ginger, and seasonal vegetables, served at festivals and family celebrations. In the days before modern refrigeration, mackerel was processed in the fishing ports before being transported inland. It became a favorite standby in home cooking and one of the distinguishing ingredients of *barazushi*.

*Barazushi* is made by pressing sushi rice and toppings into a rectangular wooden mold. The squares of rice layered with colorful ingredients, neatly sliced with a wooden spatula, look almost like slices of cake. A box of *barazushi*, filled with tasty rice and vibrant toppings, makes a festive sight. While every household has its favorite ingredients and flavorings, all families share the tradition of lovingly preparing this special dish and then gathering to enjoy it together.

**Torimatsu Honten**  
146 Amino-chō Amino, Kyōtango, Kyoto  
Tel. 0772-72-0429; Monday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday 11:30 AM to 3:30 PM and 5:30 to 9 PM on weekends <https://torimatsu.jp>



Torimatsu offers *barazushi* for eat-in or takeaway. In addition to the classic version, other popular variations are offered, including one accented with the brisk freshness of *aajiso* perilla leaf and another flavored with curry spices (at limited stores).



## Chapter 3

# Enriched by Tradition and Craftsmanship

Kyoto's dining culture has long been enhanced by crafts born of creativity and adaptability. The skilled hands that make these works are as vital to culinary tradition as the chefs themselves.



## Where the bamboo grows: In pursuit of fine handcrafts

The Otokuni area southeast of Kyoto is known for its high-quality bamboo. Strong and lightweight, bamboo has long been an intimate part of daily life in Japan, valued both for its toughness and resilience as a construction material and for the attractive and durable household goods produced from it. The culture of Tea, with its use of tea utensils and flower vases prized by tea devotees has gone far to deepen appreciation for bamboo's material beauty. Designers and homemakers covet handcrafted bamboo items such as baskets for pleasing interiors.

Tea practitioners have been regular customers for the superb utensils made by the bamboo-craft artisans of Takano Chikkō. For nearly 60 years, the company has catered to the needs of temples and shrines in Kyoto and produced a wide array of tableware, drinking vessels, personal accessories, and other items for the consumer market. In order to utilize its stock of precious legacy materials and to pass down its accumulated know-how to younger generations, the company holds occasional workshops and other events showcasing high-quality bamboo.

Chikubuen, the Takano shop and gallery, is housed in a renovated traditional-style inn tucked into a bamboo grove on the grounds of the Kinsuitei luxury restaurant, which is part of the landscaped pond-garden of Nagaoka Tenmangū Shrine. There, a swooping tiled roof shelters unparalleled products of art and craft. A wide array of tableware and utensils made from bamboo stock curated by time and seasoned craftsmanship await your leisurely perusal.

**Top left:** The pourer and cups of this sake-drinking set were fashioned to highlight the beauty of the roots and nodes of bamboo. The small dipping saucers are brilliantly lacquered with gold and silver.

**Top right:** Lightweight, elegant bamboo chopsticks are a popular item. Chopstick rests made from bamboo root can be used for knives and forks as well.

**Above:** A cornucopia of flower vases crafted from soot-darkened bamboo (*susu-take*), tortoise-shell bamboo (*kikkō-chiku*), streaked bamboo (*shimi-take*), and many other types. The bamboo stock they are made from is de-oiled and left to season for as long as thirty years.

**Opposite page:** A veteran craftsman carries fresh-cut bamboo from a well-tended grove in the forests of timber bamboo (*madake*) that flourish at the confluence of the Katsura, Uji, and Kizu rivers west of Kyoto.



**Shop and Gallery  
Chikubuen**

2-15-15 Tenjin,  
Nagaokakyō, Kyoto  
[www.takano-bamboo.jp/en](http://www.takano-bamboo.jp/en)





## From the forest hinterlands: Trace the source of Tanba lacquerware

The *kintsugi* classes offered by the Fukuchiyama City-run Yakuno Wood and Lacquer Museum are popular. Students can take a one-time class or an ongoing series. Support is available for those who want to lacquer wood bases they have turned themselves, as well as for repair of old lacquerware items, *maki-e* decoration, and other related activities.

Tanba, in the northwestern part of Kyoto Prefecture, has long supplied woodland and agricultural resources for the cultural capital of Kyoto. The township of Yakuno in the mountains west of the city of Fukuchiyama is the cradle of “Tanba urushi,” which is synonymous with strong and lustrous lacquerware.

In modern Japan, production of lacquerware for daily use has declined, and only 2 percent of the supply of lacquer is collected in domestic forests, but Tanba has sought to carry on its precious craft traditions. To accomplish this, the Tanba Urushi Production Association was established in 1948; in 2012, its mission to plant and grow *urushi* lacquer trees, as well as harvest their sap, was taken up by the NPO Tanba Urushi.

Lightweight lacquer soup bowls and *soba* cups, made from

lathe-turned bases coated with multiple layers of polished *urushi*, are ideal for enjoying Japanese cuisine. They are well suited to the custom of drinking soup directly from the bowl and may be used for tea and other beverages. Tasteful contours and designs make them beautiful to gaze at as well. Lacquerware may seem difficult to maintain, but when made with strong natural *urushi* and their use is bolstered by a little knowledge, they can add a new dimension of pleasure to daily life.

For those interested in the fine handicraft traditions of Tanba, a side trip to the Yakuno Wood and Lacquer Museum is recommended. Opened in 2000, it features exhibits about *urushi*, sells Tanba *urushi* products, and offers lessons in genuine *kintsugi* lacquer-mending technique.



**Left:** Harvesting lacquer in Yakuno-chō. Sap collection starts at six in the morning and lasts for about two hours. Here, using scaffolding set up in an *urushi* grove, NPO president Haruko Takahashi and Kōsuke Yamauchi draw lacquer from trees about thirty years old.

**Above:** The bark of the tree is creased and the white sap that flows out collected with a spatula. By the time a tree has grown for 10 to 15 years, it has yielded only about 200 grams of sap.



**Right:** Tanba *urushi* vessels. At top right is a black *urushi* soup bowl; middle, zekko-wood *soba* dipping cups; bottom, chestnut-shaped *urushi*-coated chopstick rests. The cloth beneath them is dyed using the wood of *urushi* trees.

**Below:** Yakuno Wood and Lacquer Museum Director Akiko Hiraoka stands in front of the Museum.



### Yakuno Wood and Lacquer Museum

2199 Yakuno-chō Hirano, Fukuchiyama, Kyoto  
Tel. 0773-38-9226; 10 AM to 5 PM (closed Wednesdays, or following day if Wednesday is a holiday)  
[www.city.fukuchiyama.lg.jp/soshiki/64/13903.html](http://www.city.fukuchiyama.lg.jp/soshiki/64/13903.html)





Matsubayashi Hōsai, the current head of Asahiyaki, has developed a distinctive style based on the aesthetic of seventeenth-century tea master Kobori Enshū. Matsubayashi enthusiastically shows his work overseas and holds workshops to foster a wider appreciation of the culture of tea.

## Centuries-old craft endures in famed tea country

Across from the famed Byōdōin Temple in the heart of Uji, one of Japan's premier tea-growing areas, is the Asahiyaki pottery kiln, studio, and shop. Asahiyaki is one of only a few kilns that make pieces from both earthenware and kaolin porcelain. The reason for this dual approach is closely connected to Uji's history as a center of tea culture, where demand grew for implements used for *chanoyu* (the formal tea ceremony) as well as more quotidian ware for drinking brewed green tea. These contrasting needs led to the development of two distinct styles of pottery produced from different raw materials in the same kiln.

The studio's clay, quarried from nearby Mt. Asahi and Orii-ima, is allowed to "rest" for at least 50 years before being used for pottery; thus, the material being used by the studio today was dug up two generations ago or more. The resulting clay has soft nuances that are brought out when it is kneaded, along with good moisture absorption and excellent heat resistance—quali-



ties that make it ideal for porcelain pottery, and for tea utensils in particular.

Asahiyaki pottery traces its roots in this area along the Uji River to the era of the great tea master, architect, and cultural leader Kobori Enshū (1579–1647). In contrast to the *wabi-sabi* sensibility of rustic imperfection advocated by his predecessor Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591), Enshū espoused *kirei-sabi*, an aesthetic of elegant simplicity. Enshū taught that there should be a note of *sabi* imperfection in even the most colorful and attractive pieces—a view that has influenced the current and sixteenth-generation head of Asahiyaki, Matsubayashi Hōsai.

In addition to collection-quality pieces that express the artistic sensibility of the current kiln master, the studio makes and sells everyday items that perfectly complement today's household. All are on display in the shop and gallery, which is equipped with an impeccably appointed tearoom.



**Top:** Matsubayashi in front of the wood-fired climbing kiln (*nobori-gama*) Asahiyaki has used for generations. The pottery's Uji-sourced clay and the akamatsu red pine that fuels the kiln are integral to the distinctive Asahiyaki style.

**Left:** The current kiln master is particularly interested in exploring the possibilities of the blue-and-white overglazed Geppaku style, as seen in the tea bowl on the left.

**Below:** The studio also makes items that match easily with Western table settings and contemporary lifestyles. Top: Pine-ash-glazed round vessel, cup, and pourer; black plate with matching Geppaku cup-and-saucer set. Bottom: Celadon tea set.



**Asahiyaki Shop & Gallery**  
67 Uji Mataburi, Uji, Kyoto  
<https://asahiyaki.com/en>







## Keen in blade and spirit

Kyoto cuisine, characterized by its exquisite appearance, is supported by high-quality knives. Kyoto boasts a history of superbly crafted knives that satisfy the discerning standards and exacting demands of great cooks. To this day, the manufacture of chefs' knives draws on sword-making experience passed down through generations, and knives continue to symbolize the skills and mindset of the master swordsmith.

Aritsugu, found at the eastern end of Nishiki Market, was established in 1560 as a swordsmith supplying the imperial court. It still manufactures and sells "knives for a lifetime." Its wares are widely coveted by professional chefs seeking incredibly sharp, long-lasting blade edges and well-balanced tools. Never compromising quality, the shop still uses the choicest materials and master-level techniques throughout the manufacturing process. To meet cooks' varied needs, Aritsugu has devised around 450 models. They include chefs' knives, knives for everyday use, and even knives for left-handed wielders. Common to all is the stark beauty accomplished by stripping away all unnecessary elements.

The wares are true manifestations of functional artistry. Shin'ichirō Terakubo, the eighteenth-generation head of Aritsugu, emphasizes the importance of knives as bearers of a rich culinary culture. "Good knives are not only for professional chefs," he says. "Good knives also make delicious homemade dishes, and homemade dishes full of love bring happiness to the entire family. Never cut corners, always do things conscientiously, take good care of your tools, and never forget your sense of gratitude."



**Top left:** The imperial court-issued license dating back to the founding of Aritsugu as a swordsmith in 1560.

**Top right:** Four basic types of knives, from right to left, are the *yanagiba*, excellent for slicing sashimi, roast beef, etc.; the *deba-bōchō* (15 cm), most suitable for chopping or cleaning fish and seafood; the *ajikiri* (13.5 cm), best for cleaning and filleting small fish or squid; and the *ryōba-santoku* (19.5 cm), suitable for everyday use on all three food groups (vegetables, fish, meat). *Santoku* means "three virtues" or "suitable for three purposes."

**Left:** The hands of Shin'ichirō Terakubo sharpen a *fugubiki* (specialized knife for slicing blowfish) on a natural slate whetstone. The way to sharpen knives is to breathe calmly, concentrate, and keep gratitude foremost in mind.



Terakubo's philosophy pervades the entire store. Aritsugu's customers receive guidance on essential maintenance, in particular the sharpening of blades. They are reminded of the importance of taking proper care of tools so they will last a long time.

In Japan, swords have traditionally symbolized the spirit of the samurai. In maintaining the condition and sharpness of their blades, the samurai continually polished and sharpened their own spirits as well. Today, we must do the same with the knives that are fundamental to culinary life. Aritsugu, dedicated to making cutlery for more than 400 years, is also intent on transmitting this important mindset, which modern people tend to forget.

**Aritsugu**  
219 Kajiya-chō,  
Nishikikōji-dōri  
Gokomachi Nishi-iru,  
Nakagyō-ku, Kyoto  
<https://aritsugu.co.jp>

## Unsung keystones of cultural advancement



High-quality natural whetstones are quarried from geological strata as old as 250 million years. The Natural Whetstone and Hone Museum in Kameoka displays these and hundreds of other whetstones from around Japan and beyond. Visitors can also learn to sharpen knives on high-quality natural whetstones.

**Natural Whetstone and Hone Museum**  
15 Kōzaki Nagano, Miyazaki-chō, Kameoka, Kyoto  
[www.tennentoishikan.com/en](http://www.tennentoishikan.com/en)

Kameoka's history as a whetstone production center dates to the Kamakura period (1185–1332). The industry peaked in the early twentieth century; only a few quarries remain active in the region today.



Kameoka lies in the heart of a rural area west of Kyoto that is surrounded by mountains and valleys. The town is known for its scenic railway and boat rides down the Hozu River, as well as for its production of *Kyō-yasai* traditional vegetables. It also has a proud history as a major center of natural whetstones.

It goes without saying that whetstones are essential tools for keeping blades sharp. As such, they are indispensable for creating and maintaining everything from kitchen knives to samurai swords. Historically, they have been essential for sharpening the planes used to finish the pillars of temples and shrines, the chisels used for carving Buddhist statues, and even the small blades used to shape the reeds for the *bichiriki* (double-reed flute) in traditional *gagaku* music. Without such blades—and the means to keep them sharp—Japanese culture might have followed a very different path.

Today, the most commonly used whetstones are synthetic stones made from abrasive particles held together with a bonding material. Before these were invented, however, natural whetstones, crafted from quarried geological stone, were the only option available. As the availability of natural whetstones has dwindled, they have become rare, and excavating and processing these stones is no easy matter, as choosing the right materials requires a discerning eye and considerable expertise. Despite this, there is still a real demand for these traditional nonsynthetic items. Artisans in a wide range of fields insist on natural whetstones to ensure the best possible sharpness and durability of the edge for their precious tools.

In Kameoka, the much-sought-after Awasedo finishing stone is still quarried, and stock remains of the now-rare medium-grit Tanba Aoto stone (left photo). Such whetstones have rarely been in the limelight, but throughout history they have played a vital supporting role in the development of Kyoto's culinary, artistic, and architectural traditions.

