

Kikkoman's quarterly intercultural forum for the exchange of ideas on food



## THE JAPANESE TABLE

# Japanese Feasts for Special Occasions

## Notable Nineteenth-Century Banquets

by Ayako Ehara

*In our new series for 2020, Food Forum takes an in-depth look at the distinctive foods served at celebratory and ceremonial occasions, and the manner in which they are presented. In this first installment, we introduce a few of Japan's more memorable historical banquets.*

4

SPECIAL REPORT:  
Japanese Cuisine Around the World  
Joji Sugawara

6

MORE ABOUT JAPANESE COOKING:  
Zucchini Noodle Salad  
*Inari-zushi*

8

KIKKOMAN TODAY:  
The Iconic Kikkoman Soy Sauce Tabletop Dispenser

# Japanese Feasts for Special Occasions

## Notable Nineteenth-Century Banquets



First zen (*honzen*)



Second zen



Third zen



Fourth zen



Fifth zen

The word for festive dishes intended for entertaining guests is *gochiso*, the root meaning of which comes from “running about”—as in gathering ingredients, making elaborate preparations and so on—and refers particularly to luxury or gourmet dishes that require extra effort to prepare. The way in which such foods are served varies widely. By way of background to contemporary styles, here we describe three significant formal banquets held in the nineteenth century.

### Entertaining Korean Envoys

In the period between 1607 to 1811, the Joseon (Choson) court of Korea sent a total of twelve delegations to Japan, mostly on occasions when the seat of the Tokugawa shogun changed hands. Receiving these delegations, each of which comprised some four hundred envoys, was the responsibility of the shogunate, and the entertainments and their scale evolved over the years. The banquet held for the highest-ranking members of the 1811 entourage was to be the last in the long history of Edo-period (1603–1867) Korea-Japan relations. In that year, to save costs, the banquet was held not in Edo (present-day Tokyo), but on the island of Tsushima, off the coast of Kyushu between Korea and Japan.

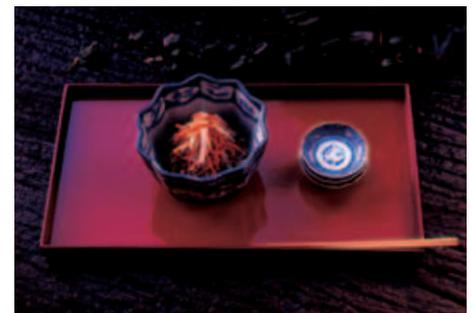
In those days, most banquets like this one were presented *honzen* style,

wherein dishes were placed on low tray-tables called *zen*, which were served all at once. The highest-class menu of *honzen* was called *shichi-go-san zen*; literally, seven-five-three dishes on a *zen*. The dishes on the first three *zen* tray-tables were ceremonial and not intended to be eaten: the first *zen* was the main tray-table, called the *honzen*, and it held rice and seven dishes with dried fish, *kamaboko* fish cake and pickled vegetables (*konomono*); the second *zen* held soups and five dishes of dried foods, including dried seafood such as shark and squid. The third *zen* featured soups and three dishes, including *Ise-ebi* Japanese spiny lobster.

The fourth and fifth *zen* were actually consumed. These included sashimi, a steamed dish, *Ise-ebi*, sea bream marinated in miso and grilled, and other dishes. After the fourth and fifth *zen*, soup and diverse decorative or technically elaborate tidbits were served with sake. Wrapping up the *honzen*-style banquet were sweets and tea. Various constraints were typically imposed on the first three ceremonial dishes because of the custom of not consuming the meat of livestock; but in consideration of the dietary habits of the Korean envoys, boar and venison were included with the fourth and fifth *zen* in several banquets held for them over the years.

### Banquet for Commodore Perry

In 1853 Commodore Matthew C. Perry and his ships landed in Japan, requesting that the country open to trade; one year later, he returned for the shogun's response. In 1854, a banquet was held in Yokohama to entertain Perry and his party. It opened with sake served in traditional sake cups (*sakazuki*) along with several complementary soups, including miso soup and clear soup (both regarded as excellent accompaniments to sake); other refreshments included dried squid, young yellowtail, flounder, *chikuwa* and *kamaboko* fish cakes set out on deep square lacquered trays, called *suzuributa*. Numerous other dishes followed, mainly fish and fowl such as sashimi, Japanese tiger prawn, sea bream and duck. Woodblock prints (*see cover image*) portraying this occasion depict large platters and bowls in the center of the table laden with food which must have been shared by the diners.



A vinegared dish of squid, *udo* mountain vegetable and ginger, recreated from original Ishida banquet. Courtesy Tanaka Honke Museum

Opposite: *Shichi-go-san zen* banquet for Korean delegation, 1811. Detail from the illustration *Chosenjin gokyouou shichi-go-san zen bu zu*. Courtesy Hosa Library, City of Nagoya



Steamed dish in an *oohira* (left) and flounder sashimi, reproduced from the 1851 Ishida banquet at the Tanaka home, now the Tanaka Honke Museum. The museum collection comprises some 30,000 Edo-era artifacts and artwork, including ceramics, lacquerware and kimono. Courtesy Tanaka Honke Museum



These drinks and appetizers were then followed by the main meal. Two *zen* tray-tables were set before each person: the *honzen* held rice, soup, vinegared dishes made with abalone and other ingredients, a simmered dish of tofu and other ingredients, and pickles; the second *zen* held soup and a dish containing prawn and squid, accompanied by a smaller tray of grilled sea bream. In his journal, *Narrative of the Expedition of an American Squadron to the China Seas and Japan*, Perry noted that the *zen* trays were placed on top of regular tables, allowing guests to eat while seated on stools. This thoughtful gesture was made by the hosts, who apparently understood their Western guests could not be expected to dine seated on tatami mats. Castella cake prepared as dessert for the meal was sent to the ships for later consumption.

### Dining in a Merchant House

The Tanaka family of Suzaka city in Nagano Prefecture were wealthy merchants engaged mainly in the tobacco and sake-brewing business, and were purveyors to the Suzaka domain during the Edo period. The family often entertained eminent guests; one such event was a farewell banquet held in February 1851 for Koemon Ishida, a teacher who had been invited to educate and advise domain retainers.

After greeting guests with high quality *sencha* green tea and *yaki-manju* (small round buns filled with *azuki* red bean paste), sake and appetizers were served, including miso soup with monkfish (*anko*) spiced with *sansho* Japanese mountain pepper. These were succeeded by a *suzuributa* tray which held an array of delicacies, including simmered lotus root with sesame dressing, simmered shark meat, *tamago-yaki* rolled egg and boiled shrimp. A large bowl called an *oohira* was filled with simmered pheasant, grilled tofu, spinach and other ingredients; this was followed by a vinegared squid dish, clear soup with duck meat, and sashimi. The appetizers served on *suzuributa* and *oohira* were shared among diners, after which the main meal of rice, soup, a simmered dish and grilled salmon was presented on individual *zen*. Dessert was *shiruko*—*azuki* red beans simmered with sugar into a thick, luscious soup—with small *mochi* rice cakes. This grand banquet began before noon and continued until late at night.

### Transitions in Style

In the case of the earlier Korean banquet, the menu started off with the main dishes, or staples, after which came sake and tidbits. In those later banquets held for Commodore Perry and Koemon

Ishida, sake and appetizers were served first and shared by the guests; the staples of rice, soup and side dishes came afterward.

During the late Edo period, *kaiseki*-style meals began to appear in restaurants, wherein diners were first served sake and appetizers, and then the main meal, whose dishes were all served separately, one after another in a specific order, to each individual—similar to today's *kaiseki* style. Different banquet styles which emerged over the years helped shape the banquet styles we know today. ●

#### cover

Banquet in Yokohama held in 1854 for Commodore Perry. Illustration from *Bushu Yokohama osetsusho ni okeru kyouou no zu*.

Courtesy Yokohama City Central Library

#### Author's profile

Ayako Ehara was born in 1943 in Shimane Prefecture, and graduated from Ochanomizu University. She holds a Ph.D. in Education and taught for many years at Tokyo Kasei Gakuin University, where she is currently professor emerita. A specialist in food culture, the history of food education and cookery science, Dr. Ehara is the author and editor of many publications, including *Katei Ryori no Kindai* ("Modern Home Cooking"; 2012); *Oishii Edo Gohan* ("Delicious Edo-period meals"; co-author, 2011); and *Nihon Shokumotsushi* ("History of Japanese foods"; co-author, 2009).



**SPECIAL  
REPORT**  
from Mexico

Mexico

# Japanese Cuisine Around the World

Food Forum's annual *Special Report* introduces those who are promoting Japanese cuisine around the world. This issue features restaurateur Joji Sugawara, who manages multiple Japanese restaurants in and around Mexico City.

## Joji Sugawara



Born 1948; moved to Mexico in 1967. Founded his first Daruma Japanese restaurant in 1975; currently, there are four Daruma restaurants. Mr. Sugawara also runs the Sushi Zen chain, and is senior advisor to the Nichiboku Kyokai (Mexican Japanese Association). In 2013, received the Foreign Minister's Commendation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan for promoting mutual understanding between Mexico and Japan. Commended by the Mexico Restaurant Association in 2014, and in 2017 received the Minister's Award for Overseas Promotion of Japanese Food from the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. In 2019 he was the recipient of the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays.



## DARUMA

**Daruma Parque Hundido**  
Porfirio Díaz 534, Col. Noche Buena,  
Mexico City  
Tel: +52 (55) 5611 3171  
<https://daruma.com.mx>

There are three other Daruma restaurants in the Mexico City area.

## Sushi Zen

**Sushi Zen Río Tamesis**  
**Sushi Zen Río Elba**  
**Sushi Zen Plaza Cuicuilco**  
<https://sushizenrioelba.negocio.site>

In the 1940s my father was transferred from Japan to work in Mexico for about three years. Relying on his contacts there, after graduating high school in 1967, I went to Mexico City, where I worked in a local Japanese restaurant. I always dreamed of starting my own place, and on October 18, 1975, I opened my first Daruma restaurant, a humble forty-seat eatery with a bar-counter—one of only six Japanese restaurants in the city. I chose that particular date because it marked exactly eight years since my arrival in Mexico. Our most frequent customers those days were Japanese residents working for trading companies, who accounted for less than 1 percent of the potential Mexican customer base. My plan from the outset was to familiarize locals with Japanese cuisine.

## The Local Palate

At first, Daruma served only *kushi-age* deep-fried skewered meat, vegetables and seafood. But locals considered these as small side dishes, not enough to

satisfy the appetite, so we added variety to our menu. Not many people in Mexico were familiar with sashimi, so we started with thin-sliced *suzuki* sea bass sashimi, accompanied with only *ponzu* sauce (soy sauce mixed with citrus juice). Mexicans use locally grown lemons and limes in all their cooking, from soups to seafood and meat, so they were comfortable with the taste of *ponzu*, and it quickly became—and remains—a local favorite. Wasabi was not used, as it was considered too strong for the Mexican palate. In the early days, encouraging diners to try sashimi took a lot of effort. I would half-joke that I wouldn't charge if they didn't like it, but get them to pay double if they did! The challenge then was to discover what would satisfy the local palate. These days, our best-selling dishes are thin-sliced *suzuki* sashimi and *kushi-age*. Manchego cheese *kushi-age* has been a huge hit for four decades. Other popular choices include *tonkatsu* deep-fried pork with cheese filling, and vegetable and cheese wrapped in deep-fried chicken *katsu*. Despite the modest size of our restaurant, we were successful within three years after opening, serving well over two hundred customers on Sundays.



Daruma Parque Hundido Restaurant

## Sourcing Japanese Food

In 1982 we opened Daruma Río Tiber restaurant, with seating



The Daruma menu includes, clockwise from bottom left: manchego cheese *kushi-age*, vegetable and cheese wrapped in deep-fried chicken *katsu*, dragon roll sushi and Patriota roll sushi topped with tampico sauce.

for eighty. Its sushi bar was instrumental in triggering the sushi boom in Mexico City. Only Japanese could be found in the sushi bar seats early on: locals were not particularly familiar with *nigiri-zushi* (fish atop hand-formed mounds of rice). The more common choice was *maki-zushi* rolls, particularly the California roll. We created various *maki-zushi* to suit Mexican tastes, including my own twist on tampico sauce—a Mexican favorite—which was a hit: shredded blue crab meat with minced onion and green chili mixed with mayonnaise. Mexico has the widest variety of chili peppers in the world, and avocado is another local ingredient we were quick to incorporate into our sushi. During the sushi boom, Daruma Río Tiber was packed day and night. Many Mexican notables came to enjoy our meals.

Still, all was not roses. The country was in economic crisis, suffering from both inflation and currency devaluation. High import prices had a direct impact on our costs, and some food products

were temporarily banned from import. With a large portion of our menu relying on those imports, we often struggled. In fact, when we had first started our business, all ingredients from Japan, including Japanese rice, were virtually unavailable—we used rice grown by the descendants of Japanese immigrants to Mexico who had arrived in 1897. Unfortunately, that rice was not always of the best quality. Gradually, though, by the late eighties, times began to change and Japanese ingredients became easier to obtain, as the number of import companies increased.

### Restaurant Expansion

In late 1988 we opened our third restaurant, Daruma Parque Hundido, a large venue with a teppanyaki corner, which proved popular. By then, most of our Mexican customers could handle chopsticks well. Forks and other Western utensils were no longer necessary—a reflection of the extent to which Japanese cuisine had been accepted. We opened

Daruma restaurants in succession through the nineties, and also started the fast-food restaurant chain Sushi Zen.

### An Affection for Japan

Very few competitors were around when I first started out, but the sushi trend we kicked off in the 1980s led to more sushi-focused restaurants, and sushi has gained a solid foothold among Japanese food choices here. Following on the current swell in popularity of Japanese cuisine, many new Japanese restaurants are appearing here nowadays. More and more ramen noodle shops, *izakaya* bars and traditional Japanese-style restaurants are being established in Mexico City and throughout the country—there may be as many as five hundred Japanese restaurants now.

As for us, since 2015 we have been holding popular sake-tasting events at our Daruma restaurants. We also host event stalls at seasonal festivals hosted by the Mexican Japanese Association, to help promote Japanese cuisine.

Other food trends have come and gone, but nothing has lasted as long as the popularity of Japanese cuisine. It may be because of the eat-healthy trend, but I also believe it is thanks in part to the influence of Japanese anime and the growing number of those who have developed a deep-seated affection for Japan. 



Sake-tasting event at Daruma



Mexican Japanese Association festival



## ZUCCHINI NOODLE SALAD

Zucchini “noodles” are a popular alternative to pasta, and are also great for salad-style dishes like this one. Soy sauce-based dressing adds an Asian touch. This recipe is easy to adjust for vegetarians by exchanging chicken with tofu, and using vegetable stock or kombu dashi instead of the chicken liquid.



◆ Scallion

青葱

### Serves 2

148 kcal Protein 4.6 g Fat 1.4 g  
(per serving)

- 1 boneless chicken breast, skin removed

### Marinade for chicken

- 100 ml / 3.5 oz. water
- 1/2 t salt
- 2 pieces Mandarin orange peel\*, each 3 cm x 4 cm (1 in. x 1.5 in.)
- 3 T sake

### Scallion sauce

- 2 T grain vinegar
- 2 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 1 T sesame oil
- 2-4 T minced white part of scallion
- 1 knob ginger, minced

### Zucchini seasoning

- 1 T grain vinegar
- 1 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 1/2 T sesame oil
- 1 T liquid from cooked chicken
- Peel of 1/3-1/2 Mandarin orange, grated\*

- 2 medium zucchini

- Broccoli for optional garnish
- Tomato
- Dill

**1** Butterfly the thickest part of the chicken breast so the meat will cook uniformly. Pierce entirely with a fork. Marinate the chicken and refrigerate overnight. Drain and pat dry with a paper towel.

**2** Place the chicken in a frying pan and pour on the sake. Cook over medium heat. When it starts to boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer for about 10 minutes or until a skewer goes through the chicken smoothly. Turn off heat and leave chicken in the pan for about 10 minutes, then remove from pan to cool. Strain the liquid and set aside to use in zucchini seasoning. Tear the chicken into thin strips along fibers.

**3** Mix ingredients for scallion sauce and allow to sit for over 10 minutes.

**4** Mix together zucchini seasoning ingredients and set aside. Trim both ends of the zucchini and make zucchini “noodles” using a spiralizer.\*\*

**5** Place the “noodles” in a shallow heat-resistant plate and microwave for 20 seconds at 500-600w. Toss and microwave for another 20 seconds.

**6** Stir 1-1 ½ T of the zucchini seasoning into the noodles to season lightly.

**7** Boil the broccoli, drain and cut into small pieces. Mix in a little zucchini seasoning.

**8** Arrange zucchini noodles on a serving plate. Place chicken over the noodles, and sprinkle scallion sauce over the chicken. Lay out broccoli and diced tomato on the plate and garnish with dill leaves. Serve with extra scallion sauce on the side.

\* Lemon or orange peels may also be used.

\*\* Alternatively, use a cheese grater to make long shreds.

1 C (U.S. cup) = approx. 240 ml; 1 T = 15 ml; 1 t = 5 ml

Recipe by Michiko Yamamoto



## INARI-ZUSHI

*Inari-zushi*, thin deep-fried tofu pouches filled with sushi rice, is popular throughout Japan, enjoyed on picnics and other outings. It differs slightly by region, with shapes from oblong to triangular forms, and filling variations that include adding sesame seeds or lotus root pickled in sweetened vinegar to the rice.



◆ *Abura-age*

### Makes 20

123 kcal Protein 3.8 g Fat 3.9 g (each)

- 400 ml / 1 2/3 C japonica rice
- 440 ml / 1 5/8 C water

### Sushi vinegar

- 40 ml / 2 T + 2 t grain vinegar
- 1/2 t salt

- 10 *abura-age* thin deep-fried tofu\*

### *Abura-age* simmering liquid

- 360 ml / 1 1/2 C dashi stock
- 5 T granulated sugar
- 3 T Kikkoman Soy Sauce

- 40 g / 1.4 oz. burdock root
- 40 g / 1.4 oz. carrot

### Simmering liquid for burdock root/carrot

- 120 ml / 1/2 C dashi stock
- 2 t Kikkoman Soy Sauce
- 1 t granulated sugar

- 2 T roasted white sesame seeds

- 1 Wash and drain the rice, cook with 440 ml water.
- 2 Mix sushi vinegar ingredients and fold into the hot cooked rice and allow to cool.
- 3 Cut each *abura-age* in half into two squares. Place them in boiling water in a saucepan for 5 minutes to remove excess oil. Drain, cool, then squeeze excess water out by hand. Open the cut edges to form a pouch.
- 4 In a pan, place the *abura-age* pouches together with the *abura-age* simmering liquid ingredients. Cover with a drop lid or parchment paper and simmer over medium heat for about 20 minutes or until the liquid is nearly evaporated; drain.
- 5 Scrub the burdock with a brush. Using a knife, shave off short thin slivers while rotating the burdock root (*see photo*). Allow the shavings to fall directly into a bowl of water. Soak for 5-10 minutes to remove bitterness and then drain.
- 6 Peel the carrot and cut into 4 mm- / 0.15 in.-cubes. Simmer the burdock and carrot in their simmering liquid over medium heat until they are tender and the liquid is nearly evaporated. Remove from heat, allow to cool and drain.
- 7 Add the burdock, carrot and roasted sesame seeds to the sushi rice and fold in gently. Divide the rice into 20 portions, to form 20 small oblong mounds of rice.
- 8 Fill each *abura-age* pouch with a mound of rice. Gently press the rice into the corners of the pouches with thumbs (*see photo*). Fold over the open edges of the pouches and place on a plate to serve.



\* Canned pre-seasoned *abura-age* for *inari-zushi* may be used.



# The Iconic Kikkoman Soy Sauce Tabletop Dispenser



Kikkoman website presents the video “seasoning your life” The Story of Kikkoman’s Soy Sauce Tabletop Dispenser. [www.kikkoman.com/en/quality/ip/topics4.html](http://www.kikkoman.com/en/quality/ip/topics4.html)

In January 2020, the Kikkoman website released the video, “seasoning your life” The Story of Kikkoman’s Soy Sauce Tabletop Dispenser, which tells how its iconic glass dispenser, first introduced in 1961, was developed. The fundamental design objective was to craft a dispenser that would be regarded as essential tableware—in the same category as a plate or teacup, as opposed to producing a mere container.

In October 1955, Kikkoman made its soy sauce available in one-liter bottles, intended for small families; despite this, consumers demanded



The Kikkoman Soy Sauce tabletop dispenser does not drip and is easy to use.

even smaller bottles. In response, Kikkoman sought to introduce a new kind of easy-to-use dispenser that could be placed on a tabletop. Industrial designer Kenji Ekuon, then president of GK Industrial Design Laboratory, was commissioned to design such a dispenser. After over three years of trial and error, he ultimately realized a design that embodied innovative functionality, and which was both user-friendly and ergonomically stable. Since its appearance in 1961, the Kikkoman Soy Sauce tabletop dispenser has remained a popular best-seller, both inside and outside of Japan.

On March 30, 2018, the Kikkoman Soy Sauce tabletop dispenser was successfully registered as a three-dimensional trademark in Japan. Typically such trademarks involve the registration of three-dimensional forms imprinted with logos or names; however, the Kikkoman Soy Sauce tabletop dispenser is a rare case

which was permitted to be registered without a logo or product name printed on it.\*

It is therefore legally acknowledged that, even without a logo or name, the Kikkoman Soy Sauce tabletop dispenser is recognizable by its form alone. This tabletop dispenser is currently used in over one hundred countries around the world. The total number of shipments since its introduction in 1961 until March 31, 2018 exceeded 500 million bottles. The design is also registered as a three-dimensional trademark in the U.S., the E.U., Ukraine, Norway, Russia and Australia.

Kikkoman continues to value the design and concept of its unique soy sauce tabletop dispenser as it endeavors to develop products that fill the world with the joys of food while enriching lives. ●

\* Other examples of three-dimensional trademark registrations for food containers without logos or names printed on them include the Coca-Cola Contour Bottle and the Yakult drink container.