

The background is a rich, textured collage of Japanese culinary elements. In the top left, there are two small dark bowls filled with a light-colored liquid, possibly soy sauce or miso, next to a small brown teapot. To the right, a cluster of bright orange citrus fruits, likely mandarin oranges, is shown. Below the oranges, a black plate holds a piece of salmon topped with a green garnish. In the center-right, a wooden bowl is filled with white rice, with a pair of wooden chopsticks resting on top. The bottom of the image is dominated by a variety of fresh ingredients: several pieces of nigiri sushi (salmon and tuna) are in the bottom left; a basket of fresh green onions and other vegetables is in the bottom center; and a large, vibrant platter of sashimi, including salmon, tuna, and various types of mushrooms, is in the bottom right. The entire scene is set against a dark, vertically-grained wooden background.

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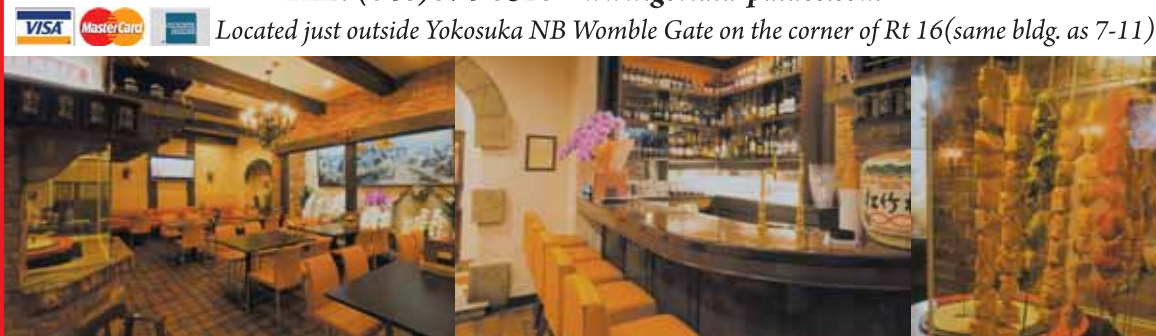
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# THE KITCHEN OF JAPAN

BYFOOD

**K**nown as the younger, hipper, younger brother to Tokyo, Osaka has a reputation for futuristic architecture, wild nightlife, and of course, amazing street food. It's a port city in the Kansai region of Japan, with an easy-going but fun and colorful vibe, and a distinct Osaka dialect. Osaka is said to be the birthplace of kuidaore, a word in Japanese that loosely translates to "ruin oneself by the extravagance of food," meaning either financially or physically (it's all-you-can-eat madness out there, guys).

It's a lot of fun in Osaka, and easy to get on board with Osaka's unique food culture, but be warned, a lot of it is cheap, fried, and absolutely delicious! With so many places to visit and things to eat along the way, you can easily stuff yourself with all kinds of weird and wonderful Japanese foods. Discover Kansai cuisine in this comprehensive Osaka food guide, and find out what to eat in Osaka right here.

Osaka is sometimes known as the food capital of Japan, supported by its endearing nickname, Tenka no Daidokoro, meaning "the nation's kitchen." With its place as a port city, this originally referenced Osaka's important place as a trade hub in the Edo period of Japan. True for travelers and Japanese people alike, the name now refers to Osaka's amazing food culture. A gourmet's paradise, Osaka is considered one of the best cities in Japan for passionate foodies to come and worship Japanese food.

## 1. Okonomiyaki

Osaka is the original home to the now-typical Japanese food, okonomiyaki, and remains the best place to eat it. This savory Japanese pancake was invented before World War II and grew to build a legacy, now continuing to have country-wide popularity. You'll find plenty of yatai street food stalls selling Osaka-style okonomiyaki around the city, the absolute best in Japan! Most restaurants in Osaka are teppanyaki

hot plate style, so you can try the full experience of grilling okonomiyaki for yourself. Eating okonomiyaki this way goes hand-in-hand with the casual eating and drinking culture in Osaka, as you can take your time drinking and chatting with friends as it grills away.

Okonomiyaki in Osaka is the counterpart to Hiroshima okonomiyaki, which has the ingredients layered. Osaka-style okonomiyaki is a kind of savory pancake made from a mixed batter of eggs and shredded cabbage, grilled and topped with a thick savory-sweet soy sauce, Japanese mayonnaise, and a sprinkle of seaweed, aonori. But, literally meaning "grilled as you like it," you can grill it as you wish and put on whatever toppings you'd like. Try some okonomiyaki in its birthplace, one of the best foods in Osaka.



## 2. Takoyaki

Another amazing invention from the Kansai region, takoyaki should be right at the top of your list of what to eat in Osaka. These balls of batter-y goodness are quite similar to okonomiyaki, however, the bite-sized balls are made individually, each containing a piece of tako (octopus). Each ball is a bit crunchy on the outside but gooey on the inside, so it's definitely food for the adventurous. Those dancing flakes sprinkled on top of the takoyaki are dried bonito flakes, or katsuobushi in Japanese, which are also used to garnish okonomiyaki. They are used to round out the dishes and give takoyaki its signature flavor. Osaka has more than 700 takoyaki stores in the city, a whopping amount of tako-love that shows



it's the best place to try this popular Kansai specialty. Enjoy the street food culture of takoyaki, with yatai street stalls throughout the city turning tako balls all day. Pick up some takoyaki en route to your next tourist stop; it's an essential part of what to eat when you visit Osaka.

## 3. Sushi & sashimi

When you're visiting Osaka, you've just got to try the local sushi and sashimi, simple but oh so delicious. As a port city, it's unsurprising that Osaka has one of the biggest fish markets in Japan, Osaka Central Fish Market. With canals running throughout the city, Osaka has a laid-back kind of seaside vibe with fresh, high-quality seafood to match. From the finest sushi restaurants to local markets like Kuramon Ichiba, you can find freshly sliced sushi throughout the city. Even bento boxes of sushi sold at the supermarket are extra fresh and easy to grab when you're on-the-go sight-seeing. Conveyor belt sushi trains are a fun, easy going way to have sushi in Osaka, but sitting down to an omakase chef's special sashimi menu in Osaka is a must-do, too.



*byFood is a platform for food events in Tokyo, with over 80 experiences to choose from and a fantastic resource for learning about Japan's thriving food culture! What's more, byFood runs a charitable outreach program, the Food for Happiness Project, which donates 10 meals to children in Cambodia for each person who books a food event through our platform!*





## 4. Kushikatsu

Kushikatsu are an irresistible snack in Osaka, one of the city’s signature foods you should definitely try on your Osaka trip. The word broadly covers skewered meat or vegetables, kind of like a yakitori chicken stick, only it’s not just chicken, and it’s panko-crumbed and deep-fried. Now one of the city’s biggest and most famous kushikatsu restaurant chains, Daruma is said to have started selling kushikatsu in 1929, skewered meat as a quick fix lunch for laborers. Cheap, easy and of course delicious, kushikatsu continued to gain momentum throughout the war era for working class people. Fast-forward through to today, who doesn’t love bite-sized, deep-fried morsels on skewers? You can grab them either as local street food or order a la carte at specialty restaurants throughout Osaka. Head to the nostalgic Shinsekai if you want Osaka’s best kushikatsu, where many of the restaurants are open round the clock, or the Tsutenkaku area can also sort you out. And remember everyone, it’s a big no-no to double dip. Kushikatsu is an essential snack to accompany a sake or a beer, in Osaka’s friendly drinking culture.

## 5. Yakiniku

Kind of like Korean barbeque, yakiniku means “grilled meat,” which is an extremely popular thing to eat in Osaka. You can, of course, get a grill’s worth of yakiniku anywhere in Japan, but Osaka gets away with stealing some glory from their neighboring city, Kobe. As in the name, Kobe is home to the world-famous Kobe beef, which is considered one of the highest quality wagyu (Japanese beef) produced in Japan. With such close access to such high-quality meat, not just limited to Kobe beef, Osaka serves some seriously delicious yakiniku. You can grill for yourself with friends at yakiniku restaurants all over Osaka (you can’t go wrong at the Koreatown in Tsuruhashi) or again grab some grilled wagyu meat sticks to-go from a street vendor.



Butaman

File photo

## 6. Horumon

Following the philosophy of “waste not, want not” horumon or horumonyaki is like yakiniku, except you’re grilling the other random meat bits like organs, offal, giblets, and innards. Also referred to as motsu, it was introduced to Osaka by a yoshoku (Western-style cuisine) chef who swiftly had the term “horumonyaki” trademarked in 1940. Horumon comes from the word hormone, also doubling up as it sounds similar to the word for “discarded goods” in the Kansai-Osaka dialect, which aligns with the Japanese mentality of mot-tainai, to avoid being wasteful. Practical and delicious, horumonyaki has a reputation for being a “stamina-building” food and goes perfectly with a beer. Beef sinew broiled in sweet miso and mirin sugar marinade (doteyaki) is a tasty entry-level horumon. A dish designed for adventurous eaters, grilled livers, kidneys, intestines, hearts, try the works and grill your own horumonyaki in Osaka.

## 7. Kitsune udon

Udon noodles are popular throughout all of Japan, but the kitsune variety was invented in Osaka. The local style is less intense than what’s eaten in Tokyo; the Osaka style soup comes with noodles in a light dashi fish stock broth, topped with a piece of deep-fried tofu skin (abura-age) that’s been stewed in sweet soy sauce. The name “kitsune” means fox, derived from the myth that abura-age is a fox’s favorite food, also used on the outside of an inarizushi (rice ball wrapped in tofu skin). It’s now eaten widely throughout Japan, although Osaka is the birthplace of this simple yet filling udon dish.



Source: OiMax

Kitsune Udon

## 8. Butaman

The humble steamed pork bun, of course, originated in China, but is now widely sold throughout Japan and named butaman in Japanese. The delicious pork bun specialists at 551 Horai have brought Osaka some fame in the butaman game, with their headquarters proudly in the heart of Namba. It’s so popular that around a whopping 170,000 buns are sold each day! With juicy pork and spongy buns, the butaman are delicious every time, while their other dumplings, like gyoza, are also extremely tasty. Sold in sets of even numbers for good luck, it’s a must-try snack in Osaka.

## 9. Negiyaki

Negiyaki is yet another dish that is grilled on a tepanyaki hot plate, and is loved by people from Osaka. Another pancake-style food, it is made of negi (green onions) between thin layers of grilled batter, without meat and more crunch. It’s a popular form of konamono, a flour-based food, much like takoyaki and okonomiyaki. Konamono is well-loved and consumed regularly by people in Osaka, either in restaurants or at home.

## 10. Ehomaki

An ehomaki is a long tube of sushi, traditionally eaten during Setsubun (the bean-throwing festival) for good luck. Each year on February 3, you are meant to

eat these “fortune rolls” all in one go while pointing in a particular direction (which changes each year) to ward off evil. Setsubun is celebrated throughout Japan, however, ehomaki originated in Osaka, made by street vendors in the mid-1800s. Bigger than your standard sushi roll, an ehomaki averages 6cm thick and 20cm long. These are filled with egg, fish, vegetables, or even pork cutlet.

## 11. Fugu (Pufferfish)

The giant fugu pufferfish decorations flying overhead throughout Osaka are impossible to miss. They’re calling for those who are feeling game (and rich) to try pufferfish in Osaka. Zuboraya is the biggest restaurant for fugu in Osaka, and among one of the many Michelin-starred restaurants throughout the city. You can have fugu in many different styles and dishes and don’t worry, they’re prepared carefully so you can dine death-free when tasting fugu in Osaka.



Source: tsuda

## 12. Kappo cuisine

Kappo is the answer to fine dining in Osaka, the specialty meal that rivals elegant kaiseki in Kyoto. A kaiseki meal in Kyoto is typically a multi-course meal, combining craft with food. Kappo in Osaka is similar in that it’s high-end food, but with an emphasis on cutting, cooking, and preparing, without covering up what goes on behind the scenes. It’s a little more rustic, but the result is always fresh and creative dishes that are presented beautifully every time. Kappo dining also is different as you are seated in bar-counter style, with an open kitchen and chefs working right in front of you. You watch the chefs cook and they watch you as you eat; it’s an immersive, interactive experience, only to be had in Osaka. Kigawa is the big name in kappo dining in Osaka, alongside other high-class establishments. When visiting Osaka you have to have a kappo experience, the Osaka version of kaiseki.

## 13. Jiggly cheesecake

It was Rikuro Nishimura who founded the company in charge of making the fluffiest baked cheesecake in Japan: Rikuro-Ojiisan (or, Uncle Rikuro). As the story goes, Rikuro was once a humble pastry chef, and now widely known for developing the ever-popular Japanese cheesecake. Jiggly, wobbly, sweet and delicious, this cheesecake is incredibly popular for a reason and is a must-try dessert in Osaka. Their flagship store is located in Namba but also have 11 stores in the Kansai area. However, with the intention to keep it as an Osaka delicacy, Uncle Rikuro doesn’t plan to expand, so you’ll have to head to Osaka if you want to taste it! It’s definitely one of the best cheesecakes in Japan (and somehow always makes it onto your Instagram feed).

Explore the different areas of Osaka, knowing exactly what to eat in Osaka with our helpful guide. Whether it’s casual street food or a fancy kappo meal, you can have it all with Osaka’s fun food culture quickly putting you cozily in a food-coma in no time. Discover your new favorite Osaka food and make sure you try okonomiyaki, takoyaki, sushi, and kushikatsu on your Osaka trip. As Osaka is sometimes regarded as the kitchen of Japan, you can always expect a guaranteed high standard of food quality in this food capital.



File photos

# The essence of green tea in Japan culture

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,  
STRIPES JAPAN

managing director of Japan Tea Central Public Interest Incorporated Association.

## UMAMI

**A**s much as sushi and ramen may dominate the chatter about Japanese food, green tea cannot be ignored.

Teas from Asia, especially matcha green tea, are experiencing their moment abroad, so it wouldn't be surprising if you've tried a few varieties already.

A common misconception is that green tea, also cha or ocha, is only meant to be paired with sushi or Japanese sweets, known as wagashi. However, drop by any local Japanese restaurant, and you will find, more often than not, besides handing you the standard oshibori (wet towel), the server will also bring green tea for the table.

Inside Japanese homes, green tea also serves as an important tool to welcome guests and create a cozy atmosphere. Japan's tea ceremony is a recognized cultural symbol which revolves around the formal act of welcoming guests with green tea. But today, even casual visits with Japanese friends will often include refreshing hot or cold green tea, depending on the season.

While there has been a slight decline in green tea consumption (due to the bubble tea trend and introduction of new soft drinks), it still holds strong. In 2016, Japan produced 77,100 tons of tea, 97 percent of that being green tea.

What makes green tea stand out among countless beverages available in Japan? Green tea has three special characteristics, according to Hitomi Nakajima,

"First, green tea has 'umami' or savory and rich flavor in itself, not like other teas and beverages," Nakajima said. "The unique flavor is made from amid acid, and it gives a complicated, profound taste without applying sugar, salt or any other seasonings."

So, while British black tea is often enjoyed sweetened and with cream, green tea is usually enjoyed as is.

In addition, brewing the same tea leaves two or three times enables you to enjoy the changing umami flavor.

On a trip to Kamakura once, I stopped in at a traditional tea house for some green tea and sweets. The employee recommended brewing the tea leaves again after enjoying the initial brew. "The first service of tea and the second have a completely different flavor and aroma," I remember her saying.

When I tried as she suggested, the second pour was smoother with a milder aroma compared to the sweet and sour richness of the first brew. Without realizing, she had introduced me to green tea's evolving umami.

## HEALTH BENEFITS

The second characteristic of green tea, according to Nakajima, is its many health benefits. "Since green tea has not been fermented and contains the original nutrition of the unchanged tea leaves, it works on your health in various ways," Nakajima said.

During the 9th century, green tea was first introduced from China for medicinal use in Japan. Green tea contains caffeine, catechin and other vitamins and antioxidants which helped Buddhist monks stay alert during Zen meditation and sutra study, Nakajima said.

A drink for monks and aristocrats became a staple in Japanese homes when Nagatani Souen, a tea farmer in Kyoto, created sencha, green tea processed and dried which allowed for it to be inexpensive and accessible to all. Today, more than 60 percent of whole tea product of Japan is sencha.

## ART FORM

The third characteristic of green tea is the consumption of it in powdered form. Today, matcha is used in drinks, lattes and desserts, including ice cream. It is also at the center of a prized custom in Japan – the tea ceremony. This ritual involves matcha tea, Japanese sweets and participants often wear kimonos. More on this ceremony later.

"Matcha enabled us to develop an art of traditional tea ceremony, while it offers a particular wonderful flavor to various drinks and sweets these days," Nakajima added.

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## Green tea is a superfood

Aside from being a refreshing drink to have while relaxing with friends or enjoying some quiet time, green tea is considered a superfood by many health experts.

According to the Japan Tea Central Public Interest Incorporated Association, one cup of tea (about 4 ounces) contains about 30 – 50 milligrams of caffeine, 70-120 milligram of catechin and 10-milligram vitamin C, along with other nutrients, such as theanine, calcium, magnesium, iron, beta carotene, vitamin E, chlorophyll, protein and dietary fiber.

Just like coffee and black tea, caffeine in green tea has an awakening effect that helps us stay alert

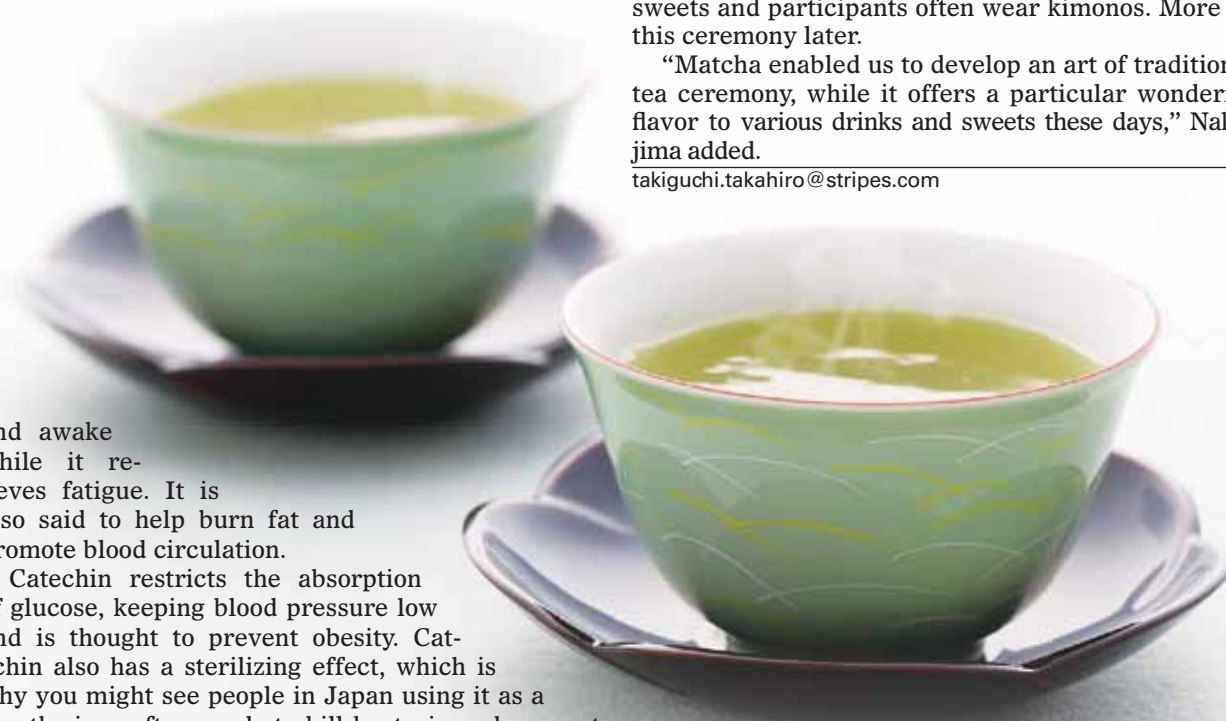
and awake while it relieves fatigue. It is also said to help burn fat and promote blood circulation.

Catechin restricts the absorption of glucose, keeping blood pressure low and is thought to prevent obesity. Catechin also has a sterilizing effect, which is why you might see people in Japan using it as a mouth rinse after meals to kill bacteria and prevent cavities.

Theanine is a substance unique to green tea. It affects the brain cells and gives a relaxing and healing effect. Another added benefit is the amount of Vitamin C in green tea, which gives it the antioxidant effect

we want to help prevent colds and improve immunity.

Fair enough. You now know why green tea is called a superfood, don't you? Let's drink it daily and improve our health!





### Where to get your hands on it

Today, green tea is available throughout the nation. You can buy green tea leaves at virtually any supermarket, department and convenience stores for around 1,000 – 1,500 yen (\$9-13.50) per 100 gram or 3.5 ounces.

Although you can buy green tea anywhere, Nakajima recommends seeking out a specialty tea shop as these usually have employees well-versed in tea facts and can help you find your perfect cup.

Since tea leaves are a fresh product, it's best to purchase small batches and refrigerate them at home. Green tea should be consumed within a month after purchase.



### Difference between teas

Green, black and oolong teas all taste very different, but did you know they come from the same tea bush? The only difference is the way the harvested leaves are processed, whether they are fermented and for how long. Green tea is not fermented but steamed instead. Black tea is deeply fermented, while oolong is lightly fermented during production.

Further adding to the complexity, green tea is available in many different varieties:

- **Sencha (steamed tea)** – This is the most popular and most common form of green tea. After the steaming and cooling process, the tea leaves are crumpled and dried before packing.
- **Bancha (low-quality steamed tea)** – Although it has the same steaming and drying process as sencha, bancha is a coarser tea because it consists of leaves harvested after the sencha harvest. Despite bancha being considered a lower quality tea, many regional variations and different manufacturing methods make the tea popular among tea lovers.
- **Gyokuro** – This variety is made of leaves from plants grown under sunshades for three weeks prior to harvest. Gyokuro has a sweet, profound taste and considered a high-end tea.
- **Hojicha (roasted tea)** – For this cup, green tea leaves are roasted in high heat and traditionally in a special pan called a houroku. Thanks to this roasting, the color of the tea changes to a beautiful golden brown and has a crisp aroma and flavor.
- **Tencha** – Like gyokuro, tencha tea is made from leaves off plants grown in shade of reed screens for four weeks before harvest. Unlike gyokuro, however, tencha is steamed without crumpling the leaves.
- **Matcha (powdered tea)** – A famous and popular form of green tea, matcha is made of tencha leaves which are steamed, dried, and then, ground with a stone mill to a fine powder. This tea is used during traditional tea ceremony and also offers unique flavor to various sweets and drinks.
- **Genmaicha** – This tea is made by mixing roasted rice with sencha or bancha green tea. Because of its pleasant roasted aroma and buttery taste, the tea is popular worldwide.

- Source: Nihoncha Instructors Association



### Why tea is bitter



Green tea might seem too bitter to appreciate. It is the tea's catechin and caffeine which might give you that impression. However, both of these are known for their health benefits, including disease prevention.

So, how do we soften the bitterness?

Adding cool, non-boiled water helps brew sweet, tasty tea. Both caffeine and catechin dissolve easier in hot water, so hotter tea is bitter since it contains more of these substances. If you want to soften the bitterness, be sure to steep tea in lower temperature, so that you can reduce the extraction of them while keeping the umami flavor and aroma.



### Mixing in matcha



As Nakajima mentioned, matcha is loved by a lot of people throughout the world and has been applied to various food and sweets.

Sweets and drinks made with matcha

- Matcha rollcake
- Matcha chocolate
- Matcha cookies
- Matcha nuts
- Matcha popcorn
- Matcha pudding
- Macha Pockie
- Matcha latte
- Matcha cheesecake
- Matcha milk



Photos by Takahiro Takiguchi, Stripes Japan

### Elegant tea ceremony “Chanoyu”

While being a popular flavor, matcha is the centerpiece of the traditional tea ceremony. The tea ceremony known as chanoyu, originated in China, but was developed and refined in 16th century Japan. The ceremony incorporates Zen philosophy and unique aesthetics of “wabi,” where art is harmony, simplicity and tranquility.

According to Nakajima, “Wa-kei-sei-jaku” are four words that represent the art of the tea ceremony. (“Wa” stands for peace of mind, “kei” means respectfulness for guest, “sei” is purity and clean and “jaku” stands for calmness).

“In brief, the ritual art of the tea ceremony shows the mind how you welcome guests through brewing and serving a cup of matcha tea,” he said.

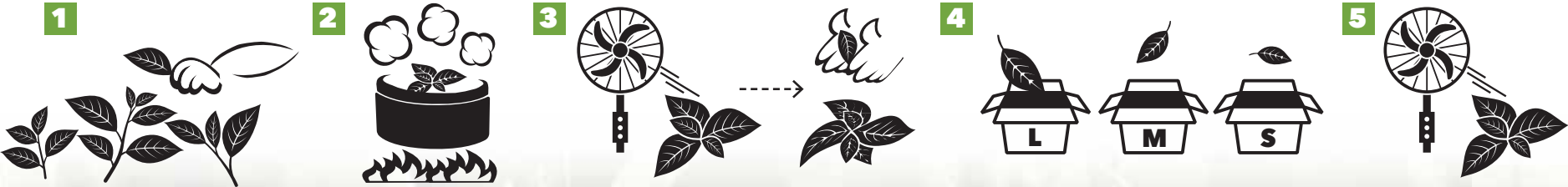
There are many opportunities at museums and events to participate in a traditional tea ceremony, so keep an eye out to try it for yourself!



### How to produce green tea



- 1 Picking tea leaves in the field
- 2 Steaming the leaves
- 3 Drying the tea leaves and crumpling them
- 4 Arrange the size of leaves
- 5 Dry leaves completely





CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

# TEA: Try it at home



## How to brew tasty tea

Brewing your own cup may seem intimidating, especially if you think you need to be an expert after reading Nakajima’s description. Don’t worry, it’s easy!

Keep in mind while brewing that the richness and sweetness can be adjusted depending on the ration of tea to water and how long you steep.

- For sweeter and richer tea, use more tea leaves and brewing in warm water that did not reach a boil.
- For a milder, more balanced cup, uses less tea and brew in warm water.
- If you don’t mind bitterness but you want to make it mild, then apply boiled water and steep the tea leaves for just a few seconds.
- Remember: Longer steep time makes the tea stronger.

The following is a brewing way recommended by Nihoncha Instructors Association. Try it first, then you can adjust the water temperature and steeping time to make it your favorite taste.

- 1 Prepare teacups and teapot.
- 2 Pour boiled water into all the teacups. (4 ounces per cup)
- 3 Put the tea leaves in the teapot. (For three people: about 9-10 grams)
- 4 When the boiled water has cooled down to around 70 to 80 degrees Celsius in the teacups, pour the water into the pot over the tea leaves.
- 5 Wait for one or two minutes to steep the tea leaves. While the first brew takes one or two minutes, the second brew takes only around 30 seconds.
- 6 Pour the tea into the teacups. Avoid filling the cups with tea in a single pour. Instead, pour a small amount in each cup and then continue to add more until all cups are filled because this will ensure to distribute the richness and sweetness amongst all the cups.



## Tea tools



- A (Yunomi) Chawan – teacup
- B Kyuusu – tea pot
- C Chazutsu – tea canister
- D Yusamashi – bowl for cooling boiled water
- E Chasaji – tea spoon
- F Chataku – teacup saucer



## Traditional sweets and green tea

Try these traditional wagashi (traditional Japanese sweets) and Ryukyukashi (traditional Okinawan sweets), which pair well with green tea.

### Wagashi (mainland of Japan)

- **Dango** - A sweet dumpling that comes in an assortment of colors and is made from cereal and rice. Soy sauce and sweet bean paste are often used to flavor it. Applying sugar to a well-pounded dango can preserve it for long time.
- **Monaka** - A wafer filled with adzuki bean paste. The paste can be made from sesame seed, chestnuts or rice. Most wafers are square-shaped.



Dango



Monaka

- **Senbei** - A Japanese rice cracker in various shapes, sizes and flavors that are usually baked or grilled over charcoal. A typical senbei is flavored with soy sauce, mirin, and wrapped with a layer of seaweed. There also are salt- and sugar-flavored senbei.



Senbei

### Ryukyukashi (Okinawa)

- **Chinsuko** - An Okinawan cookie that originated during the Ryukyu Dynasty. It is made from wheat flour, sugar and lard. Chinsuko is one of the most important traditional sweets on Okinawa.
- **Chilrunko** - Often called “Okinawan kasutera,” Chilrunko is a brightly colored steamed cake topped with a smattering of peanuts that have been dyed red with citrus peels boiled in sugar syrup. The recipe includes plenty of eggs, which were scarce and thus highly-prized during the Ryukyu Dynasty era.



Chinsuko

It is said that this cake was eaten only by nobility.

- **Senjuko** - A pretty lotus-shaped cake with pastry on the outside filled with a mixture of sesame and peanut butter and refreshingly fragrant
- **Kippan** - A traditional Okinawan sweet made by boiling mixed local citrus fruits and sugar syrup down until it has become a chewy, mochi-like texture. Usually, white sugar powder is sprinkled over this sweet.



Senjuko

- **Hanabo-ru** - A cookie made from wheat flour and egg yolk then shaped like a wisteria flower. This Ryukyukashi requires the skilled techniques of an experienced patisserie chef. The Portuguese introduced this sweet to mainland Japan in the 1600s, and it was later introduced to Okinawa.



Hanabo-ru

– Souce: Masae Arakaki of Arakaki Kashiten







## Museums to check out

If you want to learn more about tea or would like to check out a tea ceremony, explore the museums below.

### ■ Fujinokuni Chanomiyako Museum

This museum has a plethora of tea information, hosts a tea ceremony, brewing and grinding tea leaf demonstrations.

**LOCATION:** 3053-2 Kanayafujimicho, Shimada City, Shizuoka Pref. (1-hour-and-40-minute drive from Camp Fuji)

**HOURS:** Wed – Mon, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

**ADMISSION:** 300 yen; College students or younger and age 70 and older: free

**URL:** <https://tea-museum.jp/>

**TEL:** 0547-46-5588

### ■ Iruma City Museum ALIT (Tea Museum)

Iruma City is famous for its local Sayama Tea. The museum displays several tea houses, tea cultivating gears, hundreds of panels explaining green tea.

**LOCATION:** 100 Nihongi, Iruma City, Saitama Pref. (20-minute drive from Yokota AB)

**HOURS:** Tue – Sun, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

**ADMISSION:** adult: 200 yen; high school and college students: 100 yen; middle and elementary school students: 50 yen

**URL:** <http://www.alit.city.irma.saitama.jp/>

**TEL:** 04-2934-7711

For further information on Japanese tea and its culture:

### ■ Japan Tea Central Public Interest Incorporated Association

**LOCATION:** 2-8-5 (5F) Higashi Shimbashi, Minato-ku, Tokyo

**URL:** [www.nihon-cha.or.jp/](http://www.nihon-cha.or.jp/)

**FACEBOOK:** @nihoncha.public

**TEL:** 03-3434-2001



## Okinawans keep it cool with Sanpin cha

BY SHOJI KUDAKA,  
STRIPES JAPAN

While brewing your own green tea at home or indulging in a nice cup at a tea house in Japan, convenience stores and supermarkets do offer a much more convenient option in a bottled form.

A quick browse through the offerings at your local shop will show you just how many varieties of brands and flavors are readily available for consumers. On Okinawa, another variety is also dominating the beverage section – sanpin cha, or jasmine tea.

Sanpin Cha's history dates back to the Ryukyu Kingdom (1429 – 1879).

According to Tsutomu Suga, a columnist who authors several articles about the history of tea, the name "Sanpin" has its roots in the Chinese word "香片(xiāngpiàn)" for jasmine tea. Suga believes jasmine tea used to be recognized as a signature product of Fuzhou, China. Given the fact that the Ryukyu Kingdom had an outpost in this harbor city on China's east coast, Jasmine tea was most likely brought to Ryukyu from there, according to Suga. It had to wait until after the end of the kingdom to reach all the people of Ryukyu, not just nobility.

Today, you'll find it served in restaurants and alongside other tea varieties in stores. According to Suga, sanpin cha can either be fully fermented as it

was in Fuzhou, half-fermented like in Taiwan, or even as green tea scented with jasmine imported from China.

I enjoy the jasmine tea as a refreshing and re-energizing beverage. It tastes a bit milder than oolong tea with a delicate bitterness and distinct scent that both relaxes and reawakens your senses.

And this tea reminds me of the visits to my grandparents' homes as a child. Having it with Sata Andagee (Okinawan doughnut) or Kurozatou (black sugar) still brings back memories of the old days.

Enjoying the tea with local sweets is still quite popular but you'll also find new pairings like the sanpin-cha-wari cocktail, which mixes sanpin cha with Okinawan liquor, Awamori.

According to the book, "Cha to Ryukyu-jin (tea and people of Ryukyu)" by Koichi Takei, another popular tea during the Ryukyu Kingdom was Kuma cha, a green tea harvested in Kumamoto Prefecture (then known as Higo). The author draws similarities between Kuma cha's strong flavor and that of sanpin cha, including how the strong scent drew the people of Ryukyu to drink both as refreshments during the subtropical island's steamy summer.

Sanpin cha remains a part of that strategy for keeping cool in the hot Okinawan summer. As for me, the scent and flavor both refresh me and remind me of the past.

[kudaka.shoji@stripes.com](mailto:kudaka.shoji@stripes.com)



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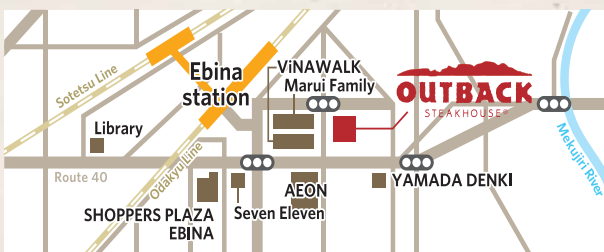
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# Guide to Japan's popular munchies



**Nikomi:** Pork or beef offal stew with vegetables such as carrots and radish in a miso-based soup. We usually sample it with shichimi spice powder (mixed with Japanese chili pepper, ground sansho and hemp seed), which gives it a little kick.

BY TAKAHIRO TAKIGUCHI,  
STRIPES JAPAN

Eat like a local, and try one of hundreds of options of tsumami dishes you'll find at many restaurants around Japan.



**Tofu:** There are several variations. Hi-yayakko, chilled tofu with grated ginger, green onion and bonito flakes, is known as a great tsumami to cool you down on the hot summer night. Yudofu, warmed tofu with mustard, green onion and sour soy sauce, is great to sample with warm sake on a cold night.



**Yakitori:** Despite literally meaning "grilled chicken," yakitori is used as the general term for all skewered and grilled items. They include negima (a skewer of small pieces of chicken thigh), sasami (a skewer of minced chicken) and butabara (a skewer of pork rib). When you order one, you usually can choose to have them grilled with salt or soy-sauce based broth (tare).



**Sashimi:** This is one of the most popular tsumami dishes consisting of sliced fish, usually tuna, yellowtail, squid, horse mackerel or salmon. We usually sample them by dipping in soy sauce with wasabi.



**Shiokara:** Salted and fermented squid guts. It has a chewy texture and a fishy and salty taste. The squid is thinly sliced so you can eat just a little bit at a time.



**Edamame:** Boiled or steamed green soybean pods usually served with salt. We push the beans out of pods when we sample one. This tsumami dish can go along with virtually any type of liquor and is considered as a standard starter for any party.



**Oden:** Japanese hotpot with assorted ingredients like daikon, tofu or fish cakes. Especially good during wintertime.



**Potato salad:** Most izakaya offer this, but how it's prepared varies by izakaya. The biggest difference between Japanese and American potato salads is the mayonnaise. Japanese mayonnaise is tangier and saltier than the standard U.S. mayo used in American potato salad.

## Unique tsumami dishes (or maybe weird-looking)

You may consider them weird, but they pair well with traditional Japanese liquors (sake and shochu). Don't hesitate to try one when they are available!

**Karasumi:** Dried mullet roe.

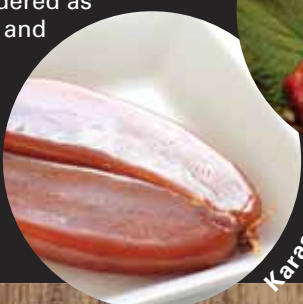
**Uni:** Sea urchin.

**Konowata:** Salted sea-cucumber guts. It is traditionally considered as one of the three "unusual" delicacies, along with karasumi and uni, with its strange and exotic flavors.

**Basashi:** Thin slices of raw horse meat.

**Namero:** Made by placing miso, Japanese sake, green onions, a perilla leaf, and ginger on top of raw fish and mincing them together with a knife until it becomes sticky.

**Shuto:** Salted and fermented bonito intestine.



Don't drink  
and drive





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