A Taste of Okinawa

The 3 ‘R’s to good eating – Restaurants, Reviews & Recipes

8-page pullout
13 curious things you never knew about Japan’s most famous condiment!

Love it or hate it, wasabi is one of the more well-known condiments served with Japanese cooking, most commonly served with sushi. Mixed with soy sauce, or served directly on top of sushi, a little dash of wasabi gives a real spicy kick to raw fish but without leaving an aftertaste. According to historical records, Japanese people have been adding wasabi to a variety of dishes for over a thousand years, and today it can be found in most restaurants.

It might seem like a dull green condiment, but actually there are a lot of things that even Japanese people don’t even know about wasabi!

**Eating wasabi? You’re likely eating the stem, not the root!**

When you think of a wasabi plant, the image of a chunk of the dull green plant probably comes to mind. Contrary to what you might imagine, however, it is the part that’s ultimately grated up into the spicy green mass that’s eaten with sushi that is the lower portion of the plant’s stem, and not the root!

*Raw wasabi at the market. Note that the roots have not been removed from the stem, and the leaves are relatively intact.*

**Wasabi is actually something of a cabbage?**

A lot of people tend to think that the wasabi plant is like a Japanese version of horseradish, but actually it is an herbaceous plant (Brassicaceae) which is related to cabbage, as well as mustard and radish. However, calling it Japanese cabbage doesn’t quite the same ring to it!

**Using wasabi to prevent food poisoning**

Japanese people didn’t start using wasabi on their food to add a bit of spice to it; actually, they discovered that it had medicinal properties. Eating raw fish or poorly cooked meat could lead to food poisoning because of the bugs which were on the food. However, it was believed that adding wasabi to their food helped against illnesses. This was with good reason as it has been discovered that wasabi contains a chemical called allyl isothiocyanate, now used as an insecticide, and it also has anti-bacterial properties too.

**It is pretty hard to grow wasabi**

As wasabi is served so generously in Japan, you can easily imagine that Japan is covered in fields of wasabi plants alongside rice plants. However, the wasabi plant needs particular conditions to be grown; it is a mountainous plant found in the natural habitat is in river valleys, protected from direct sunlight and with its roots reaching into running underground water. Also, it will only grow around 1300 - 2500 meters above sea level while it won’t thrive if the air temperature is below 8°C or above 20°C. It isn’t a plant you can just grow in your back garden, and you would have to be pretty determined to want to grow it commercially.

**Real wasabi is expensive**

Wasabi is challenging to grow, which means that actually, there isn’t a lot of wasabi plants on the market for sale. Just like any product where there is a limited supply and high demand, real wasabi is pricey. To buy. On top of this, Japan has been very successful at exporting its cuisine abroad, so in recent years demand for wasabi plants has really ramped up. Outside of Japan, in 2014, a kilo could cost $160, but year on year, the price has increased by up to 10% so that today some restaurants are willing to pay $300 or more for stock. Even in the country, prices for fresh wasabi can be somewhat steep as well.

**Wasabi is cheap in supermarkets though!**

As wasabi is in limited supply and expensive, you are probably wondering why you can easily buy a tube of wasabi for a low price in supermarkets. However, alternative ingredients have been utilized to replicate the taste of wasabi, without using any actual wasabi. If you want to eat real wasabi you have to check out a specialty shop.

The wasabi imitation game

Unfortunately, imitation wasabi isn’t limited to the supermarket. Although the number of Japanese restaurants around the world is increasing, and demand for authentic wasabi is also growing, it’s said that only around 5-10% of restaurants outside of Japan actually serve wasabi made from the actual plant. Many restaurants create an imitation of wasabi with horseradish, mustard, flavoring, etc., along with powdered wasabi. On the one hand, it means it isn’t likely the wasabi you are eating is real, while on the other if a restaurant says they use real wasabi, then you should really savor it!

Not just for sushi

Outside of Japan you will commonly see wasabi just with sushi and sashimi, but in Japan you can find it being used in a lot of other dishes. It is a versatile condiment which can be seen added to soba noodles, to dipping sauces served with yakiniku, wasabi rice bowls, unagi (eel) chazuke, and more. When in Japan be prepared for some wasabi surprises!

True wasabi’s flavor disappears quickly

If you are lucky enough to get your hands on a real wasabi plant and plan to make some real wasabi paste, then you had better be careful, once you have made it if you leave it uncovered then it would lose its flavor after about 15 minutes. As your wasabi plant is quite precious, and eating real wasabi paste is a treat, you should try only to grate what you need when you need it. This goes for eating at a restaurant serving real wasabi too. If it is real then you need to eat it within 15 minutes or so – don’t let it go to waste!

Real wasabi lasts quite a long time

In contrast to the short life of grated wasabi, the actual wasabi stem can keep its flavor for months if properly stored. So, although you should only grate as much as you need when you need it, your wasabi stem, under proper conditions, can last for months and be enjoyed again and again.

The Food-Borne supremacy

Wasabi has a long history of being used to prevent food poisoning, and just like Jason Bourne, wasabi has been shown capable of wiping out many bad things. Its antibacterial properties have been shown to be highly effective against E. coli and other bacteria, which cause food poisoning. Regular consumption of wasabi is perfect for your body’s defenses, and lately, a few pharmaceutical companies have even started using this ingredient in antibacterial creams.

The wasabi plant isn’t just about the stem

Talking about real wasabi might leave you thinking that the only useful part of the plant is the stem, but if you have a plant, then you should use all of it, including the leaves. These can be eaten pickled (in a dish called “wasabi zuke”) or cooked and added to any meal for a little kick, or they can be eaten raw. When you visit Japan, definitely give it a go!

*Pickled wasabi - wasabi zuke - is a traditional food in Shizuoka, made by chopping up and salting wasabi roots and stems before pickling the mix in sake lees and seasoning with salt and sugar.*

Eat a wasabi plant for its nutrition?

By itself, wasabi is a bit pricey, so it isn’t convenient to be eating large amounts every day, but even a little bit will give your body some tremendous nutritional boosts. Besides its antibacterial properties and isothiocyanates, it also anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial properties. The leaves and stems have a lot of calcium and vitamin C too. Besides, in addition to being really good against food poisoning, it is also thought to be useful against allergies, inflammation, and cancer.
Let Transit Café serve you some tasty drinks and food while you take in the surrounding beauty. Relax and unwind as the blue sky gradually changes into yellow and orange over the never-ending ocean landscape. Spend a momentary “transit” before heading to your next destination. Open every day. Takeout available 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Or stay home and we’ll deliver to you. Call 098-936-5076 for free home delivery on orders over $35.00 (yen or cash only). Must order day in advance. Delivery area limited to Chatan, Kadena, Yomitan, Okinawa City, and Kitanakagusuku. Check out our delivery menu at www.transitcafe-okinawa.com. 

RisN’ Shine serves up Apple Pie Smoothie

If you are looking for a seasonal sweet treat, stop into Risner Fitness Center on Kadena! RisN’ Shine is featuring an Apple Pie Smoothie for the entire month of November! Conveniently located right inside the main doors of the complex, RisN’ Shine juice bar has protein smoothie options, as well as other nutritious options for a post-workout treat! If you are not fan of frozen drinks, they also have a light lunch menu. Paninis and fruit are featured, as well as granola and other add-ins for a yogurt parfait. Be sure to make RisN’ Shine part of your fitness routine!
Let's start from street food sweets! Out of the tens of varieties of sweets available, chocolate bananas came in as the most popular! It's also ranked as a familiar food item on street food menus. What do foreign visitors find so appealing about chocolate bananas?

“Isn’t chocolate and bananas the perfect combination? It’s also colourful and cute!” (Kazakhstan, 10s, Female)

“Chocolate bananas will never let you down! This combination is the best.” (Korea, 20s, Female)

“With a thick chocolate coating, I like that it feels up my stomach. No matter where I eat it the taste is consistent, which is great.” (USA, 20s, Male)

With a thick chocolate coating and colourful sprinkles, chocolate bananas are really photogenic. More than 80% of our respondents have eaten chocolate bananas before, and almost all of them expressed their love for it. The perfect pairing of chocolate and bananas is a sentiment shared across borders.

When asked which street food they would like to try the most, the answer that came up is imagawayaki, a pancake filled with sweet red bean paste. What’s so special about this sweet?

“The shape is pretty and seems really tasty! I also love red beans.” (France, teens, Female)

“I haven’t eaten it before, but we have something similar back in Korea, and it smells really delicious.” (Korea, 20s, Female)

“I’ve eaten tayaki (fish-shaped pancake stuffed with sweet red bean paste) before and it was really delicious, and I think imagawayaki looks really great too.” (USA, 20s, Male)

The main reason for wanting to eat imagawayaki is that it looks delicious. With such a beautiful shape like a taiko drum, it’s easy to be intrigued by it. There are also those who expressed their preference for red beans, and amongst those who have eaten tayaki before, there are many who expressed the desire to eat imagawayaki.

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The Japanese street food sweet that everyone wants to try the most

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A popular street food among tourists, imagawayaki is made of ingredients such as flour, baking powder, eggs, sugar, and milk. The simplicity of the ingredients makes it popular across borders.

 imagawayaki, the Land of the Rising Sun

In Japan, one thing you definitely can't miss out on is street food gourmet! Recently, the variety of street food available has increased considerably, and the menus available have likewise increased, as more people have come to enjoy the variety of street food available. With such a wide variation in the types of street food available, which ones are most popular?

The next most popular street food sweet item after chocolate bananas is the baby castella. A one-bite sweet item that tastes like pancakes, it's found not just at street food stores at festivals, but is popular at tourist destinations such as Asakusa as well. We hear why foreign visitors like baby castella so much!

“The size of the baby castella is perfect. It’s just nice for eating while walking. On top of that, festivals have many sweet desserts, and the baby castella is not too sweet, making it easy to eat for adults to stomach as well.” (England, 30s, Male)

“It’s the perfect sweet to eat when you’re hungry. With a familiar rich taste, I immediately fell in love with it.” (France, teens, Female)

Baby castella are made of flour, baking powder, eggs, sugar, honey, and milk, simple ingredients that combine together to make this wonderful sweet. Its light sweetness stole the hearts of many foreign visitors, making it a hot favourite!

Another reason for its popularity is not just the taste, but the size as well. In contrast to food items that fall apart easily as you eat them, this is one food that is easy to eat while walking, and the ability to share it with others is a definite plus. Wanting to share the feeling of excitement while eating street food with your friends is natural, and this sweet allows you to do just that!

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Japan Culture Shock

The Land of the Rising Sun

Ranking of street foods in Japan

The least favourite street food sweet is mizuame, or millet jelly, is another street food available, which ones are most popular?

The most popular street food is okonomiyaki,

Unshakeable popularity!

Okonomiyaki

is the most popular street food!

Takoyaki

Surprisingly has people who do not enjoy it

Next, we’ll be moving on to street foods! With its pungent aroma greeting you at festivals, it’s a street food you usually end up eating anyway, and it’s popular amongst foreign visitors as well. “Of course okonomiyaki! I don’t just eat them at street food stores, I even go to restaurants just to eat them too.” (France, 20s, Female)

“I like okonomiyaki and Hiroshima yaki (okonomiyaki cooked in a style unique to Hiroshima). The sauce and pancake batter are a great match, and it’s very delicious.” (Papua New Guinea, 30s, Male)

“In Korea, there’s a similar dish to okonomiyaki called chijimi (spicy Korean pancake), and it’s a very familiar taste.” (Korea, 20s, Female)

A hot favourite amongst Japanese, okonomiyaki is also the most popular street food amongst foreign visitors. As Japanese food is also popular the world over, there are many people who have eaten okonomiyaki before they even come to Japan. Tempted by its fragrance at street food stalls, there are many who end up eating it when they come.

Similar to okonomiyaki, takoyaki is also one of the kings of Japanese street food. Though you’d think that there are many foreign visitors who would enjoy it as well, there were many surprising answers. “I can’t eat octopus! Especially in takoyaki, there are large pieces of octopus inside, aren’t there? I definitely can’t eat it.” (USA, 20s, Male)

Especially amongst westerners, there are many who don’t like octopus and squid, resulting in a re-sounding distaste for takoyaki. There are many who find the slimy-looking texture of octopus unappetizing, and they don’t eat it back in their home countries. However, there are some who enjoy it as well! “I’ve liked takoyaki since I came to Japan. I often eat it as a snack as well.” (France, 20s, Female)

“I like the combination of ingredients in takoyaki. If you’re in Japan, you definitely must eat it.” (Netherlands, 40s, Female)

For foreigners who are used to Japanese food, properly grilled octopus doesn’t seem to be an issue for them. There are those who eat it as a snack, and who will definitely eat them at street food stalls. Because of the ingredients of takoyaki, there is a clear divide between those who like and dislike it.

Corn dogs and frankfurters are popular not just in Japan, but in other countries as well. However, there are many who don’t like to eat them at street food stores, and we find out why.

“Corn dogs and frankfurters are food items that I can buy from the convenience store just down the street. I can easily buy it anywhere, I think it’s better not to buy it at a street food store.” (Kazakhstan, 10s, Female)

“Honestly, I can eat it outside of Japan, I don’t think of eating it here.” (USA, 20s, Male)

Corn dogs and frankfurters are foods that you can easily buy anywhere, and not just at street food stores. As there are those who usually eat them in their home countries, they don’t eat them at festivals in Japan.

It’s not unpopular because it’s disgusting, but many feel that there are other foods that they’d much rather eat instead.
In Japan in general, but especially in Tokyo, you’ll find a large number of restaurants that serve food from all over the world. Tokyo is one of the food capitals of the world, and it’s not so only because of the many choices available in terms of Japanese food, but also because it’s home to restaurants specialized in dishes from virtually every country.

With not so much research you’ll be able to find in Tokyo Italian food, French, Turkish, Spanish, Portuguese, Brazilian, Indian, Pakistani, Korean, Chinese, Greek, and so much more (pretty much any country you can think of).

Furthermore, if you have any dietary restrictions, in Tokyo you’ll find restaurants that serve vegetarian food, vegan, halal, kosher, or gluten-free. Outside major cities, however, the range of choices may diminish.

**Ethnic food restaurants**

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**Family restaurants**

There’s a kind of eatery in Japan referred to as famiresu - short for family restaurants. These restaurants resemble an American-style diner and have a very large menu with mostly western-style dishes, from hamburger plates to pasta, steak, different kinds of potatoes, grilled chicken, a host of salads and so on. They usually also have a very large dessert menu.

Depending on the restaurant they have different selection of dishes (and it’s always a lot of them). Furthermore, they are very easy to find and tend to be quite inexpensive as well.

**Fast food**

Like everywhere else in the world, Japan doesn’t lack western fast food chains. You’ll find a McDonald’s or Kentucky Fried Chicken virtually anywhere. In larger cities you’ll also find Burger King, Wendy’s and a bunch of other fast food chains.

Patrons often say that fast food joints taste better in Japan than they do in the U.S. or other countries. It’s hard to know if it’s true, but this could be your chance to judge it yourself.

**Convenience stores**

These bars usually have quite a large selection of pub food, ranging from sandwiches, to meat dishes, potatoes, fries, a wealth of finger food - and, of course, fish and chips.

**British-style pubs**

These bars usually have quite a large selection of pub food, ranging from sandwiches, to meat dishes, potatoes, fries, a wealth of finger food - and, of course, fish and chips.

Regardless of your country of origin, chances are that you are familiar with some version of skewered meat. Japan has its own, called yakitori (lit. grilled chicken). Despite what the name suggests, yakitori come in many different combinations (chicken, pork, beef, vegetables). Yakitori can be found as street food, or in restaurants that serve Japanese food, and especially in traditional Japanese restaurants called izakaya.

Occasionally, places that serve yakitori have an enormous selection, and some of the choices may look a little too unique, but if you don’t feel adventurous, or you don’t like sauces, or pre-seasoned food, you will always find simple varieties like salt, salt and pepper (spicy or mild), and certainly something that wouldn’t look or taste too “foreign” to you.

**Yakiniku - Japanese-style Korean BBQ**

Similarly to what we said about yakitori, chances are that you’re familiar with grilled foods. A very popular type of food in Japan is yakiniku (lit. grilled meat). Yakiniku is a style of grilling meat inspired by the Korean one. Yakiniku restaurants are very common and you can find places that will have an all-you-can-eat menu (you pay a fixed price and you eat all you can for 90 minutes, or two hours, usually). Others will not have an all-you-can-eat menu. They tend to be of higher quality and a little pricier.

Regardless, these restaurants will have a very large selection of meat and veggies that you can choose from, with many different seasonings and dipping sauces (if desired – otherwise you can keep it as simple as you want to).

Yakiniku restaurants will serve raw meat and veggies that you will grill yourself at your table on a gas grill or on a charcoal grill.

While yakiniiku is indeed a typical Japanese dish, it’s no different from grilled meat from anywhere else in the world (assuming that you don’t select typical Japanese cuts, or animal parts, or traditional Japanese seasonings).
Japan is famous for its seafood. For this reason, many visitors think that the largest majority of Japanese dishes is based on fish. This can be quite troublesome for those who don’t really like seafood, or fish in general. Actually, though, Japanese dishes are equally divided among fish and meats (probably leaning more towards the meats part). One thing that is ever-present, though, is vegetables.

Side dishes, main dishes, snacks, and on-the-go meals, are often based on vegetables. You’ll find dishes of grilled, boiled, raw, or steamed veggies almost anywhere you go.

Very much part of Japanese diet, they are very easy to find, and they rarely have a very distinctive Japanese-style flavor to them.

Some dishes you should try are:
- Edamame: Soybeans served boiled, steamed, or raw, with or without salt.
- Pickled cucumber or okra: Usually served as an appetizer, these are light, flavorful, and not too adventurous dishes.

Namatsu: Kind of salad made with raw veggies and sweetened vinegar.
Potato Salad: Yep, Japan is indeed really big on potato salad. Chances are you’re already familiar with some form of potato salad, but even if you’re not, it’s a very accessible flavor.

There are many vegetable dishes in Japanese cuisine. Some more unique, others more familiar to foreigners. Try a few.

Noodles
Surely you know of ramen, a very popular Japanese noodle widely consumed also in its “instant” variety.

Unlike what you may find abroad, though, ramen in Japan is offered in a plethora of different flavors, soups, and hot or cold. Even if you’re not a fan of Japanese flavors, chances are that there will be some kind of ramen that agrees with your personal taste.

Furthermore, Japanese noodles are not limited to ramen. On the contrary there are a huge number of different kinds of noodles you’d be able to enjoy. Each one of them has many sub-categories. Some of the most popular are udon and soba.

Once again, the choice is seemingly limitless, as you can find noodles served with a number of soups (or without), with meat, fish, veggie, or bland soup or flavoring, all kinds of toppings and side dishes that are very accessible even (and especially) if you are not a fan of Japanese food.

Save dietary restrictions, most people like fried chicken.
Japan is famous for its version of it, karaage. Don’t get thrown off by its very Japanese name, though. While karaage is one of the most popular dishes in Japan, its name simply distinguishes it from its counterparts from the rest of the world.

Karaage can come in the simplest of forms, or with flavoring of cheese, soy sauce, spicy or mild (and more depending on the place serving it).

For those who have not acquired a taste for “too Japanese tasting” dishes, karaage is a sure shot that makes all Japanese food lovers and non-agree.

Fried chicken
A common misconception about Japanese food, among those who have never visited Japan, is that a lot of the food that populates Japanese culinary tradition is “very Japanese”, meaning that it’s something that you’d enjoy only if you have acquired a particular taste for certain flavors.

In reality, while in part this may be true, the vastest majority of Japanese dishes are accessible and easy to eat for anyone, regardless of their cultural background.

A prime example of this is the many dishes “over-rice” you’ll find in Japan. These are dishes of white rice, topped with beef, pork, veggies, or chicken in a variety of seasonings and flavors.

They are very fluffy, easy to find, and they rarely have a very distinctive Japanese-style flavor to them.

Fried foods and tempura
Surely you know of ramen, a very popular Japanese noodle widely consumed also in its “instant” variety.

Fried chicken is big on fried dishes.

Tempura is as Japanese as Japanese cuisine. Some more unique, others more familiar to foreigners. Try a few.

Tonkatsu is a deep-fried pork cutlet that you can enjoy as it is or with a particular sauce. Tonkatsu is served on its own or as a topping for other dishes. Like some other dishes in this list, tonkatsu is a staple of Japanese cuisine, but especially by itself, it’s a relatively simple and very flavorful dish that you’re going to love if you’re looking for something that won’t push your comfort zone.

There you have it!
Whether you like Japanese food or not, you’ll have plenty of options to choose from during your stay in Japan.

Food here is part of the culture, but it’s only a segment of the many things you’ll probably love when you visit.

If you’re searching around and still not finding exactly what you would like to eat, why not give a human a try!

Restaurant Information Centers have multilingual concierges who are happy to help you find something yummy to fill you up.

Desserts
Japan is really big on sweets. You can find the uniquely Japanese traditional desserts (called wagashi), or a number of desserts and cakes based on chocolate, vanilla, custard, fruit, different creams, ice cream, and so much more.

You could theoretically try a different kind of sweet for every meal, and you won’t eat the same one twice during your stay in Japan.

A reader might want to have some more insight on Japanese sweets, look at the link below!

Colorful, crazy, and kawaii: Tokyo’s top 6 sweets and desserts that we can’t get enough of!

Cafes
If you really don’t know where else to go, don’t forget there are thousands of cafes serving drinks, cakes, sandwiches, pastries and more.

Most Japanese cafes are quite similar to one another. If you’re looking for something particularly familiar, then you may be right at home within one of the many Starbucks.

If you want to try something new, but without drifting too far away from the familiar, try one of these!

Japanese cafe chains in Japan
1. Doutor
2. Excelsior Cafe
3. Pronto
4. Caffe Veloce
5. Moriva Coffee
6. Ginzan Renko
7. Cafe de Crie
8. St. Marc Cafe
9. Kohikan
10. Komeda’s Coffee
11. Cafe Colorado
12. WIRED CAFE
13. Miyama Coffee
14. Maisen
15. 3 tonkatsu chains in Japan
1. Saboten
2. Wako
3. Maisen
There is something very comforting about sitting around a bubbling hot pot with friends and family. Often rich with a variety of vegetables, hot pots are also very nourishing. A nabe (Japanese hot pot) is an easy meal to put on the table with a simple clean-up, as it is a one-pot meal. Some famous styles include sukiyaki, shabu-shabu, or chankonabe (known as the sumo wrestler’s meal). These dishes can be found in restaurants, but cooking nabe at home is really a breeze and recently there has even been a trend of hitori nabe (hot pot for solo diners) — so don’t let that hold you back from getting started.

Keeping in mind that there are a few guidelines but no set rules for cooking nabe, here are some basics to get you started.

The most essential equipment are the konro (tabletop butane gas stove) and hot pot. The size of the pot should be determined by the number of people you are cooking for. There are many styles of hot pots but to get started, a donabe (clay pot) is the most versatile. Do note that it needs to be seasoned with rice before using for the first time.

When you’re thinking of what to put in it, for proteins, consider: chicken, sliced pork belly, beef, fish (like cod or salmon) or shellfish; ground chicken or pork can be formed into meatballs; even frozen gyoza could be your protein.

For vegetables, use a wide variety including daikon, hakusai (Napa cabbage), carrots, shungiku (edible chrysanthemum), komatsuna (Japanese mustard spinach), mushrooms, leeks or cabbage; and use mushrooms like enoki, shiitake, and shimeji. Shirataki (chewy konnyaku noodles) add a nice texture, but check the package as some need to be boiled in water to get rid of the “off” aroma before being added into the nabe.

Dipping sauces can be purchased or made at home. If you’re not feeling like the traditional ponzu, gomadare (a creamy sesame dressing) is just as easy to find. Fun condiments like yuzu kosho, a salty chili paste, can also add another dimension to the meal.

Mizutaki, a chicken-based nabe, is a popular recipe to get started with. Add water and a piece of kombu (a variety of kelp) into your pot, then let this simmer while preparing the ingredients. Cut some boneless chicken into bite-size pieces. Cut hakusai, leeks and momen (firm) tofu into similar-sized cubes. Slice carrots into thin leaves. Break down mushrooms like shimeji or shiitake into smaller pieces. Turn off the heat on your konro, remove the kombu and add the ingredients to the pot. Put the lid on and boil until the chicken is cooked through. While the ingredients are cooking, skim off any scum as it has bitter flavors. Dip the cooked vegetables and chicken in ponzu before eating.

The broth should be well seasoned by this point. Once you’ve finished all the vegetables and meat, add some pre-cooked noodles or rice to the soup. If you like, scramble an egg into the hot rice porridge. Taste and add salt if necessary.

Another simple hot pot is buta-kimchi, made with thin-sliced pork belly, kimchi, kinu (soft) tofu and shimeji mushrooms. Finish the pot with harusame rice noodles. A vegetarian mushroom hot pot could be made with tofu, a variety of mushrooms, hakusai and shungiku.

Once you get the hang of things you can get creative and make your own original hot pot. As mentioned, these are your guidelines: cut proteins into bite-size pieces; slice harder vegetables like carrots into thin slices; softer vegetables like hakusai can be cut into bigger pieces.

There are two resourceful cookbooks on hot pots. Japanese Hot Pots: Comforting One-Pot Meals by Tadashi Ono and Harris Salat (Ten Speed Press) is filled with classic Japanese hot pot recipes. Donabe: Classic and Modern Japanese Clay Pot Cooking by Naoko Moore and Kyle Connaughton (Ten Speed Press) includes hot pot recipes as well as a plethora of recipes for cooking in a variety of donabe pots like a smoker, steamer and rice pot.

If you’re just getting started consider getting a cheaper pot and test the waters before splurging on a donabe.