

Pothoiler

Culinary adventures in Japan

TOKYO

50 YEARS

TOKYO'S BELLY

TOKYO FOOD

MOVING ON

ISHIKAWA

YAMANAKA ONSEN

KYOTO

O HARA

EATING KYOTO

OSAKA



Episode 2



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(いらっしゃいませ)

A word you will hear constantly when entering a restaurant (Welcome/Please come in) this applies in this Magazine too



Some places you visit are easily assimilated to, you have a visual history of the place in your mind, an expectation of how it will be based on accumulated information.

Tokyo somehow over delivers, the rush of the crowds in Shinjuku, the tightly packed buildings old and new together, small bars filled with salary men still in clouds of cigarette smoke .

Over 100,000 restaurants just waiting for you a Michelin star ramen where you buy a ticket for your bowl outside after queuing for an hour, or perhaps a small counter in Ginza with just six guests and the Chef as the host.

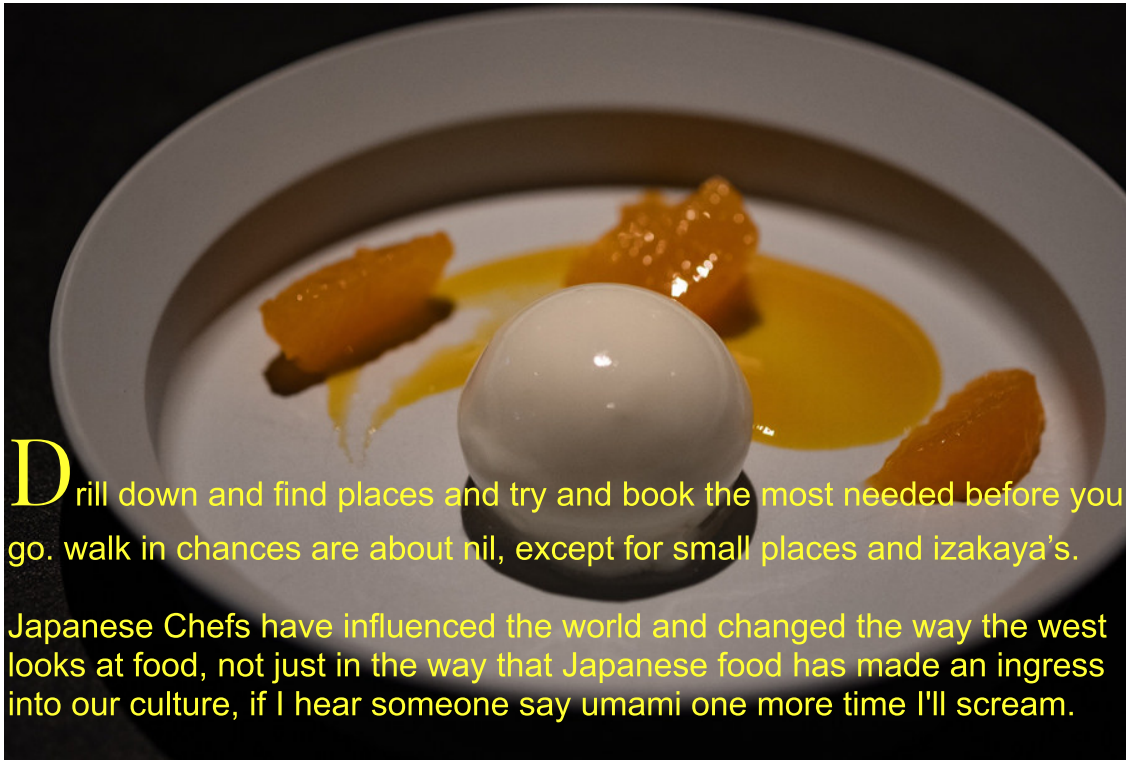
Where Japan and Tokyo differs from anywhere else, is that somehow it still feels like an adventure. Its environment although welcoming feels completely alien, That's what makes it exiting.

If you are a Chef or just like to eat it's a bucket list destination.

No written guide can truly help you fully navigate the food culture here, it's too diverse , you only scratch the surface as a visitor, even as a local you could only visit so many in your orbit in a whole life dedicated to the task.

The only way to approach it is in advance have a plan but also allow for some random discoveries. I usually break it down into categories Japanese , Ramen ,Soba ,Kaiseki , Sushi, Tempura.

Then perhaps Sake bars and wine bars (a new huge wave of natural wines in Tokyo)
You get the idea.



Drill down and find places and try and book the most needed before you go. walk in chances are about nil, except for small places and izakaya's.

Japanese Chefs have influenced the world and changed the way the west looks at food, not just in the way that Japanese food has made an ingress into our culture, if I hear someone say umami one more time I'll scream.

When Nordic cuisine was on the rise and fermentation became a thing, the Japanese had been at it for centuries and its just taken for granted.

Vegan's, Shinto cuisine no meat for a thousand years, perfected over millennia.

aesthetics on a plate has long been a fundamental part of eating Kaiseki long before any European picked up a pair of tweezers.

So with all this history there is no standing still. Culinary adventure evolves here at a starling pace. Shokinin is the name for a specialist totally focused on their craft for instance Soba noodles the chef maybe generational 3rd or 4th and all he does is Soba it may have adapted and offer modern twists but do just one thing. This is how excellence just does not just happen its fine tuning over a long time. As the customer and a visitor it does open your eyes to how good things can be.

Food around the world and Chefs have caught up, excellence abounds, But Tokyo with its massive roll call of places to eat and still the most numbers of Michelin stars on the planet, has the edge.

50 Years is a long time for a chef, Dog Years 7 to every human that's how it feels ,sometimes Those hard days the difficult ones stick with you! But the camaraderie the passion the heat and sweat, the happy customers the empty plates make all that happens before disappear, That's why I do it. Currently still working and privileged to be part of the team at kiln Soho in London, can't thank them enough for giving an old guy a job, worked out well for us both!

I have been a chef since the age of 13 and have had my hand on a pan ever since. A journeyman rather than someone sparkling in the culinary firmament! but I like that.

I have had a moment in the spotlight and damnation too. Highlight two pages in the times from Jonathan Meads, low point also centre pages of the times AA Gill, I guess after his short career getting shot to pieces by AA is almost a badge of honour.

I travel, I eat with passion and greed, drink with gusto and enthusiasm and take pictures of chefs and food and places when I can. Japan is a passion, the food the people the food, did I mention the food. I have long been an advocate of what has been going on there long before Michelin got in on the game. Not that I had any means to get my message out there to a wider audience. However, I was happy to keep it to myself less people fighting for the same table, as it is now.

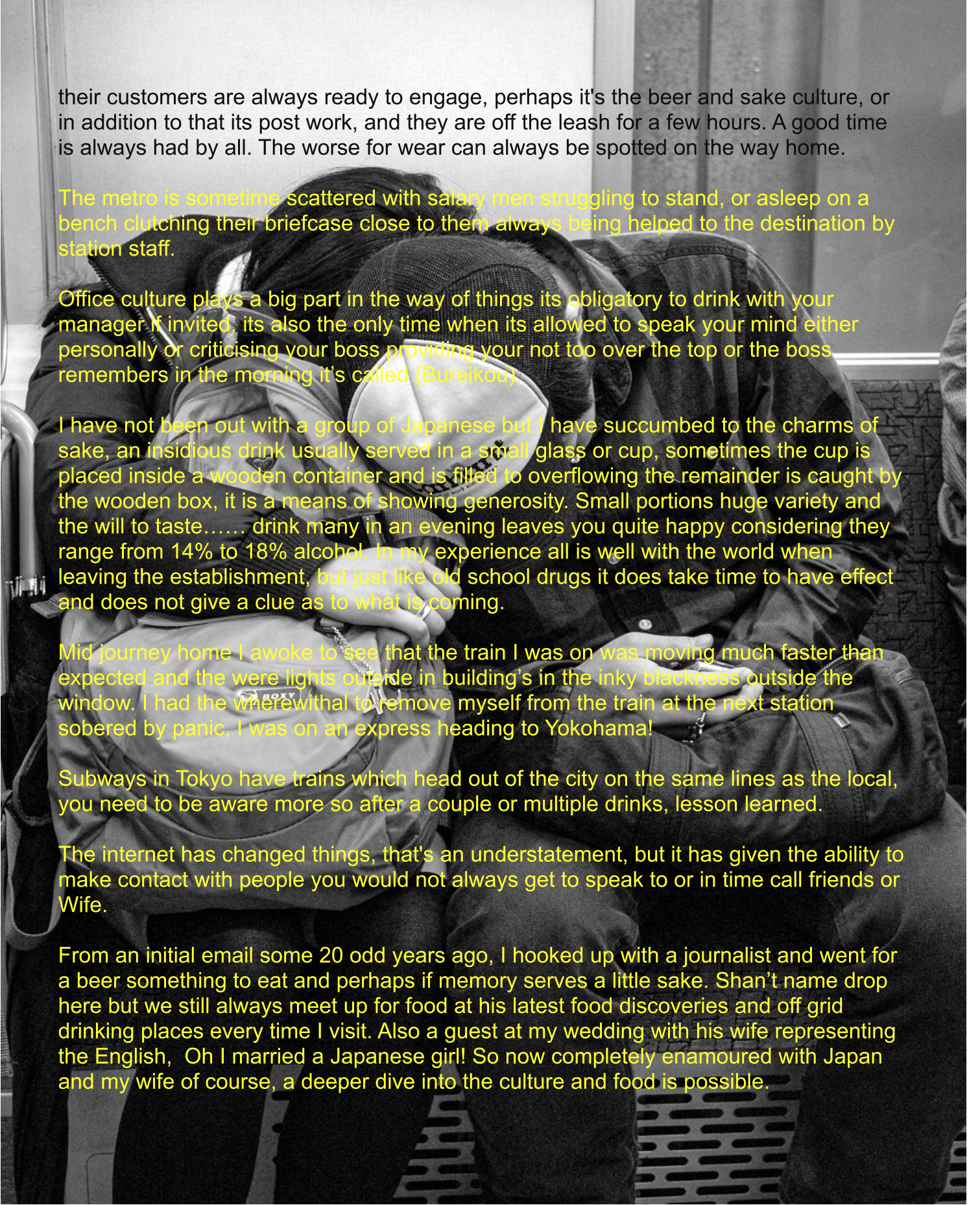
For many years I was on repeat I had found some great places all over Japan so to make life easy and to avoid any complications I stuck with them. slowly trying new places to add to my list.

I was always willing to engage with chefs if I could, but my zero ability to learn any of the language was always a hindrance but sometimes an advantage Thanks to the generosity and hospitality shown to foreigners by the Japanese.

I never really struggled to find somewhere to eat, Izakaya were always my first choice,



"The bucket list city for almost all chefs they have the Miso the bloody umami and the knives but not visited"



their customers are always ready to engage, perhaps it's the beer and sake culture, or in addition to that its post work, and they are off the leash for a few hours. A good time is always had by all. The worse for wear can always be spotted on the way home.

The metro is sometime scattered with salary men struggling to stand, or asleep on a bench clutching their briefcase close to them always being helped to the destination by station staff.

Office culture plays a big part in the way of things its obligatory to drink with your manager if invited, its also the only time when its allowed to speak your mind either personally or criticising your boss providing your not too over the top or the boss remembers in the morning it's called (Bureikou).

I have not been out with a group of Japanese but I have succumbed to the charms of sake, an insidious drink usually served in a small glass or cup, sometimes the cup is placed inside a wooden container and is filled to overflowing the remainder is caught by the wooden box, it is a means of showing generosity. Small portions huge variety and the will to taste..... drink many in an evening leaves you quite happy considering they range from 14% to 18% alcohol. In my experience all is well with the world when leaving the establishment, but just like old school drugs it does take time to have effect and does not give a clue as to what is coming.

Mid journey home I awoke to see that the train I was on was moving much faster than expected and the were lights outside in building's in the inky blackness outside the window. I had the wherewithal to remove myself from the train at the next station sobered by panic, I was on an express heading to Yokohama!

Subways in Tokyo have trains which head out of the city on the same lines as the local, you need to be aware more so after a couple or multiple drinks, lesson learned.

The internet has changed things, that's an understatement, but it has given the ability to make contact with people you would not always get to speak to or in time call friends or Wife.

From an initial email some 20 odd years ago, I hooked up with a journalist and went for a beer something to eat and perhaps if memory serves a little sake. Shan't name drop here but we still always meet up for food at his latest food discoveries and off grid drinking places every time I visit. Also a guest at my wedding with his wife representing the English, Oh I married a Japanese girl! So now completely enamoured with Japan and my wife of course, a deeper dive into the culture and food is possible.



Tokyo's Belly.

The engine that runs Tokyo is the salary-men and women, the homogeneous army of suits carrying briefcases, crowding the streets and subways. The long hours and the likelihood of being located outside of the city where living is cheaper. Makes the days longer and more stressful. Most companies pay for the commuting as part of the salary package. Down time is mostly spent in bars and Izakayas before returning home and these places I love there is always a good atmosphere you can almost feel the happiness and relief of finishing for the day and the joy when taking the first



"Arrive early as they open at 4.30 pm and are always busy first thing after ordering a beer is to secure a Tsukune 1 each



beer or bite.

I have a thing for Tachinomi or standing bars. On my first visit to Japan some 25 years + ago I just stumbled across Akitaya, it is perched on a street corner within the eye-line of Tokyo tower.

Charcoal and pork scented smoke billows out from the street facing open grill, Upturned beer crates with Formica topped boards for tables arranged outside.

“Populated with standing chatting drinking smoking salarymen”

A well-worn interior of some character and age, much like the grandmothers who oversee the back kitchen turning out complimentary dishes to the ever flowing skewers of pig, in all its component parts. The speciality here is the Tsukune it's like a kebab made with pork and flecked with cartilage formed onto a skewer grilled and dipped into their own sauce and dusted with ai nori, strictly one each.

Inside there is a bubbling pot full of the internal parts from the pig(motsu) it is said

that the same pot has been added to for decades on the taste remains since the opening day. This is served up in a bowl topped with a heap of Negi and you should without doubt top it with some hot pepper.

The original shop has changed over the years they closed some years back for the site to be redeveloped the briefly relocated to a portacabin in the adjacent street, somehow still keeping the atmosphere in a sterile environment, the customers make it! When the moved back it was not, the same somehow too new and they had a second floor, even with the same customer base It felt a little lacking in of what drew me there in the first place. I remember commenting the soul had escaped up the lift shaft.

Time and the patina of the smoke seems to have filled the missing soul and things are good once again.

The chefs when I first came were the fathers of the two waiters, the two waiters some how took a dislike of me, perhaps my lack of Japanese perhaps because I came almost every day.

Well I still Visit, and now the sons are the chefs, the fathers retired, and I think for my part I still annoy them. In an ever changing city at least one thing thankfully stays the same.

"Uosan in Monzen Nakatcho is a few stops away for a fish based shop with cheap prices and great atmosphere two in one night"



Tokyo

OK lets start with some districts. **Shibuya** the crossing It should be seen and walked across just well" because ! Can also be viewed from Starbucks, bag a window seat above the crossing and watch the madness.

Tomigaya IS cool for want of a better description kind of starting with **Fugulen** Norwegian café many branches worldwide . There are numerous food outlets for snacks takeaways and restaurants located here Path all day dining inc breakfast , **Camelback** sandwiches but not as you know them think sushi chef house in charge of a sarniel

Le Cabaret French bistro Japanese ethics.

did a pop up with Brawn when they came to Japan. **Wineshop flow** bottle shop and drinks natural wines. But the most popular/ best is **Ahuru** store small perfectly formed and busy, small bites to compliment the wines. If its busy and a Q maybe best to give it a swerve. Generally long wait.

Omotesando

Not so far from Shibuya some posh shopping and also it links into the youth district **Harajuku**, at the top Harajuku station end is a large park with **Meiji Jingu shrine** worth a visit. If on a weekend there is a farmers market along with food trucks **UNU farmers market**. Omotesando end also apple store and **Maisen Tonkatsu** and over the junction in the spiral building is **Sakurai tea** can be a little expensive if you go all out but nice experience if you like tea Some of the options include tea infused alcohol (now your talking)

Other interests Zoff if you need glasses frames at great prices and bearbrick art based bears cool and collectible **medicomtoy** +basement of Omotsando hills complex.

Tsukiji outer market

Other than the market and the temple opposite not a lot of features the outer market all that remains is a bit of a nightmare tourist world, lots of milling about and eating on the street and overpriced sushi and sashimi. A bit mad so visit at your own risk if you want to go make a plan is best. **Aritsugu Knives** are here they are not connected with **Aritsugu of Kyoto**

Ginza

Bond Street on steroids ! Along with the big department stores all the major brands are here along with some good restaurants, mostly hidden away hiding on upper floors of non-discreet buildings Hakkoku for instance.

Close by

There is a little gallery that sell woodblock prints mostly contemporary not expensive and you can browse online or pre order what you see **yosiedo gallery** they changed the

website a bit cranky now can only browse by artist?

Mitsukoshi and Waco are on opposing sides of the street both amazing stores , best thing of course is the food halls in the basement every type of food is there. like a Michelin supermarket plenty of samples they have and a few scattered restaurants too. The food halls not to be missed.

Shinjuku

I Never offer to meet someone at Shinjuku station unless they explain exactly what exit as there are over 200 .

In this area you will find the famous **Golden Gai** or **Omoide Yokochō** memory lane Piss street an ally filled with eateries and small bars. Not as imposing as you might think no guarantee anyone speaks English but after a few highballs we all speak the same language.

There are few large department stores in this district **Isetan Takashimaya** and notably **Don Quixote** which is a colourful retina burning experience full of everything you thought you never needed! Open 24 hours also in Osaka good place to stock up with kit kat
Close by is **Kabukicho** the entertainment district the old soho neon lit and on the right side of seedy :-> notice Godzilla peering over the top of the hotel at the end.

Roppongi

A bustling area with some interest a good bakery owns by a starred chef **Roppongi Midtown** a shopping mall and ritz carlton. Further down Roppongi Hills big shopping complex and also the **Mori building** which houses the Mori art museum which is worth visiting if the exhibition running is of interest and also some many storeys up is a viewing platform where you can see tokyo in all its glory

Tokyo 160.000 restaurants and counting , how can anyone navigate that ?
Im sure you are aware of **Tabelog** this is like trip-advisor without the fakery and bitterness, and is the best indication of quality and expectation met.

Any visit to Tokyo is always dominated by time, so many places on peoples lists like areas temples and restaurants museums etc.

So a strong plan and booking ahead will make it smooth and stop too many distractions , so easy to loose a day or two enjoying a particular place, such an enchanting fast-moving photographic city. There ends the preamble!

Japanese chefs take what they like from the rest of the world and turn it up to 11.
Burgers ,Pizza
Steak need I go on ?

The old Tokyo

Shibamata

Neon free, old style and mood driven a rather pleasant diversion from the madness of Tokyo a good retro Japanese sweet shop and grilled sticky rice balls from street vendors (dango)

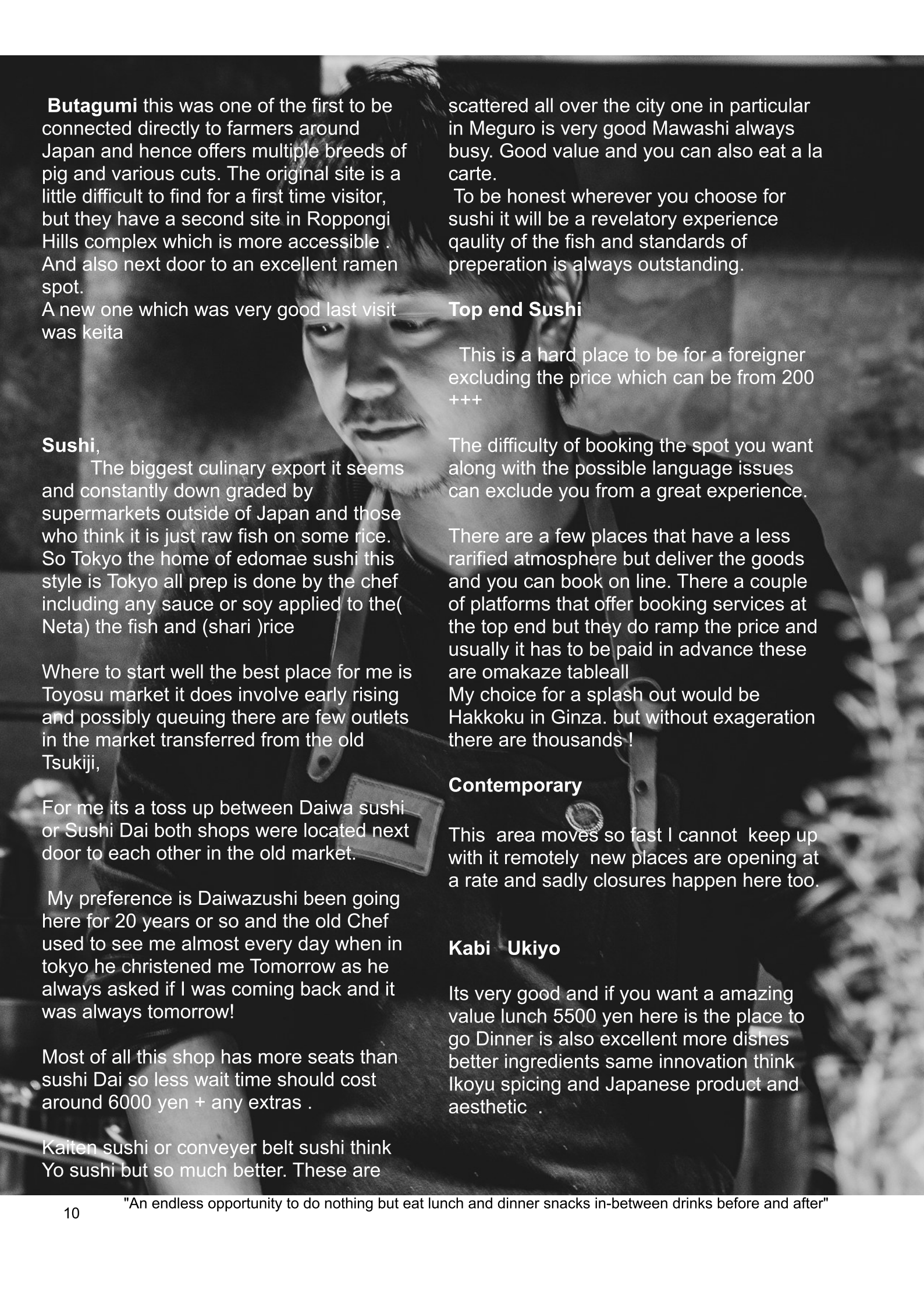
So General Recommendations

Old school Tonkatsu

Tonki

Pork cutlets or Tonkatsu
This is a old shop always busy fully open kitchen scrubbed wooden counter slightly odd opening hours but always good its not the best cutlet in town but it has mood and the patina of time about it and should be considered.

seems to start and on to the bond street of Tokyo Omotesando must to see and shop and some good eating to be had too



Butagumi this was one of the first to be connected directly to farmers around Japan and hence offers multiple breeds of pig and various cuts. The original site is a little difficult to find for a first time visitor, but they have a second site in Roppongi Hills complex which is more accessible . And also next door to an excellent ramen spot. A new one which was very good last visit was keita

Sushi,

The biggest culinary export it seems and constantly down graded by supermarkets outside of Japan and those who think it is just raw fish on some rice. So Tokyo the home of edomae sushi this style is Tokyo all prep is done by the chef including any sauce or soy applied to the (Neta) the fish and (shari) rice

Where to start well the best place for me is Toyosu market it does involve early rising and possibly queuing there are few outlets in the market transferred from the old Tsukiji,

For me its a toss up between Daiwa sushi or Sushi Dai both shops were located next door to each other in the old market.

My preference is Daiwazushi been going here for 20 years or so and the old Chef used to see me almost every day when in Tokyo he christened me Tomorrow as he always asked if I was coming back and it was always tomorrow!

Most of all this shop has more seats than sushi Dai so less wait time should cost around 6000 yen + any extras .

Kaiten sushi or conveyor belt sushi think Yo sushi but so much better. These are

scattered all over the city one in particular in Meguro is very good Mawashi always busy. Good value and you can also eat a la carte.

To be honest wherever you choose for sushi it will be a revelatory experience quality of the fish and standards of preparation is always outstanding.

Top end Sushi

This is a hard place to be for a foreigner excluding the price which can be from 200 +++

The difficulty of booking the spot you want along with the possible language issues can exclude you from a great experience.

There are a few places that have a less rarified atmosphere but deliver the goods and you can book on line. There a couple of platforms that offer booking services at the top end but they do ramp the price and usually it has to be paid in advance these are omakaze tableall

My choice for a splash out would be Hakkoku in Ginza. but without exaggeration there are thousands !

Contemporary

This area moves so fast I cannot keep up with it remotely new places are opening at a rate and sadly closures happen here too.

Kabi Ukiyo

Its very good and if you want a amazing value lunch 5500 yen here is the place to go Dinner is also excellent more dishes better ingredients same innovation think Ikoyu spicing and Japanese product and aesthetic .

Lunch at Kabi 10000 yen also good value veg focused good wines or you could go to Kome Kome sake place round the corner opens at 6pm and go to Kabi at 7-730

Denkushiflori

A shared owner restaurant Den 2* and Florilege 2* some skewered food but another bargain lunch with high standard and fun factor . We recently ate at the Bangkok branch Where Shimizu san presides the first head chef of this place.

Florilege

Kawate san is a force to be reckoned with having just relocated to a redeveloped area two whole city blocks redeveloped by Hetherwick studio new shops and buildings lunch can be had @ 11000 yen worth the trip and the new location and surrounding area book lunch spots hard to come by.

Den

I have been going since the early days in the previous location. And their pop up at kitchen table in London . Have been a couple of times in the new spot, food and service still fabulous but not quite as intimate as the old place they still maintain their strong sense of culinary humour Bookings by phone only

Salaryman spots

Cheap cheerful busy atmospheric tasty and a taste of real Tokyo.

Uosan in Monzen Nakacho been around since the 50s still going strong seafood and fish is their thing open from 4 and constantly busy onwards they have three floors but best is downstairs where the action is little bit of Japanese is helpful or just point at somebody else's food. Sashimi is good been cut from frozen so always super chilled fried oyster in season is always a go to massive oysters served with

mustard washed down with sake hot or cold!

Akitaya

A perennial favourite of mine. Pork and pork offal grilled over charcoal smokey busy open to the elements and the passing pedestrians, with a view of Tokyo tower all lit up just evokes the old town and I just cant get enough of it. But no English spoken or very little and it is what it is expect no luxuries except the food grilled pork trachea liver tsukune (minced pork sausage)get there early for that as they allow one each only . Motsu a pork innards stew always super good been cooking for 50 years topped with spring onions add some chilli to spice it up

Izakaya

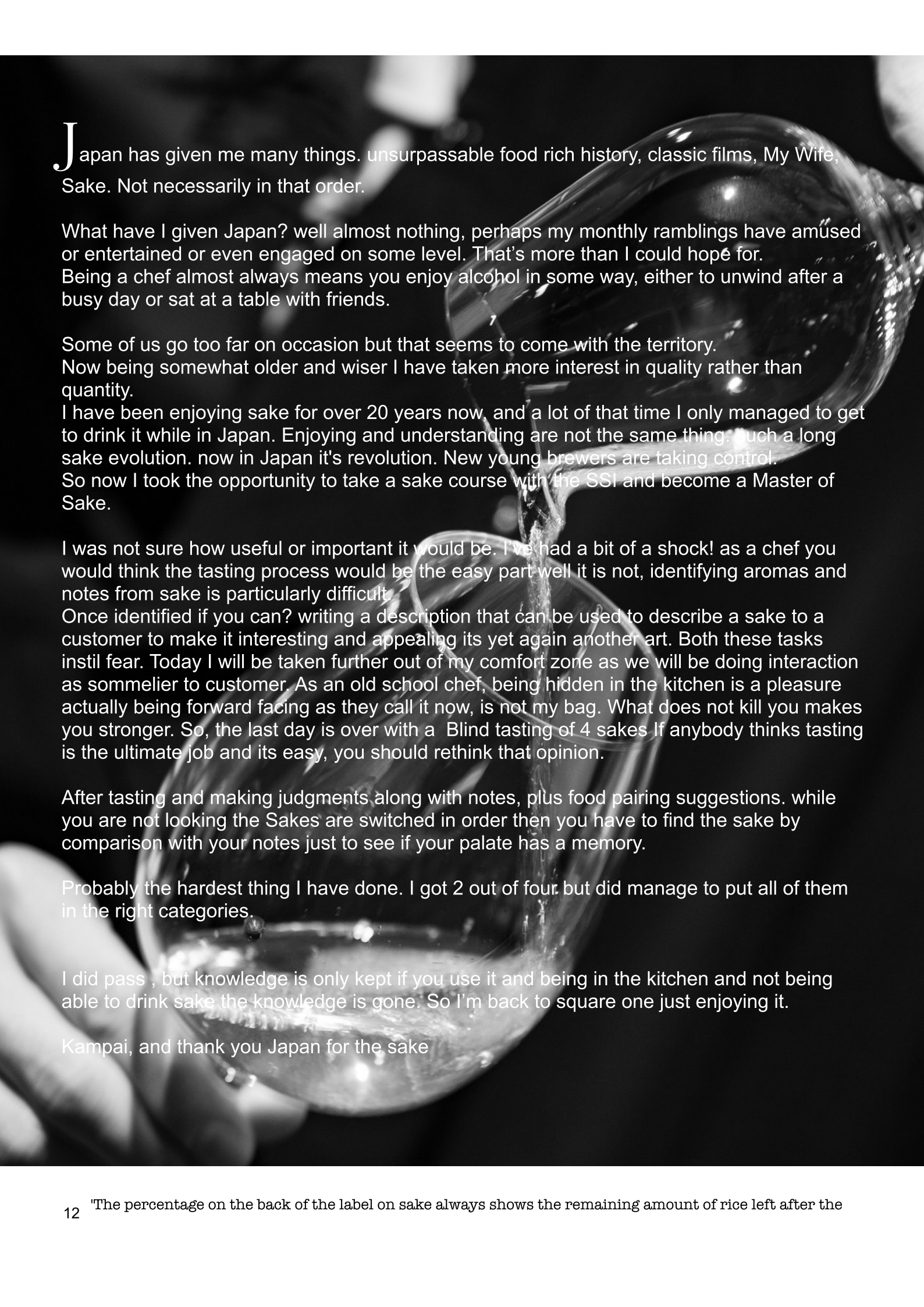
The lifeblood of Tokyo a pub with food for all intents lots of bar seating and some surrounding tables usually campaigning Sake although Beer is the most popular drink in Japan. Always atmospheric if you find a good one and they all seem to offer a few classics which can be best way to find your favourite, such as potato salad not to be scoffed at in Japan its culinary artistry and always good and of the scale.

Akaoni A real old school go to classic they carry some 100 sakes and its a train ride from Shibuya always good start with the sashimi platter and decent into a massive menu always busy best to book unless alone been a while since I visited but still reviews well.

Sakai Shokai

They have three shops this was the first to open celebrating their culinary history from Kyushu very good new style always busy and also their other places too.

They have a new spot the floor above called **Shizen** wood fired cooking and fermentation its super good.



Japan has given me many things. unsurpassable food rich history, classic films, My Wife, Sake. Not necessarily in that order.

What have I given Japan? well almost nothing, perhaps my monthly ramblings have amused or entertained or even engaged on some level. That's more than I could hope for. Being a chef almost always means you enjoy alcohol in some way, either to unwind after a busy day or sat at a table with friends.

Some of us go too far on occasion but that seems to come with the territory. Now being somewhat older and wiser I have taken more interest in quality rather than quantity.

I have been enjoying sake for over 20 years now, and a lot of that time I only managed to get to drink it while in Japan. Enjoying and understanding are not the same thing. Such a long sake evolution. now in Japan it's revolution. New young brewers are taking control.

So now I took the opportunity to take a sake course with the SSI and become a Master of Sake.

I was not sure how useful or important it would be. I've had a bit of a shock! as a chef you would think the tasting process would be the easy part well it is not, identifying aromas and notes from sake is particularly difficult.

Once identified if you can? writing a description that can be used to describe a sake to a customer to make it interesting and appealing its yet again another art. Both these tasks instil fear. Today I will be taken further out of my comfort zone as we will be doing interaction as sommelier to customer. As an old school chef, being hidden in the kitchen is a pleasure actually being forward facing as they call it now, is not my bag. What does not kill you makes you stronger. So, the last day is over with a Blind tasting of 4 sakes If anybody thinks tasting is the ultimate job and its easy, you should rethink that opinion.

After tasting and making judgments along with notes, plus food pairing suggestions. while you are not looking the Sakes are switched in order then you have to find the sake by comparison with your notes just to see if your palate has a memory.

Probably the hardest thing I have done. I got 2 out of four but did manage to put all of them in the right categories.

I did pass , but knowledge is only kept if you use it and being in the kitchen and not being able to drink sake the knowledge is gone. So I'm back to square one just enjoying it.

Kampai, and thank you Japan for the sake



Sake

You would think its everywhere in Japan well it is but some places have a better understanding of it than others . One such place is located just around the corner from

Kabi

Kome Kome

A one man shop he cooks food directly in front of you and has an array of sake. The difference here as most of the sake is a room temp and also aged. I was a revelation to say the least and I am a sake sommelier simple interesting food great drinking educational revelatory . Price can scale if very thirsty :-)

Eureka.

Used to be my first choice but I have been many times and have enjoyed to the max rare sakes and really well matched food this tradition still continues in the new location But now Marie san is the owner and still walks her own path for pouring and storing sake. It can get expensive here but you can set a budget for each, they will suggest sake and food the spam croquette is banging !



Shibuya crossing **Hachiko** just to see the swarms of people

Yoyogi park is close to Shibuya if you need some greenery

Teamlab multiple locations art experience

Meiji jingu shrine big shrine close to Omotesando and Harajuku so can be looped in for a day out.

Asakusa shitamatchi (under the castle) Senshoji temple lined with small shops up to the temple at the back are more interesting streets with small food vendors and an amusement park still trapped in the 1950s

Kappabashi chef town a multitude of shops with everything catering lots of knife shops here so overwhelming choice. Walking distance from Asakusa

Departo many big stores like Harrods populate Tokyo they are always a wonderland of food they usually also have restaurants in house too sometimes by big names at more convenient pricing. But the big deal is the food halls always in the basements a must visit.

Wako

Takashimaya

Mitsukoshi

Isetan

Daimaru

Akihabara or electric town the latest and greatest can be seen here TVs cameras etc But mostly the discount we enjoy in the UK are not always reflected in their pricing here so not such a good idea although you could factor in Tax free as long as you bring a passport week yen and tax for can get you a cheap iPhone but Not in the Apple store they don't offer that anymore. For a generally weird experience the area is populated with maid cafes . Overtly Kawaii (cute) service .

Ginza exclusive shopping and a place to people watch, good at the weekend as road is closed 12-6 pm Wako has its main store here and the window display is always amazing close to Christmas . Here also apple store lots of hi end restaurants usually hidden away. Ginza six is good store always a hanging installation in the massive six storey atrium . Basement yes food and drink ! Notably Imadeya a sake shop also down here is a whisky bar where the opportunity to drink Japanese whiskies can get expensive quickly :-)

Although buying a bottle whisky tax free does work out cheaper than UK . Sake is a bargain compared to UK. As a bonus there is a roof top garden.

Roppongi a few things of interest here notably coinciding with your visit is the Mori Museums **Roppongi crossing exhibition** showing new contemporary and veteran artists this is tri annually and I have managed a couple and they have always been amazing. Probably best to book ? Also there is a basement complex full of restaurants Butagumi Tonkatsu in particular

Nakano Broadway. Full of manga and vintage watch shops no amazing bargains I'm afraid but great browsing also plenery of hobbies shops vintage Godzilla and plastic characters will appeal to you if you have any otaku tendencies. There are plenty of side streets off the central area



dotted with Izakaya and various eating spots.

Glassware Japan does make some fantastic glassware micron thin beer glasses innovative whisky tumblers etc worth a look while you are there maybe even browse internet before you visit Kimura Kimoto the black Kiriko is great but is reflected in the price. Link

Tokyo Tower. Much like Paris this tower has become emblematic of its city. Strangely I have never been although I do look at it from my favourite salaryman restaurant Akitaya. I will rectify this in October. Also for the modern view SkyTree the new addition which I have

visited went late in the day to enjoy the night view one or both is worth it.

I'm sure you will have your own places to see but a reminder 37 million tourists last year and growing so booking hotels and restaurants can be troublesome and needs to be done as soon as possible in advance once your schedule is in place.

Skytree The new interpretation of Tall fast lifts and great views from a different part of Tokyo Both Tower come into their own at dusk sundown and into night.





Eating drinking and traveling around Tokyo is exhausting but rewarding. One trip will only prepare you for another.

It can be overwhelming , some people I have spoken to don't like its frenetic pace.

I do but that can easily be offset by a visit to a shrine or temple maybe one of the many parks.

"PERHAPS WITH A BENTO FROM A DEPARTO AND A ONE CUP SAKE, IT IS LUNCH AFTER ALL"

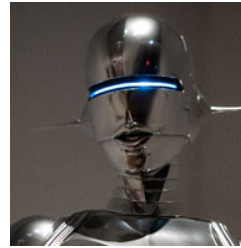
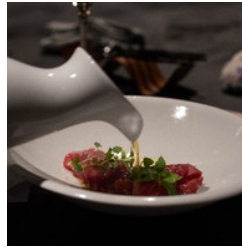
Or just get out of central Tokyo. There are many small districts especially if you enjoy an older aesthetic even some what should I call them? Hipster locations with smaller interesting bars cafe's and restaurants.

its just not the core of neon and masses of humanity Tokyo is a comprehensive area of around 13500 km and stretches to forests and mountains and islands off the coast. Daytrips ?



Trains planes and automobiles will transport you out of the city, the transport network is second to none efficient

T O K Y O



YOKOHAMA

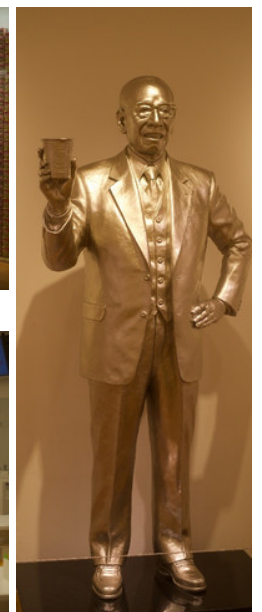
A 1 hour train ride from Tokyo will bring you to the port town of Yokohama. Famed for Chinatown. Which to my regret I have only just walked through.

Another highlight which I have visited was the Cup noodle museum Nissin brand the inventor Momofuku Ando is celebrated here.

This place blew up all thoughts of what to expect. It was fun and informative delving into the history method and the story of how this world dominating product came to be. They also have a canteen and a noodle factory where you can assemble your own cup noodle with thousands of combinations. It's truly great day out. Add Chinatown for lunch, or if you are there on December 1st you might be able to catch the Mooneyes custom show at Pacifico.



CUP NOODLE MUSEUM



fast clean but not so cheap but its still good value, and what small child in you, does not want to ride the shinkansen?

With the Hokuriku Shinkansen linking up Tokyo with Kanazawa in 2015 there has been an exponential rise in tourism in that area just two and a half hours from Tokyo. You will be rewarded with a change of scenery and a shift in the style of food. Kanazawa has much to offer an art museum good hotels and lodging, one of the best gardens in Japan a castle historic buildings and heaps of charm. Eating here is a pleasure Omicho Market is a hub of all things good the seafood offer here is just fantastic.

You can of course visit and graze from the stalls offering giant oysters Uni with their sweet briny essence, and many restaurants catering to tourists and locals.

Kenrokuen garden is big and fabulous in any season if you can catch it in full cherry blossom or the autumn leaves that is definitely a big win.

The samurai district is just that populated with ancient walls and a samurai house open to the public with a charming garden and a green tea offering on the top floor. Gaze at the multicoloured koi swimming in the garden zen out while sitting on the engawa I have visited many times it does not get old.

The Higashi Chaya District filled with old tea houses some still serving tea. A Geisha house open to view and some repurposed for eating and drinking this can be reached by bus or a leisurely stroll from the centre of town.

There are many hotels here and Ryokan from the entry level right up to world class with everything in between. If there are a few of you, renting a Machiya becomes very economical and a Wonderful very Japanese experience.

Kanazawa deserves your time, you could do the highlights in a day but you would be doing the city a disservice and yourself to boot. A

He has been lauded as the Jiro of the west :-)



couple of days will give time to properly immerse yourself in all it has to offer. Back to the important things food for instance.

The city does boast some really top restaurants on a global scale, these are known to the Japanese before the tourists came and they visit frequently as they are a food driven nation, that means bookings are at a premium and getting a spot has become very difficult in the last few years. a friend who is a regular can help if you are lucky enough to have that kind of contact or if you are staying at a distinguished lodging the concierge may have leverage.

There are booking sites that operate in English and offer a portal to those

restaurants, but sum charge quite large fee for the privilege and a mark up on the house price of the meal. The booking sites are Omakaze. Tableall and Pocket concierge. Tabelall seem to have a service charge of ¥ 8000 .

So what are the restaurants.

Well you could go Spanish **Respiración** they are creating waves right now . And you can book online

Kataori almost impossible

Tempura Koizumi visited a couple of trips ago very good

Komatsu Yasuke by phone worth going. The chef now well into his 80s is well respected not high end but the style and taste is worth the effort for a seat I have been a few times in my top five sushi in Japan

Zeniya visited 4 years ago chef was not in attendance so not sure if we got the full effect?

Ryōtei Suginoi Honami Old restaurant in classic building by the river a very reasonable priced lunch for super Kaiseki

Favorites:

Yasuke is in there

Itaru Honten I have been going there as long as I have been visiting Kanazawa and love the place found it by randomly staying at a little B&B almost next door. Local food proper cooking great sake and an exemplary host in Itaru San who is always there. Since this place opened he has branched out and now has two other eateries one specialising in Nodoguru (black throat Perch). I always go to Honten as a preference always busy so booking essential . Does accept walk inn just down to timing and luck.

I could just give a list of restaurants but others have dedicated whole books on the subject and this is not one of them, so its dig and discover!

There are many sushi ,unagi and various genres all around the city the best way to navigate is by using Tabelog website

Omicho Market

Not an evening spot but from early morning



Itaru San Offering Comfort



Komatsu Yasuke



plenty of choice grazing from the stalls the restaurants generally don't open till later. All life is here!

Kaga Onsen

A thirty minute train ride from Kanazawa will bring you to Kaga onsen, that being the hub of the area. There are four onsen towns in this area all different **Yamashiro Onsen**.

Katayamazu Onsen **Awazu Onsen**. Awazu does boast probably the worlds oldest hotel Ryokan **Hoshi** has been running for 1300 years I think they have probably nailed the hospitality thing by now! I dont think I have actually stayed at Kaga onsen, we have always gone to **Yamanaka onsen** which is a bus ride or Taxi away, purely as as a good memory we first came on our honeymoon. A gource runs through the town very picaresque along with being able to sit by the fast flowing river eating Japanese sweets and drinking green tea adds to the atmosphere . The town is proud of its Bath house located at its central square , or you could just enjoy the foot bath outside. There are many Ryokans dotted about some very luxurious with river view roof top bathing or outside baths where you can gaze at the borrowed scenery and hear the calming sound of birds and rushing water.

Nearly all provide wonderful in house dinners and breakfasts some times there can be a little sticker shock on the pricing , but remember you are getting an excellent room fine dining dinner and a substantial breakfast, separating that would be difficult and really not the same experience.

One of the places we love to go is **Washu Bar Engawa** a sake Bar a gem of a place just the bar owner Shimoki San and recently an addition of a chef just a few seats.he is a master of procurement for interesting sake. Not forgetting the vessels in with the drinks are served some from local artisans, turned wood and pottery all adding to the best experience, the food has of course played its part complimenting what is poured a must visit if in town closed on Thursdays this I found out after booking a hotel !

For a reasonable ryokan stay in Yamanaka onsen we chose Yamanaka Onsen Kagari Kisshotei for a good room with private hot spring water bath dinner and breakfast as of writing £385 for two. They also offer a shuttle bus from Kagaonsen station.

Its been many years since I visited **Takayama** but not so far from here can be reached by train in 2.5 hours, and just a bus ride away is the village of **Shirakawago** famous for the **gassho-zukuri** farmhouses with thatched very sharp angled rooflines to help dissipate the weight of snow that settles in the region. An overnight stay is possible in some of these houses .

EAT DRINK BATHE RELAX WANDER



The joys of Yamanaka Onsen



a fire in the middle of the house local foods , rich history and if you go in winter snow covered rooftops

**tempura
matsu** ➔



Kyoto

This is the Icon city along with Tokyo. When you disembark the train and enter into the cathedral like building you cannot fail to be impressed. When you leave the station and see the queues for the taxis or the people on the subway heading to their day out or the hotel of choice . You will understand how the city is being invaded by some of the 37 million who visited Japan in 2024. In high seasons . Festivals cherry blossom and turning leaves.

Hotel rooms are at a premium not necessarily price wise but availability. So booking well in advance is recommended .

Currently some parts of Gion are closed to non residents. Maiko stalking has reached epidemic proportions people following with the intention of taking a picture, it has caused issues The Maiko are usually not out for a stroll, they are going out to work and on a timed schedule the interference by some has caused personal distress and also caused lateness, which is frowned upon, this has resulted in the city council closing off the area, and there are fines in place to discourage.

"So there are a few downsides but the up do outweigh them".

If you are on a Japan food quest one of the must visits are:



THE STATE GUEST HOUSE





Nishiki market always madness the heart of Kyoto lots of stalls selling food and sake etc, sometimes trying to stop and look becomes impossible and you are pulled along like a river. A few places I always go firstly **Aritsugu** , If now only just to browse at all the knives. They are cash only so I don't bother anymore.

There is the **Kyoto State Guesthouse** built in the last few years to the highest standards with the best artisans. You need to book if it interests as its not open all year due to visiting dignitaries .

Kiyomizu-dera temple they have finally removed the scaffolding and now can be seen in all its glory just around the corner is **Il Ghiottone** Italian good Have been on 3 occasions .

The **Golden Temple** is the Photograph that everybody craves and yes its worth it. Set in gardens which include a tea area where you can drink Matcha and enjoy a small wagashi is recommended.

The **Silver temple** which is in fact not



the best artists and artisans from around the country, their best work is well represented here and as so worth a visit"

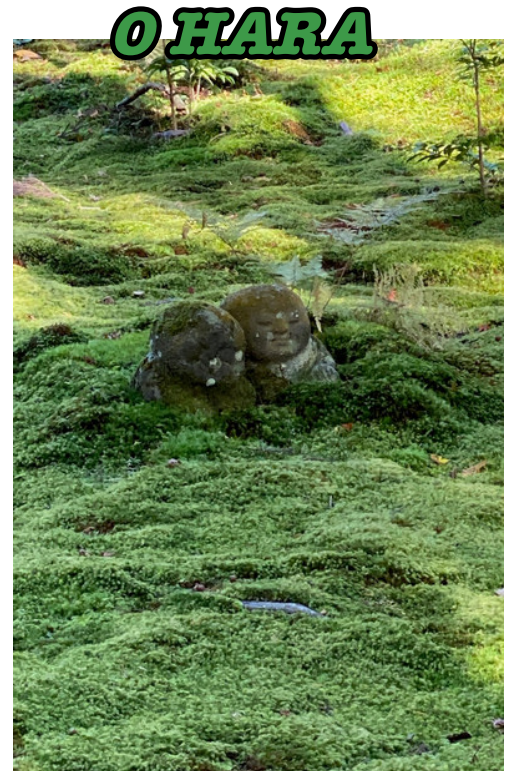
silver, but does have a modern stone garden and also a moss garden, there is a winding ascending walkway which give you a view of the Temple and grounds from a different perspective.

Kyoto Imperial Palace Is a Massive area and as name in decryption a Palace with extensive grounds with gardens building and a moat, an important part of Kyoto

There are many non hot spots where tranquility and beauty abound sometime just getting somewhere early can work in your favour.

For me **O Hara** just outside Kyoto city is worth the trip there is a good ryokan located amongst the proliferation of temples namely, Sanzenin Temple. Yes it does get busy but if you stay at the ryokan you have an advantage people leave to return to the city. Without accommodation so you are left in relative peace in morning and late afternoon. If you are a fan of moss like me the intense green of the surrounding gardens force you into a state of forest bathing calm and give that Japanese Zen moment you were searching for.

For those seeking an hot spring bath Kyoto is not so blessed, but travel outside there are a couple I can recommend the first in Kurama less than an hour from Kyoto has a rotemburo an outside bath, soaking in the hot spring water with a view over the boundary fence to the mountains in the distance , called borrowed scenery does instill calm and a red body when exiting, described as Tako or octopus which takes on a red hue when boiled.



If **Arashiyama** is on your list. Bamboo forest and Tenryu-ji, and the throngs of tourists if your body and feet have taken the toll perhaps a little extra walking can be rewarded by visiting Fufu no Yu a newly constructed Onsen facility not so far from the station, boasting indoor and outdoor baths. I normally go here after my day in the town followed by dinner at Tempura Matsu which is not really Tempura. Run by the son of the chef who was cooking Tempura, but now modern Kaiseki He worked for a time in France for Ducasse and again in Japan so you can expect fireworks and get them Cash only ! ¥ 30.000 +

Where to eat.

Kyoto Nishiki Market. **Stando**. this place has been here a long time looks like it kicked off in the 50s by the interior style. It has not changed original fixtures and fittings , that includes some of the staff I think. I love the exterior the font is just great has a unique charm. the fixed bench seating on one side with tiled walls and very interesting ceiling lighting. it remains stoic classic and very lovable always drop in for a beer and something to eat between meals. can't buy a vibe!

Upmarket Izakaya **Tsuneya**
Densuke our first visit last trip and



ARISHIYAMA



Tempura Matsu



Stando



Aritsugu



Tsuneya Densuke

would be on the top of our list this year mixed sashimi was superb. Along with every other dish.

Roan part of Kikono chef Murata 2* good for lunch hard booking but possible great value

Kitchisen

2* but you can get lunch very reasonably its Kaiseki and the chef is famous for defeating Iron Chef in a battle with conger eel. Presentation of the food is genuinely spectacular.

Monk

Situated on the philosophers path this is ostensibly a Pizza place. Netflix did a deep dive into the chef the food and philosophy and post that, it has been a hard booking I assume things may have calmed down since, quite a strong take here on the local and foraged, could well be a good diversion from too much sushi or Kaiseki.

Pontocho Masuda

The location is a giveaway in the name! Here it is Obanzai basically all the food is preprepared and put out on a raised counter in front of you. And although I think nobody speaks English it really is not needed at worst case just point very limited sake selection from one brewery as its the chefs Favourite but selection is good along with excellent food did I mention 1*

Honke Owariya

Tasty and old this soba restaurant opened its doors in 1465 and as such have definitely got things right good soba an amazing old building packed with character and customers, but a fast turnover so you can Geta walk in with a wait or book.

Nakahigashi

2* however it does have bargain lunch I have been 3 times and it is beyond good although if Japanese language is not your forte I think they can be booked through a portal site and lunch is around ¥ 10.000 and worth every yen , The chef has a good



' For culture and aesthetics Kyoto is hard to beat with gardens and iconic temples and shrines scattered about the city

humour and many ingredients are foraged from the mountains .Beautiful restaurant try to find a seat at the counter!

Kyogoku

Unagi or Eel something of a big thing in Japan said to have a cooling effect on the body in summer. But whatever season it is tasty. Here just off to side of Nishiki market is this historic spot boasting a 500 year history and much fresher Eel!

Tenjakju

Tempura 1* like all tempura shops in Japan there are no smells associated with the frying process just the release of a perfumed mist once you bite into the freshly fried morsel price here are not too excessive and can be booked through the Omakaze portal. You will need to take a city bus 51 or 46 30 mins.

Cocktails and Sake

I am fairly sure I have covered all the major food groups, but what to drink and where. Bars and barmen and women proliferate Japan and usually world class ir disappear in weird tangents with fermentation kombucha and unusual combinations.

But first lets mention **Sake**

So many options such little time for recovery !

Masuya Saketen

This small but perfectly formed bar is my go to for some youthful atmosphere, a great selection of sake, there are tables and standing tables scattered about, and you could settle in for the night as a good selection of sake snacks and some dishes of a little more substance are available.

Yoramu Sake

Run singlehandedly by and Israeli who became enamoured with Sake and opened this small bar just about 8 seats he offer a small ever-changing list of Sake of which he understands all the nuances and history of the brewery to boot some small snacks are available but some times if busy patience is needed as solo

Jam Sake bar

Just located north of Pontocho facing the Kamo river this place is the ground floor level of a hostel, they offer a list of over 30 Sake on a rotating basis and is generally good value I have been a few times never seems to be particularly busy , but I imagine later in the evenings its ramps up along with the atmosphere with no doubt a worldwide client mix from the hostel.

Cocktails

The first one nokishita711 cocktails but not as you know them certainly out on a liquid limb here. Cocktails made with flavour sources such as meat and fish insect and Plant. I have not been as yet, I do like a bit of adventure. Its a flat fee of ¥ 11.000 and reservations are required, if anybody can pull off the premise of this surely the Japanese?

Den @ the Dusit Tani

A somewhat more sober option, or maybe not if you take full advantage of the happy hour between 4pm -7pm classy comfortable with views of the garden.

Osaka' **Thank you** in Osaka dialect

If Tokyo is the head of the country Osaka is happy to be called the belly.

So much so are Osakans invested in their food culture a word often pops up "kuidaore" (喰倒), which translates to "eat until you go bankrupt" or eat until you drop along with more restaurants per capita than Tokyo. It has more Michelin per square mile although that is kind of an unfair comparison as Tokyo is much bigger but it wins on density !

This year with the Expo in Osaka although not at the centre of the city, but it will pull more people in . I can already see a spike in hotel prices covering the period of the expo. I actually went to last one in 2005 luckily I managed get a press pass and skipped the queues, It was very busy. I do not have enough time to visit this coming trip I'm sure ill get to see all of it due to some Vlogger so it will all work out in the end.

"There are localised foods here many which have taken a jump globally and are common in a lot of countries. "

Takoyaki Octopus balls well known as a street food filled with octopus cooked in a half moon steel mould they deftly turn the batter ending up with a perfectly formed sphere, then assemble in packaging sometimes bamboo containers coated with bulldog sauce criss-crossed with kewpie mayo and dusted with Aonori and shaved katsuobushi.



"I cant tell with a mouth full of burnt flesh"



" Dotobori bridge a gathering point for Osaka's youth and also for the jumping off the bridge when the local baseball team

“ Eat one straight from the vendor at your peril. The lava like contents will obliterate and blister your mouth.”

Okonomiyaki.

A savoury pancake cooked on a griddle mostly composed of a batter and cabbage which is cut up and added to the batter ‘lots of things can be added such as pork or shrimp and much customisation is possible. Many shops cook in front of you and your food is cooked and finished for you but a lot rely on customer interaction with a built in riddon on your table, being an ex chef my interaction can be done without on these occasions

Thdish is finished similarly to Takoyaki the bulldog is not bulldog sometimes house made but similar taste profile. There is a regional variant of this Hiroshimas variant adds noodles to the mix.

Kushikatsu

Particular to Osaka there are a lot of shops serving this delicacy , although to my mind not so delicate, perhaps one place can aspire to that with a bib gourmand Kushikatsu Gojoya they do an Omekaze they keep serving till you scream stop! And some quite innovative and railing against the norm.

But to be honest you should really start in the area which has the most and contains the reality of the genre **Don't Double Dip.** The area that is best is Shinsekai called "Kushikatsu Town" where the Tsutenkaku tower shadows the streets and Biliken is a God. More of that later.

Around 50 shops populate this area and they are busy right from opening in fact you will find queues outside the popular shops so if you have researched your favourite best to get there early. Each shop does general have a speciality so moving around can be fun.

Fugu

The poisonous Blowfish, people supposedly live in fear of getting a rogue portion and dying horribly. Firstly paralysis starts all over your body

KushiKatsu Home town



the tigers win a championship sometimes ending with fatal consequences"

ending with complete paralysis while remaining conscious, then slowly or quickly your organs will start to fail ending of course with your demise the tetrodotoxin having worked its deadly magic. This of course was the hook and the reason for its popularity Bravado of the diner. The chefs of old had to be licensed to prepare the fish and strict training and rules were involved even locked waste containers and specialist collectors of the waste, so contamination was eradicated. I have eaten fugu a few times and it hold no magic for me , its a fairly inner flavoured fish and is only boosted by the accompanying side dishes and grated chilli daikon, in high end shops of course its presentation is at the fore particually when its presented in the style of a a crane .



So now some myth busting so many places not just speciality shops now offer fugu. Not needing the skilled chefs, oh so they buy in from a skilled chef? No a clever scientist has worked out how to farm and out the toxin completely by controlling the diet of the fish. So in the chain places you can be sure they are using this most likely but the high end chef lead still the hard way .

Why am I telling you this nearly all pictures you see of Osaka feature the hanging lantern of a fugu shop and fugu is a city favourite .For my taste if I am going to eat I favour Tempura.

Doteyaki

My Wife being Japanese and a woman always follows her skin care, and it seems collagen is the holy grail for this. I am not sure she has eaten this but it contains Beef tendon slow cooked over many hours resulting in a gelatinous texture and deep flavour the broth contains miso and mirin a some soy sauce the addition of daikon (radish as textual and vegetable ingredient add to the package) not forgetting Konyaku a set product kind of like arrowroot but with some roughage included and it does not break down during cooking so keeps its gelatinous texture.



