

Exploring the World of Japanese (Kyoto) Cuisine

Japanese food has gone global. Sushi and ramen have become international fast foods, which is to say they are now almost as common to us as pizza or doughnuts. Still, one of the greatest appeals of Japanese cuisine is its promise of a healthier diet. This is increasingly a concern in an overfed and undernourished society where many of us have forgotten the pleasures, as well as the hard work, of cultivation and food preparation, not to mention dining as a form of communion, with both family and our larger communities. Despite its “exoticism,” Japanese cuisine can have much to teach us about eating locally, seasonally, and ethically.

Along with French and Mexican cuisine, Japanese cooking (*washoku*) has been designated world heritage status by UNESCO. Japan’s highly refined cuisine, based on the freshest ingredients, light and simple seasonings, and exquisite presentation, has been an overwhelming influence over many of the world’s greatest chefs. Several have studied under Japanese masters like Murata Yoshihiro of Kyoto’s Kikunoi restaurant. Today, Japan is also a leader in fine international dining. Japanese chefs and sommeliers travel the world to train.

This course will look at the history of Japanese cuisine and show how the country’s obsession with eating well anticipated the global slow food movement and our age of celebrity chefs. Last but not least, Kyoto has been the mecca for Japanese cuisine for over a thousand years, and we are perfectly situated to explore its mysteries and delights. We will be visiting a variety of places in Kyoto associated with its unique food culture and savouring some of their products.