

Umami summit in KYOTO Event Report

29th December, 2008
Non Profit Organization
Umami Information Center

100 Years of Umami: Centenary Event: Umami Summit in Kyoto

Dr. Kikunae Ikeda, the man responsible for discovering the scientific secrets behind the umami taste, was born and bred in Kyoto, so it was only fitting that the events scheduled to celebrate the 100th anniversary of his groundbreaking discoveries be held in his hometown. Organized at the suggestion of Daisaku Kadokawa, Mayor of Kyoto City, the Umami Summit in Kyoto was held from 30th November until 8th December 2008. The summit was sponsored by Kyoto City, the Kyoto City Board of Education, and the Umami Information Center, amongst others, and featured a range of events celebrating a centenary of umami, from cooking classes to public lectures, through to seminars and lessons on dietary education.

Main Program:

23rd November, 2008 Family Umami Cooking Class

30th November – 7th December, 2008

Japanese Culinary Fellowship/Open Workshop

6th December, 2008 Umami Open Lecture “Umami’s secrets”

8th December, 2008 Dietary Education Class
(Kyoto Hiyoshigaoka High School)

Organizers:

Kyoto City, Kyoto City Board of Education,
Kyoto City Association for nutritional education
Japanese Culinary Academy (NPO)
Umami Information Center (NPO)

Sponsors:

Ajinomoto Co., Inc.

Okui Kaiseido Co., Inc.



The flyer of this event

1. Umami Open Lecture Silk Hall, Kyoto Sangyo Kaikan on 6th December , 2008

The Umami Open Lecture held on 6th December was opened by Daisaku Kadokawa, Mayor of Kyoto City. His comments were followed by a keynote speech, “The Global Popularity of Japanese Cuisine”, from Yoshihiro Murata, owner and chef of the famed Kikunoi restaurant in Kyoto, and Director of the Japanese Culinary Academy. Mr. Murata has long been engaged in the promotion of traditional Japanese food and culinary techniques both throughout Japan and overseas, placing particular emphasis on the importance of dashi and its role in imparting the umami taste to Japanese cuisine. He explained how recent years have seen a sharp rise in the interest shown in umami by non-Japanese chefs working overseas. Brandishing a sheet of kombu, one of the key ingredients of dashi, in his hand, he told the audience that “umami, the fifth taste after sweet, sour, salty and bitter, is a tradition of which Japan can be justly proud. We should push forth in introducing it to the rest of the world, and I am sure that the next few years will see a global explosion of interest in this taste”.



Mr. Daisaku Kadokawa,
Mayor of Kyoto City

This keynote speech was followed by a round-table talk, entitled “Umami’s secrets: what the world wants to know”. Chaired by Professor Tohru Fushiki of the Division of Food Science and Biochemistry at the Graduate School of Agriculture, Kyoto University, the panel comprised three leading Japanese chefs : Kunio Tokuoka, Executive Chef at the Arashiyama Honten branch of Kyoto Kitcho, Kiyomi Mikuni, Chef Patron at Hotel de Mikuni, and Yasuhiro Sasajima, Chef Patron at Il Ghiottone. Dr. Fushiki opened with a brief description of the etymology of umami, explaining that in Japan, umami can be written in two ways: when written using the phonetic alphabet, umami means the scientific taste that Dr. Ikeda first discovered 100 years ago, and when written using Chinese ideograms, however, umami simply means a “delicious taste”, and it is the former of these homonyms that has now become a culinary buzzword across the world. He went on to describe how whilst the flavours associated with umami differ according to country and region, the actual taste itself is universal, being identical throughout the entire world.



Mr. Yoshihiro Murata

The three guest chefs then talked about their views on umami, and about how they used the umami taste to their advantage in their respective fields of Japanese, French and Italian cuisine. They also talked about the reactions to umami they had encountered from chefs overseas. Mr. Tokuoka talked about his experiences at the New Frontiers of Taste: Umami Symposium held in San Francisco, USA, in July, Mr. Mikuni about his involvement in the so-called “Umami Team” of junior Japanese chefs who triumphed at the 2008 Culinary Olympics held in Germany in October, and Mr. Sasajima about presenting Italian cuisine that made use of kombu dashi, usually associated with Japanese food, at the Identità Golose, held in Milan in January. Their honest and entertaining anecdotes created a relaxed atmosphere, in which the attention of the crowd was held without pause. The discussion then moved onto the potential for greater knowledge and manipulation of the umami taste in the future, with Dr. Fushiki commenting that, “umami is not just about providing delicious food to the world community; I think it’s got more potential than that – by having our children learn about and experience umami, in the future they will be able to contribute to the development of food, and help improve the health of the global community”.



From left, Dr. Fushiki,
Chef Tokuoka, Chef Mikuni
and chef Sasajima

The talk was brought to a close after around an hour, and was followed by a documentary tracing the discoveries made by Dr. Ikeda about the scientific composition of umami. The extensive and information program kept the audience of 700 guests rapt throughout.

In addition, the venue hosted booths run by the sponsors and other supporters, where guests could try a taste of kombu dashi, learn more about the activities being undertaken to encourage better dietary education, and find out about the various events happening around the globe to celebrate umami. All this allowed guests to really get a sense of the broad influence and impact of umami.



UIC exhibition booth

2. Japanese Culinary Fellowship Workshop
Joint sponsors: Japanese Culinary Academy (NPO)
UMAMI Information Center (NPO)
On 7th December, 2008

A public workshop, part of the 4th Japanese Culinary Fellowship, was held at the Kyoto Chorishi Senmon Gakko Culinary College on 7th December. The Japanese Culinary Academy was established in 2004, with the dual goals of encouraging the development of Japanese cuisine, and contributing to the global dissemination of information on Japanese cuisine, as well as cultural and technical research in the field. Since being established it organizes a fellowship program and currently runs exchange and dietary education programs for young overseas chefs on a regular basis. This year's fellowship course was held as part of the Umami Summit in Kyoto program of events with co-organizers as the Umami Information Center and the Organization to Promote Japanese Restaurants Abroad and saw five renowned young chefs, working in the USA, the UK and France, come to Japan to enhance their knowledge about Kyoto cuisine through an integrated approach that included receiving instruction in the kitchens of some of the finest traditional restaurants in the country, learning about the tea ceremony, and visiting traditional agricultural producers. Course content was devised with a view to developing the chefs' overall knowledge about the climate, customs and traditions that have shaped Japan's culinary culture, in which umami plays such an important role.

The public workshop was scheduled for the final day of the fellowship program. Each chef was charged with producing a single dish that encompassed everything they had learnt during their instruction in Japan, and, as might be expected, each managed to come up with a fascinating, umami-rich culinary creation.

•Michael Anthony, Gramercy Tavern, USA

Using ingredients seasonal to Kyoto in the winter, such as snow crab, yuzu citron, and kintoki ninjin carrots, Michael created a colourful snow crab salad, accompanied by an dashi based umami-rich dressing.

•David Chang, MOMOFUKU, USA

Having used both kombu and bacon – umami-rich ingredients representing Japan and the West respectively – to draw out an intense stock, David then added seasonal Japanese vegetables, rich in umami, such as Japanese mustard leaves and kyo ninjin carrots, to create an impressive soup brimming with fresh, local flavour.

•Mauro Colagreco, Mirasour, France

Mauro combined seasonal Kyoto vegetables, such as Shogoin turnip, red turnip and kyo ninjin carrots, with French winter vegetables, such as the romanesco cauliflower, into a base of ichiban (primary) dashi and white miso, to create a mellow soup with intense flavours, successfully marrying umami-rich flavours from both East and West.

•Sat Bains, Restaurant Sat Bains with rooms, UK

Sat selected a variety of ingredients of varying colour and texture, such as pork, large prawns, cauliflower and persimmon, to create an elaborate dish seasoned with kombu dashi, yuzu citron, and Marmite, a British condiment rich in umami taste.

•Claude Bosi, Hibiscus, UK

Claude produced an imaginative dessert, combining a myriad of Japanese ingredients to make yuzu citron-flavoured ice cream with a hint of wasabi, a vivid strawberry sauce, a croustillant made with broad beans and wasanbon sugar, and Japanese pears, accompanied with a dressing created by a vacuum cooking technique that drew out the various flavours brilliantly.



The workshop's venue



The dishes by chefs; from top, Chef Anthony, Chef David Chang, Chef Colagreco, Chef Bains and Chef Bosi

After sampling the dishes created by each of the five chefs, guests were then treated to a panel discussion on “Japanese food and umami: the unique and the universal”. The chefs talked about what they had discovered about umami during their fellowship, and this was followed by a lively exchange of views on what the future might hold for umami and umami-rich cuisine. The chefs who had been training the team of youthful overseas chefs could not hide their surprise at the ability of their charges to absorb and assimilate information and knowledge on umami.

Mauro Colagreco, visiting from France, invited warm applause from the crowd when he said, “I don’t think that umami is something uniquely Japanese that Japan has transmitted to the rest of the world. It’s true that perhaps the West was not conscious of the umami taste, but I think that now recognition for umami is widening, and it’s now being used in cuisine to a great extent.” The discussion ended with each chef offering his concluding remarks on what had been achieved during the fellowship, drawing a fitting close to the symposium.



Panel Discussion



From left,
Chef David Chang,
Chef Claude Bosi,
Chef Sat Bains,
Chef Mauro Colagreco,
Chef Michael Anthony

3. Dietary Education Class **Hiyoshigaoka Municipal High School, Kyoto** **on 8th December 2008**

To round off the series of centenary summit events, Sat Bains and Claude Bosi, two of the Japanese Culinary Academy’s fellowship chefs, oversaw a “Dietary Education Class” for local high school students. 40 2nd year students at Hiyoshigaoka High School saw their usual English language class substituted for a conversation class with a twist – they were given the chance to listen to two talented young chefs talking about how they came to choose cooking as a profession, what they had experienced in Kyoto, and what they felt about umami, as well some of their culinary secrets and their approach to their chosen profession – all in English, of course.



Claude Bosi shows the students his umami-rich dish

Making full use of everything they had learned during their fellowship, the two chefs spent the first hour in the school’s audio-visual room, talking to the students about umami, and having them taste tomatoes and kombu stock, to increase their understanding of the principles of umami. For the second hour, students and instructors moved to the home economics classroom, where the chefs prepared some original umami-rich food, and presented it to the students to savour. Sat’s dish was “Pork with Marmite”. He lightly sautéed sliced pork belly meat that had been slowly vacuum cooked at a low temperature in kombu dashi for 24 hours, then combined it with Marmite, a British condiment, a yeast extract paste extremely rich in umami, to further draw out the umami taste. Claude made “Cheese on Toast”, using Worcestershire sauce, a British liquid condiment, again rich in umami, that he brought from the UK especially for the lesson. He loaded up bread with two types of cheese, Cheddar and Parmesan, sprinkled the cheese with the sauce, and toasted the bread lightly. The students were able to enjoy the umami-rich dishes conjured up by the young chefs, during a class that was both instruction and enjoyable.



Sat Bains demonstrates the students his umami-rich dish

The entire two-hour session went extremely well, thanks to the dedication of the two chefs. The chefs talked about deliciousness and about umami taste, whilst the students had plenty of questions about food in the UK and the daily life of a chef – all in English, with no interpreters necessary. In addition to these activities, the Summit also held “Umami Cooking for Families”, a cookery class where families could enjoy learning how to make dashi from some leading Japanese chefs. The class was well attended by parents and children, who certainly appeared to enjoy tasting and learning about umami.

The Umami Summit, held over nine days in Kyoto, managed to celebrate not just the discovery of the scientific make-up of the umami taste, but also represented an exciting opportunity for each citizen of Kyoto, as a family, through their school, or as part of the local community, to think about the importance of food and diet and of the crucial role played by umami. It also represented a platform for meaningful communication between Kyoto chefs and culinary professionals from Western countries, where they could exchange and share views and learn from one another.

Umami Information Center (Non Profit Organization)

Umami was discovered in 1908 by the Japanese scientist Dr. Kikunae Ikeda, making 2008 the centenary anniversary of its discovery. The Umami Information Center (UIC) was established in 1982, with the support of The Umami Manufacturer's Association of Japan, in order, to promote the global spread of information on umami. Following its establishment, in April 2007, in order to safeguard its neutrality and ensure its fairness and openness, the UIC has been accredited by a Tokyo Metropolitan Governor of the appropriate office as a Non Profit Organization (NPO).

The UIC is dedicated to the spread of accurate and beneficial information concerning umami within Japan and throughout the rest of the world.

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