



Awakened to Washoku after a Visit to Osaka—“The Kitchen of Japan” Chef Embraces Japanese Culture and Adopts a Japanese Name

Joe Kimura (Scotland)

Born in Scotland to parents who were both talented at cooking, Joe Kimura dreamed of becoming a chef since he was a child. When his parents moved to France, he enrolled in a culinary school there to learn traditional French cooking, later polishing his skills at restaurants in France and England, including under renowned English chef Gordon Ramsay. Kimura has held an interest in Japan ever since participating in a cultural exchange with Japanese students when he was in elementary school. He says that he first tasted true washoku upon visiting Osaka—considered “the Kitchen of Japan”—in 2006. Interestingly, the first thing he ate there was takoyaki. “The octopus was still alive and it seemed to be dancing on the teppan grill. I was taken aback, but the takoyaki was delicious,” says Kimura with a laugh.

Throughout his two-month stay in Japan, Kimura was surprised at just how different washoku was compared with what he had tasted in England. For example, sushi in London uses a wide variety of ingredients, but in Japan, sushi is very simply made from rice and neta, yet intensely delicious all the same. Determined to learn more about washoku, Kimura returned to England and gained further experience at Japanese restaurants such as Nobu London Old Park Lane, which is known for its creative washoku cuisine. In learning the basics of washoku, one aspect that made a distinct impression on Kimura was the handling of knives. “In the West, we don’t have the same respect toward tools, so chefs aren’t trained on how to properly maintain and handle knives.”

Kimura was originally a nickname given to him by the chef of a Japanese restaurant, upon seeing his embrace of washoku and Japanese culture. Kimura says that he feels like he is one-third Japanese, and two years ago, he officially changed his last name to “Kimura.” In 2015, he moved to Denmark to open Oiran, a Japanese cooking school in the nation’s capital of Copenhagen. He chose Denmark over his native England due to the ready access to seaweeds in Denmark including konbu, an essential washoku ingredient. Kimura also felt that Scandinavian cuisine, which emphasizes simplicity and quality ingredients, shared a common thread with washoku.

Kimura’s entry for the World Washoku Challenge 2016 is a preparation of saba no misoni with apple, ginger, and winter vegetable. Saba no misoni is a staple dish using mackerel, and was chosen by Kimura knowing that the contest was being held in the winter, when the flesh of mackerel is at its richest. The mackerel is garnished with thin apple slices to resemble a fin, creating an eye-pleasing dish that strikes a balance between the richness of the mackerel and acidity of the apple. Kimura says he experimented with several different types of apples to achieve the best taste.

In 2017, Kimura will publish a book on Japanese cooking. He is looking forward to expanding his knowledge of washoku by meeting more Japanese chefs, and teaching people in the West about true washoku.



Saba no misoni with apple, ginger, and winter vegetable