

Kitchen Ohana – A Healthy Lifestyle

[Fadyly Agustimahir]

“You are what you eat”. That is how the proverb goes. Becoming vegetarian is one of many ways to maintain your health. Sometimes I think, “is vegetarian food delicious enough?” It is healthy, for sure. But is it delicious too? Maybe I am not the only one who has thought this before.

Also, vegetarians eat vegetables. Vegetables are grown by farmers. Have you ever thought to create a business while working with farmers around you? This is an article about Kitchen Ohana, a restaurant has done just that.



About the place

As a Muslim, I need to eat halal food. As there are limited halal restaurants around Yamanashi, I have been trying to find vegetarian food instead. In early winter, I came to a vegetarian restaurant and café in Hokuto: Kitchen Ohana.

This restaurant only offers lunch time service and prepares only 20 meals a day. This is because the owner is also a chef who makes all the dishes and appetizers by himself.

Kitchen Ohana is open for lunch from 11:30 until 15:00, and as a café until 17:00. However, the owner says dinner may be added as an option in a few years.

There is a traditional stove using lumber located in the corner near the main entrance. Here, guests can choose to dine in a

western-style room or a Japanese-style room. This is a nice place to relax and take time out from the bustling city. This place was built from an old Japanese house, remade into its current magical form by the owner.

Until now, the usual customers are those who live around the restaurant, coming regularly. Sometimes there are also foreign tourists who come by themselves or on group visits arranged by travel agencies.



Today's Plate

About the dishes



The main concept for dishes here is 'macrobiotic'. It is said that this concept comes from Zen Buddhism and then spread across the world to Japan. The concept consists of balancing the nutrients in a dish by using grains, fresh seasonal vegetables, seaweed, and fermented food.

But there is only one item on the menu here. That is the *Ohisama* dish—which means sun dish—the name for a plate with seven different foods to enjoy, accompanied by a bowl of delicious brown rice and some

miso soup. This plate is named the sun dish because around 80% of the ingredients are supplied by organic farmers around the Mt. Yatsugatake area, whose harvest depends on the weather, controlled by the sun.

So, even though the menu name remains the same, the composition of this dish is always different, depending on each season's vegetable harvest. The appetizers also differ based on the season.

On that day, my *Ohisama* plate contained green salad with carrot dressing, broccoli onion sauce, chili beans, a veggie meat ball, wheat veggie meat cutlet, radish & rice curd (grilled sticky rice), pumpkin salad, and falafel with green apple spice sauce. This menu is also served with a bowl of miso soup and brown rice that can be refilled as much as you like. I was most impressed by the freshness from the green apple spice sauce on the falafel and the savory onion oil on the broccoli, created by the owner himself.

After eating lunch, I ordered a few desserts from the menu: no-egg veggie custard pudding, malon bonet, miso & walnuts poundcake with rice milk ice cream, and homemade red shiso soda.

The owner takes great pride in the fact that he was finally able to make a pudding without milk or eggs. It has a nice, subtle taste—not too sweet—perfect for the Japanese palette.

Chestnut bonet is a chocolate pudding used as a traditional dessert in Italy. Unfortunately, I could not eat the chestnut bonet as it contained alcohol, so I had my friend, Brandon, try it. Verdict: delicious!

The miso and walnut pound cake, served with rice milk ice cream, has a thick texture. The pairing of sweet and savory was unique, and felt good as I chewed my way through.

The last dessert, Homemade Red Shiso Soda was a unique flavor for me. Before I came here, the 100% shiso juice I had tried really tasted like medicine: quite bitter and strong. But this one was different: not strong, a little bit sour, and refreshing. Maybe I should come here again next summer to experience that fresh taste again!



About the Owner.

Business for self-sufficiency, not for wealth. Doing your best as much as you can. Contributing to others. Isn't that an interesting approach?

Before starting his very own restaurant in Hokuto City in Yamanashi Prefecture, Daisuke Ishino, originally from Niigata, worked at restaurants in Tokyo and many other places, gaining experience and learning from others.

There is one interesting story from his working experience at a fossil fuel free restaurant. They generated and used their own renewable energy via sources like solar panels. Because of the limitations of these energy sources, all workers in the restaurant had to bear in mind how much and how efficiently they used energy. They had to work while monitoring the energy meter display, with the restaurant manager warning everybody if they used too much energy.

It is very important to him to create dishes that are suitable for vegetarians or those who have special dietary restrictions for health or religion reasons. He does his best to ensure that his dishes are edible for many people.



Unfortunately, because his dishes are French-based vegetarian dishes, it is almost impossible to cook without onion, garlic, or any of their derivatives. In other words, using his cooking techniques, it is difficult to prepare dishes for oriental vegetarians.

Choosing Hokuto City to build his restaurant was not an accident; vegetables are the main ingredient for his dishes, so he wanted to be located as close as possible to the vegetable farmers to ensure freshness and quality. According to him, organic farmer numbers in Hokuto city—surrounded by the Yatsugatake mountain range—are three to four times more than anywhere else, boasting high numbers of high-skilled farmers as well.

In other words, the purpose of building a business away from the city was to help develop the region. 50% of this restaurant's ingredients are bought directly from the farmers, with different vegetables for each season while maintaining the same price on restaurant menu. The farmers also as benefit as well. Though the vegetables may change, no matter the season, the price is the same, and the farmers share in the profits.

Because the owner is only able to serve 20 portions a day, he asks that you please make a reservation via phone first before coming, to make sure there is still a dish left for you that day!



This is Fadly's first time in Japan, coming from Indonesia and bringing his wife and two children with him! He is experiencing new challenges as a Muslim in Japan, but it is so far an interesting change in lifestyle. He and his family go to the Prefectural Library once every two weeks to borrow picture books for the children, so they can learn both Japanese and English. He is looking forward to exploring Yamanashi with his family!

