

Lunch for Monday, September 17

Gontaro

The premises of Gontaro are a 15-min. walk from the Yachiyo ryokan and offer old, traditional atmosphere together with Japanese noodle and rice dishes. Past the impressive old gate, there is a small tea ceremony room and a garden. Western table seats (for about 16 people) look out on to the garden. Then there is a large L-shaped tatami seating area on the ground floor and two large tatami rooms on the second floor. The service is fast and friendly. A good selection of *a la carte* dishes (noodle or rice dishes) and a variety of Kyoto-style courses consisting basically of soba or udon noodles, pickles and soup are offered at reasonable prices, ranging from ¥800 to ¥1,200. Tel: 751-7880.

Dinner options for Monday, September 17

Mishimatei: Sukiyaki beef cuisine

This is really the one choice for sukiyaki (stir-fried beef, vegetables and noodles) in Kyoto. In the heart of the downtown shopping district, Kyoto housewives line up out front to pay premium prices for Mishimatei's high-quality beef, sold by the kilogram over the counter at the meat shop downstairs. Mishimatei was established in 1904, and climbing the staircase of this traditional wood-frame restaurant with its turn-of-the-20th-century atmosphere is like journeying into the past. Down the long dark corridors with polished wood floors, kimono-clad servers bustle about with trays of beef and refills of sake to dozens of private tatami-mat rooms. Ask for a room that faces the central courtyard garden for the best view. Tel: 221-0003.

Kushikura: Skewered chicken

Kushikura, which specializes in a kind of cuisine called kushi (grilled food served on bamboo skewers), has lots of loyal foreign fans. The building, housing Kushikura, which is more than 100 years old, is characterized by its authentic machiya or townhouse style. Each of its nine interior rooms have been preserved in their original form. The tatami rooms overlooking Kushikura's three small gardens are particularly recommended. One room has a long counter where you can watch chicken being roasted. Skewered roast chicken (of all kinds and cuts), prepared over a charcoal fire, is the most popular menu item at Kushikura. *A la carte* items start at ¥300 (two skewers per serving). Their Kushikura Course (¥3,000), which comes with chicken soup, seven two-skewer servings, one chicken dish, a salad, rice, miso soup and dessert, is a great deal. Kushikura is also known for its wide range of reasonably-priced sakes. Tel: 213-2211.

Yanagiya Honten: For great sushi

Yanagiya Honten has been serving the finest sushi and Japanese cuisine since it opened in 1925. The third generation sushi master, Mr. Yanagisawa, is an avid practitioner of the Japanese ceramic arts and the tea ceremony. Yanagiya Honten serves an excellent range of seasonal sashimi (raw fish) delicacies, and the favourite of foreigners (the menu here, by the way, is written in English) around the world: nigirizushi (hand-shaped rice on which various ingredients are placed, often with a bit of hot, green wasabi horseradish). Nigiri favorites include: toro (top cut tuna; seasonally priced), ebi (¥250, shrimp), hamachi (¥250, yellow tail), anago (¥250, sea eel). In the winter season, they also serve hearty fish hot pots (kue nabe) and the favourite of fish connoisseurs: blow fish sashimi! At night, especially recommended are the nigiri courses: Tokujo Nigiri Sushi (¥3,300; 8-10 pieces of raw fish on hand-shaped rice), Goku-jo (¥3,800; like the previous course but better) and Nami (¥2,200; the regular version of Tokujo). Other tenshin set courses (with salad, sushi, soup, dessert) are all ¥2,850. There are also Hamo (conger eel), Tai (sea bream) and Kyoto classic cuisine courses. Tel: 221-1327.

Yoshikawa: Tempura in an exquisite Japanese setting

Yoshikawa is one of Kyoto's finest traditional inns. The entrance's classical, dignified appearance makes visitors feel they are in old Kyoto. Even better is their interior garden that takes up a third of the inn's land. Yoshikawa specializes in tempura, one of the world's most popular Japanese dishes. Tempura dinners (¥6,000), which include 13 different pieces of fish, meat and vegetable tempura, plus rice and soup are served in a tatami room or at their Western-style tempura counter near the entrance. Tel: 221-5544.