



OIDEYASU!

MAHALO! TO GOOD HEALTH

Finding a Healthy Slice of Hawai'i in Kyōto

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On a sunny Kyōto spring day, I rode my second-hand bicycle down along the Kamogawa River. Still acquainting myself with the back alleys of Kyōto, I decided to take a ride down one of the little side streets. The warm breeze gently tossed my hair. All around me, the sweet fragrances of peony, iris and plum trees awakened my senses as I pedaled slowly, looking from side to side. One of the many things that makes Kyōto so charming and special is discovering its hidden treasures. There could be rows and rows of houses in quiet residential areas and all of a sudden you come across something surprising and unexpected: a Japanese-Western fusion clothing store selling jeans designed with patches of kimono; or a small aromatherapy boutique selling a variety of scented incense made all the more intoxicating by the delicate but clear clink and tinkle of hand-made glass, metal and wooden wind chimes. Or, a café that could easily be mistaken for someone's home that serves organic Kyōto-style charcoal-roasted coffee and home-made cakes. The sheer delight or quiet satisfaction of discovering a "secret hide-away" and the specialness of the gem bring a giddy smile to my face.

On this day, I pass on my left a ramen noodle restaurant and well-kept houses decorated with pots of geraniums, petunias and hanging wisterias with their lavender-colored blossoms swaying elegantly in the light breeze. To my right, an accessory shop for pets catches my eye with its array of shirts, jackets and hairpieces for puppies and dogs of all breeds, sizes and shapes. Ahead, I hear the cheering, rhythmic voices of middle-school students as they volley tennis balls between each other. I glance to my right, passing a few houses, a playground, Café Mahalo, a small shrine . . . Screech! I squeeze the handbrakes of my bicycle as hard as I can. "MAHALO?!"

I walk through the aloha-print entrance curtain that sways gently in the warm breeze. The familiar sound of the Hawaiian music and the distinct sound of the 'ukulele greet my ears. "Wait. Where am I?" I ask myself.

"Irasshaimase!" "Oh, right. I'm in Kyōto," I assure myself.

A middle-aged man and his wife greet me from behind a counter lined with a row of long-neck Kona Lager beer bottles as part of the décor. "Aloha," I say, smiling.

Akiko and Yasuhiro Makino, the owners of Yasai (meaning "vegetable") Café Mahalo, love Hawai'i. Yasuhiro worked for a food processing company in Ōsaka for a number of years. True to the well-publicized stereotype about the Japanese "salaryman" who works exorbitantly long hours with lots of stress and barely any vacation, Yasuhiro found himself dealing with what the Japanese call *seikatsu shūkan-byō*, or lifestyle-

related diseases. He was overweight, suffered from high blood pressure, and felt generally sluggish and unhealthy. He dreamt of running his own business and living a "slow-paced" life, leaving behind the robotic, repetitive routine of waking up in the morning, rushing to work and coming home in the pitch dark hours of night with barely any time to spend with his family or on anything he enjoyed.

Akiko credits their four children for starting her love affair with Hawai'i.

"When the children were going through their adolescence, and it was stressful for not only them, but also for me as their mother. They were uncertain about their future. They felt lost about what they wanted to do with their lives. It was a really stressful time. I felt so down. I needed to get away, so I decided to go to Hawai'i. My first sunset at Waikiki Beach was, for me . . . healing.



Yasai Café Mahalo owners Akiko and Yasuhiro Makino offer a menu of locally grown fresh foods that follow a Japanese-style macrobiotic diet. (Photo by Jackie J. Kim)

I've never seen anything like it here in Kyōto. It gave me such peace. The sunny, breezy days; watching the beautiful sunset in the evening; the slow lifestyle; the delicious fruits and vegetables and the friendly people made me feel so much better."

Since then, the couple has tried to visit Hawai'i at least once a year.

In July of 2007, Yasuhiro made a life-changing decision. At age 49, he quit his job and began studying the Japanese-style macrobiotic diet. This concept emphasizes a natural diet of locally grown fresh foods eaten according to the changing seasons and based on the principle of yin and yang. Whole grain products, brown rice, buckwheat noodles, beans, vegetables, fruits, miso, fish, soy and mild spices are eaten in symbiosis with the natural changes of the seasons, taking into consideration fluctuating temperatures and body chemical balance and needs.

In February of last year, Yasuhiro and Akiko made their dream come true when they opened Yasai Café Mahalo to share their healthy lifestyle awakening with others. The café's name is its concept: Vegetables and Hawai'i are the two elements that the Makinos view as their personal answer to good health — fresh foods and a relaxed atmosphere and environment. The Ha-

waiian word "Mahalo" in their business' name expresses the gratitude they felt as they received their own spiritual healing in Hawai'i during their most challenging times.

The café is entirely vegan. Lunch menus are made using locally grown Kyōto vegetables, soy products and all-natural seasoning. No animal fat, eggs or white sugar come near the kitchen. Set menu choices for the week include "veggie meat" stir-fried in ginger and onion sauté and served with brown rice, milled rice or half-half with two small side dishes and dessert; vegetable and bean curry (onions, potato, carrots, tomatoes and apple juice stewed for more than two hours in the original house curry spice; after the beans are added, it is simmered for another hour); or corn soymilk soup served with walnut yeast bread.

The drink menu includes, of course, Lion Vanilla Macadamia Nut Coffee and different types of Kona beers as well as acai-berry tea and tofu chai or latte. Other interesting drinks are their brown rice coffee and dandelion coffee, both non-caffeinated drinks said to have a "warming" effect on the body temperature rather than "cooling" it like regular coffees.

The March 11 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami and the radiation scare in Fukushima has left many wondering what is and is not safe to eat. Shopping in grocery stores takes longer as consumers examine product labels to decipher the origin of the particular food item. Incidences of food poisoning stemming from raw beef dishes served in a chain-restaurant popular for its rock-bottom prices shocked the nation a month ago. Four people died and close to a hundred were hospitalized

after being affected by the E. coli 0-111 bacteria. Similarly, a few days ago, it was reported that hundreds of people in northern Germany had fallen seriously ill after eating raw vegetables contaminated with the E. coli 0104 bacteria.

Unfortunately, there are no quick or easy solutions to the many problems and challenges of our modern times. But there are life-changing alternatives, such as the one Yasuhiro and Akiko Makino made with Café Mahalo in their pursuit of a balanced lifestyle. ■■

Jackie J. Kim lives in Kyōto with her husband. Kim is the author of "Hidden Treasures: Lives of First-Generation Korean Women in Japan." While living in Japan as a JET teacher and later as a graduate student, she interviewed elderly Korean women who had immigrated to Japan. Those interviews led to the publication of "Hidden Treasures." If you're wondering about the title of Kim's column, she explained that "Oideyasu!" means "Welcome!" in Kyōto ben, or dialect. She can be reached at jackiejkim@hotmail.com.