



The native food culture of Japan is called *washoku*, literally “the harmony of food.” *Washoku* meals are made according to certain guidelines such as *goshiki* (five colors), *goho* (five methods) and *gomi* (five flavors). Following these guidelines it is easy to achieve culinary harmony with a balanced diet. The

ABOVE: Elizabeth Andoh explains the intricacies of Japanese tea to a group of western tourists.

five colors are green, yellow, red, white and black; typically different nutrients are present in different colored foods. The five methods of preparing food – boiling, steaming, grilling, deep-frying and raw (not

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applying heat) – draw out different flavors from the same ingredients while limiting total caloric intake. Balancing the five flavors, *sanmi* (acidity), *nigami* (bitterness), *amami* (sweetness), *karami* (spiciness) and *shio-karasa* (saltiness) provides satisfaction, and discourages over-eating. A sense of well-being and harmony results from eating a balanced *washoku* meal.

In celebrating the foods available in each of the four seasons, Japanese cuisine is particularly sensitive to ingredients that are *shun*, or in-season. The thinking behind *hashiri* (early season) and *nagori* (late season) was born due to the great importance placed on *shun*. Coming a little before *shun*, *hashiri* includes the feeling of not being able to wait until food is in season. *Nagori* reflects the desire to avoid missing the chance to eat something and risk having to wait another year before being able to taste the food again. These words are derived from the desire to enjoy the subtle changes in flavor that occur in food just before and after *shun*.

I strive to provide visitors to Japan with an understanding and appreciation of *washoku*, both the cuisine itself and the thinking behind it. I began my



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own journey of discovery in Japan more than 40 years ago with a simple *omusubi* (triangular-shaped rice ball) stuffed with a surprising, mouth-puckering *umeboshi* (pickled plum). My enthusiasm for Japanese food and culture continues to grow. I enjoy learning about *washoku* from Japanese homemakers and shopkeepers, as well as food professionals and culinary masters. I hope you will join me on this taste-of-culture journey, savoring the foods and philosophy of Japan.

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The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism's "Yokoso Japan!" campaign aims to attract 10 million foreign visitors to Japan annually by 2010. As part of the campaign, people striving to increase visitor numbers are appointed as Yokoso Japan! ambassadors.