

Glossary of Terms Related to the Japanese Ryokan

Ichigo-Ichie (a once-in-a-lifetime encounter)

'*Ichigo*' signifies a person's lifetime from birth to death, while '*Ichie*' refers to an assembly of a religious nature such as *hōyō* (Buddhist memorial service). Although both are Buddhist terms expressing the Buddhist spirit, the phrase '*ichigo-ichie*' does not exist in Buddhist Scriptures. It was in *Sadō* (the art of tea ceremony) that '*ichigo-ichie*' first came to be used as an idiom. The Tea Master Yamagami Sōji, who was a follower of Sen-no-Rikyū, the Grand Master of tea ceremony, compiled the rules of *Sadō* in his book entitled "*Cha-no-yu-sha Kakugo Jittei*" ("Ten Rules for a Tea Master"). In this book, Yamagami writes: "An encounter over tea is essentially *ichigo-ichie*, in other words, however many times the host and guest might meet over tea, this particular encounter today may never be repeated again, and so each encounter is a precious once-in-a-lifetime occasion." He instructs that one should regard each encounter as the only such occasion in one's lifetime, and the host and the guest alike must be thoughtful in every respect, treating one another with the utmost courtesy. This philosophy can still be found underlying the spirit of Japanese hospitality today, for Japanese people treasure the wonders of an encounter between one person and another, and the spirit of *ichigo-ichie* continues to be respected by the large numbers of people working at ryokans.

Wabi-Sabi

'*Wabi*' refers to the aesthetic sense of finding tastefulness within tranquility and quietude, whereas '*sabi*' refers to the aesthetic sense of finding elegance within an old, faded and withered calmness. Both can be described as spirituality unique to the Japanese and originating in tea ceremony. These terms, when used in a Buddhist context, signify a world of serenity, liberated from all sufferings, preoccupations and anxieties, lying beyond enlightenment. The interpretation of the terms is left up to the individual for they are considered extremely difficult concepts. The term could be defined more simply as an appreciation of tranquility and graceful old appearances. When gazing at the garden of the Japanese ryokan, trees, teahouse, *roji* path, stone lanterns, *kake-jiku* scrolls, flower vases, figurines and other ornaments, or even just observing the very old Japanese-style building of the ryokan, if your heart perceives a special air or sense of beauty in these authentic ryokan features, then you have experienced the essence of *wabi-sabi* deep within yourself.

Ishin-Denshin (from soul to soul)

This is a famous Buddhist term expressing the mission of *Zen*. The teachings of the Buddha are recorded in the Buddhist Sutras, but enlightenment cannot be attained merely by reading them. Rather, the essence of Buddhism is directly imparted from one person's soul to that of another, instead of through

the written or spoken word. In other words, the term *ishin-denshin* indicates the importance of conveying from soul to soul. This is the true concept or spirit underlying the essential principles of hospitality taught in service industries including ryokans. If one extends sincere hospitality, then the guest will sense this sincerity and will be touched. True hospitality requires being alert and sensitive to the needs and wishes of the guest.

Morijio

A mound of sea salt on a small plate or pedestal, normally placed under the eaves by the entrance. The practice of *morijio* is thought to have originated in a legend concerning the First Emperor of China, Qin Shi Huangdi, who had many concubines and who used to visit the house of each of his concubines on his ox cart night after night. One of his concubines, wondering how to become his favorite, came up with the idea of heaping salt, a favorite of oxen, in front of her gate, upon which the ox would stop in front of her gate every night and stay put. Ever since, a mound of salt has been regarded as an auspicious means of attracting customers or bringing good fortune. A similar tale exists in Japan, too, and the custom of placing *morijio* had already taken root in the Nara-Heian Period. Today, you will find such small mounds of salt at many *ryōtei* and *kappō* restaurants, ryokan, *yose* (storytellers' house) and other places where traditional Japanese culture continues. Moreover, as salt is believed to have the power of purging impurities, the practice of *morijio* is also regarded as a purification ritual.



Uchimizu (water sprinkling)

The practice of sprinkling water is generally carried out to prevent dust from scattering, to cool the summer heat through evaporation, and to moisten dry ground. In Japan, however, the practice has also been considered a significant courtesy. When receiving guests, we not only clean indoors but also sprinkle water by the entrance or the street outside as a gesture of the warmest welcome to our guests in accordance with the Japanese spirit of hospitality. *Uchimizu* is also an expression of respect derived from the art of tea ceremony, and is believed to have the power of purging impurities as in the case of salt (see *morijio*). This practice has been faithfully passed down in many ryokans, where water is sprinkled every day without fail.

Roji

The garden outside the *chashitsu* (teahouse) is called *roji*. Literally, it refers to a plot of land which is not covered by a roof, and signifies a narrow alley between one house and another or a



narrow passageway within the grounds of a large residence. First used to describe the pathway leading to the teahouse, it apparently came to be called *roji*. Sen-no-Rikyu defined *roji* as “the outside path in the mundane world”, in other words, a boundary separating the world of *cha-no-yu* (tea ceremony) from the world of the mundane. At some ryokans there are teahouses in the gardens, allowing you to appreciate the structural beauty of the *roji* which is evocative of *wabi-sabi* (see *wabi-sabi*).



Tsukubai

This refers to the very low stone washbasin for washing one's hands (also known as *tearaibachi* and *chōzubachi*) in a *chaniwa* (tea garden). The name *tsukubai* derives from the practice in tea ceremony of bending oneself so low, almost crawling on the ground, to wash one's hands and rinse one's mouth. There is a wooden ladle (*hishaku*) for scooping up the water inside, but you must not touch it directly with your lips. The *tsukubai* is often located close to the teahouse or in the garden of a Japanese ryokan.



Geta (traditional wooden clogs)

Two pieces of supporting wood are attached to each of the wooden boards to produce these traditional Japanese clogs for outdoor use. Each clog board has three holes through which the cloth thong called *hanao* is threaded, and you wear the *geta* either in bare feet or wearing *tabi* socks, with your feet firmly fixed by grasping the *hanao* between your big toe and your second toe. The *zōri* and *setta* are of similar design, but *zōri* are made by weaving plant fibers such as straw, rushes and bamboo sheaths, whereas the *setta*, apparently conceived by Sen-no-Rikyu, originally had *tatami-omote* coverings on the top with animal skin fixed on the sole with iron nails. Today, *zōri* and *setta* are made of all kinds of materials. Such footwear is provided at Japanese ryokans for when you take a short walk or stroll in the garden in your *yukata*.



Tabi

These Japanese socks are designed in the shape of your feet, to be worn with *wafuku* - traditional Japanese clothing such as *kimono*. The big toe is separated from the other toes, so that you can wear *geta*, *zōri* or *setta* (see *geta*). They open at the seam above the heel where there is a row of metal hooks for fastening the *tabi*.



Wagasa

Japanese-style umbrellas, to be used when wearing *kimono*, are made by



covering a bamboo framework with greased *washi* (traditional Japanese paper). There are many types of *wagasa* such as *bangasa* and *janome-gasa*. The large-sized *bangasa* is for the common people. The word *janome-gasa* derives from the round ring resembling the eye of a large snake when the umbrella is opened up, and is slender and graceful compared with the *bangasa*. Some ryokans place these Japanese style umbrellas ready for use by the guests on rainy days.



Toko-no-ma (Alcove)

A traditional style of Japanese architecture, this is an alcove with a slightly raised floor built in one of the walls of the *tatami*-mat room (*zashiki*). The front wall is decorated with *shoga* (or *kake-jiku*, hanging scrolls), and an ornamental article or a flower vase is placed on the floor of the alcove. Although modern standards specify a width of 1 *ken* (about 1.8 meters) and depth of a *ken* (about 0.9 meter), it used to be wider and not so deep. You will find *toko-no-ma* in the majority of Japanese-style *zashiki* rooms, and the *kake-jiku* and flowers conveying the season form a fine interior decoration.



Kake-jiku (hanging scrolls)

Mounted *shoga* (works and paintings of calligraphy) which can be hung on the wall. The *kake-jiku* was first devised for the preservation of *shoga*. The hanging scrolls are changed in accordance with the season or traditional events, and are stored rolled-up.



Ranma (transom)

A *ranma*, installed between the upper part of a wall or a partition and the ceiling, is a transom for allowing daylight to stream in, for ventilation, and also for interior decoration, and comes in latticework or openwork. It is interesting to observe the motifs symbolic of the traditional Japanese architectural style used since the Heian Period. A *ranma* is often used so as not to cut off the adjoining room or the outside light. It plays an important role in the *tatami*-mat rooms of Japanese ryokans, and comes in a wide variety of styles such as *osa-ranma* (transom with closely spaced vertical bars), *take-no-fushi ranma* (transom having posts that are carved with knuckles resembling bamboo joints), *ita-ranma* (transom having thin boards with openwork designs), *shōji-ranma* (small sliding window-type transom covered with Japanese paper), *chōkoku-ranma* (sculptured transom), and so on.





Shōji (sliding screen)

Foreigners often describe traditional Japanese architecture as buildings made of wood and paper. It is true that *shōji*, just like the *fusuma* sliding doors, are interior fittings used in Japan since a long time ago and are made of wood and paper with some metal fixtures. The materials of wood and paper come in a wide variety of types and designs. The *shōji* and the *fusuma* are both made by covering a wooden frame with paper, but the *shōji* is made in such a way that light can filter in. This means that *shōji* paper is easily discolored by sunlight, and needs to be replaced periodically with new paper. The *washi* (Japanese paper) used in *shōji* and *fusuma* absorbs the impurities of the air, and helps to adjust the humidity by absorbing moisture. It also enhances the insulation and illumination effects, and is ideally suited to the climatic features of Japan. You will find *shōji* and *fusuma* used in various forms in the traditional *tatami*-mat rooms in Japanese ryokans.



Kokoro-zuke (Japanese-style tipping)

The practice of 'tipping' as in Western hotels has not taken root among the Japanese, and basically there is no need to offer tips since a service charge is added to the accommodation charge. Nonetheless, there is the custom of handing over *kokoro-zuke* on special occasions (coming-of-age, marriage, funeral and memorial service, and other ceremonial occasions) and when moving house to express one's gratitude, and some guests offer *kokoro-zuke* when staying at a ryokan. When doing so, the guests usually wrap the money or place it in a small envelope called a *pochi-bukuro* and hand it as *shōgi* (generous tip), *sunshi* (small token of appreciation), or *chadai* (small tip) usually to the room attendant. The *kokoro-zuke* is given at various timings, such as upon arrival, at dinnertime, or upon departure. The amount is usually 10 per cent of the accommodation charge, but as *kokoro-zuke* is at the discretion of each guest, there are no set rules. Some ryokans firmly decline gifts of *kokoro-zuke*.



Kaiseki ryōri (tea-ceremony dishes)

Also called *cha-kaiseki*, this essentially refers to a meal in the world of *cha-no-yu* (art of tea ceremony), served before the tea itself to enable the guests to savor the tea all the better. As tea is the main feature of a tea ceremony, the food is simple in principle, and basically consists of *ichijū-sansai* (literally, 'one soup plus three side dishes', besides rice). *Ichijū* refers to soup served in a bowl whereas *san-sai* signifies the *mukōzuke* (appetizer), *nimono-wan* (dish of boiled food) and *yakimono* (grilled dish). The term *kaiseki* originates in the practice of *Zen* monks carrying heated stones against their chests to withstand

the cold and hunger during ascetic training. Today, you will find many dishes arranged freely and called *kaiseki* style, but strictly speaking, *kaiseki ryōri* refers to the food served at tea ceremonies.



Kaiseki ryōri (party dishes)

As the name of this cuisine is homonymous with the tea-ceremony *kaiseki ryōri* (or *cha-kaiseki*) in the Japanese language, even Japanese people get confused over the two kinds of *kaiseki ryōri*. The *kaiseki ryōri* here generally refers to full-course meals served at restaurants and ryokans. As this cuisine is served on occasions of drinking *sake*, it mostly consists of relishes which go nicely with *sake*, and the meal normally ends with *shokuji* (rice). The key difference between the *kaiseki ryōri* at tea ceremonies and this *kaiseki ryōri* is that the former is a formal set of dishes prepared for specific guests whereas this party *kaiseki ryōri* refers to freely arranged sets of dishes served to large numbers of guests. The latter type of *kaiseki ryōri* commonly starts with appetizers called *sakizuke* (also called *otōshi*, or *tsuki-dashi*) and *zensai*, followed by *wanmono* (soup), *otsukuri* (or *osashimi* - slices of raw fish), *yakimono* (grilled dish), *nimono* (boiled dish), *sunomono* (vinegared dish), and ends with *shokuji* (set of rice, pickles and soup). Depending on the menu, *otōshi* (appetizer), *nabemono* or *romono* (kinds of casserole dishes), *mushimono* (steamed dish), *agemono* (fried food), *aemono* (vegetables flavored with dressings), *kōnomono* (pickled vegetables), and *mizugashi* (fruits or sweets) may be added. For menus of more than five dishes, soup is served two or three times, and the dishes are increased by two, to seven dishes or nine dishes, so that the total number of dishes served is always an odd number. The meals served at ryokans often tend to diverge from conventional rules and come in great variety. Menus rarely seen in classical Japanese cuisine, original dishes created by the chef, or Western dishes of meat arranged in Japanese style are also becoming more common.



Ita-ba (kitchen)

Just as chefs of Japanese cuisine at ryokans, *ryōtei* and *kappō* restaurants are called '*Ita-mae*', '*Ita-ba*' is a rather old term for the kitchen (also known as *chōri-ba*) used for cooking Japanese food. Formerly, the *ita-ba* for Japanese cuisine was a hierarchical society in which a particularly rigid and absolute hierarchical sequence was respected. Although this custom has become more relaxed over the years, the conventional hierarchy still exists in the role and assignment of each member. The chief chefs called '*Ita-chō*' and '*Ita-mae*', at the top are followed by *Nikata*, *Yakikata*, *Tachimawari*, and *Araikata* in this order in the *Kantō* District. Depending on the size of the kitchen, the *Ita-mae* might have *Wakiita* and *Wakinabe* and *Morikata* assisting him. Only the '*Ita-chō*' and '*Ita-mae*' are qualified to stand before the

mana-ita (chopping board) and slice raw fish into *otsukuri* or *osashimi*, and decide on the flavoring of the entire menu, for it takes many years of training to be able to perform these tasks. The *Nikata* prepares boiled dishes (*nimono*), and is assisted by the *Wakinabe*. The *Yakikata* prepares the grilled dishes (*yakimono*), and the *Morikata* is in charge of arranging the grilled food on the plates. The *Tachimawari* assists everyone else while learning his job. The *Araikata* rinses vegetables and fish with water, performs initial preparations of the ingredients, and is in charge of miscellaneous chores in general. These job titles and the authority involved differ slightly from one region to another.

Wagashi (Japanese sweets)

Western-style cakes and sweets were introduced into Japan in the Meiji Period, and the conventional Japanese sweets that had been known merely as *kashi* until then came to be called *wagashi* in order to distinguish the two. Instead of using butter, milk and eggs as in Western-style cakes (*yōgashi*), *wagashi* are made with cereal grains such as rice, oats, and buckwheat, starchy flours such as *warabi* (bracken root starch) and *kudzu* (arrowroot starch), beans such as *adzuki* beans and soybeans, and brown sugar and *wasanbon* (pale ivory in color), which are sugars produced in Japan. But there are also various sweets that reflect the influences of Holland and Portugal, and the best known and commonly popular *wagashi*, such as *manjū* (bean-jam bun), *yōkan* (sweet bean-paste jelly), and *senbei* (rice crackers) all originate from Chinese sweets. The skills for creating *wagashi* developed together with the art of tea ceremony (*cha-no-yu*), and the sweets became progressively more refined and new varieties were devised. At the *ryokan*, *wagashi* are served to guests while they are relaxing after arrival.

Mizugashi (fruits and sweets)

Mizugashi is not a type of *wagashi* sweet. In fact, the word *kashi* originally meant fruit, but once the sweets now known as *kashi* began to be made, fruit came to be called *mizugashi*, in order to differentiate between the two. At the *ryokan*, *mizugashi* are served at the end of the meal, and consist of fruit cut into bite-sized pieces, as well as fruit made into fruit jellies or bavarois mousse.

Onsen (hot spring)

Onsen, which is subterranean water heated geothermally, comes in two types: a volcanic hot spring caused by volcanoes, and a non-volcanic hot spring which is very hot water coming from deep underground. Volcanic hot springs are found almost nationwide, whereas non-volcanic hot springs can be categorized into two types, 'deep groundwater' and 'fossil

seawater' types. In Japan there is a law governing *onsens* called the Hot Spring Law, and all hot springs must meet the prescribed definition in order to be officially recognized as an *onsen*. Imperial visits to hot springs in the distant past are recorded in the "The Chronicles of Japan" (*Nihon Shoki*), which means that the Japanese *onsen* dates back more than 1,000 years. Many of the old hot spring resorts located in remote mountainous and seaside regions still retain vestiges of ancient times when they were first founded, and there are also many inns where you will find old ways still practiced, such as guests cooking their own meals and *kon-yoku* (mixed bathing) with men and women sharing the same bath.

Sakura (cherry blossom)

Sakura has a very special meaning for the people of Japan. This is perhaps because the cherry blossom season in April coincides with enrollment ceremonies marking the new academic year and the start of the new fiscal year for public institutions and companies. This is also the season for bidding farewell to friends of old. From the time the cherry blossoms first come out until the petals start to fall, huge numbers of Japanese go to view cherry blossom all over the country (such outings are known as '*hanami*'). Some *ryokans* have carefully preserved cherry trees which had been planted at the time of their foundation, and many *ryokans* are found close to famous *hanami* spots. Although there are many species of cherry trees, the most common *Sakura* in Japan is the *Somei Yoshino* species. Dancing pale pink petals caught by the wind are likened to a snow blizzard and are called *sakura-fubuki* (cherry blossom blizzard), and their fleeting nature makes the Japanese ponder over the ephemerality of life.

Japan Ryokan Association

The Japan Ryokan Association (Kokkanren) was inaugurated in 1948, and was officially approved as an incorporated association in 1953. In the post-war years, an increasingly large number of foreign tourists started to visit Japan, and so the Association was established with the objective of providing safe and reliable accommodation facilities to overseas guests, whereupon some 1,500 major, well-reputed *ryokans* and hotels in agreement with our objective joined the Association. These *ryokans* and hotels, with facilities, environment and services of the highest quality, have since strived to ensure that guests enjoy a pleasant stay. One of the leading nationwide associations among the numerous *ryokan*-related associations, we undertake a wide range of activities as an institution, including providing instructions, conducting surveys, and acting as a liaison between our member *ryokans* and hotels.