

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 bavares 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.