

Itadakimasu!

A dish to beat the summer heat



鰻重のタレは自家製

このページを担当しているジョージナさんは、イギリス人。日本の夏らしい食べ物は」と聞かれて、「そりゃ、うなぎでしょう」と答えると不思議そうな顔。イギリスでは、うなぎは寒い日に、がっつり食べるイメージがあるのだそうです。

ロンドンにも、うなぎの専門店があります。看板メニューは、うなぎのパイ。お皿の上には、ブツ切りのうなぎ、パイ、マッシュド・ポテトがたっぷり載って、そこに「リカー」と呼ばれる鮮やかな緑のソースがかかります。うなぎの茹で汁に、パセリがたっぷり入ったソースです。

イギリスの「うなぎパイ」の歴史は18世紀にさかのぼります。当初は、下町の庶民の味でした。うなぎは、ひき肉よりお安く手に入り、パイの詰め物となったのだそうです。

ジョージナさんは、倶楽部の鰻重を食べて、「日本のうなぎは、骨がなくていいわね」とニッコリ。盛夏の香ばしい蒲焼も、お気に召したようです。

With the arrival of the hot, steamy summer months, most people's food cravings turn to iced drinks and lighter dishes. Few would add broiled, freshwater eels (*unagi*) to their list of summery temptations. And yet, in Japan, Unagi Day – or *Doyo no Ushi no hi* – falls at the height of summer, during the 18-day period that in the Lunar Calendar marks the beginning of a new season. Each of the 18 days is attributed to one of the twelve animals of the zodiac, with Unagi Day falling on the day of the ox (*ushi*).

According to Japanese folklore, Unagi Day was the brainchild of an 18th century academic keen to help a struggling restaurant owner attract customers during the summer. Not only was *unagi* rich in vitamins A and E that supplied the stamina necessary to endure the sweltering heat, but, like *ushi*, it began with the letter 'u'. This proved to be a winning combination and Unagi Day has been a key date in the Japanese food calendar ever since.

Unagi is commonly served in the *kabayaki*-style, boned, butterflied, cut into square fillets, glazed with a sweetened, soy-based sauce (*tare*), and grilled over an open flame. The Club's *unajyu* consists of *kabayaki unagi* served in a bento box over steamed rice and sprinkled with *sanshō*, or Japanese, pepper. Accompaniments include a clear broth, which traditionally contains eel liver or stomach (*kimosui*), but here features springy slices of fish cake and tiny spheres of gluten (*marifu*).

Texture is provided by the crunchy and iridescent pickles that are served with most Japanese dishes. Deliciously sour *shibazuke*, a combination of cucumber and eggplant coloured purple with *shiso* – a Kyoto specialty, pickled radish (*oshinko*), and *nukazuke*, slices of cucumber, carrot and daikon that have been fermented in rice bran.

There is something delightfully down-to-earth about unagi, and if this unfussy, modest dish can help us beat the summer heat, then all the more reason to enjoy it.

By Georgina Challen