

An Outline of Nobuyoshi Kuraoka's Historic Restaurant Nippon

Restaurant Nippon is a high-quality all-star Japanese restaurant that has been located in midtown Manhattan for over half a century. It has been described in various newspapers and publications as the "granddaddy of Japanese restaurants in New York", "a restaurant of firsts" and "a classic eatery responsible for helping to make Manhattan the culinary capital of the world" (The Washington Post, New York Times, Forbes, etc.)

Opened by Nobuyoshi Kuraoka on August 19, 1963, Nippon made history by becoming the first truly authentic Japanese restaurant in New York, and even-more, the first to have a fully dedicated Sushi bar. It has also become famous for the great lengths it has gone to introduce fresh world-class edomae kaiseki Japanese cuisine to the American public. Some of Nippon's historic firsts have included creation of the (now standard) Beef Negimayaki Dish, the introduction of fresh soba (grown at its own buckwheat farm in Montreal, Canada) and tofu using specially patented methods and machinery, and the introduction of Fugu to the United States after a five-year battle with the FDA.

The following outline offers a summarized chronology of the historical development of Restaurant Nippon:

- 1961 Nobuyoshi Kuraoka (1933-2018) establishes Wako International Corporation, the parent company of *Restaurant Nippon*.
- 1963 *Nippon* begins operations in New York on August 19, 1963.
- 1964 *Nippon* receives a three-star rating by the renowned *New York Times* food critic Craig Claiborne.

At the behest of Mr. Claiborne, *Nippon* develops a special beef dish, Beef Negimayaki for the American diner. It becomes a common offering at Japanese restaurants around the world and is now included in many Japanese cookbooks.

Nippon is chosen to serve Japanese cuisine at the Showa Emperor's Birthday reception hosted at the Plaza Hotel by the Consulate General of Japan and the Permanent Mission of Japan at the UN. In doing so *Nippon* becomes the first Japanese restaurant to serve Japanese cuisine at a hotel party.

- 1966 *Nippon* is chosen as the first restaurant to cater for Japan Airlines upon launch of JAL's non-stop service between New York and Tokyo.
- 1975 *Nippon* is accorded the privilege of catering the official banquet for the Emperor and Empress of Japan at the residence of the Consul General of Japan.
- Nippon* prepares inflight meals for the Showa Emperor and Empress of Japan and entourage at the request of the Government of Japan and Japan Air Lines on their return flight from the U.S. to Japan.
- Nippon* becomes the first Japanese restaurant to receive an all-star rating by *Forbes Magazine* and continues to receive all star ratings for the decades to follow.
- Hyo-tan Nippon* opens at 119 East 59th Street, NYC.
- 1986 The Washington Post documents the beginning of Mr. Kuraoka's battle to introduce *fugu* (blowfish) to American public. ("*There's No Fooling With Fugu*" 5/11/86)
- 1989 Following five years of negotiation with the Food & Drug Administration of the U.S. Federal Government, *Nippon* receives exclusive license to import *fugu* (blowfish) to America. *Fugu* is introduced throughout the U.S. and England in 438 newspapers and magazines and on many television and radio stations (including CNN). Consequently, the word *fugu* is introduced into the English language.
- 1990 *Nippon* becomes the first Japanese restaurant in America to offer *Ni-Hachi Soba* ("2-to-8 *soba* noodles"), prepared from buckwheat grain imported from Japan, freshly ground and kneaded with 20% wheat flour and 80% buckwheat flour. (*Ni-Hachi Soba* has been cherished as a health food by the Japanese for over 3000 years.)
- 1991 *Nippon* receives special commendation from JAL on the 25th anniversary of JAL's NY-Tokyo service.
- Nippon* receives a letter of commendation from New York Mayor David Dinkins for its contribution to New York Culinary culture.
1994. Mr. Kuraoka establishes the *International Buyers Association* in order to introduce unique new food products such as "New Soft Salmon" from Scotland and Danish Blue Cheese from Denmark to Japan. Historically, this helps Japan internationalize its food culture by allowing for the direct distribution of high-quality food products to restaurants and hotels.

- 1999 *Soba Nippon* is opened on 19 West 52nd Street (666 Fifth Avenue).
- 2001 A review by Eric Asimov appears in the New York Times popularizing *Nippon's* buckwheat soba noodles as "a healthy, nutritious food alongside sushi."
- 2003 After four years of development, Mr. Kuraoka files a patent application for "Pre-cooked soba buckwheat noodles."

NRE, a subsidiary company of Japan Railroad East Co., begins to serve *Nippon's* patented "Pre-cooked soba buckwheat noodles" at one of its restaurant chains.

Japan Air Lines begins serving "Pre-cooked soba buckwheat noodles" as part of its inflight meal service for first-class passengers.

Nippon begins catering Japanese inflight meals for Continental Airlines.

- 2004 Mr. Kuraoka begins developing a process for exporting natural fresh wasabi from the *Hida* mountains of Japan at the request of the governor of Gifu Prefecture.
- 2005 *Nippon* is selected for inclusion in the renowned Michelin Guidebook.
- 2006 Mr. Kuraoka receives the "Cultural Bridge Award" in New York.

Mr. Kuraoka receives a permit from the FDA for importation of fresh *wasabi* from Gifu Prefecture in Japan into the USA.

A patent application for "Pre-cooked *soba* buckwheat noodles" is filed with the U.S. Patent Office.

Mr. Kuraoka is chosen as the first recipient of the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries Award.

Mr. Kuraoka receives an exclusive contract for the exportation of patented "Natural *Wasabi*".

- 2007 Mr. Kuraoka begins development of a new machine for making *tofu* and begins experimental cultivation of soy beans at his farm near Montreal. This enables *Nippon* to produce fresh home-made *tofu-sashimi* on-location at its restaurants in New York.
- 2009 Nobuyoshi Kuraoka is honored by the Government of Japan with the *The Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette*, for his "outstanding contributions to the promotion of Japanese Culture through Japanese food."

2012 JRE, a subsidiary of Japan's largest railroad company, opens a soba restaurant, close to Tokyo Station offering Nippon's Soba Salad as their main dish. It becomes popular with everyone from health conscious office ladies to middle age businessmen.

2013 *Nippon* celebrates its 50th Anniversary.

Nippon is honored to serve the official dinner for Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the official residence of Ambassador Motohide Yoshikawa.

2015 Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan visits *Nippon* during his UN General Assembly visit.

Mr. Kuraoka serves three terms of the Chairman of the Japanese Restaurant Association of New York.

2017 *Nippon* is selected by *Forbes Magazine* as a "CLASSIC All Star Eatery responsible for helping to make NYC the culinary Capital of the World."

2018 *Nippon* is reviewed in the New York Times by Pete Wells leading to a resurgence of local and international interest in the historical Manhattan culinary institution.

Restaurant Nippon
155 East 52nd Street
New York, New York 10022

(212) 688-5941

www.restaurantnippon.com

rev. 7/26/2018 epl