

News from under the Southern Cross – Edition 2. The Ambassador’s Chef

“Number 1 is chef. Number 2 is chef. Number 3, 4 and 5 are what? You guessed it”

This is what a very senior colleague of mine who I respect much once said when asked what was most important for an ambassador. Truly, the role he speaks of “what” is considered a very significant position within an embassy. But I refrain from writing in details about “what”, because it may have an impact on morale at the Embassy.

The point I wanted to make is that chefs of ambassadors and consuls-general have a very important role to play in the diplomatic activities conducted by embassies and consulates abroad.

In saying that, I am often asked out of curiosity if ambassadors eat meals prepared by a professional chef at every meal. As I will explain later, it’s not the case.

Dining occasions as an Element of Diplomacy

The three cornerstones of an ambassador’s work are (1) to build personal connections, (2) to gather information, and (3) to present Japanese perspectives to expand the support base for its position. The most effective way to achieve these goals would be to invite guests whom we zeroed in on, entertain them with superb food and saké and have private and in-depth conversation in a space where guests would feel confident in not being eavesdropped on. This is what has been done in the course of history as a practice of human beings regardless of time and place.

If the dishes to be served are Japanese cuisine coupled with saké or wine produced in Japan, it is needless to say this would definitely provide another opportunity to promote Japan itself.

Chef Ogata Sadayuki’s Achievements

There’s one thing I am truly grateful for upon my appointment to Canberra. Thanks to the extraordinary support from Tokyu Hotels Director GOTOH Yasuo (Currently based in Los Angeles), to whom my junior colleague introduced me, and the former President KOBAYASHI Akihito, Shibuya Cerulean Tower Tokyu Hotel has kindly agreed to dispatch hugely successful up-and-coming Chef OGATA Sadayuki to Canberra.

Despite his youth, Chef Ogata already has many glowing accolades to his name including Fourth Prize in the First Escoffier Young Chef Competition and First Prize in the 2019 Maille Cooking Competition. Originally trained in French cuisine, he is passionate about

pursuing various other styles of cooking as well and now crafts fine sushi, tempura and *dorayaki*, Japanese pancakes with sweetened red bean inside.

What is impressive about him is that instead of deploring limited access to fresh seafood due to Canberra's land-locked location, Chef Ogata is working hard with a motto that he wants to fully utilise locally available ingredients and create dishes that satisfy Australian and other guests. Seeing young Chef Ogata cycling energetically about Canberra searching out ingredients on his bike he bought upon arrival in Canberra, one may see his other aspect as a swordsman from Karatsu, a location of traditional lords' domain, in Kyushu island, as he holds a third *dan* in the traditional Japanese martial art, *kendo*.



Preparation work in the kitchen

The Work of 'Team Japan'

It's not only Chef Ogata that supports the dining occasions at the Residence. There's also Ian (born in Canberra, Australia), who earned his stripes at the Hyatt Hotel, impressing guests with hospitality skills and his knowledge of wines and saké. While in the kitchen, Maream (originally from Bangkok, Thailand) is working with dedication and skills to support the Chef, Angela (originally from Jakarta, Indonesia) makes sure linens such as table cloths and napkins are impeccably prepared and regularly contributes her photography skills to the team. Working together as 'Team Japan', they are committed to staging our functions with perfection.



Setting the table for guests

Indeed, a symphony of masters' *omotenashi*, or Japanese hospitality is orchestrated just like you may have seen in the British historical drama, *Downton Abbey*.

Health is Wealth

By this point, I can imagine some might say that ambassadors get off lightly because all they do to is eat delicious meals. Certainly it is delicious. However, the role of host should

not be taken lightly; it is not an easy task at all as a host to memorise their guests' background information, change subjects as necessary to adjust to the flow of conversation and occasionally even engage in a psychological tug-of-war to accomplish the three goals I mentioned above. Each function is indeed a serious duel.

Having said that, herbal medicines are essential for me as I do not have a strong stomach. Since concluding my two weeks of quarantine upon arrival in Australia, I hosted on average four functions every week. In addition, I am often invited out by fellow ambassadors and friends on other days, such that I find myself eating very simply on days off from functions; *somen* noodles or *ochazuke* tea-over-rice is more than ample.



“Team Japan”

We Look Forward to Welcoming You

The functions at the Residence are not limited to seated dinners and lunches. The Embassy also holds events such as the upcoming Emperor's Birthday Reception and various forms of teas. If you have the chance to come here, I hope you will enjoy the subdued ambience of the Residence and the beauty of the Japanese garden as well as the hospitality of “Team Japan” at what some call “Canberra's best restaurant”. I look forward to meeting you.

YAMAGAMI Shingo