



 **Philippine Airlines**  
The Heart of the Filipino

# mabuhay

JANUARY 2019

HIT THE  
SLOPES IN  
SAPPORO



A weekend  
with the family  
in Singapore

The cool factor  
of Toronto's  
Junction Triangle

A slow-paced  
road trip around  
West Bali

Tokyo

## Land of the rising daughters

In the deeply traditional Japanese restaurant scene, a group of women takes on the country's most intricate and male-dominated cuisine

**FOOD** Like many of Tokyo's best restaurants, Tsurutokame is small and difficult to locate. The restaurant, with a 14-seat counter plus a couple of tables, resides in the basement of a nondescript high-rise in Ginza. The intricate *kaiseki* (multi-course fine dining) menu, which begins with a collection of one-bite *sakizuke* (appetizers) – abalone, pickled mushrooms, snow crab and chestnuts – is nothing if not traditional. But this staunchly authentic restaurant is simultaneously iconoclastic and revolutionary. Here, seven young women are trying to upend Japanese restaurant culture with their excellence.

Very few women pursue culinary careers in Japan, and the restaurant industry is so patriarchal that the only way for a woman to lead a kitchen with respect is if her entire team is made up of women. Thus, husband-and-wife restaurateurs Osamu and Harumi Mikuni (inset) embarked on a grand



**Tsukiji's 83-year-old inner market - where live auctions of tuna were held in the open air at 5:30am every day - officially moved to the waterfront district of Toyosu in October, and will open auctions to the public this month. However, Tsukiji's outer market - which features shops and sushi joints - remains in the original location and is still open from 5am to 2pm.**  
[tsukiji.or.jp/english](http://tsukiji.or.jp/english)



social experiment. In 2015, they opened Tsurutokame, with only women in the kitchen to prove that they are every bit as talented as men.

"All seven chefs are now capable of making all of the dishes," Harumi says. She acts as a general manager, overseeing daily operations so her crew can concentrate on their work in the kitchen. "Kaiseki is much harder than sushi and not so many young chefs want to learn this now," Harumi continues. Kaiseki, as most Japanese chefs would agree, is the most difficult to master because there are so many techniques involved: grilling (*yakimono*), deep-frying (*agemono*), simmering (*nimono*) and, finally, working with revered raw fish for sashimi.

Yubako Kamohara, Tsurutokame's grand chef, says she leads her team with patience, love and understanding, like an elder sister, with the knowledge that they are under more scrutiny than most. The women who work here come from all over Japan for the opportunity to apprentice and work at this unique restaurant. They live together in a dorm, learning everything from flower-arranging and singing to calligraphy, meditation and tea ceremonies. They attend the opera on weekends, shop and eat all of their meals together. The cooking training is more intense than any reality show, though not as dramatic or glamorous. The women spend up to 12 hours a day in the kitchen, dedicated to precision and perfection in cooking and plating each dish.

Ultimately, the food at Tsurutokame speaks for itself. Nobody can deny the pure bliss in each bite of dishes like the creamy handmade *yuba* (tofu skin) with salted sea urchin wrapped in crisp *nori* (seaweed). Even Shinzo Abe, Japan's prime minister, was impressed with his meal, Harumi says. "We have gained more respect from male colleagues, including our competitors."  
**[tsurutokame.jp/en](http://tsurutokame.jp/en) - Amber Gibson**