

TASTE BUDS



Okada Coffee's fresh brews, including its special blend and Brazil Girota Funda, are best savored with cakes such as cheese mousse cake.

BLOOMING WONDERFUL

Cherry-blossom time is a great reason to indulge in the tastes of Japan, writes **Joyce Kam**

SPRING AND cherry blossoms go hand in hand in Japan so chef Danny Chiu Tak-keung says it is the season to savor floral delicacies. The veteran chef is cooking up a sakura menu at Taku (Tel: 2545-9966) in SoHo until the end of the month.

"The cherry blossom we import is pickled, so it is a little salty with an intense floral fragrance," said Chiu, who has worked in kitchens for 27 years.

"It's traditionally used to mix with *onigiri*, which is rice ball wrapped in seaweed, or *chazuke*, made by pouring green tea over rice. But I try to blend it with sushi and sashimi as well."

Whet your appetite with snapper sashimi and toro tartar, which offer a smooth texture with the aroma of

sakura before moving on to Chiu's favorite rainbow roll. "The dish offers sushi rolls with different colorful fillings, including tuna, salmon and scallop. It's very satisfying."

Other highlights on the seasonal menu include grilled sea bream, tea pot rice and dessert. The set costs HK\$480 while a la carte prices range from HK\$40 to HK\$120.

To complement the menu, the restaurant has introduced *shochu* with sakura as an aperitif for HK\$280 a bottle.

Fans of Japanese ramen are invited to Mist (Tel: 2881-5006) in Causeway Bay where chef Yasuji Morizumi is serving homemade noodles.

He has spent five years perfecting his recipe for ramen, blending wheat from Hokkaido, Nagano and Nagasaki with Japanese egg, natural brine and salt from Inner Mongolia to create velvety noodles.

"We've a place in Wong Chuk Hang to make fresh noodles, so we know the ramen we serve is of top quality," said Morizumi, 43.

"My favorite is soy sauce ramen as it shows the delicate balance between the noodles and soup."

Another signature dish is ramen sushi made with various seafood toppings, oven-baked Japanese Chiba pork and almond pudding.

The a la carte menu is priced from HK\$50 to HK\$120.

If you want to have it all, try the shabu shabu dinner promotion at Daikyo (Tel: 2832-6636) in Wan Chai. Head chef Marco Chung Chi-wang has prepared an espresso-flavored beer broth to give diners an interesting experience. "The broth is slightly sweet with a strong aroma of coffee and beer that goes well with various meats."

Priced at HK\$98, the buffet offers 50 items, including beef, pork, chicken, dumplings, mushroom and vegetables. Seasonal seafood such as fish and clams can be ordered on the side.

Other broth options include Japanese curry and milk from Kyushu.

Meanwhile, coffee aficionados can drop in at Okada Coffee (Tel: 2367-0332) in Tsim Sha Tsui.

Its signature special-blend coffee is brewed with seven types of different beans to produce a nice aroma and slightly sour aftertaste. Japanese *wasanbon* sugar is used to enhance the flavor.

Other appealing items include pure Jamaica blue mountain and Colombian Supremo Popayan coffee. The beverages are priced from HK\$33 to HK\$70. joyce.kam@singtaoneWSCorp.com



Soy sauce ramen from Mist.



Our love affair with things Japanese can include, from far left, Yasuji Morizumi's very own ramen, the sushi the Mist chef makes with it, his salad with chiba pork, Taku's sakura-themed dishes and Daikyo's platter of treats to go with the espresso-flavored beer broth shabu shabu.