

# ENKAI 101 !

Explain about enkai in general & subsequent parties following.

## **Itadakimasu and Gochisōsama**

"Itadakimasu" ("I gratefully receive") before starting to eat

"Gochisōsama (deshita)" ("Thanks for the food") after finishing the meal

Usually accompanied by putting your hands together -but no religious connotation

## **General etiquette for eating**

- After finishing eating, try to place all your dishes in the same way as they were at the start of the meal. This includes replacing the lid of dishes which came with a lid and replacing your chopsticks on the chopstick holder or into their paper cover, if applicable.

## **Rice:**

The rice is brought to your mouth, rather than the bowl, but it's OK to lift your bowl closer to you while eating your rice. Do not pour soy sauce over rice. It is usually considered polite to finish all but a few grains of rice in the bowl.

## **Sushi:**

If you choose to get sushi without wasabi you can use the phrase "wasabi nuki de."

In general, you are supposed to eat a sushi piece in one bite. Hands or chopsticks can be used to eat sushi. Just be sure not to leave any grains of rice behind.

In case of nigiri-zushi (the one with the fish on top), dip the fish part into the soy sauce. A few kinds of nigiri-zushi, for example, egg or eel, should not be dipped into soy sauce.

In case of maki-zushi (sushi wrapped in seaweed), just dip the bottom bit if desired before eating.

## **Miso Soup:**

Drink the soup directly out of the bowl bring the bowl by bringing it to your mouth.

Use your chopsticks to eat solid parts such as tofu, seaweed or other ingredients.

## **Noodles:**

Slurping noodles in Japan is the norm and is the way to cool the noodles so you don't burn your tongue.

If a spoon is not provided, it is customary to lift the bowl to your mouth, with your left hand in order to drink the soup, while using your chopsticks with your right hand to grasp the larger non-liquid ingredients of the soup.

## **Drinking rules**

When drinking alcoholic beverages, it is a Japanese custom to serve each other, rather than pouring the beverage into one's own glass. Be aware of the level of liquid in the cups of those immediately surrounding you and refill their cups when they are getting empty. Likewise, if someone wants to serve you more alcohol, drink a little bit out of your glass and hold it towards that person.

Enkai style of "making the rounds". Note: if you do not drink alcohol, bring a bottle of your beverage of choice - it's usually the gesture of serving drinks to each other that's more important than the beverage itself.

Do not start drinking (or eating) before the kanpai.

## **Chopsticks**

- Hold your chopsticks towards the back, and not in the middle or the front third.
- When not in use, place them down in front of you with the tips facing to the left. If a hashi-oki (chopstick rest) is provided, rest the tips on it.
- Waribashi (disposable wooden chopsticks) you can use a make-shift hashi-oki with the wrapper. Do not rub them together to get rid of splinters unless absolutely necessary, in which case try to be discrete and do it out of view (e.g. under the table).
- Do not leave your chopsticks sticking into your food, especially with a bowl of rice. Only at funerals are chopsticks stuck into the rice vertically in order as an offering in the altar.
- Never pass food with your chopsticks directly to somebody else's chopsticks. The only time that an object is passed from one person to another by chopsticks is at a funerals when the larger pieces of bones of the cremated body are passed from person to person as they are being placed in the urn.
- Avoid spearing your food with chopsticks.
- Do not point or gesture with your chopsticks, as it is considered quite rude.
- Do not use your chopsticks to move plates or bowls.

- If you have already used your chopsticks, use the opposite end of your chopsticks in order to move food from a shared plate to your own plate.
- Don't lick your chopsticks clean. This is akin to licking your plate.
- If using wooden disposable chopsticks, try not to rub them together to remove splinters. This will usually not be necessary & is considered rude to the host/restaurant as it implies they have provided bad chopsticks to their guests. If you feel that you absolutely must get rid of a sliver/splinter in the wood, do so very discretely and out of plain view, especially of your host.
- When chopsticks are set out on a table, they are placed horizontally, closest to the edge where one sits, with the pointed ends facing left. (This is based on the custom that the majority people are right-handed and historically, only the right hand was used to eat with chopsticks, regardless of which hand was naturally dominant – though this is no longer practiced)

## Restaurants

- ***WAX FOOD – Your new best friend, when eating out! ~***
- "Irasshaimase"
- Oshibori

In most restaurants, you are supposed to bring your bill to the cashier near the exit when leaving in order to pay and there is no tipping in Japan.

## Enkai (Formal Dinners)

During your first month and at certain other times during the year, you will be expected to go out with your colleagues for a formal-ish meal. As a basic rule of thumb, the more people attending, the more formal the occasion will be. Your welcome party for example may be more informal compared to say, a New Year's party, but either way, there's not need to worry – you won't be expected to know how everything works. Here are some basic tips:

- There is a definite seating hierarchy, where the highest ranked guests and guests of honor will be seated furthest from the door, facing the door. Oftentimes, if in a traditional Japanese tatami room setting, the guests of honor will be seated in front of an alcove known as the "Tokonoma", which may have a hanging scroll displayed or some other

artwork. The hosts or lower ranked guests will be seated nearer to the door, with the lowest priority seat being the one that has its back to the door.

- There will usually be a short speech by the KACHO (Office: Section Chief/ School: KOCHO-SENSEI: Principal) and /or BUCHO (Office: Department Chief/ School: KYOTO-SENSEI: Vice Principal) and then a toast (kanpai) before the food comes out. It is polite to have something in your glass to toast with even if you don't drink.
- Drinking is central to enkai. Remember though, that it is not proper to eat or drink while someone is giving a speech at the beginning. Furthermore, it is customary not to drink or eat anything prior to the kanpai (toast)
- If the setting is formal Japanese, you will be on the floor for the duration. Until the kanpai is given, you are expected to sit in seiza (formal kneeling) position as a sign of respect to the speaker(s). Don't worry about sitting in seiza position for the whole evening, as it won't be expected. You are allowed to relax after the kanpai is given. Men most often sit with their legs crossed and women with their legs together on either side.
- There will be alcohol at enkai, usually beer and sake (Japanese rice wine). They are intended as a way for work colleagues to relax and get to know each other outside the office. If you don't drink or can't drink, that's perfectly OK. Just make sure that you let everyone know beforehand, so that people are aware and a non-alcoholic drink can be prepared for you. Some people may be a little taken aback, especially if you are male, but not offended. Usually providing a reason (I'm allergic, I'm not allowed to drink alcohol because of my religion, etc.) helps.
- The same rules apply for dietary restrictions. If you're vegetarian, etc. just let people know in advance of the enkai (and repeat on the day of, just in case) then it will be fine. This does *not* apply to dietary preferences. If you *don't* eat something rather than *can't* eat, swallow your pride, figuratively and literally. It is often most effective if you quickly wash down the food you do not like with a gulp of whatever you're drinking. You're in Japan to learn and become a part of new things.
- Formal enkai will start with pre-determined seating, but after the main course, people will move around to talk to others. Don't be surprised if people are less reserved in this setting than in the office.
- During enkai, nobody pours their own drink. When your glass gets around midway, it will often be filled by one of your colleagues. It is appreciated if you offer to fill theirs in a reciprocal gesture. When receiving, hold the glass up with both hands.

- As a foreigner you are not expected to strictly adhere to this custom, but the norm is that younger will fill the glasses of older first, junior employees will fill the glasses of the senior ones, and women for men.
- If your glass is still relatively full and someone still wants to fill it for you, this is just their way of wanting to be social. The best way to deal with this is to take a quick sip, let them refill your glass, drink a small amount and then set the glass down so you can do the same for them.
- At enkai, people tend to get quite drunk, especially the older gents. If you feel you've had too much, it's not a problem to say, "no thanks" to further refills as long as you do it diplomatically.
- In Japan, the basic rule is: "What happens at an enkai, stays at an enkai." Expect some people to get very drunk, and no matter what happens, it will not be talked about the next day. The morning or day after the enkai, it is considered polite to say, "kinō arigatō gozaimashita" (thank you for yesterday) when you see someone who was at the enkai the night before.
- No matter how drunk some of the gents get, remember that inappropriate advances and sexual harassment are not tolerated in any country, so be on your guard.
- Enkai usually run no later than 9 pm and are ceremonially brought to a close with everyone standing and given a single clap in unison. There may or may not be an after-party, called a nijikai, which is usually held at another location, such as a bar within walking distance of the restaurant (because many people are already quite inebriated at this stage).
- NEVER DRIVE IF YOU HAVE BEEN DRINKING ALCOHOL! People walk home, ride bicycles, trains, taxis or go home with a designated driver. Being a designated driver is also a great way to avoid having to drink alcohol. The law is very strict regarding drinking & driving in Japan especially for public servants, which you are considered to be. When you are at an enkai or out drinking with friends, take advantage of the special taxi called **DAIKO**, which arrive with two people. One to drive the taxi & the other to drive your car home for you!

### Conversation fillers:

Traditionally, green tea is the most common hot drink in Japan and comes in a wide variety of grades from the very high quality *matcha* served in traditional tea ceremonies to *sencha*, which is the everyday tea most commonly served with meals, at the office and at restaurants.

### Some like it hot:

<i>Matcha</i>	Highest quality green tea, used only in traditional tea ceremonies. Made from specially grown stalks of young tea leaves, which are ground into a very fine powder. Often described as bitter, it is served after the guest has eaten special sweets, specifically made for Japanese tea ceremonies.
<i>Gyokuro</i>	Another high quality tea served in small quantities. The flavor tends to be sweeter than matcha.
<i>Sencha</i>	Most commonly served “Everyday “ green tea, made from soft young, tea leaves usually harvested in May or June.
<i>Bancha</i>	Made from large tea leaves picked in August, which are left behind after the <i>sencha</i> tea leaf harvest.
<i>Houjicha</i>	This particular tea has a delicious toasted aroma created by roasting the <i>bancha</i> leaves over a strong flame. Appears brown when served.
<i>Genmaicha</i>	Similar to <i>houjicha</i> , <i>genmaicha</i> also has a toasted flavor & aroma. However unlike <i>houjicha</i> , the flavor comes from toasted rice and popped corn kernels, which are mixed with the tea leaves.
<i>Sakuracha</i>	A type of <i>Kawaricha</i> ( special enhanced teas which are enjoyed during different seasons or at different times of celebration), which is actually not a tea, but a drink made with salted, dried cherry blossoms in hot water to represent spring. For weddings or engagement parties it might also have flecks of gold leaf added to make it extra special (depending on region).
<i>Kombucha</i>	Similar to <i>sakuracha</i> , it is also made without tea leaves and uses dried & salted <i>kombu</i> (sea kelp) for flavor.
<i>Ofukucha</i>	Literally “tea of happiness or good fortune”, <i>ofukucha</i> is a combination of <i>bancha</i> , <i>kombu</i> and <i>umeboshi</i> ( pickled plums). Often served at New Years or in the spring.
<i>Kuromame-cha</i>	Tea made from roasted black beans. This has an especially earthy and robust flavor and is said to be very healthy (good hot or cold)
<i>Oolongcha</i>	A Chinese tea, which is very popular in Japan. Served hot or cold.
<i>Ko-cha</i>	The name for Western-style black tea. Served either with milk or with lemon & sugar.
<i>Kohi</i>	Coffee – very popular in Japan and is readily available in vending machines either black or with sugar & cream already mixed in.

**Some like it cold:** (*most of the previously listed beverages can be enjoyed hot or cold, but the beverages below are especially popular in hot weather*)

<i>Mugicha</i>	One of the most popular hot weather drinks, this tea is made from barley. It is always served chilled & unsweetened.
<i>Macha</i>	The same powder used for tea ceremony listed above is also served cold mixed with cold water, ice and sugar. It’s a great drink for summer with its bright green color.
<i>Calpis</i>	Sweet & tangy drinks made from fermented milk. Served with or without carbonation. Cloudy white in color.
Isotonic Drinks	Wide variety of “sports drinks” similar to Gatorade, which are supplemented with minerals. “ <i>Pocari Sweat</i> ” is the most common.
<i>Iced Coffee</i>	Very common to have sweetened iced coffee with or without milk. The coffee is sometimes served with a small glass container of clear, thick liquid – this is the sweetener. Be warned that by American standards, pre-sweetened coffee is <i>really</i> sweet.

## **Snacks**

<i>Ishi yaki imo</i>	Sweet potatoes roasted in hot pebbles. Usually sold in the winter by street vendors.
<i>Kakigori</i>	A summer delight similar to a snow cone. Shaved ice is topped with flavors ranging from fruit to green tea. Kintoki is a variation of kakigori served over sweet beans in sweet bean paste. You might also wish to add a scoop of ice cream for an extra special treat!
<i>Kuzumanju</i>	A type of chilled <i>manju</i> made from a jelly-like substance, which is wrapped around sweet bean paste. Usually chilled in vats of cool water.
<i>Takoyaki</i>	Small balls of dough baked with small octopus chunks. Served with a sweet soy sauce based sauce.
<i>Edamame</i>	Very popular snack served at bars. Goes well with beer & liquor because of its saltiness. Made from green soy beans which are boiled, salted and cooled. Served cold. Note on eating <i>edamame</i> : only the individual beans inside the beanpod are eaten, because the skin is too tough to eat. The easiest way to eat edamame is to hold one end of the pod in your fingers, place the whole pod in your mouth and pull on the end of the pod so that the individual beans are squeezed out into your mouth to enjoy.
<i>Tai-yaki</i>	Pancakes shaped like fish. Stuffed with sweet bean paste