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Namara*08 2011 Spring
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A comfortable feeling
Flowers, sceneries, and tastes of Okhotsk spring in East Hokkaido.

Deepening encounters

A sweet temptation; Nouvelle Sweets of Sapporo
Nouvelle Sweets of Sapporo, A sweet temptation

White chocolate, baumkuchen and cheese cake. Hokkaido, which is blessed with fresh and high quality agricultural produce, is known by some as the land of sweets. There are many confectioneries centered in Sapporo where the confectioners compete in ideas and skill. Once you step inside a confectionery, you will find a small universe that sparkles inside the show case. The taste is something that you cannot get enough of by just ordering them or trying them at fairs. It is a privilege of the “sanctuary of sweets”; so then, you must go there. This spring, journey to the northern city of Sapporo in search of sweet delicacies.
The anecdote about the grand prize.
Inspiration born in Odori Park.

Milk, butter, fresh cream, wheat, eggs, vegetables and even fruit are all ingredients used for pastries and confections. And all come from the great northern land. For this reason, “Hokkaido sweets” are said to be delicious, but great ingredients are not the only reason. Recently in Hokkaido, there are many patisseries and confectioners who are striving to increase their skills for making sweets.

There is a confection that fascinated Sapporo last year.
That confection is called “Corn Verrine.”
Why was this confection so fascinating to people?
“Corn Verrine” was first introduced at the “Sapporo Sweets Competition” which is held once a year to decide the “sweet of the year.” Last year in the 5th competition to be held, it became the grand prize winner in the “Unbaked Confection Division.” That winner, our star for this issue, is Ma’i Ishiguri, the young patissiere (female pastry maker).

“Last year’s theme was a “confection that gives an image of Sapporo.” There are many competitions where cheese, fruit or other ingredients are designated, but this broader theme was a little baffling at first. Letting one’s imagination run wild did breed many ideas, but then narrowing them down was a difficult process.”

After continually trying recipes with various ingredients to narrow down her entry creation, an idea came to Ms. Ishiguri.
“During the summer in Sapporo, Odori Park is very refreshing. The “Corn Stand”, a signature icon for the park, appears, and people enticed by the aroma of roasted corn gather around and relax. That image of the city just came to me.”

However, it was already one week away from the cut-off date for entering the competition. It is from this point that sleep and meals were sidelined in order to perfect the “Sapporo Corn Verrine.”

Diverse charms resound together in a delicious taste typical of Sapporo

The “Corn” or “tounorokoshi” in Japanese of course refers to the corn in “Sapporo Corn Verrine.” In the Hokkaido vernacular it is called “Tokibi.” Verrine is derived from the French word “vérre” meaning “glass”, combined with the word “terrine”, a food similar to pâté. The word refers to a confection made of mousse or jelly that is layered inside a glass or transparent dish.

The best way to know its pleasure is to taste it. So, prompted by Ms. Ishiguri, we decided to try it. As you bring the confection near your face, the sweet aroma of corn tickles your nose. On the very top is a cookie made from corn, and under this layers of fresh whipped cream, Hokkaido sweet corn mousse and locally produced Mascarpone cheese.

One spoonful of mousse and the sweet taste of boiled corn with a hint of salt is diffused. It is as though you have taken a mouthful of creamy corn potage, and combined with fresh cream and cheese mousse, a rich aftertaste follows. The little kernels of corn and white chocolate corn crunches add accent to the texture.

“Due to the distinct difference in temperature between day and night during summer in Hokkaido, sweetness is enhanced in sweet corn. In order to bring out the sweetness of the corn, I was conscious of balancing the salt content. I also searched for the right cheese that would match the flavor of corn. I finally ended up with locally produced Mascarpone cheese which is made from fresh cream with a high fat content.”

Corn, cheese and while chocolate: all have individual characteristics, yet by blending them together in your mouth, the best of each is brought out.

“If only mousse is used, the flavor becomes monotonous, so I added rhubarb and raspberry sauce to add a fresh tartness.”

Rhubarb is a vegetable recently gathering attention. It has a red stalk which is fibrous like Fuki (Japanese butterbur), with a tart taste similar to an apple. This unusual combination is original with Ms. Ishiguri. The light sweetness of sweet corn blended with the taste of diverse ingredients and texture—these various notes quite simply imitate the taste of Sapporo, a city where multifarious people and cultures interact and fuse together.

Revealing the recipe
The fun of comparing tastes becomes popular

Ms. Ishiguri was born and raised in Sapporo. For this reason, she believes that she can create sweets that are peculiar to the city and has entered the competition every year.

Actually, it appears that “Sapporo Corn Verrine” was the 4th charm.

“In 2009, I entered a potato Mont Blanc. I have been experimenting with vegetables other than corn, and have tried making elaborate sauces. Especially with “Sapporo Corn Verrine”, the origin of the idea came from the “Corn Stand” in Odori Park. I decided to concentrate on the image and atmosphere of Sapporo, not try to play the eccentric artist with ingredients and taste.”

She specializes in confections made with raspberries and other berries, fruit and vegetables. Luckily, this northern land is a cornucopia for food. Fresh, high quality ingredients are easy to come by.

“The dairy products in Hokkaido are really good. Fresh cream and cheeses influence the taste of sweets on a delicate level. I want to continue to study how to bring out the best in good ingredients, and what combinations of ingredients can bring forth a great taste.”

One of the great aspects of the “Sapporo Sweets Competition” is the revealing of the Grand Prize recipe. Ms. Ishiguri’s recipe for “Corn Verrine” will be available to all registered members of the Sweets Kingdom Sapporo Promotion Association, and as long as
Inherited palatability. Discover a “new face” this spring

It is possible that the lifestyle of the patissier naturally influences the taste of the confection. The experiences that have been gained could bring out the flavor of a person in the confection.

“Benbeya, where I work, is in fact a patisserie that I frequented with my mother when I was a child. Formerly, it was in a different location, nearer to my parents’ house. I can clearly remember there being shortcake named “Alice’s House.” It is not sold anymore, but it was a cake shaped like a house, with pink and brown and white chocolate on top. It was a dreamlike cake. After Benbeya moved, I didn’t have a chance to visit them very often, but when I was searching for work I learned that they were hiring.”

Ms. Ishiguri loves confections so much that she used to bake cakes with her mother when she was a child. The origin of the young patissiere lies with cake baking with her mother and memories of encountering cakes that left an impression.

“Shortly after I began working for Benbeya, I told the owner about “Alice’s House”, and he made it for me! It was the same taste as I remembered.”

When asking Ms. Ishiguri, who has had such an amazing experience, what she thought most important about baking she replied, “Being a huge cake fan when I was a child, I want to make cakes that appeal to all ages, from children to adults, cakes that you will want to eat again and again, cakes that are unforgettable.”

Ms. Ishiguri has been a professional for eight years now. She is beginning to search for “her taste.” What kind of sweets will she challenge herself to next?

*Vegetable sweets are my favorite field. The combination of Hokkaido’s high quality dairy products and vegetables from this land make me want to experiment with lily bulbs grown in Hokkaido.”

The challenge before the young patissiere is that there are many up and coming patissiers and patisseries besides Ms. Ishiguri in Sapporo. And again this year in March, the new “Sapporo Sweet of the Year” will be born. What image of Sapporo will we taste this year? Secret hopes and dreams of the maker have gone into these sweet gems. Delicate northern sweets are sure to lead your travels to bliss.

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The History of “Sapporo Sweets”

Introducing Grand Prize winners of past “Sapporo Sweets Competitions”.
The Sapporo Sweets Competition began in 2006. Every confection made with fruit and local agricultural products typical of Hokkaido and confections which express snow and the scenery all broaden the image of Sapporo and Hokkaido.

2006
Sapporo Strawberry Tart
Made with Hokkaido strawberries, which are able to be produced year round only in Hokkaido, Japan.

2007
Sapporo White Tiramisu
Although the cream is white, you taste coffee when you take a bite. A creation with an element of surprise and the image of snowy land.

2008
Sapporo Pudding Pie
Whey, the by-product of cheese, is used to make this eco-friendly sweet.

2009
Sapporo Sweet Berry Honeysuckle Cheese
An exquisite combination of Hokkaido cheese and Sweet Berry honeysuckle that grows widely in Hokkaido.

* Grand Prize winners from 2006–2009 are not available at this time.
Sweets unique to the region, Sweets made by the people and the climate.

While Sapporo's functions as a city are fortified, it is also full of nature where art and music are suitable. Now add sweets to a scene like that. This is where we began. Going back in time, we see for instance that the first machinery, built in Japan to make flour, a major ingredient in confections, was in Sapporo. Not to mention the fact that besides flour, all dairy products, sugar, eggs, fruits and vegetables can be found in abundance in this northern land. Because Hokkaido is recognized as a “food brand”, the patrons who live here improve their skills, well that just puts the “icing on the cake!” Past Grand prizes, such as “White Tiramisu”, were made with Sweet Bern hard candy, and other ingredients typical of the north. New signature sweets of Sapporo are continually being born.

Also, as an ordinary competition, the Grand prize is the goal, but to us, it is the beginning. Revealing the recipe and having patisseries throughout Sapporo throw in their ideas is something that you don’t see anywhere else in Japan. The stamp rally to compare tastes has also been a success.

Sweets are like travels. You look for tastes that can only be found in that country or land, and you taste them and feel them. We urge you to come to Sapporo and enjoy the sweets here.

What is the Sweets Kingdom Sapporo Promotion Association?

Sweets Kingdom Sapporo Promotion Association
TEL: 011-529-3112

Hokkaido, a land that abundantly produces ingredients used to make confections and pastries and which has the perfect climate for confection making, has many famous confections known throughout the nation. With this background for a foundation, the association was established with the idea of promoting a new confectionery culture from Sapporo and promoting Sapporo sweets as well as stimulating the economy of Hokkaido. By developing confections made with local agricultural produce, active publicity and developing human resources, Sapporo strives to become the “Sweets City” of the world.

Sapporo Sweets Cafe

Over 5 confectioneries within the Sapporo area that are members of the Sweets Kingdom Sapporo Promotion Association enter their creation each month. Not only can you enjoy the taste of locally famous shops, but you can also enjoy seasonal confections. It is becoming the base for introducing “Sapporo Sweets.” Besides the take-out corner, there is an eat-in corner. Enjoy a delicious break time with a cup of coffee from a coffee shop based in Sapporo.

- Located in Aurora Town in Sapporo (Chikage underground mall)
- Open daily
- 10:00 AM - 8:00 PM
- Open all year round, except at the beginning of the year and regular underground inspection days.
- TEL: 011-211-1541
- URL: http://sweets-cafe.jp

2010 Grand Prize winner

In March 2011 a new and enticing Sapporo Sweet will be chosen. The 2011 Grand Prize winners are coming soon!

Unbaked Confections Division Grand Prize
Sapporo Corn Verrine

Hokkaido sweet corn and mascarpone cheese mouse create a mild taste. A variety of ingredients like kernels of corn, rhubarb and raspberries add to the exquisite balance of texture.

Besides this, certain standards such as using Hokkaido cheese and corn, placing the confection in a clear cup, and placing a seal issued by the association on the cup are set. Each shop recreates and sells their interpretation of the Sapporo Corn Verrine, using their own design and ingredients.

Gift Confections Division Grand Prize
Sapporo Sakutto Choux

The first winner in the "Gift Confection Division", a new addition to the competition from 2010, is a baked sweet with a fun shape that brings to mind “hot buttered poffertjes.” Hokkaido wheat flour and ice flour are used to make the choux pastry and potato paste is added to the mixture and then baked till crisp. Certain standards are set, such as using Hokkaido wheat flour and ice flour, baking until crisp and using certified seals issued by the association. The Sakutto Choux is then made at individual shops with individual designs and ingredients and then sold.

* For information on shops that carry the product, please check the website <http://sweets.sapporo.com/> and contact each shop.
Travel through the sprouting great outdoors.
Take pleasure in the flowers, scenery,
and tastes of Okhotsk. Spring in eastern Hokkaido.

A drastic change from the pure white winter wonderland.
As the snow melts in Hokkaido, flowers begin to flourish with life.
Between late April and early May the skunk cabbages begin to bloom,
and in early May the Ezo murasaki tsutsuji azalea are in full bloom,
transforming the northern land with spring charm.
Come wander through flowers, explore tastes and journey to Okhotsk
and eastern Hokkaido and immerse yourself in history and in hot springs.

Lured to Okhotsk by the scent of mint and skunk cabbages swaying in the breeze.

Colorful flowers let Hokkaido know of the change in season. In all
of Hokkaido, the arrival of spring is leisurely here in eastern
Hokkaido. From the end of April, tulips and phlox moss, skunk cabbages and Ezo murasaki azalea begin to bloom, painting the land in vivid color.

When you arrive at the gateway to eastern Hokkaido, Memanbetsu Airport, you must first go to Lake Abashiri near the airport where a colony of lovely skunk cabbages will welcome your arrival.

The lakeside of Memanbetsu Lake located on the southeastern side of Lake Abashiri, is home to the largest colony of hygrophytes in the nation. The colony of skunk cabbages, spread across a distance of 2 km, is recognized as one of Japan’s Natural Monuments.

The pure white spathe (the bract that projects the floral spike) flowers are reminiscent of winter, the sight of the flowers swaying in the breeze, romantic. Time is forgotten as you gaze at the contrast of white and green that seems to continue forever.

After you have filled your senses with the aroma of skunk cabbages, drive about an hour from Abashiri to the Mint Memorial Museum and Mint Distillery in Kitami. Kitami was once the largest producer of mint in the world. It was a surprise to hear that in its day,
the crop acreage covered over 20 thousand hectares, representing approximately 70% of the world market.

Mint is the only natural plant with a refreshing aroma, but it is also an effective antibacterial deodorizer and stimulates perspiration. After you learn about mint at the two facilities, buy some Kitami mint oil as a souvenir and reminisce about your travels as you enjoy the mint at home.

While you are traveling, if you get hungry in Kitami, try the Okhotsk Kani Shiro Yakisoba (fried noodles). It is full of Kitami onions and Okhotsk scallops tossed together with noodles made from Hokkaido wheat; a local delicacy.

45 minutes by car from Kitami is Onneuyu Hot Springs, the accommodation for tonight. Check in a little early and visit the Ezo murasaki tsurui azalea colony near the hot spring resort. Over 70 thousand bulbs of 28 thousand azalea trees emit a sweet aroma, and their flowers paint the hillside in hues of light purple. There is a walkway through the trees for your convenience.

Onneuyu Hot Springs boasts of its 100% natural flowing spring water. Since it was founded in 1899, the spring water has continued to flow, warming the body and making a name for itself as “beauty water.” Enjoy the vivid azaleas and gentle spring water.

The cruiser ship sailing across the shimmering surface of the lake appears to be chasing spring

Next day, drive 3 hours from Onneuyu Hot Springs to Lake Akan, which opens in late April every year, and board the cruiser ship. Feel the spring wind and take in the vast landscape. As the cruiser drifts deep into the crevices of land, you can almost touch the budding greenery. The luxury of gazing at green foliage awaits you. During the cruise, you can stop in and observe the Marimo (moss balls) on Churui Island.

Lunch for this day is Akan’s local gourmet dish, Akan Yakitori Don. Although it is called “Yakitori”, which means “grilled chicken”, here venison is used. Venison is high in protein, yet low in fat and high in iron, so it is a good dish for women.

Of course it is great to take a bath in the hot spring before you set out, but when you don’t have time, you might try out one of the many “hand baths” located throughout the hot spring resort.

From Lake Akan to Kushiro Airport, it is about an hour on the “Marimo Highway.” As the Far East Amur Adonis and wind flowers along the road bid you goodbye, you may feel a little sad that your journey has come to an end.

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Recommended spots in eastern Hokkaido

Kitami Mint Memorial Museum and Mint Distillery
Inside the Memorial Museum, which has a retro appearance, there are many mint-related exhibits and stuff, freely share basic knowledge concerning mint. Also, in the adjacent distillery, the manufacturing process and a demonstration of the distillation can be observed. (The distillation demonstration is held between Apr. 29 – Nov. 3, twice a day.)
- 3:30  11:00, 12:30, 14:00, 16:00, 18:00
- 1:00 AM – 5:00 PM (Mon. – Fri.)
- Closed on Mon. and day before Holidays
- Open on Wednesdays, Intosh, and Saturdays that fall on a Holiday
- http://www.kitamihana.jp/
- No Charge

Akan Sightseeing Cruiser
Circles Lake Akan which bears a beautiful panoramic view of 85 min. including a 15 min. stop to observe the Marimo. A fulfilling and relaxing way to enjoy Lake Akan.
- 5:20 Akan Onsen 1 Chome, Akan Cho, Kashi
- Open from Apr. 1 to Oct. 31
- Closed during season
- http://www.akanseiken.com/
- Adults 1,550 JPY  Children 830 JPY

Abashiri Tourism Association
http://www.abakanko.jp/

Kitami Tourism Association
http://www.kitanicto.or.jp/

Onneuyu Hot Springs Tourism Association
http://www.onneuyu-onsen.jp/ (only in Japanese)

Akan Tourism Association Community Development Promotion Organization
http://www.lake-akan.com/

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Hokkaido Tourism Organization
Hokkaido Sapporo Food and Tourism Information Center
Hokkaido Economic Affairs Department Tourism Bureau

Inquiries pertaining to tourism in Hokkaido,
Visit Hokkaido; http://en.visit-hokkaido.jp/

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