



**Attracted to Seasonality of Washoku in Tropical Sri Lanka
Featuring a Familiar Dish Used Every Day at the Restaurant**
Meegama Gurunnaselage Don Malith Wejikoon (Sri Lanka)



Meegama Gurunnaselage Don Malith Wejikoon first visited a Japanese restaurant as a teenager. It was an event that would steer the course of his life. Seeing a Japanese chef preparing sushi, he decided to become a chef of Japanese cuisine when he grew up.

Despite his ambitions, the opportunity to work at a Japanese restaurant did not present itself right away. At the age of 19, Wejikoon began his culinary career working in a kitchen preparing Sri Lankan and Western food, at the well-known Siddhalepa Ayurveda Health Resort, which offers accommodations and Ayurveda treatments in the Wadduwa resort area in the southwestern part of Sri Lanka. It was another four years before his opportunity to work at a Japanese restaurant came, when he secured a job at the Ginza Hosen restaurant, which was a tenant in the Hilton Colombo hotel in Colombo. This was in 2007.

With its tropical climate, Sri Lanka lacks the distinct seasons that Japan has. As he learned about Japanese food, Wejikoon became increasingly attracted to the way that washoku reflects the seasons, while incorporating healthy and fresh ingredients such as raw fish. During his seven years at Ginza Hosen, Wejikoon was thoroughly trained on the fundamentals of washoku cooking by the Japanese owner and chef. Given the responsibility of preparing breakfast for the owner, Wejikoon would get feedback on whether his seasoning was right or too salty on a given day, as he gradually got better at preparing washoku that would even satisfy Japanese tastes.

Ginza Hosen later moved to a different location and Wejikoon took a job at the Japanese restaurant Ikoi Tei operated by Hilton Colombo. There he is responsible for preparing sushi and sashimi including the restaurant's popular sushi rolls. Hikaru Takahashi, the head chef of Ikoi Tei, thinks highly of Wejikoon, saying, "He is a good person and a very hard worker. Sri Lankans are typically more focused on doing their own work, but Wejikoon goes beyond his own responsibilities to actively help others when they need it, whether it is for service or preparing food. He's a real asset."

Wejikoon's entry for the World Washoku Challenge 2016 is a dish he calls "Break me and eat! Kimpira in potato" featuring mashed potato stuffed with kimpira, rolled in cornflakes and deep-fried. The sauce thickened with katakuriko starch uses kombu dashi to make the dish vegetarian, for the large segment of vegetarians in Sri Lanka. Wejikoon chose to feature kimpira as a main ingredient, as it is something that his restaurant Ikoi Tei uses every day in set meals and bento lunches. In creating the dish, Wejikoon wanted to create something new, using dishes and ingredients that he was most familiar with.

In reaching the final competition of the World Washoku Challenge 2016, Wejikoon is visiting Japan for the first time and is looking forward to taking advantage of the opportunity to expand his washoku knowledge. Rather than working in other countries, Wejikoon wants to further spread Japanese food in his homeland of Sri Lanka. "I want to introduce Sri Lankans to authentic Japanese dishes that they have never tasted before, and create new washoku-based dishes that appeal to Sri Lankan tastes."



Break me and eat! Kimpira in potato