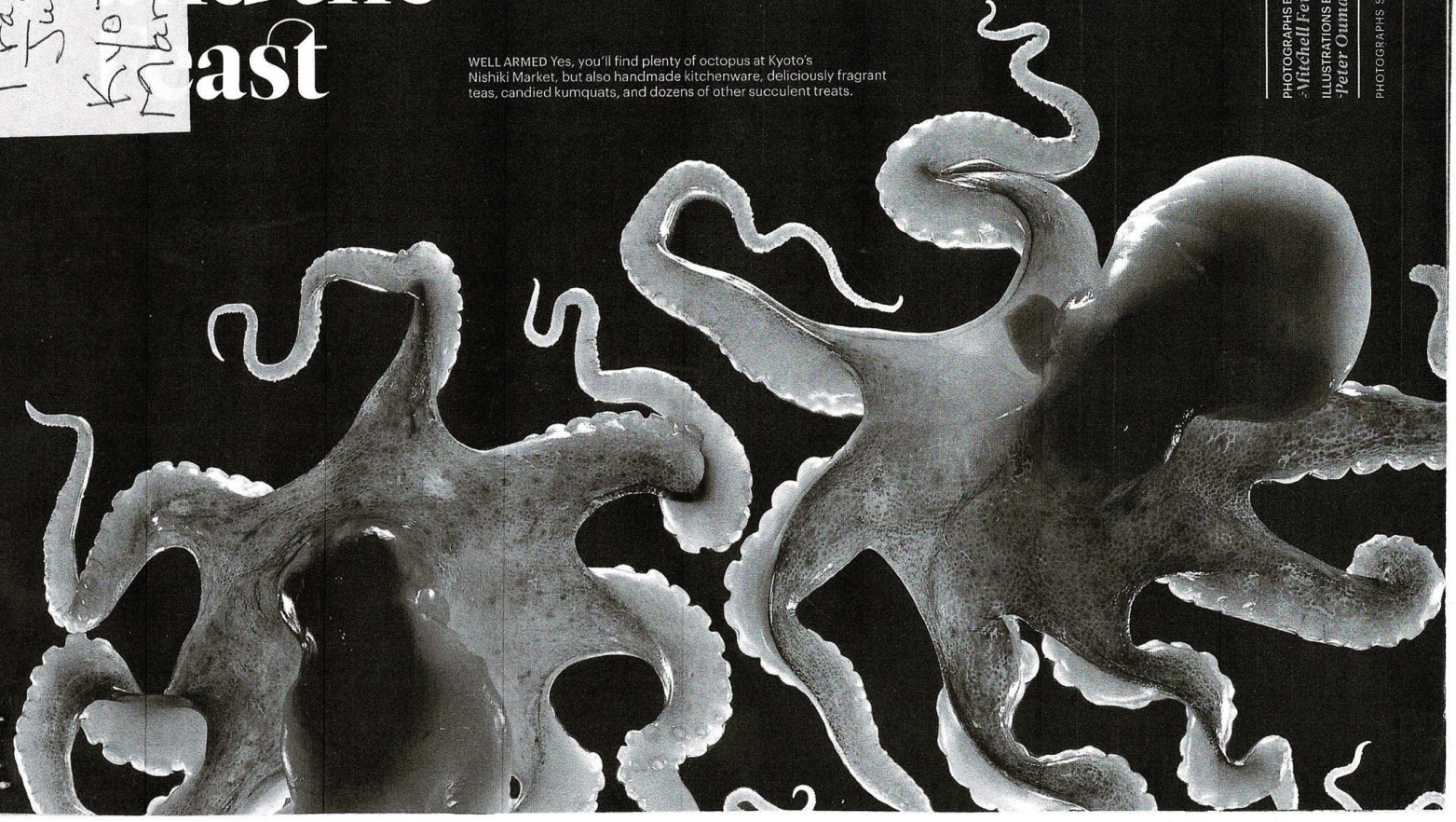


WORLD SERIES
Traveler
July 2012
Kyoto
Market

Beauty and the Beast

In Kyoto's four-hundred-year-old Nishiki Market, it's not enough for the food to taste better than it does anywhere else—it has to look better than it does anywhere else as well. *Janya Yanagihara* snacks her way through one of Japan's most iconic markets, a place where the seafood may be displayed like precious jewelry . . . but it's yours for the scarfing for just a few dollars

WELL ARMED Yes, you'll find plenty of octopus at Kyoto's Nishiki Market, but also handmade kitchenware, deliciously fragrant teas, candied kumquats, and dozens of other succulent treats.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY
Mittell Fennberg
ILLUSTRATIONS BY
Peter Oumanski
PG. 109
JULY 2012
TRAVELER

PHOTOGRAPHS STYLED BY MOMOKO TAKEDA

AS CITY RIVALRIES GO, Tokyo versus Kyoto seems like a pretty unfair matchup. Tokyo, after all, is the world's largest metropolis and by far Japan's most populous city, with 13.2 million residents. Kyoto, on the other hand, is a town of 1.5 million, a place beloved not for its go-all-night sleeplessness but its quiescence: In pockets of Kyoto, you can see Japan as it was centuries ago, as if modernity itself were a simple inconvenience, something to be adapted or ignored as chosen. Tokyo may have the bulk, and the bustle, and the buzz, but Kyoto? Well, Kyoto has the bona fides. This is, after all, where everything we think of as Japanese—its court culture, its art, its artisanry, and, oh yes, much of its spectacular cuisine—was born or perfected.

Which is probably why some Tokyoites are still so sensitive about Kyoto. "Oh, Kyoto," sneered a

friend of mine, a former New Yorker and now die-hard Tokyo booster. "They think they're so special." As evidence, he complained about how some old-guard Kyoto-ites insist on referring to their city as the eternal capital, in reference to their millennium of reign (794–1868), while at the same time implying that Tokyo (formerly Edo) is an arriviste, a mere capital manqué. He then went on to complain about the paucity of choice in Kyoto: Here, he claimed, everything from the selection of socks to the shrimp wasn't as varied as he'd have wished, unlike the diversity he could find in his beloved Tokyo.

And then the young (and, we later discovered, eighth-generation Kyoto-ite) chef, who until that point had been silent, leaned over and placed our next dish—silken sheets of tofu swimming in milky tofu broth, the sixth in a majestic procession of what

SECTION 1: BETWEEN TAKAKURA-DORI AND SAKAIMACHI-DORI

SECTION 2: BETWEEN SAKAIMACHI-DORI AND YANAGINOBANBA-DORI



1.

DAIYASU (stall 125)
The theater at Nishiki Market tends to be of the subtle sort, but if you grab a counter seat here, you'll be able to enjoy the spectacle of Daiyasu's crew of longshoremen types furiously shucking their way through a mountain of enormous oysters—and the equally fun sight of polite Japanese women sucking down the glistening blobs of flesh with a relish that borders on the obscene. Oyster season is November through March.

2.

TORITOVO (stall 52)
Michiko Hasegawa, the giggly, friendly, seventy-something proprietress of this shop specializing in free-range chicken and duck—with a little freshwater food, like *ayu* (a tiny whitefish) and *kawa-ebi* (river shrimp) thrown in for variety—introduces herself with an apology: "Our store is only a hundred years old," she says. Although her shop may not be among the ten or eleven that have been part of the Nishiki Market for the last four centuries, it does offer a singular souvenir: freeze-dried packets of duck, smoked on-site. "Eat it sliced with a sliver of white onion," she advises.



3.

KONNAMONJA (stall 50)
Both tofu doughnuts and tofu-milk soft-serve are more delectable (and—warning—addictive) than they sound. The doughnuts are actually little spheres of gently sweet fried dough, and are sold by the half dozen in a paper bag; they're best eaten piping hot.



4.

FUKA (stall 49)
There's nothing on offer here but the freshest *fu* (wheat gluten) and *yuba* (or tofu-milk skin; see "F Is for Fu," page 114). Buy the to-go container of skewered *fu* in five different flavors—depending on the season, these might include pumpkin, squash, or sesame—that have been brushed with sweet miso paste, grilled, and topped with sesame seeds; they make a great snack.

5.

YAMASHO (stall 48)
One of the most beautiful seafood sellers in the market. Never thought of a fishmonger's wares as beautiful? Well, check out Yamasho's displays—platters heaped with fresh oysters, squid laid out like jewels on blue plastic trays, eels arranged in loose curls—and you won't be able to think otherwise. If it's in season, ask to see the *komochi ika*, or squid stuffed with its own eggs—it's a delicacy.



6.

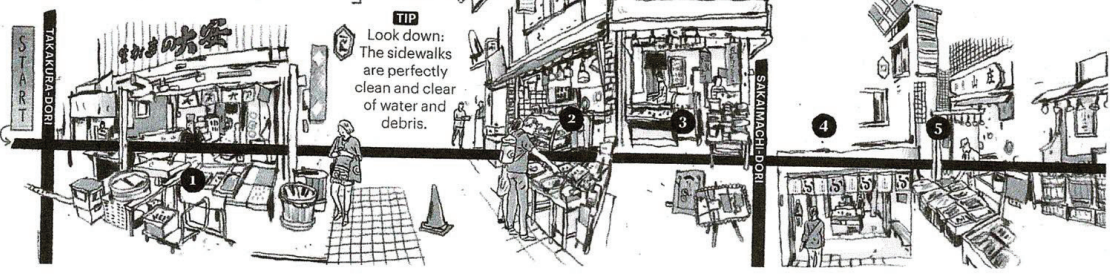
UCHIDA (stall 109)
There are pickles, and then there are Kyoto pickles. Uchida, with its barrels displaying jewel-bright pickled eggplants, cucumbers, radishes, turnips, and lotus roots, is the biggest pickle purveyor in the market. The ones half-buried in what looks like sand are made with *nuka*, or rice bran; others are pickled in a mixture of salt, *shoyu*, and *konbu* (dried kelp). They'll happily give you a sample if you ask, and all the pickles come in leakproof bags.

7.

KANEMATSU (stall 108)
Kanematsu is more boutique than stall, except instead of earrings, there's a backlit refrigerator displaying precious-as-truffles *matsutake* mushrooms (from \$200) in fern-lined wooden crates; instead of Louboutins, there are prettily arranged baskets of *ebi-imo*, a tuber that tapers into a curl. It's like a concept store for vegetables, all of which have been sourced from across Japan and are perfect examples of their species. Mushrooms too rich for your wallet? Satisfy yourself with one of the shop's exclusive souvenir *tenugui*—or dish towels—hand-blocked with vegetable designs.



TIP
Look down: The sidewalks are perfectly clean and clear of water and debris.



would be a twelve-course meal—before us. “We don’t have the most here,” he murmured. “Just the best.” My friend shut up immediately.

And, indeed, although that ethos—not the most, just the best—could apply to anything in Kyoto, it seems tailor-made for its most famous and beloved food market, the nearly four-hundred-year-old Nishiki Market. This long, narrow covered market occupies six short blocks at the heart of the city’s modest downtown, just a few minutes’ stroll from the famous Gion district, where the few remaining geishas still entertain customers in private, warmly lit teahouses at night. And though it’s certainly not Japan’s largest or flashiest food market, the things you’ll find here—from just-harvested, flame-orange locally grown carrots, to eels arranged, pretty as necklaces, on their beds of ice, to woven baskets

ETIQUETTE 101

Put the Camera Away

What to do (and not to do) while in the market

- DO**
- **Ask for samples.** The shopkeepers here are very friendly and will be happy to give you a taste.
- **Use any Japanese you know.** They’ll be tickled if you try.
- **Ask questions.** They may not be able to answer you, but they’ll certainly give it a go.

DON'T

- **Take pictures unless you ask first.** Remember, these are working people, not zoo animals.
- **Stand in the middle of the pathway yaking.** Nishiki Market is busy (and cramped) enough without tourist traffic.
- **Tip.** It isn’t expected in Japan. (Isn’t that nice?)
- **Haggle.** A strict no-no here, and beyond rude.
- **Walk and eat.** Except in the market itself. Japanese people do not wander down the street with a *kamaboko* in one hand and a soda in the other. (For more do’s and don’ts on Japan, see our *Etiquette 101* series at condenasttraveler.com/etiquette.)

abrim with fresh chestnuts—really do represent the best, the freshest, of Kyoto’s culinary offerings. Most of the 126 stalls sell just one thing: grilled squid, or omelets, or sugared fruit, or rice balls. It’s the perfect place to come to find a cheap meal or a snack, or just to witness the quality and care with which the Japanese treat even the most ordinary, the most humble, objects of life. After all, that attention to detail and presentation is, as much as the food itself, what makes Japan the place it is.

So, are there places where you can find more species of oranges, or more ways to prepare grilled fish, or a wider selection of candies? Sure. And is one of them Tokyo? Most assuredly. But will they be better than here? Absolutely not. Not the most, just the best. Welcome to Nishiki Market. Welcome to Kyoto. □

SECTION 3: BETWEEN YANAGINOBANBA-DORI AND TOMINOKOUJI-DORI

7.—UPSTAIRS

YAOKA NO NIKAI
Vegetarians, rejoice: After you’ve finished swooning downstairs, head up one flight to this famous vegetables-only restaurant. The menu changes regularly, but expect lots of seasonal *fu* and produce—there’s an English-language menu as well (81-75-221-0089; prix fixe, \$26).

8.

CHUO BEIKOKU (stall 107) The Japanese take rice as seriously as the French take wine. Want proof? It’s at this rice shop, where varieties from across the country are displayed in glass-domed bamboo dishes, all perused by hawk-eyed local connoisseurs. You, however, are here for the *nigiri*, or rice balls, which come mixed with salmon flakes, with *anago* and *shiso*, or with minced chicken (or grilled with miso paste, or rolled in toasted black sesame seeds). Buy a few for later—if you’re planning an afternoon temple crawl, they make the perfect portable bite—or eat them with tea at the counter in the back.



9.

KIMURA (stall 43) Said to be the oldest shop in the market—it was founded around 1620—Kimura sells one of its most refreshing treats: sticks skewered with marinated chunks of fish, from cuttlefish to scallops. It’s like *seviche* on a stick. And everything’s labeled in English.

PLUS
Visit the Shopping & Style section of condenasttraveler.com for the first in our series of Great Markets of the World: Oaxaca.

10.

MARUTSUNE KAMABOKOTEN (stall 39) More delightful food on a stick. Here, it’s *kamaboko*, or steamed fish cake. And there are more varieties than you can (ahem) shake a stick at, including *shiso kamaboko* (*kamaboko* wrapped in a minty *shiso* leaf) and cloud-ear-mushroom *kamaboko* (fish cake threaded with bright, crispy strands of fungus).

12.

MIKI KEIRAN (stall 31) What makes Japanese omelets so sumptuously fluffy, so rich, so eggy? We hung around Miki Keiran, one of the market’s best egg shops, to get the scoop.



STEP 1: The better the egg, the better the omelet. Whip the egg with dashi broth. The more dashi you add, the better it tastes but the harder it is to roll.

STEP 2: Add in any ingredients: The umami of the egg is particularly good paired with root vegetables or spicy greens like *mitsuba*.

11.

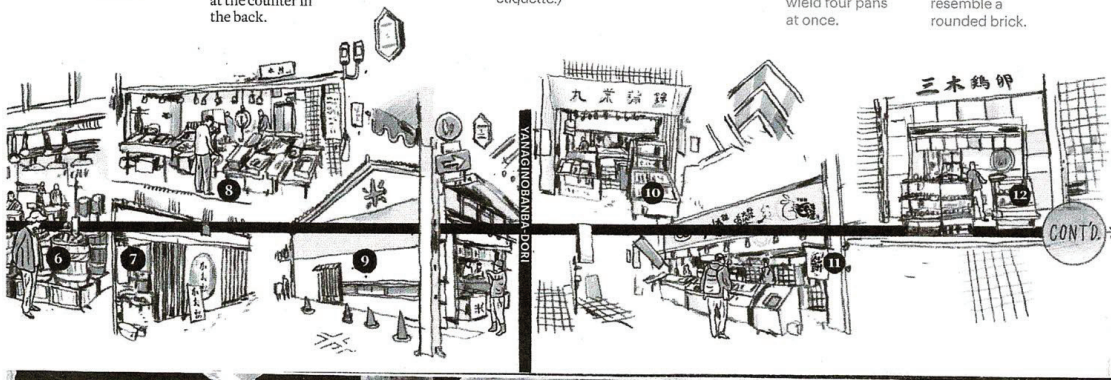
MOCHITSUKIYA (stall 99) It’s mochi heaven here: You can buy a square of this pounded glutinous rice grilled and to go, or eat it over a bowl of *udon* in the back.



STEP 3: Quickly cook the eggs. This is done in a shallow square skillet. An experienced chef can wield four pans at once.



STEP 4: Roll the omelet. This must be done quickly with a pair of long chopsticks. It should resemble a rounded brick.



CONT'D. →

THE GLOSSARY
F Is for Fu

It's made from dried what? Some key ingredients and treats, explained



BONITO Also known as *katsuo-bushi*, this is dried, fermented, and smoked skipjack tuna. Bonito has a distinctively meaty flavor and is used in stocks as well as atop rice and tofu.



DASHI Made with bonito and kombu, dashi forms the base for most soups. The flavor is the very definition of umami: a fat-mouth taste that warms the blood and which the tongue registers instantly as "Japanese."



FU A high-protein wheat gluten that's been mixed with glutinous rice flour; a staple in *shojin-ryori*, or vegetarian temple cuisine. Chewy and slightly nutty, fu absorbs flavors well and is excellent grilled.



KONBU This highly versatile kelp is harvested and dried in large, gold-green sheets. Its distinctive salty flavor lends a boost to many soups and stews.



MATCHA A high-grade and very caffeinated form of green tea that's been pulverized and whisked with hot water to make a brew that's both bitter and, somehow, highly filling. It's served at tea ceremonies.



MOCHI Made from pounded glutinous rice, mochi comes in forms both savory (grilled, fried) and sweet (topped with powdered sugar, stuffed with bean paste). Sticky, chewy, and extremely tasty.



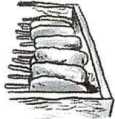
YUBA A Kyoto specialty, yuba is the pale-yellow skin that gathers on the top of boiled soy milk. It's scooped off and sold either dried or fresh. Yuba has a pleasant milky taste and the texture of al dente pasta.

SECTION 4: BETWEEN TOMINOKOUJI-DORI AND FUYACHOU-DORI

SECTION 5: BETWEEN FUYACHOU-DORI AND GOKOMACHI-DORI



13.
KAWAZENI (stall 90) Excellent, sturdy (and charming) restaurant-supply pottery at fair prices, from just a few dollars for a colorful rice bowl.



14.
HOUKYOUAN (stall 89) Slabs of *kamaboko* (fish cake) in inventive flavors: We like the shrimp and onion and the *renkon*, or lotus root. Big enough for a meal.



15.
SHIMAMOTO NORI (stall 84) Those long strips of what look like pencil shavings? They're actually curls of dried bonito, or skipjack tuna, which is peeled on-site and is a key flavor in Japanese cooking. Shimamoto also sells great leathery strips of dried *konbu*, or kelp, a staple of any Japanese kitchen.

16.
YAMADASHIYA (stall 16) You'll smell Yamadashiya—the market's only tea vendor—long before you see it: The distinctive odor of roasting leaves (a curiously, yet deliciously, meaty fragrance) permeates the entire block. Buy 100 grams of tea—either earthy *genmaicha*, which is green tea tossed with popcorn bits, or *houjicha*, roasted barley leaves—to re-create the experience at home.

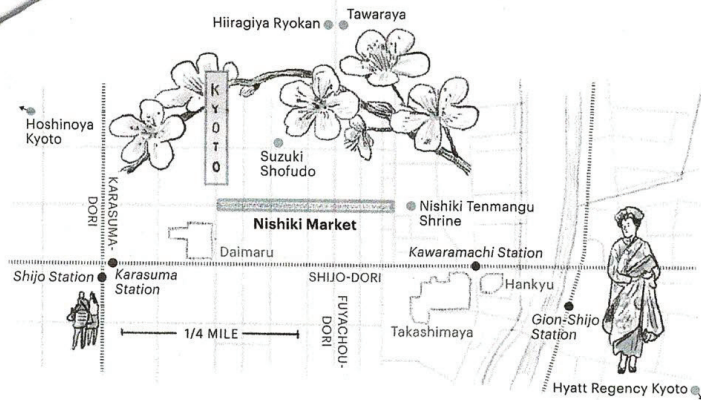


18.
YUBAKICHI (stall 9) The best yuba available in a town that prides itself on great yuba. Sold in ribbons, sheets, or various shapes, like pasta, it has a subtle, almost milky flavor but is as valued for its silky texture. It's wonderful dropped into soups for a bit of protein, or rehydrated and loosely scrambled with a bit of oil.

19.
MARUI (stall 69) It's all fugu all the time here. It takes an expert chef to cut this poisonous blowfish, whose mild, slightly chewy flesh is considered a delicacy. Try for yourself with the to-go fugu plate, which comes with thin slices of raw fugu and greens. Check out the trippy mobile—replete with little dried blowfish with pasted-on googly eyes—that twirls slowly over the display.

TIP
If you're here in summer, don't be alarmed to find nothing on display in the fish shops: The goods are in the back, secreted in ice, so they won't spoil in the heat.





THE ESSENTIALS From Bunking to Booking



WHERE TO STAY

The two best ryokans in Kyoto (and two of the most famous in the entire country) are **Tawaraya** (81-75-211-5566; doubles from \$1,037) and **Hiiragiya Ryokan** (81-75-221-1136; doubles from \$827), both only a short stroll from the Nishiki Market. For those wanting more-Western comforts and flexibility (ryokans require that you return to the property by a certain time at night), there's the superlative **Hyatt Regency Kyoto**, which has a subtle, Japanese-inflected aesthetic (81-75-541-1234; doubles from \$233). And to split the difference—ryokan or hotel?—there's **Hoshinoya Kyoto**, a hybrid ryokan (meaning that the meals can be ordered à la carte) in the watercolor-lovely Arashiyama district, a 20-minute taxi ride from the Nishiki Market (81-75-871-0001; doubles from \$827).



HOW TO GET THERE

Bordered on the west by Takakura-dori and on the east by Teramachi-dori, the market is very easy to reach. From Kyoto Station, catch the Karasuma Subway line and get off at Shijo Station; from here, it's a short walk to the Takakura-dori entrance.



WHEN TO GO

The market is open seven days a week, although many shops are closed on Wednesdays. Most stalls open around 9 A.M. and start closing around 6 P.M.



HOW TO BOOK IT

Nancy Craft, of **Esprit Travel & Tours**, offers a half-day tour of the market with a guide followed by lunch at *Yaoya no Nikai*; she can also give you shopping and eating tips beyond the market (800-377-7481; half-day tours for two from \$475). □

SECTION 6: BETWEEN GOKOMACHI- DORI AND TERAMACHI- DORI

PLACES JUST OFF THE GRID

SUZUKI SHOFUDO

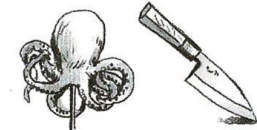
For some of Kyoto's most charming (non-edible) souvenirs, make a quick detour to this shop, where traditional Japanese paper is printed with colorful modern designs and fashioned into sturdy pencil cups, trays, stationery, tea containers, and jewelry boxes. The tea containers in particular make wonderful gifts on their own (from about \$7), and they're even better with a scoop of, say, sugared kumquats secreted inside (corner of Takoyakashi-dori and Yanagino-banba-dori).

NISHIKI TENMANGU SHRINE

Teramachi-dori marks the eastern end of the market; here, Nishiki becomes an indoor arcade full of fun, cheap little restaurants and stores selling dry goods. Continue just a few feet east past Teramachi-dori and you'll see a torii, or gate, marking the entrance to this tiny shrine consecrated in A.D. 1003 and moved to its current location in the sixteenth century. A prayer here is thought to bring good luck in affairs of the head: business and scholarship. Purify your mouth and hands at the natural well (a sign shows you how), and toss a coin into the wooden box to better your chances (Nishiki-dori and Teramachi-dori).

22.

**KYOTO
TSURUYA
KAKUJUAN**
(stall 62) At this tea shop, a perfect place to end your visit, everything is presented as sweetly as it tastes. Sit and rest your feet (though not your stomach) with a cup of strong matcha and a rice-flour-dusted little round of mochi (buy some to go, too). And check out the lovely display of *keiran somen*, which resembles a skein of yellow angel hair pasta but is actually a sweet made from egg yolks and sugar and pulled into a rope of fine strands. Like so much in Japan, it's beauty and delicacy in one delicious package.

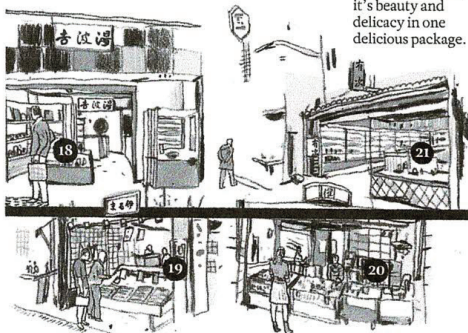


20.

KAI (stall 68) You'll find an amazing selection of *furikake*, a mixture of dried seaweed, seeds, and fish that the Japanese sprinkle over their rice. Oh, and that weird little red thing on a stick that resembles a candied apple with legs? It's a *takotamago*, a small octopus with a cooked quail-egg yolk inside its head.

21.

ARITSUGU
(stall 5) Attention all super-chefs, regular chefs, and wannabe chefs: Don't leave the market without stopping by this temple to handmade kitchenware, from hand-punctured copper graters to vegetable cutters to the most beautiful knives—for fish, meat, vegetables, sashimi—you'll ever see, anywhere. When you buy a knife here, they'll even engrave your name on it. Pricy and worth it.



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