



村上重本店

Revised and Updated

OLD KYOTO

A Guide to Traditional Shops, Restaurants, and Inns

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SAGENTA

sōmen noodles

左源太



76 Kibune-chō, Kurama, Sakyō-ku
 左京区鞍馬貴船町76 TEL: (075) 741-2146 (Sagenta) / (075) 741-1068 (Ugenta)

OPEN: 11:30 A.M.-7 P.M. ■ CLOSED: Periodically in winter ■ PRICES: Seasonal *bentō* YY-YYY, *kaiseki* YYY-YYYY ■ CREDIT: JCB, VISA

Deep in the Kitayama Mountains north of Kamigamo Shrine is a village called Kibune, where old inns and restaurants hug the banks of a stream beneath tall cedar and maple trees that have been enticing escapees from city life for generations.

According to legend, Kibune got its name over two thousand years ago when Tamayori-hime (the mother of Jinmu Tennō, the first emperor of Japan) traveled up the Kamogawa River on a yellow (*ki*) boat (*fune*), and, when she arrived at the river's source, she ordered that a shrine be constructed there. Kibune is now written with different Chinese characters, so the origin of the name is obscure. At any rate, a shrine has existed in Kibune since before the Heian period, and it is here that the god of water dwells.

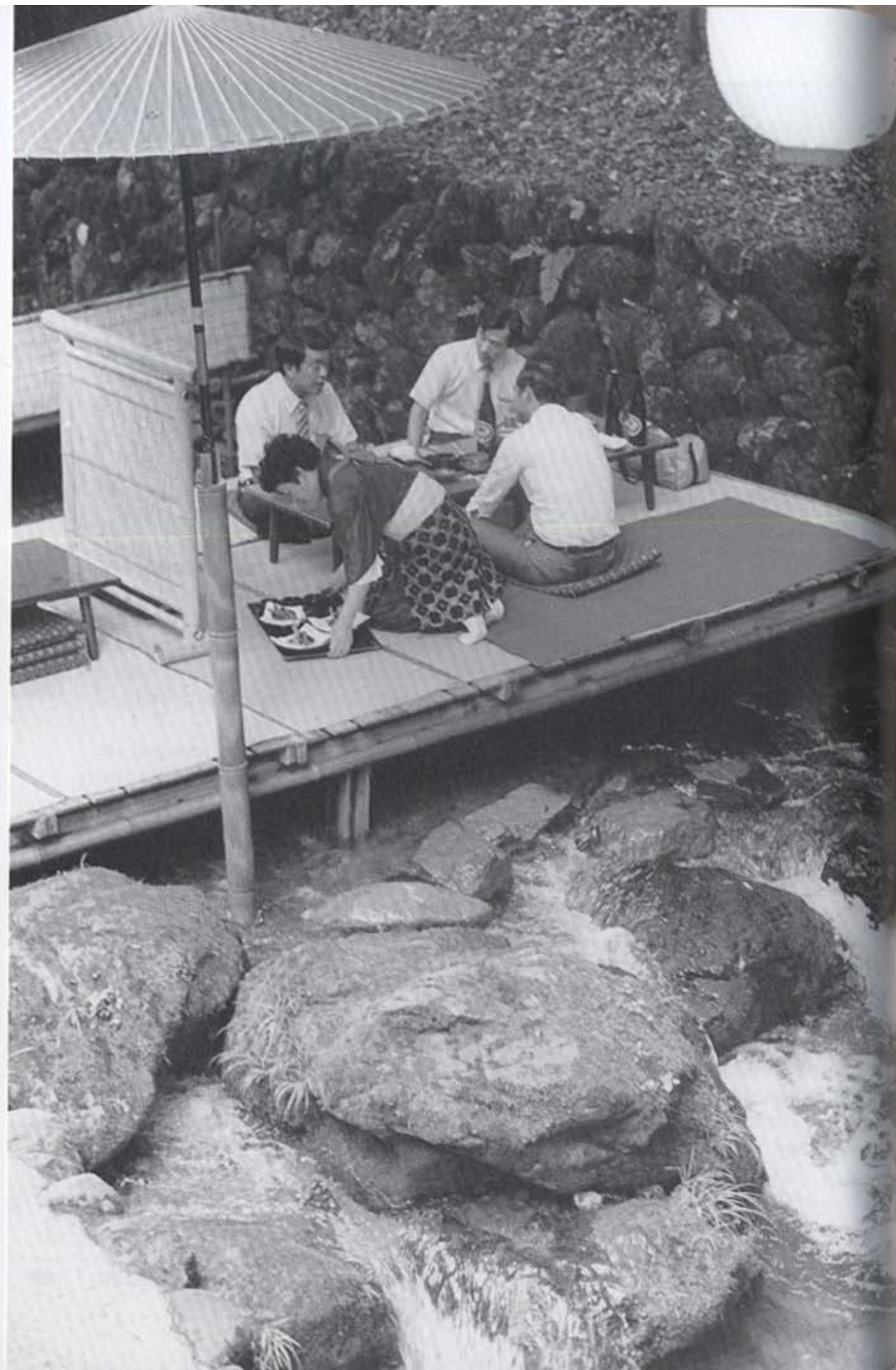
A thousand years ago, before the river was tamed with a network of canals, floods and droughts were a constant threat to the people in the valley below. The townspeople went to Kibune, then considered the source of the unreliable river, to pray to the water god for mercy.

In times of flood a white horse was offered at Kibune Shrine; in times of drought, a black one. (In those days the northern mountains were mysterious places inhabited by goblins called *tengu*, with long noses and supernatural fighting skills.)

Kibune Shrine and the water god are still revered by the people of Kyoto, who celebrate a rain festival on March 3, a shrine festival on June 1, and water festival on July 7 as they have for centuries.

But the main attraction in Kibune today are the many beautiful inns along the roadside that serve meals all summer long on tables built right out over the river, giving Kyotoites a place to escape the torturous humidity of July and August.

Kibune is at least five degrees cooler than Kyoto, which is enough to draw hundreds of hot city dwellers here each summer (and enough to keep them away in winter, so this is also an ideal hideaway to spend a snowy New Year's soaking in the steamy *iwa-buro*, or rock baths, at one of Kibune's inns). Most



inns feature *botan nabe*, or wild boar stew, in the winter months and seasonal *kaiseki* meals year round. Though summer is by far the most popular season in Kibune, the maple trees in fall and cherry trees in spring are worth the short thirty-minute train ride from Keifuku Demachi Yanagi Station to Kibuneguchi. Walk across the bridge and through the orange *torii* gate that leads left from the train station and up the road that follows the stream.

Sagenta, the last shop on the river side at the north end of the narrow road, serves a summer treat called *nagashi sōmen*, or “flowing noodles,” which is exactly what they are. Thin white noodles flow down into a boat-shaped trough through a bamboo pipe which carries them in a stream of ice-cold water from the kitchen in the main building above. Seated outside on a platform over the cool river (close enough to reach down and splash), you overlook a fern grotto on one side of the stream and the stone walls and thatched roof of Sagenta covered with bright green moss on the other. Enjoy your *nagashi sōmen* surrounded by nature—not the artificial, planned variety found in the temple gardens of the city below, but the overgrown, shady, breezy kind that reassures you that the whole island is not “landscaped.”

Sagenta and *nagashi sōmen* are primarily a summer treat, and reservations for a seat out over the river at any of the restaurants in Kibune can be difficult to obtain. But there are over a dozen fine places to eat in Kibune depending on your taste and budget. Some can be quite expensive, offering elaborate full-course *kaiseki* meals and deluxe overnight accommodations.

Ugenta, the partner of Sagenta, is located further down on the opposite

side of the road, and has new accommodations popular with larger groups.

Hiroya and Fujiya are the two most prominent inns and restaurants along the river. Lunches are relatively affordable, but dinner can be a costly affair, particularly in the peak summer season.

Tochigiku, an inn at the southern end of this stretch of the river, is a friendly place to stay overnight any time of the year or just to stop by for lunch or dinner. Tochigiku is just next door to Beniya, and is actually an offshoot of the older, more expensive inn, but the hospitality, cozy accommodations, and originality of their talented chef make this an annual place of pilgrimage for many of Kyoto’s younger generation, to whom the prestige of staying in one of the more famous local inns doesn’t mean as much as comfort, economy, and a fine meal.

