



→ Young Japanese superchef Keisuke Matsushima has taken classic French gastronomy to modern Michelin stardom.

Keisuke Matsushima, Nice

Words by Tristan Rutherford



HIT NICE'S FRUIT AND VEGETABLE MARKETS EARLY IN THE MORNING AND YOU'LL BE IN HALLOWED COMPANY.

The Riviera's top chefs hunt down seasonal goodies at the city's two colourful street markets. Franck Cerutti, head chef at Alain Ducasse's Le Louis XV in Monaco, shops for cheese at the seaside Cours Saleya market.

The larger Libération market, north of Nice train station, is frequented by staff from both Keisuke Matsushima and the venerable Chantecler restaurant at the Hotel Negresco. Both markets are packed with cafés, restaurants, and lots of local colour. April is a key time in the local produce calendar.

Wild green asparagus from the local hills is sold alongside stubby white fingers grown over the Italian border. Delicate peas, beans, and artichokes arrive by the bucketload and make it onto every restaurant menu on the Riviera. Also in season are the first wild strawberries, which make for a great nibble as you peruse the stalls selling fresh bread, flowers, and olives.

CONTACT

Keisuke Matsushima

22 rue de France, Nice
Tel +33 (0)4 93 82 26 06,
www.keisukematsushima.com



KEISUKE MATSUSHIMA IS A TOKYO-BORN CHEF WHO DOES THINGS THE HARD WAY. At the age of 25 he opened a formal French restaurant before scooping up the nation's most prestigious culinary accolade.

Matsushima's road to Michelin stardom came by following a childhood dream. After the Japan World Cup in 1998, he packed his bags and flew to France. He had "no support network, no idea what was in store," just a nose for French cuisine that led him from kitchen to kitchen in search of gastronomic greatness.

His grown-up dream was to open a "restaurant that would be recognised both by Michelin stars and by the people of France". In April 2010 he achieved both, as he was awarded the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres by France's Minister of Culture, Frédéric Mitterrand. Matsushima may have beaten the French at their own game, but his opening goal took sheer confidence.

It takes a brave restaurateur to position a restaurant behind Nice's two landmark hotels, the Negresco and the Palais de la Méditerranée, both titans of fine dining. To do so on one's 25th birthday is even more self-assured. But push past the wooden door of Keisuke Matsushima's restaurant and the air

is one of expectation, not intimidation. Above the gentle clang of silver upon silver are enraptured coos of delight and squeals of surprise. Patrons aged 25 to 85 are represented too: unusual for the often-genteel Riviera.

The secret of Matsushima's success isn't the influence of Japanese flavours; wasabi won't feature on any menu here. Nor is it a fad for Euro-Asian fusion, perfected by hip chains Hakkasan and Zuma, and now replicated across the globe. Instead, Matsushima's amazing flavours stem from a simple mastery of classic French ingredients from citrus and cream to truffle, scallop, and foie gras. Set menus (€15 to €88) present crunchy, candied cherry tomatoes, or sea urchins crowned with a beef jelly. Dishes come in delicately built tiers, balancing flavour upon flavour, each one resolutely demolished with a knife and fork.

With plaudits for his new sushi-noodles restaurant, Saison, in central Nice, Matsushima looks like a man still living his dream. 🍣

Connect Nice, France → Distance: 4,488 km → Flight Time: 9 hours → Frequency: 3 flights a week via Milan