

# The Maestro Chefs at Tsunami Restaurant



Chefs de Cuisine Bantoon and Charley preside over Japanese restaurants Tsu and Nami. The French say “bon appetit”, at Tsunami it’s “itadakimasu!” – Japanese for “let’s eat!”



One of the most eagerly anticipated new restaurant openings in years arrived with the launch of Tsunami at JW Marriott Bangkok. The grand opening in October attracted an eclectic mix of people – local expatriates, Thai celebrities and high profile politicians alike flocked to the ultra-hip Japanese restaurant complex.

Set in the completely refurbished lower lobby of JW Marriott Bangkok on Sukhumvit Road, this exciting new venture is actually two spacious Japanese

restaurants in one stylish location. Known individually as Tsu and Nami, each of these restaurants has its own significantly different personality in terms of menu, pace and temperament. Together, they offer a unique, multi-dimensional dining experience.

Tsu specializes in classical Japanese cooking served by Kimono-clad staff in elegant surroundings. It has been designed as a semi-open space taking as much advantage of the outdoors as possible. It features a prominent eight-seat Sushi Bar – run by Sous Chef Bantoon Chupara.

Teppanyaki restaurant Nami on the other hand, is somewhat younger at heart, offering an amazing selection of dishes that are fun, adventurous, innovative and determinedly upbeat. Nami has secured the services of top chef Chalermphant Rognnatham to take charge off the Teppanyaki side of this Japanese restaurant complex.

Despite their physical differences, Tsu and Nami share the same philosophy for culinary excellence and authenticity. As such, they complement each other perfectly.

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# Tsu

Chef de Cuisine of ‘Tsu’ the traditional restaurant of Tsunami, is Master Sushi Chef Bantoon, who has been an apprentice of Head Chef Tsutomu Nakamura for over ten years.

Having grown up in a restaurant environment – his family

owned a traditional Thai eatery in the ancient capital of Ayuthaya – it is no surprise Chef Bantoon became an expert cook himself. For the past 19 years he has perfected his culinary talents in Japanese food, even moving to Tokyo for a few months to further hone his skills.

There he worked and lived in the Tsukiji area, which happens to be the location of the most famous wholesale market for seafood in

metropolitan Tokyo, and one of the world’s largest fish markets, handling over 2,000 tons of marine products per day. The sight of the many kinds of fresh fish, shellfish and other seafood and the busy atmosphere of scooters, trucks, sellers and buyers hurrying around, make Tsukiji market one of Tokyo’s major tourist attractions, especially early in the morning when the auctions take place.

Fortunately those living in Bangkok do not have to travel to



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Tokyo for a taste of the real Japan, and fresh seafood, as Tsunami imports fresh fish from the land of the rising sun. "At Tsunami we only use fresh ingredients," Chef Bantoon says, "which are flown into Thailand about four times a week." Overall, around 80% of the products the restaurant uses are imported, such as the fish, beef and nori (seaweed). The remaining 20% is procured locally like the shrimp.

Chef Bantoon's personal favorite and one of Tsunami's signature dishes is "Matsu Sashimi". This dish is made up of several varieties of sashimi – Toro (tuna), Ama Ebi (sweet shrimp), Hirame (halibut flounder), and sake (salmon) among others – served on a bed of grated daikon (long white radish). An

absolute delight for true sushi aficionados.

Fortunately Chef Bantoon's favorite part of the job is preparing sushi and sashimi. "Making sushi is complicated, it's an art," Bantoon explains. "The fish has to be fresh, the rice must be cooked in exactly the right way otherwise you won't get the authentic Japanese taste." Like most of the fish and seaweed, the rice is imported from Japan as well. "The presentation of the foods is equally important – it must be a feast to both the palate and the eye."

Attracted by the authenticity of the ingredients and preparation, more and more Japanese expatriates are finding their way to Tsu, currently resulting in a fair amount of Japanese clientele. Many

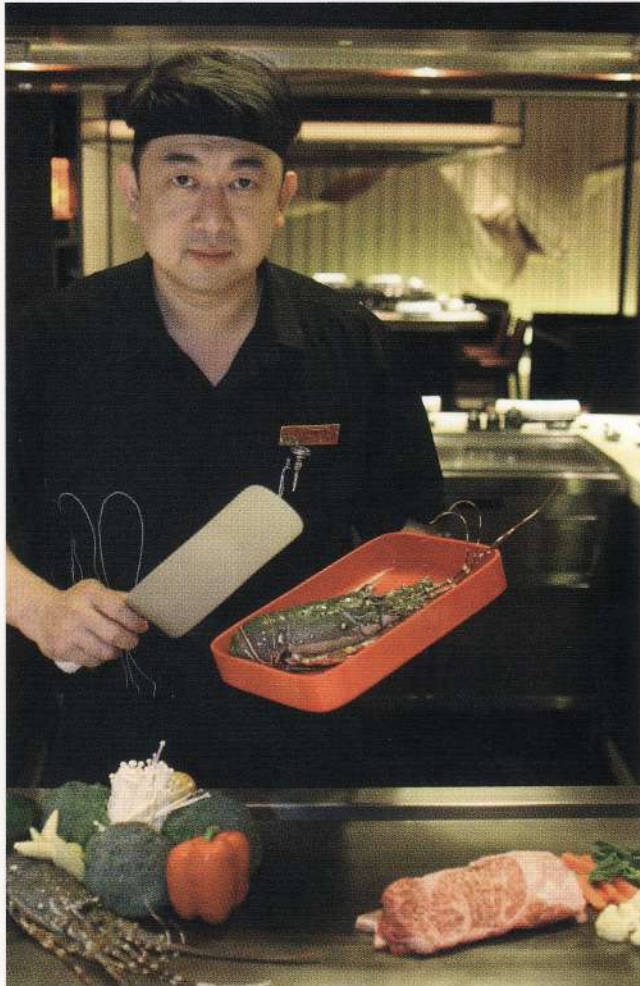
customers are Thai, and the restaurant is also gaining popularity among local and visiting expatriates. Asked if he adapts any of the food to suit the Thai taste bud, which seems to have a notorious disposition towards sweetened food, the Chef says "no concessions are done towards the Thai taste, we are committed to keeping the food as classically Japanese as possible." He does admit however, to adding a slight pinch of sugar to the soy sauce claiming, "otherwise it would be too salty, and even the Japanese seem to like it better that way."

Not only guests at Tsu have the pleasure of enjoying Chef Bantoon's cooking, but also his wife. "My wife does cook Thai food sometimes, but I usually end up doing most of the cooking – Japanese food," he laughs.



# nami

"My favorite part of cooking is experimenting and coming up with new dishes"



At the helm of Nami, Teppanyaki Bar and Tsunami's alternative dining experience, is the extrovert and dynamic maestro Chef Chalermphant Roggnatham, nicknamed "Charley". Teppanyaki is stir-fried meat, fish and vegetables cooked and eaten off a "teppan" or tabletop grill.

The Bangkok-born chef started his career in food in 1986, learning about French cuisine. "I like to learn about the way different foods are prepared... I also have a background in Indian cuisine," he says. Like Chef Bantoon, he considers Teppanyaki to be an art form, albeit "art by action".

Enjoying the fun of cooking is part of the superb gastronomy that Chef Charley prepares. Using the flashing tools of his trade – a knife, a fork, and two metal spatulas – he entertains guests nightly with his display of dexterity. Cutting, stirring, seasoning and dividing each diner's portion onto plates on the teppan - he does all with the flair of a true showman.

Nami's mouth-watering selection of Australian Wagyu Beef, Phuket Lobster, New Zealand Lamb or Ostrich – especially flown in several times a week – is complimented by soup, salad and dessert. Teppanyaki has its own traditions that are quite different from classic Japanese cuisine. "It is very much fusion food. A combination of Japanese with a bit of American," notes Charley.

"My favorite part of cooking is experimenting and coming up with new dishes," he says. "We also try to honor special requests and diners are

welcome to make suggestions." Vegetarians will be happy to hear that there is an ample selection of fresh vegetables to choose from including different varieties of mushroom.

During the week, Nami offers a venue for work colleagues to come after a hard day at the office to loosen up. On weekends, it takes on a family-oriented ambiance, with people of all ages enjoying its fabulous Teppanyaki cooking. For the lamb, Charley has created his own Teppanyaki sauce, a secret recipe which customers are already beginning to ask for even though it's not on the menu. "Having prepared food from so many different cultures and combining the best of them, it makes sense for me to put together a special sauce," he says, "just to tantalize my customers' taste buds a little more!"

