

Five minutes with Chef Kengo

A master of innovation (and surprises!)

Soneva Jani's new Executive Chef shares his love of Spain, tapas and beautiful women...

Soneva Jani's Chef Kengo Tomita is not an ordinary chef. As his name suggests, he is a Japanese National, born and bred in Tokyo, Japan's capital city. So, I'm quite astonished when he speaks to me in English with a thick Spanish accent. "I am full of surprises," he jokes, breaking out into his broad characteristic grin, which illuminates his beautifully photogenic face.



Why did you want to become a chef?

I didn't plan on being a Chef at first. I studied International Commerce at University. My obsession was to travel to Spain, and I needed money to travel and to eat. During University, I found work in a Japanese Restaurant in the kitchen, which was easy as I grew up working in the kitchen anyway. My mum and dad had full time jobs so I always had to help cook and clean; I knew the basics. Once I graduated, I left Japan straight away for Spain.

But why Spain?

Twenty-five years ago, in Tokyo there were very few Spanish restaurants – only Japanese, Chinese, French and Italian. I had read that Spain had a very nice cuisine, so I was thinking – this is the future! If I could learn the Spanish language, I could go wherever I wanted; USA, Central America, South America.... Plus I love football and beautiful women. That's probably a big part of it too.

What happened next?

I found a job in a restaurant and I started studying to become a Chef as I enjoyed the work. I ended up spending 18 years in Spain, working in restaurants and hotels throughout San Sebastian (including in the three-Michelin starred restaurant Arzak), Madrid, Barcelona, and Malaga. I am in love with Spain, it's a beautiful country and my home is in Malaga now.



After this we decided to spend a bit of time travelling the world, so I worked in the United Arab Emirates in the popular Al Hambra Restaurant in Dubai's Madinat Jumeirah, before moving to the Maldives to work for Soneva Fushi as the Chef de Cuisine at By the Beach, where I have been for the past 18 months.





We have eight nationalities in our kitchen team, including chefs from Thailand and Vietnam, so expect the most delicious Som Tum, Vietnamese Pho and hand-rolls, among other things....

We try to use as many ingredients from the gardens on the island as possible. We have a very large garden here that was an operational farm for many years,

so we have no limit in terms of how much we can grow and use for our restaurants. We use only the freshest local fish that are caught daily, which include Tuna, Mackerel, Job fish, Kingfish, and Rainbow Runners.

What is your remit at Soneva Jani?

I am the new Executive Chef at Soneva Jani. I am responsible for all the outlets and the whole kitchen team. It's a big responsibility and I'm extremely grateful and honoured to have this opportunity at this incredible resort.

Tell us about your food.

My specialty is Japanese and Spanish cuisine. Although I may be inspired to use subtle influences of Japanese in Spanish cuisine, for instance, I don't like to mix the two cuisines too much as they lose their taste and it becomes confusing to the guests.

My specialty dish is Arroz Negro (Black Rice Paella), a Valencian and Catalan dish made from rice, Squid ink, seafood stock, calamari, prawns, vegetables, paprika, onion, bell peppers, aioli, green apple, and pears.

What can guests expect at Soneva Jani?

Simple, healthy and delicious food that is beautifully presented. Our restaurants serve mostly international cuisine, with a heavy Asian and Mediterranean influence.

Don't miss...

The Seafood Paella, it's perfect for sharing as it is so huge and tasty with fresh local seafood.

Upon request, I can also make an organic Daikon Salad, which is made from Japanese Radish and ginger.

But you should definitely try Kengo's Special Tapas Selection. This is comprised of a small selected mix of Asian Tapas and Mediterranean Tapas, such as Maki sushi, strawberry gazpacho, croquettes, and Spanish omelettes, paired with excellent champagne, of course.

