## A Historical Walk Around Kyoto

Kyoto style *Soba* Noodle on New Year's Eve

Peak of the autumn season is ending in Kyoto, and it's already December. It is about time to get ready to welcome the New Year.

In Japan, speaking of food on the New Year's Eve is buckwheat noodle, especially called" *Toshikoshi soba*" (*Toshikoshi* means year-crossing, *soba* means buckwheat noodle). Although there are various theories, it is said that we started to eat *soba* on New Year's Eve with the wish for long life since *soba* is fine and long. When it comes to *Toshikoshi soba* in Kyoto, it is *Nishin* (herring)-*soba* (a bowl of hot *soba* topped with herring).
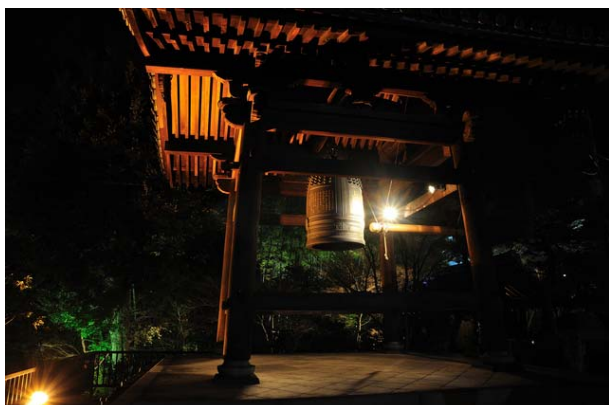
Herring is a popular foodstuff widely used as salted or vinegar pickled in other countries. In Japan, the herring fishing was major industry in Hokkaido in Edo era. At that time, they seemed to be used not only as foodstuff, but also as oil for lamp and fertilizers from their pomace, because of their large catch and their high fat content.

It was difficult to get fresh fish in Kyoto because it is far from the sea and there was no technology to keep freshness like the present. Dried herring was a precious preservable source of protein. The dried herring fillet was soaked in the rice water over night and seasoned with soy sauce and *mirin* (sweet cooking rice wine), etc. and simmered for adequate time.

Nishin soba was originally made in Matsuba located beside Minamiza which is a theater featuring kabuki and other stage production. Then it becomes widespread as a local specialty in Kyoto. A lot of people seemed to eat *Nishin soba* after seeing the play in Minamiza. Sweet-and-salty broth from the herring helps lightly-flavored *soba* soup to make rich and savory. It is delicious Kyoto's taste. The cooked herring is also recommended as a good pairing to alcohol.

How about to spend New Year's Eve while tasting *Nishin soba* in Kyoto?