

Consul-General of Japan in Sydney's Newsletter

No. 26 Japanese Food Stores and Japanese Restaurants in Sydney: Transcending Cultures

16 October 2020

More than a year has passed since I came to Sydney. This Consul-General's newsletter is my 26th. As part of "an open consulate", I have written every other week (with occasional exception) to convey to you the daily work of this Consulate and to create an opportunity to reflect upon Japan-Australia exchange and cooperation across various fields.

One topic I have long wanted to pick up is Japanese food retailers and Japanese restaurants. Japanese food stores are an indispensable part of life for Japanese people residing here and I have often been thankful for their existence. Moreover, here in Sydney, there are many wonderful Japanese restaurants, which enhance Japan's presence in the city. There is also a noticeable increase in the number of Australians who are fans of Japanese food – when Australians visiting Japan are asked about what they are looking forward to during their trip, around 85% respond "eating Japanese food", making it the most popular response (2019 Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) statistics).

The current COVID-19 situation has had a huge impact, especially on the restaurant industry, and Japanese restaurants are no exception. However, recently, due to the decrease in the number of new infections, restaurants are resuming trade while observing the necessary COVID-19 safety measures. I have also been supporting Japanese restaurants, originally by ordering deliveries and lately I have finally been able to meet and speak with some people working in Japanese food stores and Japanese restaurants.

In this issue of my newsletter, I would like to reflect on the various support measures for local Japanese food stores and Japanese restaurants and invite you to consider with me how we can support their development from here on.



A pairing of *bento* lunchboxes from “Musubiya” and NSW wine
(12 July 2020)

- **Japanese food take-away and delivery – a recommendation**

When COVID-19 measures came into full effect in March this year, Japanese restaurants were greatly affected by the restrictions on people going out and by restrictions on operating restaurants and limits on the number of people able to gather.

The Consulate also wondered whether it could do something for local Japanese restaurants, and the first step we took was to publish “Support Japanese restaurants by ordering take-away and delivery” on our website in Japanese and English.

It listed up the various special-feature websites (in Japanese and English) that local community papers and lifestyle sites had created about Japanese food take-aways, largely in Sydney, calling on people to support Japanese restaurants. If our webpage helped even a little, that would make me very happy.

While staying at home to help prevent infection, every weekend I have ordered Japanese food delivery or had Japanese food take-away, comparing the flavours. They have all been delicious!



An advertisement for JETRO's "Japan at Home" campaign
(October 2020)

- **JETRO's "Japan at Home" campaign - discounted deliveries from Japanese restaurants**

Later, the Government of Japan announced its policy to promote Japanese food product exports as part of its COVID-19 measures. As part of these measures, in Australia, the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) launched the "Japan at Home" campaign, which from this month offers discounted deliveries from Japanese restaurants.

The campaign is being conducted with a view to the prospective stable increase of the amount of deliveries post-COVID-19. The participating restaurants are Japanese restaurants around Australia which are certified as supporters of Japanese food products. The campaign is connected to Deliveroo's Early Week

Deals and supports the cost of giving discounts and sales expenses, and the costs of flyers and Japanese food product samples. Currently, approximately 40 restaurants around Australia are participating in the campaign and around 20 of them are in NSW. This number is expected to increase.

I hope this campaign will result in an increase in people choosing Japanese restaurant deliveries and using Japanese food products as well as lead to even closer ties in this sector between Japan and Australia during and post COVID-19.



With Ms Anegawa, owner of Anegawa Enterprises
(9 October 2020)

- **The beginning of Japanese food stores in Sydney**

Measures against COVID-19 are progressing and recently the number of new infections has fallen, so finally, I have been able to hear from Japanese food retailers, Japanese restaurateurs and others in the industry about the history of Japanese food in NSW and Australia.

After WWII, strong anti-Japanese sentiment remained in Sydney and there were only a limited number of Japanese nationals in the city. I heard that, in the early 1960s, there were no Japanese restaurants and no Japanese food stores. Japanese residents would meet at the Japanese Club in Elizabeth Bay (eastern Sydney) to eat dinner.

As far as is known today, the first Japanese food store to open after the war was Anegawa Enterprises, founded in 1966. Originally it was on Elizabeth Street in central Sydney, but now the shop is located a one-minute walk from Artarmon Station in Sydney's north.

When I went to introduce myself, I learnt that the owner of the store, Ms Anegawa Kyoko, has been cheerfully serving customers at the register for 54 years, ever since the store was established. The *anpan** I found myself buying without thinking was moist and tasted of Japan!

* A popular type of soft bread roll with sweet, red bean paste inside



With Tokyo Mart's Managing Director Funayama and Manager Umeda and Washoku researcher Mr Dekura
(From left: Mr Umeda, Mr Dekura, me, Mr Funayama, Mr Tsuchiya (Consul) and Chef Saeki (official residence chef), 1 October 2020)

● **Japanese food retailers expand Australia-wide from Sydney**

Ten years later in 1976, in Northbridge Plaza located in northern Sydney, the shop Tokyo Mart opened its doors. Managing Director Funayama Seiji was sent to Sydney as a 30-year old businessman, and when his office merged and he was instructed to return to Japan, he stayed and established Tokyo Mart.

Although business was difficult in the beginning, he kept his business on track by selling the meat for *sukiyaki*. Later he expanded the business and in 1991 established the food trading company Jun Pacific. Furthermore, Mr Funayama led the development of the Japanese food market throughout Australia, establishing branches called Fuji Mart in Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia.

Another key player in the popularisation of Japanese cuisine is Mr Dekura Hideo, who arrived in Sydney in 1972. He has worked as a chef in Japanese restaurants including Suehiro, has published multiple books and runs a cooking school. Thanks to the column “My stay in Australia (豪州滞在記)” which appears in the *Nichigo Press*, this history of the development of the Japanese food scene in Australia has been recorded. Both Mr Funayama and Mr Dekura are still very active, and not long ago, I had the pleasure of inviting them to my official residence, and once again conveyed the appreciation of the Government of Japan for their contribution to date.



With Azuma Restaurant Chef Azuma Kimitaka in front of commemorative items from the welcome dinner for Their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Princess

(From left: Chef Saeki (official residence chef), me, Chef Azuma Kimitaka and Mrs Azuma, 10 October 2020)

- **The development of Japanese restaurants in Sydney**

After those pioneering efforts, Japanese restaurants boomed in Sydney. The owner-chef of Azuma restaurant in Chifley Square in the Sydney CBD, Mr Azuma

Kimitaka, began working as a chef in Sydney in 1990, and in 1996, he established Azuma. In 2002, he prepared the welcome dinner for Their Imperial Highnesses the Crown Prince and Princess (now the Emperor and Empress of Japan) at the official residence of the Consul-General of Japan in Sydney. The style of menu used on that occasion is still employed at the residence to this day.

Currently, there are more than 50 Japanese restaurants in Sydney that employ chefs who have gained sufficient levels of experience in Japan and other places. There are various types of restaurants, including sushi restaurants, *izakaya*, restaurants with set menus, yakiniku restaurants, yakitori restaurants, ramen restaurants and so on.

At the moment, there is an *omakase** boom in Sydney, and depending on the restaurant, some are so popular they have bookings for several months ahead. I would also like to visit Japanese restaurants one by one to support them.

* *Omakase* literally means 'I'll leave it up to you' and here it means that the diner is in the hands of the chef who decides what to serve to patrons that day.



Sea bream *chazuke* at Shiki Restaurant
(Courtesy: Washoku Lovers)

- **Japanese cuisine: transcending and connecting cultures**

And today, there is a new type of stakeholder emerging, contributing to the popularity of Japanese cuisine. The other day, I met with Ms Tazunoki Yuri, owner of SD Marketing Global which operates the website 'Washoku Lovers', the only restaurant booking site in Australia which specializes in Japanese restaurants.

Ms Tazunoki arrived in Sydney 9 years ago and established her business 6 years ago. She envisions connecting Japan and Australia through Japanese food by increasing the number of restaurants using online booking systems and by making use of data about Australians who like Japanese food, and then taking that successful example to the world. On the Washoku Lovers website, there is information about how to use Japanese ingredients such as natto, as well as interviews with local chefs of Japanese cuisine in the 'Chef's Gallery'. The enthusiasm to spread Japanese cuisine is clear to see on the Washoku Lovers website.

On 26 October, a “Tasting Symposium” will be held at Mr Dekura Hideo's studio. This new undertaking is designed to develop knowledge about Japanese food culture in Australia and foster young chefs. The first guest chef will be Mr Kawano Takumi from Shiki restaurant, who will demonstrate sea bream *chazuke* and tempura using fresh tea leaves grown in NSW. It is planned to hold this “Tasting Symposium” regularly in the future. Through this, the skills and knowledge of highly experienced chefs such as Mr Dekura will surely be passed on to a new generation of chefs.

Japanese food transcends words and culture and conveys the best/goodness of Japan. Furthermore, by using a variety of fresh ingredients unique to Australia, new value will be created and new ties forged between Japan and Australia.

Through a mix of Japanese and Australian ingredients, wonderful Japanese cuisine that can only be had here in Sydney is being created. Moreover, you will often find Australian restaurants with menus that include flavours inspired by Japanese cuisine. However, according to Ms Tazunoki, the reality is that about half of Australians have hardly eaten any Japanese food, not knowing, for example, that Japanese *onigiri* rice balls have tasty ingredients at their core, so there is still opportunity to popularise Japanese cuisine even more in this country.

Recently, I met the leadership of the Sydney Fish Market, and opinions were exchanged about how to utilise the state-of-the-art technology and know-how of Tokyo's Tsukiji/Toyosu Market ahead of the opening of the new Sydney Fish Market planned for 2024. This development will further improve the quality of marine products and ingredients in Sydney and more widely around Australia, in turn improving the quality of Japanese cuisine. I feel this offers new possibilities for cooperation between Japan and Australia in the food industry.

As the Consulate-General of Japan, we would like to continue to support efforts to promote the popularity of Japanese cuisine and local Japanese food stores and Japanese restaurants. If you have any good ideas how to do this, I encourage you to approach us and share such ideas with us. You are welcome!

Support Japanese restaurants by ordering takeaway and delivery

<https://www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp/files/100051415.pdf>

JETRO's "Japan at Home" campaign offering discounted deliveries from Japanese restaurants

<https://www.facebook.com/JapanAtHomeAU>

Anegawa Japanese Groceries - the foundation for the development of Japanese food culture (6th instalment of "Dekura Hideo's Japanese food journey in Australia") (Japanese)

<https://nichigopress.jp/live/dekura/152648/>

Anegawa Japanese Groceries on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/Anegawa.artarmon>

"Tokyo Mart" - the foundation for the spread of Japanese cuisine (28th instalment of "Dekura Hideo's Japanese food journey in Australia") (Japanese)

<https://nichigopress.jp/live/dekura/188708/>

People living for the now in Australia: Mr Funayama Seiji (Nichigo Press) (Japanese)

<https://nichigopress.jp/column/imaikiru/135572/>

Tokyo Mart on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/tokyomartsydney>

Dekura Hideo's Japanese food journey in Australia – 'My stay in Australia' (Nichigo Press Issues 1 to 35) (Japanese)

<https://nichigopress.jp/category/live/dekura/page/2/>

<https://nichigopress.jp/category/live/dekura/>

Washoku Lovers : online booking site for Japanese restaurants

<https://washokulovers.com/>

Washoku Lovers – The story of a female entrepreneur making her dream come true in Australia (Blog of Washoku Lovers owner and founder Tazunoki Yuri) (Japanese)

<https://ameblo.jp/washokulovers>

Invitation to “Tasting Symposium” (Japanese)

<https://ameblo.jp/washokulovers/entry-12629956434.html>

Utilising know-how from the move to Toyosu City Market: Japan-Australia Cooperation for the Redevelopment of the Sydney Fish Market (*Nichigo Press*, September 2019) (Japanese)

https://nichigopress.jp/nichigo_news/monthly_news/187460/

Collaboration continues with Sydney Fish Market’s visit to Japan (NSW Department of Primary Industries, 1 October 2019)

<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/about-us/media-centre/releases/2019/collaboration-continues-with-sydney-fish-markets-visit-to-japan>

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