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Destination Restaurants 2021

AUTHENTIC JAPAN SELECTION

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Why regional restaurants topped Destination list

By MINAMI NAKAWADA CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Destination Restaurants 2021 is a list of the best restaurants in Japan, published by The Japan Times in April 2021. To commemorate the announcement, a special talk session on the charm of Japanese food culture was held at The Japan Times' headquarters in December. The speakers were Yoshiki Tsuji, principal of the Tsuji Culinary Institute and a member of the Destination Restaurants selection committee, and Kei Tokado, representative director of Pocket Concierge, one of American Express' dining businesses and a sponsor of the Destination Restaurants list. The facili-

tator was the chair of The Japan Times, Minako Suematsu.

Over the years, the Japanese have cultivated distinctive and rich food cultures suited to their particular local climates. They have also actively incorporated dishes from overseas and developed them into original dishes through the use of local ingredients and cooking methods. And yet, when it came to evaluating Japan's foods and restaurants, there was always a tendency for foreign criteria to be applied. The new list was born from a desire to demonstrate to the world how the Japanese evaluate and appreciate their own food.

"At first, when The Japan Times asked me to join the selection committee, I worried that the list would be no different from the other guides and awards," Tsuji said. "But the more I heard about the plan, the more I realized it was different. This award was the chance for Japanese to proudly introduce restaurants selected when a Japanese filter is applied, based on Japanese culture and history. Other major awards to date, such as the

Michelin Guide and the World Best 50 Restaurants, evaluate food based on an international common language from a foreign perspective. But they can't capture everything that Japanese food has to offer. We seek out the artisans, and the local stories. Perhaps the difference between this list and others is that we don't make selections based solely on the taste of the food. We consider the surroundings leading to the creation of the restaurant, the chef's efforts to bring together the local environment, ingredients and producers, like an orchestra conductor." As a result, the restaurants that were ultimately selected were not in the big cities of Tokyo, Osaka and Kyoto, but in the regions, in locations you might visit for a night.

For curious customers venturing to these independently run regional restaurants, there is a service to help: Pocket Concierge (<https://pocket-concierge.jp/en/>). Pocket Concierge lists more than 1,000 famous restaurants all over Japan and allows you to make reservations and payments. You can even

make reservations in English as well as Japanese. With Pocket Concierge, not only can people from all over the world experience the best food culture that Japan has to offer, but they can make reservations at restaurants recognized by local foodies, and payments are smooth with their online pre-payment system. "Of course, for people visiting a restaurant the taste of the food is important, but I think the experience of the restaurant goes far beyond that. We see it as our role to provide that experience," Tokado said.

Although the number of inbound tourists to Japan has declined drastically amid the pandemic, this does not mean that Japan's diverse food culture and the technical skills of its chefs are being lost. Japanese food continues to yield rich discoveries. American Express members can make priority reservations for Destination Restaurants on a special section in the Pocket Concierge site. Don't waste any time going out to the countryside and enjoying a completely new food experience.



Right: Kei Tokado, CEO of Pocket Concierge, which was founded in 2011 and acquired by American Express in January 2019.

Left: Yoshiki Tsuji, head of the board of directors of the Tsuji Culinary Institute, director of the All Japan Food Association and selection committee member for Destination Restaurants.



Tsuji and Tokado with the chair of The Japan Times, Minako Suematsu

● Summary

日本発信のベスト・レストラン・リスト。その魅力を語る。

「Destination Restaurants 2021」は、ジャパントイムズが発表した日本のベストレストランを選定したリスト。それを記念し日本の食文化の魅力をテーマに特別セッションが行われた。ゲストは、辻調理師専門学校校長でリスト選考委員の辻芳樹氏と、リストのスポンサーで、アメリカン・エクスプレスのダイニング事業のひとつである「ポケットコンシェルジュ」の代表取締役、戸門慶氏。「このリストは日本人のフィルターを通して、外国人へ向け、誇りを

もってレストランを紹介するものです」と辻芳樹氏は語る。

そんなレストランとお客さんを繋いでくれるのが「ポケットコンシェルジュ」。予約から決済までを行えるオンライン予約サービスで、日本全国の名店を1000軒以上掲載。英語でも店の予約ができる。「おいしい」と感じていただくことは大切ですが、それ以上に店での体験が重要です。それを提供するのが私たちの役割だと思っています」。戸門慶氏は語る。



日本語全文はこちらから

POCKET CONCIERGE

Pocket Concierge is a restaurant reservation service for carefully selected restaurants, offering services such as vacant seat notifications for hard-to-book restaurants and waiting lists for restaurants that are usually open only to regular customers.



Destination Restaurants 2021
Supported by Pocket Concierge

A seamless dining experience from booking through online payment with Pocket Concierge.

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