

# sustainable japan

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## Holistic approach aims to ready kids for roles on world's biggest stages

# Rugby School Japan bridges nations, generations

**Name: Tony Darby**  
**Title: Rugby School Japan, Principal**  
**URL: <https://rugbyschooljapan.ed.jp/>**  
**Hometown: Midlands, U.K.**  
**Years in Japan: 1**

### Leaders & Readers

**KERRY FURUKAWA**  
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Rugby School has opened in Japan! A new chapter has begun, building on over 400 years of traditional education in the English town of Rugby.

The sport of rugby was invented at Rugby School in England. The school in Chiba Prefecture uses the curriculum of its parent school, sharing a strong connection, including the eponymous sport. Principal Tony Darby says it offers a holistic, bespoke education in the spirit of an authentic British boarding school.

Quick history: In 1823, during a soccer game at Rugby School, student William



For Tony Darby, one of the most important qualities a person can have is the ability to be courageous. COSUFI

Webb Ellis caught the ball and ran with it toward the opposing side's goal. That act formed the foundation for the sport of rugby.

### Second school outside the U.K.

Recent history: The first Rugby School outside the U.K. was started in Thailand in 2017, and the school in Japan is the second. Located in Kashiwanoha, with the University of Chiba and the University of Tokyo's Kashiwa campus nearby, Rugby School Japan sits on a sprawling complex that is still expanding.

The developers delivered the complex — which includes a gymnasium, an exercise gym, boarding houses, an airy rugby-ball-shaped dining room, a cafe, reading nooks and a library — in nine months. The buildings' clean lines and well-lit rooms have a modern edge, yet they also echo the aesthetics of a British boarding school.

Darby, looking for a unique challenge where he could apply some of the entrepreneurship skills he has taught, jumped at the chance to move to Japan a year before the school's launch to set it up. He is satisfied that it has successfully communicated the culture and expectations of the Rugby brand to its more than 140 students, their families and others involved.

### Building international citizens

"It's important that the pupils and the parents really understand what we're offering. So if they want to take their children home at 3:00, that's not us. (School ends at 5:30.) If they don't want to be involved in the co-curricular program, that's not

us. It's that holistic approach that not all parents understand, and so we have been selective. We test rigorously, but we interview every pupil and we meet with parents before entering into the school."

The aim, Darby explains, is to produce well-rounded individuals ready to play roles on the world's biggest stages.

"Every single pupil does something outside of the classroom every single day — choir, painting, lots of different societies. They do sport three times a week. What we're building are international citizens designed to be very open and outward-looking. They can go on to be whatever they want. But they've got the skill set there. They have the confidence to go forward and contribute to society," Darby said.

The student body, from 15 nations and running from ages 11 to 18, has a combination of day students, weekly boarders and permanent boarders. Regardless of whether they go home at the end of the day, on Saturdays or at the end of the term, students are all integrated into a community that focuses on cultivating a sense of belonging. Even though day students don't live in the boarding houses, they still have their own desks in assigned rooms.

The emphasis is not only on academics, but also on pastoral care — looking after the well-being of the students. Darby has separate academic and pastoral deputies, members of the teaching staff are assigned to the boarding houses as residential house masters, and deputy house masters, together with nonresidential teachers, support the boarding teams.



COSUFI

### In love with teaching

Darby himself did not attend a boarding school, but he was inspired to pursue higher education based on his interactions with teachers at his British state school. He simply loved school and was the first in his family to attend university. But this was not before giving up another dream, determining at 17 that he was not "quite good enough to become a professional soccer player."

An "exciting" year of teaching abroad after university ended with him being smitten with the profession. He returned to an office job in the U.K. but was eventually pulled back into the classroom by memories of how rewarding that work had been.

"That thirst for knowledge, that enthusiasm. I became an accountant, which was quite a contrast. After a while, I just thought, 'I much prefer the interaction

### Longtime teacher, sports enthusiast

Tony Darby grew up in the Midlands in the United Kingdom. After studying economics and politics at university, he taught English for a year in the Czech Republic.

Upon returning home, he briefly worked at the accounting firm Price-WaterhouseCoopers before completing a teaching qualification and starting his long career in education. In 2003, he joined Rugby School as head of the economics and business department and spent 14 years there in various roles.

Before Rugby School Japan, he had served as subwarden of St. Edward's School in Oxford starting in 2017. A sports enthusiast, he has coached several school teams, including rugby, cricket and soccer.

During his downtime, Darby enjoys traveling within Japan, spending quality time with his family, playing golf and listening to classical music.

with the pupils and seeing the progress that you get there rather than looking at balance sheets or profits."

### Community partnerships

One area he is looking to make progress in at Rugby School is forming partnerships with community groups and corporations. With a goal of increasing the number of women in tech, Google helps to run a co-curricular club at Rugby School. There is also a local innovation lab where students can interact with entrepreneurs and access resources for starting their own ventures. Ties have been forged with Chiba University in the field of hydroponics as well.

"Every pupil needs to understand that they are part of a local community and then a wider Japanese community," Darby said.



# Tsukumo

## Tsukumo showcases Nara's far-flung history



**TAEKO TERAO**  
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The Japanese restaurant Tsukumo opened near Nara Station in 2015 and relocated in 2021. Its current site is a 30-minute walk from the station and 25 minutes from Kintetsu Nara Station, an area that is home to many of the most outstanding sightseeing attractions in Nara.

Located on a corner of Naramachi-dori, a street lined with traditional houses, some dating back to the Edo Period, Tsukumo is a detached structure brimming with the aesthetic sensibility of chef Masato Nishihara, who has a deep love for traditional Japanese culture. The restaurant, which has seven counter seats, four table seats and one private room, is run by Nishihara together with *okami* (proprietress) Tomoko Nishihara and a small kitchen staff. The *omakase* set menu, priced anywhere from ¥25,000 to ¥35,000 (\$170 to \$240) for both lunch and dinner depending on the ingredients purchased that day, is based on changing monthly themes.

The succession of dishes is not only delicious and visually beautiful, but also richly evocative of Nara's history. Nishihara honed his craft at Japanese restaurants in New York and London as well as Japan, acquiring an international sensibility along the way. "Nara



**Address**  
 Tsukumo  
 968, Kideracho, Nara,  
 Nara  
<http://tsukumaonara.com>



is an international city that gathered objects from overseas via the Silk Road since ancient times. I really enjoy creating dishes that combine these elements with the adventure and romance of encounters between ancient and modern," he said.

At many traditional Japanese restaurants — including Kyoto Kitcho Arashiyama,

where Nishihara started training and worked for a decade — apprentices have learned not only about cuisine and serving vessels, but about Japanese traditional culture as a whole. With the continuing decline in the number of traditional restaurants, the work of chefs like Nishihara has become especially significant.

**MAKOTO YAMASHITA**  
 GOVERNOR OF NARA PREFECTURE



I would like to congratulate Tsukumo for being selected for this prestigious recognition.

Tsukumo offers cuisine inspired by Nara's history, culture and nature, and also promotes the appeal of ingredients from Nara Prefecture by using ingredients cultivated in the area's lush climate. I truly hope that more restaurants in Nara will offer such delicious food, with more opportunities for young chefs to take on new challenges, leading to the promotion of the use of local ingredients and the revitalization of the community.

**GEN NAKAGAWA**  
 MAYOR OF NARA



I am very proud that Tsukumo has been selected as one of 10 prestigious restaurants and also that it is attracting worldwide attention. Nara, with its long history, is the birthplace of Japan's culinary culture, and many wonderful restaurants are now being established in the city. Tsukumo offers an "experience" where you can feel the climate, history, scenery, air and colors of Nara through its cuisine, and you can truly taste Nara. I hope that such wonderful restaurants will gain more recognition and spread their wings to the rest of the world.

# Sasue Maeda Fish Shop's owner is discerning partner to top chefs

## Sustainable Japan Awards: Satoyama Special Award

**MAIKO MURAOKA**  
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Naoki Maeda was born to know fish. Now the fifth-generation owner of Sasue Maeda Fish Shop in the Shizuoka port town of Yaizu, he pays meticulous attention to the quality of each fish and works with chefs to sell them the fish most suited to specific dishes. A fish shop is just one step of the process of getting fish from the hands of fishers to the mouths of consumers, but how that is done makes a vast difference. Even chefs from overseas are among the many people who come to Maeda's shop to learn his techniques.

Maeda's fish shop received the Satoyama Special Award in the Sustainable Japan Award 2023, presented by The Japan Times, for its continuous efforts in elevating the fish business to the next level by adding value that is only made possible by a polished sense and highly trained technique.

But Maeda was never an award-winning student at school. "I was a troublemaker all along," he said with a laugh in a recent interview with The Japan Times. He either quit or soon got kicked out of all of his 20-odd part-time jobs during high school. The only place he felt satisfied was the seaside fish market, where he took a part-time job at his family's fish shop — the only job he managed to keep for more than a month. "Old men at the fish market would praise me for coming early in the morning to work before school," he said. "Never happened at school."

He started working full time at the fish shop 29 years ago. But being the son of the



**Naoki Maeda, fifth-generation owner of Sasue Maeda Fish Shop** SASUE

master was not easy, especially since his father was a genuinely traditional man who taught his skills to all of his employees except his son. "I tried to eavesdrop on what he was saying to other workers and practiced on pears and *konnyaku* because I wasn't allowed to touch fish yet. The only thing I was allowed to do was cleaning and removing sardines' heads for the first year and a half," he said.

It was the master of the traditional Japanese restaurant Tsuki no Mori, Yuzo Hasegawa, who supported Maeda all through his younger days. Maeda used to visit the restaurant and learned the master's sophisticated cooking skills and style while talking about his problems. The master used the fish Maeda prepared for him, gave him feedback and introduced him to many of his customers.

"It wasn't just know-how that he taught me — he showed me the order of things and how to explore," Maeda said. About 10 years after Maeda started working at the fish shop, the master of the restaurant fell ill. "I told him that I was about to start repaying him for everything he'd done for me. 'I am glad that you intend to return the favor, but pay it forward instead. There will be people of younger generations who will rely on you and your fish, so put your mind to supporting them. It's a man-to-man promise' — those were his last words to me," Maeda said.

That was why Maeda started to pour his energy into making a local restaurant, Tempura Naruse, into a highly reputed establishment attracting customers from all over the world. Takeo Shimura, its owner and chef, had been buying fish from Maeda's shop. One day 13 years ago, Shimura showed Maeda a small red book: the Michelin Guide. Shimura said he wanted stars, and everyone laughed, but Maeda knew he was not joking. Maeda talked with Shimura every night, getting feedback on the fish used that day and looking for potential solutions to problems.

Thirteen years ago was a milestone for Maeda as well. It was the year when he went to the Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo for the first time and found that the fish he got in Yaizu could be highly competitive in markets outside the prefecture. He also met the owner of Yoshitake, a sushi restaurant in nearby Ginza, and the two got along well through their shared passion for fish. Maeda started to prepare and deliver fish to Yoshitake —



**A sashimi plate prepared using Sasue's fish** SASUE

and with that, his shop's fish passed beyond the prefecture's border for the first time in its five-decade history. Soon after the collaboration took off, the restaurant was given three Michelin stars. This fueled Shimura's passion. Day and night, he worked with Maeda to research various kinds of fish and polished his cooking skills, and eventually Tempura Naruse became a famous restaurant that is always filled with customers from all over Japan and around the world.

Last year, Yuki Nakamura, a young chef who trained under Maeda for one year and at Naruse for eight years, opened his own restaurant, Nakamura, at Tsuki no Mori's former location. "When Nakamura said he was looking for a place for his restaurant, I knew where it should be. I also knew that the wife of the deceased master had been cleaning the place every day even after her husband was gone," Maeda said.

There are several other restaurants in Shizuoka Prefecture that now collaborate with Maeda as well. More than 25,000 visitors now pass through Shizuoka Station annually to reach them, including Naruse. Maeda holds workshops for foreign chefs and shares his techniques by releasing videos on online platforms. His activities will continue to contribute to the region's revitalization and preservation and the broader dissemination of Japanese seafood culture.

The Sustainable Japan Award commends individuals, companies and organizations who have made advances in sustainable efforts. To learn more, scan the QR code or visit <https://sustainablejapan-times.com/sjaward2023>



Destination Restaurants 2023 AUTHENTIC JAPAN SELECTION

