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Sake: Improving with age

FROM THE EDITOR

By YOSHIKUNI SHIRAI / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Japan's most recognizable alcoholic beverage, sake, is made from rice and water. The rice is grown in paddies that are an important feature of the nation's beautiful countryside, attracting birds and other creatures, and sustaining the rich natural environment. Clean and delicious water is also essential, and so its proper management is necessary to secure the future of sake brewing. In

this way, sake depends on both the blessings of nature and their sustainable utilization.

According to statistics that the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries released this year, domestic shipments of sake peaked in 1973 at over 1.7 million liters. Fifty years later, in 2023, they were less than a quarter of that amount, at just 390,000 liters. In line with this decline in domestic

consumption, the number of breweries has also declined. There were more than 4,000 in 1955, according to the National Tax Administration Agency, but there are now fewer than half that number — just 1,500.

In such difficult circumstances, what new initiatives are the remaining sake breweries taking to ensure their survival? In this special issue, we explore some innovative new trends.

「日本酒」の原料は、「米」と「水」です。その酒造りに適した酒米を育てる水田は、美しい田園風景をつくり、また様々な生き物が集まり、風景だけでなく豊かな自然環境をも形成しています。また日本酒づくりには美しくきれいな水が欠かせず、酒造りを続けていくためには水源を含め、水の適正な管理が必要となります。そう、日本酒づくりは、大いなる自然の恵みと持続可能性ある取り組みの上に成り立っているのです。

2024年発表の農林水産省の統計によれば、日本酒の国内出荷量は1973年がピークで170万kℓでしたが、50年後の2023年には約39万kℓと、1/4以下に減少しています。その消費の落ち込みに伴い1955年に4000軒強あった清酒製造免許場数が現在その半分以下の約1500軒程度にまで減ってしまったことが国税庁のデータから見て取れます。厳しい状況にあるなか酒蔵はどのような取り組みをしているのか。その新しい潮流を探ってみたいと思います。



Kokuryu Sake Brewing Corp.

In 1804, Nizaemon Ishidaya, an ancestor of Kokuryu's Mizuno family of brewers, split from the main branch of the Ishidaya family split from the main Ishidaya family and established a sake brewery in what is now the Matsuoka Kasuga area of the Fukui Prefecture town of Eiheiiji. Known for its Kokuryu brand, which takes its name from the ancient name of the Kuzuryu River where the brewery is located, the company has been a driving force behind the local sake and *daiginjo* booms since the 1980s. Its sake, including its aged Muni, first launched in 2018, integrates the latest technologies with techniques dating back to the brewery's founding and is lauded in the industry. <https://www.kokuryu.co.jp/>



PHOTOS: TAKAO OHTA

Feature SAKE

INTERVIEW

Kokuryu innovates with fine rice wine and dining

By TAEKO TERAQ



“For more than 30 years, I have wanted to make an inn in Eiheiiji,” said Naoto Mizuno, an eighth-generation brewer and representative director of the Kokuryu Sake Brewing Corp.

NAOTO MIZUNO

Mizuno was born in 1964 in Eiheiiji, the eldest son of seventh-generation Kokuryu brewer Masato Mizuno. He graduated from Tokyo University of Agriculture with a degree in brewing. After working at Kyowa Hakko, he gained experience in the wine distribution and tourism industries in France and other parts of Europe before joining the family business in 1990. In June 2022, he opened Eshikoto, a food and culture promotion facility operated by Ishidaya Nizaemon Co. His other efforts to leverage sake in revitalizing the local economy include producing the Kanshukuen Eshikoto accommodation facility, which is scheduled to open on Nov. 26.

With its prices skyrocketing, Japanese whisky is attracting attention around the world. And now some pundits are asking if sake might follow in its footsteps — or in the footsteps of the well-known high-end wine brand *Domaine de la Romanee-Conti*. Some bottles of sake are already selling for hundreds of thousands of yen both in Japan and overseas.

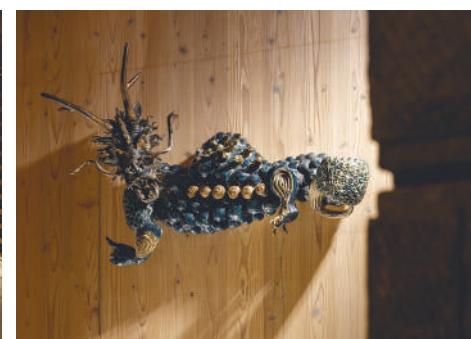
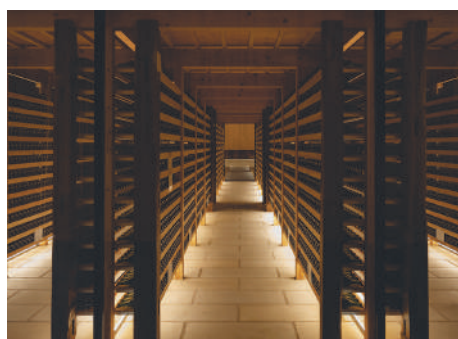
One brewery that is often compared to *Romanee-Conti* is the Kokuryu Sake Brewing Corp., a family business based in Fukui Prefecture.

This year marks the 220th anniversary of the founding of the brewery. Its high-quality sake, prized by connoisseurs, is brewed using rice and the gentle waters of a river that was once known as the Kokuryu River, although its official name is now Kuzuryu, meaning “nine-headed dragon” because of a legend that one lived there in ancient times.

In 2016, the wine critic Robert Parker

awarded 92 “Parker points” to a 720-milliliter bottle of Kokuryu sake that retailed for just ¥6,000 (\$40). It was a *junmai daiginjo* sake, best drunk as fresh as possible. Truth be told, the shelf life of regular sake is generally just one year. For this reason, sake has traditionally been distributed at low prices — unlike wine, which gains flavor and rarity as it ages. A Kokuryu sake first launched about 30 years ago, which sells for ¥10,000 per 720-ml bottle, was for years one of the most expensive bottles of sake you could buy.

“To further enhance the value of sake, we decided to produce a wine-like product that would have a production year and could be aged for extended periods of time,” explained the company's eighth-generation president, Naoto Mizuno. “After much research into rice selection and brewing methods, we succeeded in creating a mellow sake with no cloying taste and a long aftertaste by ag-



Left: A cellar for storing sparkling sake. Right: This dragon sculpture is the work of actress and ceramic artist Mieko Yuki.

Summary

“高付加価値化”こそ、日本酒の生きる道。

今後、ロマネ・コンティに肩を並べるような日本酒が、誕生するかもしれない。今回、取材した水野直人が代表取締役・八代目蔵元を務め、創業220年を迎える福井県〈黒龍酒造〉は、そんなニュー・ドメース・ロマネ・コンティと目される酒蔵の一軒だ。

これまで、一般的な日本酒の賞味期限は1年しかない

ため、熟成により付加価値がつくワインと違って、安い値段でしか流通してこなかった。「そこで、生産年をつけて、長期熟成に耐える日本酒を造りました」と水野が語る日本酒「無二」は現在、最高価格50万円超で販売されている。

戦後、日本酒の国内消費が減るなか、〈黒龍酒造〉は

1990年から売上を10倍以上に伸ばし、日本酒業界を牽引してきた。2022年6月、福井県の酒食と文化の発信施設〈ESHIKOTO〉をオープン。今年11月26日にはオーベルジュ〈歓宿縁 ESHIKOTO〉も開業予定だ。今後、〈ESHIKOTO〉を皮切りに本格的な酒蔵ツーリズムのブームが起こるに違いない。



日本語全文はこちら

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<https://sustainable.japantimes.com/jp>

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COVER PHOTO

A *sugidama* hangs outside the Kokuryu Sake Brewing Corp. A new ball of cedar leaves is displayed at sake breweries each year around February or March to indicate that the new season's sake is ready. It is said that the custom originated as a way of offering thanks to the god of sake.



PHOTO: TAKAO OHTA

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ESHIKOTO

Eshikoto opened in June 2022. Guests must be at least 20 years of age. The restaurant building includes the restaurant Acoya as well as Ishidaya Eshikoto, a sake store operated by Kokuryu. The Garyu Building, a storage cellar that also serves as an event space, was designed by Simon Conder, the great-grandson of the British architect Josiah Conder, who laid the foundations for Japanese architecture in the Meiji Era (1868-1912). The accommodation facility Kanshukuen Eshikoto is scheduled to open on Nov. 26. 12-17 Shimojoji, Eiheiji-cho, Yoshida-gun, Fukui. Closed on Wednesdays and the first, third and fifth Tuesdays of each month. <https://eshikoto.com/>

ing unrefined junmai daiginjo sake at just below zero degrees Celsius." The sake was called Muni, and its price now ranges from about ¥150,000 to over ¥500,000.

But Kokuryu's innovations didn't end there. After joining the family business in 1990, Mizuno worked on a range of reforms with his father, Masato Mizuno, who was then the president. One was to change the way their employees worked.

"In 1995, we made the *tōji*, the brewers, employees of the company. Also, when I joined the company, it was common for the *tōji* to live communally in dormitories, but we helped them establish their own private lives. We also made it easier for women to participate in the brewing process by automating some things and continuing to perform others by hand," he said.

Even more noteworthy were their reforms to distribution.

"No matter how good your sake is, if your distribution is not managed well, the quality will deteriorate. So from around 1989 to 1990, we decided to cut down on the number of stores that would stock our products. Our absolute requirement was that our sake had to be stored in a refrigerator. Furthermore, we decided that we would only wholesale to stores that had professionals on staff who both knew and loved sake," he explained. Naturally, the number of sake retailers that could meet those conditions was limited, and so sales dropped

by half. But after five years of perseverance, they recovered.

"My father and I agreed that if we didn't focus on the quality of sake so that customers could experience its true taste, then there would be no future for the product," he said.

Domestic consumption of sake in Japan has been declining due to lifestyle changes in the postwar period and other factors. As a result, the number of sake breweries has declined. In 1955, there were 4,021 licensed breweries, but by 2022, that number had dropped to 1,536, according to National Tax Agency data. Yet even in this challenging environment, Kokuryu has increased its sales more than tenfold since 1990 and is now one of the nation's leading breweries. With that strength, it is tackling a brand-new challenge: offering brewery-related luxury tourism services.

The town of Eiheiji in the district of Yoshida, where the brewery is located, had a population of 17,689 as of August. Its spiritual core is a Zen temple called Eiheiji. Built in 1244, it is the head temple of the Soto sect of Zen Buddhism and generally attracts about 500,000 visitors yearly. In the spring of 2024, the Hokuriku Shinkansen line extended through Fukui Station. Seeing an opportunity, and with the support of the prefecture and government agencies, Mizuno decided to launch a project that would boost tourism, particularly the number of overnight stays and the number of

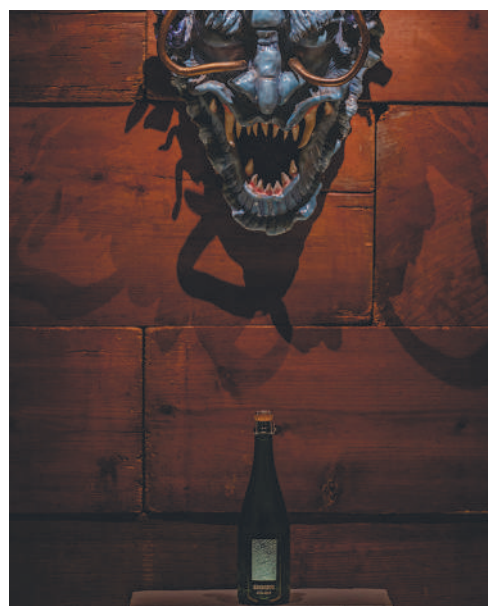
wealthy tourists.

In June 2022, he opened Eshikoto, a facility promoting the prefecture's sake, cuisine and culture, on a site facing the Kuzuryu River. Now he is working on the Kanshukuen Eshikoto rental villas, scheduled to open on Nov. 26, equipped with open-air baths and terraces. Meals will be provided on-site at En, a Japanese restaurant overseen by a Michelin-starred chef, and two other restaurants, with prices starting at ¥125,000 per person per night for accommodations and two meals. The ingredients, tableware, furniture and other handicrafts will be sourced mainly from Fukui Prefecture, but also from Ishikawa and Toyama prefectures in the surrounding Hokuriku region.

"As far as foreign tourists are concerned, it doesn't matter if they are in Fukui or Toyama Prefecture," Mizuno said. "They just want to experience attractive places. Tourists will always go to Tokyo and Kansai, but my hope is that Eshikoto will help bring them to Hokuriku as well. We have so much good sake and so many good restaurants here."

According to a 2017 survey by NTTCom Online Marketing Solutions and Jissen Women's University, 83.4% of inbound visitors to Japan tried sake during their visit. More than 60% visited a sake brewery. With new facilities like Kanshukuen Eshikoto now available, a boom in sake brewery tourism may well be taking shape.

Left: Opposite the event space, which includes a counter made from 200-year-old local cedar, is the sake cellar. Right: Aged sparkling sake.





Juku to Kan matured sake shop and bar

1F/B1 Sanbancho Building
7-16 Sanbancho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo
Tel:080-8015-5274
Open: 14:00-20:00. Closed Tuesdays and Wednesdays.
sakematured.com

Juku to Kan is a shop and bar specializing in matured sake. At the counter, which seats just five people, you can savor matured sake and dishes that pair well with it, served by bar proprietor and Juku to Kan President Nobuhiro Ueno.

PHOTOS: TAKAO OHTA

Feature SAKE

AGED SAKE

The revived tradition and future of matured sake

By RIKO SAITO

● Summary

熟成酒の伝統を掘り起こし、日本酒の未来をつくる。

日本酒をワインやウイスキーのように適切な温度管理のもとで長期熟成させ、熟成酒としてまったく別の日本酒文化を広めようとしているのが、元ポストン・コンサルティング・グループ日本代表を務め、現在熟成酒専門の販売店でバーも併設する《熟と爛》代表取締役会長の御立尚資。「江戸時代から明治時代初期頃まで熟成させ

た日本酒は普通に流通していました。明治中期に酒税法が変わり製造された瞬間から税金がかかるようになったため、熟成日本酒の文化が廃れていきました」と語る。海外やインバウンド旅行者の間で人気が高まっている日本酒だが、国内市場は低迷している。2000年には1兆円余あった売り上げは2023年には約4500億円までに落ち

込む。そのような中で10年ほど前から“付加価値のある日本酒”という課題に取り組んできた御立は、熟成酒の持つ無限のポテンシャルに注目する。「熟成酒の作り方には二つの方法があります。日本酒1種類をじっくり熟成させるビンテージ熟成と、5年以上の熟成酒をいくつかブレンドして作るものです」。



日本語全文はこちら

Sake is principally made using a technique called *kanzukuri* (“cold production”), brewed in winter from painstakingly grown rice, crystal-clear water and cultured *kōji* yeast and then shipped between January and March. The fresh flavor of cold-produced sake has made it popular as an alcoholic beverage to be savored with meals. However, some people are seeking to spread the word about an entirely different type: matured sake, created by aging sake for long periods in a temperature-controlled environment, much like wine or whisky. One of them is former Boston Consulting Group Japan co-chair Takashi Mitachi, who now serves as representative director and chairman of Juku to Kan, a shop and bar specializing in matured sake.

“Many people are astonished to discover that sake can be aged, but matured sake was perfectly commonplace in the Edo Period (1603-1868) and early Meiji Era (1868-1912),” he said. “As written accounts of this still survive today, we know that the tradition of appreciating matured sake is a venerable one. But changes to the liquor tax law in the middle of the Meiji Era meant that sake was taxed from the moment it was produced, so brewers could no longer afford to leave the drink to age, and the culture of matured sake became obsolete.”

Despite sake’s growing popularity overseas and with inbound tourists, the domestic market is in the doldrums. Net sales have slumped from in excess of ¥1 trillion (\$6.8 billion at current rates) in 2000 to around ¥450 million in 2023. It was against this backdrop that Mitachi, who has spent the last 10 years or so addressing the challenge of “value-added



From left: Daruma Masamune Over 5 Years (Juku to Kan original), ¥5,000; Azuma Rikishi Daiginjo Uroko Over 10 Years (Juku to Kan original), ¥12,000; Coin Sherry Cask, ¥12,000; and Tenju Junmai Ginjo 1997 (Juku to Kan original), ¥33,000.

✦ TAKASHI MITACHI

Representative director and chairman, Juku to Kan. Born in 1957. Received his MBA from Harvard Business School as a Baker Scholar. After joining the Boston Consulting Group, he served as the firm's Japan co-chair from 2005 until 2015, and as a member of its Worldwide Executive Committee between 2006 and 2013. Now focused on the topics of culture and support for the next generation, he currently serves as a director of the Ohara Museum of Art and professor at the Graduate School of Management, Kyoto University, among other positions. In June 2023, he opened Juku to Kan as part of his efforts to spread Japanese culture.

sake," began to focus on the unlimited potential of matured sake.

"While there's no precise definition of matured sake, we regard it as sake that has been allowed to age over time in an appropriate environment, transforming it into a drink with a complex depth of flavor," he explained. "There are two ways to make matured sake. One is vintage aging, in which a single type of sake is allowed to age thoroughly. The other involves blending a number of types of matured sake that have been aged for at least five years. Unless the blender knows the differences arising from such factors as the year of production and the original sake types being used, it's tricky to achieve a balance that will achieve a good outcome. But, done well, it's possible to produce an appealing matured sake with abundant complexity of flavor."

Mitachi says the individual character of matured sake results from both the cumulative temperature and the degree of polishing to which the rice is subjected. Sake left to age at 5 degrees Celsius will be completely different from that aged at 15 degrees, even if the aging period is the same, because maturation generally proceeds faster at higher temperatures. As for polishing, the more of the grain that is milled away, the more it loses amino acids and other components, leaving behind pure starch and making bringing out a complex flavor harder. If around 50% to 60% is left, various organic acids develop into a complex flavor. So sake brewed from rice that has not been excessively polished is the most suitable for aging and offers the potential for a more profound umami.

"Each brewery has its own approach to aging," Mitachi explained. "We've also partnered with those that have a clear philosophy around matured sake to produce our own Juku to Kan original matured sake. As the Maillard reaction between sugars and amino acids gradually proceeds, the sake changes from almost completely clear to brown," much the same way as baking browns breads. "In striking a balance between the degree of polishing and the storage temperature, a number of breweries have techniques for ensuring a pleasant flavor, and some even specialize exclusively in matured sake. I'm working with Juku to Kan President and bar proprietor Nobuhiro Ueno to track down matured sake from breweries of this kind."

All the glasses used at Juku to Kan's bar have a rim that curves outward. Whereas wine glasses enable wine to flow over the entire palate, the rim on these glasses channels the matured sake into a narrow stream that gives it a crisper taste, Ueno explained. Into my glass he had poured Daruma Masamune Over 5 Years, a Juku to Kan original. This fine example of assemblage had been created by selecting only outstanding vintages aged for six years from among the numerous varieties of Daruma Masamune matured sake produced by the Gifu

brewery Shiraki Tsunesuke. With an excellent balance of umami, sweetness and aroma, it enchants the drinker as it streaks along the palate.

Another interesting way to enjoy matured sake is to try it at different temperatures. Take, for example, Tamagawa Spontaneous Fermentation Junmaishu (Yamahai) "Vintage" 2018, which is produced by the Kinoshita Brewery in Kyotango, a city in the prefecture of Kyoto. It is the result of aging spontaneously fermented *junmaishu* — pure rice sake — for three years or more. At room temperature, it fills one's mouth with a nutty fragrance and an umami reminiscent of dashi stock. However, when slightly warmed to around 40 degrees, its body and aroma mellow, enabling the umami to come clearly to the fore. The difference in flavor is so great that one can hardly believe it is the same sake.

Juku to Kan also has an online store, where a team of tasters consisting of Ueno and three other experts provide detailed explanations of each sake's flavor and ideal serving scenario, such as before, during or after a meal. This makes it simple for even sake novices to choose a bottle. To ensure the appraisals are unbiased, the three other experts are independent of Juku to Kan.

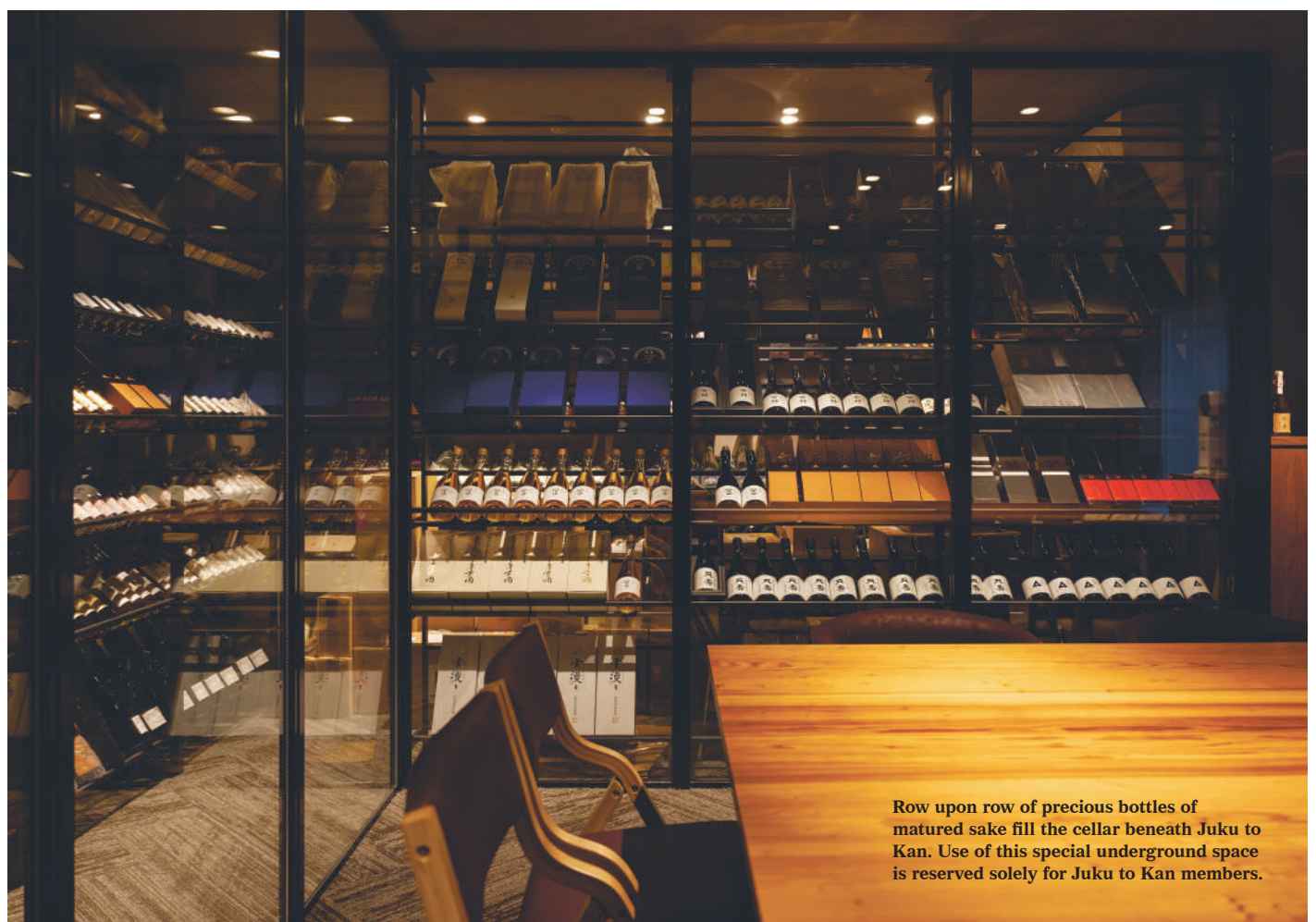
"The world of wine has a well-established culture of reviews and commentaries by expert tasters," Mitachi said. "One reason why the matured sake mar-



ket has struggled to grow until now is that this kind of culture hasn't yet developed. Many people express unease about the fact that one can't determine the quality of a matured sake until one drinks it, so we post appraisals by several tasters in an effort to establish a culture of reviews and commentaries that will enable people to feel comfortable choosing a bottle."

Ueno, who formerly ran a bar specializing in matured sake, truly is a profes-

sional in this field. He is also executive director of the Toki Sake Association for aged sake, in whose founding he played a central role. Mitachi and Ueno aim to formulate standards for evaluating matured sakes, promote the culture of matured sake and create high added value with a focus on maturation times. Guided by this mission, from a tiny five-seater bar, they are spreading a powerful message about an old yet new sake culture that will gain global currency.



Row upon row of precious bottles of matured sake fill the cellar beneath Juku to Kan. Use of this special underground space is reserved solely for Juku to Kan members.



Rice balls made from Saga Prefecture's Sagabiyori rice and an appetizer of Saga beef prepared by the Mugaritz team were among the dishes served at a gastronomic event.



PHOTOS: KOUTAROU WASHIZAKI

ANDONI LUIS ADURIZ

Aduriz was born in 1971 in San Sebastian, the gastronomic center of the Basque region in Spain. After training in several prestigious Basque restaurants, he opened Mugaritz in 1998 and was awarded two Michelin stars in 2006. He has been on the list of the World's 50 Best Restaurants every year since then. He has received numerous culinary awards, including Spain's National Gastronomy Prize. He has lectured at Harvard University, MIT and other universities, and authored more than 20 books. Aduriz is constantly pushing the boundaries of cuisine and sharing them with the world.

The original Shichida sake, which is not sold in Japan, was produced by the Tenzan Sake Brewery for the restaurant Mugaritz. Saga sake is now enjoyed as far away as Spain.



Feature SAKE

MARRIAGE

Famed Basque chef pairs with a top sake brewer

By MICHIKO WATANABE

The 1,046-meter Mount Amayama rises near the center of Saga Prefecture. At the foot of the mountain in the city of Ogi is the Tenzan Sake Brewery, which uses pure spring water from the Tenzan mountain range and sake rice grown on the local fertile plains. On March 22, 2024, a ceremony was held at the brewery to mark the appointment of Andoni Luis Aduriz, chef of the two-star Michelin restaurant Mugaritz in Spain's Basque region, as the Saga gastronomy ambassador, and he was presented with an Arita porcelain plate by Saga Gov. Yoshinori Yamaguchi.

Mugaritz is located in the countryside with nothing much around it, but it is one of those places that connoisseurs flock to from around the world. Sake and ceramics from Saga are used there.

"In my restaurant, we develop revolutionary dishes that no one has ever seen or tasted before. Despite this, for many years, our drink menu was just left to the sommelier to decide, in the old-fashioned style," Aduriz said. "Of course, the sommelier would change every two to three years, so at one time we had a lot of tra-

ditional wines, while at another we had 60 different kinds of sake on the list. However, on the occasion of the restaurant's 20th anniversary, we decided we could do better. We wanted to create drinks that were truly unique, in keeping with the spirit of the restaurant. We did this for wine and also for sake."

To achieve this, he sought out wineries supportive of his "experiment" and asked them to create special blends. The same went for sake. Tenzan was chosen and as a result it now produces two special Shichida-brand sakes for Mugaritz: a red label with a *junmai* blend (with no added alcohol) and a green label with a choice *junmai ginjō* blend.

Kensuke Shichida, Tenzan's sixth-generation president, said, "When I visited Mugaritz, I was completely blown away. I thought long and hard about the kind of sake that would match that amazing cuisine, and after many adjustments to the blend and tastings, I finally came up with these two bottles."

Unfortunately, they are not sold in Japan, but you can get a sense of them under the Shichida brand, which the presi-

dent launched in 2001 as a sake line that would suit a 21st-century palate.

Aduriz's connection with Saga dates back to an encounter with Arita porcelain at an exhibition in Lyon, France, in 2013. In 2022, the prefecture and the Spanish Embassy in Japan signed a memorandum of understanding for collaboration and cooperation. As gastronomy ambassador, Aduriz will serve as a bridge between Saga and Spain and also play a role in promoting the attractiveness of the prefecture's products.

After the commissioning ceremony, Tenzan hosted a lively gastronomic event featuring local ingredients. A number of tasting booths were set up in the brewery, offering a variety of dishes and processed foods made with the best of the prefecture's ingredients, including fruit tomatoes, lotus roots, sea urchins, strawberries, yams and *sōmen* noodles, all of which were prepared with great care by local producers and manufacturers. In addition, two chefs from Mugaritz who accompanied Aduriz pre-

pared dishes using ingredients from the prefecture, such as *adobar* consisting of the prefecture's signature *konoshiro* (gizzard shad) fish marinated in the Basque style and *pincho* using Saga beef, seaweed and other ingredients. The exchange of flavors between Saga and Spain played out in every dish, with guests pairing the foods with sake and Ureshino tea. Aduriz also partook of the offerings as he toured the brewery with the governor.

The event concluded with a speech by Aduriz. In Saga, he explained, "many producers have been in business for generations. They possess wisdom accumulated over centuries that goes into making every single product. Saga Prefecture is truly a living museum. I want to share what I have seen here with the world. The world needs you. That is why I became an ambassador. I am look forward to fulfilling that role from now on."

With that message and with thoughts on the future, the successful event came to an end.

Tenzan, established in 1875, is located in a rural setting. It hosted a gastronomic event to mark the appointment of Andoni Luis Aduriz, chef of Mugaritz, as the Saga gastronomy ambassador. <https://tenzan.co.jp/>



● Summary

バスクの名シェフと日本酒との関係。

佐賀県にそびえる1,046メートルの天山。その麓の小城市で、清らかな湧水と肥沃な平野で育った酒米を使い酒造りをするのが〈天山酒造〉だ。この酒蔵で2024年3月、スペインのミシュラン2つ星レストラン〈ムガリッツ〉のシェフ、アンドニ・ルイス・アドゥリスへの「SAGA ガストロノミー交流大使」委嘱式が行われた。

〈ムガリッツ〉は世界の食通がわざわざ訪れる特別な1軒だ。そこで佐賀の日本酒や器が使われている。「私のレストランでは、誰も見たことも味わったこともない、革命的な料理を展開しています。しかし飲み物はソムリエまかせで、ソムリエは2〜3年ごとに変わるため、レストランの有り様に合わせて、誰も飲んだことのないドリ-

ンクを作ろうと決めました。日本酒もです。現在〈天山酒造〉は、〈ムガリッツ〉のため2種類の特別な「七田」を収めている。日本では同じものを販売していないが「純米酒 七田」でその片鱗を楽しむことが可能だ。交流大使となったアドゥリスは、美食の分野における佐賀県とスペインの架け橋になっている。



日本語全文はこちらから

the japan times

Sustainable Japan Award

2024



Sustainable Japan Award 2024

In June 2021, The Japan Times merged its previously launched ESG Consortium and Satoyama Consortium into the Sustainable Japan Network. Its purpose is to support individuals, companies and organizations that have been working toward a sustainable society. Once a year, The Japan Times holds the Sustainable Japan Award, with both a satoyama section and an ESG section, to recognize and celebrate those who have made significant contributions. Here are this year's awardees.

株式会社ジャパントイムズは2021年6月、「ESG推進コンソーシアム」と「Satoyama推進コンソーシアム」、の2つのコンソーシアムを統合し、「Sustainable Japan Network」をスタートしました。

ジャパントイムズは年に一度Satoyama部門、ESG部門からなるSustainable Japan Awardを開催し、それぞれの分野でその年に先進的かつ持続可能な取り組みを行なった企業、団体、個人を表彰しています。本年の受賞者は以下の通りです。



<https://sustainable.japantimes.com/sjaward2024>



The winners



Sustainable Japan ESG Grand Prize



SUMITOMO MITSUI TRUST GROUP, INC.

Was "Sumitomo Mitsui Trust Holdings, Inc." prior to Oct. 1.

Sustainable Japan ESG Grand Prize

World Heritage Iwami Ginzan (Omoricho, Oda, Shimane Pref.)



NAKAMURA BRACE CO. LTD.



IWAMI GINZAN GUNGENDO GROUP CO. LTD.

Sustainable Japan ESG Excellence Award



WOTA CORP.



OJI HOLDINGS CORP.

Sustainable Japan satoyama Excellence Award



MURASAKINO WAKUDEN CO. LTD.



MAEBASHI DESIGN COMMISSION

Sustainable Japan ESG Special Award



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thejapantimes

Destination Restaurants 2024

AUTHENTIC JAPAN SELECTION

Charity dinner for Noto's recovery

By TAEKO TERA0

A charity dinner for the recovery of the Noto Peninsula, prepared by four chefs who have been honored by The Japan Times' Destination Restaurants, was held on Sept. 27 at the A-Brand Hotel in the Hokkaido town of Yoichi.

At the suggestion of Hiroto Murai, owner of the Yoichi restaurant-inn Yoichi Sagra, chefs Kazuhiro Inoue of Restaurant Uozen in Niigata Prefecture, Kanji Kobayashi of Villa Aida in Wakayama Prefecture and Toru Kawashima of the 2024 Destination Restaurant, Ipponsugi Kawashima in Nanao, Ishikawa Prefecture — who was impacted by the Jan. 1 Noto earthquake — gathered and created a splendid meal for 40 guests. Chef Toshiya Ikehata of the restaurant L'Atelier de Noto in Wajima, Ishikawa Prefecture, which was damaged in the quake, had planned to participate but could not because he had been engaged in distributing meals in the area and was affected by torrential rains that

struck Noto just before the event.

The dinner's eight courses, from appetizers to desserts, were created collaboratively using ingredients that each chef brought from his home region. Guests were truly delighted by the flavors of unique dishes that conveyed a feeling of the connections among regions and among people. These included "ikura rice," combining the first crop of rice from Nanao in Ishikawa Prefecture with salmon roe from Yoichi, and a contemporary take on *niku jaga* (stewed meat and potatoes) made with Noto beef that was sent by chef Ikehata.

Also participating were producers from five popular Hokkaido wineries, who answered guests' questions while serving them five rare types of wine with the meal. Bruce Gutlove of 10R Winery in Iwamizawa said: "Even though this is the busy grape harvest season, I came here because I support chef Murai's wish to help Noto. The foundation of being human is helping one another. I'd like to be useful in some way through wine."

At the end of the event, each chef gave a speech.

Kawashima said, "We haven't been able to operate our restaurant since the Jan. 1 earthquake, and when chefs aren't making food, they don't really feel that they're living. At one time I actually suffered from burnout syndrome, but today I'm very happy to have a chance to create dishes. Seeing our guests' faces has given me energy." His words were met with warm applause, and the event closed on an uplifting note.



From left: Kazuhiro Inoue of Restaurant Uozen, Toru Kawashima of Ipponsugi Kawashima, Hiroto Murai of Yoichi Sagra and Kanji Kobayashi of Villa Aida.

PHOTOS: TAKAO OHTA



Wines produced by (from left) 10R Winery, Yamada-do, Domaine Mont, Noborijozo and Domaine Takahiko. These five Hokkaido wineries, which are driving forces on Japan's wine scene, took part in the event.



A. Ingredients contributed by participating chefs were fused in the dish jute leaves and *shirogai* clams with lemon myrtle "Kanji-san" and ikura rice. B. A dish called Inoue-san's aged *ara* was made with saw-edged perch (*ara*) that had been caught and aged for two weeks by chef Kazuhiro Inoue of Restaurant Uozen and aged for two weeks. C. Inoue-san's *ayu* — sweetfish simmered with *sansho* pepper and ginger by the restaurant Ipponsugi Kawashima. D. This salad was served on a plate made of glass from bottles at L'Atelier de Noto that broke in the Jan. 1 earthquake and were later melted down. E. Inoue's soup-style hotpot with wild game and mushrooms used Asian black bear meat and was prepared in the manner of *shabu-shabu*. F. Kawashima-style *niku jaga* (stewed meat and potatoes), made with Noto beef and Yoichi potatoes. G. Roast Noto beef, dressed with a sauce incorporating strained wine lees. H. The *donabe* (earthenware pot) rice "Kawashima" was fragrant with the aroma of Yoichi mushrooms. I. A grape tart made with grapes from Domaine Takahiko.

● Summary

能登半島復興のためのチャリティーディナー。

ジャパンタイムズ主催「Destination Restaurants」を受賞した4人のシェフによる能登半島復興のためのチャリティーディナーが9月27日、北海道余市町「エーヴランドホテル」で行われた。同町で「余市サグラ」を営む村井啓人の声掛けで新潟県「ウオゼン」井上和洋、和歌山県「ヴィラ・アイダ」小林寛司、さ

らに令和6年能登半島地震の被災者でもある石川県七尾市「一本杉川嶋」川嶋亨が集まり、40名のゲストをもてなした。輪島市「ラトリエ・ド・ノト」池端隼也も参加予定だったが、直前の能登豪雨により被災して以降、地元で炊き出しを行っていることから当日の来場は見送られた。

今回は北海道の人気ワイナリー5軒の生産者も参加し、食事と共に希少なワイン5種を振る舞った。「元日の震災以降、営業ができていませんが、今日は料理ができて幸せです。お客様の顔を見て元気をもらえました」と語る川嶋には会場からは温かい拍手が贈られ、盛会のうち、イベントは幕を閉じた。



日本語全文はこちらから

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Destination
Restaurants
2024

AUTHENTIC JAPAN SELECTION

<https://authentic-japan-selection.japantimes.com/>

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VOL. 13:
Benesse Holdings Inc.

Mission: Sustainability

By OSAMU INOUE / Renew



Benesse's strong points

- 1 Changed name to Benesse, a Latin-derived coinage meaning "well-being"
- 2 First Japanese education provider to endorse the U.N.'s Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures; made CDP's 2023 climate change A List
- 3 Promotes digitalization in its mainstay correspondence course business and contributes to the reduction in paper and plastic consumption as well as the use of transportation
- 4 Works to raise awareness among children, who in the future will play roles in achieving the U.N.'s sustainable development goals, by offering a variety of environmental education programs



ILLUSTRATION: AYUMI TAKAHASHI

Benesse provides all-round support for well-being

It is difficult to summarize in one word Benesse Holdings Inc.'s business, which accompanies people through all phases of their lives, from conception to old age.

The company traces its origin to the founding of the Fukutake Publishing Co. in 1955. It initially published educational materials and student pocketbooks for junior high school students, then expanded its business to include practice exams. Its Shinken Zemi correspondence courses for primary and high school students drove rapid growth for the company, whose mainstay businesses today include

print and digital media on pregnancy and childbirth, plus providing nursing care for the elderly.

What ties these businesses together is the corporate philosophy of "Benesse = well-being," from the Latin *bene* (well) and *esse* (being). This is also the direction that the U.N.'s sustainable development goals are aiming for. In that sense, one may describe Benesse as a well-being company rather than an education-service company.

And that is exactly what made it "imperative" for Benesse to attach importance to efforts for sustainability,

according to Keiko Toyozumi, a Benesse executive officer who also serves as vice general manager of the corporate communications division (see the article in the box).

In 2018, Benesse established a sustainability promotion committee, which is aimed at strengthening efforts across the group to help make our society more sustainable. The next year, it became Japan's first education provider to endorse the recommendations of the U.N.'s Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures.

Benesse's proactive stance was recognized by the international nonprofit organization CDP, which selected it among the A List companies, the highest rating, based on a survey on climate change efforts, for three consecutive years from 2018. Benesse also made the 2023 A List, announced last February.

In April 2024, Benesse Corp., one of its main operating companies, was recognized by the Ministry of the Environment as an "eco-first" company. Benesse Corp. is currently working to reduce environmental impacts, aiming to reduce Scope 1 and 2 direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions by 100% from the fiscal 2018 level by fiscal 2041, and Scope 3 other indirect emissions by 39.4% by fiscal 2050.

One of the initiatives unique to Benesse is its digitalization strategy for products and services.

Digitalizing materials

For many years, Benesse's mainstay correspondence course business involved mailing huge amounts of printed educational materials and direct mail. The total was the second-largest among Japanese companies. The transportation and waste associated

with this were major factors that increased the company's Scope 3 emissions.

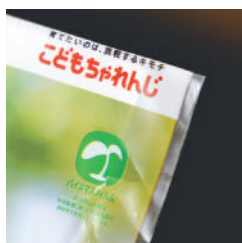
Benesse has addressed this most difficult problem by reforming its business model.

In 2014, it introduced digital courses to the Shinken Zemi correspondence courses. Teaching materials, which were previously sent by post, are now received on a special tablet device, and a check-and-correct service, called the Red Pen Teacher, can be provided on the device. The new service significantly shortens the time it takes before users receive corrections on projects and reduces CO2 emissions associated with transportation and disposal.

Reforming a service that had been based on analog culture for decades was a difficult undertaking, as it required convincing users. But Benesse patiently worked to convince them of the advantages. As a result, primary and junior high users of the digital materials, which represented about 34% of the total in fiscal 2018, increased to about 70% three years later. In fiscal 2023, the company also successfully halved the amount of paper consumed from the level in 2014.

Still, the amount of paper used by Benesse totaled 34,088 tons in fiscal 2023, representing about 0.6% of the total output of paper for printing and information uses in Japan.

"We could aim to completely digitalize these courses, but there are always a certain number of people who think printed materials are better for learning," Toyozumi said. "For these people, we aim to introduce enhancements to the individualized learning enabled by digital teaching materials and showcase the advantages not



A set of Kodomo Challenge correspondence course educational materials with a tablet. The photo on the left shows a logo indicating that the wrapping material is biomass.



©BENESSE, PHOTO: HIROMICHI MATONO

Summary

人に寄り添う
ウェルビーイング企業の
貢献。

生命が宿った瞬間から、最期を迎える時まで。人のライフステージに寄り添うベネッセホールディングスの業種を一言で表すのは難しい。

小中高生向け通信教育の「進研ゼミ」で急成長を果たしたが、今では妊娠・出産を支えるメディア事業や、高齢者向け介護事業なども主力とする。共通するのは、ベ

ネッセグループの企業理念であり、社名の由来でもある「よく生きる」。SDGsが目指す「ウェルビーイング」とほぼ同義だ。その意味では教育事業者ではなく「ウェルビーイング企業」と表現すべきなのかもしれない。

目標へ向かい、環境負荷低減に取り組んでいる最中。中でもベネッセらしい取り組みが、「商品・サービスの

DX化戦略」だ。同社は子どもとの接点という強みを活かし、SDGsへの貢献人材の育成にも積極的に取り組む。ベネッセによるこの「環境教育」は、同社が排出するGHGの削減などに直結しないかもしれないが、日本や地球の未来にとっては大きな意味がある。「ウェルビーイング企業」への期待は大きい。



日本語全文はこちら

available with printed materials.”

Benesse's efforts have paid off. Its paper usage decreased 10.9% from a year earlier to the 34,088 tons in fiscal 2023. It has also digitalized areas other than teaching materials.

“We have also significantly reduced the number of direct mail items sent and the amount of paper used,” Toyozumi said. “Previously, we delivered 15 to 20 DVD materials each year (for every grade) but have since switched to a system where users scan a QR code with their smartphones or other devices to play videos.”

Although she declined to disclose specific impacts of introducing this method, terming the information a “corporate secret,” she said the amount of DVD deliveries “has declined significantly.” Benesse still sends direct mail, but the frequency has decreased and the booklets have grown thinner after it introduced the QR system. Furthermore, the company began in November 2022 to use bio-materials for the plastic envelopes used in direct mail. This increases costs, but Benesse went ahead on the insistence of Representative Director, President and CEO Hitoshi Kobayashi, according to Toyozumi.

Reusing and recycling

Benesse also puts effort into reusing and recycling teaching materials to help realize a circular economy.

In 2023, it began reusing tablet devices for digital teaching materials. It has already recovered more than 70,000 such devices and reused about 26,000 after refurbishing them (as of Aug. 31).

By reusing the tablets, the company can reduce the usage of such resources as oil, the raw material for plastics, and rare metals used in circuit boards, as well as reduce CO2 emissions from production processes. Benesse estimates that reusing a device cuts annual CO2 emissions by 42.5 to 46.5 kilograms.

In the Kodomo Challenge correspondence course for preschoolers, it launched in 2010 the Kurukuru Recycling program for plastic, wood and fabric educational toys that it distributes as educational materials.

For courses for preschoolers who cannot read or write, the main educational materials are educational toys sent monthly. Although they are popular, they become unneeded as children outgrow them.

The company thus began setting up collection boxes at venues of concerts and other events for Kodomo Challenge subscribers. By the end of fiscal 2023, it had collected a total of about 17.1 tons. Collected materials are recycled into oil to be used as an energy source.

“Children say thank you to the toys that used to be dear to them but are no longer needed, and return them to the collection box for their rebirth. This is a special event, different from just throwing them away,” Toyozumi said. “Parents have told us that it’s great for their children’s education.”

Another benefit of the Kurukuru Recycling program is that it can be a catalyst for children’s greater awareness and behavioral changes, according to Toyozumi.

Recycling has an “environmental education” aspect, which has been established as an approach unique to Benesse.

Oyako Mirai project

In 2008, Benesse launched the Oyako Mirai (parent-child future) project, marking the 20th anniversary of the launch of Kodomo Challenge. The project is aimed at giving parents and their children the opportunity to think

together about the importance of the environment and living things. Under this project, the company has introduced wide-ranging content and initiatives related to environmental education through learning materials and events.

First, Shimajiro, a popular cartoon character from Kodomo Challenge, and the Shimajiro Car, designed after the tiger cub, toured 47 prefectures to hold nature events in which children can experience the importance of the environment and living things. Over the course of a year, they traveled 17,970 kilometers and interacted with 3,641 parents and children.

The project delivered to day care facilities across Japan a *kankyō kamishibai* (environmental picture story show) kit that plainly explains the concept of *mottainai*, a word expressing a sense of guilt for the act of wasting, and the importance of protecting the environment, as well as materials to be used at home to review what has been learned. When the project was offered to kindergartens in fiscal 2008, it proved popular and was used at about 3,300 facilities, representing 25% of all kindergartens in Japan. The next year, the project’s scope was expanded to include nursery schools, and picture story kits and learning materials were delivered to about 7,000 facilities nationwide.

The project also offered environmental education to existing Kodomo Challenge subscribers. It incorporated environmental themes into its regular illustrated teaching materials in a way that naturally allowed parents and children to learn together what *mottainai* is all about. In addition, the project was enlivened by the distribution to subscribers of booklets on the themes of the environment and food education, as well as the distribution of more than 1 million eco-friendly traditional *furoshiki* wrapping cloths.

This project was the catalyst for Benesse to begin actively leveraging its points of contact with children to develop human resources who can contribute to achieving the U.N.’s sustainable development goals. Toyozumi, who was at the time one of the executives in charge of Kodomo Challenge, was one of the main members of this project.

Environmental education

“When we launched the Oyako Mirai Project, some people raised questions, asking, ‘Why environmental education for preschoolers?’ or ‘Will they be able to understand?’ But many young parents and guardians have high awareness on the future of the environment,” Toyozumi said. “So we continued the project, hoping they would understand our thinking.”

Apparently many parents and guardians, as well as their children, understood.

Today, environmental education is becoming the pillar that represents Benesse, which has enhanced its offerings for preschoolers through wide-ranging media.

In 2012, a TV program for preschoolers that had aired nationwide since 1993 was renewed and renamed “Shimajiro no Wow!” It has since conveyed the importance of biodiversity and protecting the environment. The program received international recognition when it was recognized as the best preschool program in the Asian Television Awards, one of the largest award programs in Asia. In addition, Shimajiro videos conveying the idea of *mottainai* have become popular online, with hundreds of thousands to millions of views on YouTube.

The list goes on for Benesse’s envi-

ronmental education initiatives, but let us conclude by mentioning the Summer Challenge: Nationwide Primary School Students’ “Future” Creation Competition, a major event.

Since 2004, Benesse has held the annual competition during summer vacation, inviting primary school students to submit works including research reports and paintings, and giving the best ones awards. In 2008, an environmental category was added to this program in connection with the Oyako Mirai Project. Over the years, the total number of essays, research reports, paintings and other works has reached more than 1 million.

Last summer, the 20th anniversary of the program, approximately 210 works were selected, of which 21 received grand prizes. The winner of the grand prize in the environment category for the fourth grade was research on cardboard composting in which the student tried to use cardboard to help compost vegetable scraps. It was a serious research project in which the student confirmed that both rice bran and humus are required to make compost, and tried to find the right ratio for mixing them. It also won the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Award.

Benesse is working to reduce its environmental impact by reforming its core business, and at the same time is actively involved in environmental education for children, with whom it has many contact points in its core business. Environmental education may not directly lead to reducing Benesse’s greenhouse gas emissions, but it has great significance to the future of Japan and the Earth.

Benesse’s efforts on environmental education, which began with preschoolers, have expanded to include educational materials and events for primary and high school students. In addition, it is beginning to support environmental education for society as a whole — for example, it has cooperated with Tokyo’s western Tama area on education over biodiversity.

Benesse has the know-how about easy-to-understand ways to educate children, who may not otherwise be interested, about sustainability to protect the global environment and society. It should be able to extend such know-how to wide-ranging organizations and companies that wish to introduce environmental education programs.

Asked if the company has any plans to launch a business providing support for environmental education, Toyozumi said: “There are certainly things we do better than anybody else. Since I became an officer in charge of sustainability, I have grown more and more convinced that the type of education that only helps improve school grades is not enough to help maintain our society.”

Benesse, which supports people in their efforts to “live well,” has the potential to bring about significant changes in society as a whole, starting with environmental education. Expectations are high for the “well-being company.”

The Kurukuru Recycling program, launched in 2010, places collection boxes at event venues for Kodomo Challenge subscribers.



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Sustainability is a natural goal

Keiko Toyozumi

Vice general manager of corporate communications



PHOTO: HIROMICHI MATONO

The word “benesse” is a coinage that combines the Latin words “bene,” which means “good” or “right,” and “esse,” meaning “to live.” In 1990, we adopted “well-being” as the corporate philosophy and changed the company name to Benesse Corp. in 1995.

“Living well” is largely synonymous with “well-being.” It also reflects our determination to support people’s aspirations and their efforts to solve problems in all phases of their lives.

For about 30 years since we adopted this word as our company name, every one of our employees has continued to think about what “living well” means for our customers, who span from little children to the elderly, and what we should do to create a future in which people can live better lives.

It is obvious that people cannot “live well” unless we have a sustainable society and global environment in the first place. When the world began to move in the direction of realizing sustainability, it was a natural theme for us to arrive at.

In addition, the targets of our core business, correspondence courses, are children. We call children “exchange students from the future.” How can we afford to not take action when we know their future is in trouble? It was natural for us to eventually think about the global environment and make efforts to make it better so that our children can have a better future.

Since I joined Benesse in 1997, the more I have done work for children, the stronger I have felt the need to ensure that we do not leave a negative legacy for future generations.

Environmental destruction and resource problems are issues our generation has caused. We must pass the Earth to the next generation after our generation has returned it to its former state. At the same time, we must establish a cycle in which the generation following us will think deeply about the generation following them and create a world in which they can live well.

In that sense, I feel that it is a natural extension for us to not only teach children to study, but also provide them with environmental education at the same time.

Having adopted “well-being” as Benesse’s corporate philosophy, that makes us responsible for certain things and enables us to do certain things for children. With this in mind, we will continue our efforts for the future.

the japan times

Destination Restaurants

Hokkaido

- 1 French
Chimikepp Hotel
- 2 Italian
Yoichi Sagra
- 3 Wild game
Elezo Esprit

Aomori Pref.

- 4 Italian
Casa del Cibo

Iwate Pref.

- 5 Japanese
Tonoya-Yo

Akita Pref.

- 6 Japanese
Nihonryori Takamura

Yamagata Pref.

- 7 Japanese
Deway
- 8 French
Restaurant Pas Mal

Fukushima Pref.

- 9 Innovative
Hagi

Tochigi Pref.

- 10 French
Otowa Restaurant

Gunma Pref.

- 11 Italian
Ventinove

Niigata Pref.

- 12 French
Restaurant Uozen
- 13 Japanese
Satoyama Jujo
- 14 Sushi
Tokiwasushi

- 15 Japanese
Shintaku

Ishikawa Pref.

- 16 Japanese
Kataori
- 17 Sushi
Mekumi

- 18 French
L'Atelier de Noto

- 19 Japanese
Ipponsugi Kawashima

Toyama Pref.

- 20 Innovative
Cuisine régionale L'évo
- 21 Japanese
Oryouri Fujii
- 22 Japanese
Ebitei-Bekkan

Tokyo

- 23 Italian
Don Bravo

Kanagawa Pref.

- 24 Japanese
Kamakura Kitajima

Shizuoka Pref.

- 25 Japanese
Chakaiseki Onjaku
- 26 French
Chisou Nishi Kenichi

Yamanashi Pref.

- 27 Innovative
Terroir Ai to Ibukuro

Nagano Pref.

- 28 Japanese
Nihonryori Yukimoto
- 29 Innovative
Restaurant Naz
- 30 Italian
Ca'enne

Mie Pref.

- 31 Chinese
Shibousai Kitagawa

Wakayama Pref.

- 32 Italian
Villa Aida

Nara Pref.

- 33 Japanese
Tsukumo

Hiroshima Pref.

- 34 French
Akai

Nagasaki Pref.

- 35 Innovative
Pesceco
- 36 Italian
Villa del Nido

Oita Pref.

- 37 Innovative
Enowa

Okinawa Pref.

- 38 French
État d'esprit
- 39 French
6 Six
- 40 French
Mauvaise herbe

A list of the best restaurants in Japan, selected by Japanese experts with international diners in mind.

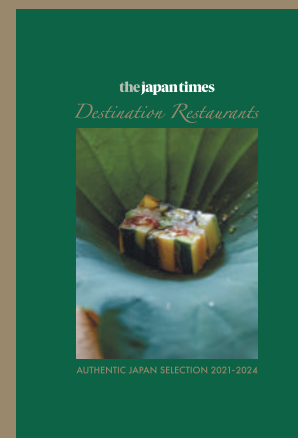
In 2021, The Japan Times created the Destination Restaurants list around the idea of Japanese experts uncovering top local restaurants for people around the world — hidden gems that not only offer unique culinary experiences but also contribute to community revitalization, sustainable food and the promotion of natural resources.

We aim to differentiate ourselves from other selections by bringing countryside talent proper recognition.

This book, marking the fourth anniversary of the Destination Restaurants project, is a compilation of the finest restaurants we have selected so far.



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