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sustainable japan

'Right man in the right place' Koos brings a revolutionary zeal to work Swedish Chamber of Commerce sets high targets

Name: Martin Koos

Title: General Manager of the Swedish Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan
URL: <https://www.sccj.org/>
Hometown: Hoganas, Sweden
Years in Japan: 17

Leaders & Readers

WARREN MEEHAN
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Growing up in Sweden, Martin Koos had never really contemplated a move to Japan. Now general manager of the Swedish Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan, New York had been his original goal. "I was young and considering what to do with my life, and luckily I was introduced to a scholarship that was being given out by the European Union, with two basic rules: One rule was that you must go abroad to a non-EU country, and the second was that you must have somewhere to stay and work," explained the multilingual manager. "And for me, New York was

always the cool place to be, and that's where I wanted to go." But he soon realized that satisfying the visa requirements was going to be a problem, so when someone at the scholarship agency suggested Japan, he changed direction. "I had absolutely no image of Japan back then, but I thought, 'OK, why not?'"

Things come together

Koos first arrived in Japan in 2001, and soon found himself enamored with the pace and vibe of Tokyo. "I still remember taking the escalator down from Shibuya Station and seeing Shibuya crossing for the first time — it was the strongest impression I've ever had going abroad," he said. "I found a project called Swedish Style in Tokyo, which was run by Ewa Kumlin, the wife of the Swedish ambassador at the time. It was this super-ambitious project to bring across all aspects of Swedish culture to Japan, and I just felt that everything was coming together." The project had a lofty goal of bringing over 200 people from Sweden to showcase everything from street art to cooking. "I went straight into that project, and it was a fun experience, and I got to meet a lot of great people, and that all came together in October 2001."

After a short stint back in Sweden working in advertising and digital marketing, Koos felt drawn back to Japan: "I just had a feeling I was not done with this country." He quickly got busy, and after setting up a meeting with Great Works, a Swedish advertising firm in Tokyo, he got the chance to return in 2007, even assuring the hiring manager that within a year he would be fluent in Japanese. "I guess I was pretty cocky back then, but oh, well." That positive attitude yielded dividends, and with his background in advertising

and entrepreneurship, he was soon recommended for an empty position at the SCCJ. "I was a bit hesitant at first, but I also saw great potential in reviving the chamber."

No longer just 'men in suits'

Koos set about revamping the chamber's website, updating its booking process and starting a lot of new types of events. This included bringing onboard a group of female CEOs and executives working in Swedish companies in Japan who really wanted to make a change in empowering women in the corporate workplace. "In 2018, we organized seven or eight events based on the women-empowerment movement alone," he said. "We reached out to people who had never been to our events before — they had a very outdated image of a chamber, you know, just a lot of men in suits — and we showed that that just wasn't us. It was actually quite different to what they expected." While he can point to companies such as Ikea Japan, which has reached a target equilibrium in the numbers of male and female executives, there are still challenges to be dealt with.

"It's really about creating an employment pipeline so that female executives are there when opportunities for promotion present themselves," he said. He now believes that a key requirement to increase participation is to find ways to retain female employees. He also believes in the importance of having a mentor or someone to champion them within the organization, "It can be a man or a woman, but just to know that someone has your back — it's a key ingredient," he said. "So many times I've heard it said that 'If this or that person wasn't there, then I wouldn't



COSUFI

Selling the idea of Sweden in Japan

Martin Koos was born in Hoganas in the south of Sweden. He began studying commerce and entrepreneurship at university but changed course when he took up a European Union scholarship to work overseas. He spent a year in Japan in 2001, working on a cultural project attached to the Swedish Embassy. Shortly after that he returned to Sweden, where he worked in Stockholm with various advertising and digital marketing agencies.

Feeling like he had more to offer, he returned to Japan in 2007 as an account executive at an advertising agency, eventually taking his advertising experience to become a market research specialist at the Embassy of Sweden. In 2017, he was appointed general manager at the Swedish Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan. He now plans to steer the chamber's next project of opening up an event space in the embassy, part of its renovations.

sity for companies to make presentations and hold panel discussions on their target ambitions at which they get input from students.

Getting the work done

For now, Koos is awaiting the completion of renovations to the Swedish Embassy, including an event space of over a thousand square meters. "The chamber has put up its hand to run this space, and we have grand plans to run it as a meet, work and collaboration space — and there will also be a cafe in the building. It's scheduled to open in 2028. I hope I'm still around at the time, and this will really take us to the next phase," he said. "Our members as well as other companies can use this space, and we'll really need to run this place professionally. We have a great sunny location and great garden, and if I can get this project off the ground, then my work here is done."

have taken the chance.' So this was what these events were mainly about, sharing stories — 'If I can do it, you can do it.' It was a small group, but we felt like we were starting a revolution."

Climate-neutrality committee

Along with overseeing a huge calendar of networking events being organized by the SCCJ, such as midsummer festivals, CEO breakfast meetings and ski trips, Koos is also overseeing the chamber's Climate Neutral Committee and its Talent, Equality,

Diversity and Inclusion Committee, which run their own slate of events within the chamber and consist of 12 to 14 companies each. "We decided to go with climate neutrality because we wanted to nail it down to make it more precise, but climate neutrality is the most urgent task that many of the Swedish companies in Japan are facing." Company targets are imposed on local Japanese management and are often more ambitious than the 2045 target set by Sweden. The committee has also recently begun a collaboration with Sophia Univer-

Times Gallery



The Indonesian martial art organization Pencak Silat Kera Sakti holds an inauguration event at PASELA Multifunction Hall, located in the Akihabara district of Tokyo, on Jan. 2. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA



Ecuador Embassy staff members visit a Soka school, where they shared experiences with the students, encouraged cultural exchange and promoted Ecuador as an educational and tourist destination. EMBASSY OF ECUADOR



Yemeni Ambassador Adel Alsunaini honors the youngest participant in the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies-hosted Arabic Language Competition 2024, Kai Kobayashi, 5 years old. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF YEMEN



Ambassador Shorna-Kay Richards joins UCC Japan, chairman of UCC Japan, to celebrate the seventh anniversary of Jamaica Blue Mountain Coffee Day at Yushima Tenjin in Tokyo. EMBASSY OF JAMAICA



Serbian Ambassador Aleksandra Kovac meets with Yuichiro Koga, state minister of economy, trade and industry, to present the official invitation letter for the specialized expo in Belgrade in 2027. EMBASSY OF SERBIA



Bolivia's charge d'affaires, Natalia Salazar, and a delegate from VCEI, Graciela Aponte, pose at the International Participants Meeting 2025 in the city of Himeji, preparing for Osaka 2025. EMBASSY OF BOLIVIA



Yokohama St. Patrick's Day Parade Vice President Tomoyuki Ekuni with Hiroshi Takarada, president of Motomachi Shopping Street Association, and Katsuya Matsushita, executive at Senyo Kogyo. EMBASSY OF IRELAND



Panama's ambassador receives a courtesy visit from Interior Minister Seiichiro Murakami on Jan. 16. EMBASSY OF PANAMA

Chisou Nishi Kenichi

French cuisine featuring fish fresh from Suruga Bay



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The city of Yaizu in Shizuoka Prefecture faces Suruga Bay and boasts a number of splendid views of Mount Fuji, as well as hot springs.

Over the past decade, a succession of Yaizu restaurants have been gaining attention, a notable example being Chakaiseki Onjaku, a Destination Restaurant of 2022. Thus, gastronomes from both inside and outside Japan are now visiting the area. The central figure in this trend is Naoki Maeda, owner of Sasue Maeda Fish Shop in Yaizu, which has been run by the Maeda family for five generations.

Chisou Nishi Kenichi's owner, Kenichi Nishi, opened the French restaurant Chisou 2924 in Hiroshima in 2019 and included fish from Sasue Maeda Fish Shop on the menu. The problem was that fish caught in Yaizu arrived in Hiroshima a day and a half later, meaning a little of its freshness was lost. Because of this, he decided to move to Yaizu, where he opened the French restaurant Chisou Nishi Kenichi in June 2022.

The restaurant's exterior architecture is Japanese in style. In back is a courtyard, and in front there is an open kitchen with an eight-seat counter. Both lunch and dinner service are exclusively *omakase* (chef's

choice) course menus consisting of 10 or 11 dishes, eight of which feature fish in starring roles, and cost ¥16,500 (\$110). Nishi's fritters are made from Pacific rudderfish, the moisture retention level of which has been enhanced through the use of 12 types of ice of differing shapes and temperatures in the cooling process. The fish is fried in

untoasted sesame oil, and the fritters are amazingly juicy.

Today, Maeda's fish appears on the tables of famous restaurants throughout Japan. But when it is eaten locally, the flavors are truly exceptional. It is well worth a visit to Yaizu to experience them for yourself.

YASUTOMO SUZUKI GOVERNOR OF SHIZUOKA PREFECTURE



I would like to express my heartfelt congratulations to chef Kenichi Nishi. Chisou Nishi Kenichi is a renowned restaurant where guests can fully enjoy the seasonal ingredients unique to Shizuoka Prefecture.

Shizuoka is blessed with a diverse environment, including Mount Fuji and Suruga Bay, and is known as a "kingdom of ingredients" producing a variety of agricultural, forestry and marine products. I hope many people, both domestic and international, will have the pleasure of experiencing the delicious food our prefecture has to offer.

HIROMICHI NAKANO YAIZU MAYOR



I would like to express my congratulations on chef Kenichi Nishi's selection for The Japan Times Destination Restaurants 2024.

We in the port city of Yaizu take great pride in this achievement. The chef's dishes, which make the most of local ingredients, are crafted with both French and Japanese techniques. Not only are they delicious, but you can also enjoy the process of watching the dishes being prepared right before your eyes. We sincerely hope that everyone will enjoy this heartwarming and delightful moment.

Destination Restaurants 2024 AUTHENTIC JAPAN SELECTION

