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# Kurumasushi

Ehime restaurant offers fish of a different dimension



**TAEIKO TERAO**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Kurumasushi, in the Ehime Prefecture city of Matsuyama, was selected as a Destination Restaurant for 2025, marking the fifth year of The Japan Times' honors and the first time a Shikoku restaurant has received the award. Located in a lively area about 30 minutes by car from Matsuyama Airport, the restaurant is run by owner-chef Koji Takahira, who was born and raised nearby. He succeeded his father — who founded Kurumasushi in 1976 — in 2017 after training in Edomae-style sushi at Ginza Sushi Aoki and Sushi Yoshitake in Tokyo, returning home the previous year.

The eight-seat counter, fragrant with fresh wood and set beneath a wickerwork ceiling of locally sourced cedar, evokes the calm of a teahouse. An *omakase* menu priced at ¥27,500 (\$180), including tax, is served in two evening seatings. About 70% of guests come from outside Ehime, including a growing number of international visitors.

Nearly all the seafood is sourced within the prefecture, sometimes featuring fish prepared using the *shinkeijime* nerve-pinching method by Imabari fisherman Junichi Fujimoto. While quality fish and



precise knife work are fundamentals of sushi, Takahira distinguishes himself through meticulous cutting techniques. His *hamo* (conger eel) sashimi, for example, is deboned entirely by knife rather than finely scored, producing an unusually smooth texture. He also refines tools to suit each ingredient, sharpening the blade used

**TOKIHIRO NAKAMURA**  
GOVERNOR OF EHIME



I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Kurumasushi.

Ehime Prefecture is blessed with abundant nature and is bordered by two seas: the calm Seto Inland Sea and the Uwa Sea, which is influenced by the warm Kuroshio Current. Thanks to the exceptional skills of our fishermen, premium seafood — most notably red sea bream — is shipped in large quantities not only throughout Japan but also overseas. We warmly invite you to visit Ehime, where delicious seafood is produced in abundance, and to savor our finest specialties.



**Address**  
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for *managatsuo* (butterfish) to achieve a glossier surface and cleaner flavor.

Far from Tokyo's sushi capital, Takahira is exploring the expressive potential of knife work — a defining element of Japanese cuisine — and quietly expanding the boundaries of sushi from his home in Ehime.

**KATSUHITO NOSHI**  
MAYOR OF MATSUYAMA



I am very pleased that Kurumasushi has been selected for The Japan Times Destination Restaurants 2025.

The city of Matsuyama faces the Seto Inland Sea and is blessed with rich ocean currents, allowing a wide variety of fresh seafood to be available year-round. The city also boasts a history of over 3,000 years and is home to Dogo Onsen, said to be the oldest hot spring in Japan, as well as Matsuyama Castle, one of the country's 12 original castles still standing. Matsuyama aims to be "the most hospitable city in Japan." I warmly invite you to visit.

## Destination Restaurants 2025 AUTHENTIC JAPAN SELECTION



# Imperial Hotel, Kyoto: Where hospitality traditions meet

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**MANAMI TOMINAGA**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

On March 5, Tokyo's cosmopolitan excellence will converge with Kyoto's timeless refinement as the Imperial Hotel, Kyoto opens, extending a tradition that began when the original Imperial Hotel opened in Tokyo in 1890.

Kyoto rests in a basin cradled by mountains: Higashiyama to the east, Kitayama to the north, Nishiyama to the west and Mount Hiei rising in the northeast. From Shijo-dori street, one of Kyoto's main east-west arteries, Hanamikoji-dori runs southward through Gion Kobu, the historic district where Kyoto's *geiko* and *maiko*, renowned geisha and their apprentices, preserve centuries of theatrical tradition.

"The moment you step into Hanamikoji-dori, Japan's spiritual essence touches you — daily gratitude, humility, beautiful gestures," said Reiko Sakata, general manager of the hotel, appointed last April.

The hotel, completed in December, stands at the lane's end. It incorporates part of the former Yasaka Kaikan, built in 1936 with invaluable financial support from the geiko and maiko communities. Designated a Tangible Cultural Property in 2001, Yasaka Kaikan served as a center of theatrical art for nearly a century. However, deterioration meant the structure could no longer be sustained, and



**"To enhance service quality, hiring began two years before opening," Sakata said.**  
HARUO MOTOHASHI

the community sought a partner willing to preserve the building's exterior while transforming its interior.

"We were honored to be entrusted with realizing their vision. Our partnership grows from *ryō omoi* — a bond of mutual regard," Sakata said. "The journey of this hotel project took almost a decade — five years of construction alone — but we'd been dreaming of having a presence in Kyoto for far longer."

The renovation demanded extraordinary finesse. Obayashi Corp., whose architect Tokusaburo Kimura designed the original Yasaka Kaikan in 1936, returned to manage this delicate resurrection. Kimura, most notably influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright — architect of the iconic 1923 Imperial Hotel in Tokyo — created a structure that blended castle-like elements with art deco sensibilities, an exterior identity now preserved in the hotel.

The work required protecting the south and west facades while simultaneously demolishing and reinforcing the internal structure. "Painstaking manual work was involved in salvaging 16,387 antique tiles — about 10% of the total — for reuse," Sakata explained. Maintaining Yasaka Kaikan's original height of 31.5 meters presented another challenge, as city regulations typically restrict buildings to 12 meters or less to preserve scenic vistas.

For the interior, architect Tomoyuki Sakakida of New Material Research Laboratory embraced the concept "old is new," weaving natural, locally produced materials throughout — including Oya stone, the distinctive volcanic tuff used in Wright's Imperial Hotel.

The Kyoto hotel has restored the iconic copper roof and pagoda-like gazebo that have defined Yasaka Kaikan's silhouette since 1936. "The moment we step inside, we experience a nostalgic recognition: 'This is the Imperial Hotel.' The feeling is unmistakable," Sakata said. "Working within these museum-like surroundings naturally elevates our service."



**Reiko Sakata, general manager of the Imperial Hotel, Kyoto** HARUO MOTOHASHI

**A stage for lingering**

The Imperial Hotel in Kyoto is the company's first small luxury property, with just 55 rooms compared to the 909 at the flagship hotel in Tokyo. This intimate scale permits a more personalized approach.

"When guests arrive, they check in while seated comfortably in the guests-only lounge, rather than standing at a traditional counter. In Kyoto, people want to linger. They come to experience time itself," Sakata explained.

The team providing this personal hospitality numbers 130, some relocated from Tokyo or Osaka and others newly employed. "To enhance service quality, hiring began two years before opening to allow training in Tokyo," Sakata said. "We continue to build the team by gathering diverse talents. Strong command of foreign languages is one of many essential skills."

The 55 rooms unfold across three dis-

# Pioneers in vision care, food win Veuve Clicquot Bold Woman Awards

## Event coverage

**MAIKO MURAOKA**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

On Nov. 27, Veuve Clicquot, a champagne house under the LVMH Group, held the Veuve Clicquot Bold Woman Award 2025 at Azabudai Hills in Tokyo's Minato Ward. Masayo Takahashi, the president and representative director of Vision Care Inc., was selected for the Bold Woman Award, and Chihiro Kano, the CEO of Astra Food Plan Co. Ltd., was selected for the Bold Future Award.

Takahashi is an ophthalmologist who led the Laboratory for Retinal Regeneration at the Riken Center for Biosystems Dynamics Research from 2006 to 2022. She conducted the world's first clinical research using induced pluripotent stem cells in 2014. In 2017, she contributed to the establishment of the Kobe Eye Center, a facility dedicated to researching and treating vision impairments and other eye conditions, prior to becoming the head of Vision Care, which specializes in the development of treatments for visual impairments including low vision and diseases of the outer retina.

Kano established Astra Food Plan in 2020 to address the issue of food waste and loss. The company distributes machines that use superheated steam technology to dry food residues generated during the production and processing of agricultural ingredients, turning them into powder. It also distributes various types of powder, including onion and shiitake mushroom, that are nutritious, delicious and would otherwise have been discarded.

Minako Suematsu, the chairperson and publisher of The Japan Times, served as one of the judges on the panel, which also included Norbert Leuret, the president and

representative director of LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton Japan K.K.; Ryuko Kida, a journalist and editorial director; and several other experts on entrepreneurship, business management, finance and the creative industries, as well as Kanoko Oishi, a previous award winner and president of the medical consulting firm Mediva Inc. The key elements in their assessments were "boldness," "insight," "resilience" and "impact."

Since the launch of the Business Women Award (now called the Bold Woman Award) in 1972 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the company's establishment, Veuve Clicquot has given it to 450 women in 27 countries. Inspired by the spirit and success of Madame Clicquot — who lost her husband at the age of 27 in 1805, took over his business at a time when it was not normal for women to work outside the home and transformed Veuve Clicquot into a world-class champagne brand — the award is dedicated to women who demonstrate boldness, creativity, entrepreneurship and diversity.

The award ceremony began with a video message from Thomas Mulliez, the new president and CEO of Veuve Clicquot. His message was full of powerful words of encouragement for female innovators and young people, urging them to believe in themselves.

The Bold Future Award honors promising next-generation female leaders for their innovative initiatives, and Kano said she was delighted to be recognized as a role model for the next generation of female entrepreneurs. "This experience has propelled me forward. My driving force is 'expectations.' The desire to meet people's expectations and build a better society has grown stronger thanks to this award," she said. Many of her company's staff members are working mothers, and the company is dedicated to creating a



**Chihiro Kano (left) and Masayo Takahashi pose with their awards in Tokyo.** MHD MOET HENNESSY DIAGEO K.K.

supportive work environment for them. "I believe the diverse perspectives and multitasking abilities that women possess are a significant strength for advancing business," she said, encouraging other women to take the first courageous step toward opening up a new world in which they can realize their ideas.

The Bold Woman Award recognizes women who have brought change and growth to established industries and inspired the next generation through their efforts, and Takahashi commented that receiving it was a great honor for her. Driven by her conviction that she would not just provide treatments, but create them, she left a university hospital earlier in her career to join a research institute, where she overcame immense opposition and difficulties to succeed in the world's first application of iPSC cells. "Thanks to this experience, I was able to venture into the world of business without hesitation, and now I find my work deeply rewarding," she said. She also expressed her determination to continue moving forward with courage to deliver treatments.

After the award ceremony, there was a panel discussion featuring the award recipients, the judges and Rikako, a lifestyle brand CEO and well-being producer, as a guest speaker. The panel exchanged opinions on topics such as "the driving force behind challenges," "the barriers to balancing work and family life" and "the power of connections." Data from the Veuve Clicquot International Bold Barometer, compiled from a survey of 49,000 people in 25 countries, was presented to deepen the discussion on the current situation surrounding female entrepreneurs.



**Speakers at the "Real Voices" panel discussion** MHD MOET HENNESSY DIAGEO K.K.

produces grilled dishes such as the signature Yasaka Burger using locally produced *kuro shichimi* (black seven-flavor spice) and *kujō-negi*. Across venues, curated Japanese wines along with international selections complement the culinary offerings.

At the Old Imperial Bar, the signature cocktail Mount Hiei, featuring matcha, evokes a moonrise over Mount Hiei, a landscape immortalized in poetry and literature for centuries. "The moon rising over the eastern mountains tonight is the same moon that rose a thousand years ago," Sakata said. "That continuity is what we want guests to feel."

**Embedded in community**

The hotel occupies the same precinct as the Gion Kobu Kaburenjo theater — home to April's renowned Miyako Odori dance to celebrate spring and the Gion Kagai Art Museum, where visitors can discover the sophisticated culture of geiko and maiko. Here too stands Yasaka Nyokoba Gakuen, a traditional arts school where geiko and maiko train daily — studying Kyo-mai dance under Living National Treasure Inoue Yachiyo V while also learning a wide range of Japanese cultural arts, including song, tea ceremony and calligraphy. "Geiko and maiko preserve disciplines connecting us to centuries of Japanese culture," Sakata said. "Guests can hear and feel it as part of the hotel's daily life."

Aspiring for guests to discover what exists nowhere else, the hotel team is determined to become consummate professionals of Gion. "The concierge team is compiling hyperdetailed maps featuring spots most visitors would pass unwittingly. We're cultivating insights to inspire every guest according to their particular inclinations," Sakata stated. The team receives lectures from local history connoisseurs.

**Two capitals, one vision**

Ultimately, inheriting Yasaka Kaikan represents a profound mission: sustaining this cultural landmark and its artistic legacy. Daily



**The hotel incorporates part of the historic Yasaka Kaikan.** IMPERIAL HOTEL KYOTO

greetings and open dialogue during construction, helped forge bonds with neighbors and local advisers. The Imperial Hotel's 136-year legacy of impeccable service earned the trust that made this partnership possible.

"Gion's community carries deep dignity and pride representing Kyoto's cultural heart. We have borne similar responsibility as representatives of Japanese hospitality. We believe that we provide Japan's finest service and embody the heart of true service and experience," Sakata said.

Looking to the future, the Gion community offered simple but profound guidance: Just come as the Imperial Hotel. "Tokyo within Kyoto, preserving Gion's legacy while standing as ourselves for years to come — that continuity itself is co-creation in harmony," Sakata said.

"At the kickoff meeting with the staff who will build the Imperial Hotel Kyoto together form here on, I spoke about *ichigo ichie* — a once-in-a-lifetime encounter," Sakata recalled. "That philosophy came from my years in the wedding division, where I learned that a wedding represents everything a couple has planned for years — failure is never an option. The staff immediately understood, and I knew we were ready. I can't wait to welcome our guests."

Here, Kyoto's guardian spirit meets Tokyo's ambassadorial legacy: two capitals united in hospitality.

