

# sustainable japan

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## A look back at Destination Restaurants 2025

Gastronomic tourism born of collaboration; two offering experience of 'receiving life'

### Destination Restaurants

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Launched by The Japan Times in 2021, Destination Restaurants lists outstanding restaurants in Japan, chosen with international diners in mind. Having completed our coverage of the 10 restaurants selected in 2025, the fifth year of Destination Restaurants, we now present Parts 1 and 2 of a report on the year's culinary currents.

#### Part 1

Ten establishments out of several hundred throughout Japan are selected as each year's Destination Restaurants, and



**Nonna Nietta: 3-26-28 Namiki, Tsukuba-shi, Ibaraki Prefecture**  
Instagram: @nonna\_nietta TAKAO OHTA

one becomes the representative Destination Restaurant of the Year. Himawari Shokudo 2, the Destination Restaurant of the Year for 2025, was the second Toyama Prefecture restaurant to receive the top honor, after Cuisine régionale L'évo in 2021. Additionally, that prefecture's Oryouri Fujii and Ebitei-Bekkan were selected in 2023 and 2024. These are not mere coincidences.

In selecting each year's restaurants, we have found strong collaboration among chefs in certain regions even amid increasing competition. By discovering and sharing information about excellent producers — not only of ingredients, but also of tableware and the like — and organizing culinary workshops and other activities, these chefs continue to develop their talents and grow their businesses. Not surprisingly, areas that are activating cuisine-centered regional revitalization under the guidance of chefs have seen remarkable progress in the quality of their restaurants. Toyama Prefecture could be considered the prime example of this phenomenon.

Ibaraki Prefecture, home to the 2025 Destination Restaurant Nonna Nietta, is another area where collaboration among chefs has been gaining attention of late. Transcending cuisine styles such as Japanese, French and Chinese, these chefs engage in activities including information exchange and workshops about local producers and techniques. In addition, hotels and restaurants in the prefecture have held events featuring dishes based on recipes handed down by the Tokugawa



**Inaka no Taiho: 2-1 Yatsui-cho Betto, Ayabe-shi, Kyoto Prefecture**  
Instagram: @inakanotaihou TAKAO OHTA

clan, which governed the region in the Edo Period. This succession of programs is bringing about a major shift in consciousness among chefs and transforming Ibaraki into a prefecture with a robust gastronomic scene.

If a particular prefecture has a number of good restaurants, gastronomy tourism becomes feasible. This suggests a potential for creating new and highly attractive tourism resources even in locations lacking historic sites or places of scenic beauty.

Regional restaurants have been making great strides in areas where chefs strengthen their collaborative efforts, and this trend is sure to continue.



**Farm Restaurant Cuore: Charogawanishi, Shiranuka-cho, Shiranuka-gun, Hokkaido**  
https://charomen-cuore.com TAKAO OHTA

#### Part 2

We reported in Part 1 that the process of selecting the top 10 restaurants of 2025 revealed a trend of increased competition among dining establishments in certain regions, with Toyama and Ibaraki as notable examples — and, at the same time, strong collaboration among chefs in these regions, resulting in the emergence of many fine restaurants. In Part 2, we will take a look at two of the most memorable restaurants covered in 2025.

In Japan's regional areas, there are many restaurants with their own vegetable fields, and quite a few chefs who forage in the mountains for wild plants in spring and mushrooms in autumn. But few din-

ing establishments run their own livestock farm and center for processing game meat and carry out every step from meat production to cooking in the manner of Elezo Esprit in Hokkaido, the Destination Restaurant of the Year for 2024. Two of the restaurants that transform life — animals such as sheep and chickens — into meat, and then into refined cuisine, were listed as Destination Restaurants for 2025.

Farm Restaurant Cuore in the Hokkaido town of Shiranuka, an area where Ainu culture is deeply rooted, is attached to the Charo Sheep Farm, which pastures about 800 sheep on its 15-hectare site and processes and sells the meat.

The restaurant Inaka no Taiho, located next to the poultry producer Hasugamine Farm in the Kyoto Prefecture city of Ayabe, was created with the guiding concept "an open-air restaurant next to a farm." Shortly before the course menu is served, a chicken from the farm is slaughtered with guests' assistance and then becomes the main ingredient in the meal they experience.

Both restaurants make full use of their close proximity to a meat production site, offering dishes that include meat and internal organs from every part of the animal, with nothing wasted. Farm Restaurant Cuore's menu features meat from sheep in various periods of growth, from lamb to mutton, as well as organs such as brain, sweetbreads, heart and kidney. At Inaka no Taiho, owner-chef Koki Watanabe points out each part of the chicken to guests while processing the bird, saying, "These are the lungs, this is an egg before

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its shell has hardened" and so on.

Tasting such unusual organs in a state of extreme freshness that cannot be experienced in cities far from the production area is a special culinary event in itself. More than that, it sparks a new awareness of the fact that living is receiving life. This might be called the essence of gastronomy — something much more than merely "delicious."



**Himawari Shokudo 2: 1-5-18 Jinzuhonmachi, Toyama-shi, Toyama Prefecture**  
https://r50900.gorp.jp TAKAO OHTA

## Destination Restaurants 2025 AUTHENTIC JAPAN SELECTION



## Originator Profile advances tech against misinformation and fraud

### Event coverage

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Companies and organizations involved in technologies to reduce misinformation online presented their achievements at an event organized by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications at Otemachi Sankei Plaza in Tokyo's Chiyoda Ward on March 16. As risks increase, including misinformation created using AI, the ministry has been inviting companies and organizations to participate in the Development and Demonstration Projects for Countermeasure Technologies against Dis-/Misinformation on the Internet since 2024.

This event began with a keynote speech by Kazutoshi Sasahara, a professor at the Institute of Science Tokyo, that highlighted the speed at which fake information spreads and its increasing sophistication, as well as the current state of technological advancement designed to counter it. This was followed by a series of five-minute presentations from the 14 companies and organizations selected to participate in the projects for fiscal year 2025.

In the venue's exhibition area, the companies and organizations had set up booths to showcase their achievements, along with two of the six research institutes selected by the ministry to participate in the projects. The area was crowded with people interested in the exhibitors' technologies, products and services and exploring possibilities for collaboration.

One organization selected to participate in the ministry's projects for two consecutive years is the Originator Profile Collaborative Innovation Partnership (OP-CIP), of which The Japan Times is a member.



**Kazuki Kuniya, the Originator Profile technology partnership's deputy secretary-general, gives a presentation.** THE JAPAN TIMES

Originator Profile is a technology that allows internet users to verify who created and published the content they are viewing and who operates the website so they can be sure the content has not been tampered with, helping them determine for themselves whether the sources are trustworthy.

In his five-minute presentation, Kazuki Kuniya, OP-CIP's deputy secretary-general, explained that the partnership currently consists of 48 companies. "These companies, which transmit information via the internet — including media outlets and other businesses — register information such as their names, addresses, philosophies and editorial policies with OP-CIP. We verify the registered information by consulting third-party organizations such as industrial organizations that the companies belong to, to ensure that no false information is registered," he said.

Once the registered information has been confirmed, an Originator Profile — a certificate certifying the organization's authenticity — is issued, which can then be embedded into the content published by the organization. Kuniya also explained that a certificate called a Content Attestation (CA) is issued for each piece of content published by the organization. "Using a browser function, viewers can verify the OP and CA to ensure that the content has undoubtedly been published by an OP holder."

During this fiscal year's project, funded by the ministry and involving 17 companies including media firms and five advertisers, some of these companies adopted this technology for online advertising in real environments. By embedding OP in ads, users can verify the identities of advertisers, helping them identify the authenticity of ads and avoid phishing scams.

Kuniya believes the social implementation of this technology will be highly beneficial for municipalities and media outlets, where the authenticity and accuracy of information is critical, especially during disasters and other emergencies. He cited the exam-

ple of the false claim of an escaped zoo lion that spread after the 2016 Kumamoto earthquake and emphasized the importance of being able to quickly determine whether information is reliable. He added that it will also benefit companies, including financial institutions, which suffer damage from fraud.

Following his presentation, Kuniya spoke with The Japan Times, saying the pilot project also revealed new challenges. "We learned that not all companies can easily integrate OP into their existing systems, partly because some have complex systems or outsource the development of their systems — this was a significant finding" said Kuniya. As a first step toward solving this problem, OP-CIP has already begun distributing plugins for WordPress, which he described as the most versatile content management system. "We recognize the need to make OP implementation easier by developing a wider range of CMS plugins" and using software as a service, he said.

Kuniya expressed his hope that not only the current OP-CIP members but also a wider range of companies and other social stakeholders will participate in OP's pilot program this year and beyond. "This will help us understand various circumstances unique to each industry and sector, which will define the direction of the further development of OP technology." He also noted the importance of raising awareness among internet users, saying, "We hold events such as symposiums quite frequently. We also receive a lot of media coverage; just the other day, the OP-CIP's secretary-general appeared on a television program sponsored by the ministry to explain the OP."

Kuniya also said that in order to enable internet users to utilize OP automatically, OP-CIP aims to establish OP as an international standard and have it preinstalled in browsers in the future. "While this is just my personal opinion at this stage, I would like to see OP technology being used to identify the sources of videos and emails in the future," he added.

"It is said that fake information spreads faster than anything else." "By using OP to verify the source of information, people can avoid becoming the ones who spread misinformation."



### ESG/SDGs

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A forum exploring the potential to transform social challenges into opportunities for creating new value was held in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward on Feb. 18. The event was co-organized by World Eggs, a consulting firm specializing in planning and managing projects that address social issues, and the Millennium Sustainability Foundation, a public-interest incorporated foundation dedicated to the revitalization of Japanese culture and local communities.

Over 140 participants from many companies and organizations gathered to discuss how they can initiate or participate in such projects through a deeper understanding of "social IP," a new concept introduced by World Eggs to redefine solutions for social issues as "intellectual public properties."

World Eggs CEO Katsunori Namifusa noted in his opening remarks that projects and activities intended to address social issues often suffer by lacking an effective presentation of clear purpose and thorough discussion to define a strategy for long-term viability. "We need to turn social activities and public projects into intellectual public properties that people want to participate in, talk about and support," he stated. He added that to achieve this, it is essential to articulate the purpose of these projects in concise terms, create experiences that foster public engagement and ensure that they make business sense so they remain both scalable and sustainable.

He cited the Olympic Games and the Shikoku pilgrimage — known as the *henro*, which consists of long-distance



**Over 140 participants attended the forum.** WORLD EGGS

treks visiting 88 temples — as quintessential examples of successful social IPs. "The Olympic Games not only celebrate sports and athletes but also symbolize peace, diversity and other universally important elements while offering people excitement and fascination. That is why nations and companies across the world offer it their full support," he said. He also noted that the *henro* has consistently contributed to local economies along the pilgrimage route for the 1,200 years since its beginning. "These traditions would not have been sustained by righteousness alone," he emphasized.

The first session featured a unique format in which presentation videos of four projects, either imagined or still in the conceptual stage. These were followed by commentary from three panelists. The projects were all aimed at creating new social IPs and demonstrating their successful use. The first project focuses on utilizing lighthouses in Japan. There are approximately 3,000 lighthouses in Japan, according to the presentation, and the project aims to connect about 50 of them by sea routes, offering visitors the unique experience of standing at the edge of the land while exploring the history and stories of each location.

The second project involves animating and digitally archiving Japanese folktales. Namifusa argued that these tales embody a reverence for nature, the belief that one's actions ultimately return to oneself and the idea that all things possess a divine spirit. He also noted that these concepts, which are considered traditional Japanese values and ancient wisdom, align with the SDGs. The panelists agreed that such an archive, if presented effectively, would be highly valued globally.

The third project is an initiative to promote Japan's unique fish preparation and cooking methods. The fourth involves efforts to promote the understanding and preservation of watershed environments and cultures. It has introduced a new perspective of viewing rivers not as administrative boundaries but as "connecting nodes" that contribute to the sustainability of various organisms, including humans, in watershed areas.

The three panelists — Shinichi Ikenoue, a professor at Hokkai School of Commerce who specializes in urban and



**A commemorative photo of panelists and organizers** WORLD EGGS

regional planning and management; Shunpei Shimada, representative director of Satoyume Co. Ltd., a consulting firm dedicated to regional revitalization; and Tokutaro Nakai, representative director of the Millennium Sustainability Foundation and a former environmental bureaucrat — sympathized with the ideas and shared the inspiration they received from the presentations.

In the second session, the discussion centered on how to channel funding toward activities that hold value but lack economic rationality. Three panelists — a business producer, an investor and consultant, and a fundraiser — exchanged views especially on how to increase corporate donations for socially meaningful activities. They highlighted the need to more strongly link investments in solving social issues to corporate branding, to develop methods to calculate the social impact of companies' contributions and to create a framework for companies to support individuals engaged in social-good activities, suggesting as one possibility a system that involves giving people "social action points" that can then be purchased by companies.

In the final session, Namifusa discussed methods for transforming entertainment content into social IP, using examples from projects he is leading. The speakers, who included Tokumaru Oguri, the executive chairperson of the World Cosplay Summit, along with representatives from the gaming and radio industries, discussed how "passion," in addition to "righteousness," is essential to move people. They emphasized that projects must be designed so that enjoying entertainment inherently becomes a form of participation in socially meaningful action.