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Tsukihi's wood-fire cuisine conveys Echizen terroir

TAEKO TERAO
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Energized by the extension of the Hokuriku Shinkansen line to Fukui and Tsuruga in March 2024, Fukui Prefecture's tourism scene is bustling. Yet fewer than 3% of the guests at the prefecture's hotels last year were from overseas, as opposed to 27% in Japan overall, so attracting more overseas visitors is the next challenge going forward. Just at this juncture, the restaurant Tsukihi in Echizen has seen its first bookings from overseas guests, on the heels of its selection as a Japan Times Destination Restaurant.

Opened in February 2025, Tsukihi is attached to the natural winery Six Three Estate, launched in January 2023 just 15 minutes on foot from Echizen-Takefu Station on the Hokuriku Shinkansen line.

Chef Kyohei Nagaya, who was born in Gifu Prefecture, honed his skills at restaurants in Italy and Japan. Though he had no prior connection to Echizen, he had no hes-

itation about practicing his craft there. "I'd always worked in urban areas, but I wanted to have a stronger feeling of each season as I created cuisine," said Nagaya. "If restaurants in urban areas are places that bring out the character of the chef, you could say that in regional areas the land itself has a distinctive character, and that is what I want to commit myself to."

Nagaya moved to the area in January 2024. While preparing for the opening of Tsukihi, he studied grape cultivation and winemaking at the winery. He also sought out ingredients from Fukui Prefecture and experienced the area's food culture directly.

Tsukihi's course menu, priced at ¥22,000 (\$150) for both lunch and dinner, depicts Fukui Prefecture's culinary culture from Nagaya's perspective. Served at the start of the meal is spring water infused with the aromas of scorched local rice and grape shoots. The source of the water is snow-melt on Mount Hino, the beautiful mountain visible from the restaurant's eight



counter seats, 12 table seats and private room. Just one sip conveys a strong sense of the region's characteristic freshness and abundance.

Occupying a former storehouse for a construction company, the restaurant has no gas connection. Firewood is used for boiling water and cooking rice, and baking and grilling are done with far-infrared radiation from glowing embers. Japanese sea bass grilled on skewers arrives at the table with crisp skin and meaty flesh. The course menu incorporates Fukui specialties including kombu seaweed, sea urchin, soba and crab, as well as accompaniments originating in *shōjin ryōri* Buddhist vegetarian cuisine, which is closely associated with this devoutly Buddhist region. These include wheat gluten (*fū*) with mustard, which is served with the beet dish "Echizen clay wrap grill." The cuisine, created by a chef hailing from a different part of Japan but yet expressing the Fukui terroir, is



sure to be a source of great inspiration and excitement for the area.

Kyohei Nagaya

Born in Gifu Prefecture in 1985, Nagaya began his culinary journey at the age of 18. After refining his skills at restaurants in Italy and Japan, he discovered wood-fire cuisine at the Kobe restaurant Erre, where he served as chef starting in 2017. In January 2024, Nagaya moved to Echizen in Fukui Prefecture. He assumed the post of chef at Tsukihi, a restaurant attached to the winery Six Three Estate, when it opened in February 2025.

TSUKIHI

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TAKATO ISHIDA
GOVERNOR OF FUKUI PREFECTURE



Fukui Prefecture supports restaurants that serve as destinations in their own right, attracting visitors from Japan and abroad through the appeal of food. We are delighted that Tsukihi has been selected as a Destination Restaurant.

Our prefecture has long been considered a treasure trove of fine cuisine. In addition to ingredients such as Echizen crab, *Wakasa guji* tilefish and *ichihomare* rice, it is home to a diverse food culture, including crafts such as *Wakasa* lacquered chopsticks and the Buddhist vegetarian cuisine of Eiheiiji temple.

We warmly invite you to visit Fukui, now even more accessible following the extension of the Hokuriku Shinkansen.

TORU HIRABAYASHI
MAYOR OF ECHIZEN CITY



I am truly delighted that Tsukihi has been selected as one of 10 restaurants from across Japan to be introduced to the world.

Over its long history, Echizen city has fostered a rich tradition of craftsmanship, culture and the arts. In October 2025, the city joined the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in the field of crafts and folk art, proudly becoming part of this global network.

We hope you will enjoy a meal at restaurant Tsukihi, where Echizen's local ingredients are paired with wine, while also experiencing the city's rich history and culture and the appeal of its traditional crafts.



Destination Restaurants 2026 AUTHENTIC JAPAN SELECTION



America-Japan Society selects three for aiding nations' relations

ESG/SDGs

MAIKO MURAOKA
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The America-Japan Society announced the recipients of the sixth Kentaro Kaneko Award, presented to people who have made long-standing contributions to friendly U.S.-Japan relations through grassroots activities, on July 23. This year's recipients are Akiko Kuno, an adviser to the America-Japan Society, and Kozo Kimura, the president of Tokyo Express Co. Musician and philanthropist Yoshiaki Hayashi (known simply as Yoshiaki) was selected for the Special Award. The award ceremony will be held on Oct. 5 at the International House of Japan in Tokyo's Minato Ward.

Kentaro Kaneko, after whom the award is named, was the founding president of the AJS. Born in 1853, he traveled to the United States at age 18 and earned a law degree from Harvard University. Even after returning to Japan and becoming a politician, he visited the U.S. repeatedly. Amid the complex international geopolitical climate of the time, he delivered passionate speeches — not only to American politicians with whom he had personal ties but also to influential figures from various fields and the general public, explaining Japan's just cause in the Russo-Japanese War. His efforts contributed significantly to deepening U.S.-Japan diplomatic relations.

Kaneko is renowned for having won over American public opinion to Japan's side through these efforts and leveraging his personal friendship with Theodore Roosevelt — his former classmate at Harvard who later became U.S. president — to secure American cooperation, paving the way for the end of the Russo-Japanese War and the Portsmouth Peace Treaty.

This award was established in 2017 to

commemorate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the society and to recognize individuals who, like Kaneko, have contributed to U.S.-Japan relations.

The AJS was founded in 1917 by Japanese and American intellectuals. Currently chaired by Ichiro Fujisaki, a former ambassador to the United States, the society contributes to building and maintaining friendly bilateral ties by hosting various symposia to discuss U.S.-Japan relations and organizing events that promote exchanges between Japan and the U.S.

Currently, there are 27 local America-Japan Societies in Japan and 41 in the U.S., and candidates for the award were nominated primarily through recommendations from members of these organizations. The recipients were subsequently selected by a committee comprising six members from various sectors, including Yuzaburo Mogi, honorary chairman of Kikkoman Inc. and the committee's chairperson; Shinichi Inoue, senior adviser to ANA Holdings; and Christopher LaFleur, chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan.

Recipient Akiko Kuno was born in Tokyo in 1940. She graduated from the Faculty of Letters at Keio University in 1964. After joining the Society in 1970, she served as executive director and vice president for approximately 40 years, dedicating herself to promoting U.S.-Japan exchanges at the private-sector level. Her key achievements include organizing the Japan-America Societies International Symposium to build networks between societies in both countries, as well as planning and hosting joint events with the Japanese government. She also devoted herself to preserving the archives of the society and making them widely available to the public. In 2012, she co-authored the book "Another History of Japan-US Relations — The 20th Century Observed Via AJS Archives" (Chuo Koron Shinsha).

Kozo Kimura, who received the Kaneko Award upon a recommendation from the Japan-America Society of Northern California, currently resides in the U.S. as a U.S. citizen. Born in Kagoshima in 1940, he graduated from Kokugakuin University. He moved to the U.S. in 1969 and established the logistics company Tokyo Express Co. in 1973. In 1987, he founded the U.S.-Japan Friendship Cup. He has contributed broadly to U.S.-Japan exchanges through donations and establish-



Recipients and nominators at the 2024 Kentaro Kaneko Award ceremony. This year's ceremony will be on Oct. 5. AJS

ing funds to promote Japanese-language education, serving as a bridge between Japanese nationals living in America and the Japanese American community, strengthening the activities of the Japan-America Society of Northern California and promoting the sister-city relationship between the Saitama Prefecture city of Hanyu and Millbrae, California.

Yoshiki received the Special Award upon a recommendation by the Japan-America Society of Southern California. He was born in Chiba Prefecture in 1965. Since moving to the United States in 1992, he has been based in the U.S. for about 34 years, leading musical exchanges between Japan and the U.S. while conducting musical activities worldwide. In 1999, he composed and performed the celebratory piano piece "Anniversary" at the national celebration honoring the 10th anniversary of the emperor's enthronement. He is also actively involved in philanthropic work, including establishing a foundation dedicated to offering support to those in need. He has consistently made donations to victims of major disasters and tragic incidents in both Japan and the U.S. He has also donated to displaced people in Ukraine and neighboring countries as part of emergency relief efforts for the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. In 2019, he was selected for the 30 Heroes of Philanthropy list in the Asia-Pacific region by Forbes.

Including this year's recipients, a total of 14 individuals have received the Kaneko Award, and six have received the Special Award. According to the America-Japan Society, the next award selection process is scheduled to take place in 2028.

Destination Region

MAIKO MURAOKA
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About a year has passed since the city of Yamagata was honored by The Japan Times as the Destination Region of the Year 2025, with a series of articles introducing people and projects that have contributed to the city's vibrancy. To conclude the series, Mayor Takahiro Sato spoke about the city's attractions and potential in a recent interview.

The Destination Region is a new annual accolade developed in collaboration with Kosuke Motani, the chief senior economist at the Japan Research Institute. It recognizes a Japanese region for its efforts to advance sustainable development by preserving its heritage for future generations, helping local economies thrive through the effective use of regional resources and demonstrating a strong capacity to address both local and global challenges.

While Yamagata is typically known for its natural features — the frost-covered trees of Mount Zao, hot springs and its climate, which is ideal for winter sports and growing fruits such as cherries and pears — its cultural depth is equally extraordinary.

When Sato became mayor in 2015, the city had already submitted its first application to join the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. Although that initial bid was unsuccessful, Sato firmly believed that effective promotion would eventually lead to the designation.

He traveled to UNESCO's headquarters in Paris to deliver presentations and continued to lobby until Yamagata was finally accepted

into the network in the film category in 2017, largely thanks to the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival and its contribution to the local economy.

Sato views this achievement not only as a global validation of Yamagata's rich film culture, but also as a powerful catalyst that allows the city to showcase its diverse cultural offerings — including crafts, music, design and literature — to the world.

During the process of applying for membership in the network, Sato's belief that culture should be integrated with the economy to boost jobs and regional vitality was further strengthened. He said this idea aligned seamlessly with the network's philosophy of identifying creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development.

"Another major benefit was that local residents rediscovered the true value of their local resources and treasures. The global recognition also helped us to promote the city more effectively to the world," Sato said.

The central hub for Yamagata's efforts to become a creative city is Q1, a facility housed in Yamagata's first-ever reinforced concrete building, constructed in 1927. It accommodates studios of local artists and artisans, as well as cafes and restaurants that use local produce. It also houses some offices of local entrepreneurs. This facility exemplifies the city's approach of polishing, enhancing and promoting existing resources. "Materials and potential can be found everywhere," said Sato.

Various projects have also been carried out by students and graduates of the Tohoku University of Art and Design to renovate old buildings in the city for use as apartments and student dormitories.

Sato said that rather than rigid, top-down urban planning in which every zone is predetermined, Yamagata aims to foster a flexible environment where small-scale, experimental and community-driven initiatives can emerge and eventually transform the entire city organically.

Sato emphasized that advancing urban revitalization hand-in-hand with promoting tourism is the key to maintaining a vibrant economy in the face of inevitable population decline.

While Zao, home to a new Hoshino Resorts hotel that opened in October, and the scenic mountainside temple of Yamadera remain famous tourist destinations,



Mayor Takahiro Sato TAKAO OHTA

the city center boasts deep-rooted traditions as well. There are long-standing confectionery shops, traditional sake breweries and a surviving culture of geisha and *maiko* at traditional Japanese restaurants. Because Yamagata escaped major air raids during the war, historic architecture remains intact throughout the city.

At Momiji Park, which houses a municipal tea house and a traditional garden, the city hosts an annual tea ceremony. "There are distinct schools of tea ceremony that rarely mix, but Yamagata city organizes the event to bring all schools together," Sato said. "This kind of collaboration is unheard of elsewhere. I think it is a testament to Yamagata's collaborative spirit."

This spirit is also at the core of community-driven revitalization efforts such as the promotion of Yamagata's ramen culture. Sato noted that over 160 ramen shops, nori seaweed vendors and noodle-making factories have formed a council to promote ramen culture. "Instead of a cutthroat, 'me-first' mentality, the close-knit human relationships of a small city have been contributing to the city's revitalization," he said.

Sato looks forward to Yamagata's future as a vibrant tourist city — but not one that merely offers tourist experiences. "The ultimate way for visitors to enjoy their time in Yamagata is to experience the everyday pleasures that Yamagata residents enjoy in their daily lives and the genuine warmth of the local people," he said.

the japan times

Destination Region 2025
Yamagata city



Sato receives an award from Kosuke Motani, an adviser to The Japan Times' Destination Region program. TAKAO OHTA



The main prize is the Kentaro Kaneko Award AJS