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INTERVIEW

## “Aux Merveilleux de Fred” in Japan; a business and familial project

Interview with Alexandre Tranchellini, General Manager of the shop in Tokyo

“Aux Merveilleux de Fred” is a patisserie brand founded by Frédéric Vaucamps which is especially known for its delicious “Merveilleux”, a light meringue covered with chocolate and whipped cream.

The brand has shops all around the world including Japan since this summer. Alexandre Tranchellini moved with his family to open this shop in Tokyo and live in Japan. He told us about this unusual journey.

### *Why did you choose to open this store in Japan?*

For two reasons mainly. First, our family fell in love with Japan after several trips here. Second, we became friend with the family managing the shop “Les Merveilleux” in Geneva. Gradually it was obvious that an Aux Merveilleux in Japan would be a wonderful opportunity for both my family and the brand.

### *How did your establishment go? What were the main challenges you had to face?*

Our establishment was very particular. We arrived here last November and we first suffered from strikes in France. When things started to move forward, the coronavirus arrived. It was and still is a difficult period for everyone, but it has been espe-



Mr. Alexandre Tranchellini with his family in front of the Tokyo shop

cially true for us as we had to open a boutique and settle the family. We had to be very flexible.

Visiting Japan as a tourist or settling there are two different things. As entrepreneurs, we had to learn quickly how things are done here. In Japan, there are many unspoken rules one must follow. It is very complex to know what you have the right to do from what you don't; what is expected and required.

*What was your criteria for choosing the location of your*

*store?*

For the brand, Tokyo was clearly the best choice. Nonetheless, as we wanted to live close to the shop, we would probably have opened in a smaller city if the choice had been ours alone. Therefore, Kagurazaka district was the best choice, as it is both business friendly and has a community soul with people knowing each other. It is also a bit of French area, quite international, which was easier to set up for the kids too.

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INTERVIEW

## “Aux Merveilleux de Fred” in Japan; a business and familial project

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*Have you encountered any difficulties in importing goods to Japan?*

Although we do not import raw materials directly, as a brand, we had to import many things related to the packaging and the decoration. The requirements for material that comes in contact with food are extremely high and thus difficult to import.

Japanese customs were extremely demanding about every specific detail, especially about the composition. We did a lot of back and forth at that level. This said, once the first import is done, as long as the composition does not change, the following ones will be much easier.

For the rest, we mostly worked with local companies, importers and distributors as well as a company called Centdix, which helped



Many people queuing the first day

with interpretation and to get familiar with Japanese business culture.

*You hired Japanese staffs. Was it difficult?*

We have about 15 part-time employees; mostly students interested in working in a company where French / English is spoken. It was not very easy to find enough people. The business culture is also different and we had to adapt to it. Our staff expects us to be extremely specific about our expectations and to provide very detailed instructions.

The great thing is that once the task is understood, they do it amazingly well.

Furthermore, Japanese employees are very punctual and respectful. There is also a fantastic climate of trust. For example, in our small staff room everyone leaves their bag open. Nobody would think that someone might steal someone else's items.

*How have you been perceived by Japanese consumers?*

We hesitated for a while to adapt, but eventually decided not to change the recipes. We wanted the customers here to have the same experience as in a shop in Paris. For instance, we welcome people in French. Half of the staff are French native speakers and will never be able to meet the high expectations of Japanese clientele anyway. In the end, people are happy and many come specifically seeking our products and the related experience.

*What are the similarities or differences between the Swiss and Japanese markets?*

Generally speaking, Switzerland is a bit like the Japan of Europe and Japan is a bit like the Switzerland of Asia. We are very similar. We have the same values as respect for others, precision, love of a job well done, respect for the boss. Legally, there are also many similarities regarding labor or immigration, for example. We share a lot of values even though huge cultural differences remain.

In the similarities there is a respect for the customer, a respect for the work, the price too. Here we pay the right price; the demanding customers are ready to spend on quality products.

In the differences, it is often said that the “customer is king”, but here this has been brought to a completely different level. Meeting the expectations of Japanese customers is sometimes very difficult. On the other hand, this is also amazing when you are the customer. Once a trustful relationship has been built, you can almost call a supplier in the middle of night and expect to be delivered first thing in the morning. We actually had such an emergency once, and I do not think we could have solved it so quickly in Europe.

*Do you plan to open other stores in Tokyo or elsewhere in Japan?*

We have a development project in Japan; but we move slowly.

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## “Aux Merveilleux de Fred” in Japan; a business and familial project

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We are a craft brand; we need to find other craftsmen to open other stores. It may take time and will probably not be in Tokyo. We want to create exclusivity.

*What did you think about JETRO's services?*

Japan is a complex market. We needed a lot of support and JETRO was there from the very beginning. The JETRO documentation is ex-

tremely important at the start; very comprehensive. JETRO is excellent for the exploratory phase and we felt well accompanied. The JETRO Invest Japan Business Support Center allowed us to hold meetings in suitable places. Once this phase was over, then other partners took over and made things happen.

*Your impressions of the Japanese market in 3 words?*

Exciting, demanding, competitive.

*Your advice for a good implementation?*

Good preparation, believe in your project, and have a strong philosophy and identity. We wanted to be self-support in Japan, while everyone was telling us to find a partner. We really felt like we had been tested several times. It took us longer, but we managed to get where we wanted to be.

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会見

INTERVIEW

## Prime Minister Suga succeeds to Mr. Shinzo Abe

On September 16 Mr. Yoshihide Suga succeeded to Mr. Shinzo Abe as Prime Minister of Japan. Two days earlier he succeeded Mr. Abe as President of the Liberal Democratic Party. In Japan, the leader of the ruling party becomes prime minister in a way similar to the UK system. Designated by the National Diet (Parliament) and appointed by Emperor Naruhito to form a new Government.

Former Prime Minister Abe announced in August that he had to resign for medical reasons. Suffering from ulcerative colitis, a long time disease, his condition has worsened recently forcing him to leave office, despite his will to maintain continuity during this major crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Mr. Abe already had to resign a first time in 2007 after his first year as Prime Minister.



First press conference of PM Suga

Thanks to a better treatment and after a few years in opposition he retook his former office in 2012 and became Japan's longest serving Prime Minister.

Mr. Abe had a great influence in the country. “Abenomics” have supported the Japanese economy through difficult times, and he contributed to several diplomatic

breakthroughs including two of the largest Economic Partnership Agreements in recent times, with the EU (Japan-EU EPA), and another one with 10 other countries in Asia, Oceania and America (Trans-Pacific Partnership).

Mr. Abe remains a Diet member.

PM Yoshihide Suga has served as Chief Cabinet Secretary for nearly 8 years in Mr. Abe's government. In this position he contributed to the former PM's longevity. Last year he was in the spotlight for announcing the name of the new Reiwa era

Prime Minister Suga has already said there will be continuity in the political orientation of the country. The cabinet remained mostly unchanged and is expected to stay in charge until the end of term next year.

動向

TREND

## 革新

INNOVATION

## Care 222, Ushio's UV lamp that kills Covid-19, and is harmless to humans

The Japanese light maker Ushio Inc has developed a new series of lamp UV lamp called "Care 222" which has been proven effective in killing the SARS-CoV 2 and is harmless to humans.

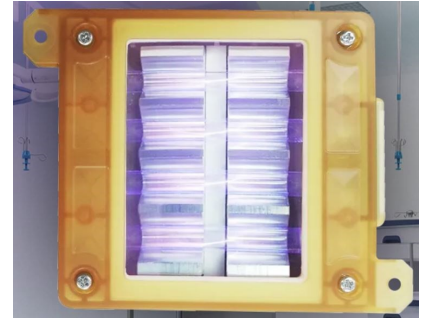
Its effectiveness in killing SARS-CoV 2 has been demonstrated by a study conducted by the Hiroshima University. The related article has been published in the [American Journal of Infection Control](#).

UV lights have long been used for medical and food processing application as they are an effective sterilization feature, killing both bacteria and viruses. Until now however, most of the existing lamps emit-

ted a wavelength that can harm human health, provoking skin cancer or eye problems. Innocuity is possible at lower wavelengths but with the risk of being less effective.

Ushio's Care 222 series has been developed in collaboration with Columbia University, and is named so because those lamps emit at a wavelength of 222 nanometres, instead of the conventional 254. The difference may seem small, but it is actually huge as a 222 wavelength cannot breach the surface of the skin or eye.

For the first time, a UV lamp is harmless to humans and can therefore be used in occupied spaces.



The Care 222 UV lamp

The challenge was to find the right balance where a UV lamp is harmless to humans, but effective against virus and bacteria. The potential of such lamps goes far beyond Covid-19 only. For more information, please check the [press release](#) and [product page](#).

## Agenda

## 活動

AGENDA

- ✓ Swiss Open Innovation Webinar - Exploring Possibilities in the Swiss Blockchain Field  
October 7th, 9am - 10am (CEST)  
Organized by JETRO and the Greater Geneva Bern Area (GGBa)  
Language: Japanese/English (simultaneous translation)  
Program is available [here](#)  
[Registration](#) deadline Oct. 6th. Free of charge

JETRO is a government-related organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world. Originally established in 1958 to promote Japanese exports abroad, JETRO's core focus in the 21st century has shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping small to medium size Japanese firms maximize their global export potential.

The JETRO Switzerland Newsletter can also be viewed and/or downloaded online:  
<http://www.jetro.go.jp/switzerland/newsletter>

# JETRO

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