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Season's Greetings from JETRO Geneva



Winter in Fukushima prefecture © JNTO

Dear Readers,

JETRO's mission and privilege is to support companies. During this challenging year, we have seen how resourceful they have been. We will continue our support knowing that better days are ahead.

Our office will be closed on Dec 25th and from Dec 29th to Jan 3rd.

We wish you all a lovely holiday season and a good rest.

Kind regards,

JETRO Geneva's team

“Wagyu: one of the best experiences you can enjoy in your life”

Interview with Mr. Sebastian Stöveken, co-founder of Umai International GmbH

If you want to treat yourself during the end-of-year celebrations, you should consider wagyu. Wagyu is an exceptional product that comes with mystery and often a bit of confusion. We asked Mr. Sebastian Stöveken from [Umai International](#) GmbH, the exclusive importer of Miyazaki-gyu in Switzerland, to tell us what authentic wagyu is, why it is expensive, and why it is fully worth the price.

Can you please introduce yourself and your company?

I am a trained chef who worked in Michelin star restaurants. My wife and I had a restaurant in Argentina for 7 years. I was in Japan in 2014, when the government lifted the export ban for

wagyu meat to Europe. It was a local chef who told me about it. I was surprised as I believed we already had wagyu in Europe. I got curious and was inspired to do something with wagyu. It took me one year to get all the certificates and be able to start importation into Europe. So, we have been official importers since 2015. To be honest, the first reason for us to import wagyu was simply to enjoy this meat we like so much after our departure from Japan and return to Europe with the family.

Where does your interest in wagyu beef come from?

In general, I would say my wife and I were always lucky to work with the products we loved and do what we like. It could be

wine, food, or the fact that we travel a lot. When we were in Japan, we were amazed by the quality of Japanese food, especially wagyu. It was so great to talk with farmers, restaurants, and butchers. We were hooked by the perfectionism of Japanese ways.

What is wagyu?

The first thing to understand is

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Wagyu's typical intermuscular fat

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INTERVIEW



The two founders of Umai International GmbH, Ms. Fernadna Etchegoyen and Mr. Sebastian Stöveken

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that wa means Japan and gyu means beef. Wagyu is the term used for Japanese beef. It is not a species. So, saying wagyu beef or Japanese wagyu are pleonasm. Plus, if we stick to the definition of the word, an Australian wagyu would be nonsense.

In Japan, four species of beef are used for meat, more than 90% of it being the species called Japanese Black (Kuroge), which is the one used for the best meat. If you eat wagyu, it is likely to be a Japanese Black cattle.

Sometimes people refer to Kobe beef. It is actually wagyu made from the same species in the area of the small city of Kobe. There is a big competition between the producing regions which are marketing their product with the name of the city or region.

If you have never tried authentic wagyu, it is unlikely you will be able to taste the difference between the regions where wagyu is produced.

Today, it is possible to find “non-Japanese wagyu.” Is there any difference?

Here, many people think they know what wagyu is because they believe they already tried it. It is often not true because they tried an Australian “wagyu” or American one.

The main difference is that “wagyu” produced outside Japan is not genuine, but a hybrid between Japanese Black and a local species. Plus, those hybrids are a recent thing and do not benefit from the same careful selection genuine Japanese Black have gone through over centuries. They are not necessarily bad, but they are different species. The growing methods and time are often different, too.

What makes wagyu so special?

Wagyu cannot be regarded like any other beef. It is not about quantity. It is more of a premium food one would enjoy, like caviar or foie gras. They are many anecdotes about wagyu, like the daily massage or the fact they drink beer. It is difficult to say if this contributes to the taste or if it is marketing. What is sure, however, is the production cycle of wagyu is much longer. Wagyu cattle grow for 2 to 3 years compared to 8 to 10 months for industrial beefs in the West. This longer cycle is necessary for the meat to develop its characteristics, especially the intermuscular marbling that is so praised.

In Western culture, we wrongly associate fat with an unhealthy diet, so the breeders want to get rid of it. In Japan, on the contrary, for generations they selected the wag-

yu to have this marbled fat, which is not only tasty but also healthy as it is mostly unsaturated fatty acids.

To sum it up, wagyu has been carefully selected for its taste and qualities over time, has a long growing cycle to develop its full potential, and enjoys the perfectionism of Japanese producers to continuously improve it.

How would you describe its taste, texture, and other specificities?

Eating wagyu beef is one of the best experiences you can enjoy in your life. You cannot compare it to any other meat. Just keep an open mind when trying.

Visually it is already enjoyable. You will see the very fine marbling and the cherry color.

Then, the preparation is important. When tasting, the wagyu meat will melt in your mouth. It is a very unique culinary experience. The meat is very tender, and the flavor is very complex and pleasant. It tastes of umami. The fat is very different from other animal fat. It is very clean and has a very firm texture.

Can you explain how the wagyu quality scale works?

Wagyu beef is judged by two main criteria; the yield grade and the meat quality grade. The yield grade scale is A, B and C whereby A is the highest grade. The meat quality consists of four subcriteria; colour and shine of the meat, firmness and texture, colour and shine of the fat,

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“Wagyu: one of the best experiences you can enjoy in your life”

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as well as the marbling. The scale goes from 1 to 5 whereby 5 is the highest quality standard. The Beef Marbling Standard (BMS) independently rates the marbling and ranges between 1 – very scarce and 12 – very abundant.

To keep it simple, going with A4 and A5, you will have the best quality possible with a typical high marbling.

What is/are the best way(s) to enjoy wagyu?

Obviously, the Japanese cuisine has developed incredible recipes over time. You will find several recipes for every cut, including nice ones for second cuts. I strongly recommend them.

If you want to be safe, you can go to a good Japanese restaurant as long as the wagyu is authentic Japanese beef. You should look for the label (see picture on the right).

It is also possible to enjoy it at home. The most important thing to keep in mind is that wagyu is the star: no heavy sauces, a bit of salt or soy sauce, and some vegetables as a side dish.

For a 1-cm. thick piece, a light cooking – one minute on each side – is enough. We have videos on our website, and you can find good ones on the internet, too.

With our customers we also do a lot of teaching.

How would you describe the Swiss market regarding wagyu beef?

It is definitely a growing niche market, but we are behind the curve. In the USA, it's already more common. It is a premium product not fit for the mass market. Price wise, because it is important for people to know what they should expect, we are talking about 400 to 500 francs per kg in a butchery. As direct im-

porters, we are under this price mark. If you go to a retail shop, it will be higher and even more in a good restaurant, where it is likely to be about 1,000 francs per kg.

As I said, the long growing cycle and high production costs are incompressible. When you see lower prices, it is unlikely to be Japanese beef. Again, look for the certificate. 400 for authentic wagyu is a good deal.



The Universal Wagyu Mark is a proof of authenticity introduced by Japanese authorities. Look for it when buying.

会見

INTERVIEW

An English-speaking single-entry point for financial service firms

Japan is already of the largest financial market in the world, but it could be further improved according to the Japanese government. Prime Minister Suga is willing to make it a global financial centre. Among others, it should be easier in the future for foreign asset management companies to enter the Japanese market. This would bring diversification and thus resilience, but also stimulate the economy and create valuable jobs. Several initia-

tives are in motion to achieve this goal. Two of them are especially helpful at the preliminary stage. It will be the creation of a single-entry point and the promotion of the use of English.

Thus, in January 2021, the Financial Service Agency (FSA) and Local Finance Bureaus (LFBs) will establish a Financial Market Entry Office to handle pre-application consultation, registration and supervision for newly entering asset man-

agement firms as a single point of contact with all the communications available in English.

Relevant regulations will be amended accordingly.

More information is available on the [FSA website](#) or by contacting the Financial Market Entry Consultation Desk via email or phone:

marketentry@fsa.go.jp

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活動

ACTIVITY

文化

CULTURE

The Japan Club Genève and Ms. Naoko Herbort-Tanno awarded

Every year the Japanese Foreign Minister awards people and organisations with outstanding achievements in promoting the friendship between Japan and the rest of the world.

This year we are happy to highlight the two recipients of the Foreign Minister's Commendations for the fiscal year 2020: Ms. Naoko Herbort-Tanno and the [Japan Club of Geneva](#). In both cases, the Minister has recognized the effort in the promotion of mutual understanding between Japan and Switzerland.

Ms. Naoko Herbort-Tanno was the first President of the [Cercle Suisse-Japon](#) and is currently its Vice-President. The Cercle is located in the Lausanne area and is very active and open to anybody having an interest into Japanese culture.

The Japan Club of Geneva is the

organiser of the "Fête Japonaise" in Carouge (GE). This celebration took place almost every year since 2010 and has become a huge success over the year with more than 10,000 visitors. This year, the event

was cancelled because of the COVID, but hopefully it will take place next year. The Club also publishes a monthly newsletter in Japanese called "Bonjour Léman".



The logo of the last edition of the Fête Japonaise, check the [website!](#)

Agenda



Stay tuned!

活動

AGENDA

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>

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