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INTERVIEW

On a Mission to Share Japanese Sake Culture in Switzerland

Interview with Cristina Volpi, Co-founder of *Kitsune Trading*

Kitsune Trading is a dynamic and innovative trading company based in Mendrisio, in the canton of Ticino. The company's mission is to make Japanese products available in Switzerland, focusing on authentic Japanese cuisine such as Sake, seasonings, tea, gourmet foods, and accessories. *Kitsune Trading* imports and sells only products made in Japan, carefully selected to promote high-quality food specialties crafted by family-run companies. Additionally, the company offers advice for clubs and restaurants, organizes Sake tastings, and works towards sharing the authentic tastes of Japanese cuisine with a focus on quality and tradition. For this edition of our newsletter, we are excited to bring you an interview with Mrs. Cristina Volpi, co-founder of *Kitsune Trading* and certified Sake sommelier and educator.

Mrs. Volpi, can you share the inspiration behind starting Kitsune Trading and your journey in promoting Japanese food and ingredients in Switzerland?

Kitsune Trading was incorporated with the aim to select true Japanese Sake, Premium Sake, in order to share the correct culture of Japanese Sake and Japanese gastronomic culture in Switzerland. Sake is our core business, but we have added a few more products (Japanese tea,



Cristina Volpi (center) with Mrs. Haruko Morita (left) and Mr. Masataka Shirakashi (right), President of Kenbishi Sake Brewery © Cristina Volpi

knives and accessories) and wish to increase our offer. To be honest, sometimes it is not so easy to introduce products very different from those known locally. There are many prejudices and misunderstandings associated with *Nihonshu*, for example many people still think that *Nihonshu* is a liquor, not a fermented beverage and that it can only be consumed hot.

How has being certified as JAPAN FOOD AND INGREDIENT SUPPORTERS impacted your business and the range of products you offer?

We personally select only products that respect the Japanese tradition. They are all craft products, often made by small producers. We applied for *Japan Food and*

Ingredients Supporters certification because it is an important promotion of our work. Being certified also helps us correctly present our products and our mission.

How do you find your suppliers and what are the most important criteria in choosing them?

We participate as judges in Sake challenges (especially *Milano Sake Challenge*), which is an amazing opportunity for tasting many different references, sharing opinions with other sommeliers and professionals and also to personally meet Japanese producers. We started with a few products, based on our experience and taste, and have now increased our offer, following the request of our clients, such as restaurants and cocktail bars. We like to offer a customized service to build a sake menu for our clients that can meet the preferences of their customers.

Since the founding of your company, have you witnessed any noteworthy changes in the perception of Japanese products among your Swiss customers?

We want to share our passion by offering our clients advice on different types of Sake, optimal food pairings,

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INTERVIEW

and recommended serving temperatures. Additionally, we offer training sessions for their staff to ensure Sake is presented and served correctly. It is crucial that staff are knowledgeable about *Nihonshu*, enabling Swiss customers to fully appreciate the experience and return for more tastings.

You are also a certified Sake sommelier. How did this certification influence your work at Kitsune Trading, and how has this enhanced the company's operations and offerings?

I am a certified Sake sommelier and Sake educator accredited by the Sake Sommelier Association (SSA) in London. These certifications, along with the invaluable experience gained through the journey of becoming a Sake sommelier, play a pivotal role in cultivating comprehensive product knowledge. This expertise not only instills trust in our clients but also creates appreciation for our curated selection of products. While possessing the expertise of a sommelier is fundamental, genuine passion is equally crucial.

As for Japanese Shochu, do you think it will be able to find a place on the Swiss market?

Shochu is Japan's most popular liquor, yet less than 1% of production is exported internationally. *Shochu*, alongside *Awamori* (an alcoholic beverage indigenous and unique to Okinawa), represents an undiscovered world that holds significant appeal, particularly for mixologists. In Japan, *Shochu* is commonly enjoyed during meals. While the traditional Japanese method of consuming *Shochu* may seem



Cristina Volpi with Mr. Sato Junpei, CEO of Tatenokawa Sake Brewery © Cristina Volpi

daunting to newcomers, its allure lies in its diverse aromas and flavors. In fact, unlike many other liquors, *Shochu* offers a wide spectrum of aromas based on its ingredients such as rice, barley, sweet potato, and more. Once again, emphasizing promotion is crucial to unlocking the potential of these distinctive beverages.

How do you envision the future of Kitsune Trading, and what goals do you have for expanding your presence in Switzerland and beyond?

We would like to further increase our presence, especially by offering more training. To expand our presence in

Switzerland we are planning to launch a campaign aimed at promoting not only Japanese Sake but also food pairings with it. Our goal is to communicate that Sake complements a variety of unexpected foods such as dairy, red meats, fried foods, bitter flavors, and spicy cuisine. Our advice is to savor the experience, whether you are new to Sake or a seasoned enthusiast. Take your time, savor the flavors, experiment with temperatures and food combinations, delve into the world of this traditional Japanese beverage.

Thank you for the interview!

Results of the Federal Vote of 3 March 2024

Switzerland held its first federal vote of 2024 on 3 March. Swiss voters were asked to vote on two initiatives: The first one aimed to introduce a 13th Old-Age and Survivors' Insurance (OASI) pension payment and the second one envisioned the raising the retirement age from currently 65 to 66 to guarantee the medium-term financing of the old-age pension system. While the first initiative was approved with 58.24%, the second one was rejected with 74.72%. Overall voter turnout was at around 58%, well above the average.

The [first initiative](#) proposed adding a 13th pension payment to the existing 12 monthly payments each year, aiming to enhance OASI retirement pensions and improving financial support to retirees. Additionally, it safeguards that supple-

mentary benefits cannot be reduced due to this additional payment. The initiative text did not specify how this increase would be funded. According to Federal Councilor and Interior Minister Elisabeth Baume-Schneider, the Federal Council will present a decision on the financing of the 13th OASI pension payment this year. The aim is to be able to start paying the additional pension payment in 2026.

The [second initiative](#), originally launched by the youth wing of the Radical Liberal Party, sought to ensure long-term funding of OASI by gradually increasing the retirement age for both women and men from currently 65 to 66 by 2033. Additionally, it suggested linking the retirement age to life expectancy, similar to what is already common

in some European countries. The initiative received support from the political right and various business associations, which warned of financial risks for pension provision if reforms were not implemented. Opponents from the political left and trade unions rejected the initiative and argued that the demographic challenge of the OASI cannot be overcome by increasing the retirement age alone.

Due to an increasing number of pensioners and longer life expectancies, the question of the overall financing of OASI remains a challenge and this issue will likely continue to be important in future political discussions.

Source: [admin.ch](https://www.admin.ch); [swissinfo](https://www.swissinfo.ch); [ch.ch](https://www.ch.ch)

動向

SITUATION

The Return of the Geneva International Motor Show

After a 5-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Geneva International Motor Show* returned to the city of Calvin from 27 February until 3 March 2024.

Despite its comeback, the event faced challenges with fewer major manufacturers participating compared to previous years. The event showcased a more compact, innovative, and electric focus, with around 20 exhibitors unveiling new global and regional products. Notable brands like Renault, Dacia, and BYD made appearances, introducing new models and emphasizing electric vehicles. In addition, the show fell short of its attendance target, with only 168'000 visitors compared to the ex-



Impressions from the event © JETRO

pected 200'000. This lower turnout was attributed to various factors, including the absence of key players like Porsche, Audi, Mercedes, Toyota, and Peugeot. The organizers faced criticism due to these notable absences.

While the 2024 Geneva International Motor Show brought back a sense of

normalcy to the automotive industry after pandemic-related disruptions, it also shed light on the changing dynamics of auto shows in an increasingly digital age. The challenges faced in terms of exhibitor participation and attendance numbers reflect broader shifts in how car manufacturers engage with audiences and unveil new products in a rapidly evolving industry landscape.

According to the organizers, the 2025 edition of the motor show will take place from 17 to 23 February 2025.

Sources: [swissinfo](https://www.swissinfo.ch); [Agefi](https://www.agesfi.ch); [Tribune de Genève](https://www.tribune.ch)

行事

EVENT

Farewell Message by Director General Shiro Takegami

活動

ACTIVITY

“Two years and nine months are not enough to fully grasp the intricacies of Switzerland's economy, but it has been more than enough time to forge meaningful connections and friendships that have enriched my life. I am grateful for the experiences and relationships I have cultivated during my time here. I extend my heartfelt thanks to my colleagues at JETRO Geneva, who have been instrumental in shaping these experiences. I am also grateful for the new friends I have made in Switzerland, both through official engagements and personal encounters, including all the subscribers of this newsletter. My latest accomplishment was collaborating with the Japanese embassy in Bern to promote Japanese food at Globus stores in Bern, Zurich, Lausanne, and Geneva. This initiative marks a promising beginning towards expanding the Japanese food market through high-end department stores in this country. This endeavor is just one example of the potential for growth and collaboration.

As I bid farewell, I am confident that the strong relationships between JETRO and these esteemed organizations will endure under the guidance of my successor, who will be taking over from me starting in May”.

Warm regards,
Shiro Takegami



Shiro Takegami's tenure as Director General of the JETRO Geneva office has officially come to an end. ©JETRO

Agenda

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AGENDA

- ✓ **The Key Success Factors of Doing Business in Japan**
Event organized by Switzerland Global Enterprise (S-GE)
Registration available following [this link](#)
23 April 2024 - 10:15 AM -12:10 PM
Switzerland Global Enterprise, Stampfenbachstrasse 85, 8006 Zurich

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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