

Japan's Local Foods Are GOING GLOBAL

Japanese food companies are taking regional dishes, handmade traditions and distinctive ingredients abroad while preserving the culture behind every bite. **BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD AND BERNARD THOMPSON**

Behind counters across Japan, cooks cut udon, grill okonomiyaki, arrange stem wakame and pour regional sake. When people think of Japanese food, they think of sushi and ramen, but now, a new wave of local specialties is impressing new taste buds around the world. In a country where population decline is threatening to drive centuries-old comfort dishes extinct, chefs, producers and food companies are fighting back by carving new spaces outside of Japan to preserve and translate local washoku.

Preserving Local Flavor Across Global Markets

At Chibo, that mission begins with okonomiyaki, Osaka's savory pancake and a fixture of the city's homes and casual restaurants. Unlike sushi or kaiseki, it is everyday food that's flexible and communal. "To see such everyday cuisine gaining recognition overseas makes me very happy," said Kanji Nakai, CEO of Chibo Co., Ltd. "I believe this is the real Japanese food." For Nakai, bringing okonomiyaki abroad means preserving the human connection at its center while adapting ingredients and flavors to local tastes. The communal feel and line of sight to preparation are important dimensions of Marugame Seimen's bid to maintain the authenticity of handmade in-store udon, while scaling internationally. President and Representative Director Hiroshi Yamaguchi asserts that machines cannot replace humans in creating an experience through craft. The company trains "udon masters" in its restaurants around the world to ensure that the texture and taste are consistent and correct, even where ingredients like local water varies in mineral content. "For us, the handmade process itself creates value," he said. "It creates authenticity, excitement and trust with customers." Authenticity is not limited to how food is prepared, and SHN Corporation shows that the environment in which one dines is central to the experience and must be translated authentically. From its beginnings as a single izakaya, it has grown into a network of around 1,000 stores. "The

key is to protect what must remain Japanese, while adapting the parts that should evolve for each local market," Ryuta Takahashi, president of SHN, said. As the company expands outward, it adapts menus, pricing and restaurant concepts to make them accessible locally while retaining their Japanese identity.

Bringing Everyday Japanese Foods to New Audiences

Nagatanien Holdings Co., Ltd. brings washoku from restaurants into supermarkets and people's daily routines. Taijiro Nagatani, representative director, chairman and CEO, hopes that Japanese food becomes deeply ingrained in everyday life around the world. Products like Ochazuke-Nori take old comfort foods and give them new life. Its convenience is a way of preserving culture, rather than diluting it.

"Our objective is to make Japanese food accessible without compromising what makes it special," Nagatani said. Sokan Co., Ltd. is also creating new occasions for traditional ingredients. Its stem wakame snacks helped establish what the company calls "ingredient-based confectionery": minimally processed foods that remain recognizable while offering the convenience of packaged snacks. Kenichi Itayama, representative director, president and CEO, believes seaweed's associations with Japan, health and natural ingredients can support its growth overseas, even where it is not yet part of the everyday diet.

"Similar to how raw fish was once unfamiliar but is now widely accepted through sushi, seaweed may follow a similar path over time," he said. Approaching from a different direction, Kabaya Foods Corporation is creating products that appeal through emotion and experience. Tetsuro Anai, representative director and president, said that Tough Gummy's distinctive texture centers on the idea that chewing can influence mood. "We focus on creating products that can move consumers emotionally and resonate with people anywhere in the world." Yet these products cannot reach new audiences without trusted routes to market. J&C Corporation connects Japanese producers with overseas buyers through a network spanning thousands of business relationships. "I believe there is still tremendous potential for Japanese food products internationally," President Shigeyuki Ochi said. As Japan's domestic market contracts, companies such as J&C are helping regional foods travel without losing their identity. From handmade noodles to seaweed snacks, the future of washoku may depend on taking its local character to the world.



Nagatanien Brings Washoku to Global Tables

“We want people to discover Japan through food. We want them to experience the culture, the quality and the spirit that Japanese food represents.”

Taijiro Nagatani
Representative Director, Chairman and CEO, Nagatanien Holdings Co., Ltd.



Nagatanien Holdings is expanding the global reach of Japanese cuisine through food innovation, strategic partnerships, and freeze-drying technology.
BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD, BERNARD THOMPSON AND LISA KAYASTHA

As international interest in Japan grows, traditional Japanese cuisine known as washoku is becoming a gateway to the country’s culture. Social media is awash with tourists discovering their new favorite dishes, which go beyond taste alone and combine craftsmanship, hospitality and tradition. For many, the appeal lies in value for money: premium-quality experiences at approachable prices. Others are drawn to the cuisine’s reputation for balanced, health-conscious meals.

For Nagatanien Holdings Co., Ltd., Japanese products are an opportunity to introduce Japanese culture to the world, rather than simply export goods. The company has built its business on product innovation and meeting the challenges and demands of the times, and it continues to evolve today.

Nagatanien is guided by “Aji Hitosuji,” its longstanding commitment to creating distinctive, trusted foods that center on washoku. Taijiro Nagatani, the company’s representative director, chairman and CEO, attributes its success to continued innovation. Approximately 300 years ago, Nagatani’s ancestor developed a new method of processing green tea. That spirit has been passed down through generations, with his father inventing Ochazuke-Nori, which transformed the way people consumed ochazuke. Typically, people had ochazuke after drinking at a koryoriya, but Ochazuke-Nori made home preparation simple, and it became a meal people enjoy at all hours of the day.

That spirit lives on in Nagatani. “We are always exploring new products, new categories, new business models and new markets. At the same time, innovation must be supported by honesty and quality,” he said. “It is not enough simply to create something new; we must continue making products that consumers genuinely enjoy and trust.” Now, he believes that as consumer habits continue to change, new opportunities will arise for people to enjoy products such as Ochazuke-Nori. Nagatani sees convenience becoming increasingly important, and young people have different lifestyle expectations than

previous generations. “They want products that are simple to prepare, easy to use and compatible with modern daily routines,” he said. Beyond convenience, Nagatani wants to help consumers understand the value of Japanese food. “Products such as miso have significant health benefits, but many consumers outside Japan may not fully understand those benefits,” he said.

Nagatani hopes Japanese food becomes an everyday part of dining habits around the world, rather than something reserved for specialty restaurants or occasional meals. Through acquisitions, manufacturing capabilities and distribution networks, Nagatanien is creating the foundations to introduce authentic Japanese foods to new markets while preserving the quality and cultural values that define washoku. “My hope is that Japanese food becomes even more deeply integrated into everyday life around the world,” he said. Nagatanien Holdings’



overseas operations are built around two core pillars.

For more than 70 years, JSL Foods Inc. has built its reputation as a trusted manufacturer and innovator in Asian-inspired foods, combining deep manufacturing expertise with a commitment to quality, authenticity and innovation. Headquartered in California, JSL Foods serves a diverse customer base across retail, foodservice, club, distribution, and private label, with a portfolio that includes Fortune Noodles, Twin Dragon, Amber Farms and Nanka Seimen brands. From ramen, udon and yakisoba to



egg roll, wonton and gyoza wrappers, JSL’s products bring convenient Asian-inspired meal solutions to consumers and professional kitchens alike. Its long-standing manufacturing heritage, paired with an understanding of evolving consumer preferences, enables the company to translate culinary trends into scalable, commercially viable products. Today, JSL Foods’ greatest strength is its ability to connect product innovation with manufacturing and customer-specific solutions. The company develops products across formats, flavors, packaging configurations and channels—from consumer-ready retail products and club-sized offerings to foodservice formats and customized private-label programs. JSL continues to explore emerging opportunities around convenient single-serve meals, globally inspired flavors, better-for-you options, and new noodle and wrapper applications, while maintaining the operational capabilities needed to support large-scale customers. This combination of innovation, manufacturing flexibility, quality and multi-channel expertise positions JSL Foods as more than a noodle manufacturer—it is a strategic food manufacturing partner capable of helping retailers, foodservice opera-

tors, distributors and brand owners bring the next generation of Asian-inspired food products to market.

While JSL strengthens Nagatanien’s overseas manufacturing capabilities, Chaucer has become the cornerstone of Nagatanien Holdings’ international freeze-drying business, giving the group an established manufacturing and commercial presence across Western markets. Founded in the United Kingdom, the company produces freeze-dried fruit, specialist ingredients and baked products for many of the world’s leading food and beverage brands. Manufacturing sites in the U.K., France, the United States and China provide customers with a resilient supply network while supporting multinational manufacturers with consistent quality across regions.

Freeze-drying sits at the heart of Chaucer’s business. By removing moisture while preserving much of a fruit’s original flavor, texture and nutritional value, the process creates ingredients that meet growing demand for clean-label foods without the need for additives. As consumer preferences continue to shift toward healthier products with simple ingredient lists, Chaucer has broadened its portfolio to include freeze-



<https://jslfoods.com/>



<https://www.nagatanien-global.com/>

J&C Corporation Unlocks Japan's Hidden Flavors

Beyond sushi and ramen, Japan's regional producers create exceptional foods rarely seen overseas. J&C connects these hidden treasures with global markets through trusted partnerships and expertise. BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD, QUENTIN LANGE AND KYANN EDOUARD



“Delivering smiles to the world through trade,”

Shigeyuki Ochi

President, J&C Corporation.



The richness of matcha tea has become a popular and familiar taste throughout cafés around the world. Still central to Japan's traditional tea ceremony, matcha has also become an internationally recognized beverage. Across Japan, thousands of local specialties remain undiscovered, and J&C Corporation is bringing them to new audiences. Beyond logistics, reaching markets requires trusted expertise.

Japan's advantage is clear, according to Shigeyuki Ochi, president of J&C. “I believe there is still tremendous potential for Japanese food products internationally,” he said. Expanding overseas is a matter of preserving culture in a nation facing a shrinking population, and manufacturers have come to realize that growth cannot depend on the domestic market. “J&C Corporation identified this shift early and continued investing in international business,” Ochi said.

The company has more than two decades of export experience. Founded as an import business, J&C has since evolved into a global trading company with more than 2,500 manufacturing partners and customers in over 25 countries, connecting them to Japanese-made products. The company has built extensive experience navigating the local market while understanding international demand. The company positions itself as a partner and a bridge between regional SMEs and international buyers. For small and medium-sized manufacturers with limited export experience, J&C provides end-to-end support, from navigating overseas regulations and refining product design to tailoring offerings for local markets and developing new sales channels. The company

has built a market-development export platform that helps Japanese producers expand internationally with confidence.

Beyond facilitating exports, J&C focuses on creating sustainable growth by helping businesses establish a lasting presence in overseas markets. It uncovers the untapped value of products that remain unknown and communicates the stories behind them to enhance their appeal and perception. In doing so, the company aims to support the long-term growth of Japan's SMEs while introducing authentic Japanese products to the world.

Supported by a multicultural workforce, which Ochi cites as one of the company's greatest strengths, J&C has built trusted relationships with a diverse network of international partners, strengthening its expertise through years of cross-border collaboration. By combining the precision and attention to detail of Japanese business culture with the speed and adaptability of its international team, the company has developed an integrated operation that manages everything from sourcing and procurement to logistics under one roof. “That combination allows us to respond quickly while delivering a seamless service across the entire supply chain,” Ochi said.

J&C has always been defined by its ability to look forward and outward. “You have to anticipate where the market will be years into the future,” Ochi adds. As the global appetite for Japanese cuisine continues to grow, the company seeks partnerships with international businesses seeking authentic Japanese products. Ultimately, J&C aims to deliver smiles to the global community through trade.

Kabaya Enters Global Markets

An 80-year-old confectionery maker in Japan is placing great expectations on a single, springy gummy. Its goal is to achieve what only a handful of brands have ever managed: move people emotionally, anywhere in the world.

BY BERNARD THOMPSON AND KYANN EDOUARD

At first, Tough Gummy looks like an ordinary gummy candy. But the first chew transforms that impression, as its springy resilience and powerfully chewy texture assert themselves. It's an experience that goes beyond taste alone and works on something deeper. Tetsuro Anai, representative director and president of Kabaya Foods, believes that because chewing stimulates the brain, it can help foster a more positive state of mind. "Consumers are not only enjoying a flavor and taste," he said. "They experience a change in their state of mind through Tough Gummy."

Now, eight decades after Kabaya's founder set out to create nutritious confectionery for the children who would rebuild postwar Japan, the company has become one of Japan's leading confectionery makers. It is now looking to take its domestic success global by bringing products that resonate emotionally to people around the world. The company established Kabaya USA Inc. in Torrance, California, and began selling Tough Gummy across the United States in early May. At the same time, it formed a strategic partnership for expansion into China, creating a foothold for further growth.

"Tough Gummy has the potential to become a symbol of challenge, positivity and forward momentum. I believe people everywhere can relate to the feelings and experiences that our products

"We focus on creating products that can move consumers emotionally and resonate with people anywhere in the world."

Tetsuro Anai
Representative Director and President,
Kabaya Foods Corporation.



"Tough Gummy Night"



A live club event featuring artists who love Tough Gummy. Over 500 Tough Gummy fans gathered to experience the brand's positive atmosphere and shared their experiences on social media.

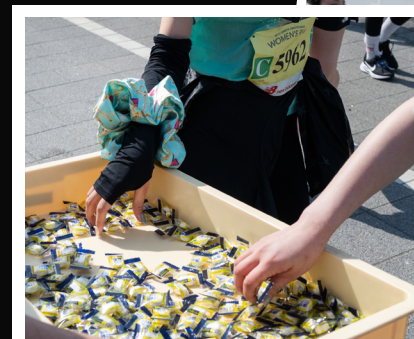


are designed to create," Anai said. Rather than relying on conventional advertising that simply introduces product features, the company is focused on communicating emotional value through new approaches. These include videos sharing the experiences of athletes and artists who openly identify themselves as Tough Gummy fans, as well as events where consumers can experience for themselves the mental and physical changes associated with Tough Gummy. Another flagship brand is Enbun Charge Tablets, sold internationally as Splashlytes. The tablet candy replenishes salt and potassium lost through perspiration. But Anai is clear that the function itself is not what matters most. For people, sweating represents effort, dedication and support for someone else. Splashlytes exists not merely to replace electrolytes, but to celebrate and support people's efforts.

"The ability to replenish electrolytes is simply a means of deepening the message and meaning the brand seeks to convey," he said.

As Kabaya enters new markets, it is this commitment to creating emotional value, or meaning beyond function, that gives the company confidence its products can resonate just as strongly around the world as they have in Japan.

*Photo courtesy of the "II-ASE (Nice Sweat), Shibuya Action" initiative by Future Design Shibuya.



"Shibuya-Omotesando Women's Run."



"Splashlytes" were provided to participating runners at hydration stations. This allowed participants to experience the brand as a partner that supports them as they sweat.



<https://www.kabaya.co.jp/>

S.H.N Pours New Life Into Japan's Izakaya Culture

Founded from a single izakaya in 2014, S.H.N Corporation is redefining Japan's dining culture through innovative restaurant concepts, operator partnerships, inbound-focused experiences and ambitious international expansion beginning in the Philippines.

BY KYANN EDOUARD, DANIEL DE BOMFORD AND QUENTIN LANGE



"We believe Japanese food already has the foundation to resonate around the world. The key is to protect what must remain Japanese, while adapting the parts that should evolve for each local market."

Mr. Ryuta Takahashi
Representative Director and President, S.H.N Corporation.



S.H.N
STAR HUMAN NATURE

Like a bartender who reads the mood of a room before pouring the next drink, Ryuta Takahashi believes restaurants must constantly adapt to the people sitting at the table. For the President of S.H.N Corporation, success in hospitality comes from understanding how customers think, how they move and what kind of experiences they are searching for next. "Customer needs today are different from what they were in the past, and they will continue to evolve," Takahashi said. "Rather than committing to a single fixed concept, we focus on being flexible and responsive."

Born in 2014 with a single izakaya in Akasaka, Tokyo, S.H.N has grown into a nationwide hospitality network supporting around 1,000 stores across Japan. Yet describing

S.H.N solely as a restaurant operator overlooks the broader ecosystem the company has built. Combining dining, entrepreneurship and experience design, the company has developed a hospitality platform centered on adaptability and customer experience. As Japanese cuisine continues to grow in popularity, Takahashi believes international customers likewise are not satisfied with surface-level experiences. They want clarity, accessibility and authenticity.

To achieve this, S.H.N carefully designs everything from menu layouts and pricing structures to visual presentation and customer flow. The goal is to remove uncertainty for first-time visitors while preserving the atmosphere and energy that define Japanese izakaya culture. The company also uses internet search analysis to understand what overseas visitors are looking for before they even arrive in Japan. "We analyze data from the internet to understand what inbound customers are searching for and what kinds of food they are interested in," Takahashi said.

One concept shaped by that thinking is "Toraichi," which offers all-you-can-drink sake from all 47 prefectures for 748 yen per hour. A curated tasting journey across Japan, the concept allows customers to explore regional flavors in a simple and approachable format.

Concurrently, S.H.N has expanded beyond its own stores by supporting independent restaurant operators through procurement, marketing and operational expertise. "Our role is not to replace their ideas, but to complement them by filling in the gaps," Takahashi said.

Now the company is preparing to bring that philosophy overseas through expansion into the Philippines, centered on its flagship chicken wing concept "Yotteba" (Yo-tteba), where it aims to establish around 100 stores within five years. Leveraging its robust hospitality platform that already supports around 1,000 stores in Japan, S.H.N plans to achieve this rapid scaling through strategic local partnerships and franchise development. Takahashi sees immense potential in the vibrant Philippine market, where the culinary culture aligns perfectly with S.H.N's dynamic dining concepts. S.H.N is currently seeking strategic partners, franchisees and property developers in the Philippines to drive its global expansion.

Like the bartender who instinctively understands the mood of the room, Takahashi believes true hospitality begins with understanding the people sitting at the table.

<https://shn-food.co.jp/>





MARUGAME UDON
JAPANESE NOODLES & TEMPURA

<https://jp.marugame.com/en/company/>

How MARUGAME UDON Made Udon a Global Success



“We are a company deeply committed to deliciousness.”

Hiroshi Yamaguchi

Global Brand Head of MARUGAME UDON and President and Representative Director of Marugame Seimen Co., Ltd.



<https://jp.marugame.com/>

MARUGAME UDON has built a global udon empire on flour, salt, water and the one ingredient no machine can replicate: the human touch.

BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD, BERNARD THOMPSON
AND KYANN EDOUARD

In a MARUGAME UDON restaurant, what makes washoku, Japanese cuisine, so special is on full display. Dough is kneaded, stretched and cut in full view of the customer. Tempura is breaded and crackles in open fryers. The scent of dashi wafts through the restaurant. Before the customer receives their bowl, they understand why washoku is beloved worldwide.

Founded in 2000, MARUGAME UDON has grown into the world's largest udon chain, with over 870 locations in Japan and over 320 abroad spanning the United States, the United Kingdom, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. The restaurants draw their culinary heritage from Kagawa Prefecture, historically known as Sanuki, where thick, chewy wheat noodles have been a staple for centuries. Every MARUGAME UDON location around the world prepares noodles with the same three ingredients: flour, salt and water. The simplicity is deliberate, and the authenticity is the point.

Hiroshi Yamaguchi, global brand head of MARUGAME UDON and president and representative director of Marugame Seimen, described the company's unwillingness to remove the human element as its greatest differentiating factor; even as many competitors pursue cost reduction and automation at the expense of the highest possible quality. “For us, the handmade process itself creates value,” he said. “It creates authenticity, excitement, and trust with customers.” Despite the time and costs that come with the thorough training, the restaurant's “udon masters” are its greatest strength.

Scaling that business model globally is no mean feat. The company developed an “udon checker” system to measure texture and consistency after

boiling and uses it to adjust its processes for different global conditions that can affect the chemistry of the dish. Around the world, the company trains “udon masters,” employees who are certified to assess quality the way a sommelier assesses a wine. Japanese chefs and operational teams travel regularly to overseas locations to audit quality firsthand, and international partners are brought to Kagawa Prefecture to learn not just technique but the philosophy and history behind it. “When selecting franchise or joint venture partners,” he said, “the most important factor is whether they genuinely understand and share our values.”

In markets where sushi and ramen are mainstream, udon is ready for its time in the spotlight. Yamaguchi described the noodle's relative unfamiliarity in some markets as an opportunity rather than a hindrance. The open kitchen serves as the greatest of its educational tools. “When customers can actually see the noodles being made fresh inside the restaurant, it helps remove hesitation and creates curiosity,” he said. “Watching the preparation process makes the experience feel more authentic and approachable.”

MARUGAME UDON is positioning itself to capture the next wave of curiosity beyond the categories consumers already know. Yamaguchi is targeting strong continued growth in over a dozen markets. “We are obsessed with delivering delicious food to our customers,” he said. For him, deliciousness is freshness, craftsmanship, atmosphere and the emotional memory a customer carries out the door; which can only be made with the care of human hands.



丸亀製麺 

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