

Discovering Japan Through Food and Travel

BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD AND BERNARD THOMPSON



The glitz and glamor of Ginza or the incredible powder snow of the Japanese Alps show a side of Japan defined by monumental experiences. But Japan is more than that. Japan is also defined by smaller, ordinary moments. As you pass through a train station on your way to the slopes, you might meet a local selling their produce at a mall, or taste one of Japan's innumerable local specialties. Perhaps it's a minor blip in a trip of a lifetime, but it stays with you, anchoring you to a distinct time and place.

Finding Japan in Everyday Encounters

Adventure Inc. and its AI-powered online travel platform, skyticket, connect travelers with destinations, transportation, accommodation and more, from major cities to lesser-known regional destinations. CEO Shunichi Nakamura said the company doesn't tell people where to go; instead, it meets a wide range of needs, from independent, budget-friendly travel to luxury, tailored experiences. "Every traveler is different, and AI lets us expand travelers' choices by showing the options that fit them," he said. "The choice is always theirs."

Once on the ground, LUMINE Co., Ltd. offers visitors the chance to live like a local, connect with the community and create moments that inject a little joy into their day-to-day lives. "We want to help customers discover something new every time they pass through our stores, encouraging them to take what we often describe as half a step or one step forward in their everyday lives," Teruyuki Omote, president and CEO, said.

HANSHIN CONTENTS LINK CORPORATION facilitates encounters that draw on Japan's strengths in culture, food and hospitality through live music and sumo experiences. HIRAKUZA shows and explains sumo, while inviting visitors to participate, giving them a physical understanding. President Susumu Shimizu thinks participation is important. "It turns the experience from simply watching entertainment into something people can understand personally," he said.

Bringing Japan's Flavors Home

This spirit of discovery is not limited to those who have visited Japan and can continue at the table. SANPOFOODS Co., Ltd. President Tadanori Oishi wants to take the flavors of Kyushu beyond Japan. "Kyushu has its own food culture and its own flavors, and we want people who experience SANPOFOODS to discover those characteristics through our products," he said.

Shinichi Shibuya, representative director of Shibuya Foods, said people aren't simply looking for foods that "taste Japanese," but are instead seeking authentic cuisine. Its imo kenpi is already finding success in Korea and Taiwan, and the company continues to look outward. "Our goal is to become a pioneer in bringing sweet potato products to the global market," he said.

For Bourbon Corporation, growing interest in Japan means more people are visiting and seeking out its products. "Naturally, some of those consumers may then want to buy the product again after returning home," President Masayoshi Yoshida said. He sees expanding overseas retail distribution as the next step, turning a small holiday pleasure into a familiar part of everyday life.

For NISHIKI FOODS, discovery also begins with an uncompromising commitment to flavor. Its NISHIKIYA KITCHEN brand draws on insights from field research in India and elsewhere, harnessing ingredients' aroma and appeal to deliver authentic flavors in convenient retort-packed foods. "It has to be very convenient and, at the same time, genuinely delicious," President and Representative Director Yoichi Kikuchi said. That approach brings travel and food together: journeys inspire new tastes, while food makes those encounters part of daily life. Japan's lasting appeal can lie in these smaller moments, wherever in the world we find ourselves enjoying them together.



SANPOFOODS is bringing authentic Kyushu flavors to global consumers while preserving the distinctive character behind its celebrated ramen products.

BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD



"We want to deliver the flavors of Kyushu to people beyond Kyushu."

Tadanori Oishi
President, SANPOFOODS Co., Ltd.



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

SANPO Brings Kyushu Overseas

SANPOFOODS has spent generations evolving alongside Japan's food culture, but its ambitions today remain firmly rooted in Kyushu. The company wants to bring the region's distinctive flavors to consumers around the world. "One of the strongest feelings we have is that we want to deliver the flavors of Kyushu to people beyond Kyushu," President Tadanori Oishi said. For about half a century, its Yakibuta Ramen has helped build SANPOFOODS' reputation for genuinely delicious food, something Oishi considers fundamental. Now, SANPOFOODS is looking beyond established overseas markets such as Taiwan and Hong Kong. The company is preserving what makes the flavors of Kyushu distinctive while adapting them to international tastes. As tonkotsu ramen gains recognition worldwide, SANPOFOODS sees an opportunity to establish its own flavors as an international expression of authentic Kyushu ramen.



LUMINE's Vision Extends Beyond Shopping

From railway station shopping centers to NEWoMan TAKANAWA, LUMINE is creating welcoming spaces where everyday discovery, human connection and Japanese creativity extend well beyond the purchase of products.

BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD, KYANN EDOUARD AND QUENTIN LANGE

One might be forgiven for forgetting that you are in a mall among the trees and warm gathering spaces of NEWoMan TAKANAWA. Adjacent to JR Takanawa Gateway Station on Tokyo's Yamanote Line, it's a place where people come to do more than shop; they can slow down, enjoy the gardens with views of Tokyo, meet producers and craftspeople or simply spend time with friends. It reflects LUMINE President and CEO Teruyuki Omote's ambition to create spaces that bring people together in meaningful ways and bring nature back into urban spaces.

It's within people's daily lives that Omote sees the greatest impact. LUMINE connects developments to railway stations, so that visits are routine, rather than one-off experiences. "We are not trying to create moments that feel distant or unattainable," he said. "Instead, we want to help customers discover something new every time they pass through our stores, encouraging them to take what we often describe as half a step or one step forward to discover a new version of themselves in their everyday lives." He defines the company's core audience by curiosity rather than age, and by hosting events that feature producers or designers in welcoming spaces, the company seeks to pique that interest.

Despite Japan's shrinking population, LUMINE's domestic shopping centers have seen sales triple over the last 30 years. LUMINE SHINJUKU has consistently remained one of the most patronized malls in Tokyo and has attracted a broad swath of customers, from teenagers to the elderly. While inbound tourism has certainly contributed to its success, its trust among local customers has attracted international visitors. "International visitors often want to experience places that local people genuinely value, and we think that authenticity is one of our greatest strengths," he said. NEWoMan TAKANAWA is the complete distillation of LUMINE's philosophy and vision. Hundreds of trees bring the changing seasons into the development, while restaurants are working to make full use of ingredients rather than discard them. Farmers and sake producers meet visitors to explain the work behind what they make, and local residents can take part in community projects. An experience in complete darkness, guided by people with visual impairments, reawakens dormant feelings and makes guests realize the importance of human connection and love. "We hope these encounters will foster a deeper appreciation for a truly inclusive society," he said.

Omote also wants the site to give businesses and creators with high aspirations room to try ideas, including those that may fail. For him, such encounters are what give a physical place its purpose. "What cannot be replicated digitally is the experience of connecting emotionally, building relationships of trust and love, and opening future possibilities," he said.

LUMINE is also looking beyond Japan through its Global and Sustainable Vision. During Paris Fashion Week in June and July 2026, its first Paris retail pop-up, "tokyo sense," introduced around 30 Japanese brands and designers to international audiences. Omote sees the event as an opportunity to share the philosophy, aesthetic sen-



"We believe that one of the greatest values of physical spaces lies in their power to connect people in a meaningful way and to help each individual discover a new, as-yet-unknown 'true self'."

Teruyuki Omote
President and CEO, LUMINE Co., Ltd.

sibility and craftsmanship behind its products, giving visitors a fuller understanding of what makes them distinctive.

By engaging with different cultures and markets, LUMINE can learn where its approach resonates and where it needs to evolve. For Omote, building an international presence means giving Japanese creators new audiences while remaining open to what those audiences can teach the company.

While a purchase might bring in a customer, it is conversations, discoveries and new perspectives that customers leave with and that compel them to return. "Our mission is to blend the diverse cultures of each region with the Japanese spirit, thereby creating unique values—such as hope, courage and love—that will resonate for the next 100 years."

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LUMINE

Adventure Builds Global Travel Ambitions With AI and skyticket

Adventure is leveraging AI to transform into a truly global OTA.

BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD, LISA KAYASTHA, QUENTIN LANGE AND KYANN EDOUARD

The advent of the internet has transformed how people plan their holiday itineraries. Gone are the days of sitting in a shopfront office, thumbing through a guidebook. Now, a single site lets travelers plan routes, compare options and book activities. Today, with AI, a new transformation has begun, led by the company behind skyticket, Adventure Inc.

CEO Shunichi Nakamura's ambition is for Adventure to become the first truly global, AI-powered online travel agency (OTA). With skyticket already available in 20 languages and with over 26 million downloads, the company is preparing for the next phase.

The platform already connects travelers with flights, hotels, rental cars and bus services from over 10,000 providers. "Our role is not simply to tell customers that there is one route they should follow," he said. "We can provide options, and customers can decide for themselves what they want to experience." Nakamura sees an increasing trend of people moving away from the Golden Route, and skyticket is able to connect them with local transportation.

As an AI-powered OTA, Adventure is developing tools that offer new ways to plan and book travel. Technical staff account for approximately half its workforce, but all em-



ployees are encouraged to use AI to develop services and features. Beyond its own platform, the company sees opportunities in AI services that could connect travelers with booking options.

Adventure is building on its Asian customer base through global marketing, new supplier relationships and a search for international acquisition opportunities. The company is seeking direct relationships with airlines, especially U.S. airlines, to demonstrate what it can bring to the market. Its experience serving travelers across Asia provides a starting point, while additional partnerships could broaden options for customers and support overseas growth.

The next step is to strengthen its business in Asia and prove its model there, laying the foundation for global expansion.



ADVENTURE



"We are a company that wants to challenge the global market."

Shunichi Nakamura
CEO



Hanshin Contents Link Creates Lasting Live Memories

Hanshin Contents Link connects audiences with music, sumo and Japanese culture through live entertainment. BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD, CIAN O'NEILL AND QUENTIN LANGE



A wrestler steps onto the dohyo, plants both feet, raises a leg high and drives it into the clay. The shiko continues as his thighs tighten and his breathing grows heavy. He lowers into a crouch, settling with his opponent as hands approach the packed earth. Then, an explosion of movement, and within seconds, it's over. In sumo, bouts may only last a few moments, and it can be hard for an observer to truly understand the stamina required to succeed.

HANSHIN CONTENTS LINK CORPORATION President Susumu Shimizu believes that the struggle cannot be understood by watching alone, and that participation is the most effective way to communicate the iconic sport. "Guests who experience a sumo bout come back down from the dohyo and talk about how difficult it was," he said.

"They now understand through their own bodies something that previously they could

only see." The company's baseball-related media for the Hanshin Tigers, advertising and merchandise activities also inform its approach to authentic live experiences.

At the company's HIRAKUZA venues in Osaka and Tokyo, sumo veterans give a moving performance that explains sumo's history, rules and uniqueness in English. The show has been taken on the road, to Edinburgh and Adelaide, opposite sides of the world, introducing a new generation of international fans to the sport.

At Billboard Live, a part of the company's music business, that experience brings music, dining and hospitality together at venues in Tokyo, Osaka and Yokohama. Guests can enjoy accomplished Japanese and international performers in an intimate restaurant setting. Behind the sumo experience is knowledge accumulated over years in the live music business, helping the company

"We want them to see something

directly and feel the difference that comes from being physically present."

Susumu Shimizu,
President,
HANSHIN CONTENTS
LINK CORPORATION.



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connect artists and audiences. Its Billboard Classics concerts offer another approach, pairing orchestras with pop and rock performers to give familiar songs a different character.

Across its businesses, Hanshin Contents Link aims to give people experiences they remember and reasons to return.

Bourbon's Global Growth Recipe

BOURBON

Bourbon combines a century of confectionery expertise, distinctive manufacturing capabilities and beloved products with an ambitious strategy to bring Japanese quality to global consumers. **BY DAN-**

IEL DE BOMFORD, BERNARD THOMPSON AND JANANI SAMPATH

“One of the most distinctive characteristics of Bourbon is the wide range of categories in which we operate.”

Masayoshi Yoshida
President, Bourbon Corporation.



For generations among Japanese families, Bourbon Corporation has been a familiar presence at the kitchen table. From Lumonde being served alongside tea to Alfort opened as an everyday snack, Bourbon's mission has always been to make quality sweets available to everyone since its founding in Niigata over a century ago. Today, that legacy provides a foundation for

a new era of growth. Bourbon has expanded far beyond its biscuit origins, developing a diverse portfolio spanning chocolate, snacks, ice cream, chilled products and beverages. Yet as Japan's population declines and its domestic market contracts, the

company is increasingly looking beyond its home market. President Masayoshi Yoshida sees international expansion as a key source of future growth, bringing Bourbon's manufacturing expertise and product-development capabilities to consumers worldwide. Its diverse product categories have allowed Bourbon to develop what Yoshida calls “category mixing,” combining technologies and expertise accumulated across different product areas.

“The key is not simply having a broad portfolio,” he said. “It is being able to connect the technologies

behind those products.” By applying techniques developed for one category to another, Bourbon can create distinctive textures, structures and eating experiences that would otherwise be difficult to produce. Lumonde demonstrates Bourbon's philosophy, which extends from product development into manufacturing. Its exceptionally thin, delicate structure presented a challenge that existing equipment could not easily solve, leading Bourbon to invent the machinery required to manufacture it in-house. Guided by its principle of “Quality Assurance First,” Bourbon develops products and the processes needed to produce them consistently at commercial scale. This integration gives the company greater freedom to pursue unusual ideas while balancing quality, efficiency and affordability. Yoshida said that achieving all three requires “manufacturing know-how, not simply a recipe.”

At the center of Bourbon's international ambitions is Alfort, the chocolate-covered biscuit Yoshida believes could become a truly global brand. Bourbon has already established a track record of exporting the product in several overseas markets, where he said consumer response has been highly positive. Its combination of chocolate and biscuits gives Alfort broad appeal, while its distinctive identity offers Bourbon a recognizable flagship as it introduces its products to new consumers. Building on these early results, the company plans to place particular emphasis on Alfort as it strengthens its presence abroad, using the product as a bridge between Bourbon's century of Japanese confectionery expertise and its global future.

Bourbon is taking a measured approach to turning that potential into sustainable international growth. North America is a particular focus, with the diverse U.S. market providing valuable insight into consumer preferences, while China and Southeast Asia also present important opportunities. In its second century, Bourbon is carrying the quality, manufacturing expertise and product diversity built over generations to new consumers around the world.

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



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Shibuya Foods is exploring new markets, innovative products and international partnerships to bring its premium Japanese sweet potatoes to global consumers.

BY DANIEL DE BOMFORD, BERNARD THOMPSON AND CIAN O'NEILL

“We want to build a genuine brand presence in each local market.”

Shinichi Shibuya,
Representative Director,
Shibuya Foods Co., Ltd.
<https://www.shibuya-foods.co.jp/>



Shibuya Foods Takes Japanese Sweet Potatoes Beyond Borders



For Shibuya Foods, decades of experience with one of Japan's most familiar ingredients are providing the foundation for a new period of experimentation. Building on its domestic wholesale business and premium Imoya Kinjiro brand, the sweet potato specialist is exploring new markets, products and partnerships as it looks toward its next stage of growth. Korea has already demonstrated Imoya Kinjiro's potential, where strong consumer demand helped an initial store expand into additional pop-ups and a permanent location. Rather than assuming the same formula will work everywhere, Shibuya Foods plans to test each market individually. Taiwan is the next major step, with Thailand and Indonesia among the markets it hopes to explore over the coming years. “In these countries, consumers already understand sweet potatoes,” Representative Director Shinichi Shibuya said.

“We do not have to explain the ingredient itself from zero; instead, we can add a premium value that is distinctly Japanese.” Product development opens further possibilities, and Shibuya Foods is developing frozen roasted sweet potatoes made without oil or added sugar, offering an alternative for health-conscious consumers while potentially overcoming the freshness challenges created by long-distance distribution. The company believes frozen products could eventually open new routes into markets such as the United States.

NISHIKIYA KITCHEN Brings Everyday Meals to Life With Gourmet Retort Food

NISHIKI FOODS combines craftsmanship with convenience to create authentic, tasty retort foods.

BY BERNARD THOMPSON, LISA KAYASTHA AND KYANN EDOUARD

Since entering the retort food market in 1975, NISHIKI FOODS CO., LTD. has prioritized taste and now produces approximately 50 million packages annually. Instead of producing processed foods, NISHIKI FOODS aims to recreate the aromas and authentic flavors of freshly prepared dishes. Its attention to detail shows in its selection of three types of salt for different dishes and its sourcing of fresh curry leaves grown by local farmers. NISHIKIYA KITCHEN embodies this philosophy through around 120 products made at the company's Iwanuma factory, offering a diverse lineup designed to enrich everyday meals and introduce consumers to new dishes and flavors. To understand these cuisines, NISHIKI FOODS sends development teams to India and other parts of the world, conducting extensive research that informs its dishes. NISHIKIYA KITCHEN draws out ingredients' natural qualities without relying on food additives. Combined with sophisticated packaging and convenience, its products serve as everyday meals, thoughtful gifts and practical emergency food supplies. NISHIKIYA KITCHEN continues to explore cuisines from around the world, bringing authentic flavors in accessible, convenient forms.



“The ideal is something that is extremely convenient but, when you actually eat it, has the feeling of home cooking.”

Yoichi Kikuchi
President and Representative Director,
NISHIKI FOODS CO., LTD.

<https://nishikiya-shop.com/>

**NISHIKIYA
KITCHEN**



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