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WAGYU SPECIAL

THE BEST OF JAPAN



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Savory wagyu steak is loved all over the world. JAPAN LIVESTOCK PRODUCTS EXPORT PROMOTION COUNCIL



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CHARACTERISTICS OF WAGYU

WHAT IS WAGYU?

STRINGENT PRACTICES ENSURE TOP QUALITY

The defining characteristic of wagyu produced in Japan is its consistently high quality. Authentic wagyu is markedly different from other beef, including foreign wagyu, which is usually cross-bred between wagyu and other breeds abroad.

There are four Japanese cattle breeds: the Japanese Black (which makes up the majority), Japanese Brown, Japanese Shorthorn and Japanese Polled. The Universal Wagyu Mark, introduced in 2007, verifies that meat with this mark attached comes from cows that were born and raised in Japan — authentic 100% purebred wagyu.

Registration and grading

This high traceability and farmers' efforts to pursue optimum rearing environments and methods, combined with a standardized grading system, help ensure the consistent quality of domestic wagyu. This allows consumers to enjoy its common features, including the rich aroma and melty texture, wherever the beef is sourced from and without any disappointment. At the same time, wagyu cattle raised throughout Japan provide regional variations in taste.

The cattle records are handled by the Wagyu Registry Association, which was originally established in 1948 and became a public interest incorporated association in 2012. The association also engages in efforts to improve breeding, foster inspection and screening experts, and promote the beef to consumers.

Every wagyu calf gets registered and receives a certificate with a unique Cattle Individual Identification Number. During the process of growth, some calves that pass a certain screening can also be registered as fertile bulls.

Using the ID number, detailed information about each cow, including date of birth, breed, where it was raised and when it was slaughtered, can be viewed on the website of the National Livestock Breeding Center.

Once a beef cow is slaughtered and the quality of its meat becomes visible the meat is graded according to a nationwide standard defined by the Japan Meat Grading Association. The grade is determined based on a combination of the yield grade and the quality grade.

The yield grade is divided into three levels from A to C. The top grade, A, is granted to the meat with the highest yield, meaning more meat can be produced from the same weight of dressed carcass.

The quality grade is divided into five levels from 5 to 1, based on marbling, brightness, firmness and texture, and fat brightness and quality, according to the Japan Meat Grading Association.

This means there are 15 possible combinations of the two grades — from A5 to C1 — with A5 generally deemed the best.

To promote improvement of wagyu qual-

ity in Japan, a national competition has been held at different intervals since 1966 and every five years since 1982. The latest one was held in Kagoshima Prefecture in 2022, gathering 438 cattle from 41 prefectures for evaluation in the Breeding Cattle Division of the contest. The top prize was presented by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida to a cow from Kagoshima Prefecture.

Wagyu beef presented by a farm in Miyazaki Prefecture meanwhile took the top prize in the Beef Cattle Division.

The five-day event, which is open to the public, attracted 310,000 people and also offers side events, tastings and other activities to promote wagyu.

The next competition, scheduled to be held in Hokkaido in August 2027, will also be full of attractions, such as meat auctions, tastings, barbecuing, and promotions for Japan's largest prefecture. While Hokkaido may be better known for its dairy farming, it is also one of Japan's major beef producing areas, along with Kagoshima and Miyazaki prefectures.

Receiving a prize in this competition is a great honor for wagyu farmers, who treat the cows as if they are part of their families.

Breeding methods

While some areas such as Matsusaka in Mie Prefecture, Omi in Shiga and Kobe in Hyogo are more popular as brand-name wagyu producers than other prefectures, wagyu is produced in all of Japan's 47 prefectures, with 98.4% from the Japanese Black variety. The meat has different characteristics depending on factors including climate, feed and rearing methods.

What is common among all wagyu farmers is that they toil night and day to take care of their cows so that they produce the finest quality beef.

According to the Japan Livestock Products Export Promotion Council, better known as the JLEC, breeding and pregnant cattle are generally grazed to prepare them for delivery in a stress-free environment at breeding farms, where they receive extra attention and care. The calves spend about seven to 10 months at the farm after birth before being sent to auctions. Although breeding and rearing methods may vary slightly by farm, newborns are generally fed with milk by hand.

Once they are auctioned and moved to fattening farms to reach a weight of about 700 kilograms, they are generally kept in small groups in spacious and comfortable environments that serve the purpose of maximizing animal welfare and producing healthy and delicious meat at the same time.

Farmers observe the cows carefully not only to find health issues at an early stage, but also to ensure that the cows in each group are getting along. If they aren't, adjustments are made to minimize their stress, which is crucial.



Above: Breeding methods vary from farm to farm, but grazing is the main method used for wagyu cattle.

Right: Every wagyu calf gets registered with a certificate and a unique identification number.

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Another important factor for making high-quality wagyu is diet. Wagyu cattle are fed with feed combinations that vary depending on the methods used by each farm as well as the geographic characteristics of where they are raised, but some of the main fodder includes whole crop rice silage and grass.

Rice straw, which Japan has in abundance, absorbs moisture in their stomachs, maintaining a condition ideal for microorganisms to stay active, which is necessary to digest grass.

Good feed combinations and balanced diets contribute to the beautiful marbling of the white fat called *sashi*. *Sashi* is high in oleic acid, which is a main component of olive oil and is said to help regulate LDL cholesterol. The inosinic acid, which is a source of umami, and the sweetness of the amino acids contained in red meat, combined with *sashi*'s light and smooth oleic acid, produces the rich, intricate flavors.

It is said the aroma of wagyu is most prominent when it is heated to 80 C. It is relatively easy to control the cooking time and temperature when using sliced meat and cooking it in a hotpot style, such as *sukiyaki*, or as barbecue. Thicker cuts can be best enjoyed when they are cooked slowly at a low temperature.

Wagyu exports

According to a report by JLEC, Japan exported 8,421 tons of beef to 45 countries in

2023, a 13% increase from the previous year. The largest portion, 20%, was exported to Taiwan, followed by Hong Kong, the United States, Cambodia, the EU, Singapore and Thailand.

The beef exported to the rest of Asia is relatively diverse in terms of cuts. According to a report by Agriculture and Livestock Industries Corp., 43% of the beef exported to that region in 2023 was loin, with 36% shoulder, shoulder clod and round, and 18% rib. However, about 80% sent to Europe and North America in the same period was loin.

The various cuts are valued for their different flavors. Thinly sliced chuck roll is suitable for *sukiyaki* and similar Japanese dishes, including stir-fry, while bottom round, which is low in fat, is used the same way to provide a different texture and flavor. Shoulder clod is often used for steak, barbecue, stir-fry, curry and stew. In Japan, almost all the parts are used, including the guts, bones and tallow.

Getting to know how each part is cooked and eaten in Japan will help give foreign consumers greater choices and opportunities to enjoy wagyu.

To this end, the JLEC is accelerating efforts to promote the wagyu produced in Japan by sharing information about places in Japan and abroad that serve it, and how to enjoy the meat at home.



A national competition to promote the improvement of wagyu quality has been held at different intervals since 1966 and every five years since 1982. JAPAN LIVESTOCK PRODUCTS EXPORT PROMOTION COUNCIL



Farmers monitor their cows carefully not only to find health issues at an early stage, but also to ensure that the cows in each group are getting along. JAPAN LIVESTOCK PRODUCTS EXPORT PROMOTION COUNCIL

WASHOKU

WAGYU TIPS AND VENUES

CONSUMPTION GUIDE FOR THE DISCERNING DINER

Visitors from all over the world can enjoy Japan's wagyu cuisine at restaurants in major cities such as Tokyo and Osaka. One can pick and choose from a variety of richly flavored wagyu brands, such as Kobe beef from Hyogo Prefecture, Matsusaka beef from Mie Prefecture and Omi beef from Shiga Prefecture — to name just a few.

Many washoku dishes that use meat rely a lot on wagyu for its rich aroma and distinctive taste. Since wagyu is said to suit any style of cuisine, it is used for anything from steak to sukiyaki, *shabu-shabu* (hot pot), *gyudon* (beef bowl) and *teppanyaki* (meat, seafood or vegetables cooked on an iron grill).

Wagyu can be served in blocks as well as slices of various thickness and cooked in many ways to savor its taste. It can literally be enjoyed "from nose to tail," with characteristics including taste and texture that vary significantly depending on the cuts, which range from sirloin, chuck roll, shoulder clod and short plate to rump, gooseneck round and tallow.

Among all wagyu dishes, sukiyaki and shabu-shabu seem to stand out and win praise worldwide. Sirloins or ribloins are recommended to make sukiyaki, whereas sliced chuck roll or top-round are recommended for shabu-shabu. The basic ingredients for sukiyaki are wagyu, beef tallow, leeks, onions and *shungiku* (chrysanthemum greens), which are simply cooked with just sugar, sake and soy sauce.

On the other hand, the ingredients for shabu-shabu include wagyu, *kombu* (kelp), *shungiku*, shiitake, *shimeji* mushrooms, carrots and firm tofu. These are seasoned with soy sauce, sugar and dashi before cooking. To eat, the meat is then blanched in the pot piece by piece before dipping in either *ponzu* (Japanese citrus vinaigrette) sauce or sesame sauce.

Secrets behind the flavor

The secret behind the beef's exquisite flavor is said to be brought about by three elements: First, its aesthetic look featuring beautiful, highly detailed marbling and an extremely delicate texture. Second, fat content rich in oleic acid, providing a succulent flavor that fills the mouth as it melts. And third, the so-called "wagyu aroma" — a rich, sweet smell similar to that found in peaches and coconuts that spreads in the mouth when chewed.

This aroma comes out strongest when the meat is heated to 80 C (176 F), the same temperature best suited for sukiyaki. Also, since wagyu's distinctive aroma doesn't disappear even when chilled, the aroma and the mild texture of wagyu add to the high quality of its taste.

New Otani offers variety of cuts

Be it steak, shabu-shabu, sukiyaki or teppanyaki, visitors to Tokyo can choose from numerous restaurants, small and large, for their beef fix. However, it might be difficult for most to beat the variety and quality of wagyu offered at the Hotel New Otani Tokyo in Chiyoda Ward. The top-notch inn buys a side of beef from a particular producer, which is



Tender, thinly sliced wagyu is the star ingredient in shabu-shabu, a popular boiled Japanese beef and vegetable dish. JAPAN LIVESTOCK PRODUCTS EXPORT PROMOTION COUNCIL

rare for a hotel to offer meat without having any waste like this.

While the dishes are offered at many of the hotel's 37 restaurants and bars, at the top of the list is its steak house, The Rib Room, which offers succulent top-quality cuts grilled in the open kitchen. The steak is served with its famous sauce prepared with carefully selected ingredients.

Additionally, of special note are the teppanyaki restaurant Sekishin-tei, Chinese restaurant Taikan En and coffee shop Satsuki, where wagyu frequently appears on their menus.

"We use each and every part of the wagyu we buy," says Takahiro Ota, executive officer and grand chef of the hotel, adding that the hotel started to buy a side of some brands 15 to 20 years ago.

Ota says the hotel procures beef through its own unique channels, which involve personal contacts as well as relationships with prefectural and municipal governments.

For example, it has a special channel to attain Ozaki beef raised by Muneharu Ozaki on his spacious ranch in Miyazaki Prefecture. Ozaki ships only 30 cattle per month in Japan. The cattle are fed 12 kinds of pesticide-free feed mixed in-house and watered with natural water drawn from a nearby stream. While most beef cattle are shipped at about 28 months of age, Ozaki beef is raised for 30 to 34 months so that they "mature while still alive."

"I have known Mr. Ozaki for a long time. He used to say, 'Hotels only use really good parts. What happens to the rest?' Through visiting his farm and building a relationship with him, the hotel step by step managed to

procure a side of Ozaki beef," Ota said.

Tips for best results

Ota said people can tell wagyu from other beef from around the world by its *sashi* (fat marbling) and fine fatty meat in between. "That is why it's moist, tender, tasty and sweet," he said.

According to Ota, the hotels consider many things when cooking wagyu. One is that the chefs calculate backward to determine the best timing for the meat to be served. In this way, they adjust the period of time between slaughter and serving, using this method to keep inventory.

"If the meat is served immediately after slaughter, it is too young and tastes watery and the flavor has not yet developed," Ota said "We often say 'It's young,' which means it's too early. We leave the meat to mature for a certain period of time so that the flavor will develop," he said.

Second, the hotel chefs are particular about choosing female or castrated meat.

"While male meats are muscular and hard, female meats are softer and have more unsaturated fatty acids with a lower melting point compared with male meat," he said. Thus, female meat is finely textured and when one eats it, one will find it totally different from that of the male."

Third, they must look at the state of the meat, which includes the marbling and the color, which is important. "The meat in its early stage is bright red, and its redness becomes slightly dull as time passes. The latter is better," Ota said.

At the Hotel New Otani Tokyo, the dishes are served after taking all of these points into

consideration. Sekishin-tei is a relaxing restaurant with counter-style seating nestled within a 400-year-old Japanese garden, boasting a mixture of Japanese, Western and Chinese-style cuisine grilled right in front of the guests. A variety of wagyu brands including Kobe beef are offered a la carte or as an upgrade to course menus.

Additionally, at Taikan En, its Shanghai-style seasonal course (until Nov. 30) includes dishes such as braised beef and chestnuts, and steamed soup with beef.

Last but not least, hashed wagyu on a chicken rice omelet and Satsuki's burger beef patty are regular items at Satsuki, allowing guests to savor wagyu at any time of day.

The hotel also holds beef fairs several times a year to feature brands from all over Japan. One such fair was held at six of the hotel's restaurants from Sept. 1 until Oct. 31, featuring Iwate Prefecture's shorthorn beef. Their menus included omelet rice, pasta, *shoga-yaki* (fried with ginger), steak and other items. One unique Chinese dish was a rich, spicy Iwate shorthorn beef *yakisoba* (stir-fried noodles) made with black miso and served with crispy baked Zemb noodles made from 100% yellow peas — served at Taikan En.

"By holding fairs like this, we can use the meat without any waste. I think we are one of the few places (in Tokyo) that offer such a variety of beef, especially wagyu. Not just steak and teppanyaki ... We want people to know that there are various genres of cuisine. We want people from all over the world to come to our restaurants and enjoy a wide variety of wagyu," he said.



Iwate shorthorn beef served atop stir-fried noodles with black miso is served at the Hotel New Otani Tokyo's Chinese restaurant Taikan En during a recent wagyu fair. HOTEL NEW OTANI TOKYO



Restaurant Sekishin-tei draws wagyu aficionados to the 400-year old Japanese garden at the Hotel New Otani Tokyo. HOTEL NEW OTANI TOKYO



Hotel New Otani Tokyo's wagyu is one of the hotel's signature dishes. HOTEL NEW OTANI TOKYO

WAGYU IN FUSION CUISINE

INTERNATIONAL TAKES

GLOBAL CHEFS OFFER THEIR VIEWS ON WAGYU

With standout features such as aromatic sweetness and buttery tenderness, wagyu continues to inspire new and experienced chefs across the world, earning their awe and respect as an ingredient that commands and deserves all the attention it gets.

The Japan Livestock Products Export Promotion Council (JLEC) has created an online wagyu compendium that includes hundreds of recipes from various countries. Adding more depth to this comprehensive resource are interviews with top chefs of Chinese, French, Italian and Japanese cuisine who express an intimacy with this star ingredient that has grown stronger over years of preparing it.

Wagyu around the world

Chef Adam Handling's wagyu with black garlic and wild herbs is one of 20 listed recipes from London restaurants. Handling operates a restaurant in London's Covent Garden. For this recipe, he uses wagyu knuckle for a balance of texture and fatty softness and serves it with a puree made with garlic that has been cooked at 60 C for eight weeks.

"I treated (the meat) the same way that I first got introduced to wagyu, sealing it and then slow cooking it on the barbecue. You get all them beautiful, smoky notes from the coal, but also slight caramelization. And we've served it with wagyu tongue," Handling said in a video describing his dish.

For American chef Philip Lee, the focus is on "luxury" in his wagyu chuck roll and *uni nigiri* (sea urchin sushi). The dish is a thin

slice of tenderized wagyu chuck roll on a bed of sea urchin on sushi rice, dressed with truffle and sea salt.

"Wagyu is one of those ingredients that is so easy to pair with so many things because it's so robust, it's got such a backbone that it is not easily overpowered," Lee said, describing his choice of wagyu.

The approach of French chef of 35 years Patrick Bertron is that wagyu preparation calls for simplicity. In his dish — wagyu with iodized juice, *puntarella* (chicory sprouts), broth and slivers of smoked wagyu — onions are browned and pureed and *puntarella* bulbs are cooked in stock and stuffed with white vegetables. But the wagyu is "fried simply."

"Japanese wagyu is really different and of an incomparable quality: The flavors stand out and the meat retains its juice. To prepare it, I recommend simplicity," Bertron said.

A single wagyu cube from the rib or fillet is the centerpiece of Italian chef Marco Moreschi's wagyu fried in grape oil, asparagus salad, lemon-flavored scampi, *burrata* (mozzarella and cream) and balsamic vinegar reduction. The meat is fried for 30 seconds before being placed on the salad and topped with the scampi and a fried basil leaf.

Although most of the wagyu information on the JLEC website is about cooking and eating the meat itself, there are also wine-pairing suggestions for wagyu dishes. Taku Iguro, a sommelier at L'osier who is featured in the Advice from Foreign Chefs section, explained that the compound lactone that gives wagyu its aromatic sweetness also develops in barrels of wine. This makes



Luca Fantin, executive chef at Ginza's BVLGARI II Ristorante Luca Fantin, believes that wagyu cooked very rare is the best way to enjoy the meat. BVLGARI II RISTORANTE LUCA FANTIN

wagyu and wine a good match.

"Wagyu is often served in hot dishes, so one factor to consider is to ensure the wine is not chilled too much. If you raise the temperature, the wine will feel softer. You'd feel a soft and rounded texture, so when considering the drink, do consider the temperature," Iguro said.

Cooking tips from the experts

On the JLEC website, six top chefs praise wagyu's versatility and provide guidance on how to pick, cook and enjoy different cuts.

Chef Michael Michaelidis of Joel Robuchon in Meguro cooks wagyu rib loin quickly on a *teppan* (iron grill) to give the meat a crispy texture. This cut is ideal for those who prefer some chewiness in their meat, and "addictive" wagyu always leaves one wanting more.

"In fine dining, it's important not to mix too many ingredients, so wagyu is perfect for a chef. There is not much to add, it is already a very refined product," Michaelidis said.

Hiroshi Sasaki, chef and owner of Gion Sasaki in Kyoto, said wagyu's charm also lies in pulling out flavors from different cuts through different ways of cooking the meat.

"The quality of fat differs from cut to cut. We need good ideas to bring out the best in each cut, to use every part, leaving no leftovers," Sasaki said. Gion Sasaki's popular sukiyaki-style roast beef was born when Sasaki started searching for new ways to use round, a less sought-after cut.

Luca Fantin, executive chef at Ginza's BVLGARI II Ristorante Luca Fantin, still remembers the first time he ate wagyu prepared in front of him on a *teppan*. His current method for serving it at his restaurant is to "cook it very fast, let it remain almost raw, that's the best way."

"For this dish, the meat must not be very

tough, so I adapted cooking methods to bring out the best in the wagyu. With these methods, medium-rare is the best for wagyu. The meat should be 46 to 48 degrees in the center."

While Fantin uses a large cut of meat for his main dish, for L'osier Director and executive chef Olivier Chaignon, one little bite of wagyu is enough for a complete taste sensation. He creates a dish of thinly sliced fillet layered with truffle, steamed, grilled and cut into bite-size pieces, wrapped in ravioli and poached in a consomme broth. The dish is served with a bouquet of vegetables and beetroot sauce.

Wagyu achieves its tenderness and "endless possibilities," Chaignon explained, because the animals are raised stress-free.

Head chef Ryusei Chin of Chinese restaurant Toh-Kah-Lin at The Okura Tokyo, added that wagyu's traceability is a source of confidence for chefs as they can guarantee the provenance of the ingredients served to the hotel's guests.

"Wagyu is often cooked rare to medium-rare, but it is so beautifully aromatic that as a Chinese cuisine chef, I like to use a wok burner and flash fry it on a high heat. With wagyu, even when it's slightly overcooked, the smell is enticing."

Jun Mishina, executive chef at Ren Mishina in Tokyo's Ginza district, advises chefs to look carefully at the surface of the meat when choosing cuts, not the grade.

"Sirloin and rib loin are tender, so we often use them for sukiyaki or *shabu-shabu* (hot pot). Rump and top round butt are tender, too, but they also have a plump texture and are good with a charcoal flame or to *sous vide*. [Wagyu] is beautiful to fry, steam, grill, to *sous vide*. I can't name many ingredients this versatile. That's what makes wagyu from Japan stand out," Mishina said.



Left: L'osier Director and executive chef Olivier Chaignon's wagyu dish is composed of thinly sliced fillet and other select ingredients. Right: Head chef Ryusei Chin of the Okura Tokyo's Toh-Kah-Lin Chinese restaurant feels that the smell of wagyu, even slightly overcooked, is enticing. LOSIER, THE OKURA TOKYO



Wagyu Experience

Explore the delights of wagyu

Enjoy authentic wagyu in Japan!

Visitors to Japan can take advantage of discount lodging and meal plans as part of our efforts to tell everyone about the wonders of Japanese beef. Check the reservation sites for details. Why not try some while you're in Japan, then go to a restaurant in your home country and eat some more? Savor wagyu and help us spread the word about this delicious beef!



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