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Report Highlights:

This month's issue tackles eating out in Japan and one of Japan's newest food trends, B-class gourmet.

Japan Food Trends (JFT) communicates Japanese food and lifestyle trends that may help U.S. exporters to generate product and marketing ideas.

B-Class Gourmet

Editor's Note

While Michelin guides anxious Japanese foodies towards some of the world's most lavish culinary institutions, most Japanese consumers have become too price conscious to participate in such luxury dining. Despite this, the desire for quality remains high and thus the Japanese food scene has adapted. From rolling eateries to food entertainment with a new economizing twist, Japanese consumers seem to be hungry for new ways to live the same lifestyle but at the right price. Known as *B-kyu gurume*, or B-class gourmet, this issue will give you some insight into the trends surrounding the economically conscious diner-out.

From the Editor

B-class gourmet can be defined as affordable food with popular appeal or gourmet eating without the high-end price tag. Often the trend references the reinvention of local cuisines to fit the more reasonable budget.

Entertainment

“Kitanachelin”, Wall Street Journal 2010/5/25

<http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2010/05/25/japans-new-food-trend-dirty-but-delicious/>

Kitanachelin is a new hit Japanese television show that has gained significant popularity in Japan. The show awards Michelin-style stars to some of Tokyo's cheapest, but most delicious eateries. Starting out as a comedy show, it is now an hour-long special about where the budget-conscious Japanese consumer can still satisfy their pallet for gourmet



food for a reasonable price, or B-class gourmet. Restaurants featured on the show are experiencing large surges in business directly after their appearances, showing not only the influence of Japanese food television but also the continuing trend and subculture developing around inexpensive gourmet.

Events

B-Class Gourmet B-1 Grand Prix in Atsugi, Oricon 2010/9/19

<http://gourmet.oricon.co.jp/80198/full/>

The 5th annual B-1 Grand Prix drew hundreds of thousands to Atsugi this September 18th and 19th for one of the largest B-class gourmet events in Japan. The festival was attended by 175,000 people on the first day and 260,000 on the second, not only making it the largest attendance in the festival's history but also creating lines of over 100 customers at each booth. The festival aimed to increase awareness of new B-class gourmet foods from around Japan as well as to give customers an idea of how to replicate the dishes at home. The winner of the event was Yamanashi-ken's *kofu-torimotsu-ni*, which is an original boiled chicken recipe. For producers of foods associated with B-class gourmet, this country-wide competition could prove to be a very useful marketing tool to penetrate the market that is developing around this trend.

From the Editor

Public food events like this one are very popular and fairly low cost. Hopefully, you can experience one of these events when you visit Japan. Make sure you have your chopsticks ready!

Dining Trends

All You Can Eat, Asahi Newspaper 2010/9/15

<http://www.asahi.com/business/update/0915/TKY201009150385.html>

After school or work gatherings are common place in Japan and can be a great way to get to know classmates or co-workers without the stresses of school or the office. One of the best places to go is a restaurant or *izakaya* that has *tabehodai*, all you can eat buffet, and/or *nomihodi*, all you can drink. The suffix --*hodai* means roughly “all you can”, guaranteeing as much food as one wants within a given timeframe for a very reasonable price. Many different kinds of restaurants in Japan use *tabehodai* to draw in hungry but frugal crowds after 5 o’clock. These types of places are also great for planned parties or gatherings because the patron enters the restaurant knowing how much the tab will be at the end of the night, which can be quite a concern for many students and young professionals. The practice of *tabehodai* has become so popular in Japan that even big fast food chains like Burger King have added a *tabehodai* option to their Japanese menu for a limited time.



Food Venue Marketing

Restaurants on Wheels, Web Japan 2010

http://web-japan.org/trends/09_lifestyle/lif100218.html

Incurring lower overhead costs and aiming to provide convenience and quality, truck restaurants are popping up all over Japan. Two types of these rolling eateries are common. First, are actual full restaurants fit into truck trailers approximately 10 by 2.3 meters. These large trailers have a large window on one side to display an open kitchen and an eating counter with a seating area. These tiny restaurants on wheels are most commonly sushi bars. Second, are food trucks much like those often found in construction sites in the United States. These trucks specialize in everything from ramen to curry dishes and are often frequented by professionals in the middle of Tokyo’s business districts. Both types of these truck restaurants have become extremely popular as they have all the flare of an upscale Japanese

restaurant without the large price tag, the essence of B-class gourmet. In fact, this mobile trend is becoming popular in other commercial areas such as mobile travel agencies and brokerage firms.

From the Editor

While these food trucks, like the one pictured above, have limited choices, it is the tantalizing smells and speedy service that truly pull in the crowds at lunch. Hungry yet? I am.

Fast Food Scales Up to Meet Demand, Metropolis 2010/7/15

<http://metropolis.co.jp/dining/dining/trend-2/>



With the explosion of B-class gourmet's popularity, fast food restaurants are trying to compete as diners try to find the line between value, health, and taste. In 2007, McDonald's expanded its McCafe franchise to Japan, offering both healthier foods and a more stylish interior design to patrons. After its popularity, McDonald's decided to revamp its own stores, completing the new interiors of 13 Tokyo stores in April of this year. Burger King and KFC soon followed suit in an effort to fit into the new trend of healthier, finer fast food. Trying to take a more sophisticated angle, major fast food labels are attempting to update the quality of their dining

venues and products in order to evolve with their new price- and quality-conscious market.

From the Editor

Appearances are big in Japan and little changes like an interior update or different packaging can take an ordinary item and make it into the flavor of the week.

The Bottom Line

Food is a very important element of the Japanese lifestyle and eating out is still very common here. Through trends like B-class gourmet, the Japanese have found new ways to maintain this important part of their lives despite the less favorable economic conditions. What does this mean for US importers? You have to inject yourselves into the trend. Placing competitively priced, quality US ingredients and products into the B-class gourmet scene, through events or placement in B-class gourmet restaurants, allows you exposure to a typically younger and loyal market. Open and excited, it is these dedicated foodies that are going to be the people that specifically seek out your ingredient or product while at a restaurant or walking down a grocery aisle.

Photos provided by:

Kitanachelin logo: vnoadakoda.blog27.fc2.com/blog-entry-35.html

Mc Cafe photo: <http://www.papascott.de/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2007/05/mccafe-design-wenge.jpg>