

For fresh fruit and vegetable marketing and distribution in Asia



By Gabrielle Easter

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Taste of Aus for Japanese chefs

Austrade has led a delegation of Japanese chefs to vineyards, farms and Melbourne's Queen Victoria Market to highlight Australia's premium produce



Four Japanese chefs and one sommelier have won a trip to Australia after winning Austrade Japan's Taste of Australia menu competition.

The competition saw 42 restaurants across Japan create menus using Australian premium produce, with the final cook-off broadcast on local television.

The winners were gifted a visit to Victoria's Lethbridge Wines vineyard, the Jade Tiger abalone facility, Koo Wee Rup asparagus grower-packer-exporter Momack Produce and the Queen Victoria Market in Melbourne's CBD before heading to a cook-off with Australian chefs.

On tour with the chefs was Austrade's Tokyo-based trade commissioner Julianne Merriman and trade specialist Kiyoko Owaza, who said the competition was designed to increase awareness of a variety of Australian produce and wine in Japan's high-end food service industry.

"Part of this visit was allowing these chefs to experience the natural environment in which Australian produce is grown, and see how it is handled to gain an understanding of the supply chain," explained Merriman. "Now, they can go back to Japan and can tell a story about the produce.

"They can talk from experience and can be ambassadors for Australian produce."

While Australian beef, wine and seafood already have a strong reputation in Japan, Merriman said the recently signed Japan-Australia free trade agreement (JAEPA), market access, and the favourable exchange rate have opened a window of opportunity to push the premium message around other Australian produce, such as fruit and vegetables.

The five Japanese winners included Tomohiko Murakami of RIHGA Royal Hotel Restaurant Chambord, Masami Katano of the Prince Park Tower Tokyo Brise Verte, Takayuki Ogawa or Ruby Jack's Steakhouse Bar, Munehiro

Takasue of Cerulean Tower Toyko Hotel and Natsuki Sata of Resort Trust XIV Kyoto Yase Rikyu.

Australian table grapes make mark in Japan

Australian table grape exports to Japan have been the success story of the season, with around 500 containers shipped to the country during the 2015/16 season, up from the forecast 350 containers.

"We gained market access for Australian table grapes in 2014, and along with JAEPA, it's been a perfect storm for table grape exporters," Merriman said.

Indeed, the winning chef in the Taste of Australia menu competition used smoked grapes in one of his dishes, which Merriman said blew the judges away.