

REPORT | A Workshop on Making Onigiri



● **DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi members come together and raise sustainability awareness**

Around the world, increasing attention is being paid to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As perception also grows in MICE events, various companies and groups in the Marunouchi area (Note: In this context, the term “Marunouchi” refers to Otemachi, Marunouchi, and Yurakucho) are working toward achieving the SDGs.

The Marunouchi area is a business district surrounded by an abundance of nature, and many activities promoting sustainability have been carried out.

Endeavors being promoted that are exclusive to this area include a project to restore wildlife living in the moat in the outer garden of the Imperial Palace and the Marunouchi Honey Project that practices beekeeping on building rooftops in the Marunouchi area. In 2019, Marunouchi SDGs ACT 5 was launched to encourage Marunouchi area-wide activities for achieving the SDGs, and various actions have been taken under themes such as sustainable food, climate change and resource circulation, and WELL-BEING.

Initiatives unique to DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi offer hands-on, sustainability-themed experiences

that provide hints on sustainable activities inspired by being in Marunouchi, such as jogging around the Imperial Palace.

Moreover, many of the DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi member companies are also developing their own endeavors. They have been raising one another's awareness while regularly exchanging information and sharing pages dedicated to sustainability on their official websites.

As a part of these activities, a workshop on making onigiri (rice balls) was held for members on October 13, 2020.



The workshop was held at MY Shokudo Hall & Kitchen in TOKYO TORCH Tokiwabashi Tower, which opened in July 2021. The location offers the optimum venue for team-building programs that enable participants to learn about, prepare, and experience food in a kitchen.

Members gathered together and gained hands-on experience making onigiri while learning about foods, which served the dual purpose of raising sustainability awareness and practicing team building.

In addition, the members posted photos of the onigiri they made that day on social media to participate in Onigiri Action sponsored by TABLE FOR TWO, which delivers food to impoverished regions around the world.

Twenty DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi members gathered for this workshop. Before it even started, members were engaging in animated conversations since a real-world event had not been conducted

in a while due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



First, DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi's Executive Officer Hiroaki Fujii greeted everyone.

“The hope is that this kind of event, which aims to achieve the SDGs, doesn't end with the activity, but presents an opportunity to be aware of the continuous connection between the world's people, the environment, and the earth. Each and every pattern of behavior will change if we live our day-to-day lives with that awareness. It's a small thing, but we think it's important, so we'd like to share this opportunity with you all.

Likewise, we hope this will be a chance for team building through real interaction so that with everyone's cooperation we work as a cohesive team to attract MICE events in the future.”

● **Listening to explanations from producers and experiencing foods firsthand**

Next, President Satoshi Ninomiya of NINO inc., which runs MY Shokudo Hall & Kitchen, took the floor.

NINO inc. is a design studio located in the city of Matsuyama in Ehime Prefecture that is involved with projects in a wide range of fields both in Japan and abroad. The company often works with chefs and producers throughout Japan to engage in regional community development through foods. MY Shokudo Hall & Kitchen leverages these experiences to develop projects that give rise to communication through foods.

The company coordinated the overall planning and running of this onigiri workshop, and talked about rice.

The main ingredient of rice used in the workshop was Uwa, which is a variety also served at eating establishments. The regional, low-pesticide rice has been grown for over 2,000 years in the Uwa area of Seiyo, Ehime Prefecture. The rice provided in the workshop was grown by Mr. Ninomiya and his family. He used photos to explain the year-long process that resulted in providing the rice at the workshop, from creating rice seedlings to planting and harvesting the rice.



After the explanation on the rice, it was finally time to make the onigiri.

There were two types of rice that formed the base of the onigiri: beautifully colored, flavored rice made with seasonal ginkgo nuts and aromatic rice mixed with edible chrysanthemum. The rice was placed at each participant's seat, and after washing their hands, all the participants began shaping the onigiri. They were told to mold the rice into the shape they preferred while it was hot. The participants' laughter and cheerful voices were heard around the room as they spent a pleasant time taking photos and eating the onigiri with miso soup.

In addition, the organizers practiced sustainability-conscious management and avoided using plastic and disposal materials in the workshop as much as possible. Participants took home the onigiri they were unable to finish to prevent food waste.



- **The significance of creating communication through food in Japan's business center**



The workshop lasted for about 40 minutes, but it was a valuable opportunity that allowed participants

to hear about the deep history of foods and an explanation from a rice grower. Mr. Ninomiya said the following about this endeavor.

I think it's very important to create points of contact with various regions in Japan, share things that can be helpful in daily life, and have a real-world venue where people can learn and gain a keen understanding while carrying out these kinds of activities in Tokyo. You can learn a lot on the internet, but I feel that opportunities are sought after that enable visualization of the backstory to foods and producers through real communication.

In this workshop, although making onigiri is quite simple, preparing foods after understanding the backstory gives even the simple hands-on experience a deeper meaning, and I think everyone had a very good time.

Ordinarily, in this space we sell a menu of onigiri and miso soup prepared with ingredients selected from all over Japan. Even though we offer it in the heart of Tokyo, we don't do anything special. We offer foods as they are and give careful consideration to how to faithfully share them.

I think being able to experience their true nature is embraced by people in the Marunouchi area, but I believe it is also a chance for foreigners to experience real Japanese food firsthand.”



This workshop was an excellent opportunity for team building through the experience of learning about growing rice and joining together to make onigiri, the comfort food of Japan. It will be added to

the list of suggested activities and will also be introduced on the website to attract MICE events in the future.

Marunouchi is a business district, but the area is also surrounded by nature and boasts a concentration of regional delights. It can also be called an area where the three SDGs-related aspects of economy, society, and environment intermingle. DMO TOKYO/Marunouchi will continue boosting area collaboration and working together to promote sustainability initiatives.