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INTERVIEW

Enter the world of the Sake Sommeliers!

Interview with Mr. Charly Iten, Sake Sommelier Association's first Master Sommelier in Switzerland

The Sake Sommelier Association (SSA) is the largest association outside Japan which focuses on sake out of other liquors. In addition to making courses available for every level, the association is also well-known for its annual sake competition. The competition is not only interesting for local customers, but also for Japanese sake producers who will receive feedback and advice on what they can improve to work better with their European consumers. For the purpose of this interview, we met with Mr. Charly Iten, the first, and currently sole Master Sake Sommelier in Switzerland. Mr. Iten studied East Asian art, with a particular focus on Japanese art. He worked as an expert for auction houses and collectors, and also organizes trips to Japan centered on handcrafts and art.

Over the years, he has developed a strong knowledge of sake and decided to utilize it to make a living out of it. He kindly answered our questions on the SSA and the sake scene in Switzerland.

Can you please introduce the Sake Sommelier Association to our readers?

The Sake Sommelier Association (SSA) was created in 2000 in



Mr. Charly Iten

London. The goal of the two founders, Kumiko Ohta and Xavier Chapelou, is to spread the culture of sake and provide education on this alcoholic beverage outside of Japan. Today, SSA is the largest sake courses provider outside of Japan. The organization has certified representatives in more than 15 countries. Currently, I am the only SSA representative in Switzerland. Our goal is to promote the history and culture of sake here.

The SSA is also the organizer of the London Sake Challenge, the oldest sake competition in Europe. Last year, SSA held the first sake challenge in Milan, and would like to push the idea further by having regular competitions in several other countries.

Where does your interest/passion for sake come from?

The first time I tried sake was during a Japanese festival in Zurich, when I was 17 years old. It was a 'kanzake' meaning that it was served warm. It was a rather poor one. I thought to myself "Okay, sake is not my thing."

But then, in 1997 I visited Japan for the first time, and thanks to friends of mine I could visit a sake brewery in February (traditionally one of the brewery months). This time I had an amazing experience. For dinner, my friends brought a freshly brewed Nigori sake and paired it with sushi and sashimi. I was amazed by the difference I could feel between this delicious sake and the unimpressive memory I kept from the one I tried when I was 17. From this moment, I became a fan. In all my following trips to Japan, I tried more sake and learned about its making process. To me it was simply a hobby, until recently. Three years ago, I thought that with all the knowledge I had acquired over the last 20 years I could take it to a professional level. While I was looking for courses, I learned about the SSA.

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会見

INTERVIEW

Enter the world of the Sake Sommeliers!

(continued from page 1)

You are the first Master Sake Sommelier in Switzerland. What does Sake Sommelier mean and how can someone get this title?

It means that I attended and successfully passed the four levels of the courses I took with the SSA, and that consequently I am an official SSA sake educator. To get the SSA Master Sake Sommelier certificate is highly demanding.

During this process, candidates are thoroughly tested on their knowledge of sake including blind tasting and food pairing. The most advanced courses also entail an internship in a sake brewery in Japan.

The internship is a meaningful experience. My passion for sake grew even stronger after this. Making sake certainly gives you a different perspective and a better understanding of it.

What kind of courses do you teach?

Regarding SSA, I teach the first two levels at the moment. On February 24, I will give the first Introductory Sake Professional Course. Most of the participants are professionals interested in learning more about sake, but a couple of people will attend out of personal interest. Later, in September, I will provide the first Certified Sake Sommelier Course.

In addition to the SSA official courses, I like working on sake/food pairings, either through collaborations or with workshops.

As you can see on my website, I also sell sake. When I sell to pro-



Ready for some sake tasting? Check [Mr. Iten's website](#) for the latest news

professionals it helps to have a workshop with the staff. Having sake on your menu is nice, but being able to tell more to the client is better.

In your professional experience, what are the main trends regarding sake in Switzerland?

Sake is not new to Switzerland. We have had it for more than 20 years, but it was usually associated to a hot spirit served with dinner. The fact that it was traditionally served in small glasses also probably contributed to giving it the image of a highly alcoholic beverage.

However, things have started changing. A premium sake, chilled and served into wine glasses works well here too.

I do believe that the Swiss market has a lot of potential. There is already a nice selection of sake available on the market. Plus, people already tend to have a good knowledge of wine. Sake and wines share a lot. As said, wine glasses work well with sake, and the terminology we use to describe wine can be used for sake, partially at least.

This being said, sake has not yet

fully entered people's habits. When I see the small selection available in major department stores in Zurich, I can only say that we have still a lot of work to do.

At my personal level, I must say things are doing well. I have been working as a retailer for two and a half years now, and the business is on the positive side.

What would be your recommendation for somebody who wants to try sake but has none or little experience?

I would recommend a yuzu sake to start with, or a blood orange sake. Those liqueurs are very easy to enjoy and the effect is immediate. It is perfect as an aperitif, pairing it with cheese, or accompanying desserts such as panna cotta or fruit coulis.

If you want to try pure sake for the first time, I would recommend to pair it with some food. Pairing creates interesting interactions. The umami in the sake and in the food connect and interact. Pure sake tasting is still a bit more for connoisseurs.

Private consumption plummet impacted Japanese economy in Q4

The Japan Cabinet Office has published the first preliminary GDP estimates for 2019's last quarter (October to December).

As expected, the VAT increase had a significant impact on private consumption. Private demand greatly decreased (-2.9%), while public demand (+0.4%) and net exports (+0.5%) grew positively. As a consequence, the GDP contracted by -1.6% for the first time in several quarters.

Nevertheless, the Government was aware that a VAT increase was likely to have repercussions. It had

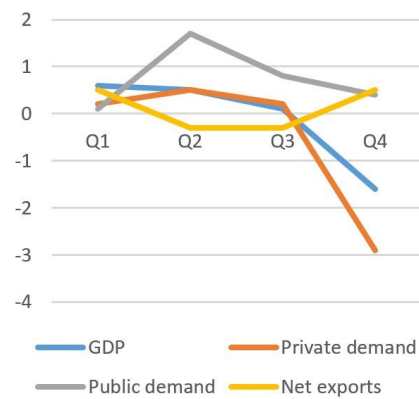
already happened in 2014, when the VAT was increased to 8%.

Usually, knowing that an increase is coming, many households advance their purchases.

So, if the drop was indeed caused by the advanced purchase before new VAT rate, private consumption should quickly come back to its usual level.

Currently, the Government believes that economic risks for the Japanese economy are more related to external factors such as a slowdown of the global economy and an increase of trade barriers.

2019 Quarter-to-quarter in %
(real growth rate, seasonally adjusted)



Source: [Cabinet Office](#)

動向
TREND

Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games: Where to get a ticket?

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games are starting in less than half a year and many people are wondering how to get a ticket.

The Games certainly are a good reason to visit Japan.

The purchasing process has already started, but at the moment tickets are only available to local residents. A first round of tickets was sold last year, but due to the high demand a second round, based on a lottery system, is scheduled for this spring.

For people outside Japan, Authorized Ticket Resellers have been selected by the Organization committee. In Switzerland, the official reseller is Globetrotter.

They can organize bespoke tours which include the Olympic games. The company is also Swiss Olympic's official partner. People interested in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic

Games are strongly advised to only buy tickets through official channels to avoid inconveniences.

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games will take place between July 22nd and August 9th. The Paralympic Games will start one month later,

and will take place between August 25th and September 6th.

More information here:

- [Tokyo 2020](#)
- [Swiss Olympic](#)
- [Globetrotter](#)

活動
ACTIVITY



The Olympic Medals, made from 100% recycled metals coming from electronic devices from all over Japan. Learn more [here](#) ©Tokyo 2020

革新

INNOVATION

Introducing the Japanese Start-up visa

Starting a business in Japan is now easier thanks to the Start-up visa. Until recently, entrepreneurs willing to set up a new company in Japan needed a Business Manager Visa to establish themselves in the country. Unfortunately, this visa was difficult to get because the requirements, including company's capital, were hard to meet.

Last year, however, a Start-up visa came into existence. This new visa lasts 6 months and grants a residence card to its owner. Thanks to this visa, entrepreneurs can now realise their project and create their company while they're already in Japan. They will be authorized to proceed with all the required steps. In order to get a Start-up visa, ap-

plicants must match the following requirement:

The location where the business will be set up must be one of the National Strategic Special Zones.

A pioneer when it comes to start-ups, Fukuoka was among the first to accept applications; plus, the city offers services such an additional 6-months period as well as [financial aid, tax deduction, etc.](#)

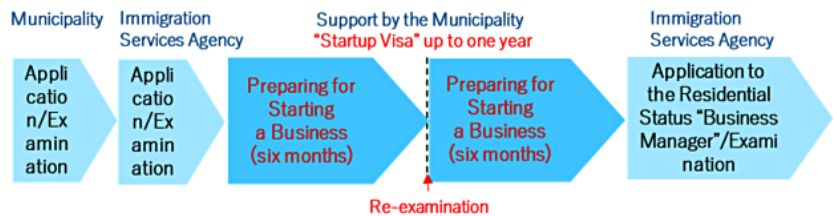
More information on the Start-up

visa and the special zones can be found on the Japanese visas webpage:

[Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry](#)

Swiss citizens who simply want to visit Japan do not require a visa for trips up to 90 days, an extension of up to 6 months is possible upon request.

[Ministry of Foreign Affairs website](#)



The Start-up visa process

Agenda

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AGENDA

- ✓ Impact in Japan: Make your market entry in Japan a success. March 12, 13:30 to 16:45, Forum St. Peter (Credit Suisse), Zurich. [Program](#) and [registration](#)
- ✓ Japon: Evaluer vos possibilités d'affaires. JETRO Seminar in Moutier. March 17, 11am to 12:30. [Program](#) and [registration](#)
- ✓ Introductory Sake Professional (ISP) Course on Feb. 24 in Bad Ragaz (SG). This is a "Sake Sommelier Association" course provided by Dr. Charly Iten. More information on this [page](#).

JETRO is a government-related organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world. Originally established in 1958 to promote Japanese exports abroad, JETRO's core focus in the 21st century has shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping small to medium size Japanese firms maximize their global export potential.

The JETRO Switzerland Newsletter can also be viewed and/or downloaded online: <http://www.jetro.go.jp/switzerland/newsletter>

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