



Bringing a Bit of Ireland to Japan

NOAM KATZ

Entrepreneur Alan Fisher shares his passion for Irish culture with people in Japan through his restaurant.

STEP into Kyojin no Stewhouse (The Giant's Stewhouse) on Tokyo's Togoshi Ginza shopping street and you'll find a celebration of Irish culture lining the walls. When you sit down to order, the staff brings you both a menu and a folder with bilingual explanations about those wall decorations.

More than a restaurant, Kyojin no Stewhouse is the home base for owner Alan Fisher's personal mission. The two-meter-tall Irishman says he started

the restaurant and his overarching Kyojin brand to "help Japanese people connect with Ireland and its culture. There really isn't much knowledge about Irish culture here, and I wanted to do something about that."

Fisher's path to restaurateur was guided by chance. He came to Japan in 2008 as part of an Irish government scheme called the FAS (Foras Áiseanna Saothair, Training and Employment Authority) Overseas Sponsorship Programme, which helped



Irish lamb stew is one of the most popular dishes on the menu



The walls are festooned with information about Irish history, art, music and sports



Several Irish beers are available to wash down Alan's famous stew



The bright green sign announces the restaurant's presence on this traditional shopping street

Irish graduates find employment at Japanese and Chinese companies. He was eager to work in a country where English was not the native language and to experience a different way of life. His father's stories about Japanese culture and history had already sparked his interest in Japan at an early age.

With a master's degree in commerce and marketing, Fisher found work in international sales for a large Japanese software company. He spent six years there, often acting as a liaison between Japanese engineers and overseas clients. "It was a good opportunity for me to gain international experience, but it was stressful too," he says.

That stress prompted Fisher to leave the company in 2014. As he contemplated the next bend in his path, Fisher started brainstorming options. "I love cooking and sharing Irish culture, so is there something I can do around these things?" he recounts. "I wanted to bring passion into my work life."

The Kyojin brand concept was Fisher's answer, and he decided to open the restaurant in 2014 as the first step. After scouting various locations around Tokyo, Fisher and his wife were enchanted by the friendly environment of the Togoshi Ginza shopping district, and found a space to launch Kyojin no Stewhouse. "The idea was to use food as a doorway to share Irish culture," he explains. "There are plenty of Japanese-run Irish pubs in Japan, but they don't really offer Irish food."

To fill this culinary void, Fisher decided to offer traditional Irish soups, stews and bread. He started off with familiar favorites—his mother's recipes. "I spent the first six months practicing her recipes every week. I think my wife was sick of stew by the end of it!" Fisher even flew his mother to Japan so she could gauge his progress.

Some three and a half years later, Fisher is pleased with the restaurant's success and is already working on the next phases of his concept. One involves writing a series of novels in both English and Japanese to introduce Irish fairy tales, and the other is an import business for high-quality Irish products, such as beer and cheese.

Fisher stays in constant motion. "I don't really have any days off," he admits. "It's the hardest work I've ever done. But I'm passionate about what I do, and it's either succeed or die trying," he says with a laugh.

This Irish "giant" is connecting his homeland with Japan, one bowl of stew and fairy tale at a time. **7**