

Watami Japanese Dining

“It is important for me to be based in Hong Kong in order to receive first-hand feedback from customers, follow the food trends, understand the concerns of our staff and adapt to this fast-moving market.”

**Yutaka Kuwabara, President
Watami International Co Ltd**



Expand Japanese Dining into a Broader Horizon

Having established in Hong Kong for more than 15 years, Watami International Co Ltd has established a wealth of successful brands with 28 outlets in Hong Kong while planning to expand their footprint to a broader horizon with more new concepts

Hong Kong's first Ishokuya concept Watami, a dining oriented bar, opened in 2001 and it was also the first Watami outside Japan. According to Yutaka Kuwabara, President, since the population and market size in Japan was declining, it is important for the restaurant group to expand to overseas markets with a growing economy and business potential. Hong Kong not only provides the potential for the group to expand, its strategic location near Mainland China allows the group to gain up-to-date information about the Mainland market which helps the company to establish their presence in the country.

Building Diversified Brands

Watami Group operates 17 Watami outlets, five Watei outlets aiming at a more mass market, four Gochiso restaurants that serve fusion Mediterranean cuisine, and Kitchen J that offers sandwiches and pizza. The restaurant group has also launched two new projects recently. Firebird, a yakitori skewers restaurant located in buzzing Causeway Bay and Kyo Watami, a new premium concept to be implemented at the Kornhill branch. Both the interior design and menu are designed by Japanese professionals; most of the ingredients are also imported from Japan.

Kuwabara understands that nowadays gourmards are not looking for localised Japanese food but something authentic from Japan. So when they have decided to create Kyo Watami, it was essential to incorporate Japanese elements from start to finish. “Japan is one of the most popular leisure destinations for Hong Kong people. A lot of them are very familiar with Japanese cuisine and its origins. It is important for me to be based in Hong Kong in order to receive first-hand feedback from customers,

follow the food trends, understand the concerns of our staff and adapt to this fast-moving market.” Kuwabara said.

“With the assistance of InvestHK, I am able to receive timely advice on my ideas and the networking events they arrange really help me expand my network and open up new business opportunities,” Kuwabara added.

At the moment, the group has hired 1,000 staff in the city and 95 percent are locals. “Hong Kong people are very independent, hardworking and always willing to learn more,” he added.

Other than Hong Kong, Watami Group also has presence in other parts of Asia, such as Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Suzhou, Singapore, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines and Cambodia. Talking about the future development, Kuwabara is planning to create more diversified brands to capture a wider audience and cater for the ever-changing market.

Watami International Co Ltd

- Opened the first Watami Japanese Dining Restaurant in Hong Kong in 2001
- The group now operates 28 outlets under different brand names in Hong Kong with 1,000 staff

watami-int.net

investhk.gov.hk



InvestHK 投資推廣署
The Government of the Hong Kong
Special Administrative Region