



# "Onigirazu" chosen as 2015 Dish of the Year!

## Handing down Japanese food culture to future generations

- "Dish of the Year" website <http://gri.gnavi.co.jp/dishoftheyear/>
- Gurunavi Research Institute <http://gri.gnavi.co.jp/>

Gurunavi Research Institute (GRI; Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo; Hisao Taki, president and representative director), which conducts a variety of surveys and research efforts primarily on food-related themes, announced today on December 7th that it selected "*Onigirazu*" (rice sandwiches) as its "Dish of the Year" for 2015, an item of cuisine that best reflects the year in contemporary Japanese society. *Onigirazu* was chosen among six nominated dishes announced on November 9.

In addition to the latest trends and topics, the Dish of the Year selection is also deeply relevant to societal developments and broad trends for the year. As a mirror on contemporary society, it has even greater value in its function as a memorial to food culture that can be handed down through the generations, and is selected on that basis. We have held our annual Dish of the Year event since 2014 to memorialize and preserve our common human heritage represented in the finest of Japanese food culture. The 2015 Dish of the Year selection started off by identifying the most noteworthy dishes of the year among the 52 million monthly unique users that visit the Gurunavi website operated by Gurunavi Inc., as well as the results of a survey of the 13.46 million Gurunavi members. Six nominated dishes were then announced on November 9 following selection from a jury of members of the media\*. The six candidate dishes were *Onigirazu*, Superfood, Grilled catfish, *Nodoguro* (blackthroat seaperch), Craft beer and Japanese whiskey. The final selection was made by GRI.

At Gurunavi, our aim is to contribute to the development of culinary culture through food research and education, and the use of Big Data. As one of the educational activities by GRI, the annual "Dish of the Year" selection is widely announced not just in Japan, but worldwide in hopes that this contributes to further development of Japan's superb culinary culture.

### 【Media selection committee】 A total of 47 members from 44 media (40 media companies)

Asahi Shimbun (culture/living), Mainichi Shimbun (news, business & digital), Yomiuri Shimbun (lifestyle & education), Nihon Keizai Shimbun (lifestyle), Sankei Shimbun (culture & business), Nikkan Kogyo Shimbun, Hokkaido Shimbun, Chunichi Shimbun, Nishi-nihon Shimbun, Ibaraki Shimbun, Saitama Shimbun, Niigata Nippo, Kyoto Shimbun, Sanyo Shimbun, Minami-nihon Shimbun, Kyodo News, Jiji Press, NHK, NTV, EX, TBS, TX, CX, ABC, MBS, TOKYO MX, KBS, OHK, FBS, Chuo Koron, Newsweek, Zaikai, Weekly Toyo Keizai, Nikkei Business, Kindai Shokudo, The Food Service Management, The Professional Cooking, Cuisine Kingdom, Magazine of the Foodservice Industry, Nihon Shokuryo Shimbun, Gaishoku Restaurant Shimbun, HOTERES (Listed according to the PR/Media handbook 2015 by the Public Relations Society of Japan (PRSJ))

## 2015 Dish of the Year

# Onigirazu

The 22<sup>nd</sup> installment of the “Cooking Papa” column in *Morning*, a weekly comic magazine published by Kodansha, demonstrated “How to make *onigiri* rice balls without balling up the rice.” They’re made by spreading a layer of rice over a square sheet of *nori*, or dried laver seaweed, topping with sandwich fixings, then forming a square by folding the four corners over to meet in the center. The whole is then sliced in two. Being able to see what’s inside is what makes this rice sandwich different from conventional rice balls.

**Reasons for selection**

- This is a year of flourishing inbound travel, in which more overseas visitors have come to Japan than ever before. At the same time overseas, the appeal and diversity of Japanese culinary culture has been publicized at the International Expo in Milan, Italy. In addition, the general agreement on a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) has been among the factors making this a year in which new efforts to convey Japanese cuisine to the world have begun. In this context, the fresh contrarian idea of making a dish like traditional rolled rice balls (or, *onigiri*) without packing them into rounded shapes (or, *onigirazu*) has become a surprise hit so popular that it is transforming household cuisine and commercial distribution.
- Having spread from household to general consumer cuisine, these *onigirazu* rice sandwiches are increasingly a part of dining out, and their presence in restaurant menus has increased rapidly. Numerous recipe books have sold, and various food manufacturers have come out with specially prepared *nori* dried seaweed and devices for making the dish as the boom spreads its ripples through the market.
- At a time when many in Japan have come to see the modern trend away from rice as troubling, this new idea has expanded the possibilities of the traditional staple, re-establishing an awareness of just how essential rice is to Japanese people. At the same time, this is a simple, beautiful, hygienic dish. A diversity of variations results from the fact that it does not have to be balled up, and therefore can be made with ingredients of any available size. This allows for an enjoyable freedom of new *onigirazu* ideas. There are now signs of its having taken root as a standard menu item that’s here to stay. There are also hopes for a synergistic effect with the brand-name rice varieties that are gaining popularity each year, stimulating domestic consumption of Japanese-produced rice.

**“Sardine with Cheese Onigirazu”**

Japanese cuisine Tsukiji Tamura, 3<sup>rd</sup>-generation Chef Takashi Tamura

*Onigirazu* stuffed with Japanese *maiwashi* sardine sautéed with boiled ginger, and placed with cabbage and cream cheese. Made with Fukurinko, a Hokkaido-grown variety of new rice selected by five-star rice connoisseurs. Seaweed is a Tokyo-style variety produced in Chiba prefecture.

**“Winter Vegetable Onigirazu”**

SUGALABO Inc. Representative, Chef Yosuke Suga

Stuffed with foie gras, truffle, celery root, *daikon* radish, carrot, cabbage, this is a French-style *onigirazu* with a luxury gourmet sensibility. Sauce made with Oita Kanmuri free-range chickens. Made with Niigata-produced koshihikari-variety new rice and *nori* produced in Chiba prefecture.

## Nominated dish

## Superfood

"Superfood" refers to foods that excel in nutritive balance and high nutritional value. Prominent examples in the popular spotlight include coconut oil, known for its devotees among overseas models, chia seed, quinoa and numerous other items.

**Reasons for selection**

- Amid heightened consumer interest in eating foods that are good for the body, demand has been growing, with items such as coconut oil enjoying popularity spreading worldwide to the extent that food import shops and other outlets have been continually selling out. Coconut oil has taken its place next to olive and linseed oils in popularity, due not only to its excellent taste and aroma, but also for popular non-food applications as well.
- Just last year, the volume of chia seed use by restaurants was virtually nil. But use suddenly increased this year, so that now it is used in a broad range of items and business types, from drinks and desserts to salads.

## Nominated dish

## Grilled catfish

Grilled catfish cultivated for a taste approaching that of Japanese eel. The dish is to be eaten on a particular mid-summer's day as an alternative to the traditional Japanese eel, now a designated endangered species.

**Reasons for selection**

- After Japanese eel, American eel and Bluefin tuna were listed as endangered species last year, this year's catches of popular fish species such as horse mackerel, sardines and even Atka mackerel have declined. With the depletion of fishery resources having become an issue, some offerings are being marketed in a new way as "alternatives".
- Now in the limelight as an alternative to eel, catfish already has a long history as a highly nutritious seafood ingredient in country dishes and other cuisine all over Japan. In recent years, improvements in domestic seafood farming technology have helped spread its use beyond grilling to tempura, *nabe* stews, *sashimi* and numerous other methods of preparation. Its naturally straightforward delicious taste is becoming better known, leading to a clear potential for even fuller use as a food ingredient.

## Nominated dish

## Nodoguro

Blackthroat seaperch are a specialty catch of the Hokuriku and San-in regions of western Honshu, among other regions. Treated as a high-end delicacy, they are also known by the nickname *nodoguro*, Japanese for "blackthroat".

**Reason for selection**

- This delicacy was freshly in the limelight again after a famous tennis player mentioned it in a post-game interview as the most desirable thing to eat upon returning home to Japan. The spring launch of service on the Hokuriku Shinkansen high-speed railway line brought attention to gourmet dining on blackthroat seaperch in Kanazawa, and widespread awareness of the appeal of this fish. The number of restaurants serving it has increased by a factor of 1.5\* from last year, and the Gurunavi website saw a sevenfold increase in related user searches. As demand thus increases, it is also becoming the focus of interest in terms of fisheries conservation.



### Nominated dish

## Craft beer

Craft beers, in which expert artisans bring craftsmanship to the art of small-batch brewing.



### Reasons for selection

- Revisions during the 1990s to the Liquor Tax Law deregulated beer production, giving rise to a boom in local brewing.
- Twenty years hence, the boom has been revitalized by the surging popularity of craft beers. This year, each of the various major breweries got into the act, holding numerous beer festivals in various locations. The number of shops serving craft beers has grown by a factor of 2.4.\*
- As the domestic beer market continues to shrink, diverse, high-quality craft beers produced by skilled artisans provide a satisfying answer to the needs of consumers looking for added value, and eager to take their time enjoying locally brewed flavors, characteristics, colors and aromas. There appears to be potential here to stimulate the market.

### Nominated dish

## Japanese whiskey

Whisky produced in Japan. Whisky has been distilled in Japan since around 1870, and production for sale began in 1924. A highball boom in recent years has heightened demand for whisky in general.



### Reasons for selection

- The occasion for more widespread awareness of Japanese whisky was a series of awards conferred on Japanese whiskies in competitions around the world just as a related domestic TV serial drama enjoyed high ratings. Favorable global attention was attracted, reacquainting the world with the meticulous nature of Japanese manufacturing, and the high levels of quality it produces. The number of shops serving Japanese whiskies has increased by a factor of 1.6.\*
- The sudden increase in demand resulted in the selling out of sought-after vintages of many popular brands, which resulted in even further popular interest.

\* Please refer to Appendix for more details of the research data by GRI for the nominated dishes.

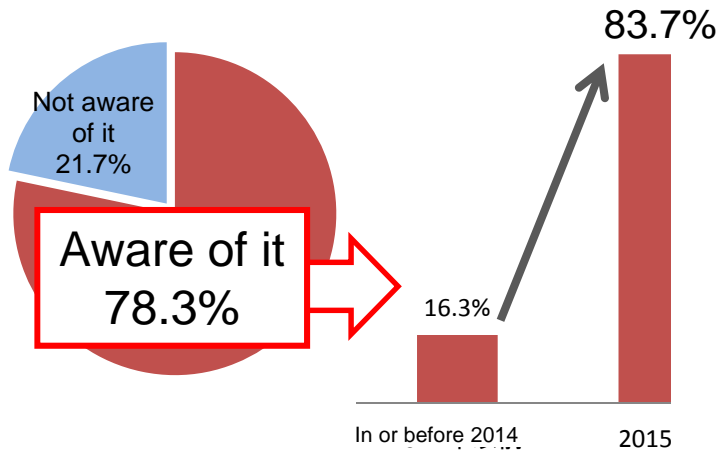
<Contact>

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## Results of Gurunavi member survey on *onigirazu*

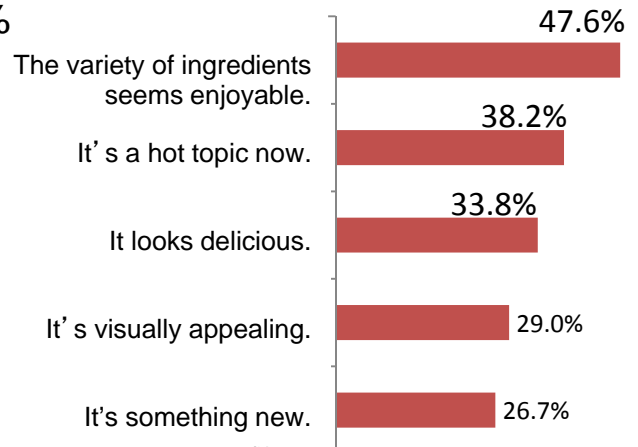
### ■ When they learned of *onigirazu*

1,190 responded that they knew of *onigirazu*



### ■ Impressions of *onigirazu*

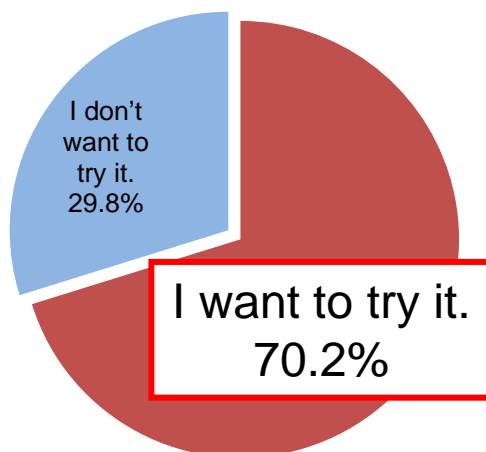
1,520 Gurunavi members



Awareness of *onigirazu* increased dramatically from 2014 to 2015. Impressions of *onigirazu* indicate an interest in the size and variety of stuffings relative to conventional *onigiri* rice balls, and the richness of variety of ingredients.

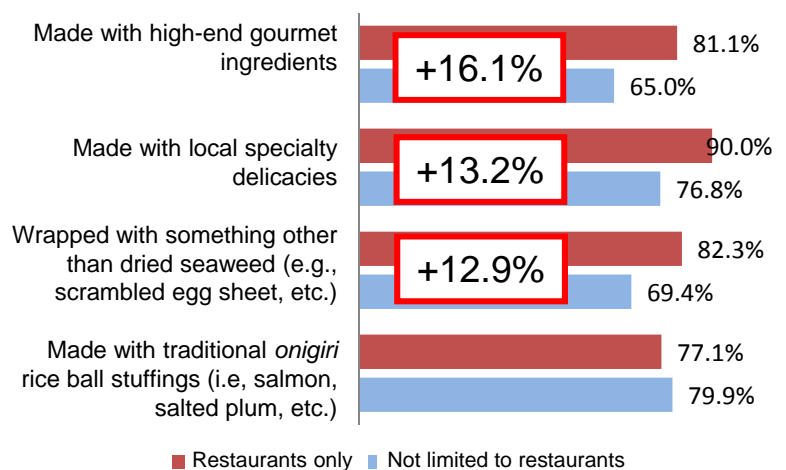
### ■ *Onigirazu* in restaurants

1,520 Gurunavi members



### ■ Regarding *onigirazu* eaten at restaurants

1,190 said they wanted to try it at a restaurant.



Although *onigirazu* has strong associations with handmade foods and boxed lunches, fully 70.2% said that they wanted to try it as a dish served in a restaurant. Asked what kind of *onigirazu* they wanted to try at a restaurant, there was an overwhelming preference among respondents for high-end gourmet ingredients and local specialties compared to *onigirazu* eaten in settings not limited to restaurants. There was also a tendency to want to try wrappings other than seaweed at restaurants, as well as other preparation methods that require more work and expertise. Meanwhile, the tendency to want to try traditional *onigiri* rice ball stuffings at restaurants was weak.

Although only a very few restaurants offered *onigirazu* during 2014, the number increased rapidly during 2015 as awareness spread. About one in four Gurunavi member shops asked whether they wanted to offer *onigirazu* on their menus (from whom 387 valid responses were received) said that they would like to do so. Many shops were also considering offering it not as a main menu item, but on the side/appetizer menu, or to accompany drinks.

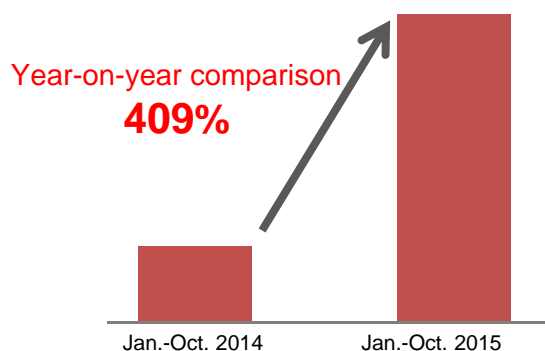


## Data on nominated dishes (Gurunavi Research Institute)

### Data on numbers of user searches and restaurants behind nomination

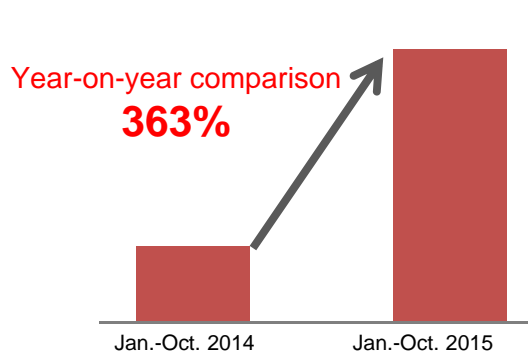
#### “Superfood” user search count

User searches including “superfood (cocoanut, chia seed, quinoa)”



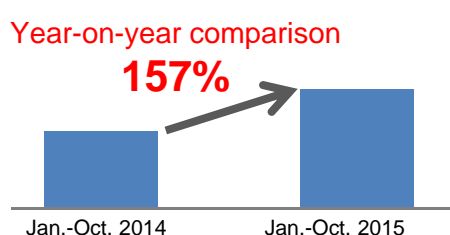
#### “Catfish” user search count

Keyword searches using various phonetics for *namazu*, Japanese for “catfish”



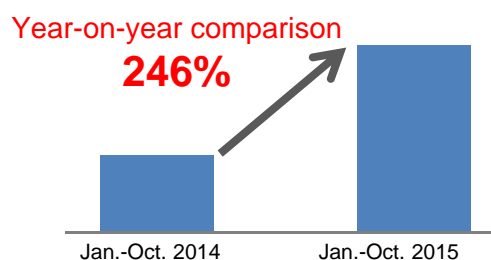
#### Shops serving “blackthroat”

Number of shops serving *nodoguro*, Japanese for “blackthroat”



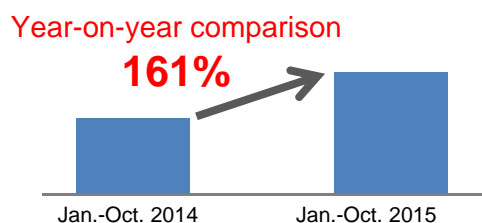
#### Shops serving “craft beers”

Number of shops serving “craft beers”



#### Shops serving “Japanese whiskies”

Number of shops serving items identified in Japanese as “Japanese whisky,” “domestic whisky” or “Japan whisky”



#### User search count

The number of user searches within the Gurunavi website

#### Number of shops serving the items

The number of Gurunavi-member restaurants that include the specified key words in their PR copy and menu content at the Gurunavi website