

**Ms. Kieko Suzuki, attractive Junior Proprietress of Takaraya Restaurant,  
Founded in 1897,  
Talks about Hospitality for Foreigners and the Attractions of Kisarazu**

In the past Kisarazu in Chiba Prefecture, a city that has continued to develop in recent years following the opening of the Tokyo Bay Aqualine expressway, had many classy Japanese-style restaurants and geisha houses (from where geisha were sent upon request to entertain customers at restaurants). At its height, this entertainment area had about 200 geisha going around dressed in colorful kimono. Even today, there are still geisha practicing dancing and samisen every day at the Kisarazu Kaikan, which is used as a training facility for them. I asked Ms. Kieko Suzuki, the junior proprietress of the well-established Takaraya restaurant in Kisarazu, who is also active as a radio personality on the bayfm78 channel and in other ways, about the attractions of the city and the efforts of her restaurant, which is very popular among foreigners.



Ms. Kieko Suzuki

An entertainer on screen and in the restaurant

---I hear that you spent eight years in the United States. What did you do during that time?

I went alone to America at the age of 14 and spent four years there in high school. [Secondary education in the United States lasts for four years.] Then I entered the University of Southern California. I took a break from my studies there to work for a while as an actress in Japan, but later I returned to America and, while attending university, received lessons at the Actors Studio, a drama school in Los Angeles. In America at that time, Asian people were synonymous with action movies, so as well as taking part in television programs, I also auditioned for kung fu films!

In Japan I was selected as the heroine in the film *Kishiwada shonen gurentai: Kaoru-chan saikyo densetsu* [The Bad Boys of Kishiwada: The Legend of Kaoru-chan; 2001], and I also appeared in the television drama *Aibo* and others.

Those younger days spent in America and my experience as an actress are proving to be valuable in my present restaurant work in a variety of ways. As an actress, though stage and film are different, a commonality between the two is the importance of spontaneity. Everything hinges on that single moment. We tend to think of actresses as individual performers, but actually they are pieces of a whole playing the parts they have been assigned. Even if you come up with some kind of acting plan yourself, although it may fit perfectly sometimes, on other occasions the outcome is totally different because of such factors as rapport with the other actors or instructions from the director. A restaurant is a kind of living environment as well. Like an actress, a proprietress needs to be flexible and capable of responding as the situation demands.



In her younger days as a budding actress

## Cherished encounters abroad

--What motivated you to study overseas? And what special memories do you have of your life in America?

My mother always told me to have an eye for the best. In my childhood, she would take me from Kisarazu to Tokyo to see performances in theaters. I also remember going on a tour to Kyoto and having lunch in a house that was a tangible cultural property. Those experiences, and my own strong sense of curiosity, led me to want to see an even wider world, so I decided to study abroad.

Of my four years of high school study, I spent two years at a boarding school in the state of Colorado. The campus there was surrounded by nature. We used to go horse riding and have picnics. The scenery of the forests and mountains was so stunning, I shall never forget it. My eyesight improved a lot!

The color of the sky was different. Snow fell in the winter, but at night, when you looked up at the sky, it was purplish. I suppose that color was the result of moonlight reflecting in the snow. It was fantastic. An unforgettable scene.

America is a melting pot of races, so I was able to meet people from various countries and cultures. Those encounters are now my greatest treasure.



The campus in the US state of Colorado where Ms. Suzuki spent her high school days

A place where people from around the world can make friends and have fun

--Why are you so positive about welcoming foreign customers to Takaraya?

After my study abroad, I continued to visit various countries on business or in a private capacity, and I witnessed the misunderstandings and problems that can arise due to differences in race or religion. Therefore, for a long time I was thinking how good it would be to have a place where people from various countries could have fun whatever their race or religion. And I began to wonder whether Takaraya, our family business, could become such a place. So now I have cut my work as an actress and, while also serving as a personality on programs to publicize our region, am working as the junior proprietress of our restaurant.

Importance of active experience

--What efforts are you making to attract foreigners?

I am participating in overseas promotional projects conducted by Chiba Prefecture. In February of this year I took part in a mission to Thailand led by Chiba Prefecture Governor Kensaku Morita. On that occasion, I did not just advertise Takaraya but also introduced tourist sites in Kisarazu and neighboring cities and towns to representatives of Thailand's travel companies. I think it's important for us to engage in various forms of collaboration from now on.

I feel that the more active you are, the more experience you gain. You never know when that experience will prove useful in the future.



Promotion of Chiba Prefecture in Thailand

First-rate local food and traditional culture

--Takaraya gets many Japanese repeaters and a lot of positive reviews from foreigners. What are you doing to attract such attention?

Kisarazu has the largest tideland in Tokyo Bay, the Banzu Tideland, and clam gathering is popular from mid-March to early summer. At Takaraya, our menu centers on Kisarazu clams, fresh fish and shellfish harvested in the vicinity, and vegetables grown locally in Chiba Prefecture. Many customers come to our restaurant again and again to enjoy this taste. The most popular item among Japanese customers is our clam dish.





Clamming on Kaneda Kaigan beach

To cater for Islamic believers visiting our restaurant, we also offer Muslim-friendly cuisine using halal ingredients. In April someone from the Indonesian embassy in Tokyo brought a lot of guests visiting Japan from their country to our restaurant. We have also had visits by customers wearing gorgeous kimono borrowed from the Sharakukan photo studio. They looked really happy. When the camera turned on them, the children suddenly became quite bashful too. They were so sweet! In addition, our vegetable and tofu stews are popular among vegetarians.



Customers from Indonesia

The other day we had a visit by a group of foreigners who enjoyed dancing and singing by Kisarazu geisha while eating their sukiyaki. I think Kisarazu geisha, who have been around for a long time, are a treasure of our city.

Foreigners seem to like watching a show while eating. At Takaraya, we take care with our cuisine and hospitality and are always making new challenges so that foreigners can fully savor Japanese culture. I think my experience studying overseas in my younger days, meeting people from various countries and coming into contact with various cultures, has helped me a lot in this respect.



Performance by Kisarazu geisha

Wedding anniversary ceremony in Kisarazu

---Can you give us any suggestions about how to enjoy Kisarazu's attractions from now on? Kisarazu is currently advocating the concept of community development for the next generation and is emphasizing organic measures. This means not only organic vegetables and other food ingredients but sustainable community development that is environment-friendly and enables people to lead healthy and affluent lives. In Kisarazu, this initiative is called "organic community development."



Ceremony at the Sharakukan photo studio

Regarding ways to enjoy Kisarazu, although it is still only at the planning stage, there is a plan to encourage inbound tourists to hold ceremonies in Kisarazu to commemorate milestones like, for example, their tenth wedding anniversary. The idea is for them to don bridal costumes at the Sharakukan photo studio, which has more than 1,000 kimono, then go to the historic Yatsurugi Hachiman Shrine for a ceremony, and then enjoy a celebratory meal at Takaraya. The Kisarazu Tourist Association will also be involved, and the plan is for commemorative wedding anniversary certificates to be issued. And if they don't want to go as far as holding such a grand ceremony, tourists can just borrow kimono and *hakama* [skirt-like pants] at Sharakukan, have a photo taken, go to the shrine, and stroll around town a little.





With Kisarazu geisha hopeful Wakaba

Contributing to the community

---Finally, what are your ambitions for the future?

Today people from various countries, with various religions and cultures, come to Takaraya to enjoy the food and Japanese culture. In the future, for the sake of Kisarazu, which has helped Takaraya to grow this much, and also of Chiba Prefecture, I want to publicize the attractions of the Boso Peninsula, which has abundant food ingredients and nature, both in Japan and overseas.

Profile of Ms. Kieko Suzuki

Born in Kisarazu, Chiba Prefecture. Began acting career during eight-year stay for study in the United States. Made film debut as heroine in *Kishiwada shonen gurentai: Kaoru-chan saikyo densetsu* (The Bad Boys of Kishiwada: The Legend of Kaoru-chan) and subsequently appeared in such television dramas as *Aibo*. Became the junior proprietress of the Takaraya restaurant, her family's business, eight years ago. Also active as a media personality on the bayfm78 radio channel and the J:Com Kisarazu cable television channel.

Takaraya Restaurant

Address: 2-3-4 Chuo, Kisarazu, Chiba Prefecture 292-0831

Tel.: 438-22-3765

Website: <http://takaraya.awk.jp/>

Mondays to Saturdays: 11:30–14:00/17:00–22:00 (last order 20:25)

Sundays and national holidays: 11:30–14:30/17:00–21:00 (last order 20:00)

Holidays: 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday