

**Our Special Guides for Foreign Dignitaries  
Delve a Little Deeper into Japan's Attractions!**

**A Visit to the Bifteck Kawamura Ginza Restaurant  
to Ask About Kobe Beef, the King of Wagyu**



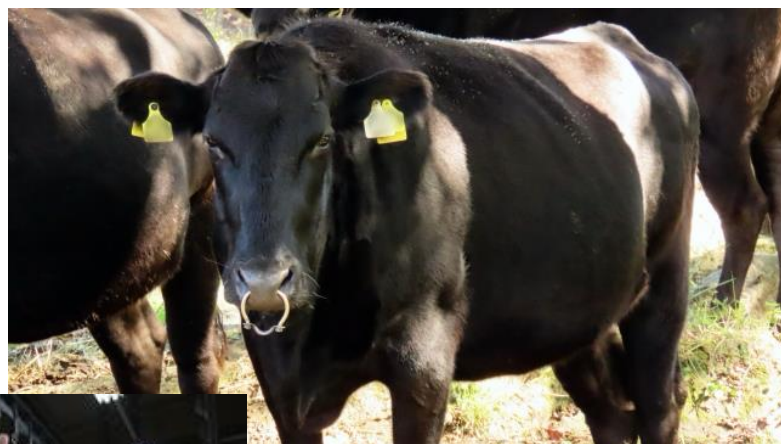
Amid the increasing interest in Japanese cuisine worldwide, if you ask foreigners visiting Japan what they would definitely like to eat, one of the first dishes they cite is *wagyu* (Japanese beef).

Among the various types of *wagyu*, Kobe beef has been widely known overseas for a long time, and indeed many foreigners think that *wagyu* means Kobe beef. Japanese are aware that there are various kinds of *wagyu*, but even so their image of Kobe beef tends to be one of a rare, out-of-reach delicacy that one almost never sees in daily life. Really, what is this Kobe beef? Why is it so special?

Bifuteck Kawamura (Beefsteak Kawamura), whose main restaurant is in Kobe, has been serving Kobe beef as a specialty restaurant for more than half a century. Recently I had the good fortune to savor prime Kobe beef for the first time in my life at its Ginza branch restaurant in Tokyo. The special taste moved me so much that I just had to go to the restaurant again and ask them to tell me more about Kobe beef.



Mr. Hiroyuki Yamamoto, the manager of the Ginza restaurant, answered my questions. First, he told me the surprising fact that there is no such thing as Kobe cattle. The official name in Japanese is “Kobe meat,” which is translated into English as Kobe beef, but the source of this meat, he told me, is Tajima cattle raised in Hyogo Prefecture. After these Tajima cattle have been slaughtered (in Mr. Yamamoto’s words, “After we have taken their lives”), they are taken apart to leave the carcass. The carcass is the bony meat left after the removal of head, tail, legs, skin, internal organs, and so on. In this carcass condition the meat undergoes numerous inspections, and if it is recognized as exceeding a certain standard (in terms of grades, A4 or B4-6 or higher), it is certified as Kobe beef. Carcass that falls below this standard is classified as “Tajima meat.” Apparently there is a general misunderstanding that cows called Kobe cattle are born and bred in the vicinity of Kobe, but actually, when alive, they are Tajima cattle. Mr. Yamamoto told me that he tries to convey this fact to customers visiting his restaurant as much as possible.





Meat that finally is appraised as Kobe beef is then given a certificate of authenticity, and the meat itself is given a stamp, or *nojigiku* (wild chrysanthemum, the prefectural flower of Hyogo), as evidence that it is Kobe beef. The certificates adorning a whole wall at the Bifteck Kawamura Ginza Restaurant are magnificent. The framed ones are certificates of Japanese black beef registration. They are sealed with the muzzle print of each Tajima cow that has become Kobe beef. Cattle do not have fingers, so instead of fingerprints, muzzle prints are used. They also show not only the name and date of birth of the relevant cattle but also its lineage. The bloodlines of Tajima cattle are strictly managed over several generations, and information stretches back to parent, grandparent, and even great-grandparent cattle.

The mark above the fat is the *nojigiku* (wild chrysanthemum) stamp.



The certificate of authenticity for Akane-chan after it became Kobe beef; on the bottom left is Akane-chan's muzzle print.

### **Importance of pedigree**

Regarding this strict management of bloodlines, Mr. Yamamoto declared categorically that bloodline is the most important factor in determining the quality of Kobe beef.

Tajima cattle are born entirely through artificial insemination carried out under a strict regimen. Sperm for breeding is taken only from selected studs with a high level of meat quality. Crossbreeding takes place only between Tajima cattle. Crossbreeding with foreign cattle or cattle from other prefectures in Japan is not permitted at all.

It was in the late Edo period (1603–1868) that meat consumption began in Japan. The reputation of tasty Tajima beef spread among Westerners living in Japan following its opening to the outside world, and people came to realize that its high meat quality was influenced by pedigree. Ever since then, crossbreeding of Tajima cattle with other varieties has been avoided, and it has become a kind of purebred variety rarely seen in the world.

There are only 12 selected studs that become the source of all Tajima cattle, and they are strictly managed by the Kobe Beef Marketing and Distribution Promotion Association. Of course, the studs eventually grow old and retire. What happens then is that cattle with the highest quality are selected from among cattle in wait and upgraded to new stud cattle.

### **Kobe beef: Features of its tastiness**

What is the unique quality of Kobe beef produced from this highly protected pedigree? What are the special features of its tastiness? When I put those questions to Mr. Yamamoto, his answer was the balance between fat and red meat and the sharpness of the fat. Kobe beef does not have that much fat. Even in the case of marbled beef, the ratio of red flesh and fat is about fifty-fifty. And the fat has a low melting point, so when you put it in your mouth, it quickly melts. Therefore, he told me, Kobe beef does not feel fatty and is not so heavy.



### **Award-winning “champion beef”**

Even among Kobe beef that has undergone such tight pedigree management and passed tests, there is a range of meat quality. Therefore, various Kobe beef competitive shows are held, and grand prix and excellence prizes are awarded.

In the grading of wagyu, you often see such signs as A4 and A5, but then these are



further broken down into ranks from 1 to 12. Around A4-7 is standard. A5-8 or above is the level required to receive awards at shows, and prices suddenly jump up as well. The highest rank is A5-12. There are also differences among the 12 studs that heavily influence the ranking of meat coming from the offspring of each stud.

Bifteck Kawamura is well known for purchasing Kobe beef that has been awarded grand prix or excellence prizes, in other words, award-winning “champion beef,” and serving it to customers. Among this meat, female champion beef is very rare, with only seven or eight cows selected every year. Kawamura tries to purchase as much of this meat as possible.

Incidentally, Kobe beef can only be purchased at auctions. It cannot be bought directly from contracted farmers. Meat trade professionals look at the quality and give marks, and businesses make purchases fairly at auctions. Thanks to this equitable system, the Kobe beef brand has been safeguarded with a stable level of quality, and producers have been protected from unreasonable knockdown pricing.

Anyway, the more you learn about Kobe beef, the more you want to eat it. My final question to Mr. Yamamoto was which would he recommend, sirloin or fillet? His answer was sirloin. The softness of fillet is popular, he said, but with sirloin it is easy to understand the sweetness of Kobe beef fat and the difference in taste from other wagyu. There are various ways of eating beef, he told me, but Kobe beef is best when eaten as steak. You can enjoy that feeling of wedlock when the fat and red meat blend together in your mouth.



The Bifteck Kawamura Ginza Restaurant closed its previous premises on January 12, 2025. It is scheduled to reopen in another building nearby in mid-April. The new restaurant will occupy two floors and have an increased number of seats. So if you want to taste the very best Kobe beef in Ginza, you know where to go!

## Cooperation

### **Bifteck Kawamura Ginza Restaurant**

New address after move:

10–11F, Ginza Bijutsukan Building, 6-5-6 Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo

Tel.: 03-6252-5011 (5-minute walk from Ginza Sukiwabashi Crossing)

Menu (Mainly Kobe beefsteak courses)

Kobe beefsteak course:

Lunch from ¥19,800; dinner from ¥22,000

Award-winning (champion) Kobe beefsteak course:

Lunch from ¥38,500; dinner from ¥44,000

Courses include hors d'oeuvre, soup, grilled vegetables, salad, dessert, etc.

The menu and prices shown here are as of December 2024.

Since the restaurant's stock of meat depends on delivery conditions, you are recommended to contact the restaurant beforehand.

### Website

Japanese: <https://www.bifteck.co.jp>

[https://www.bifteck.co.jp/menu/tokyo/course\\_ginza.html](https://www.bifteck.co.jp/menu/tokyo/course_ginza.html)

English: <https://www.bifteck.co.jp/en/>