



Press release
For immediate release

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Native Grape Odyssey: Getting Ready for Japan's Sophisticated Wine Market

From the 22nd to the 24th of July 2019, Native Grape Odyssey (NGO) hosted a press tour in Tokyo to present its new educational program on high quality European wines. The NGO Maestro Program is scheduled to make its debut in the Fall of 2019. During the tour, the NGO team engaged with several institutions that represent Europe in Japan as well as some of the most important personalities of the local wine scene working in the fields of wine education, commerce, and journalism. These engagements have helped to inform the approach for delivering a successful NGO Maestro Program, which is sensitive to the particular socio-economic context and nature of the local wine market.

The Native Grape Odyssey press tour in Japan ended in Tokyo on July 24th 2019, after three days of successful business meetings. The NGO team consolidated important connections with influential stakeholders in the local wine industry and European Union officials. Stevie Kim, General Coordinator of the project, introduced these key stakeholders to the NGO Maestro Program, scheduled for Fall 2019 in Tokyo. The Press Tour to Japan was the last of a series of press events, which officially presented the NGO project in three partner countries: Canada, Russia and Japan.

In Asia, the Japanese wine market at times doesn't receive the attention it should, compared for instance to the energy generated around the Chinese market. However, as [Wine Intelligence](#) notes, per capita wine consumption in Japan has risen steadily over the last decade, a trend some are referring to as a 'renaissance of wine' in the country. The Japanese market for wine is highly developed and imports (valued at \$1.65 billion in 2018) comprise seventy percent of the market. According to the Global Trade Atlas, the five major players, by value of imports in 2018 were France, Italy, Chile, USA and Spain, in order of market share. The growth of wine consumption is attributed, in part, to the proliferation of European restaurants (particularly Italian) in major cities like Tokyo. In this respect, the upcoming 2019 Rugby World Cup and 2020 Olympics in Tokyo are likely to entail a further boost in demand for European wines.

In order to understand the key drivers behind changing trends in wine consumption in Japan, it is imperative to engage with the socio-economic character of Japanese society. In particular, research and conversations had with various wine professionals over the three illuminating days in Tokyo, made it clear that dynamics of generational change, gender and culture are critical to take into account in developing a sophisticated approach to promoting European wines in Japan. For example, during a meeting with Stevie Kim in Tokyo, Davide Fantoni, the Secretary General of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan, emphasized: *"For Japanese customers, a business transaction is not only a matter of price or the product per se. It is also an emotional and cultural issue."*



The intention of this first leg of the Japanese NGO ‘odyssey’ was thus to gain insights into local contextual and cultural dynamics, in an attempt to craft a personalized educational program for Japan. A three-day press tour format facilitated this. It allowed Kim and her team to discuss the best approach for a successful delivery of the NGO Maestro Program with important stakeholders. The Japanese market is a fascinating and intricate market and understanding these nuances, with the help of our local partners, will be key to NGO’s success.



On July 23rd, Stevie Kim, General Coordinator of the NGO project, discussed the Italian wine market in Japan with Davide Fantoni, General Secretary of the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Japan.

A [2019 GAIN report](#) notes, for example, that women, although statistically consuming far less wine than their male counterparts (15% are regular drinkers, as opposed to 40% of men), are in fact the brand decisionmakers when it comes to wine since they predominantly select wines. Women also comprise 42% of professional sommeliers and 60% of wine experts, both certified by the Japanese Sommelier Association. Recognizing the significance of this local reality, the NGO team visited [Yumi Tanabe’s](#) wine school. Tanabe is also the chairperson for the renowned [Sakura Japan Women’s Wine Awards](#), a competition judged exclusively by female wine specialists.

There are also definite generational factors to consider that drive consumption trends of European wine in Japan. Older consumers (over fifty-five) still drive the Japanese wine market, especially for high quality wines, and account for around 50% of regular ‘monthly wine drinkers’, according to the 2019 [Japan Landscapes Report](#). There is a trend among younger generations to moderate their alcohol consumption, related to health concerns. However, their changing preferences have also opened new opportunities for the wine world in Japan. For example, organic and biodynamic wine is attracting a lot of attention due to the health concerns of Japanese consumers. Younger generations are also very



open-minded to trying new varieties and styles from those classically dominant among elder generations of the Japanese market.

The openness of this Japanese generation presents European wines with promising opportunities for the future, provided they are able to successfully inform and educate consumers about a wider range of native grape varieties. This is the mission of the NGO project. This optimism for the future of wine in Japan is also shared by Professor Paolo Calvetti, Director of the Italian Institute of Culture in Tokyo: "The Japanese take the quality of the product into extreme consideration. Moreover, even though they are very cautious and meticulous in their decisions, when the decision is made, they show an extraordinary determination and passion".

The NGO Maestro Program will take place in Tokyo in Fall 2019 and will be divided into two parts: a wine course and a walk-around tasting. This NGO wine course will consist of five days of intensive lectures on European grape varieties and wines and will engage professionals who are already active in the Japanese wine industry. The second part of the program will feature a walk-around tasting, allowing participants to meet eminent wine producers from Europe. Unlike the course, this second part will be open to a wider array of wine professionals, in order to compliment the strong educational approach with networking opportunities.

NGO's mission is to mentor wine "heroes" who can simplify the complex system of designations for consumers. Calvetti notes: "in interfacing with the Japanese people, it is essential to have a Japanese figure with which to dialogue and find synergies". The [GAIN report 2019](#) also notes that the Japanese market is incredibly competitive and traditional routes like directly contacting buyers can be difficult to access. It is envisioned that the professionals mentored by NGO will be able to successfully mediate between European producers and the various key actors in the Japanese market.

The above activities, co-financed by the European Union, will be completely free of charge. Those who wish to apply can do so by submitting their CV at the following address: japan.nativegrapeodyssey.com/apply-japan or by requesting further information at the following email address: info@nativegrapeodyssey.com . For future updates about the NGO Japan Maestro program, we recommend consulting the japan.nativegrapeodyssey.com website and the project's social media platforms.

About: Native Grape Odyssey is a project financed by the European Union and managed by Unione Italiana Vini and Zante Agricultural Cooperatives Union for the promotion of PDO and PGI European wines abroad, in particular in three countries: Japan, Canada and Russia. In order to achieve this, the Native Grape Odyssey educational program will organize wine seminars, workshops and b2b meetings both in these countries and in Verona, Italy, inviting wine experts and influencers from these countries. These events, realized in the span of three years (2019-21) aim at creating awareness about European native wines abroad, in particular Italian and Greek wines, which share a long tradition and a high standard of quality.