

Peace of Mind for Muslims Dining in Japan



Rexy Diane Rizkillah (right) and Nadya Oktairani Fabanyo (left) enjoy their lunch at "Shokujin" Cafeteria in Kanda University of International Studies.



At SAKURA, a Japanese restaurant in Hilton Tokyo Odaiba, halal meals certified by Nippon Asia Halal Association have been served since 2015.

Increasing numbers of Muslims are visiting Japan, partly in response to Japanese government policies for inbound travelers such as visa exemptions from 2013 for ASEAN countries. One of the top concerns for Muslims traveling to non-Muslim countries is food. The rules of Islam require that Muslims consume permissible "halal" food and drinks. Consumption of pork, alcoholic beverages, and living things containing toxins is forbidden. Also, animals consumed as meat must be slaughtered and processed in accordance with Islamic law.

NPO Nippon Asia Halal Association (NAHA) is one of the halal certification organizations in Japan. When a company or restaurant applies for certification, NAHA auditors visit their kitchen to ensure that the ingredients and equipment used meet halal standards. Muslim



Three Muslim employees work at CoCo Ichibanya Halal Akihabara, where more than 80% of the customers are foreigners.



Halal Certification Mark issued by Nippon Asia Halal Association



On-site inspection for Halal certification.

Asian languages and cultures through food. In applying for certification, the university impressed on the entire kitchen staff the necessity and value of strictly following Islamic halal laws. The cafeteria has proven a success and gained the trust of the Muslim community. When it served the *iftar* evening meal during the month of Ramadan, nearly 100 people including Muslims living in the neighborhood came to eat and celebrate. Rexy, an international student from Indonesia, remarked with a thankful smile that she finds it "very helpful to be able to have halal meals at the university. I can spend more time studying instead of having to spend that time cooking for myself. I appreciate their consideration for Muslims and the careful efforts they make to serve us."

Japan's steadily growing consciousness of halal makes it easier for Muslims to fully enjoy the delicious foods Japan has to offer.

travelers can then dine at the certified restaurants or buy the halal-approved foodstuffs with peace of mind. Although in 2013, only four Japanese companies received halal certification, this number has grown rapidly to 180 companies including high-end restaurants serving authentic Japanese cuisine. NAHA chair Dr. Saeed Akhtar, overseeing the certification process, commends Japanese as "sincere and thorough in complying with halal rules."

Akhtar notes, "Media in Islamic countries often spotlight Japan's efforts to promote halal. Japan, already a destination of choice for many Muslims, will continue to grow in popularity as its number of halal-friendly restaurants increases."

In September 2017, Curry House CoCo Ichibanya opened Halal Akihabara, the first NAHA-certified curry restaurant in the popular chain. Many travelers from overseas are now finding their way to Halal Akihabara for a variety of food items that include the popular chicken cutlet curry. Ichibanya's public relations department explained that "as people of different religions and cultures visit Japan, we wanted to develop a restaurant where Muslims could enjoy meals free from concerns about the food. Although we had some difficulty procuring the chicken and toppings, we believe our experience with this shop will help us expand our business globally in the future."

Educational organizations that accept international students are also taking steps to meet the culinary needs of Muslims. Kanda University of International Studies opened its NAHA-certified "Shokujin" Cafeteria in 2014 to give students the opportunity to better understand



Dr. Saeed Akhtar

Akhtar is Chair of NPO Nippon Asia Halal Association, which he established in 2011. He graduated from the University of Agriculture, Rawalpindi (BA) in 1991 and the University of Agriculture, Faisalabad (MSc). He received his PhD in 1999 from the Graduate School of Agricultural and Life Sciences, The University of Tokyo.