

Norwegian Salmon Sushi marks 40 years of Global culinary influence

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As International Sushi Day approaches on June 18, Norway is celebrating a milestone in global gastronomy: the 40th anniversary of introducing salmon sushi to Japan. What began as a bold trade mission in 1985 has since evolved into a worldwide culinary phenomenon.

Four decades ago, a team of Norwegians arrived in Tokyo with a vision to promote raw, high-quality Norwegian salmon as a suitable ingredient for sushi. Despite initial scepticism, their efforts laid the foundation for “Project Japan” – a pioneering initiative that would redefine both the global seafood industry and sushi itself.

“Sushi has always been an iconic part of Japanese culture, but the use of raw salmon was unheard of until the 1980s,” recalls Bjørn Eirik Olsen, one of the original project leaders. “We never imagined it would become a global trend.”

The Norwegian Seafood Council (NSC) estimates that today, nearly 30 per cent of all Norwegian salmon is consumed as raw sushi. From traditional sushi rolls to modern poke bowls, raw salmon has become a culinary staple in kitchens worldwide.

“Norwegian salmon wouldn’t be the global favourite it is today without the help of sushi,” says Christian Chrøner, CEO of the NSC. “This anniversary is a celebration of a shared legacy between Norway and Japan.”

In 1980, Norway exported just 2 tonnes of salmon to Japan. Two decades later, exports soared to over 45,000 tonnes. Today, Norway supplies over half the global salmon market, reaching 113 countries.

“Japan brought Norwegian salmon to the world,” says Johan Kvalheim, NSC’s Director in Japan. “It’s a story of trust, innovation, and culinary diplomacy that changed food culture forever.”