

Ready-to-Eat Food Trends in Japan

Japanese food, known in Japan, as [washoku](#) (和食), is still enjoying an unprecedented boom— even years after UNESCO declared Japanese cuisine to be an Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2013.

A survey by the Institute of Food Technologists last year, involving consumers across 24 global markets found Japanese food to be the third most-favourite international cuisine behind Italian and Chinese foods. Even the ready-to-eat food or meals in Japan -- defined as “food or a meal that can be eaten without cooking or heating such as lunch boxes and daily dishes with a short shelf life -- is a big hit for its convenience.

In fact, it was a Japanese company that developed the technologies which led the way to the popularisation of ready-to-eat foods in retort pouches and their entry into markets around the world.

The country’s marriage rate and age are also decreasing, leading to a greater number of single-person households. Along with this, more women are entering the labour market, meaning there is less time for cooking and for eating together. All these factors, further pushed by the pandemic, are creating more demand for ready-to-eat meals and home delivery.

The aging population is also contributing to this, as many elderly consumers prefer the ease of prepare meals. To top it off, the sales of ready-to-eat food are growing every year and according to [Statista](#), revenue in the ready-to-eat meals segment in Japan could grow to US\$38.2 million this year alone.

Often, the main products of these ready-to-eat food suppliers are cooked rice and daily dishes, namely lunch boxes, rice balls, sandwiches, croquettes, and vegetable salads in the Tokyo metropolitan area. These products are sold mainly via convenience stores, specialty stores, and food supermarkets.



Even instant ramen is a staple for college students and those who prefer to eat out. To be fair, Japan is known as the land where instant noodles or instant ramen originated. Today there are several thousands of instant noodles available with different flavours and noodle types available. However, there are other types of meals that come in an instant form.



Even the bento box, a Japanese-style lunchbox, is a convenient way for many Japanese people to enjoy their midday meal. There are numerous types of bento to enjoy.

The *makunouchi* (between act) bento is one of the most common. It is characterized as being a two-section box that can be found in convenience stores, markets, and department shops. One side will contain rice, while the other will hold an assortment of colourful side dishes.



Then there is the popular convenience store staple in Japan, *katsu sandos* or better known as sandwiches. It's a grab-and-go snack popular for picnics, quick lunches, or late-night eating and available at nearly every Japanese mini-mart. Besides *sandos*, *onigiri* or rice ball is another one of Japan's easiest and cheapest convenience store snacks.

As the name suggests, rice is moulded into a triangle or circle, stuffed with a variety of different fillings, and wrapped with a crispy seaweed sheet. It's a great pick me up to enjoy at any time of day.

Lately, all these aforementioned ready-to-eat meals and more, have come to be sold online due to their excellent shelf life, enabling consumers around the world to enjoy specialty foods from around Japan, even while travel has been discouraged to prevent the spread of Covid-19. All while becoming an integral part of the eating habits of Japanese people, both in normal times and in times of emergencies.

Images source: AFP

[Register to access Food Japan 2021 ONLINE](#) and discover new and innovative technology and ways to better your food or restaurant business!