

## Pavilion Organizer - CZECH REPUBLIC

### An Interview with Ambassador H.E. Mr. Tomas Dub, Czech Republic

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#### **Q. Can we start off our interview with your brief introduction, Mr. Ambassador?**

I arrived in Japan in September 2014. It has been great honor and great experience ever since. I enjoy the culture and people all over Japan, while traveling to many different prefectures. My first visit to Japan was in 2006 for just a week as a member of a delegation of Czech parliament representatives. However, my first touch with Japan goes back to my childhood. My schoolmate was half Czech, half Japanese, and his father was a Japanese professor who did a Czech study in Tokyo University of Foreign Languages.

Czech Republic is a middle-sized country in the center of Europe with long and interesting history. Our economy is focused mainly on industrial production. Agriculture has an important place, as it is not only about products, it is also our heritage, pride and excellence. We are part of FOODEX since 2014, offering traditional Czech beverages and food, which has a great potential to succeed in the Japanese market.

Czech and Japan have long diplomatic and business relations. Premium Japanese beers are made with Czech hops for more than one hundred years. Recently, the ASAHI group bought one of the biggest and famous breweries in the world, Czech Pilsner Urquell, which is the brewery where pilsner type of beer was invented. For me, this is just a logical step in our history of trust and understanding. Long lasting relationship and history as these, create opportunities for future collaboration.

**Q. What are the main food and beverage export items from Czech, and to what regions & countries are they being exported?**

Hops, milk, livestock, beer, grain, sugar and malt are our traditional export items. We also export wine, powder milk and cereals. Powder milk is exported to China and South Korea. Czech beer is also exported to South Korea, but since Japan has many good beer producers, they are the main importers of Czech hops.

**Q. How is the situation of your exportation to Japan? Are they growing?**

Exports are always connected with imports. Many Japanese investors are also exporters to Czech, and they are exporting back to Japan, but mostly it's not food industry, but automotive.

Czech accounts for 10% of the jobs created by Japanese companies in Europe, which is quite significant for a nation with only 10 million people. Czech is a major Japanese-concentrated country with 240 Japanese companies including Toyota and Panasonic.

For the food industry, Japan is our 2nd most important agricultural export market in Asia following China, and Japanese companies are the 2nd biggest foreign exporters to our country.

**Q. What do you see as chances and difficulties of Japan market? Are there any differences when comparing with China, South Korea etc.?**

The biggest advantage of Japan is their fair, clear, and stable business environment. Business has always its ups and downs, and the rules differ by country, but at least, you won't get unexpected attack from nowhere in Japan. You can depend on the rules and on your partner once you get to know them. Even without any signed agreement, your Japanese partner may fulfill the obligation. It's very far away from our country, but it's safe, and in this term Japan is a great market

On the other hand, Japanese market is big and very specific, not an easy one to enter. There are many barriers, not just the tariffs, language but the habits especially in the food industry. For instance, Japanese don't use so much salt and spicy ingredients when compared, which I personally like. Also, Japanese people prefer domestic production, which is quite natural. If you want to be successful in this market, you have to offer something that is competitive to domestic products, not solely depending on price but high quality is required.

**Q. When did you start exhibiting at FOODEX? What are voices and feedback about FOODEX from participated companies of your country?**

Czech started from 2014 edition with only one booth. Now it is 150sqm and as you can see from our growing presence, the feedback is very positive. We are seeing contracts already

signed.

For many Czech companies, it's even difficult to imagine that it's possible for them to export to Japan. Of course, there were some exporters during the Soviet Union time until the 1989 revolution, but not for agricultural products. At that time, Czech didn't have active policy to promote Czech agricultural products to Japan.

Japanese market is specific and open but with many barriers. We're far away and the first feeling is that it's difficult and not simple. It is improving year by year, and now how to persuade the major companies to come to Japan is a challenge for us. We know the vast size of Japanese market and its focus on quality, and it is an international market that serves as an example for the neighboring countries, so impact can be higher. Still it takes effort and time to let them understand of the possibility and openness of Japanese market.

**Q. What are your plans and marketing strategies for Czech food and beverages to take further root into Japanese market?**

One plan is for the Ministry of Agriculture to send a specialist to the embassy here in Tokyo. We are still in the first step to have a presence in the Japanese market. Also, EU and Japan are expecting to enter the EPA probably this year or early next year, reducing obstacles between Europe and between Czech. It will provide major opportunities for more Czech companies to enter the Japanese market.

**Q. Where do you recommend for Czech restaurant in Tokyo?**

There are only one or two in Tokyo, which is a pity. But there is one nice Czech restaurant Kanazawa, named "Dub." It happens to be my name, but I don't own it, the owner is Mr. Kashiwa and Dub is the Czech translation for Kashiwa, oak in English.

In Kagoshima, there is a Czech village. It's not that Czechs are living there, but there are restaurants owned by Japanese. Interesting place.

**Q. What do you like about Japanese food?**

Wagyu is a bit expensive but it's the best beef around the world. I like ramen and sushi too. Even if I'm not able to read kanji on the menu, I can just order something and it's always good.

**Q. Do you have any additional comments or supplementary remarks?**

We have successful presence in FOODEX, but this is the beginning for us to explore the food industry and Japanese market. With the expected free trade agreement between EU and Japan, I hope to boost this activity. We hope not only to increase business but also to create an important market in a wider sense with food and other sectors as well.

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