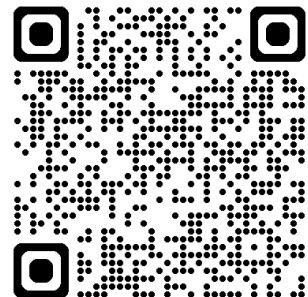


# Restaurants turn to digital tools to streamline service



<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20251023205215314/>

Japan gets much praise for the service in its restaurants, but it may be facing limitations. The pay in the industry is low, and English is needed more than ever with all the foreign visitors. Some of these needs are being met by AI and other innovations but can the great service be maintained?

This is a specialty restaurant in Tokyo serving traditional fare.

Hi there! How can I help you today?

What is your specialty?

One of our specialties is Kawara Soba, a dish from Yamaguchi Prefecture with green tea noodles served on a hot tile.

Since April, this restaurant has had a speaking AI tool that allows customers to order in English.

Your glass is starting to look a little lonely? Let me introduce some recommended items.

By analyzing an image of the table, the AI determines the glasses are half empty and suggests additional orders proactively.

Sometimes the staff feel they can't serve customers due to the language barrier. This tool not only

improves customer satisfaction, it might even increase average customer spending as well.

There are plans in the works to offer services in Chinese, Korean, and Thai. Despite Japan's reputation for great service, tipping is uncommon. But that too could be changing. This restaurant has introduced a system to make tipping easy, enhancing the staff's income. The popular taco shop is located in Yokosuka city near Yokohama. There is a US military base nearby and about 70% of the customers are foreigners including tourists from overseas. The restaurant already had a system for customers to order by smartphone. In June it added a function for tips.

I generally tip some amount.

When settling the bill, customers can simply choose to tip from 5% to 25% and the amount is added on. It's been well received as it eliminates the hassle of calculating the tip, making payment smoother.

If it's easy to tip then yeah, why not?

The restaurant now gets about \$700 in tips per month. The money goes towards staff meals and gatherings.

Tips improve our motivation and give us a sense of accomplishment, so everyone is happy about it.

The system reportedly had about 1000 stores participating within 3 months.

We want to refine the features so both restaurant workers and customers can enjoy their dining experience with a sense of pleasure.

Overseas tourism in Japan is greater than ever, raising the demands on restaurants to satisfy both customers and workers. User friendly digital innovations could be the way forward.

Source: (NHK World News)

**Now discuss the questions with a partner.**

1. What's your opinion about AI servers?
2. If tipping became mainstream in Japan, how would you feel?
3. How important is customer service for you?
4. Can you think of any other strategies to help restaurants deal with the influx of foreign customers?
5. How do you feel about machines giving suggestions like "Your glass looks lonely"?