Japan's Tabletop Ordering Model Eases Language Barriers and Labor Shortages, Boosting Tourism Dining Experience

Tabletop ordering has become a trend in Japanese restaurants, allowing overseas consumers to order food at their seats using dedicated machines. This provides multilingual menus and solves the problem of an insufficient workforce.

Many restaurants have begun to use tabletop ordering to solve language and labor shortage issues. (Photo via MERXWIRE)

OSAKA, JAPAN (MERXWIRE) – Japan's tourism sector is set to experience a 30% increase in foreign visitors by 2025, with food experiences being the top activity for tourists. However, language barriers and labor shortages have posed challenges for foreign diners. In response, many Japanese restaurants are adopting tabletop ordering systems, which offer multilingual menus and reduce the need for staff. This innovation not only helps foreign visitors navigate language differences but also addresses labor shortages in the hospitality industry.

MERXWIRE's latest "Japanese Tabletop Ordering Market Analysis Report" points out that this technology is gaining popularity and is expected to continue growing, as it enhances both customer experience and operational efficiency in Japan's dining sector. Make forward-looking predictions about future developments based on comprehensive data and market trends.

The Japan Tourism Agency released the "2023 Foreign Tourist Consumption Trend Report," which shows that the most anticipated activities for foreign tourists before their visit to Japan are eating Japanese food (83.2%), shopping (60.9%), and walking in the city center (51.7 %). This survey found that overseas tourists are looking forward to tasting delicious food, but in an environment with different languages, choosing food that suits their personal preferences becomes a problem.

A survey conducted by Recruit Co., Ltd. on the usage and intentions of restaurant ordering tools among Japanese people showed that 78.9% of respondents had experience using desktop ordering, and the usage rate has been increasing year by year. Tabletop ordering is a mode of ordering food through a dedicated machine installed at the operator's seat. There is almost no difference in usage trends and acceptance among different generations. This applies not only to people in Japan but also to foreign tourists who need language support.

The tabletop ordering model makes it more convenient for overseas travelers to order food and increases their willingness to consume. (Photo via MERXWIRE)

In addition to multi-language support, the desktop ordering system also solves the problem of the catering industry's insufficient workforce. According to a survey by the TEIKOKU DATABANK, the catering industry has the most significant shortage of informal workers, with a proportion of 85.2%. Under such circumstances, providing tourists with complete information and services is

difficult.

Many tabletop ordering systems offer multilingual support, allowing foreign tourists to select the appropriate language, read the menu descriptions, and easily order through photo introductions. In addition, consumers can also receive recommended menu information while ordering or waiting for their meals, increasing their willingness to purchase additional items.

Shinsaibashi in Osaka is one of the most popular shopping spots for tourists. Many restaurants in the shopping street adopt tabletop ordering mode, which is convenient for visiting Japanese consumers to dine. A Taiwanese tourist in Shinsaibashi said: I really like traveling to Japan alone and can taste Japanese food everywhere. Before going to Japan, I would research the food at each tourist attraction online. I usually choose a restaurant with servers who speak Chinese, or that provides Chinese ordering machines so I can choose the food that meets my expectations and avoid ordering food that I don't like.

Although tabletop ordering is initially expensive for many restaurants, the growing staff shortage, high labor costs, and the need to support menus in foreign languages make this ordering model a restaurant trend.

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