Non-Japanese only' Okinawa eatery turns tables

In a small section of Chatan Town, central Okinawa, is a restaurant that serves sushi, with a twist — it only serves non-Japanese guests.

The restaurant, Sushi Zen, was opened in 2007 by Yukio Okuhama, a former businessman who decided to open the restaurant after years of experience in the food industry.

"When I was a child, I lived in a house that belonged to a Japanese family," Okuhama told The Japan Times. "I was always curious about how they lived."

"When I was a teenager, I went to the United States and saw how people lived there. I was shocked by the differences," he continued.

Okuhama decided to open Sushi Zen as a way to bridge the gap between Japanese and non-Japanese cultures.

"Sushi Zen is like a bridge," Okuhama explained. "It's a place where people from different backgrounds can come together and enjoy a meal."

Okuhama realized that his restaurant was not popular with the local Japanese community, as they had a negative reaction to his decision.

"I think they were afraid that my restaurant would only cater to non-Japanese customers," Okuhama said.

But Okuhama was determined to continue his mission.

"I didn't give up," he said. "I knew I had to do something to make people understand my intentions."

Okuhama decided to implement a policy where only non-Japanese customers were allowed to enter.

"I thought this would show people that I was serious about my mission," Okuhama said.

Despite the negative reaction from the local Japanese community, Okuhama's restaurant has been successful.

"I've had many non-Japanese customers who have enjoyed their meals at Sushi Zen," Okuhama said.

"I think they've come to understand that my restaurant is not about excluding Japanese customers," he continued.

Okuhama's decision to only serve non-Japanese customers has been met with mixed reactions from the local Japanese community.

"I think some people think I'm crazy," Okuhama said.

"But I don't care," he added.

Okuhama is determined to continue his mission to bridge the gap between Japanese and non-Japanese cultures.

"I'll keep doing what I'm doing," he said.

"I believe that Sushi Zen is a symbol of hope for the future."