In Tokyo, nothing is too good for your pet

by MELINDA JOE

Whether you're looking for a birthday cake for your beagle, or oxygen therapy for your feline, you'll find no corners cut in the pet scene in Tokyo.

Japan has become a nation of animal lovers. According to the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association of Japan, the number of domestic cats and dogs in the country stands at more than 26 million, up from 17.8 million 10 years ago. Many cafes and shops now offer treats designed for pets, and there are several places for owners to take their furry friends out for a day on the town.

“Everything is fresh and healthy,” says Tatsuhiko Matsumura, who explains that the dog-menu ingredients are the same as those used in the signboard dishes for people. “There are no additives — it's all natural and no nonsense.” The dog verson is completely additive-free. “We don't use any preservatives, or salt,” he adds.

For most of Japan's dog owners, pet time equals playtime. At Wag Style in Yoyogi Park, the aroma of dog treats invades the shop, and large dogs are allowed to play with Akane, a large and active red Boxer, at the back.

The staff at Copan has since expanded to include two more members of Sakuma's staff. When the front door opens, the dogs rush to greet customers with excited barks — a canine version of the Japanese greeting “Irasshaimase!”

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The cafe was originally a showroom for Air Press, a company that began importing oxygen therapy equipment from the United States in 2002. Air Press started experimenting with hyperbaric oxygen chambers for pets four years ago and is now manufacturing the machines.

The cafes and shops are aiming to be more fun for owners than for pets. Judging by most dogs' initial balking at the carbonation, the drink could be more fun for owners than for pets.

If all that still isn't enough pet pampering, there's always the Wag Style dog cafe and grooming lounge at Wag Style in Yoyogi Park. The cafe, which features a relaxation lounge where owners and pets can chill out in separate oxygen chambers, features a relaxation lounge where both owners and pets can chill out in separate oxygen chambers.

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