



Joji Sugawara

Country/ Region: Mexico (Mexico City)

Age: 68

Current Occupation: Owner, Restaurant DARUMA,
SUSHI-ZEN,
Senior Adviser, the Nichiboku Kyokai
(Mexican Japanese Association)

- **Contribution to the dissemination and familiarization of Japanese Cuisine in Mexico**
- Mr. Sugawara modified sushi to suit locals' palates and brought a big sushi boom in Mexico. He created an opportunity for Mexicans to try Japanese food. It is no exaggeration to say that Mr. Sugawara established the style of sushi Mexican people are enjoying today, as locals put it.
- He opened a conveyor-belt-sushi bar, which serves authentic sushi, for Japanese people living in Mexico in 2006. He plays a huge role in the development of sushi culture in Mexico.

Mr. Sugawara left for Mexico in 1967 and opened a Japanese restaurant – the first DARUMA restaurant – in 1975. The restaurant, which mainly served fried food, such as *kushiage* (deep fried skewered meat, vegetables and seafood), as well as sashimi, lactobacillus beverages, etc., became very popular, playing a pioneering role in the dissemination of Japanese food in Mexico. In 1982, he opened the second DARUMA restaurant, which brought a sushi boom to Mexico. Subsequently, responding to the strong request by customers, the third restaurant was opened in 1988. The large premises are also equipped with iron plates to serve grilled dishes. The DARUMA chain celebrates its 42nd year anniversary this year since the opening of the first restaurant.

Currently, Mr. Sugawara is operating a chain of five Daruma Restaurants and fast-food restaurants SUSHI-ZEN. His premises are widely known as well-established Japanese restaurants in Mexico, contributing to the promotion of Japanese food. Mr. Sugawara may be justly regarded as the forerunner in the sushi boom in Mexico.

He also acknowledges the importance of the diffusion and handing down of Japanese culture, especially the Japanese language, in foreign countries. Over the past 10 years, he worked for the diffusion of Japanese culture and language in Mexico as he successively held the posts of the director of *Instituto Cultural Mexicano Japonés*, a member of the board of directors of *Liceo Mexicano Japonés* (Japan-Mexico Institute) and the president of the Nichiboku Kyokai.

In 2013, Mr. Sugawara was awarded the Foreign Minister's Commendation by the Foreign Minister of Japan for his contribution to the promotion of mutual understanding between Mexico and Japan. He was also commended for his achievements by the Mexico Restaurant Association in 2014.