

ISLAND LIFE



UNFORGETTABLE

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Celebrated Tasmanian sushi chef Masaaki Koyama rarely forgets a face. Even if you bought one of his mouth-watering creations 10 years ago, there's a good chance he will remember you.

"I'm always happy to see customers coming back again," he says. "People return from all over Australia and overseas but I have many return customers from Tasmania."

Koyama is considered one of Australia's most talented sushi-makers, turning out such beautifully presented creations they wouldn't look out of place at Mona.

But when he first opened Masaaki's Sushi in sleepy Geeveston, most of the locals had never tried Japanese food before. Business was so slow back then he had many months of eating leftover rice.

These days he'd starve to death if he relied on leftovers because he always sells out. About 300 people dine-in or take away from his tiny restaurant each Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Some line up for more than two hours.

Koyama has closed Masaaki's Sushi until November and he and his partner Lucy Whitehead, the English tutor he fell in love with in Japan, are travelling to his hometown of Wakayama for research and relaxation.

When they return to Tasmania, they will finalise architectural drawings that will see him move from his current digs into the old Anglican Church building across the road.

He says the exciting move, likely in the new year, wouldn't have been possible without the support of his local community.

Not only will Koyama's kitchen size double, he will have a retail space and plans to sell sushi and sushi-making equipment including knives. He is also considering running sushi-making classes.

"I've been working in that small space for a decade now, and it's gone so quickly, but this is exciting because I want to improve the takeaway and dining experience. It's an amazing feeling to create sushi that makes people so happy," he says.

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