

B2-C1 Worksheet: Are British-Style Pubs a Threat to Japanese Izakayas? - 10 June 2026

Article

Japan's izakaya, the informal restaurant-bars where workers once went to wind down over food and drink, are under unusual pressure. According to a recent Guardian report, closures reached a record high in the first four months of 2026. Rising food, drink and staffing costs are forcing owners to tighten their belts, while younger customers are drinking less and old-style afterwork parties are fading. Some independent venues also struggle to cash in on Japan's tourist boom because menus, customs or dishes can put off visitors who are unsure what to order.

In Tokyo's Shimokitazawa district, one manager said the streets no longer stay busy into the early hours, as people got used to cheaper nights at home during the pandemic. Other izakaya owners have tried to sit down, work out their weak spots and keep up with changing habits. In Saitama, one seafood izakaya adjusted prices, sped up service and tried to draw in more women's groups, even though they often drink less. The aim is not simply to sell more beer, but to preserve a social atmosphere that many regulars still value.

The unexpected challenger is HUB, a chain of British-style pubs with sport on big screens, anime collaborations and a bar-ordering system. It has taken on fans, tourists and younger drinkers, and now runs 110 pubs across Japan. Even so, izakaya still number about 17,000, so fish and chips are unlikely to knock out raw fish and sake any time soon. The real question is whether traditional venues can adapt without losing the charm that made customers come back in the first place.

True/False

Decide if each statement is True (T) or False (F).

1. The article says izakaya closures reached a record high early in 2026.
2. Young customers are drinking more than previous generations.
3. Some independent izakaya find it difficult to benefit from tourism.
4. The pandemic helped some people become used to cheaper nights at home.
5. One seafood izakaya tried to attract more women's groups.
6. HUB is described as a chain of American-style diners.
7. British-style pubs have already replaced izakaya across most of Japan.
8. The article suggests adaptation may be necessary, but cultural charm still matters.

Phrase Match

Match the phrases (1-10) to the correct definitions (A-J).

Phrases (1-10)	Definitions (A-J)
1. wind down	A. to become comfortable with something
2. tighten their belts	B. to defeat or remove a rival
3. cash in on	C. to relax after work or stress
4. put off	D. to find an answer by thinking carefully
5. got used to	E. to begin a serious discussion or planning session
6. sit down	F. to attract people or business
7. work out	G. to make someone not want to do something
8. keep up with	H. to save money by spending less
9. draw in	I. to move at the same speed as changes
10. knock out	J. to benefit from an opportunity

Synonym Match

Match the words (1-10) to the correct synonyms (A-J).

Words (1-10)	Synonyms (A-J)
1. informal	A. appeal
2. pressure	B. uncertain
3. record	C. casual
4. venues	D. partnerships
5. unsure	E. highest
6. regulars	F. strain
7. unexpected	G. long-established
8. collaborations	H. surprising
9. charm	I. places
10. traditional	J. frequent customers

Use the new language

Please choose 5 words or phrases and make your own sentence using the new word or phrase.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Discussion Questions

Student A	Student B
1. Have you ever been to an izakaya or a British-style pub?	1. Why are traditional nightlife venues often vulnerable when social habits change?
2. Where do people usually go to wind down after work in your country?	2. Should izakaya cash in on tourism, or would that damage their original identity?
3. Would unfamiliar food put you off entering a local restaurant abroad?	3. Can businesses keep up with younger customers without losing older regulars?
4. Do you prefer small independent venues or large chains?	4. Is the decline of afterwork drinking culture mostly positive or negative?
5. What kind of atmosphere makes you want to come back to a restaurant?	5. How can small restaurants tighten their belts without damaging quality?
6. Do younger people drink less alcohol where you live?	6. Are British-style pubs a real threat to izakaya, or just a useful alternative?
7. Could sport on big screens draw you into a pub?	7. Should traditional venues use anime, sport or online culture to draw in new customers?
8. Which traditional food or drink place near you deserves more customers?	8. What does this story show about the relationship between culture and economics?

Answer Key

True/False: 1=T, 2=F, 3=T, 4=T, 5=T, 6=F, 7=F, 8=T

Phrase Match: 1=C, 2=H, 3=J, 4=G, 5=A, 6=E, 7=D, 8=I, 9=F, 10=B

Synonym Match: 1=C, 2=F, 3=E, 4=I, 5=B, 6=J, 7=H, 8=D, 9=A, 10=G

Example sentences with the phrases

1. After a long week, many workers go out to wind down with friends.
2. Small restaurant owners may have to tighten their belts when costs rise.
3. Some bars hope to cash in on a rise in foreign tourism.
4. Unfamiliar dishes can put off customers who are not adventurous.
5. Many people got used to staying at home during the pandemic.
6. The managers decided to sit down and discuss a new plan.
7. They needed to work out why younger customers were not returning.
8. Traditional businesses have to keep up with changing habits.
9. Sport and music can draw in people who would not normally visit.
10. New pubs are unlikely to knock out izakaya culture completely.