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Japan overtakes Mexico as Australia’s biggest foreign beer supplier

Imported beer is gaining on domestic mass-market labels, pushing retailers and brewers to tailor shelves and styles to local tastes

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Japan has become Australia’s largest foreign supplier of beer, overtaking Mexico as imported beer demand shifts toward Japanese brands and styles, according to Endeavour Group’s State of Hops Report.

The report points to a broader change in Australia’s premium beer market, where imported beers are gaining ground against standard domestic mass-market labels, especially in major cities. It found that Japan now leads at the national level, although Mexico still holds stronger positions in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia.

Endeavour Group said Japanese beer sales are concentrated in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, while South Australia and Western Australia lag behind the national trend. The company’s analysis, drawing on sales patterns at Dan Murphy’s and BWS, linked those differences to local demographics and income levels.

In Western Australia, more than one-third of postcodes have a high concentration of residents born in the United Kingdom, the research found. That pattern aligns with stronger sales of British beer imports in the state and has pushed retailers to move away from broad national stocking plans toward store-by-store assortments tailored to local demand.

The report also found that imported beer performs best in affluent neighborhoods. In postcodes ranked highly on the SEIFA socioeconomic index, consumers showed a strong preference for both imported beer and domestic craft offerings.

That shift is starting to reshape decisions across the drinks business, from retail shelves to brewery production. As consumers seek global flavor profiles, Australian brewers are responding with locally made versions of international styles in an effort to keep production and revenue at home while matching changing tastes.

Industry analysis cited in local reporting said independent breweries have begun releasing domestic takes on styles such as Japanese rice lagers and Mexican-style lagers. The strategy allows retailers, bars and restaurants to tap into international beer trends without relying as heavily on overseas shipping or facing volatile supply costs.

Examples already on the market include beers such as Four Pines Japanese Lager and Balter Cerveza, which reflect demand for imported flavor profiles while being brewed domestically. The trend matters for the wider beverage sector because it shows how consumer interest in imported identities can influence not only trade flows but also

product development, merchandising and pricing across beer portfolios.

The report described the premium import segment as undergoing structural change as brewers and retailers adapt to more localized demand. For domestic producers, the challenge is not only competing with foreign brands for shelf space but also finding ways to coexist with them by offering Australian-made alternatives that appeal to the same drinkers.