



UKTI opens doors for Christopher Raeburn in Japan

Fast facts

Company: Christopher Raeburn

Industry: Creative

Target Market: Japan

UKTI Services: Trade Missions; Passport to Export; Tradeshow Access Programme

www.christopherraeburn.co.uk



Through trade missions, Passport to Export and its Tradeshow Access Programme, UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) has supported Christopher Raeburn as he makes a name for his fashion brand in Japan.

Kent-born designer Christopher Raeburn launched his fashion label in East London in 2008. A graduate of the Royal College of Art in London, Christopher has come a long way since his first collection of women's wear, made from decommissioned military parachutes. Since then, he has expanded to include menswear and now accessories, all the while focused on three core themes: Remade in England, using reconstructed and reworked fabrics to produce limited edition collections; lightweight, which has become the biggest part of the business, working with recycled fibres to create showerproof and breathable garments; and British, through which he supports his domestic market by partnering with a different British mill each season.

Today, Christopher Raeburn designs are sold through 30 stockists worldwide, including in Paris, Moscow, Milan and Beijing.

"We focus on quality and innovation in all that we do," says Christopher. "I am particularly drawn to the functionality of military materials. These are fabrics that you can't buy on a roll if you wanted to, but they are very hard-wearing, waterproof and can be transformed into high quality, functional and elegant outerwear. There are warehouses with thousands of square feet of military surplus sitting around, and for me there's a buzz about giving it a new lease of life. The fact that this is also an ethical way of sourcing materials is a wonderful bonus."

Going global

In March 2010, Christopher visited Japan for the first time with 'Wear Europe', an EU-backed Gateway programme promoting British design brands. Exhibiting at London Fashion Week that September, he met a Fashion

Sector Specialist from UKTI who was impressed with his collection. She advised that the provenance and quality of the fabrics made the products well suited to the Japanese market, and invited Christopher to join a UKTI Trade Mission to Japan due to take place in November. He received a grant through UKTI's Tradeshow Access Programme towards the cost of the trip, which saw him exhibiting alongside 20 other British designers at the GREAT Britain showcase in Tokyo.

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Christopher Raeburn, fashion designer

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There he met potential customers and partners and got a feel for the local fashion industry. Following this successful trip, Christopher has joined two further trade missions to Japan, in 2011 and 2012.

“I wouldn’t have gone to Japan on my own yet, but UKTI Trade Missions have been a great way for me to explore the potential there for my collections in person,” says Christopher. “An invitation from UKTI really means something, so we got to meet lots of useful people. At the start, people didn’t really know my name or what we were doing. I myself was still learning and working out how I wanted to grow my label. Thanks to UKTI, we’ve been able to showcase our work in a very professional environment and learn more about the territory and local stores.”

Comprehensive support

In early 2012, before returning to Japan for his third UKTI Trade Mission, Christopher took part in Passport to Export, the UKTI programme that gives exporting companies the tools they need to grow their business internationally. UKTI’s Fashion Sector Specialist provided very hands on support, accompanying Christopher to meetings with potential partners in both the UK and Japan. One of these was with Yagi, a top Japanese agent.

Christopher Raeburn has now secured a number of partnerships and wholesale accounts in Japan, and is in advanced stage talks with a potential local agent. The company is also working in collaboration with Japanese bag manufacturer Porter on Remade in Japan, a small range of bags from UK-sourced fabrics.

Meanwhile, UKTI continues to support Christopher Raeburn as it expands into other markets. For example, the company has participated in the UKTI-supported London Showrooms in Paris, London and Los Angeles, organised by the British Fashion Council.

“Consistency is very important when breaking into a new market,” says Christopher. “We need to make sure that people know who we are and that we are serious. Making repeat trips to Japan with UKTI has allowed us to build and consolidate relationships with local businesses. As a result, we have secured orders with new stores and we’ve also been growing partnerships through which we are really accessing the local market. The support we have had from UKTI’s staff in both the UK and Japan has been outstanding. Not only does our association with them give us credibility and open doors for us, but we can use them as a trusted sounding board, and benefit from their own experience in the fashion industry. We’ve grown a great deal over the past few years, and UKTI has been very influential in this.”

The UK and Japan

Japan is the third largest economy in the world. With GDP twice the size of the UK and GDP per person nine times that of China, Japan remains the high-tech powerhouse economy of Asia - with the second highest spend worldwide on R&D, a hunger for IP and new trends, and an increasingly globalised outlook.

Exports from the UK to Japan are worth £9.6 billion a year and 450 British companies have operations there. British companies are succeeding in Japan across a wide range of manufacturing, consumer goods, high tech and services sectors.

For further information about business opportunities in Japan, visit www.ukti.gov.uk/japan

Helping you attend tradeshow

Taking part in overseas exhibitions is an effective way for you to test markets, attract customers, appoint agents or distributors and make sales. UK Trade & Investment’s Tradeshow Access Programme (TAP) provides grant support for eligible SME firms to attend trade shows overseas.

Participation is usually as part of a group, a great advantage for inexperienced businesses, and is usually led by one of our Accredited Trade Organisations (ATOs). ATOs work with UK Trade & Investment to raise the profile of UK groups and sectors at key exhibitions.

For further information please visit www.ukti.gov.uk

UKTI was delighted to support Christopher Raeburn in its business overseas.



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