



Ryoko Sezutsu

On “cozy” surfing, leading longboarding in Japan, and building community around local food and environmental awareness

Japan is known for its bold cultural juxtapositions, where deep currents of tradition flow beneath neon bullet trains blazing the way to a high-tech tomorrow. It is a land where the ancient and the futuristic coexist.

Ryoko, the youngest of three sisters, was born and raised amongst the towering glass, steel, and bright lights of Tokyo. But her family were beach people at heart. Their lives were irrevocably altered by the free and easy vibes of a surfing life as depicted in *The Endless Summer*. More specifically, Ryoko's dad, Nori, was enamored with Californian surfer Robert August. Nori eventually founded a surf shop and became Japan's official dealer of Robert August Surfboards.

“My parents were both into surfing and bodyboarding, so we spent almost every weekend at the beach. For me, the beach was this massive sandbox where I could have magical fun. I definitely spent a lot more time with the sea breeze and the sunshine, running on the beach barefoot, than any other kids around.”

The beach had captured Ryoko's imagination and led her to the surfing hub of Chiba Prefecture, situated on the Bōsō Peninsula due east of Tokyo. There, at 15, she tried longboarding for the first time. Ryoko remembers the feeling of sliding, slowly and gently, across a lapping knee-high lick of Pacific on a 9' soft top, the breeze brushing her smiling face. “I've been a longboarder ever since that moment,” she recalls.

Ryoko has gone on to become one of Japan's standout longboarders, having traveled to freesurf and casually compete for her country over the last decade. In 2015, she was invited to participate in the Deus Ladies' Log Fest 9 Foot & Single, an alternative-craft showcase of some of the most skilled longboarders in the world, where “Ryobay” (her nickname) held her own amongst Bali's Canggu River mouth and international standouts like Kassia Meador and Leah Dawson. Highlighting Ryoko's outstanding poise, Leah Dawson reflects, “Ryoko is an elegant artist in life. Her approach on a wave is quiet and patient, and even in turbulent waves she has a feminine grace in her composure.”