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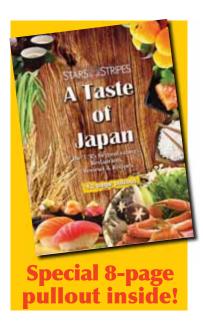
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Monte Dauphin

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Publishing and Media Design Editor **Publishing and Media Design Writers**

ChiHon Kim Shoji Kudaka Takahiro Takiguchi

Layout Designers

Mamoru Inoue Yukiyo Oda Yuko Okazaki Kayoko Shimoda

Multimedia Consultants

Max Genao Jason Lee Doug Johnson Hans Simpson Chae Pang Yi Gianni Yo Robert Zuckerman Gianni Youn

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KAWAGOE: Walk back in time

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

castle and numerous Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. Free parking is available, and the Koedo Kawagoe Loop Bus is a convenient way to get around to all the sights. You'll find many shops, cafes and other attractions which make Kawagoe a great, quick getaway.

Some of the must-see spots in Kawagoe include:

• Kawagoe Castle and City Museum — The castle is a symbol of the feudal domain and a glimpse into history. A grand hall with gorgeous pictures on the walls and the drawing room with its low ceiling, which was designed to help prevent sword attacks, are must-see. Nearby, the City

Museum features a variety of exhibits that chronicle history of the the castle town, miniature with models and reproductions of a local school classroom and "dagashiya"

sweets shop from the 1970s.

• Traditional Street — A walk down Kawagoe's main street is like taking a walk back in time. The tiled roofs and historic buildings are in pristine condition and many house souvenir and other



Marude eiga no yo desu!

500 RAKAN

KAWAGOE CASTLE

tep back in time in Kawagoe.

Jikan ga tomatta mitai desu!

- = It's as if the town was frozen in time!
- jikan = time
- ... ga tomatta = ... has stopped
- mitai = looks/feels like
- ... desu = it is ...

Marude eiga no yo desu! = It's like we're inside a movie!

• marude ... no yo desu = it makes me feel as if...

• eiga = movie



shops. Follow the crowds towards the Toki no Kane, a 53foot threetiered wooden belltower

which has been a famous landmark and symbol of Kawagoe since it was built in 1639. "Kashiya Yokocho" or Penny Candy Lane is home to a number of small sweet shops selling cheap candies, rice

cakes, various toys and crafts. • **Kitain Temple** — Boasting

more than 1,200 years of history, Kitain Temple is the head temple of the Tendai Sect of Buddhism in the Kanto region. Among its magnificent temple buildings and traditional Buddhist

garden, you can check out "Gohyaku Rakan," 540 stone statues of the disciples of Buddha, each with its own facial expression. It is said that

you can find one that looks like you among them.

While you're there, don't forget to sample local tasty eel and udon noodles. Since Kawagoe is

famous for sweet potatoes, you can try a variety of traditional Japanese sweets made from them as well.

I hope you enjoyed a look at Kawagoe through my travel photos and that it has inspired your next trip.

Stay safe and get ready to travel with us in our next video. Thanks for watching!

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STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA, STRIPES JAPAN

hether you're working from home, sheltering in place or just staying home, if you're like us, you're probably dreaming of open skies, sandy beaches, tall mountains, or perfect powdery slopes. Our travel plans may be on hold, but that doesn't mean we can't dream up where we'll go next.

Welcome to virtual vacation video series where we can explore destinations from the comfort of our homes.

Join us as we take a short virtual journey to Miyagi Prefecture.

Whether you're working from home, sheltering in place or just staying home, if you're like us, you're probably dreaming of open skies, sandy beaches, tall mountains, or perfect powdery slopes.

From Tokyo, it takes a fivehour drive, one-hour flight, or a two-hour bullet train ride to get there. From Misawa, it takes a

four- to five-hour drive or a two-hour bullet train ride.

Known as the most populated prefecture in the Tohoku area, Miyagi Prefecture has plenty of nature, culture, activities, and food for tourists.

Some of the must-see spots in Miyagi Prefecture include:

 Sendai city - Commonly known as "Mori no Miyako," which means a city of trees.
 This is the biggest city in the Tohoku area and boasts a beautiful view of the urban landcape mixed with nature. Take a walk on Aoba Dori, a street lined with zelkova, which is thought of as the symbol of the city of trees.

Zao Renpo (Zao Mountains)

is a range of peaks that strides over Miyagi and Yamagata prefectures. This location features Okama, an emerald-green lake in the volcano's crater, a ski slope, and hot spring. During winter, you can also see

jyuhyou (ice trees) there.

Narukokyou – This v-shaped valley presents a unique view with lush green in spring and autumn crimson foliage

in autumn. Take a walk on

a 2.6-kilometer-long promenade and enjoy the colorful nature.

Last, but not least, Matsushima is a destination you won't want to miss. This spot is recognized as one of the three major sceneries of Japan along with Miyajima in Hiroshima prefecture and Amanohashidate in Kyoto prefecture. The peaceful waters dotted with 260 islands impress visitors with the

fantastic view.

While touring Miyagi prefecture, make sure you try some oysters. Their creamy taste and chewy but soft texture will dazzle you.

I hope you enjoyed a look at Miyagi Prefecture through travel photos and that it's inspired your next trip. Stay safe and get ready to travel with us in our next video. Thanks for watching! kudaka.shoji@stripes.com





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MISAWA

Pro-American city offers plenty of natural and gastronomical attractions

BY TAKAHIROTAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

ocated in the north end of mainland of Honshu, Misawa City is home to a U.S. Air Force Base as well as a popular tourist destination with beautiful forests, beaches, lakes, museums and hot

Misawa City is about a nine-hour drive from central Tokyo or most U.S. military installations in the Kanto Plain, but a shinkansen ride will get you there in about four.

Surrounded by natural attractions such as Mount Hakkoda, Lake Towada and Oirase Mountain Streams, you can enjoy the area's beauty throughout the seasons - cherry blossoms in spring, green in the summer, breathtaking autumn foliage and crystal white snow in winter.

Mountains and coasts provide the city with fresh local vegetables and seafood. In fact, Misawa produces the most yams, burdock and garlic in the country. It's also home to various delicious local dishes, such as barayaki

(grilled beef rib) and paika (pork rib gristle) curry. The area is blessed with clean water and quality rice, so the city, along with other cities in Aomori Prefecture, brew superb sake, as well.

Misawa is a comfortable and convenient city to live, according to Osamu Yamamoto, Misawa District Office of Stars and

"Snowfall here is not as

heavy as other regions in Aomori Prefecture," Yamamoto said. "We just see heavy snow falls only a few times a year."

🖈 Misawa

The well-arranged expressways connect Misawa to main neighboring cities, such as Hachinohe, Aomori and Hirosaki, according to Yamamoto, while the northern mainland of Hokkaido is easily reachable by a ferry or plane.

Misawa has 12 hot springs, and they have different water to enjoy. With varieties of water, hours and locations of facilities, you can enjoy hot mineral water bathing virtually anytime, anywhere within the city for a reasonable price of 160 to 400 yen (\$1.20 - \$3).

The city population is about 40,000 with about 10,000 American service members and base employees located on the air base.

"Misawa is really a pro-American, pro-military town," said a local noodle shop staffer I met when I dropped by the shop for lunch. "We love the town's open and international atmosphere."

Misawa has a glorious history of aviation. In 1931, an airplane called "Miss Veedol," operated by Clyde Pangborn and his co-pilot Hugh Herndon, took off from the city and completed a non-stop







Photos by Takahiro Takiguchi, Yoshihito Morita and Futoshi Shinozuka,



AVIATION & SCIENCE MUSEUM – Japan's largest aeronautical museum

Located next to the air base, the Misawa Aviation and Science Museum is the nation's largest aeronautical science museum, and a must-see attraction. The museum's exhibits give you a good overview of the history, technology and innovation to conquer the sky.

The two-story building made up of an aircraft hangar, exhibition rooms and science laboratory, accommodates historical aircraft, such as a replica Miss Veedol and a Japan-made passenger aircraft "YS-11," along with many others. You can also enjoy hands-on fun with the freefall experience called "Prove IV," or test your pilot skills with a flight simulator.

While strolling the museum's open field, you can take a close look at 10 historical American and Japanese aircraft. Among those, you can even get into the cockpit of a Japanese jet fighter (F-104) and a training plane (T-3) to feel like a real pilot.

With a large playground, the museum is a great attraction for children, as well. Special events are often held on the weekends, so make sure to check out the web page before visiting.

Misawa Aviation and Science Museum

HOURS: Tues. – Sun., 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. LOCATION: 158 Kitayama, Misawa, Misawa City, Aomori Prefecture

ADMISSION: adult: 510 yen, high schoolers: 300 yen, 15 years old and under: free

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Misawa

POPULATION: 38,015 (as of May 2021) **LOCATION:** Misawa City, Aomori Prefecture ATTRACTIONS: Aviation and Science Museum, Veedol Beach, Lake Ogawara, Komaki Spa

URL: www.city.misawa.lg.jp TEL: 0176-53-5111 (Misawa City Hall)

flight over the Pacific Ocean to Wenatchee, WA for the first time in history. To commemorate this historical flight, Misawa became sister cities with Wenatchee and East Wenatchee Cities in 1981 and 2001, respectively.

Since being built by the former Japanese Imperial Navy in 1941, the facility has expanded to become a unique air facility jointly operated by the United States Air Force's 35th Fighter Wing and Japan Air Self-Defense Force's 3rd Fighter Wing. Japan Airlines also runs 6-7 flights a day for Tokyo, Osaka, Sapporo and Hakodate from the base.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com



TASTY BARAYAKI - Popular local dish of Misawa

Just a five-minute walk from the main gate of Misawa AB, Akanoren is very popular eatery

serving a well-known local delicacy called "barayaki" or grilled beef rib.

The bright reddish electronic sign invited my colleagues and me into a casual and cozy interior.

The unique tables and chairs that had widely been used in eateries during the 60s and 70s, along with an old clock and furniture, reminded me of my childhood.

Following a recommendation, we ordered the Barayaki Set for 900 yen (\$8).

I was overwhelmed by the amount of beef and onion on the plate, and when we put it onto the iron pan at table, the sizzling sound and smell of grilled beef and onion just made me hungrier.

The flavored beef was very tender and tasty. Although the meat and onions were well-seasoned,

they suggested to dip them into a soy sauce-based broth before eating. The tender meat with fullbodied Japanese flavor really went well with steamy rice and miso soup.

Akanoren

HOURS: Wed. – Mon., 11 a.m. – 10 p.m. LOCATION: 2-1-23 Chuocho, Misawa City, Aomori Prefecture

TEL: 0176-53-3333 (Japanese)



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ven though we are in the midst of Japan's rainy season, you can still have a beautiful day by getting out and exploring the country's beautiful scenery.

My wife and I (along with our car) recently took a 30-minute ferry boat ride from Yokosuka to the southern end of Chiba Peninsula, a spot known as a great oneday driving destination and home to picturesque landscapes, farms, parks, old castle towns and Japan's largest stone-carved Buddha. What else can you ask for

The Tokyo-wan Ferry connects the naval city of Yokosuka Bay and the city's skyscrapers. Driving through

the Boso Flower

Line around the top of Chiba Peninsula is fascinating. You can check out various seasonal flowers with a backdrop of the beautiful blue ocean while driving along a wide and less-crowded road.

Drop by Aloha Garden Tateyama on the Flower Line, as the large park featuring tropical flora and fauna accommodates

an impressive flower garden and zoo, along with various restaurants, shops, event halls and a playground. You can touch and play with birds, ponies, swans and tortoises in the well-arranged

and beautiful garden.

Kururi Town, an old castle town, is famous for its spring water. With pure, quality water, the town accommodates 20 wells and four sake breweries, which have been producing high-end alcohol for over 100 years. You can sample the different water at the wells around the town. Besides the water spots, the streets of this town are a trip back to old Japan. It is fun taking a stroll and dropping by some of the shops, breweries and eateries housed in traditional wooden buildings.

Southern Chiba gives you, in one day, a trip worth a couple of days, plus it's easy to get to. So, get out of the house and take quick trip to this area blessed with cool breeze, beautiful flowers and rich history.

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Stripes Sports Trivia

Nolan Ryan threw seven of them, while Jake Arrieta just became the newest pitcher with a pair. Johnny Vander Meer even threw two of them back-to-back ... back in the day. We're talking no-hitters, and sometimes, they can be a bit fluky. Cardinals pitcher Bud Smith finished his career with seven wins - one of which was a no-hitter. On the all-time wins list, Nos. 8 and 9, each of whom played into the 21st century, have 709 victories between them, but neither righty tossed a no-no. Who are they?

Answer

Greg Maddux and Roger Clemens

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apanese toilets are different than those in America. Ok, you probably already know this. What you may not know is that there is a technique for using them. First, don't sit on the toilet directly! Squat, bend at the knees and gently lower yourself down to about ankle level. Then, do your thing. You may just plan on avoiding these things at all cost, but now you know proper technique, so go practice!

Kanji of the week



Language Lesson

Take a left/right at the next corner.

Tsugi no kado wo hidari/ migi ni magatte kudasai.

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The Weekly Crossword by Margie E. Burke **ACROSS** 1 Worst finish 5 Early release 9 "Animal House" house 13 Designer Perry 15 Big name in cosmetics 16 Toy block brand 17 Slangy opposite of 'tis 18 Cooke tune, "You _ 19 Sign of trouble 20 In flight 22 Prim and proper one 23 Kind of thermometer 24 Laundry challenge 26 Barbequed bit 30 Enthusiastic 33 Be unimportant of bad

DOWN

- 1 Jared of "Suicide Squad"

- 4 Boastful
- 42 Professor
- 45 Director's cry 46 High schooler's
- infraction
- 47 Uncouth 49 It may be

news

35 Ian McKellen

36 Annapolis

academy

39 Vegas hotel.

with "The"

38 Send packing

film, "___ Pupil"

- skipped
- 50 Oscar contender 52 Dense thicket
- 57 Eve's eldest
- **58** Night sight
- 59 Absconded with 60 Some are green
- with it
- 61 Poetic cave 62 Sprinter's stats
- 63 Peony part 64 Drug cooked up
- 65 Chimps and gorillas

- 2 Hale or Thicke
- 3 Skirt feature
- wannabe
- 5 St. Peter's, for
- one
- 6 Equally matched
- 7 BBQer's need
- 8 Come-go link 9 Where Marlins
- play
- 10 Compensate
- 11 Middle-12 Word after dial
- or earth
- 14 Sound system
- 21 Caution 22 Peel, as an apple
- 25 Place for card
- games 26 Little rascal
- 27 Class attendee
- 28 Good-looking 29 Type of edge
- 31 One-time Google smartphone

32 Long lock 37 Love-lies-bleed-

41 "Rage" anagram

43 One of three

squares

44 Physics topic

e.g.

- 50 Air force heroes ___, or won't?" ing, for one 40 TGIF or TBA,
 - 53 Knee-slapper 54 Play friskily

48 Movie music

- 55 Helm position
- 56 More or
- 58 "Citizen Kane"
- studio

Answers to Last Week's Crossword:

| L | Α | М | В | | S | Κ | Ι | М | Р | | Α | D | Α | М |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Α | R | Ι | Α | | Т | Е | Ν | 0 | R | | Z | Α | Ν | Υ |
| S | Ε | L | L | | R | Е | S | Р | 1 | R | Α | Т | 0 | R |
| Т | Α | L | L | Т | Α | L | Ε | | S | Е | L | Е | Ν | Α |
| | | W | Α | R | Т | | Т | Н | 0 | S | Е | | | |
| С | Α | R | D | Ι | Α | С | | Α | Ν | Τ | Α | R | Ε | S |
| Α | L | Ι | S | Т | | Н | 0 | L | Ε | | S | Е | М | I |
| Р | I | G | | Е | L | Α | Ν | Т | R | Α | | С | 0 | D |
| Ε | С | Н | 0 | | Α | L | Е | Е | | S | М | 1 | Т | Ε |
| R | Ε | Т | R | Α | С | Е | | R | 0 | Т | Α | Т | Ε | D |
| | | | D | Ι | Т | Т | 0 | | Р | 1 | Т | Α | | |
| С | ī | N | Е | М | Α | | S | Р | I | R | Ι | Т | Ε | D |
| О | ٧ | Е | R | S | Т | R | Α | Τ | Ν | | L | Τ | Α | R |
| M | Α | R | L | | Ε | Α | G | L | Ε | | D | 0 | S | Ε |
| Α | Ν | D | Υ | | S | Р | Е | Е | D | | Α | Ν | Е | W |

SUDOKU Difficulty: Medium

6

Edited by Margie E. Burke

HOW TO SOLVE:

Each row must contain the numbers 1 to 9; each column must contain the numbers 1 to 9; and each set of 3 by 3 boxes must

| Answers to Last Week's Sudoku: | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| 9 | 1 | 4 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 7 | | |
| 2 | 3 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 9 | 8 | | |
| 8 | 5 | 6 | 9 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | | |
| 1 | 4 | 2 | 7 | 6 | 8 | 5 | 3 | 9 | | |
| 3 | 7 | 9 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 8 | 6 | | |
| 5 | 6 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 7 | 4 | 1 | | |
| 7 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 9 | 4 | 8 | 6 | 3 | | |
| 4 | 8 | 1 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 9 | 7 | 2 | | |
| 6 | 9 | 3 | 2 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 5 | | |



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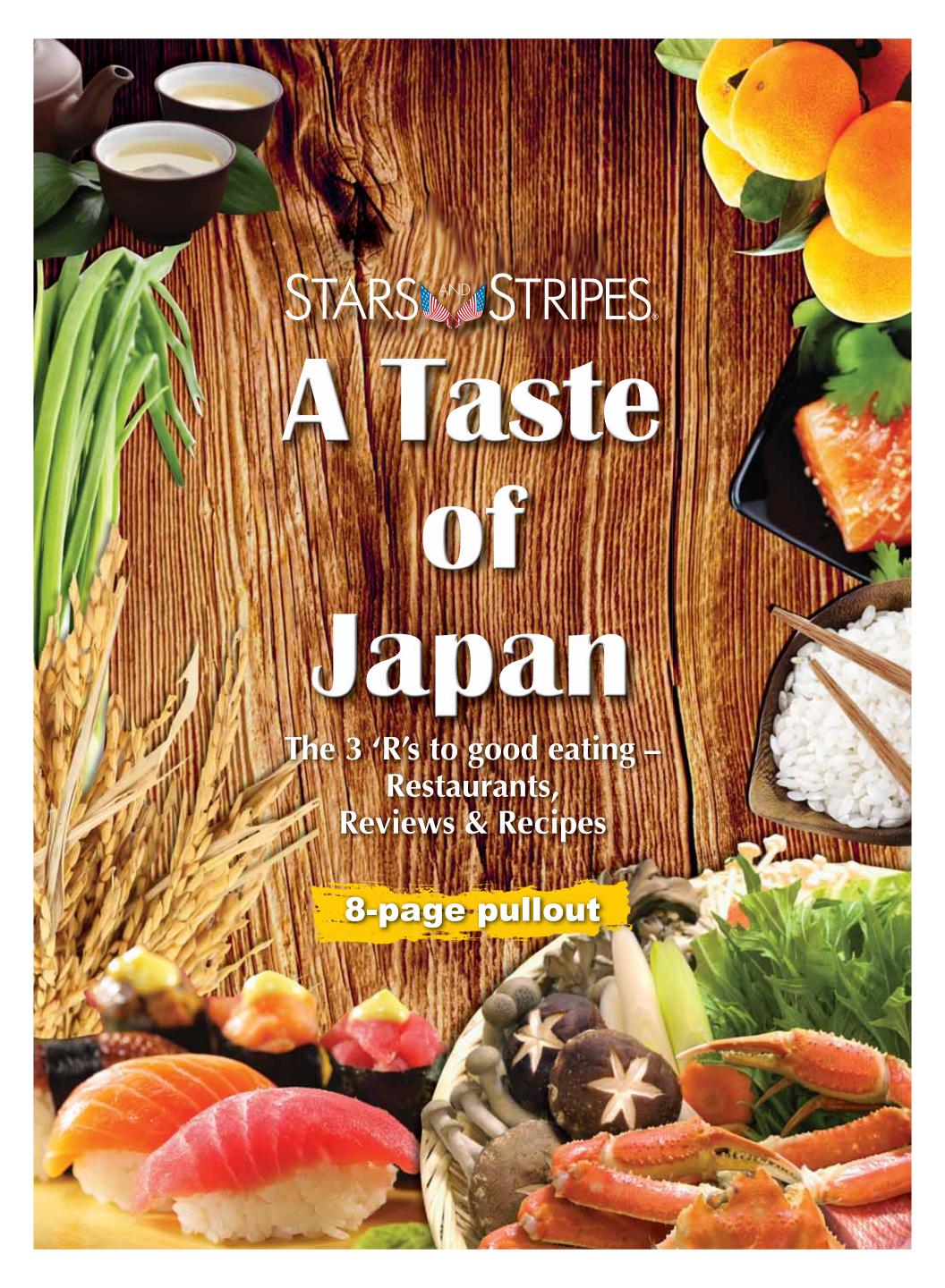




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File photo

YOSHORU Twisted in a Japanese way



BYTAKAHIROTAKIGUCHI, STRIPES JAPAN

oods like omurice, ton katsu and naporitan spaghetti are items you've likely seen on a menu if you've ever visited a casual dining restaurant in Japan.

Called "yoshoku" (literally Western dish), these familiar looking dishes are imported and have a Japanese twist to them. While authentic foreign dishes have country names such as French, Italian and German, and are enjoyed at specialty restaurants (often more expensive), yoshoku can be enjoyed at causal family restaurants, usually at a much cheaper price.

The history of yoshoku dates back about 160 years when Japan eliminated its seclusion policy and opened its doors to the world and the various Western

foods and cultures.

Japanese have often localized foreign culture by mixing it with their own and yoshoku is a good example, according to Naoko Ishikawa, a Japanese food culture expert. Japanese took the imported Western foods and swapped the expensive ingredients for cheaper local ones. The fusion dishes were established by the early 19th century and some popular dishes were widely served at various café and restaurants in the 1910-20s.

Some yoshoku dishes can go back to even earlier days, sometime in the 16th century when Spanish and Portuguese merchants and priests visited Japan for the first time. Tempura and kasutera cake are some examples, and are still

SEE YOSHOKU ON PAGE 4

Popular yoshoku dishes

- Hayashi rice: Hashed beef and rice
- Kuriimu shichuu: Cream stew
- Nikujaga: Stewed potato and beef or pork with soy sauce and mirin (sweet sake)
- Korokke: Deep-fried mashed potato
- Chikin nanban: Fried chicken seasoned with vinegar and tartar sauce
- Ton katsu: Deep-fried pork
- Bifu katsu: Deep-fried beef
- Chicken katsu: Deep-fried chicken
- Menchi katsu: Deep-fried minced meat
- Kaki furai: Deep-fried oysters,
- Ebi furai: Deep-fried shrimp
- Naporitain Spaghetti: Ketchup pasta stir-fried with onion, bell pepper and ham
 • Tarako Spaghetti: Cod roe pasta
- Omurice: Stir-fried rice wrapped in omelet
- Doria: Rice casserole with white sauce and cheese











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RESTAURANT INFO

YOSHOKU: Evolution of favorites



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

popular among Japanese.

Today, you can sample most yoshoku dishes at casual or specialized restaurants, called voshokuva (eatery for Western dishes) throughout the nation. Among the countless yoshokuya restaurants, Taimeiken and Shiseido Parlor in Tokyo are known for their original takes on omurice, katsu sand (pork cutlet sandwich) and other yoshoku dishes.

Everyone Omurice (fried has had rice in an omelet), ton katsu (deeppizza in the U.S., breaded fried cutlet of pork) but here, it often naporitan comes topped with spaghetti (ketchmayonnaise up pasta stir-fried with onion, green and corn. pepper and ham) are some of the popular

somewhat adjusted to Japanese Pizza is another common yoshoku in Japan. Everyone has had pizza in the U.S., but here, it often comes topped with mayonnaise and corn.

fusion dishes originally

from the West and have

Not your idea of a good pizza topping? Don't for get to tell the server to "Hold the mayo!"

Some yoshoku have become so localized that they are assumed to just

tant home dishes, as well. In fact, my wife cooks some yoshoku dishes, such as rolled cabbage, minced cut-

let and omurice with recipes passed down from my mother. We often season these dishes with soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce, tomato ketchup or demi-glace sauce and enjoy them along with rice and miso soup, using chopsticks, just like other traditional dishes.

The next time you get a chance to try a new yoshoku dish, give it a shot and see how your favorites from home have evolved in Japan.

takiguchi.takahiro@stripes.com



My f makes: most po cook. B

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Did you know?

Japanese-made Naples pasta has an American taste

Naporitan spaghetti has been one of the most popular yoshoku dishes among children for more than half of a century. I can remember as a kid, nagging my mother to cook it. It is an indispensable dish for kids, and any yoshokuya restaurant

The spaghetti is just a ketchup pasta stir-fried with onion, green pepper

Despite the name, you will never find it in Naples, Italy, as it originated here in Japan.

A high-end restaurant at Hotel New Grand in Yokohama established spaghetti alla napoletana using sophisticated garlic tomato (pomodoro) sauce with basil as its standard menu before World War II (1939-45).

With the end of war, and a food shortage in the postwar chaos, a Japanese cook at the hotel made the pasta by substituting pomodore sauce with ketchup, onion, green pepper and ham. There was plenty of ketchup available because of the American forces in Japan.

The greasy, sweet and sour taste of the pasta, called "naporitan spaghetti," became very popular among locals and soon spread throughout the nation.

Naples pasta in Japan with the taste of America!

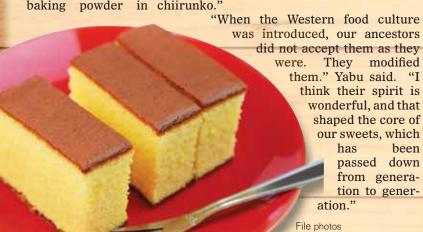
Kasutera

Western sweet or traditional Japanese?

In the 15th and 16th centuries, Spanish and Portuguese introduced Western sweets to Japan. A sponge cake was one of them. The Japanese digested it and remade it their own.

"Kasutera is one of very popular sweets in Japan and it really resembles Western sponge cake, but it is different," said Traditional Japanese Sweets Association's Mitsuo Yabu. "While Western sponge cakes are made with baking powder, our ancestors made it by whisking eggs so that bubbles would make holes in the cake when baked."

Okinawans have their own kasutera called chiirunko. "Different from kasutera, chiirunko is a steaming sponge cake with plenty of eggs," said Masae Arakaki of Okinawa's traditional Ryukyu sweets shop, Arakaki Kashiten. "Like kasutera, we don't use





avorite homemade yoshoku dish my wife is her omurice. It is known as one of the ipular yoshoku dishes and is fairly easy to esides of that, it is very tasty!

his recipe yourself and enjoy the yoshoku home.

murice

ents (Serves 2)

edium onion ces of chicken breast

spoon green peas

espoon green peas cups Japanese rice (cooked)

espoons of butter

up / to garnish

espoon of milk

ions:

p onion and parsley.

chicken breast into 1/2 inch pieces. t butter in a pan. Put onion and sauté over

lium heat until softened.

the chicken breast and cook until the color

ges.

green peas and season with salt and

oer.

rice and use spatula to break up the

ketchup, stir-fry and combine evenly until

nore white rice can be seen.

sfer the fried rice to a plate and set aside.

sk the eggs in a bowl after adding milk and

t butter in the pan over medium heat. Make the pan is nicely coated with butter.

chalf of the egg mixture into the pan. Stir

om of the pan. Lower the heat while the top are egg are still soft.

half of the fried rice on top of the omelet. a spatula to cover the fried rice with the elet. Move the omu rice at the edge of the and flip the pan to transfer it to a plate. hish with ketchup and parsley.

eat steps 11 -13 to make the second

na



An evolving yoshoku on Okinawa

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ハムエッグサンド

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHOJI KUDAKA, STRIPES JAPAN

Y oshoku, or Western dishes, came to Okinawa decades after hitting Japan's mainland.

The adoption of the Western cuisine was accelerated when the island became more exposed to American food after the battle of Okinawa.

Since then, Okinawan yoshoko has taken an interesting path on the island.

How it started

"A-lunch" is one example of the localization of western food on the island. This assortment of food such as hamburger, fried chicken, or spaghetti on a plate is a very common menu item at local diners. The dish has often been spotlighted by the Japanese media, which is intrigued by its volume and the fact that it is an all-day lunch menu item.

"'A-lunch' started around 1956 by a chef who came back to Okinawa after training in New York. He opened an eatery called 'New York Restaurant' on Park Avenue, then known as Business Center Street (BC Street), in Koza area near Kadena Air Base," said Chairperson Koji Toyama of Okinawa city's cooperative association of restaurants, who organizes "Annual Koza A-lunch Championship."

"I heard that the menu item was first targeted to taxi drivers, who were one of the wealthiest on the island back then. The one-plate dish with so much food was a symbol of luxury for others who were still struggling to feed themselves. Just like the Japanese grading system of 'sho, chiku, bai (pine,

bamboo and plum),' three levels were set as 'A, B, C' lunch. When I was a kid, A-lunch was something I yearned for because I could have only C-lunch," said Toyama.

In the early days, chefs who had worked on-base restaurants came to join New York restaurant, helping the place expand to

8 branches. And many other restaurants followed to introduce the dish.

A-lunch is special

Now, with all branches of New York Restaurant having been closed, the true original A-lunch is gone, but there are some restaurants which have been serving A-lunch just as it was in its early days. Highway Drive-in Restaurant is one such long-standing place where you can try the same taste people enjoyed decades ago.

"We have been serving A-lunch since my restaurant debuted in 1972," said Choichi Nakasome, the 55-year-old owner of Highway Drive-in Restaurant. "When my father took over the place from its previous owner, he came up with his own recipe for A-lunch after trying the menu item at other restaurants. Since then, we haven't made any changes to the recipe."

Highway Drive-in restaurant's Alunch comes with hamburger, scrambled egg and deep fried pork, which Nakasone described as the standard trio

for A-lunch; along with chicken, sausage, salad, and soup and rice.

Nakasone humbly described his A-lunch by saying, "There is nothing special about our A-lunch. But when you come right down to it, our all-homemade style is the reason that our customers have come back for the last 45 years. Although A-lunch looks simple, each restaurant has something to make it taste unique. So does my restaurant. I can say with confidence that our homemade deep fried pork and

hamburger remains the standard for customers."

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The restaurant owner admitted that, these days, many customer tend to order 'C-' or "B-lunch," instead of A-lunch probably because the exceptional volume of A-lunch looks like too much. But A-lunch is still loved by many customers as a dish for special occasions, like payday.

At Highway Drive-in Restaurant, Alunch is still the top item, which coincides the words of Toyama, who said, "Although A-lunch may be described as just collection of standard food, it is the face of a restaurant. It is a collection of food that each restaurant most proudly presents."

Ongoing evolution

According to Toyama, there are more than 50 restaurants that serve up A-lunch in Okinawa city alone. In addition, many other restaurants on the island serve similar menu items by different names such as 'special lunch.' As the dish became more common on the island, its variety increased too, likely due to the added competition according to Toyama.

"In the annual competition, we see A-lunch with various food such as steak or ribs or stew. Mixing many kinds of food on a plate was the Okinawan way of adopting American food. It was a way of champroo, which means mixing things up in Okinawan dialect. And the fact that it originated in Koza matters. I want to further develop the food as the signature food of Koza," said Toyama. kudaka.shoji@stripes.com





ADDRESS: 701 Noborikawa, Okinawa city, Okinawa Prefecture 904-2142

(15-minute drive from Gate 3 of Kadena Air Base)

HOURS: 11 a.m. - last call at 7 p.m. (- 3 p.m. on Tuesday, closed on Wednesday)

NOTES: A-lunch (990 yen), B-lunch (800 yen), C-lunch (700 yen), Special Lunch (800 yen); according to the owner,

this is a familiar spot for Americans who live in the neighboring area.

Good Sushi Or Better Sushi?

5 things to pay attention to when eating sushi

STORY AND PHOTO BY SLEIMAN AZIZI, JAPAN TRAVEL

y introduction to sushi was at my university canteen. Every week I would buy a small sushi lunch box filled with salmon, tuna, and other such exoticisms. I loved it. Soon after, I moved to Japan and things began to change. On my first trip back home, I once again bought one of those sushi lunch boxes. I hated it.

It sounds elitist, I'm sure, but there is a difference between that sushi and good sushi. Even now, after all these years, I'm discovering that the sushi I used to think was good was just a stepping stone to even better sushi.

Having said that, if you are enjoying eating it, then the sushi in front of you is good enough quality. Don't let snobs like me get in your way. Having said that, though, your appreciation of sushi is growing if you notice these five things:

The rice itself starts to take on more importance Sushi is vine-gared rice. The toppings may be the showpiece but the rice is where it's at. If you notice any hardness,



coldness or mushiness, take note. You may still enjoy it but probably not for much longer.

The size of your sushi starts to concern you less and less If you expect your meals to fill your belly until you are bloated, remember the old Japanese saying,

'hara hachi bun' - eat until you are 80% full. Quantity is different to quality.

You start to wonder why there are other foods being offered at the sushi restaurant Like most everything else, the better something is, the more attention it has probably

been given. The more attention your sushi has required, the more likely it is that you will not be offered the choice of hamburgers, noodles, or tempura.

Mayonnaise starts to get on your nerves Japanese sushi relies on drawing out the flavours intrinsic to its ingredients. Non-Japanese sushi seems to be based on the combinations of added flavours for taste. That's fine but do remember that Japanese cuisine is listed as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage...

The distinction between topping and rice starts decreasing (or increasing...) If you don't like your al dente pasta mixed with canned sauce or your fresh tomatobased sauce covering soggy pasta, then you will understand. Harmony becomes more and more important to you.

Don't be afraid of becoming a sushi snob. Consider it a badge of honour and it may not be long before you will start to enjoy and appreciate its many subtleties.

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