

みなさん、こんにちは！

Seems like it's my turn to take over the blog. Vikram and Aileen did a great job talking about moving in and some of our trips, and Enzo managed to give a better tour of Waseda in his post than I could even achieve in person, so I thought I'd talk about something a bit different that I've been particularly enjoying here... the food.

Before coming to Japan my experience of Japanese food was limited to sub-par sushi and the occasional bowl of ramen (which looking back was probably just instant noodles glorified). Since I've been here, I've had some of the best (and weirdest) meals I've ever had the pleasure of trying. It's ranged from getting hooked on trying all the flavours of mochi me and Aileen can find (kurumi (walnut) mochi are our weakness), and never managing to walk past a taiyaki shop without parting with a couple hundred yen for the most comforting anko-filled pancakes you could dream of, to trying things I'd never imagined I would eat, let alone love (I haven't gone a day without having natto as a snack, something which never fails to elicit an えええ？！ from any Japanese person).



Taste-testing mochi with our very traditional matcha lattes in Starbucks

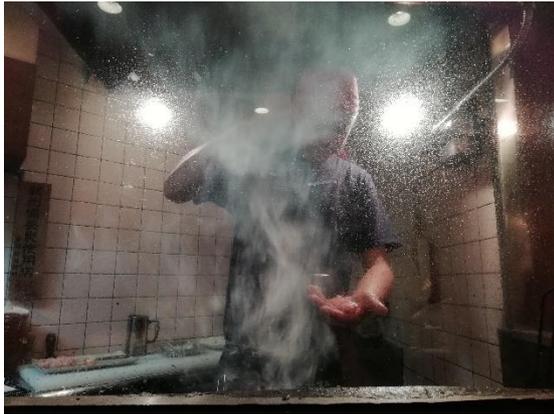


With the amount of taiyaki we've eaten I'm pretty sure I'm 90% anko by now



With eating and walking in Japan a big no-no, we resorted to the closest chairs we could find to eat

One of the great things about Waseda is the opportunities we get to experience Japanese culture, with everything from ikebana (mentioned in Vikram's post) to mochitsuki. Aileen and I even had a chance to learn to make our own wagashi (a major challenge for me with the abundance of free anko paste hard to resist). Sweets aren't the only thing I've loved about Japanese food, and something which I find great about Japan is the sheer number of small izakayas and restaurants hidden down side-streets where you can have a chat with the locals whilst enjoying delicious yakitori, sake and even sashimi. Even in a conversation where hand gestures and the occasional word are the only means of communication that are getting across, the satisfaction of interacting in a language which 3 months ago I had never studied is incredibly rewarding.



This yakitori chef managed to turn something as simple as seasoning the meat into a show, as he sprinkled salt from head height, throwing the skewers between his hands before finally placing them on the hot charcoal with a small double clap to brush off any excess salt.



If anything was going to bring the Daiwa scholars together at the same time in our busy schedules, it was going to be tempura (or Kono-san).

Aside from the food, life in Japan has been fantastic. Matsuri festivals, stumbling upon traditional horseback archery in our local park, hiking on mountains which the vending machines haven't managed to colonise yet and watching sumo-wrestlers pound fresh mochi are just some of the highlights in the last few weeks.



Miso happy



The one time I've felt small in Japan



My matcha obsession taken to new heights with matcha beer

All in all, I've been having the time of my life and can't wait to see what the rest of the program brings. To everyone who has applied this year, good luck!