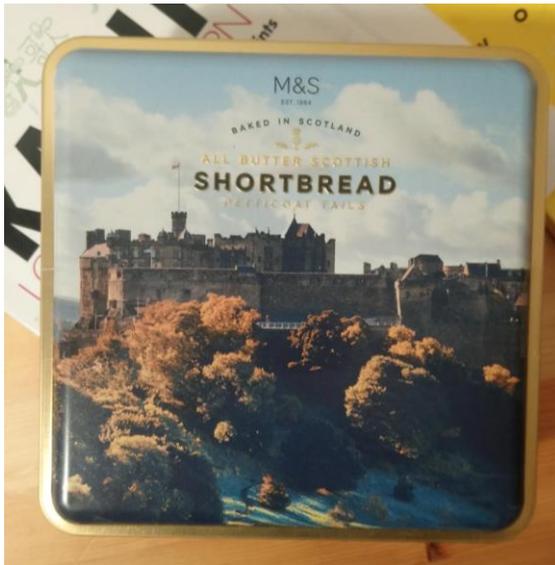


Vikram's blog.

Hello everyone! My turn to do a short blog. I can't hope to match the poise and eloquence of the previous blog by Enzo, so I'm not going to try. If Enzo's was like hand-made sushi, mine's just like a fat ramen - probably a bad idea to look inside.

Since the last blog was quite Waseda-oriented, I'll steer clear, except to say I'm having a solid time there, even if the work is as relentless as a Yamanote line rush hour train, and only slightly less certain.



An almighty cop-out omiyage.

One of my favourite things about Japan is the omiyage system (essentially gifts given to friends, family and anyone else you want to suck up to, e.g. local soba chef for extra servings). Apparently, you're meant to give an omiyage of greater value than the one you receive, but you can game the system by giving m&s shortbread, because the Japanese can't get their head round its worth.



One of ten thousand identical salarymen simultaneously contemplating their insignificance in a meaningless universe. Or, just deciding what karaoke song will most please the shachou at tonight's nomikai.

I am never sure whether to laugh or cry when I see the infamous salarymen roaming the streets at 3am. Are they coming back from a night out? are they coming back from a long day at the office? Are they going to work? It's probably all three.



Did you know Daiwa do taxis as well? Unfortunately, Jason James managed to get our platinum member passes lost in the post, so we're still on the metro for now.

Tokyo can be a little overwhelming, so Alba and I went to Nikko for a long weekend. We visited shrines, climbed mountains and melted in onsens. I was particularly looking forward to the latter, as I was already hooked on sentou (public baths). If you can learn to appreciate the Orc-like, guttural exclamations of ojisan slowly poaching in 45°C water, there's really no better way to relax with the boys after a hard day's work.



Not sure if the light-headed feeling is due to the climb or the piping-hot umeshu (plum wine). It was Alba's idea.



Sulphur onsen in Nikko. Only suitable picture allowed.



Breathtakingly beautiful autumn leaves in Nikko.



Staying in a Nikko ryokan and feeling like a happy jappie chappie with yukata on and umeshu in hand. Does it get more Japanese than this?

I even got some time to try Ikebana, flower arranging. Being the only boy there and with half of my head shaved due to a language barrier with the hairdresser, the sensei must have thought I got the wrong room and was too polite to leave.



My first, and heavily sensei-adjusted, crack at ikebana. Extremely calming and peaceful, apart from the slow disintegration of my knee cartilage from sitting Japanese-style.



Halloween is as absurd as I thought it would be.



Senso-ji is a nice spot for a solo walk at night, it's much less crowded and the lighting is very well done.



Sampling 'Placenta Juice' (プラセンタジュース). It sounded better than it tasted.



As Confucius used to say, you'll never catch a Japanese more than one metre away from soba. (そば)



You'll find that the big daddy is never far away in Tokyo city.



Tokyo isn't small.



One of my favourite authentic joints.



A typically insightful, if slightly ominous, Japanese sign.

In short, Tokyo is a blast, and I feel so lucky to have been given a genuinely unique opportunity by the Daiwa Foundation. To all those applying this year, best of luck!!

Vikram.