

Sushi and culture: Dining with locals on a visit to Japan

By Donna Bryson
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Some of my most treasured travel memories involve food. Like the time my husband and I went to what was billed as New Delhi's best rumali roti stall, where we turned the hood of a car into a table so that the extravagantly thin and succulent flatbread could be wolfed down before it cooled. Or the time I introduced my in-laws to a Johannesburg street vendor's vetkoeks, slightly sweet, slightly sour dollops of fried dough.

So when we were planning a trip to Japan and my husband heard about EatWith.com, we knew we had to try it.

EatWith links travellers to chefs and talented home cooks around the world to share a meal. It's one of several sites, including EatFeastly, VizEat, and PlateCulture, offering opportunities to dine informally with locals. The price is set by the chef, typically comparable to a mid-range restaurant meal.

We used EatWith to book a date with Shino Fukuyama, a marketing manager who loves to share her country's cuisine and culture. I, my husband, our tween daughter, and my father-in-law and his wife experienced what felt like a homestay for an evening.

Fukuyama's father was a foreign correspondent and their family lived in Mexico and South Korea. In 2002, her husband's job took them to New York. They devoted much of their spare time to exploring restaurants with a Zagat guide. But it was a Thanksgiving dinner in the suburbs with the family of her husband's co-worker that gave her a taste for sharing



MORE THAN A MEAL. Swiss tourist Alexandra Kossi, right, and American tourist Diane Freyhofer, center, prepare sushi at a dinner hosted by Shino Fukuyama, left, at her home in Tokyo. Tourists can learn about sushi and kimono while dining with locals thanks to EatWith.com, which links travellers to chefs and talented home cooks around the world. (AP Photo/Shuji Kajiyama)

kimono club, where people who like to look at and talk about the traditional clothing gather. That night, she wore a chic dress cut from an old kimono that she had ordered on the internet.

Once we arrived to Fukuyama's house, we learned how to roll sushi using fish she had bought ahead of time. We also learned to set a Japanese table with pottery handed down in Fukuyama's family. Chopsticks are placed horizontally in front of diners, with the narrow ends that touch the food pointing left.

Dinner stretched from our sushi, mine ineptly rolled, to fruit cut into the rabbit shapes that dotting Japanese moms put in their kids' bento boxes. We had plum pickled by Yamauchi's mother-in-law. Fukuyama's husband was out socializing with workmates, but he left us a vegetable dish he had prepared the night before. The whale bacon, more a textural experience than anything else, didn't clash with Fukuyama's carefully curated menu. (I've never eaten a rubber ducky, but I imagine it tastes like the whale bacon did.) After dinner, Fukuyama dressed my 11-year-old daughter in a kimono, delighting her grandfather.

Fukuyama said such moments when she can surprise and charm her guests, along with those when she learns something about another culture are among "the joys of my life."

worlds over a meal in someone's home.

She studied how to teach sushi-making in 2010, and opened her home to visitors after Japan's tourism industry began to revive following the 2011 tsunami.

We scheduled our visit with Fukuyama toward the end of our stay in Japan's capital. That gave us a few days to get to know our way around the city a bit before venturing by subway from the sleek Roppongi embassy-and-nightclub district where our hotel was located to her more down-to-earth Meguro neighborhood in central Tokyo.

Fukuyama and her friend Akiko Yamauchi, an auction company art buyer, met us as we emerged from the subway station. They first ushered us to a nearby supermarket, where they answered questions about meats, vegetables, and fruits we had until then only seen on restaurant menus. Fukuyama agreed to

add whale bacon, spotted in the prepared meat case by my husband, to our menu. We would come to see how gracious that was when we realized just how meticulously she had planned the evening. Fukuyama told me later she usually spends two days preparing for her guests.

The supermarket was a five-minute stroll to Fukuyama's home, a modern concrete box that was a fitting setting for her traditional touches — tatami mats, paper sliding screens, minimal decor. Along the way, Fukuyama pointed out local landmarks. The Shinto shrine. The liquor shop that's been in the same family for three generations. The kimono consignment shop where we bought a delicately woven, lightly used kimono. The textures, patterns, and stories of fabric make it, like food, one of our family obsessions. It turned out Fukuyama is a kimono connoisseur. She and Yamauchi met in a

U.S. colleges head to China to grow basketball fan base

By Justin Bergman
The Associated Press

HANGZHOU, China — Forty years ago, former basketball star Bill Walton made a decision he still regrets today. His UCLA college team was invited to play an exhibition game in China in 1973, the year it won its second national title with Walton, and he decided not to go. The rest of the team then stayed home, too.

"I said I didn't want to come," he said. "I didn't know any better. I was wrong."

The men's basketball teams from the University of Washington and University of Texas have done what Walton chose not to: play a game in China, halfway around the world from their college campuses.

It wasn't just an exhibition, either. The contest — in which Washington defeated Texas, 77-71 — was the first-ever regular-season college basketball game in China, the first of perhaps many for U.S. university teams as they try to tap into a new market for their sports — and their schools — in the world's second-biggest economy.

"The opportunity that these young people have to come to this country ... (it's) an opportunity that I sadly turned down," said Walton, who provided commentary for ESPN's live broadcast of the game in the U.S. "It was one of the biggest mistakes of my life."

Hopes are high on both sides that the opportunity leads to a much deeper cooperation than anyone could have imagined just a decade ago, let alone in 1973.

In the Pac-12 Conference, which organized the game at Shanghai's Mercedes-Benz Arena, officials spent the past few years trying to find a way to build on the well-known academic reputations of their schools in China, as well as the Chinese love of basketball, to build a fan base for their sports programs.

And on the Chinese side, e-commerce giant Alibaba Group jumped on board as a



HOPES HIGH FOR HOOPS. Former National Basketball Association star Yao Ming, right, watches as Dejounte Murray of the Washington Huskies, in white, falls on Eric Davis Jr. of the Texas Longhorns during a National Collegiate Athletic Association match at Mercedes-Benz Arena in Shanghai, China. Two men's basketball teams from the University of Washington and the University of Texas played the first-ever regular-season college basketball game in China, the first of perhaps many for U.S. university teams as they try to tap into a new market for their sports — and their schools — in the world's second-biggest economy. (AP Photo/Ng Han Guan)

way of acquiring content for its brand new sports platform and, as founder Jack Ma put it at the company's headquarters in Hangzhou, to help young Chinese learn the value of playing — and working — on a team.

"China is pretty good at the single sports. Ping-pong is very good, but we think China should focus more on team sports — basketball, soccer, and volleyball," Ma said. "The world is very connected and China needs to work like a team with the (rest of the) world. If we cannot make our kids focus on that, it'll be terrible in the future."

The curiosity was evident as young Alibaba employees took a break from their last-minute preparations for Singles Day — China's biggest online shopping day — to line the glass wall at the company's basketball court and watch the Texas basketball players sprint up and down the court in a spirited workout.



JAPANESE JET. Japan's first domestically produced passenger jet, the Mitsubishi Regional Jet (MRJ), takes off from Nagoya Airport in Toyoyama, central Japan, for its first flight. (Muneyuki Tomari/Kyodo News via AP)

Mitsubishi jet in first flight, in step for Japan aviation

TOKYO (AP) — Mitsubishi, a maker of the Zero fighter, took a step toward reclaiming Japan's one-time status as an aviation power with the maiden flight of its regional jet.

The aircraft took off in the central Japanese city of Nagoya, as seen in a live webcast. It landed about an hour later.

Mitsubishi pushed back the jet's first flight by a few months but said the delay would not affect its planned commercial deliveries.

The project reflects a desire to turn Japan's modern engineering and manufacturing prowess into a top-tier aircraft industry, some 70 years after Japan suspended making planes following its defeat in World War II.

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries and other major Japanese manufacturers are key suppliers for many aircraft parts and systems. But a large share of the components in the 70- to 90-seat Mitsubishi regional jet came from leading foreign suppliers.

Mitsubishi faces a stiff challenge in competing with Brazil's Embraer, which dominates the difficult regional jet market, analysts say.

"Sports is part of education," Tsai said. "You don't separate sports from your academics because you learn so much

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