

# travel

## japan on a plate

ON AN ESCAPE TO JAPAN, **SARAH BLINCO** WAS INSPIRED BY THE FOOD AND LEARNED THAT A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE REALLY IS ACHIEVABLE.

**NOT SO** long ago I remember reading a review on a book, *Japanese Women Don't Get Fat... or Old* penned by Naomi Moriyama. Soon after moving from her home in Japan to the United States to attend university, the author realised she had gained considerable weight thanks to her new Westernised routine. On returning home to her mother's traditional cooking, she found the extra kilos disappeared.

I thought at the time, "I must read that book – surely it contains some valuable secrets to health and wellbeing?" After all, the Japanese, like many Asian cultures, have a reputation

To top it off, each meal was the equivalent of just a couple of Aussie dollars. For example, when I was hungry at breakfast, morning tea or lunch, I'd buy a fresh salad consisting of lettuce, cabbage, sweet corn, kidney beans, onion and tuna; a variation of salad and a little pasta; or rice, eggs and noodles – totalling just AU\$3 or AU\$4. For an afternoon snack, I'd drop into the closest "Lawson" (a popular convenience store chain in Japan) and try a box of non-oily noodles and another small salad with an iced green tea – again costing only AU\$4. I had not previously been a "salad person", but these simple meals are delicious,



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more than about \$15 each. I was impressed, to say the least, especially considering the cost included (alcoholic) beverages as well.

So far I had eaten more than I've ever eaten in my life, yet I had not put on any weight and I'd never felt better. It seemed that not only was the introduction of copious amounts of salads, sandwiches and Watami into my diet a good thing, but an added discovery was the positive outcome of my reduced consumption of beer and wine. We found a fabulous alternative in Japan called Soju (or Shochu), which originated in Korea. Its taste is comparable to vodka, but is often a little sweeter and can vary from 20-45 percent

in the diet, and promotes the maintenance of a healthier weight as it is beneficial for one's metabolism. It causes you to eat when you are hungry rather than being famished and over-indulging."

During my trip, my mind kept wandering back to the few words I'd read in Naomia Moriyama's book, and I began to realise I'd tapped into some of the secrets revealed within her pages, because I'd been fortunate enough to experience a taste of it myself.

Japanese food and service are nothing short of exceptional and far from expensive – as long as you're willing to stray from the usual tourist markets.

**"Eating small, regular meals helps to include a wide variety of food in the diet, and promotes the maintenance of a healthier weight as it is beneficial for one's metabolism."**

alcohol content. We mixed Soju with chilled green or oolong tea and, as you can imagine, this beverage was rather low in calories and proved to be a really enjoyable social drink, minus the bad hangover and kilojoules. Soju, along with oolong (or wu-long) tea is available through Asian grocery stores here in Australia.

The other enjoyable aspect of my trip to Japan was the constant walking to trains, shops, restaurants, coffee stops, tourist attractions, up stairs, down hills and, yes, back to food stops. I'm not normally big on exercise – in fact, my fiancé jokingly calls me a "spectator by nature" – however, all this incidental walking was firming up my entire body and causing me to feel surprisingly fit and well.

Melanie McGrice, an accredited practicing dietician from Health Kick Nutrition & Dietetics agrees that the Japanese have got it right.

"These foods (salads, cabbage, tea, rice, fish) are low in kilojoules, low in artificial additives and high in antioxidants and nutrition," she explains. "Eating small, regular meals helps to include a wider variety of food

### japan's top five healthy living tips

1. Eat lots of raw food and salads for snacks and meals, including cabbage, lettuce, carrot, broccoli, snow peas, corn, onions and beans.
2. Eat more small meals consisting of rice, salads, noodles, fruit, fish and sandwiches, rather than gorging on one or two big meals a day.
3. Take the stairs, walk or ride a bike in preference to driving or using the elevator.
4. Drink lots of delicious tea (hot or cold) and less coffee.
5. Eat until you are 80 percent full – a concept called "hara hachi bunme". Once your food settles, you discover you are indeed full without feeling uncomfortable.



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for living longer and having fewer obesity issues. Unfortunately, since then, I have been run off my feet meeting deadlines, attending functions and completing the day-to-day tasks that routinely pile up on my desk.

I had expected my soiree in Japan to be costly, as the country is stereotyped as being "expensive" – but let me dispel that myth.

After I emerged from my hotel (following some much-needed sleep) I discovered a world of delicious food stops on just about every corner. In Japan, convenience stores are everywhere, but they are like super convenience stores, with row upon row of fresh sandwiches, salads, noodles, soups and pre-packaged coffee and tea options.

filling, easy and cheap.

Another fantastic dining option called Izakaya (a type of Japanese drinking establishment), consists of many small dishes of varying cuisines being brought out for your group to share. A popular chain of Izakaya restaurants in Japan is called Watami – oh how I miss Watami! The food was sensational and, again, we ordered everything from caesar salads, potato wedges, chicken skewers, fried rice, vegetables, tuna, prawns, pasta dishes – pretty much anything you can imagine – for around AU\$3 or AU\$4 per (large) dish. The food was not saturated in oil or grease; it was fresh, high-quality, tasty and cheap. We literally consumed all we could and spent no