

Food and Eating

Japanese food is delicious and healthy! While American food is frequently cooked in one pot, such as lasagna or stew, and served on one dinner plate, in Japan you may have 4-6 small plates set before you (at any meal, even breakfast), each containing a separate tasty serving of fish, eggs, noodles, vegetables, miso soup, fruit or rice. You will also eat some delicious one-plate meals in Japan, such as curry rice, spaghetti and ramen noodles.

Be sure and try everything! You will want to be a polite guest, and you sure don't want to miss out on all the great new food. Foods that you may have not liked in Alaska will be different in Japan. One example is eggplant. Japanese eggplant tastes different and less bitter than the variety of eggplant that we eat in the USA. Even Japanese scrambled eggs and potato salad have slightly different ingredients.

In Japan, when everyone is seated and ready to eat, we all say, "itadakimasu".

You may already know how to say this, but just in case, here is some help. Pronounce it like this: EE TAW (like you say saw) DAW KEE MOSS You can find Japanese pronounced online, if you want to hear people say these words.

Since the food will be delicious, you will want to say, "oishii" or "oishii desu" to let your host family know how much you like it.

OH EE SHEE (hold the final ee sound a little long) DESS

If you say "oishii" for foods that you like, you will probably be served them again.

If you are too full or want to politely refuse food, you can say "onaka ippai". This means that your tummy is full and you can't eat anymore.

OH NAW CAW EEP PIE (Just like we don't always speak in formal language, especially with family and friends, neither do people in Japan. For those of you studying formal Japanese, the complete sentence is "Onaka ga ippai desu.") In the USA, we are encouraged to eat everything on our plates. In Japan, if you are full, it is ok to leave food on your plate. Your host mother will give you less next time.

After you have finished eating, and before you leave the table, say “gochisosama deshita”. Gochisosama deshita and itadakimasu are polite words of appreciation to show that you appreciate the sacrifices that were made so that you can eat such delicious food.

GO CHEE SO SAW MAW DESH TAW

Your host mother will work hard to prepare wonderful meals for you. You will be able to eat authentic Japanese food that isn't available in the USA. Be sure and thank her for the food, either in Japanese and or in English.

Thank you= arigatou gozaimasu

AH REE GAW TOE (hold the o sound a little long) GO ZAW EE MOSS

Have fun using these words at home and with your friends.

If you wish, you can begin practicing eating with ohashi OH HAW SHEE (chopsticks). They are used for holding, but not for “stabbing” food and should be laid down flat when you are finished, not sticking up out of your rice. There are many directions online on how to hold them. Notice that they are not held down towards the tip, but about 2/3 of the way up. Use the pointy ones that are around 9” long, not the really long ones with the blunt tips. You'll realize that some foods or sizes of servings can't be eaten with chopsticks. You can think about how a tradition of eating with chopsticks might affect how Japanese mothers prepare and serve food. Japanese homes also have spoons and forks for eating things like pudding and spaghetti.

Some 4-H delegates would like to learn how to cook Japanese food and to help their host mother with chores. Please be sure and put this in the letter that you write to your host family after you receive their information sheet. You will have to also offer/ask again when you go to Japan. Since Japanese youth are so busy with school, they often do not do chores. At first, your host mother may not believe that you really do want to help cook the meals. It will be fun and amazing for your host mother to meet a teen who wants to learn to cook, and a great opportunity for you!