
The ‘Taste of Japan’ series, a group of events held at UTSA, is intended to help promote the importance of food in Japanese culture and is made possible thanks to a grant from the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership (JFCGP). The Consulate-General of Japan in Houston office also generously provided the film for this movie screening event, and Consul-General Hideo Fukushima and Vice Consul Takeshi Sugiura were present for the reception and film screening.

Free and open to the public, the event was enjoyed by UTSA students, faculty and San Antonio community members. The audience also included representatives from the Japan America Society of San Antonio, San Antonio College, San Japan, and The University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio.

Before the movie screening, a reception was held, during which the attendees enjoyed a sampling of sushi provided by Fukushima’s office. Other Japanese-style appetizers and food were also served for the guests to enjoy before the movie started.

During the reception, Dr. Wanxiang Yao, Director of the EAI, welcomed the audience to the event and introduced Consul-General Fukushima. “I am very pleased to team up with UTSA for this event,” said Fukushima. “I hope this film will help the audience understand both Japanese society and its food culture.” In conclusion of his small speech, the Consul-General invited everyone to enjoy the sushi and other snacks that were provided.

Immediately following the sushi reception, UTSA’s Japan Outreach Initiative Coordinator, Chinatsu Oku, shared a short presentation on Japanese washoku (traditional food), and Japanese food culture and traditions. “Washoku is a social practice based on a set of skills, knowledge, practice, and traditions,” commented Oku. “All of these practices are related to the production, processing, preparation and consumption of food.” Oku also explained the key elements of ‘washoku’, which includes these four key points:
diversity and freshness of ingredients, well-balanced and healthy diet, sense of natural beauty, and close links with natural events. Following the presentation, the audience was able to enjoy the movie screening with the images and flavors of Japanese food fresh in their minds.

*The Tale of Samurai Cooking* is a story that anyone can enjoy. Set during Japan’s Edo period, the story features not only Japanese food and cooking, but love and family values as well. The film highlights several unique aspects of Japanese food, such as the diversity and the freshness of ingredients, the close ties with food, nature, and annual holidays, and the Japanese balanced diet made up of rice and side dishes known as ‘ichijuusansai’ (one soup three sides).

In the film, the young talented cook Haru (Aya Ueto), is wed to Yasunobu (Kengo Kora) of the Funaki family. Yasunobu, the family heir, is reluctant to take on the responsibility of becoming a chef to represent the Funaki family name while serving the powerful Maeda clan. The film’s story follows the couple’s blossoming love story and passion for Japanese cooking.

A panel discussion followed the film, with speakers Dr. Makiko Fukuda, Professor of Japanese Language at UTSA, Nobuaki Yokoo, President of Japan America Society of San Antonio, and UTSA students Jayla Vicks and Madeleine Toro, the latter two previously spent time studying in Japan. The panelists discussed similarities between Japanese cuisine and other, more familiar cuisines to the Western palate, such as Mexican or Tex-Mex foods, as well as whether the panelists and audience follow the Japanese diet and traditional way of eating in their own lives. They also discussed their favorite aspects of Japanese washoku, and the unique style of Japanese bento box lunches.

The film and discussion were greatly enjoyed by those who attended. After the panel discussion, panelist Vicks shared his thoughts, saying, “I truly enjoyed the movie and being able to expand my understanding of Japanese culture amongst fellow students and Japanese attendees.” Other ‘Taste of Japan’ events are scheduled throughout the spring semester, including cooking classes and monthly bento photo contests.