



AN/CU 338 TOKYO AS A CULINARY CITY
IES Abroad Tokyo

DESCRIPTION:

Tokyo is one of the largest and most complex culinary cities in the world. With over 60,000 restaurants, dense neighborhood food districts, the most Michelin-starred restaurants of any city in the world, and a complex 24-hour culinary infrastructure, food plays a central role in shaping daily life in Tokyo. This course examines Tokyo as a culinary city through its historical development, everyday infrastructures, and contemporary foodscapes. From Edo-period street food and market systems to modern restaurant culture, migrant foodways, and neighborhood eateries, students will explore how food connects history, labor, space, and social life in the city.

Food, Infrastructure, and Everyday Life. In Tokyo, food is embedded in daily routines: commuting, studying, working, socializing, and caring for others. Small restaurants, cafés, markets, and street food stalls function not only as sites of consumption, but as forms of urban and social infrastructure that organize everyday life. This course approaches food beyond the plate, focusing on how culinary spaces sustain communities, shape neighborhood identities, and respond to broader forces such as colonialism, tourism, migration, and urban planning.

Learning Through Fieldwork. Tokyo itself serves as the primary classroom for this course. Through guided fieldtrips and independent observation, students will learn to analyze the city's foodscapes using basic ethnographic methods, including participant observation, fieldnote writing, and critical reflection. Field visits—to historic districts such as Fukagawa and Kanda, major market areas like Tsukiji, superdiverse neighborhoods such as Shin-Okubo, and residential areas like Kichijōji and Nishi-Ogikubo—are designed not as food tours, but as opportunities to examine how culinary spaces operate within larger urban systems. At the end of the course, students will have the opportunity to create their own urban tours of neighborhood Tokyo.

Tokyo in Comparative Perspective. While grounded in Tokyo, this course places the city in comparative perspective, encouraging students to reflect on how Tokyo's culinary culture differs from and overlaps with other global cities. Issues such as tourism, sustainability, migration, and neighborhood change will be discussed in relation to broader debates about cities and globalization. By the end of the course, students will be able to use food as a lens to understand how cities function—and how everyday practices of eating reveal larger social, economic, and cultural processes.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

INSTRUCTOR: James Farrer

PREREQUISITES: None

ADDITIONAL COST: \$300

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

- Class participation – 10%
- Fieldwork reflections – 25%
- Quizzes – 20%
- Oral presentation – 20%
- Final observation essay – 25%

Class Participation



Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings, core issues, and questions proposed by the instructor. Participation is more than just attending class; students should show that they have done the readings and are thinking critically, based on the core concepts used throughout the course.

Fieldwork Reflections

Students will write a reflection on fieldtrips that reflects upon what was observed and learned on the trip in light of the assigned readings. Reflections will be posted to Moodle and also will be the basis for in-class discussions. There will be a total of 5 reflections worth 5% each.

Quizzes

Quizzes in each section will assess whether students are completing the readings assigned for that day and comprehending their contents. These will be short-answer or multiple-choice questions and will take less than 10 minutes of class time. There will be a total of 4 quizzes worth 5% each.

Student-led Presentations (Final Presentations)

Students will share their neighborhood fieldwork experiences in the form of a student-led tour through the neighborhoods where they conduct their fieldwork on urban foodways.

Final Observation Essay

This assignment is a course paper in which students will integrate what they have learned from the fieldwork project with the theoretical contents and readings from the course. This will be a 3-4 page essay with a separate list of references.

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

- *Readings:* Students are expected to complete readings before class meetings (including, in some cases, fieldtrips) and be prepared to discuss their contents. Quizzes will assess comprehension of readings. Unless otherwise noted, readings on the syllabus are required.
- *Lectures:* In classroom meetings the instructor will provide the students with the background to the session topic through a lecture on the newly assigned readings, which will summarize the theoretical information of the session, and provide some key concepts related to the readings. The required readings for each class will be available on Moodle.
- *Class Discussion:* A significant part of the course will consist of the discussion of key themes from course readings and fieldtrips. Students must come to class having completed and reflected on the assigned readings from previous sections of the course.
- *Course-related Fieldtrips:* A key portion of the course is fieldwork. Fieldtrips provide both knowledge and intellectual background and are also preparation for students' own observational fieldwork in the city.
- *Knowledge Co-production (Neighborhood Tours):* Students will create urban tours in group work and lead other students on these urban tours as part of their final presentations for the course.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Produce a historical timeline of culinary Tokyo, from the Edo Period to the present day.
- Establish connections and analyze the relations between urban infrastructure, culinary infrastructure, and social infrastructure in the Tokyo case.
- Interpret aspects of urban society and culture that impact foodways, including urban history, urban planning, migration, and changing patterns of consumption.
- Evaluate issues of sustainability in urban food practices.
- Formulate comparative assessments of urban foodways in their home societies and the Tokyo setting.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:



At IES Abroad Tokyo, attendance is mandatory for all classes, including course-related trips. Given the three-hour format, missing one class is the equivalent of missing an entire week of a regular semester. Unexcused absences will result in grade penalties. The first unexcused absence will lower your final grade by one-third of a letter grade, and each additional unexcused absence will reduce your grade by a full letter grade. For example, one missed class turns an A into an A-, two missed classes turn it into a B-, three into a C-, and so on.

Absences are excused only for unavoidable reasons, such as documented illness or other circumstances approved in advance by the instructor. Lateness to class (including class excursions) may count as unexcused absences at the instructor's discretion. Missed exams, tests, presentations, or assignments can only be rescheduled for documented medical or family emergencies.

If a student has accumulated absences representing 25% of the total class hours, the Academic Program Manager (APM) and Centre Director (CD) will contact them to schedule a disciplinary review, and their home institutions will be informed of the result.

CONTENT:

Session	Content	Assignments
Session 1	Introduction to Tokyo and Edo Foodways	- Harada, Nobuo. "A Peek at the Meals of the People of Edo." <i>Part 1</i> - Harada, Nobuo. "A Peek at the Meals of the People of Edo." <i>Part 2</i> - Cybrirsky, Roman. <i>Tokyo: The Shogun's City at the Twenty-First Century</i>. NY and Chichester: John Wiley, 1998. Chapter 3, pp. 54-99. (recommended reading) Short History of the City (required video) submit and discuss: self-introduction through food
Session 2	Fieldtrip: Finding Edo Foodways in modern Tokyo: Fukagawa, Monzen-Nakachō (Edo street food and temple districts) Meet at Fukagawa Edo Museum [400 yen fee], walk to Kiyosumi Gardens [150 yen fee] then to Fudo Temple Monzen-Nakacho for the fire ceremony at 13:00 [no charge]	- Rath, Eric, "Cookbooks and Streetfood in the Early Modern Era" Ch. 3 in <i>Oishii: The History of Sushi</i>, Reaktion, pp. 71-99. - Rath, Eric, "Sushi in Early Modern Japan: From Snack to Delicacy" Ch. 4 in <i>Oishii: The History of Sushi</i>, Reaktion, pp. 100-136. (recommended reading)
Session 3	Modernization, Colonialism, and the Emergence of Japan's Mass Food Culture	- Cwierka, K.J. "Eating the world: Restaurant culture in early twentieth century Japan." <i>E. Journal of East Asian Studies</i> 2(1) (2003): 89-116. - Iwama, Kazuhiro. "How Taiwanese, Korean, and Manchurian Cuisines Were Designed A Comparative Study on Colonial Cuisines in the Japanese Empire." <i>Al-Madaniyya: Keio Bulletin of Middle Eastern and Asian Urban History</i> 1 (2021): 1-20. - Jordan Sands. <i>Tokyo Vernacular: Common Spaces, Local Histories, Found Objects</i> 2013 (Intro. And Ch.1) (recommended reading) Discussing group projects: studying foodways at a neighborhood level - Reiher and Kottman Studying Japan Handbook of Research Designs, Fieldwork and Methods, Ch. 5 "How to collect data," Ch. 6 "fieldwork," Ch. 8 "participant observation.") (pp. 132-183;

		211-237). (recommended resource for course projects) • Submit and discuss: reflections on last meeting's fieldtrip • Quiz (on readings assigned for meetings 1-3)
Session 4	Fieldtrip: Finding Modern Tokyo in Urban Foodways in Jimbōchō (curry, coffee and culinary postcolonialism in the “world’s coolest neighborhood”)	• Meeting at Ochanomizu Station (Waterworks Museum, Kanda Myojin Shrine, Jimbochō Bookstore district; fieldwork in <i>kissaten</i>, coffee shops, and curry shops) • James Farrer. 2022. “Seeing the Kanda River,” <i>Gastronomica: The Journal of Food Studies</i> 22(4): 49-53. • “It’s official: Jimbocho is the world’s coolest neighbourhood in 2025” <i>Time Out</i>. • White, Merry. Coffee Life in Japan. Univ of California Press (2012), Ch. 1-3. • White, Merry. Coffee Life in Japan. Univ of California Press (2012) (recommend reading the remaining chapters of the book)
Session 5	Culinary Infrastructure as Social Infrastructure	• Pilcher, J. (2016) “Culinary Infrastructure: How Facilities and Technologies Create Value and Meaning around Food,” <i>Global Food History</i>, 2:2, 105-131, DOI: 10.1080/20549547.2016.1214896 • Farrer, James. “Urban foodways and social sustainability: neighborhood restaurants as social infrastructure.” <i>Food, Culture & Society</i> 27, no. 5 (2024): 1377-1393. https://doi.org/10.1080/15528014.2023.2262191 • Submit and discuss: reflections on last meeting's fieldtrip • Discussion of group projects • All group members must have visited the target neighborhood before the presentation and have identified at least one target “food spot” for a case study • Quiz (on readings assigned for meetings 4-5)

Session 6	Fieldtrip - Tokyo Markets and the Touristic Foodscapes of Tokyo (is this culinary infrastructure or over-tourism?) Meet at Tsukiji Honganji temple (Tsukiji Market and surrounding area)	- Bestor, T. "Supply-side sushi: Commodity, market, and the global city." <i>American Anthropologist</i> 103, no. 1 (2001): 76-95. - Koens, K., P., Albert, B. Papp, "Is Overtourism Overused? Understanding the Impact of Tourism in a City Context." <i>Sustainability</i> 10, no. 12 (2018).
Session 7	Migrant Foodscapes in Superdiverse Tokyo	- James Farrer and Alejandra Vinay-Dorado. 2026. "Migrant foodways in Japan: Introduction to Special Issue" <i>Gastronomica: Journal of Food Studies</i>. 26(3). - Liu-Farrer, G. and D. Tamang. 2023. "Visa policies, migration industry, and the ethnic entrepreneurship trap: the case of Nepalese restaurant businesses in Japan." <i>Asian Anthropology</i> (2023): 1-19. Discussing group projects: progress reports - All students should present on their observations of a "food spot" Submit and discuss: reflections on last meeting's fieldtrip Quiz (on readings assigned for meetings 6-7)
Session 8	Fieldtrip – Okubo & Shin-Okubo (observing interactions in Tokyo's most superdiverse culinary neighborhood) Meet at Okubo Station South exit (From "Halal Street" to "Ikemen Dori")	Nambu, S., & Ono, M. (2024). Linguistic landscape of Shin-Ōkubo, Tokyo: a comparative study of Koreatown and Islamic Street. <i>International Journal of Multilingualism</i>, 1–19.
Session 9	Finding Emergent Tokyo in Kichijōji and Nishi-Ogikubo (how Tokyo's "most livable neighborhoods" sustain independent eateries) Meet at Inokashira Park South Exit (The shogun's water supply, urban parklands, postwar black markets, politics of gentrification and development, the importance of a human scale of urban life)	Farrer, James. Nishiogiology (read at least three of the articles).
Session 10	Neighborhoods in Emergent Tokyo (how city planning shapes urban foodscapes)	Almazán, Jorge, and Studiolab. <i>Emergent Tokyo: designing the spontaneous city.</i> (2022), pp. 1-59.

		• Video on Tokyo zoning (required video) • Sorensen, André. <i>The making of urban Japan: cities and planning from Edo to the twenty first century</i>. Routledge, 2005, Intro and Chapter 1, pp. 1-44. (recommended reading) • Discussing group projects: planning for presentations • Planning meetings for student led urban tours • J.Farrer and G.Liu-Farrer. 2020. "How to present findings: Presenting and publishing" in Studying Japan Handbook of Research Designs, Fieldwork and Methods, 447-457. (recommended resource) • Submit and discuss: reflections on last meeting's fieldtrip • Quiz (on readings assigned for meetings 8-10)
Session 11	Final Presentations	• Group presentations (neighborhood tours led by students)
Session 12	Final Presentations	• Group presentations (neighborhood tours led by students)

COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

- Fukagawa, Monzen-Nakachō (Edo Street)
- Jimbōchō
- Tsukiji Honganji temple and Tsukiji Market
- Okubo & Shin-Okubo

REQUIRED READINGS:

- Almazán, Jorge, and Studioblab. *Emergent Tokyo: designing the spontaneous city*. (2022), pp. 1-59.
- Bestor, T. "[Supply-side sushi: Commodity, market, and the global city](#)." *American Anthropologist* 103, no. 1 (2001): 76-95.
- Cwiertka, K.J. "[Eating the world: Restaurant culture in early twentieth century Japan](#)." *E. Journal of East Asian Studies* 2(1) (2003): 89-116.
- Farrer, James. [Nishiogiology](#)
- Farrer, James. 2022. "[Seeing the Kanda River](#)," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food Studies* 22(4): 49-53.
- Farrer, James. "Urban foodways and social sustainability: neighborhood restaurants as social infrastructure." *Food, Culture & Society* 27, no. 5 (2024): 1377-1393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15528014.2023.2262191>
- Farrer, James and Alejandra Vinay-Dorado. 2026. "Migrant foodways in Japan: Introduction to Special Issue" *Gastronomica: Journal of Food Studies*. 26(3).
- Harada, Nobuo. "[A Peek at the Meals of the People of Edo](#)." *Part 1*
- Harada, Nobuo. "[A Peek at the Meals of the People of Edo](#)." *Part 2*
- Iwama, Kazuhiro. "[How Taiwanese, Korean, and Manchurian Cuisines Were Designed A Comparative Study on Colonial Cuisines in the Japanese Empire](#)." *Al-Madaniyya: Keio Bulletin of Middle Eastern and Asian Urban History* 1 (2021): 1-20.
- "[It's official: Jimbocho is the world's coolest neighbourhood in 2025](#)" *Time Out*.

- Koens, K., P., Albert, B. Papp, "[Is Overtourism Overused? Understanding the Impact of Tourism in a City Context.](#)" *Sustainability* 10, no. 12 (2018).
- Liu-Farrer, G. and D. Tamang. 2023. "[Visa policies, migration industry, and the ethnic entrepreneurship trap: the case of Nepalese restaurant businesses in Japan.](#)" *Asian Anthropology* (2023): 1-19.
- Pilcher, J. (2016) "Culinary Infrastructure: How Facilities and Technologies Create Value and Meaning around Food," *Global Food History*, 2:2, 105-131, DOI: [10.1080/20549547.2016.1214896](#)
- Nambu, S., & Ono, M. (2024). [Linguistic landscape of Shin-Ōkubo, Tokyo: a comparative study of Koreatown and Islamic Street.](#) *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 1–19.
- Rath, Eric, "Cookbooks and Streetfood in the Early Modern Era" Ch. 3 in *Oishii: The History of Sushi*, Reaktion, pp. 71-99.
- White, Merry. [Coffee Life in Japan](#). Univ of California Press (2012), Ch. 1-3.

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Cybriwsky, Roman. *Tokyo: The Shogun's City at the Twenty-First Century*. NY and Chichester: John Wiley, 1998. Chapter 3, pp. 54-99.
- Farrer, J. and G. Liu-Farrer. 2020. "How to present findings: Presenting and publishing" in [Studying Japan Handbook of Research Designs, Fieldwork and Methods](#), 447-457.
- Jordan Sands. *Tokyo Vernacular: Common Spaces, Local Histories, Found Objects* 2013 (Intro. And Ch.1).
- Rath, Eric, "Sushi in Early Modern Japan: From Snack to Delicacy" Ch. 4 in *Oishii: The History of Sushi*, Reaktion, pp. 100-136.
- Reiher and Kottman [Studying Japan Handbook of Research Designs, Fieldwork and Methods](#), Ch. 5 "How to collect data," Ch. 6 "fieldwork," Ch. 8 "participant observation.") (pp. 132-183; 211-237).
- Sorensen, André. *The making of urban Japan: cities and planning from Edo to the twenty first century*. Routledge, 2005, Intro and Chapter 1, pp. 1-44.
- White, Merry. [Coffee Life in Japan](#). Univ of California Press (2012).

INSTRUCTOR BIOGRAPHY:

Dr. Farrer is an urban sociologist whose ethnographic studies center on the social and cultural contact zones of Asian global cities, investigating the complex flows of people, influences, and resources within these contexts. His major research projects have covered: (1) sexuality in urban China and Japan, including youth sexuality and courtship, extramarital sexuality, and interethnic dating; (2) the lives of Western and Japanese expatriates living in Shanghai; (3) contemporary and historic nightlife scenes in Shanghai and Tokyo; (4) foodways in urban China and Japan; and (5) the globalization of Japanese restaurant cuisine across six continents.