

Tokyo

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Living and raw foods have enormously higher nutrient values than foods that have been cooked.

Raw Food: A Global Health Brand Comes to Tokyo

Andrea and Angela Wolfgang (also known as Andi and Ang), two raw-vegan sisters from Pennsylvania, have recently ignited the vegan scene in Tokyo. The sisters have been studying raw food for about seven years, and recently opened a restaurant called Mōna, serving only raw foods next to Yogi Park. I visited them there to find out more about this "radical" diet that has Tokyoites talking.

Raw food has been portrayed by mainstream media as unappetizing and cold. I ignorantly expected the same when I went to speak to Andi and Ang, but I was pleasantly surprised to find out that there is much more to this lifestyle than meets the eye.

Raw foodists believe that eating an organic, uncooked, unheated, and unprocessed plant-based diet is the healthiest of all diets, but raw food does not necessarily consist only of uncooked vegetables. And, explains in more detail: "raw and living foods are foods that contain enzymes. In general, the act of heating food over 116°F or 41°C destroys enzymes in food (enzymes start to degrade in temperatures as low as 106°F). All cooked food is devoid of enzymes, furthermore, cooking food changes the molecular structure of the food and renders it toxic. Living and raw foods also have enormously higher nutrient values than foods that have been cooked."

To my surprise, raw food recipes included dishes like pancakes, tortillas, and even lasagna, all cooked slowly at less than 116°F to preserve all the nutrients and vitamins of the ingredients. The reason the raw food diet is popular in North America (and becoming popular in Tokyo) can be attributed to the vast health benefits people experience through this way of eating. When Andi and Ang first came to Tokyo three years ago, the vegan/raw food scene was virtually non-existent for expats. This was partly due to the fact that "veganism is a precursor to raw food in the Western world, but here in Tokyo veganism, and even vegetarianism, is still quite a rare thing." However, as a result of their efforts in cooking classes, parties, and other events, the word is quickly spreading to expats in Tokyo about the benefits of this way of eating.

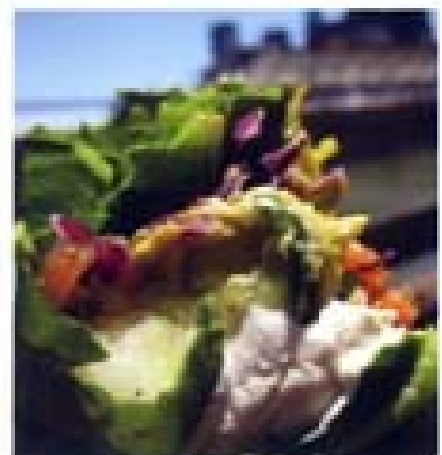
Benefits of the raw food diet:

Improved energy: Raw food is easier for the body to digest, meaning more energy is left over for other activities. Many people feel an sudden increase in physical energy after switching to a raw food diet.

Improved digestion: People no longer experience constipation because the body is fully hydrated from eating foods high in water content.

A healthy, natural weight: Initially when people start to eat raw food, they lose weight because the body is ridding itself of toxins. Once the body is fully detoxed, it will start to rebuild, and healthy new cells will be created. Digestion and accumulation of nutrients will improve, and the body will find a natural balance, even gaining weight if needed.

Cleaner skin: The body pushes toxins out through the skin when it's overloaded and can no longer eliminate toxins from the system. If allowed to detox continually, the skin can be kept fresh and clean, without suffering from blemishes, cracking, acne, or blisters.



A former model lover, I became a professional one who does not eat any meat, except for fish and seafood when I lived in Singapore in 2007. My Chinese friend friend explained how she gave up meat for a week to show her devotion to a god she worshipped. She described how much lighter she felt on those meatless days, and encouraged me to give it a try. I did it for a week, and after that I kept it going. Japan is the perfect place for me, as there is an abundance of delicious fish, but I often wish I could enjoy kobe beef, wagyu and yubuki while I am here. Perhaps it is psychological, but I do feel lighter, and I believe that my digestive system is happier and healthier now that I no longer eat red meat. As a relatively new expat to Tokyo, I have observed that it is easy to fall into an unhealthy routine of beer and yakitori at an izakaya, coupled with long work hours. However, we often overlook the unique opportunities that Japan holds to easily lead a healthier lifestyle. I did a bit of digging on what's out there and came up with three major health trends.

By Rebecca Chan

HEALTHY IN THE CITY

Yoga is also a spiritual practice of self-awareness, compassion, kindness, and interconnectedness.

Yoga: A Marriage of Physical and Spiritual Health Benefits

Although healthy eating is a big part of healthy living, it is not the only aspect that is important. A healthy lifestyle consists of harmony and well-being of the body, mind, and spirit. While living in Tokyo may foster strength of the body through healthy eating and exercise, it can be more challenging on the mind and spirit. For expats, living out of our comfort zone can often take a toll on our mental health, sometimes requiring a significant emotional and psychological adjustment. One of the most densely populated cities in the world frequently makes people feel both isolated and claustrophobic at the same time, especially those who don't speak Japanese.

Leza Lowitz, a California native and owner of Sun and Moon Yoga studio, describes her own observations when first coming to Tokyo: "There are so many people in such a small space, with little nature and 'breathing space,' and the fast pace leads to even more stress. Culturally, too, there are more rules and regulations, so people feel even more 'hemmed in.'" Determined to bring a California sense of relaxation to Tokyo, Leza began teaching yoga as a means to share this remedy to others.

Leza firmly believes that "through yoga, we can connect to the breath and the spirit. When we breathe deeply, we relax the nervous system and calm the mind. Yoga helps us move from 'thinking mind' to 'feelings and sensations,' and that is a more spacious, limitless way of being. Then we find our inner calm, and we bring together all the scattered parts of ourselves." In a place like Tokyo it is essential to have a sense of 'space,' even if it's just a way of thinking and feeling.

"Yoga is a way of re-connecting with one's self, which can be helpful when people don't feel they are connected to much, including their environment. Leza explains that, "yoga is not just physical. It is also a spiritual practice of self-awareness, compassion, kindness, and interconnectedness. When we reunite with our essence, we realize that we are all the same. So we become kinder people, more aware, more generous. Yoga is an inner method and an outer method to transform yourself, to connect with your own highest self."

Physical, mental and spiritual well-being are all essential for surviving in Tokyo, and although the city may not offer the luxuries of wide open spaces and a leisurely pace of life, it is still possible for each one of us to find our oasis and take the necessary steps to being healthy all around.

