



Day Two

I'd like to say we kicked off today with an early morning start; but that'd be a fantastic lie.

We left our hotel at 10.30am and went out in search of a famous ramen restaurant called "Shingen Ramen", a few blocks from downtown Sapporo. Our plan was to arrive just before opening time at 11am and avoid the kind of queues we'd faced the previous night at restaurant Daruma.

Imagine our frustration then, when we turned the corner to find 25 hungry customers already queuing around the block - 10 minutes before the damn place had even opened.

Fortunately, after the doors swung open, things got moving fast and we only had a 15 minute before we found ourselves sat in front of a bowl of Sapporo ramen; a miso based broth, with slices of pork and curly noodles (pictured above).

Usually, I'd avoid miso ramen in favour of a soy sauce base, as the saltier flavour suits me better. However, this was hands down the best bowl of ramen I've had so far this year; the soup tasted like gravy, and my portion came with two small slices of butter on the side, which I dropped into the bowl and watched melt into the soup. Healthy it was not, but the rich buttery gravy tasting soup went beautifully with the juicy slices of pork and noodles.

Our next stop of the day was somewhere I'd read about numerous times online, a place known only as "Koibito Park"; a cross between Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, Disneyland, and an alpine village.

One minute we were walking down a busy rural street in Sapporo, the next minute we found ourselves stood before a European red brick building, a dozen miniature houses, a double decker London bus, and a giant sweet shop. It was bonkers.





Then again, if that isn't a fantastic sales pitch for an attraction, I don't know what is.

It turns out one of Hokkaido's most famous souvenirs are Koibito cookies - a thin slice of chocolate, sandwiches between to fine biscuits - and Koibito park was the actual factory where they're made - thousands of cookies every day - with a small theme park stuck on the side.

Suffice to say it was bloody brilliant and somewhere I'd absolutely recommend visiting in Sapporo.

Not only did we get to see the cookies themselves being made, and Natsuki sitting inside one of the tiny houses scaring children, but we also ended up getting our very branded cookies, complete with a disturbing photo of us on the box.

Who knows, perhaps there's some edible Abroad in Japan merchandising potential to be had! (There definitely isn't).

Following on from our failure to eat Genghis Khan the previous evening, we decided to have another try at a different restaurant.

After a bit of research online, we found a highly regarded restaurant originally called "Sapporo Genghis Khan". The reviews were bursting with praise; which surprised us when we finally stumbled upon the restaurant, and found an old run down two-storey shack, with, yet again, a queue of people out the front.

If there hadn't been a queue out of the front of the shop, we would have had a hard time realising it was even a restaurant.

The restaurant itself was a cramped room on the second floor; there were no tables, just a bar counter in a U-shape, surrounding the chef and his three female staff. The counter managed to seat about 20 people, with each group having their own bbq. In the space of one minute, from entering to being seated, a plate of fresh lamb mutton was placed before us, so we could get going straight away, like some kind of fast food bbq.



It was quite honestly one of the most intense dining experiences I've ever had in Japan; the room contained more bbq smoke than oxygen, and we found ourselves tightly packed in, side by side with other customers. Behind all of the customers at the bar, were another 20 seats all filled with the next customers, waiting patiently, adding a real sense of pressure to



the proceedings.

This wasn't somewhere you'd sit comfortably for 2 hours and have a fine dining experience. It seemed there was an expectation you'd go in, stuff your face with Lamb, and be out again within 45 minutes.

The meat was exceptional, the ginger soy sauce for dipping the lamb tasted like heaven, and the beer was much

welcomed - even the atmosphere was captivating - but with around 20 people sitting a foot behind you, watching you eat your bbq with envy, I felt like I couldn't enjoy the restaurant as much as I'd have liked.

Natsuki was equally frustrated as the staff were too busy to be as attentive as you'd typically expect in a Japanese restaurant, and above all, he couldn't smoke - and if Natsuki can't smoke while he eats and drinks, he's not a happy bunny.

After eating a truck load of delicious Lamb, we were both relieved to get out of the crowded, smokey nightmare, and back into the warm summers air.

Despite my criticisms, it's certainly somewhere I'd recommend if you want to try Genghis Khan - a must do if you're in Sapporo.

We then decided to get some therapy in the form of a drink, and headed over to Susukino crossing - the entertainment district - and by chance, saw a colourful looking cocktail bar several stories up a building, overlooking the neon lit crossing.



It was a stroke of good luck, as not only did the cocktail

bar have an amazing view of Hokkaido's most colourful street and crossing, AND not only did it turn out to be one of the only cocktail bars in Sapporo where they did a performance show throwing cocktail glasses around (like the horrific Tom Cruise movie "Cocktail"), BUT they also had a box of Jenga on next to our table.

It was the perfect end to the day, cocktail in hand, captivating neon lit view on the right, and Jenga on the left. The only downside was Natsuki somehow won the bloody game.

For me, it was the only downer on an otherwise brilliant day.