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CIR's Corner

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Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

This Month's Topic: Ice Cream

Ice cream is a cold treat loved by people worldwide. In my home country, America, people consume more ice cream per capita than most other countries. Since over 90% of Americans consume ice cream, President Ronald Reagan officially declared July as "National Ice Cream Month" in 1984. In the same proclamation, he designated the third Sunday of July "National Ice Cream Day." Many ice cream shops take advantage of the day by having special sales. Since it's now July, I'm going to use this opportunity to write about ice cream.



The History of Ice Cream

It is unclear where and when ice cream first originated. In ancient times, ice houses could be found in many places around the world. In order to beat the summer heat, people in China, India, and the Middle East drank cold milk from cows and goats, and they ate desserts of shaved ice topped with honey. Japanese people have been eating shaved ice called *kakigori* since the Heian era.

Melting ice is an endothermic process which absorbs

heat from the surroundings. When salt is mixed with ice, the temperature of the mixture drops below the freezing point of water. If you put liquid in a container and submerge it in the ice-salt mixture, then it is possible to freeze the liquid. It is unknown when humans first discovered this knowledge of chemistry, but the first person to write about it was an Arab medical historian in the 13th century. At the time, this knowledge was used to preserve various medicines, but by the 16th century, people in India were freezing condensed milk in ceramic containers to make a creamy dessert called *kulfi*. *Kulfi*, known as traditional Indian ice cream, is still popular throughout South Asia today. From the 17th century, Europeans started making their own frozen desserts, such as sherbet, and the topic of this article, ice cream.



Left: Traditional Indian ice cream, kulfi. Mango and saffron flavor is pictured.



Right: One of the 10 ice cream makers owned by George Washington

From the 18th century, European settlers brought ice cream with them to America. The first president of the United States, George Washington, loved ice cream. He owned many ice cream makers and fancy ice cream dishes. The third president, Thomas Jefferson, ate a lot of

ice cream while he was the Ambassador to France. He jotted down his favorite French vanilla ice cream recipe while living in Paris, and it became the first known ice cream recipe recorded by an American.

In 1904, the ice cream cone became the hot item of the St. Louis World's Fair. Ice cream cones were the perfect treat for walking and eating, and the ice cream vendors no longer had to wash and reuse spoons and dishes. It was a win for everyone.



A mother and her three children enjoying ice cream cones at the St. Louis

World's Fair in 1904

By the way, the first time I had an ice cream cone in Japan, I was so confused when I was given a spoon. You are never given a spoon to eat an ice cream cone in America, because they are meant to be licked. Licking is convenient because you can keep one hand free, and there is no garbage. I think most Americans feel that if you eat your ice cream cone with a spoon, then it defeats the purpose of ordering an ice cream cone. Order it in a dish instead.

Ice Cream Consumption around the World

Americans consume more ice cream per capita than most other countries, but we're not actually number one. There are a few countries that eat even more ice cream than America does.

People in New Zealand eat more ice cream than in any other country, at around 20.1 liters per person per year. Vanilla is the most popular flavor, followed by a flavor called "hokey pokey." It's vanilla ice cream with bits of honeycomb toffee mixed in.



New Zealand's "hokey pokey" ice cream

In second place is Australia. It's geographically close to New Zealand, so their per capita ice cream consumption is close to New Zealand's, at 19.4 liters per person.

Finland comes in at third place with 14.3 liters. I was honestly surprised to learn that Finnish people eat more ice cream than Americans. I imagine Finland to be a cold country, but perhaps they eat ice cream after getting out of the hot sauna.

America is in fourth place, with 13 liters of ice cream consumed per capita. Typically the smallest ice cream container sold at American supermarkets is a pint, which is about 473 ml. This is over four times the amount in the mini cups of Haagen Dazs commonly eaten in Japan. However, in America, a pint is often eaten by one person in a single sitting. Most Americans buy ice cream in half-gallon cartons, which is about two liters. When I was a child, almost everyone I knew had a half gallon of ice cream in their freezer at all times, but recently due to "shrinkflation," ice cream cartons are getting smaller and smaller. This is a hot topic on the internet.



Left: A half-gallon (1.89-liter) carton of ice cream sold at Costco

Right: A 1.5-quart (1.42-liter) carton of ice cream sold at a typical grocery store

In fifth place is Italy, the country famous for gelato. Gelato is denser and more richly flavored than regular ice cream, but it contains less fat. In Japan, it's actually categorized as "ice milk" rather than "ice cream." The traditional flavors are custard, vanilla, chocolate, hazelnut,

A close-up view of a gelato display case. The case is filled with various flavors of gelato, each in a metal tray. The flavors include: Cocccolato (top right), Nutella (top right, second from right), Nutella Biscuits (top right, third from right), Cocccolato (top left, second from left), Nutella (top left, third from left), Cocccolato (top left, fourth from left), Nutella (top left, fifth from left), Cocccolato (top left, sixth from left), Nutella (top left, seventh from left), Cocccolato (top left, eighth from left), Nutella (top left, ninth from left), Cocccolato (top left, tenth from left), Nutella (top left, eleventh from left), Cocccolato (top left, twelfth from left), Nutella (top left, thirteenth from left), Cocccolato (top left, fourteenth from left), Nutella (top left, fifteenth from left), Cocccolato (top left, sixteenth from left), Nutella (top left, seventeenth from left), Cocccolato (top left, eighteenth from left), Nutella (top left, nineteenth from left), Cocccolato (top left, twentieth from left). The trays are labeled with small white cards that read "Nutella Biscuits", "Nutella", and "Cocccolato". Each tray has a metal scoop resting in it. The gelato is served in a white cup with a red swirl of sauce. The background is a dark, textured wall.

As for Japan's ranking, it came in at 22nd place, with 6.7 liters of ice cream consumed per person. How much ice cream do you eat?

Waseieigo



eat, and you tell your server, “I would like some ice,” then they will give you ice cubes! If you want ice cream while traveling, make sure to say “ice cream” fully.

Finally, “soft cream” is sold across Japan, and tourist areas sell their own unique flavors, such as melon and lavender. It was invented in America in 1926, and is still very popular there as well. However, Americans don’t call it “soft cream.” The full name of the product in English is “soft-serve ice cream,” and we shorten it to just “soft serve.” The Japanese term, “soft cream,” is a shortened form of the same name. I think it’s very interesting how the Japanese language abbreviates the same words in different ways. The difference between “soft cream” and “soft serve” seems small, but it is important to be aware of *waseieigo* in order to communicate effectively.

The first time I had soft serve in Japan, I was in Hakodate. I was doing a study-abroad program at that time, and my host family invited me out for “soft cream.” I didn’t know what “soft cream” was, so I imagined some kind of Japanese dessert. I was a little disappointed to see it was just regular soft serve. However, Hokkaido’s soft serve is so creamy that I felt it was more delicious than any soft serve I had ever eaten in America.

When my friend from America came to visit me in Japan, I took her to eat some soft serve. She was so excited when she saw chocolate-vanilla twist soft serve on the menu. “This flavor is so rare in America!” she said. We traveled around Honshu together for two weeks, and every time she saw chocolate-vanilla twist soft serve, she immediately bought it and ate it. Through that trip, I was reminded how much Americans love ice cream. ★



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