

Sports

48,000 meals a day: Tokyo tackles feeding an Olympic Village

TOKYO: Even under ordinary circumstances, feeding an Olympic Village is a mammoth task, with chefs preparing tens of thousands of meals a day for elite athletes from around the world. But at Tokyo 2020, there's an added pressure: strict coronavirus rules forbid athletes from eating at local restaurants, so it's their only chance to sample Japan's famous cuisine.

"I feel it's a lot of responsibility for us," admitted Tsutomu Yamane, senior director of Tokyo 2020's food and beverages services department. "We want them to enjoy (Japanese food)... but it's major pressure," he told AFP. It's a huge undertaking: the village can host up to 18,000 people at a time and its cafeterias will serve up to 48,000 meals a day, with some open around the clock. Anti-infection rules mean athletes can't go anywhere but the village, training sites and competition venues.

So organizers will provide 700 menu options, 3,000 seats at the main two-storey cafeteria and 2,000 staff at peak hours to meet the needs of all. Menus are largely divided into three categories: Western, Japanese and Asian, which covers Chinese, Indian and Vietnamese options.

Healthy home cooking

And given Japan's world-famous cuisine, there will be plenty of local flavor. The focus will be on informal dishes rather than high-end dining, with ramen and udon noodles among the staples, said Yamane.

Always-popular ramen will be offered in two of its most famous broths: soy sauce, and miso — the fermented soybean paste that is central to Japanese cuisine. But there may be one big disappointment for Japanese food fans: no sushi with raw fish. Safety rules mean rolls will only feature cooked shrimp, canned tuna, cucumber and pickled plum.



TOKYO: This file photo taken on June 20, 2021 shows a view of the main dining hall of the Olympic Village during a media tour of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Village in Tokyo. — AFP

Two other favorites will be available though: grilled wagyu beef and tempura — battered, fried vegetables and seafood. Some less familiar Japanese dishes will also be featured, including two specialties from the western Osaka region: okonomiyaki and takoyaki.

The former is a savory pancake cooked on a griddle that often contains cabbage and pork and is topped with a sweet sauce, mayonnaise, and bonito flakes. Takoyaki are small batter balls filled with octopus. And

there is Japanese home cooking, courtesy of locals who entered a competition to have their dishes featured.

Yoko Nishimura, a 59-year-old mother and housewife from Kamakura outside Tokyo, had almost forgotten about the competition after the Games was postponed. "Then I was contacted and told I was chosen. I could barely believe it," she told AFP.

She was inspired by the summer heat to create a dish of cold somen noodles topped with grilled salmon,

steamed chicken, edamame beans, broccoli, plum paste and grated yam. The dish, she said, "is full of things that are good for the body".

Gluten-free section

It uses "salmon with its skin on, which has great nutrients like collagen. The edamame beans are full of protein, and broccoli has antioxidants for your body". Other meals chosen include oden — a Japanese stew with a dashi broth base — and a panna cotta made from edamame.

Ingredients used will come from all 47 regions of Japan, including areas hit by the 2011 earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster, in keeping with the Olympics' "Recovery Games" theme. While some countries still restrict food from areas affected by the Fukushima nuclear accident, Japan says produce from the region is subject to stricter standards than those used elsewhere in the world and items are rigorously tested.

So while organizers will indicate the origins of food served in the casual dining area, there won't be any specific labeling to mark out items from Fukushima. Meals will cater to just about every religious and dietary restriction, including the first gluten-free section at a Games.

As with everything at the pandemic-postponed Olympics, the virus will cast a long shadow. Seating has been reduced and athletes must keep mealtimes as short as possible. Nishimura is hopeful though that her dish will offer up something restorative. "Athletes coming for the Olympics could lose their appetites because of the hot summer and training hard. They may also feel a lot of pressure from competing in such a big event," she said. "I would even say that eating this (dish) will let them compete in top condition." — AFP

Outbreak: Managing coronavirus at the pandemic Olympics

TOKYO: Tokyo's Olympics will be like no other Games, with the specter of coronavirus hanging over every part of the event, and organizers determined to prevent an outbreak. Here's a look at some of the ways they'll try to prevent infections among some 11,000 athletes, and what will happen if cases do emerge at the Games, which open July 23.

What safety measures are there?

The latest rulebook for athletes and sports officials is 70 pages long, and the requirements start before they get to Japan. Athletes must test negative for the virus twice within 96 hours of travel, and again when they land. They'll be tested daily while in the country, and they have to leave the Olympic Village within 48 hours of their competition ending.

And there won't be any soaking up the atmosphere: they aren't allowed anywhere except their accommodation and competition venues, with a ban on using public transport. Masks will be mandatory, even on the medal podium, with exceptions only for eating, sleeping, training and competing.

What about vaccines?

Olympic officials say 85 percent of the athletes and teams staying in the Village will be vaccinated. Getting jabbed is not a requirement, but has been strongly encouraged. The anti-coronavirus rules will be the same for those taking part in the Games, whether they're vaccinated or not. Tokyo 2020 has organized vaccinations for 38,000 officials, volunteers, local media and airport staff, among others.

What happens if there's an infection?

Athletes will be given daily saliva antigen tests, and if they come back positive or unclear, they'll have a follow-up saliva PCR test, which is more sensitive. If that test is positive, they'll have a nasal and

throat swab PCR test. A third positive result will mean the athlete is out of the Games. They'll have to isolate or be hospitalized, with no chance of rejoining the competition.

What if you're a close contact?

Things are a bit more complicated for "close contacts" of an infected person. The term only applies to people who have spent 15 minutes or more within one meter of the infected person without wearing a mask. That might include a roommate, or a dining companion but probably not a tennis partner, for example.

Those considered close contacts will face a nervous wait to hear whether they are judged safe to continue participating in the Games. Rulings will be made "case-by-case" and consider whether the close contact is likely to spread infection. If close contacts are allowed to compete, they may face additional restrictions, including being moved to a separate room and eating meals alone.

What if someone gets really sick?

Medical staff and facilities are key at any Games, but the stakes are higher given the pandemic. Organizers say there will be some 7,000 medical staff, including doctors and nurses, but have declined to specify the number of beds available.

The push to find these resources has been controversial in Japan, given a recent surge in infections that stretched the local healthcare system. To head off that criticism, the International Medical Committee has pledged to bring additional medical staff from outside to reduce pressure on resources.

Is everyone insured?

Olympic participants from overseas, including athletes, team officials and media, are required to have insurance that will cover medical treatment and repatriation. Olympic rulebooks specify that the insurance must include cover for COVID-19.

Before they enter Japan athletes will need to sign a "written pledge" to obey coronavirus restrictions, and take responsibility for their trip. "Despite all the care taken, risks and impacts may not be fully eliminated," warns the Olympic playbook, which details anti-virus measures. "Therefore you agree to attend the Olympic and Paralympic Games at your own risk." — AFP



TOKYO: This file photo taken on July 9, 2021 shows security personnel checking the accreditation and body temperature of a man entering Tokyo Big Sight, the site of the International Broadcast Centre (IBC) and Main Press Centre (MPC) for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, next to a sign illustrating "COVID-19 countermeasures" in Tokyo. — AFP

Istanbul sets sights on 2036 Summer Games

ISTANBUL: The mayor of Istanbul yesterday said he wanted the ancient Turkish city to host the 2036 Summer Olympics after a failed bid for the pandemic-delayed 2020 Games. The fabled capital of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires boasts strong infrastructure and the distinction of bridging Europe and Asia along the Bosphorus Strait.

But it also suffers from stifling heat and humidity in the summer as well as traffic nightmares for its 15.5 million residents. "Our objective is (to host) the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2036," Istanbul mayor Ekrem Imamoglu told reporters. "I am convinced that we will win."

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is expected to name the Australian city of Brisbane — the only candidate — as the host of the 2032 Summer Games before the Tokyo Olympics launch later this month. A formal bid could potentially boost the political standing of the popular mayor of Turkey's largest city. Imamoglu is a prominent member of the main opposition party who has become a thorn in the side of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

The long-serving Turkish leader is a fan of sports



TOKYO: In this file photo taken on June 20, 2021, a reporter looks at the buildings which will host the athletes during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, during a media tour of the Olympic Village in Tokyo. — AFP

Daily tests, cardboard beds: 24 hours at Tokyo's Olympic Village

TOKYO: For athletes competing at the Tokyo Games, the Olympic Village will be almost all they see, with strict coronavirus rules preventing them from leaving the compound except to train and compete. Their stay in the village will also be shorter than usual: competitors can only arrive five days before their event, and must leave within 48 hours of winning or losing. Here's what a typical day might look like at Tokyo 2020's waterside mini-city:

6:30am

The village is built to sleep up to 18,000 Olympians, coaches and officials. They should wake up refreshed, despite Tokyo's 4:40am sunrise, thanks to thick black-out curtains. As in many Japanese homes, space is limited, however — single rooms measure just nine square meters (100 square feet), and doubles 12 square meters. The beds and partition walls are made from sturdy recyclable cardboard, to be cleared away after the Games when the 21 towers are turned into luxury homes. Perhaps not so good if your neighbor snores, however...

7:00am

Time for a daily coronavirus test — a requirement for everyone staying in the village. They will administer the saliva antigen tests themselves and then submit them for processing. A positive result and a second positive on a more accurate PCR test means a trip to the fever clinic, a small prefab building in the center of the village. At the clinic, a third test determines if you are out of the Games and need to isolate or go to hospital.

7:30am

Forgetting to wear a mask can be easy, especially early in the morning — but they are mandatory in the village, except when sleeping and eating. On the way to get breakfast, athletes can check an app that shows how crowded communal areas are, including the two floors of the vast 3,000-seat canteen.

8:00am

Village residents are asked to eat alone to avoid

spreading potentially contagious droplets. Each seat is screened off with plexiglass. There's an immense selection of food, with traditional Japanese cuisine highlighted. Just about every dietary preference is catered to — vegetarian, halal, gluten-free — with nutritional values clearly indicated.

9:00am

The world's top sportsmen and women can train at a huge gym with 600 cardio and weight-training machines. Masks are mandatory even when getting sweaty, and even though the gym machines are cleaned frequently, users are recommended to disinfect them before they start.

11:00am

Public transport and walks outside the village are forbidden, so athletes must take dedicated buses from the site — built on reclaimed land in Tokyo Bay — to competition venues or training centers.

5:00pm

On their return to the village, Olympic teams can stop off at the "Village Plaza", a wooden annex incorporating traditional Japanese construction techniques. Inside are ATMs, cleaning services, a hairdresser and a cafe, among other conveniences — giving athletes the chance to buy a souvenir, even though sightseeing is off the cards.

7:00pm

It's getting dark already. Back at the village, tired athletes can take one of the 17 self-driving shuttles, which circulate the site 24 hours a day, back to their block. Each one can seat 19 passengers and there's a human operator on board just in case.

8:00pm

After dinner, athletes aren't obliged to stay cooped up in their rooms. The Village recreation center beckons, with Nintendo consoles and spaces to relax, or they can wander around the waterside park. Having a post-dinner beer al fresco isn't an option, though, as alcohol is forbidden in groups and in public areas. Violations of any rules will be punished, organizers have said — with disqualification from the Games a possibility.

10:00pm

Competitors aren't allowed to bring family members with them to the Games. But before bed, they can chat with loved ones back home using free wifi. — AFP



ISTANBUL: Mayor of Istanbul metropolitan municipality, Ekrem Imamoglu (center) speaks during a launch event to announce a new sport strategy and future sport plan yesterday in Istanbul. — AFP