



Pretty Good Number One: An American Family Eats Tokyo

Matthew Amster-Burton

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Everyone knows how to live the good life in Paris, Provence, or Tuscany. Now, Matthew Amster-Burton makes you fall in love with Tokyo. Experience this exciting and misunderstood city through the eyes of three Americans vacationing in a tiny Tokyo apartment. Follow 8-year-old Iris on a solo errand to the world's greatest supermarket, picnic on the bullet train, and eat a staggering array of great, inexpensive foods, from eel to udon. A humorous travel memoir in the tradition of Peter Mayle and Bill Bryson, Pretty Good Number One is the next best thing to a ticket to Tokyo.

Pretty Good Number One: An American Family Eats Tokyo Details

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From Reader Review Pretty Good Number One: An American Family Eats Tokyo for online ebook

Patrick says

I really wanted to like this author - He is from Seattle. He loves Japan. He loves food. Maybe he is too close to me? Or maybe his jokes are just TERRIBLE. He is like the food maven who nobody really wants to have along on a social evening, but everybody would ask for advice on where to eat and what to order. If you have every enjoyed eating in Japan, you should read this book. If not, don't.

Michelle Jenkins says

You don't have to be a Japanophile to be sucked in to Matthew Amster-Burton's Pretty Good Number One, but you might become one after you've read the book. Each chapter takes you through quintessential Japanese foods and food experiences and leaves you wanting...to book the first plane out for a bowl of ramen, or a crunchy bite of tempura, or a cup of green tea from a café with a floor for matcha and another for sencha.

This is no foodier than thou memoir. He shares stories of regular noodle and okonomiyaki joints, a pachinko parlor and the takoyaki museum. He talks about grocery shopping and trying to sort your recyclables (the specificity of which blows my American mind, but has my half Japanese side nodding knowingly). It bypasses the usual adulation and reporting of the middle of the night visit to witness the buying and selling at Tsukiji Fish Market, and instead tells a sweet story about a shopkeeper who got their day started right, talks about wandering around the market and having sashimi for breakfast.

And if you're not already drawn in by the food, the stories about life in Japan that round out the book, about the friendliness of its people and the freedom (without worry) that kids have, will get you. Amster-Burton is totally charmed by Japan and you can't help but be charmed by this book.

Shawn Mooney says

I live in Tokyo, and had already been here for three years when zany food journalist Matthew Amster-Burton, his 8-year-old daughter Iris and wife Laurie took a one-month food vacation here in the summer of 2012. They lived near Nakano Station during that month, which is a 45-minute walk from me, and where I teach English 2-3 times a week.

With unpretentious charm and goofy humor, Amster-Burton chronicles his culinary escapades. He and Iris are crazy about Japanese food, and pig out at local holes-in-the-wall and fine restaurants all over Tokyo and beyond.

I was so busy being entertained by the rollicking foodiness, I barely noticed that I also learned a ton. I'd never really understood some basic things about Japanese cuisine, such as the history of Japanized western food 'youshoku.' I found the assertion fascinating that most natives identify a dish from this category, such as

omu rice or Hamburg steak, rather than more authentically Japanese food like sushi, as their favorite Japanese food.

He also makes bold assertions such as that the French restaurants in Tokyo are just as good if not better than in Paris.

Amster-Burton doesn't confine his observations solely to food: he gave me words to describe what I most love about Tokyo when he described the "nameless, narrow backstreets, with frequent intersections and diversions" as providing an ineffably magic sense of enclosure, what some architectural theorist termed "outdoor rooms." Yes, exactly!

He and his family lived in one such outdoor room, in the narrow backstreets of North Nakano, and his book opens with precise walking directions to his place from the train station, including a crude English translation of the street name as "Pretty Good Number One." I'd been down that street before, and a few more times since I started the book.

This book has pointed me down umpteen other streets, narrow or wide, nameless or named, in search of food adventures, of teeming Japanese life.

Whitney says

[DNF]

So painful I finally had to just quit. I hate quitting books, but this was like a bunch of train of thought draft blog posts that accidentally got published. And I paid for it. Hungry Monkey was somewhat good and I enjoyed reading it before going to Seattle. Now I am headed to Tokyo and was interested to see that the same author did a book on food in Tokyo. But in Hungry Monkey, he had the expertise of living in Seattle as a food critic. Here, he visited Tokyo for a month and acts like an expert on the Tokyo food scene. I finally stopped at the chapter on tofu. "Asians like Tofu!" WOW.

Leigh-Anne says

"When you ask for a cake to go on a hot day, they'll ask how soon you intend to eat it, and then pack it for travel with tiny ice packs taped to the inside of the box for temperature control and protection against bumps and bruises."

"Bad service in Tokyo is shockingly rare, and being able to walk into any shop and be treated like a human made me realize how painful it is when you can't depend on such treatment."

This book was great and had me reminiscing about when we lived in Okinawa, Japan for 3 years. There are days that I miss Japan so much it's like a sack of Okinawan sweet potatoes sitting on my shoulders. When we left Okinawa to move back to America, the flight from Tokyo to LA was staffed with Americans. When I

asked for a water outside of the regular service window on our 10 hour flight and the flight attendant gave me a heavy, annoyed sigh, I knew we weren't in Japan anymore and my heart deflated.

I can't say I'm a huge fan of Japanese cuisine, but I do miss some of it. I never could get into Ramen or broth type Soba like the author Amster-Burton, but living in Okinawa I loved melon pan fried ice cream, sushi (duh), teppanyaki, yakitori, and yakisoba. I still think the best steak I ever had was in the mall food court! When you think of a mall food court, take it up about 20 notches and that's what the Okinawa food court was like!

I daydream about expatting to Japan, but as the author pointed out being a visitor and relocating to Japan one will experience two very different reactions from the locals. I simply loved this book because of all the little, kawaii things about Japanese culture that ring true. They are so unique, and even odd, that it just makes you smile. I loved his little shout out to Okinawa too....what's better than Japan on island time!?!? Nothing. I will say he commented on the parks being run down and dirty in Tokyo. Let me point your eyes again to Okinawa. The neighborhood parks are a bucket list item there!

This book is for any former Japan resident or those wishing to travel there. Take notes and visit some of the places he mentions. If you have the time and money, Japan should be #1 on your travel destination. Don't be afraid. It's very easy to navigate knowing zero Japanese. Several times when we traveled to mainland and were caught staring at a train map for more than 30 seconds, someone always came up to help point us in the right direction. Can you tell how much I love Japan?

Marianne McKiernan says

Hilarious and interesting. Tokyo and Its restaurants are now on my bucket list.

Jennifer Shepard says

I am giving this culinary-based travel narrative 5 stars because I loved the author's voice. For the past few months, I have been listening to the podcast he co-hosts with Molly Wizenburg. He's funny and smart "on air," and that voice was evident on the page, as well. Throughout the book, one of Amster-Burton's constant foodie companions was Shiro Yamaoka, the protagonist of Oishinbo, the seven-volume foodie manga I read a few years ago. Since I picked up Pretty Good Number One, I have been unable to think of anything but ramen, sushi, okonomiyaki, octopus balls, and more Japanese food stuffs. In fact, now, after reading this book and spending time with Japanese artifacts at LACMA, I am also pretty obsessed with Japan in general and Tokyo in particular.

Rachel says

This is a well-written and witty book by an American man from Seattle who went to Japan for a month with his wife and young daughter with the goal of eating a lot. It's both a travel memoir and a food diary, and while there are a number of inaccuracies, it's still a good read. I wrote an earlier, harsher review before I read Amster-Burton's acknowledgments at the end of the book. He thanks a few people who served as his fact checkers on precisely the inaccuracies that bothered me (regarding language and food facts), and it's not his

fault that they did a less than exemplary job. I recommend the book, but with the caveat that if you have some familiarity with Japan and Japanese food, you'll still enjoy the book but will probably be a little irritated as well.

Susann says

Covering the Amster-Burton family's month-long stay in Tokyo, *Pretty Good Number One* is a fun, breezy, and helpful love story with this beautifulugly city.

I'm lucky to have traveled to Japan once before and to have loved everything but the smoking and jet lag. So I spent much of the book smiling whenever I recognized my own experiences (yakitori! onsen! dining in department store basements!) I spent the other time feeling wistful that I've missed out on cat cafes, pan-fried soup dumplings, and traveling with eight-year-old Iris. I spent all the time feeling hungry.

I kept changing my mind about my favorite part but, ultimately, the incident involving takoyaki and a two-year-old was the winner.

Highly recommended for anyone who enjoys travelogues, food writing, or family stories. And an absolute must for anyone planning a trip to Japan.

The book is now available as an ebook and as a print copy.

Julie Davis says

I've never been that interested in visiting Japan and it says a lot for Matthew Amster-Burton's engaging food/travel memoir that by the end I was wondering if I could have a successful week-long visit without learning to read kanji. I'm already a fan of Amster-Burton's light-hearted style because I listen to Spilled Milk, the podcast that he co-hosts. It transfers fairly successfully to a book style, though I did find myself wishing that he'd have cut out a few extraneous jokes here and there.

Pretty Good Number One is fairly food-centric but without pretension and in a way that makes you understand how plain rice balls can be delicious. The food talk is woven in with plenty of interesting cultural observations that make you feel as if you understand Tokyo just a bit better. Plus it is just a fun read.

Melody says

One thing I've read over and over is that this is the book that will make you want to go to Tokyo. I don't want to go to Tokyo, however I really enjoyed reading about Amster-Burton's adventures there with his family. He's a funny guy and he has a delightfully unrepentant stance when it comes to food. He's in it for what he likes, what his daughter likes, and to hell with your idea of what's fashionable or acceptable or healthy.

I loved hearing about all the interesting foods they had, but even more, I loved reading about Iris' adventures

and how easily she made friends. My absolute favorite thing about the book, and by extension, Toyko is cat cafes. I want to go to a cat cafe. I loved the way Amster-Burton evoked the sense of place. His giddy love for Toyko warms the heart. Highly recommended.

Courtney McGrale says

I love this book. I love travel, I love Japanese food, and I love to read about food and travel. And Matthew Amster-Burton made me laugh and smile.

Ruben Giró says

Un discurs molt divertit, seguint el fil habitual del podcast Spilled Milk. L'autor enganya des del primer moment, tot i que només explica les estades familiars que ha passat a Tòquio (amb la filla primer i després amb la filla i la dona) i tota mena d'ingredients, coccions i presentacions.

M'han agradat els malentesos lingüístics, són realment molt divertits!

Aloke says

Hilarious, informative and comforting. I imagine it wouldn't be everyone's cup of green tea but if you find the jokes funny and are interested in Tokyo's food, language and culture you'll probably like it. It also helps if you like kids because the author's eight year old daughter plays a big part in the book. She's quite a character too, sociable and adventurous although wary of vegetables.

I'm wavering between 4 and 5 stars. There's no deep insights here: just a lot of great food knowledge tucked dumpling-like into funny vignettes.

On second thought maybe it's more like an okonomiyaki with the food knowledge as the batter studded with succulent bits of humorous octopus and pork belly. Or maybe vice versa.

Maren says

Sometimes reading about the fun things that other people are doing--blog posts or whatever--can be a downer for me. That just comes with the territory of having a chronic illness. But this book I found so refreshing and enjoyable! Do I wish I could go to Tokyo myself now? You bet. But at the same time I feel like I've been there, just a little. This was fun to read and just about as great as mind-travel can get. :) That said, I'd like to put in a request to Matthew: the next place I'd like to travel to vicariously is Taiwan. So if you could just learn a little Mandarin now . . . :D

I couldn't resist getting my sister a copy too, before I'd even finished--and she's actually been to Tokyo. :)

