

# Food & Drink

London tried and tasted every week Edited by **Guy Dimond**

## Teenage pupil's school lunchbox

**Allen Dawson (pictured with his mother, left), student, The Japanese School, Ealing**

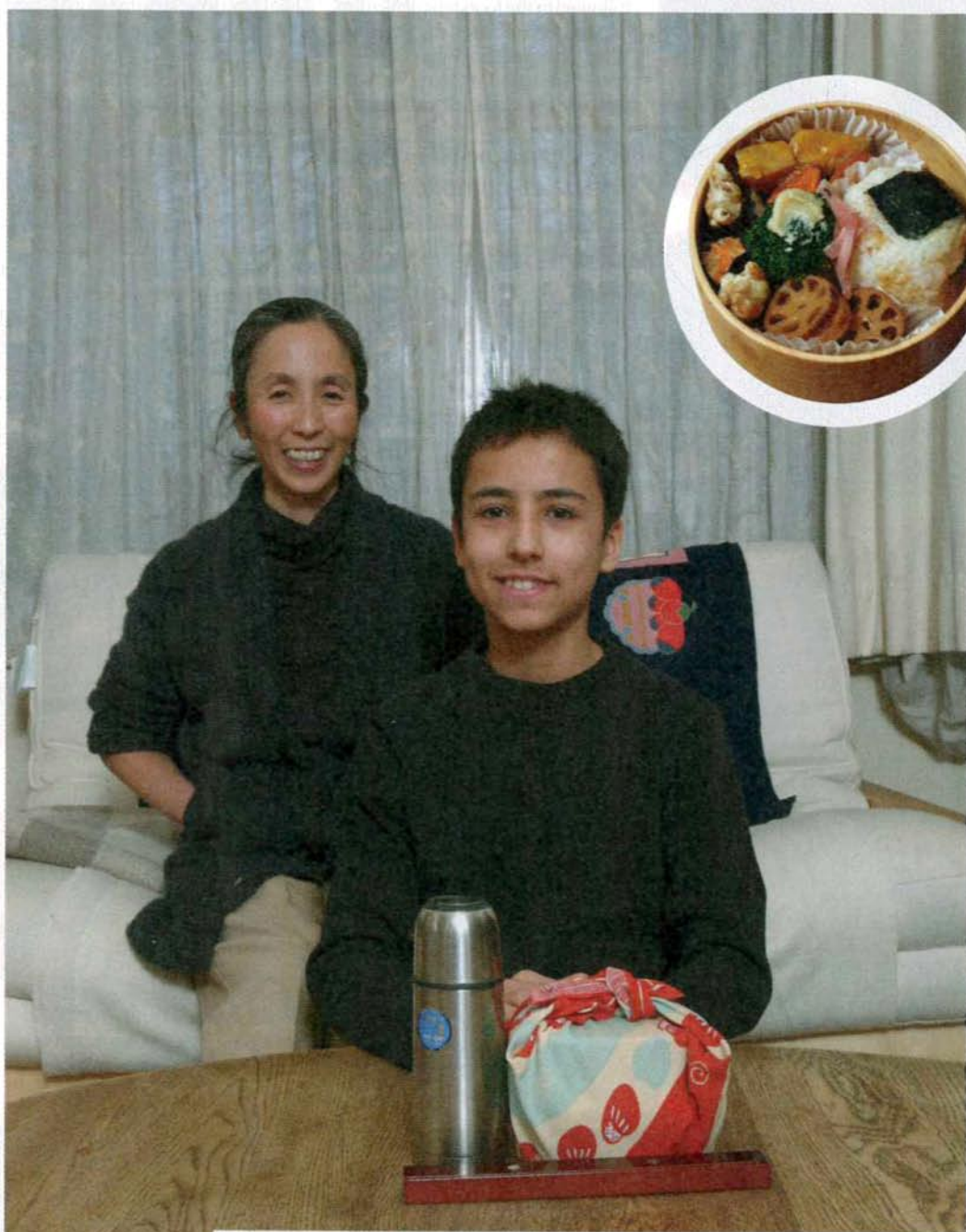
In Japan, packing lunchboxes for children to take to school is both an art form and a competitive activity, with websites devoted to the subject and proud mothers blogging the best examples (see [www.tinyurl.com/bk5glj](http://www.tinyurl.com/bk5glj)).

'It usually takes his mother, Setsuko, about 40 minutes every morning to prepare,' says Allen's dad, Chris (he is translating on behalf of Setsuko, whose English is not fluent). 'Eating traditional food has always been an extremely important part of family life, and although we don't think in terms of a balanced diet, we place a lot of emphasis on high-quality food and food presentation. Wholegrains make up 50 per cent of the packed lunch, and then we have two to three side dishes including organic tofu, lotus root, a pickle to aid digestion, a seaweed, seasonal fruits and vegetables. We mainly use organic sesame oil or olive oil, and don't add sugar. His mum also makes him some Japanese bancha (roasted twig) tea.'

'I really like my lunch and I always look forward to it,' says Allen, who is 15. 'I'm glad to say I've never been to the doctor – only the dentist! My friends always want to see what I have for lunch, and they always ask me if they can have some. Of course, I let them.' *Approx. 375kcal and 15g fat.*

### The nutritionist's verdict

It's fortunate that both Allen's parents are interested in healthy eating. Allen's lunch is a really good example of a balanced meal as the three major food groups – carbohydrate, protein and fat – are well proportioned. The Japanese bento box is traditionally rice-based with a smaller serving of tofu – this being a good source of protein and important for growth and repair in the body. With his mother using a small amount of olive oil in cooking, Allen will be getting into the habit of using healthy monounsaturated fats at a young age.



## Packing a punch

What food do you take to snack on while chained to your desk? Registered dietician and qualified nutritionist **Zerlina Mastin** takes a peek inside a few Londoners' lunchboxes and explains how, if carefully composed, your second meal of the day can give you a huge boost. Photography **Rob Greig**