

Audio and PDF versions of this article will be available on the Tomtom English homework page from 17th July at <http://tomtom-english.com/homework.html>

Saving money in Japan

Adapted from Japantoday.com

According to the company Mercer, the most expensive cities in the world for expats include Tokyo (#1), Osaka (#3) and Nagoya (#10). <http://www.mercer.com/costofliving>

Whether you're an expat or a local, you could save money using these tips:

1. Avoid Convenience Stores

It's true that they are convenient, but they are also expensive. Items in convenience stores have significantly marked-up prices - a cup of yogurt costs 128 yen but in the supermarket it's under 100 yen. A loaf of bread can be bought for only 88 yen, while the konbini is charging 148 yen. Also there are lots of unnecessary snacks and drinks staring at you from every shelf, and at 100 yen or more per item, it's easy to spend too much.

2. Eat Cheaper

Cook at home: no need to spend a lot of money on food that you can make yourself. Plan ahead, and buy all your groceries in one time. Many stores start offering discounts up to 20% after 6 p.m., so if you choose the right time, you can save money.

If you eat out, choose budget dining options. If you're looking for a big night out, then it's good to take advantage of "tabehodai" (all-you-can-eat) at an izakaya. There are also plenty of cheap chain restaurants - Yakinoya and Sushiro, for example, that will save you from over-spending. And, there's always the 100 yen menu at McDonald's.

3. Drink Cheaper

Drinking in Japan is expensive. Unless you're careful, a night out is going to cost a lot of money. Pubs tend to be pricey, even if you arrive for happy hour. Some offer discounts, but it isn't going to save you so much. "Nomihodai" (all-you-can-drink) at an izakaya is a good option, if you can drink quickly but if you're a lighter or slower drinker this deal is generally not worth it.

Supermarkets are much cheaper than convenience stores for beer. A 6-pack of Kirin may be on sale for as low as 638 yen, but at the konbini you'll have to pay at least 846 yen. Drinking at

home, in the park, or in the street is much cheaper than drinking in bars.

Karaoke can also be a cheap place to drink. Some places offer 500 yen per hour nomihodai.

If you missed your last train, sometimes karaoke is cheaper than taking a taxi.

4. Buy Cheaper

Shopping is a very expensive hobby, so you should try and avoid it. When you do need to buy something, try to find cheaper places. There are so many good second-hand shops in Japan, so you can find many bargains. These shops are selling everything from clothes to jewelry, musical instruments to electronics. Most of the items are in good condition.

The 100 yen shop is a great place to save money. The bigger 100 yen shops sell many different kinds of goods.

5. Find a Cheaper hobby

Gyms are incredibly expensive here as most places charge at least 7,000 yen a month. Save yourself money by trying to find a cheap activity. Get your running shoes out because walking and running are free. You can also explore your neighborhood. Do some yoga, weight-training, or even try something like belly-dancing, in the comfort of your own home. Develop your old hobbies or some new ones (cooking would clearly be useful). Catch up on some reading at your local library. Write a blog. Check out some parks. Visit attractions with cheap admission, such as museums, gardens, and temples. Study a language - you may be able to find cheap or reduced Japanese lessons from your local International Center.

Questions:

1. What do you think about each of these tips? Which one is best? Worst?
2. Do you do any of these things? Which ones? Why? Why not?
3. Do you think convenience stores are too expensive?
4. Which supermarket is cheapest?
5. What are the cheapest places to eat out and drink? Where is the best “nomihodai”? Do you like nomihodai? Is it good value-for-money for you?
6. Have you ever done karaoke all night? Did you enjoy it?
7. Do you like shopping? What do you like to buy? Do you spend too much on shopping?
8. What other money-saving tips can you add to the list?

Don't forget, you can follow us on twitter @tomtomenglish where we will post study tips, useful expressions and idioms, and party information.