



CHEAP JAPAN

HOW TO TRAVEL THIS
EXPENSIVE COUNTRY
ON A TIGHT BUDGET

Alex Weber

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a large, traditional Japanese temple with a multi-tiered, dark-tiled roof and red wooden pillars. A large, dense crowd of people, mostly of East Asian descent, is gathered in the courtyard in front of the temple. The image is slightly faded to allow the text to be legible.

Cheap Japan How to Travel This Expensive Country on a Tight Budget

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ISBN-10: 1530349397

ISBN-13: 978-1530349395

DEDICATION

Dedicated to all of those polite Japanese folks, who were so patient to a cheapo like me.

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DISCLAIMER

The prices listed in this book are current to it's publication date. Please check before booking for price changes.

INTRODUCTION: THE ORIENTAL BUDGET ADVENTURER

Japan is one of the popular tourist destinations. With its scenic beauty, calm rivers and lush green landscape. This island nation attracts millions of tourists from all over the world every year. Aside from its natural beauty, Japan also offers comfortable accommodation, tons of outdoor activities and historical places to visit. As a country with a long history and unique culture, Japan has many interesting attractions, both for those who seek the classic Japanese experience and those hoping to experience the modern, high-tech Japan.

There is perhaps no other country that has the same allure and exotic temptations as Japan. Apart from its popularity as the country of amazing food, beautiful women and a lot of great martial arts, Japan is actually the perfect blend of old and new. Old Buddhist and Shinto monuments stand side by side with gigantic structures of the modern metropolis. A proud past of feudal honor influences the technologically advanced way business is conducted in the city. And for the avid shopper, traditional garb and high-tech gadgets are common.

If all of the above sounds intriguing to you then you should definitely consider Japan for your next vacation destination. However, there is always a major excuse people give: It is too expensive! Many people spend years or decades thinking about a trip to Japan but never have the opportunity to actually make a visit because of monetary challenges.

To save money on a trip to Japan, you need time your visit so that you are traveling during Japan's low travel seasons. You need to know these seasons and when they come, not only that, you need to have a wide understanding of the cheapest way to fly. You need to have knowledge of Japan's less crowded and low-cost train stations, bus stations, inns and hotels. And for the shopaholics, possessing a good detail of the cheapest markets to patronize is a cost-saving necessity.

So if you are someone who has the time and passion for visiting Japan, you are in luck. Fasten your seatbelt because you have found this book. Get ready for a cheap, enjoyable Japan experience.

CHAPTER ONE: BEST AND CHEAPEST TIMES TO FLY

Because Japan stretches in an arc from northeast to southwest at about the same latitudes as Maine and Florida, you can travel in the country virtually any time of year. Winters in southern Kyushu and Okinawa are mild while summers in northern Hokkaido are cool. Most of Japan's islands lie in a temperate seasonal wind zone similar to that of the East Coast of the United States, which means there are four distinct seasons. Japanese are very proud of their seasons and place much more emphasis on them than people do in the West. Kimono, dishes and bowls used for kaiseki, and even noh plays change with the season. Certain foods are eaten during certain times of the year, such as eel in summer and fugu (blowfish) in winter. Almost all haiku have seasonal references. The cherry blossom signals the beginning of spring, and most festivals are tied to seasonal rites. Even urban dwellers note the seasons; almost as though on cue, businessmen will change virtually overnight from their winter to summer attire.

However, a great way to save money is to plan your travel to coincide with Japan's low travel season. There are certain times of the year when it is cheaper to visit Japan. And not only that, if you go to Japan during the low travel season you will be able to enjoy less crowded airports, train stations, inns and hotels.

The low travel season in Japan is mainly determined by those times of the year when few or no major holidays are planned—and when Japanese kids are in school. To help you better understand Japan's low travel season, here are 3 inexpensive times to visit Japan:

Late Autumn to March

In autumn, the days are pleasant and slightly cool, and the changing red and scarlet of leaves contrast brilliantly with the deep blue skies. There are many chrysanthemum shows in Japan at this time, popular maple-viewing spots, and many autumn festivals. As soon as typhoon season is over around early October, Japan gets pretty nice. Rainfall drops considerably and the temperature is still fairly warm. Although it can be a little tricky at times, arriving in late autumn is often pretty sweet timing. You get the warmth of Japan without as much rainfall (though there still may be some). Bring a

warm jacket.

Winter lasts from December to March. It is marked by snow in much of Japan, especially in the mountain ranges where the skiing is superb. Many tourists also flock to hot-spring resorts during this time. The climate is generally dry, and on the Pacific coast, the skies are often blue. Tokyo doesn't get much snow though it can be crisp, cold, and wet. Northern Japan's weather, in Tohoku and Hokkaido, can be quite severe, while southern Japan, especially Kyushu and Okinawa, enjoys generally mild, warm weather. Wherever you are, you'd be wise to bring warm clothing throughout the winter months.

Japan's New Year celebration makes late December/early January a more expensive and crowded time of the year to travel. Avoid this time, if possible (unless you want to participate in those celebrations). However, just after this time of the year—during the months of February and March—travel to/from and within Japan becomes less expensive.

September to November

When you are planning on serious cost-saving, the period of September to November is very ideal. Many of Japan's biggest festivals happen during the months of July and August. However, come September, October and November, there are fewer things going on in terms of festivals and holidays. And, children are in school, which makes it impossible for most Japanese families to do domestic travel. Therefore, airfare should be cheaper during this time of year. As a bonus, you will also experience less travel congestion.

Spring (mid-March to April)

Spring arrives with a magnificent fanfare of plum and cherry blossoms in March and April, an exquisite time when all of Japan is ablaze in whites and pinks. The cherry-blossom season starts in southern Kyushu in mid-March and reaches Hokkaido in early May. Known as hanami in Japan, the traditional custom of 'flower viewing' has become one of the most popular times to visit Japan with cities decorated with beautiful cherry blossom. From the end of March to early May when the flowers bloom outdoor parties are held throughout the country with people heading to parks for picnics.

The blossoms themselves last only a few days, symbolizing to Japanese the fragile nature of beauty and of life itself. Other flowers also bloom through May or June, including azaleas and irises. During spring, numerous festivals throughout Japan celebrate the rebirth of nature. The Cherry Blossom Festival is a particularly good time to visit in terms of weather also.

Notes

- Avoid New Year, Japan's Golden Week (beginning May), and O-bon (09 - 17 August) are when the Japanese travel en masse. Hotels book out, trains are **packed and prices soar**.
- If you want to catch the cherry blossom season, it varies geographically. Starting in January in Okinawa, but at their best in late March to April in the Honshu region. In Hokkaido, you want to get **there in May for the full array**.
 - You get typhoons knocking in around end August, September and October. Check out the Japan Meteorological Agency's English-language [website](#).

CHAPTER TWO: FLYING CHEAP

Findings Cheap Flights

The delightful island country of Japan has much to offer for eager tourists. Popularly referred to as the "Land of the Rising Sun" this vibrant nation is full of enthusiastic and hardworking people. One of the first things that you will notice about this impressive country is a large number of people going about their various tasks. Japan is one of the most populated countries in the world with the capital city of Tokyo housing more than 30 million people.

If you are looking for cheap travel to Japan, you will be happy to know that your options are many. You will actually find that it is not as difficult as it may seem. Finding the best deal with your travel will cost you less money and make you save some more. The traveling industry being in the trillion dollars margin does not translate it to being cheaper but more expensive. This is due to the increase in fares when it is in the high peak season. So, this means that when you are traveling the highest cost will be the cost of the flight. This need not worry you because you can already know when the best time to travel is.

The traveling industry can be a bit hard to follow. This is because the prices will usually differ depending on the season in which you are planning on traveling. It will be in your best interest to take your time in finding cheap flights to Japan. You can do this by comparing the fares with different airlines and choosing what works best for you. Be very patient and check into all the details. This will help you save on the cost and the money that you might have spent by knowing what works best for you.

There are numerous online search engines for finding cheap flights to Japan. One of the cheapest flight plans are [Vanilla Air](#) (by [ANA Airlines](#)) and [JAL Express](#) (by [Japan Airlines](#)).

Most of the Major US Airports are connected by flight to Narita, Tokyo's major international airport. You can book your tickets well in advance to enjoy cheaper rates and once you land in Japan.

Notes

- Understand low flight periods like Winter, Spring, and Fall will be the best options.
- Try “Price Alerts” at www.kayak.com to get notifications for low flight fares.
- Make use of search engines like <https://www.google.com/flights/> and www.skyscanner.com.
- Check Japanese websites as well. Often you will find different prices in the home country’s website. For example, www.expedia.co.jp. Sometimes companies want these prices hidden and will redirect you to your home country’s website. If this happens, use a VPN (like CyberGhost to change your VPN to a Japanese address.

CHAPTER THREE: FINDING THE BEST EXCHANGE RATES

Japan is very much still a cash-based society. You will find that many restaurants, retailers and taxis will not accept credit card as a form of payment. It is always advised to carry cash with you. Using large notes, even for small transactions does not seem to be a problem at most retailers, so it is vital to exchange your currency while in Tokyo. In regard to the safety of carrying money in Japan, not to fear; Tokyo is one of the safest cities in the world so you don't need to be concerned about carrying large amounts of cash on you.

Exchanging Money at the Airport

There are several points to exchange money when you arrive at Narita airport. You can do so at one of the major banks' counters or at a foreign exchange counter.

Currency rates at [Narita Airport](#) will differ slightly from bank to bank, so if you are prepared to walk around to find the best rate for your currency then you might save a couple of dollars. Narita airport also publishes a daily exchange rate table for major currencies on their website. The rates are based on the Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ.

There are also several ATM points at Narita from which you can withdraw Japanese Yen using your bank's ATM card. Note that some bank's ATM will not accept foreign bank cards. Look for the Post Office ATM or the 7 Eleven ATM, both of which accept foreign bank cards. Fees will be incurred and depend on your banks charges.

Exchange counters at airports don't usually have very favorable rates and Japan's airports are no exceptions. It is advised to exchange some money before you arrive in Japan so that you have some cash on you. However, if you need to exchange money at the airport, look for the Post Office, located in both terminal 1 and 2 at Narita Airport, as the exchange rate at the airport Post Offices will be the same as the Post Offices across Japan.

Notes

- The exchange rates presently are reasonably good compared to past years. This is the best time to visit Japan.
- Exchange your money before leaving your country for the best deals, and if you haven't, the Airport is a good and fast place to sort yourself out.
- Check the rates daily back home and exchange the day the prices drop.

CHAPTER FOUR: TRAVELING CHEAP FROM/TO THE AIRPORT

If you are looking forward to a trip to Japan, your airplane would land at Narita international airport. Therefore, this is the first place you would visit in this beautiful country. Even though, it is quite far and not centrally located for getting to Tokyo. There aren't many cheap options for getting there.

The airport manages a considerable quantity of international passenger traffic, both inward and outward. In addition, the airport acts as a junction that helps in connecting the traffic between Asia and Americas. The modernized and high-tech airport comprises of two terminal buildings. Each of the airlines is allocated to one of the two terminals. Moreover, the airport acts the principal international center for two chief airlines of Japan. These are the Japan Airlines and All Nippon Airways. Besides this, the Japanese government has included Narita international airport amongst the first-class airports of Japan. This adds another feather to the cap of this airport.

Well, as a tourist, you might want to check out some interesting destinations around the airport. You might be simply fascinated by the city of Narita. It is a striking contrast to its neighbor Tokyo that has a fast-paced lifestyle. The life of Narita promises a peaceful and relaxed life. From the charmingly old-fashioned streets to the traditional wooden shops, the city has everything to offer. Naristan, a popular temple complex is an interesting tourist destination.

Traveling cheap beyond Narita international airport is not an issue, but keep your head up about the prices. You can easily travel to any place conveniently. Any individual can easily travel from/to this airport to/from the Tokyo:

Cheap Means of Access To/From Narita Airport

By Bus

The Access Narita bus

The Access Narita bus is one of the cheapest ways of transportation. This discount bus service operates roughly three per hour between Narita Airport, Tokyo Station and Ginza Station. The one-way fare is 1000 yen. Advance reservations are possible.

Keisei Express Bus

If you are on a tight budget the Keisei Express Bus is a good option. This bus service runs every 20 minutes starting at 7:00 am until 11:00 pm. The one-way fare is 900 yen. Tickets can be purchased at the Keisei Bus Counter in the arrival lobby. There is one Keisei bus stop at terminal 1 and two stops at terminal 2. The bus will stop at Tokyo Station (90 minutes to Tokyo Station) Sukiya-bashi (Ginza), and Shinonome-shako. Check their [website](#) for a full list of timetables and prices.

By Tokyo Shuttle bus

This discount bus service operates roughly three times per hour between Narita Airport and Tokyo Station. The one-way fare is 1000 yen during the day and 2000 yen for late-night and early morning departures. If tickets are purchased in advance via the internet, the one-way fare is 900 yen. The discounted fare also applies to purchases of tickets in the direction of the airport made by phone or at a convenience store.

By Train

By Keisei Limited Express. It offers 1 transfer, takes 90 minutes. Take the Keisei Limited Express from Narita Airport to Nippori Station (about 75 minutes, 1030 yen) and transfer to the JR Yamanote Line or JR Keihin-Tohoku Line to get to Tokyo Station (10 minutes, 160 yen). There are connections every 20 minutes.

Notes

- Buses and trains are the cheaper modes of transportation to and from the airport
- Tickets can be used for the Tokyo Shuttle bus
- Reservations can be made for the Access Narita bus
- Utilize your discount tickets.
- Avoid taxis because they very expensive.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDING CHEAP ACCOMMODATION

Internet Café

There are some internet cafes in big cities. Most internet cafes are open for 24 hours. Many of them have a semi-private box and a comfortable reclining seat is installed.

Free vending machine for soft drinks are on the floor and most cafes have thousands of manga comics. Moreover, some have shower facilities. The fee structures depend on the cafes but many of them have an overnight fixed fee for around 1000 yen to 2000 yen. Normally the fee is applied from midnight till 6 am or so. If you fail in finding a proper place, please go to the downtown of the city and look for an internet cafe.

Sauna

In some big cities, there are some sauna building. They are Japanese style bath with shower and one or some rest rooms. Usually, some temporary sleeping gears are installed in those restrooms and you can take a nap as if you were in a dormitory room of a hostel though your roommates would be exhausted office workers instead of backpackers. Normally the overnight price is around 3000 to 4000 yen per person.

Capsule Hotels

Price: 2,000 yen to 5,000 yen per night (also available around 300 yen to 600 yen per hour for naps). If you aren't too claustrophobic (or too tall), then a capsule hotel, might be just the right for you. In your capsule, you'll most likely have a TV, radio, alarm clock, reading light, and, of course, a bed. There are even curtains or little doors that you can close for privacy. Just try not to think about how you are mere inches from the person next to you, separated only by a thin wall.

Capsule hotels accommodate their guests in small capsules rather than rooms. The capsules are essentially enclosed bunk beds that are often stacked two high and may include a television, internet, light and heating controls inside. Shared showers and toilets are provided while personal belongings are usually stored in lockers. Some hotels also have lounges, restaurants and a public bath.

Capsule hotels are mainly found around major train stations and tend to cater towards men. These days, however, you can also find an increasing number of women only capsule hotels, or hotels that have gender segregated floors.

Hostels

Price: From free to about 6,000 yen per night. The traditional refuge of those traveling on a budget, hostels are great places to stay in Japan. There are a ton of other sites to book from Japanese hostels are clean, well-staffed, and quiet (if that's what you prefer). As with any accommodation, it's a good idea to check the reviews, hostel rules, and location, since there are a few bad apples, a few rather early curfews, and a few hostels that are far away from tourist sites.

If you are familiar with hostels, you may know about the practice of volunteer work exchange, where you can do the cleaning, or other tasks at the hostel for a small, set amount of time in exchange for a free or reduced price lodging.

Manga Cafes

They cost about 500-3000 yen/person Manga cafes (lit. comic book cafes) are establishments where you can rent time on a computer either hourly or for the night. The simplest places offer just some banks of computers with chairs, a selection of comic books and little to no privacy and are not suited for an overnight stay.

A lot of establishments, however, also offer their customers drinks, snacks, shower facilities, game rooms and quiet areas to rest or private booths, which may be equipped with couches or Japanese mattresses (futon). Some manga cafe chains require that you sign up for a membership which may come with a small registration fee.

Sleep at the Airport

Well, people usually sleep in airports, not by choice, but that is not the case for some. Sleeping in airports have become a way of traveling for those wanting to skim a few bucks off their travel expense. The site “[Sleeping In Airports](#)” is frequented by a travel community that has been sharing their experiences and advice with fellow airport sleepers. Visit the site to read

reviews, hints and ratings of most airports around the world.

Notes

- Passing the night in public places is cheap and fairly comfortable because these places are now adapted for welcoming tourist overnight.
- Staying in groups and making friends is advisable when aiming for low accommodation
- Hostels provide cheap privacy if that is what you desire.
- Even the low—budget hotels in Japan are expensive, be careful not to book if you can't afford.
- Let 'safety' be your watch word.

CHAPTER SIX: EATING CHEAP

Japan doesn't have to be exorbitantly expensive. Standing up and slurping noodles, learning to love the supermarket, and munching street eats can help you stick to your budget.

If you're low on funds while traveling in Japan, there are many fun ways to eat inexpensively like locals, without compromising great flavor and cultural thrills. Below are some possibilities to get you started:

Convenience Stores

When it comes to food, Japan offers quite a few options. Convenience stores sell very good food at reasonable prices 24 hours a day. A lot of travelers take convenience store food for granted because they think the food is cheaply produced and low quality. In Japan, the quality standards for convenience store food is quite high.

7-Eleven

7-Eleven is actually owned by a Japanese company. Naturally, its offerings and scope are much better in Japan. There is a huge range of goods and the prices are reasonable. While you could eat dinner from a convenience store in the states, you would probably leave feeling pretty gross. Nacho cheese from a spout only tastes good as you're eating it. But, in Japan, you can have a quality meal. Different stores may have slightly different offerings and there are a myriad of prepared meals you can pick up, including mabo-tofu and good sushi.

7-Eleven has around 17000 stores in Japan, 2000 in Tokyo alone. As you can imagine, this makes it an easy to locate grocery store (not to mention the other chain convenience stores) and you'll never be without a familiar place to grab a bite to eat.

100 Yen Shops

There are many 100-yen shops in Japan, where set meals, groceries, water, toiletries, household items, and more are simply 100 yen. Their names vary by region, so ask your hotel/hostel reception where the nearest 100-yen shop is located.

Sushi Conveyor Belts

This is only for those with the willpower not to gobble up everything in sight, as it can add up when you start counting the plates. For a very light meal, a plate of sushi can range from 200 to 400 yen, and the quality and flavor are guaranteed to be superior to the conveyor belt sushi shops in the strip mall of your hometown. Remember to find somewhere with a crowd or, better yet, a line. It signals good and cheap.

Instant Ramen Noodles

This is only for those with the willpower not to gobble up everything in sight, as it can add up when you start counting the plates. For a very light meal, a plate of sushi can range from 200 to 400 yen, and the quality and flavor are guaranteed to be superior to the conveyor belt sushi shops in the strip mall of your hometown. Remember to find somewhere with a crowd or, better yet, a line. It signals good and cheap.

Cheap Restaurant Franchise

Low price, high quality. Another reasonable option for food would be chain eateries. Gyudon Restaurants: Yoshinoya, Matsuya, Sukiya. Most Japanese consider these restaurant chains, often with 24-hour openings, the salary man's best friend. A good hearty beef bowl (rice topped with shredded beef and onions) won't set you back much more than about 400 - 700 yen, and will certainly fill you up until the next mealtime.

Although it is possible to spend enormous sums in top-class restaurants in Japan, there are also very reasonably-priced eating options around which make it fun and easy to eat on a budget.

Food is often presented in a way which makes it easy to choose, and see the price and contents of what is on offer. Plastic models of the plates are displayed in many restaurant windows (making it possible to show the staff what you want, by pointing at the model). At some modest establishments, there is a payment point outside, allowing you to choose your dish, pay for it, and take the receipt to the restaurant to collect your dish.

Cook Your Own Food at the Hostel

Get creative and cook it yourself. If you do a bit of research, you will find

that there are local fruit, vegetable and meat markets that sell fresh produce at bargain prices. You can always get cheap, fresh fruits and vegetables in local markets. Hostels have kitchens, where you can cook and cut your food expenses to less than 800 yen per day, especially by shopping at the 100-yen stores.

Some of these items will look exotic, perhaps even scary to newcomers. However, you will really enjoy the experimentation that comes with cooking with new flavors and textures. It's good for the soul, good for your health, and most importantly for this scenario, good for your pocket.

Notes

- 100 yen shops are great for cheap everyday accessories.
- Japan is founded on quality, therefore, even the cheapest foods offer the best nutritiously.
- The best and cheapest places to eat are the actually the places you find plenty of tourists crowded. Be sure to ask around.

CHAPTER SEVEN: GETTING AROUND CHEAPLY

Travel Overview

In general, traveling around Japan is not always cheap. But, thankfully there are excellent, money-saving passes for both the railways and the airlines. Japanese Travel Passes can be essential for any budget traveler. Choose carefully which pass is best for you. This will depend on how long you intend to stay in Japan, how much you intend to move around and how much you can afford to spend. Investigate all the possibilities for your itinerary in order to get the cheapest and best [value pass](#).

There are some travel tips and tricks which can be used to see Japan on the cheap, and if you don't have a small fortune to spend and it is your lifetime dream to see this country, you should collect as many of these as you can.

It is important to remember that your sense of adventure will be advantageous to saving money, and this is also dependent on the length of your stay. First off, you are going to want to see as much as you can. If you can keep track of your own whereabouts at all times, you won't have to pay someone else to do this, i.e. a travel guide.

Trains

Japanese rail services are among the best in the world: they are fast, frequent, clean and comfortable. The 'national' railway is Japan Railways, commonly known as 'JR', which is actually a number of separate private rail systems providing one linked service.

The JR system covers the country from one end to the other and also provides local services around major cities such as Tokyo and Osaka. JR also operates buses and ferries, and convenient ticketing can combine more than one form of transport.

In addition to JR services, there is a huge network of private railways. Each large city usually has, at least, one private train line that services that city and the surrounding area, or connects that city with nearby cities. These are often a bit cheaper than equivalent JR services.

Japan Rail Pass

The [Japan Rail Pass](#) is great if you are staying for just a few weeks and moving around a lot. The Japan Rail Pas is a must-have for anyone planning to do extensive train travel within Japan. Not only will it save you a lot of money, it will save you from having to fish for change each time you board a train. The Japan Rail Pass must be purchased outside Japan. It is available to foreign tourists and Japanese overseas residents (but not foreign residents of Japan). Children between the ages of six and 11 qualify for child passes while those aged under six ride for free.

Seishun 18 ticket/Seishun Jūhachi Kippu

However, if you have more time to spend in Japan, there are cheaper options than this. For example, there is the [Seishun 18 ticket](#). If you don't have a Japan Rail Pass, one of the best deals going is a five-day Seishun Jūhachi Kippu literally a 'Youth 18 Ticket'. Despite its name, it can be used by anyone of any age. Seishun Jūhachi Kippu can be purchased at most JR stations in Japan. Another important factor to consider is the availability periods for the both the cheap Seishun 18 ticket and the blackout periods for the air passes.

Bus

The Highway buses for long distance travels are a good option for single journeys. However, avoid bullet trains. A journey on a bus or train overnight will, of course, save your money on accommodation. Another great option for the budget traveler.

Bicycle

Whether you intend to stay in the Land of the Rising Sun for a few or many sunrises, you will need transportation. For a short stay, rent a bicycle, for a longer stay, buy one and sell it before you leave. Think that if you are in Japan for 2 weeks or more and you can buy a bike for \$100 or less, and resell it for the same price, you will have paid very little for transport. You will have to register it at the local cop shop, but it saves you money on the subway and other public transport.

The cheapest way to get around Japan is, of course to cycle. Bicycle rentals are a good, cheap way for an easy get-around around Japan. You can walk on shorter journeys, for example, to campsites or the start of hikes. However,

hitchhiking can definitely be an option in Japan for longer distances, too.

A combination of Travel Passes

If you are planning to stay in Japan for months, then you would have plenty of time to cover a lot of ground. You would find out that the best combination of passes is to use the JAL Airpass, the Seishun 18 ticket and the JR East train passes (as well as a little hitchhiking for shorter journeys).

Walk

Not only is it totally free, you get to discover some great places you would never see when traveling via faster methods. Strolling around just about any part of Japan, business districts, shopping areas, residential, if Japan is a new country for you, will show what Japan is like off the normal tourist track. You'll constantly discover cool things to do in Japan while you're out on a walk.

Notes

- Seishun 18 ticket is a special discount ticket issued in Japan which allows holders one-day unlimited rides on the local trains of Japan Railways Group during limited periods of the year. One ticket is valid for five (not necessarily continuous) days (midnight to midnight), within the designated period of the season. It can also be used by several people simultaneously; for example, five passengers can use entire one sheet of a ticket for their one-day trip as a group instead of one passenger traveling individually on five days different days.
- Keep in mind that you do not usually have to make reservations in advance for train travel in Japan. Do consider reserving in advance, though, for Golden Week, O-bon (mid-August) and New Year travel.
- It is not possible to make reservations for JR trains online in English. However, most travel agents who handle the Japan Rail Pass can also make train reservations and sell you tickets in advance (for a fairly hefty surcharge).
- If you have a Japan Rail Pass, you will not be able to reserve travel through a travel agent outside Japan, as you must activate the pass in Japan and show the pass when you make reservations.

- It is always possible to walk into a JR office once in Japan and book all your train travel (you can reserve travel up to a month in advance). Because it is difficult and expensive to reserve train travel from abroad, many people reserve all their train travel for their trip soon after arriving in Japan at the nearest JR office.
- Bicycles are a cheap way to traverse the cities and country sides.
- Walk short distances to save money. You will find the experience and sightseeing rewarding.

CHAPTER EIGHT: BUYING CHEAP GROCERIES

As a general rule, supermarkets in Tokyo and Japan, in general, aren't particularly cheap. In fact, with many of the major stores focusing on quality rather than 'low price', they can actually be pretty pricey. However, you can pick up cheap bargains at the end of the day in some places. So what are the Cheapo friendly supermarkets in Japan?

1. OK Supermarket

With many locations throughout Tokyo, reliably cheap on most products plus the bonus of regular discounts and 50% off stickers, OK Supermarket is well deserved of being first on the shopping list of the Cheapo supermarket shopper in Tokyo

2. Ozeki Supermarket

A veritable cheapo delight with a huge range of cheap groceries and bento. Ozeki is a mid-sized supermarket chain mainly found in the South and West side of Tokyo.

3. Y's Mart

Y's Mart is a cheapo paradise—has no frills and exceedingly good deals on your daily shop. Greater concentration on the East side of Tokyo.

4. Hanamasa

Hanamasa is seriously cheap if you are buying in bulk, it's primarily geared towards the catering industry. If you can carry a lot home with you, you'll be sure to save a bundle—watch out for small quantity items, though, they may not be such good value.

5. Costco

US Cheapo's will no doubt be familiar with Costco. The membership plan is effective globally and you would also be delighted that there are a number of Costco stores surrounding Tokyo. Costco is not only super cheap but also stocks a good line of American/foreign products.

6. Donki

Donki or Don Quixote, whilst not a supermarket per se is a great place to

pick up some cheap groceries and household items. Moreover, Donki is ubiquitous across Tokyo and Japan, so it's very likely you'll find one nearby. Not very good for fresh produce, but plenty of dried and frozen bargains to make it up to you, plus it has a whole host of other cheap items to keep you entertained (clothes and electronics).

7. Yamaya

Yamaya is more a booze shop crossed with a European delicatessen, so it doesn't exactly qualify as a supermarket. However, if you crave for cheap booze, muesli and cheese, you must include it in your must-visit list. Yamaya is the cheapest source in Tokyo for a lot of imported foreign items, fruit juice, cheese, wine, champagne, olives and a host of other delights.

Notes

- Stores and supermarkets are ubiquitous around Japan.
- Finding the cheapest requires attention. Ask around for these shops to get budget deals.

CHAPTER NINE: CHEAP VISITS TO FANTASTIC CITIES AND AREAS

Utilizing Free Tour Guides

Japan can be a difficult country to explore if you're a budget traveler. One great way to make your trip to Tokyo cheaper and more enjoyable is to use a free tour guide. Tour guides volunteers show foreign tourists around the city for a variety of reasons, such as practicing their language skills, or just having fun meeting new people and showing you their hometown.

Free guides are volunteers who are very proud of their city and who donate their time to assist you to understand it. They do not receive, nor will they accept, any payment, with the exception that you provide their lunch and any public transport or entry fees. They are bilingual at the least and the organization matches you up. Most of the volunteers are retired businessmen, housewives or students who have a great understanding of Japanese history, etiquette and culture – and what they don't know, they study up beforehand. You can organize to have a guide for a day or more depending upon what you need.

There are an extensive list of [volunteer groups](#), with at least one in each major city or tourist spot. A well-known service in Tokyo is [Tokyo Free Guide](#). This platform is made for free guide service with the aim to encourage cultural exchanges between Japanese people and foreigners. Services are available in multiple languages, such as English, French, Italian and Spanish.

Free Access Viewing Buildings

When visiting Tokyo, the iconic Tokyo Tower and Roppongi Hills are among the two most common spots to survey the city. While it's tough to beat the romantic significance of the tower, there are a number of options for those looking for a budget view of the city.

Just for comparison. It costs, 820 yen to visit Tokyo Tower's 150 meter tall main observatory and another 600 yen to enter the special observatory, which at 250 meters high is still the highest observatory point in Tokyo until the Tokyo Sky Tree is completed next year.

It costs 1500 yen (1200 yen if you purchase the tickets in advance from a convenience store) to visit Roppongi Hill's 52nd floor (218 meters) and 300 yen more to gain access to the building's roof (238 meters).

The best views, of course, don't come free. However, here's a lesser known list of free access buildings with (still) spectacular views of the city. In no particular order.

1. Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building

Tokyo Tochosha or The Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building (is the headquarters of the governor and assembly of Tokyo. It's just a short distance from Shinjuku station.

The large complex actually occupies 3 city blocks and is split into 3 sections. The Tokyo Metropolitan Main Building 1 is the most prominent of the three. At 243 meters, it's also the 2nd tallest building in the city.

Building 1 has two observatories (one for each tower) which are open free of charge to the public. It offers a viewing of the city from the 45th floors, 202 meters above ground. There's even a cafe that changes into a bar in the evening in the North tower.

The South Observatory is open from 9.30 AM to 5.30 PM while the North Observatory is open until 11 PM daily. Note that the observatories are closed from 29th December to 3rd January each year.

2. Shinjuku NS Building

The Shinjuku NS Building is located beside the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and Sumitomo buildings. It too has a free viewing area on its 30th floor.

Though a much lower height than the other buildings in the area (it's only 134 meters tall), the Shinjuku NS building offers some other points of interest for visitors such as a see through glass elevator and a sky bridge on the 29th floor. Open 11 AM to 10 PM daily.

3. Shinjuku Sumitomo Building

The Shinjuku Sumitomo Building is also located across from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building. While this office building only stands at

210 meters tall, it is also the oldest building on this list.

The building's top 5 floors house a range of restaurants (from budget to extravagant) where you can sit down and enjoy a meal while overlooking the city. Definitely the main draw to visit the building.

There's also a free view lobby, on the 51st floor (200 meters) that is open from 10 AM to 10 PM daily.

4. Shinjuku Center Building

The Shinjuku Center Building is the closest skyscraper to Shinjuku station that offers a public observatory. The top floor (210 meters) has a restaurant from which you can see Fuji and the Japanese Alps on clear days. For those on a budget, there's a free viewing area one level below the 52nd floor. You will also be able to enjoy a view of Roppongi, Shinagawa and Shibuya from here. Open 8 AM – 11 PM daily.

5. Shinjuku Nomura Building

Yet another building in the area, the Shinjuku Nomura Building is located just beside the Shinjuku Center Building. The 203 meter building has a number of posh restaurants on its top floors too. For the rest, it offers a small viewing area on level 50, outside of the restaurants.

6. Bunkyo Civic Center

The Bunkyo Civic Center is the government building for Tokyo's Bunkyo Ward. The 142-meter building has a free observatory lounge on its 25th floor. Though shorter than the buildings in the Shinjuku area, the Civic Center's protruding observatory offers a clear 270-degree view of Bunkyo, Shinjuku, Akihabara and even Mount Fuji on clear days. It's open from 9 AM – 8 PM.

7. St. Luke's Tower

St. Luke's Tower or St. Luke's Garden is a two-tower complex located along the Sumida River at Tsukiji. The 47th floor of the office tower is home to a restaurant but also offers a free observatory which has a direct view of Tokyo Tower and Mount Fuji. There's also a sky bridge linking the two towers on the 32nd floor. The building is open from 9 AM to 10.30 PM daily but the observatory closes at 7 PM.

8. Dentsu Headquarters Building

For another view of the Minato Ward, you can visit the Dentsu Headquarters Building, home to the advertising giant, Dentsu. The 213 meter and 48-storey high building have free observatories on the 46th and 47th floors.

Forming the main part of Caretta Shiodome, the building is famous for its iconic sail-like design by the famous French Architect Jean Nouvel. The Dentsu Building is serviced by exactly 70 elevators and the windowed elevators are an experience on their own. There's also a free advertising museum in the basement of the building. The building is open from 7 AM to midnight.

9. Carrot Tower

Carrot Tower at Setagaya offers a skyline view from a free lounge on the 26th floor. Despite being only 124 meters tall, it is popular among couples as a yakei (night view) spot because of its excellent ambiance. Opens 9.30 AM – 11 PM.

10. Ebisu Garden Place

One of the top date spots in Tokyo, Ebisu Garden Place is an up-class promenade featuring a number of restaurants, bars, luxury boutiques and museums.

There is actually a free viewing area on the 38th and 39th floors of the tower building here that gives a view of the Meguro Ward in the direction of Shibuya and Aoyama. It's not nearly as popular with the couples though as the viewing rooms are brightly lit. If you're wondering why, the glare reflected off the windows make viewing difficult at night (among other things).

Notes

- Volunteer guides are one of the cheapest ways to enjoy Japan. Learning is mutual, so it's makes the experience a more rewarding one.
- Find volunteer groups of respective city on net or simply contact your travel agents.

- Cheap viewing buildings are subjective to time. Know when you can visit for free. The visiting times are subject to change by the authorities.
- Understand and obey the rules when visiting certain places. The Japanese people hold their tradition very dear.

CHAPTER TEN: SHOPPING FOR THE BEST DEALS

Selecting gifts can be a nerve-wracking experience, no matter if you're just passing through or trying to take a bit of Japan home with you. It's not just a matter of what to buy, but also where to get it.

Omiyage (souvenirs) can be found practically anywhere and there's a vast range of gifts and souvenirs on sale in the city. With a little digging, you can find the item you want, ancient or modern, classy or crass. If you're short on time, money or ideas, the convenience of shopping culture in Japan has given rise to some of the most complete one-stop shops in the world. The city is home to not only famous outlets that have everything (including the kitchen sink) but also those that cater specifically to Japan souvenir hunters.

100 yen Shops

With whatever you need on the ultimate budget, the various chains of "100 yen shops" around Japan are a godsend for everyday living in Japan, but they're also perfect for bringing back the best souvenirs for yourself and others.

The 100 yen shops across Japan are united by a common price and mission: making everyday things cheap and easy. That means that just about everything, unless otherwise marked, is 100 yen plus tax, and you'll be surprised at the quality and variety you can get at that price.

For the most part, 90% of what a 100 yen shop carries won't be of much use to you unless you need various household cleaning supplies and everyday items, but there's still plenty available for travelers and souvenir hunters.

Where they are Located

The biggest 100 yen shops are generally not found in the center of Tokyo, especially the higher-end areas, but there are still some pretty good options available. The shops in Harajuku and Shibuya are already plenty to explore, but if you find yourself a bit more in the suburbs there are shops that are so large they would keep you browsing for hours.

What to Buy

While they don't have name-brands, if you need basic travel goods you're in luck. Everything from toothbrushes to underwear are available. Suddenly need a necktie for an impromptu night out? They've got you covered (and even pre-tied). Also the various types of pouches, bags, and containers can make your travel easy as well. There are even small electronics options like cables and adapters that are much cheaper than going to an electronics store.

100 yen shops are also a great place to try out various Japanese snacks and treats in smaller amounts without spending much money. They don't just carry generic products in this case either, but it always depends on product cycles for good deals to be had. Souvenirs are where the 100 yen shops shine. Let's face it, if you buy a traditional item like chopsticks for a friend, they likely aren't going to know (or care) about the difference between 2,000 yen chopsticks and 100 yen chopsticks. It's the thought that counts, and right now you are thinking about saving money.

The same can be said for snacks and other packaged goods, but you'll also find stickers, stationery, and other items with a Japanese edge that are perfect for bringing back home. Examples of 100 yen shops are:

1. Natural Kitchen

Natural Kitchen is a 100 yen shop chain which mainly offers table and kitchen wares at very low prices. The concept is that a nice and comfortable kitchen will bring you and your family a happier life. In addition to daily household goods, decorations for seasonal events are also promoted monthly. If you are looking for simple items in a relaxing atmosphere, this shop is worth visiting. Their motto is to give customers a feel of beautiful and comfortable cooking and eating experience in the kitchen.

2. Watts

This 100 yen shop chain originally ran two brands, ‘meets.’ and ‘silk’, and is now trying to integrate them into one brand, ‘Watts’. They are conscious of their quality of their products, of the locality, and their customers’ lifestyles. For this reason, their shops are mainly located at non-major retail districts and the products they offer differ depending on the region. In addition to useful household’s goods, you can find wide varieties of seasonal items and DIY materials that will stimulate your creativity.

Discount Ticket Shops

Discount ticket shops have been around for about as long as there have been tickets. Typically you’ll find them under elevated railway tracks, or squeezed into small spaces between buildings. The deals seem impossibly good but the grimy appearance of the shops with the price lists plastered everywhere can be a bit intimidating for the uninitiated. Also the ‘too good to be true’ feeling is pretty strong. However, these places are legit – they buy tickets in bulk and operate on tiny margins.

Flea Markets

[Flea markets](#) are getting more and more popular in Japan, that’s a fact. Generally located in the vicinity of shrines, and featuring a variety of items ranging from handmade silver jewelry and traditional Asian and Japanese clothes (e.g. kimono) to antique furniture, old vinyls and crockery, Japanese flea markets appeal to all kind of customers, tourists included.

As a matter of facts, if you are visiting Japan as a tourist, flea markets might be a great place to buy Japanese souvenirs, since all sorts of Japanese goods—from handicrafts and antiques to the latest cartoon characters and goods can be found there. You can get [info](#) on their location and how they operate

on the net.

Mujirushi Ryohin

Imagine a place where all is calm and beautifully designed with clean lines and a neutral palette. This is Muji. It stocks everything from cheap home and office accessories to toys, crafts and even a range of skincare.

Notes

- 100 yen shops are great for souvenirs at the cheapest cost. Take home the best of Japanese tradition at the best deals.
- Discount tickets shops are lifesavers for the cheap traveler. Be sure to visit one.
- Flea markets are more or less free market because the prices are ridiculously cheap. They are a must-visit for budget tourists.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alex is a cheap travel with extensive travel across the globe. He wants to share his backpacking secrets to show people that travel can still be adventurous and cheap. He spends his time between Durham, North Carolina and Seoul, South Korea. The rest of the time, he is onward to a new travel destination.