


[Previous post](#)

Japan: Hipster heaven



by Nigel Bowen

1 September 2014 | 12:00 pm

Visiting Japan is the equivalent of diving into a giant mason jar of bacon-flavoured, small-batch bourbon while being serenaded by a band that's so cool it hasn't even formed yet.

Living up to travel journalism's tireddest cliché, the Land of the Rising Sun is usually portrayed as a 'land of contrasts' where Shinto shrines and Shoguns' castles rub up against 21st century metropolises filled with salarymen tapping away at cutting-edge gadgets from the likes of Canon, Sony, Hitachi, Ricoh, NEC, Fujitsu and Sharp.

And, sure, should you so wish, you could certainly spend a holiday in Japan traipsing around ancient Buddhist temples and working yourself into a consumerist frenzy at the sight of electronic goods sections in lavish department stores.

But here's something that's not so well known about Japan that's worth taking into consideration, especially if you're the inner-city elitist type: it's hipster heaven.

How so? Let me count the ways!

Japan is bike-friendly and has great public transport. You probably know about Japan's bullet train, which whizzes along at 320 kilometres an hour, but did you know that it's been up and running since 1964? Japan's clean, safe, punctual and ultra-efficient public transport – especially for those of a Green political persuasion – is truly a thing of endless wonderment. Plus, even in the busiest of Tokyo or Kyoto streets, motorists politely defer to bicyclists. Hard to imagine, I know, but it's true!

There are lots of small bars. Japanese bars and restaurants are typically intimate. And by intimate, I mean they make Australia's small bars look like beer barns. On our first night in Japan, my travelling companion and I rocked up to what had been described to us as a "small jazz club" expecting to find a band performing for maybe 50 people. Stepping through the door, we found ourselves in a living-room-sized space that could fit 10 people at a pinch. We burst out laughing but went on to have a fantastic evening as the owner alternated between making us cocktails and ducking into a DJ booth to choose from among thousand of vinyl records in order to give us a crash course in jazz from Bennie Goodman to Herbie Hancock.

There's lots of great, cheap food. Maybe I just got lucky with the exchange rate but it was a constant source of amazement just how cheap restaurant meals and alcoholic beverages were in Japan. And there's certainly plenty to spend your money on.

Gourmands seeking bragging rights about trying 'authentic cuisine the locals eat' can gorge on a whole lot of dishes you'll never find on the menu at Wagamama, such as horsemeat sashimi, cow's stomach (you can choose which of the four takes your fancy) or items enigmatically described on restaurant menus as, 'uterus', 'gristle' or 'fatty hormone'.

Lots of hipsters! The Japanese may have a reputation for being workaholic conformists but a significant proportion of the younger generation seem to like dressing up as gothic Lolitas or rockabillies. Harajuku is world-famous for its colourfully attired denizens but you can find fascinating eruptions of bohemia in most major Japanese cities.

Of course, there's no way you'd ever describe yourself as a hipster but if you do happen to be the lumberjack beard or androgynous hairstyle-sporting type you may well find yourself feeling oddly at home in Japan.

YOU MIGHT LIKE



Why straight men love lesbianism
(Live4)



Top4 places with the most welcoming locals
(Travel)



Top4 Game of Thrones film locations to scout
(Travel)



Colder than cold: What to know before heading to Antarctica
(Travel)

Recommended by