



3 Places to Meet People While Traveling Japan

By Chris Broad

Chatting to strangers in Japan can be difficult. As Japan is a high uncertainty avoidance culture, Japanese people actively avoid situations they're unaccustomed to, which especially includes chatting with foreign strangers. That said, if you do get chatting, you'll find you'll be met with kindness and curiosity, as to where you're from and what brought you to Japan. But there's no denying you're less likely to have someone start a conversation with you at a bar or out in public than you might experience back home. In a previous article I mentioned that I rank meeting and befriending strangers quite high on my to-do list whilst travelling, as these encounters are often so memorable they come to define the entire trip. So here's a few ideas to boost your chances of meeting people whilst travelling the country.

Drop into HUB

The Hub "British" themed pub chain, has an empire that spans across most major Japanese cities. I remember the first time I walked into a Hub and suddenly felt like I was in some kind of ludicrous British theme park, with posters for British ales pasted all over the walls, football on the tv, the Beatles playing overhead and even fish and chips (albeit, something tragic that attempted to resemble fish and chips). But make no mistake, it's still a thoroughly Japanese establishment, and you needn't feel guilty about going all the way to Japan just to visit a British themed pub. Honestly, it's worth going in just to see the Japanese interpretation of the UK.



If you're here on a two week trip, I'd recommend dropping in at least once or twice. The chain is well known as a great place to meet people and socialise as the crowd tends to be a younger

demographic, compared to most Japanese bars and Izakayas (Japanese pub restaurants). I often kick off my nights out with a drink or two in Hub - particularly as they stock a wide range of imported beers, that taste somewhat better than the usual fizzy soda water that is Japanese beer. I've met countless people over the last few years, standing at the bar or sitting alongside fellow customers in Tokyo and Osaka and you're also more likely to meet people who are looking to chat to foreigners. If you can't find a Hub, then generic 'Irish' themed pubs are another safe option and common place in every city. The food isn't particularly great in any of these places mind you, so if I were you I'd get a few drinks in, see if you can meet some folks, and then go elsewhere for food (and karaoke).

Homestay / Airbnb

I still remember my first year in Japan, when my cousin invited me to join him with his home stay family in Kobe and the warmth and hospitality I was shown by the Fujiwara family who took me into their home for a week. During that week I almost felt like part of the family, as they took me, a complete stranger, around Hyogo prefecture to glorious sights including a firefly festival and a monkey zoo. It was such a fantastic week that the only way it could have been improved was if the fireflies and the monkey zoo were combined into one seemingly spectacular event.

As Japanese people are almost disturbingly hospitable though - perhaps the most hospitable people on earth - if you do stay with a homestay family, there's a very good chance you'll be treated spectacularly well and go on to form a long lasting bond with the family. Similarly Airbnb has been wildly successful in Japan in recent times, and many of the accommodations come with welcoming hosts who'll be willing to join you for a drink and show you the local area. It can make for a far more fun and memorable alternative to staying in a hotel, and you're certainly more likely to encounter friendly locals along the way.

Tinder

Last year I met with an old schoolfriend who was visiting Tokyo on business and we had a delightfully nostalgic catch up over dinner. During the meal he kept checking his phone in the excitable manner that only comes during the "flirting stage" of chatting to someone you've just met, to which I congratulated him on his fortunate circumstances.

"I met her yesterday through Tinder and we got on pretty well" he beamed.

"Tinder? You've actually had luck on it over there?" I cynically enquired.

"Luck is an understatement!" he cried, throwing his head back in a bout of maniacal laughter and sliding the phone across the table to reveal a long list of girls he was currently chatting to through Tinder. He'd been in Tokyo a mere three days and already had his first date, with two more lined up during the week. My friend was less interested in "getting lucky" like in your favourite Pharrell Williams song, and more interested in just meeting the locals while he was in Japan. Tinder allowed this to happen with spectacular ease - after all, there's over 10 million women in the greater Tokyo area, so you're bound to have some luck getting matched.

Fast forward to July this year, and I met with another good friend who was passing through Tokyo and had a few days to spare. He was travelling solo and looking to meet some locals along the way and I recommended Tinder. His initial scepticism disappeared after I regaled the tale of my lucky schoolfriend, and a few minutes later he quickly threw a profile together. A few days later, I received a message of thanks. The lucky bastard had successfully had a date with a Japanese model and romance was now blossoming.

I've never liked Tinder and even now I'm still not particularly a fan (I don't like the emphasis on appearance over personality). But it's difficult to deny it's a great way to connect with people and awesome to think that it matched my friend with a stranger he'd otherwise never have met in the world's biggest city. It certainly made his time in Japan all the better for it.

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