

Affordable Japanese Cities Await

VOCABULARY WORDS

1. **Destination** (noun) /ˌdɛstɪˈneɪʃən/: The place to which someone or something is going or being sent.
Example: Paris is a popular tourist **destination**.
2. **Affordability** (noun) /əˈfɔːrdəˈbɪləti/: The quality of being cheap enough for people to be able to buy.
Example: The **affordability** of housing is a major concern for young people.
3. **Ranked** (verb) /ræŋkt/: Assigned a rank or position to.
Example: The university was **ranked** among the top 10 in the country.
4. **Accommodation** (noun) /əˈkɒməˈdeɪʃən/: A room, building, or lodging providing dwelling or lodging for people.
Example: The hotel offers comfortable **accommodation** for travelers.
5. **Underrated** (adjective) /ˌʌndərˈreɪtɪd/: Not rated or valued highly enough.
Example: This small café is an **underrated** gem with delicious food.



Japan has been a popular travel destination for a long time — and it's only getting more popular, with a record of nearly 37 million international visitors in 2024. There are a few reasons for this increase in visitors, and affordability is a big one. Earlier this year, Tokyo was ranked one of the world's most affordable travel destinations in the UK Post Office's Holiday Money Report, climbing to second place in their Long Haul Holiday Report for 2024.

And it's not just Tokyo. There are many affordable destinations around Japan — and JR Pass has ranked them. JR Pass — a company that sells rail passes for traveling around Japan — looked at 18 cities around Japan and ranked them based on affordability factors like transport, accommodation, and food and drink.

Known for its temples and world-famous deer, Nara came out on top for affordability according to JR Pass. In its own reporting on the list, *TimeOut* noted that the average cost of dinner in Nara is 2,878 yen — or about \$20 — and the average cost of a night in a hotel is 11,600 yen — or about \$80. Many visitors to Nara spend a night or two there, but it's also possible to do day trips from larger cities like Kyoto and Osaka.

Next on JR Pass' list is Chiba, a city to the east of Tokyo. Chiba is well known for big events like the Summer Sonic music festival and the Tokyo Game Show. Kumamoto, on the southern island of Kyushu, came in third for affordability, followed by the city of Okinawa — found on the island of the same name — and Hiroshima. But although it's an affordable city compared to other world cities, Tokyo didn't make JR Pass' top 10 rankings. *TimeOut* said this list could offer some inspiration for visiting what it calls "underrated cities" that are perhaps less crowded than Japan's larger cities.

DISCUSSION

1. Imagine you have a magical Japanese vending machine that only sells experiences! If you put in \$20, what surprisingly fun and unique experience would you hope to get in one of these affordable cities?
2. Nara has famous deer that walk around freely. If you could have any animal (real or imaginary) walk freely in your hometown, which animal would it be, and what funny things do you think it would do?
3. The article talks about "underrated cities." If your shoes could talk and had visited all the cities in the world, which "underrated" city do you think they would say was the most fun to walk in, and why?
4. If you had a super-fast time machine and could visit any of these Japanese cities for just one hour, which city would you choose, and what one silly thing would you try to do in that hour?
5. Imagine you're a chef, and you have to invent a new dish that represents the "affordability" of these Japanese cities. What ingredients would you use, what would it look like, and what would it be called?
6. If you could design a new kind of "public transport" for one of these cities that's super fun and unique (like flying carp or rolling ramen bowls), what would it be?
7. The Tokyo Game Show happens in Chiba. If you could create a new video game set in one of these affordable Japanese cities, what would the game be about, and what special power would the main character have?
8. If you found a secret map that led to the "most fun, least crowded spot" in one of these cities, what do you imagine that spot would be like, and what would you do there?
9. You've just won a "Mystery Japan Trip" to one of the affordable cities. You don't know which one, but you get to pack one "silly but useful" item. What would you pack, and why?
10. If you could send a postcard from one of these cities to a friend, but you could only draw a picture and use five emojis, what would you draw, and which five emojis would you use to describe your experience?