

Trends in Japan

Lifestyle

This section covers the latest developments in a wide variety of fields and products in which Japanese innovations often spread to other countries, such as health, leisure, and communication.

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New Thermals Help to Combat Climate Change



Warm hi-tech underwear. (C)Mizuno Corporation

Winters in Japan are cold, and in most regions wearing a coat is a must for protection against low temperatures. In recent years in an effort to combat global warming by conserving energy, many offices and shops have turned down the thermostats. This means people need to dress up warm even indoors, but it is hard to move around and be stylish when encumbered by layer upon layer of clothing. Newly developed hi-tech underwear, which is warm but not bulky, offers the perfect solution. These garments use the wearer's body warmth to generate and retain heat efficiently. Men and women from all walks of life, including both indoor and outdoor workers, all say that once you try this underwear, you cannot wear any other kind.

While there is some variation, all of today's technically advanced underwear works on the same basic principle, namely, harnessing the heat released when fabric absorbs moisture. The garments' capacity to retain heat has also been improved by expanding the layer of air between fabric and skin through such means as hollowing out and thinning the fibers. Many of the garments feature antibacterial and odor-fighting properties, greater elasticity to ensure a better fit, and perspiration-wicking capabilities.



There are many for men, too.
(C)Mizuno Corporation

Zeroing in on the Health Boom

Array of Foods and Drinks for the Weight Conscious



Low-calorie, sugar-free *happoshu*.
(C) Kirin Brewery Company, Ltd.

A trip to a Japanese supermarket or convenience store these days reveals a prominence of items displaying the numeral "0" on their packaging. They are calling shoppers' attention to the fact that the products are sugar-, calorie-, or fat-free - and sometimes all three. These "zero-type" foods and drinks, as they have been dubbed, have struck a chord among a rapidly expanding legion of health-conscious consumers, from middle-aged men who want to trim inches from their waists to young women who wish to stay slim. Developing foods that satisfy both taste buds and the desire to cut calories is not easy, but beverage and food makers are now marketing an array of new products to meet the burgeoning demand.

The "zero" products are particularly appealing to those who do not want to give up drinking alcohol or soft drinks but, at the same time, want to hold down their caloric intake. Canned *happoshu* (a beer-like, low-malt beverage), *chuhai* (sparkling beverages with a *shochu*, or distilled liquor, base), and coffee free of sweeteners were launched one after another and rang up unexpectedly strong sales, creating a massive new market for these zero-type drinks.



Sugar-free, fruit-flavored throat sweets.

Dads More Involved In Raising Kids

Society Supports Work-Life Balance

More and more Japanese fathers are taking an active role in raising their children. Stores are stocking a growing selection of baby goods designed for use by fathers, and support networks enabling men to exchange child-care information are being formed.



A Tonga baby carrier designed for men. (C) DAD-WAY INC.

Combi, a major Japanese manufacturer of baby products, has launched a new stroller with a raised handle to make it easier for fathers to use. Until now, strollers designed for mothers have been too short for most men, forcing them to bend forward while pushing, but the new stroller enables fathers to walk and push comfortably. Many other baby products, such as carrying slings and diaper bags, with designs and colors that look more appropriate for men have appeared on store shelves and are selling well. Diaper changing stations, conventionally found only in the ladies' washrooms in department stores and other places, have now been installed in the men's washroom in the Men's Building of the long-established Isetan Department Store in Shinjuku—clear evidence of the increasing number of hands-on fathers.



A stroller with high handles so men can push it easily. (C) Combi corporation

The Evolving World of Karaoke

Market Expands as Companies Diversify Services

Karaoke was born in Japan over 30 years ago. As singing is something that can be easily enjoyed by everyone, karaoke quickly gained popularity and is now a well-known part of popular culture. There are more and more karaoke establishments that, in addition to allowing patrons to have fun singing, have expanded their services through such means as presenting customers with delicious food in a lavish space or giving them the opportunity to soak in a hot bath. In addition to technological advances, these innovations in the environments offered by karaoke establishments are driving the industry forward.



A "Hollywood room" designed like a stage. (C) aria blu TOKYO

Some places provide rooms individually designed around different themes or extravagant, luxurious spaces; some even feature foot baths or jet baths. What could be more relaxing than soaking your feet in a warm foot bath while singing your favorite songs? Other karaoke boxes boast such features as DVD players, game consoles, home-cinema systems, and nostalgic retro interiors. A visit to a karaoke establishment is a great way for guests to see Japan, letting their hair down as well as experiencing Japanese hi-tech entertainment.



A karaoke room with a jet bath.
(C) aria blu TOKYO

"Spaceship" Lands In Shibuya

Youth Culture Hub Gets a Futuristic New Face



The giant, spacious atrium

The area around Tokyo's Shibuya Station, long known as a center of youth culture and fashion, is getting a makeover. The symbol of this renewal is the creation of a new subway station in the form of a chichusen, or "underground spaceship."



The route to the platforms



The station's colorful interior

The creator of this unprecedented structure is world-famous architect Ando Tadao, who employed various environmentally friendly innovations in its construction. One such example is the use of a ventilation system that harnesses the structure's innate air flow. The hot exhaust from trains rises and flows out of the atrium, while cool air from the outside is dragged in. The open space in the center of the "spaceship" helps make this possible. There is also a radiant cooling system that uses cooling tubes to circulate cold water beneath the platform floor and inside the ceiling. The use of these systems will reduce the station's annual carbon dioxide emissions by about 1,000 tons compared with an ordinary subway station.

Consumers Get a Taste for Dessert-Shaped Products



A very life-like Repos Gateau®
(C) Flower Nagano



The creations can be used as
interior decorations. Repos
Gateau® (C) Flower Nagano

Kids and grown-ups alike derive great pleasure from eating their favorite sweets. Knickknacks and daily necessities that tap into the power of desserts to make people happy are becoming increasingly popular.



A cake-shaped eraser(C) Iwako

Also popular in Japan these days are artificial cakes decorated with preserved flowers called Repos Gateau®, a name combining the French words for "relaxation" and "cake." Originally sold in flower shops, these imitation cakes use lace and carpenter's sealer instead of fresh cream, preserved flowers instead of strawberries, and come decorated with Swarovski handcrafts. Preserved flowers have freshness and texture that sets them apart from dried flowers. Seeing them in bloom atop the cake makes people feel refreshed. And since the flowers will not wither for several years, they can be given away as presents or used to decorate your room.



A strawberry ice cream eraser (C) Iwako

The Suit You Can Wash In The Shower

Dawn of a Revolution in Business Attire

The suit is the uniform of the working professional. Suits are worn every day in a variety of business settings, causing them to become dirty, wrinkled, and occasionally even coffee-stained. Who has not wished their suit could be easily washed without having to take it to the dry cleaner's? Now a new suit has hit the market that takes care of just this problem. The Shower Clean Suit can be washed in warm water from the shower, does not require ironing, and maintains a sharp crease in the trousers.

Sweat stains and odors, dust, pollen, food stains, and wrinkles can all be washed away in the shower, although grease stains may prove more resistant. Washing one of the suits is a snap: simply turn the jacket and pants inside out and place them on a hanger. Shower them thoroughly with warm water (about 40 degrees Celsius) for two to three minutes, turn them right side out and repeat the process. If the suit is still dirty, rub some bath soap on and rinse once again. That is all there is to it!



Washing one of the suits.
(C) KONAKA CO., LTD.



A Shower Clean Suit.
(C) KONAKA CO., LTD.