

# WORKING HOLIDAY JAPAN:

*a little guidebook*  
**BY SOCIAL BUS**



SOCIAL BUS  
ADVENTURE WITH US

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Hey potential, *thinking-it-through*, Working-Holiday-er,

Welcome to **WORKING HOLIDAY JAPAN:** *a little guidebook*  
BY SOCIAL BUS

I'm Peta, your friendly English guide, and I want to help you prepare for your Working Holiday in Japan in the most positive of ways.

When I first came to Japan long-term (as opposed to a month or two), I used a Working Holiday visa.

**It was great.** Relatively straight-forward to apply for, gave me the flexibility of being able to work, study Japanese and travel, and meant that I could really test out for myself if Japan was the place for me longer term.

But I also know that Japan isn't always the easiest place to get settled in. The language is *challenging* for English speakers, and short-term work, accommodation options and registration documents can seem intimidating, to say the least.

**But I promise it's worth it!** Whether you come to Japan for a year and have a life-changing experience, or whether (as is my story), your Working Holiday is the platform into something longer-term, spending a year immersing yourself in a different culture is an incredible experience.

It's not always easy, but it is exciting, full-of-adventure, and a way to grow in ways you didn't know were possible.

I've now been living in Japan for a number of years. My husband is Japanese, and together with our team, we run a company called Social Compass, based in north island of Hokkaido. Our company has two parts to it - our guesthouses (Social Hostels) and our bus company (Social Bus). *Alongside our full-time team, we are always looking for short-term or part-time staff who are coming to Japan using a Working Holiday visa.* We have had many amazing team members join us as part of their year-long experience, and we love to offer practical support that can make the experience as full and fun as possible.

**So this guidebook is for you, potential Working Holiday traveler.**

Whether or not you make it to Hokkaido, I hope it is a source of help and encouragement.

And, if you do make it to Hokkaido, please be sure to get in touch. Hopefully we can work together in the future and help spread the beauty of Japan and the kindness of the people here all over the world.

Love & Peace

*Peta*



*(UK girl, living in the north of Japan, working for Social Bus, connect with me at [www.facebook.com/socialbushokkaido](http://www.facebook.com/socialbushokkaido))*

# WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

Okay, first things first, let's talk about who is eligible to apply for a Working Holiday visa. The Japanese government do keep extending this list, so it is also worth checking out [www.mofa.go.jp/](http://www.mofa.go.jp/) for the latest updates too.

Currently, there are 19 countries or regions eligible to apply for a Working Holiday in Japan, and you need to be aged between **18 - 30 years old** at the time of your application.

First, there are countries where you have to renew your visa after 6 months in Japan, but you can then stay for a maximum of 18 months total.

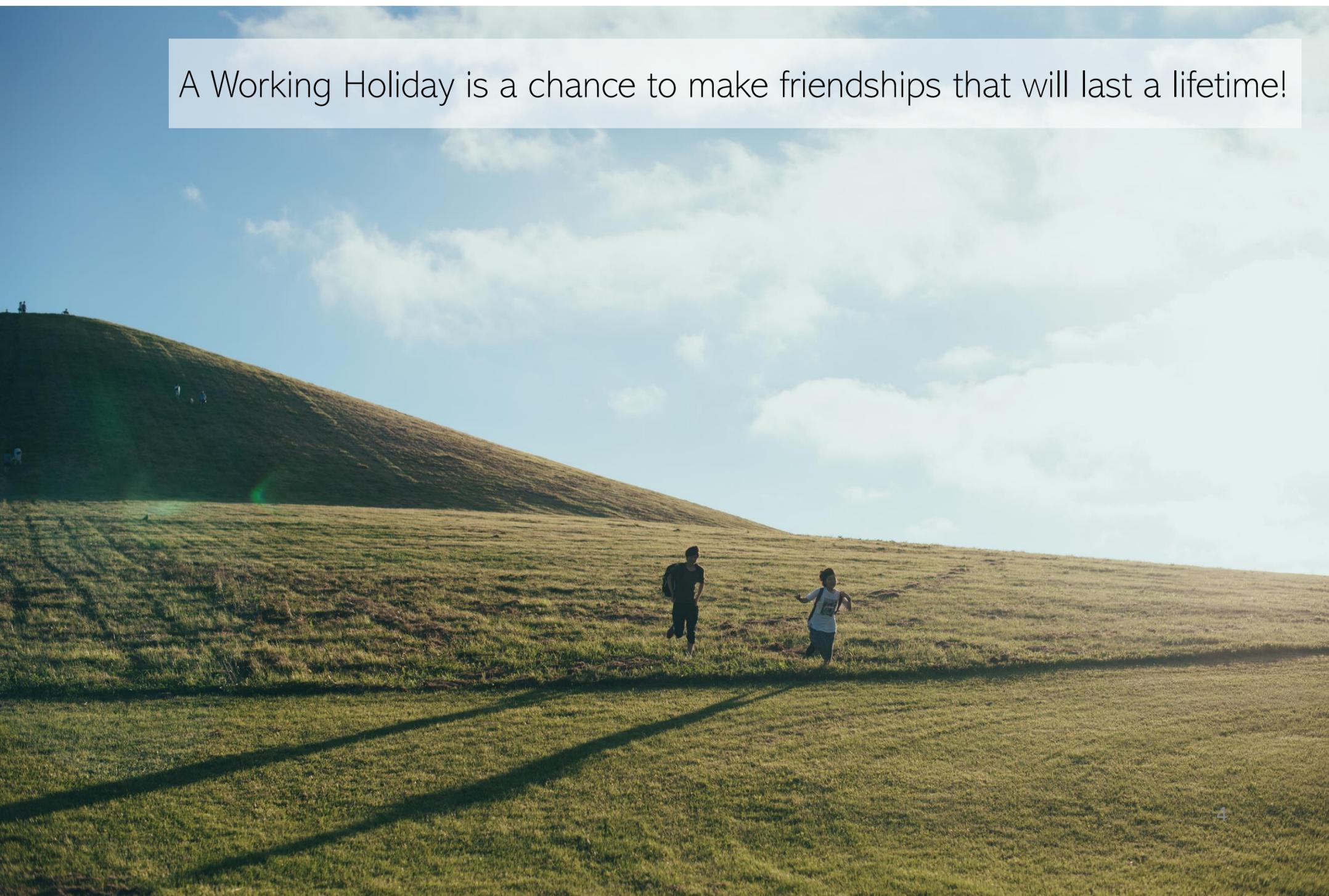
## **Australia, New Zealand and Canada**

Then, there are countries or regions where your visa will run for 12 months from the moment you enter Japan, and you don't have to renew it at any point.

## **Republic of Korea, France, Germany, United Kingdom, Ireland, Denmark, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Norway, Portugal, Poland, Slovakia, Austria, Hungary, Spain, and Argentina**

You can't extend a Working Holiday visa past either your 18 month or 12 month cut-off, so please keep this in mind!

A Working Holiday is a chance to make friendships that will last a lifetime!



Japanese city-living.

When you apply for your Working Holiday visa you need to be currently living in your home-country, and hold a valid passport. You also need to apply in person at your local Japanese consulate (which, keep in mind, is often quite a distance if you aren't living in your capital city!)

Other than that, the final preliminary condition to meet is possessing **reasonable funds**.

This will vary a little depending on your currency, but in the UK it's having **2500GBP** (plus 3 months of bank statements to prove it!), or 1500GBP and a return-flight ticket bought in advance.

You will definitely need more cash than this for your Working Holiday, especially if you don't have a job lined up in advance, and we'll talk about numbers a little bit later.

But, this is seen as reasonable to get you home again, if need-be.

You also can't bring a dependent spouse or children with you on a Working Holiday.

If you are married and both meet the criteria, then you can apply for a visa separately and travel together, but if you have kids, then I'm afraid it's not a possible visa for you!



# APPLYING FOR YOUR WORKING HOLIDAY

**You're eligible!** Your country has a Working Holiday arrangement with Japan, you're aged 18 - 30, and you have the funds in your bank account.

**Check. Check. Check.**

The next step is to get your application pack together.

1. Your passport.
2. One completed Working Holiday application form (you can download from your Japanese consulate website).
3. One photograph sized 35mm x 45mm taken within the last 6 months.
4. Your resume or CV printed on A4 paper.
5. A proposed itinerary for your whole stay in Japan, including any prearranged employment.
6. Your written reason for applying for a Working Holiday visa in Japan, on A4 paper.
7. Your bank statements with proof of funds.
8. *In some countries*, you are also required to get a medical certificate saying you are healthy. If you're from the UK you don't have to do this, but it's worth double-checking before you go to the consulate!



If you love nature and wide-open spaces, Hokkaido is definitely a place to check out on your Working Holiday adventure!

Some of that seems more straightforward than others, right?

In my experience, people mostly get stressed-out when they reach numbers 4 and 5. *How much information is too much? What if I don't have anything lined up yet? How can I know where I'll be after the first couple of months?*

## Don't panic.

The Japanese government are **not** trying to catch you out. They are just wanting to make sure that you have thought through your decision to come to Japan.

They want to know *why* you've chosen Japan, rather than another country, and they want to know that you've been thinking about what you would like to learn from your Working Holiday.

Remember, Working Holidays in general were created for the purpose of giving young adults wider opportunities to appreciate different cultures and ways of life, in order to promote mutual understanding between countries. That means that Working Holiday visas are meant to give you the opportunity to combine working, sightseeing, language-studying and general-experiencing, **all within balance**.

You can't apply for this visa if you **primarily** intend to work full-time for the whole year, although you can work pretty freely. Just make sure it's balanced. The only restriction is that you can't work in any role that will *negatively affect public morals*, so bars, gambling centres etc are obviously out!

## For number 4, keep it reasonably brief.

When are you hoping to work? For a seasonal job? On-and-off throughout the year? When are you hoping to sightsee? Where would you like to go? Are you going to be doing a short-term Japanese course? Where will you stay? (Especially at the start, this is important).

For me, between the time I applied and the time I got on my flight to Japan, my plans changed quite substantially. I ended up enrolling in a 6 week Japanese language course in a different city than I originally intended.

It was no problem.

Just give the honest information that you can at the time of application.

## For number 5, write a max of 1 page.

Show your passion and enthusiasm, and explain why you chose Japan over another country offering Working Holiday visas. Demonstrate that you've thought your decision through. Talk a little about what you are hoping to learn or achieve from your time in Japan.

Like the look of Sapporo? Get in touch!

Hokkaido also has the best seafood in Japan. I promise!



## SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION AND GETTING YOUR VISA

You've got everything you need together, and you're ready to apply.

### **Good job!**

Next comes submitting your application, which has to be done in person, and has to be done at your closest Japanese consulate.

For me, this was a three hour drive from my home in Inverness at the time, to the Edinburgh Consulate. Other UK friends have gone to London. Either way, it normally means some traveling and taking a full day out of your schedule.

**Get there early!** I dropped off my paperwork on the way to a meeting in Edinburgh so was there as soon as the doors opened. It was quieter, meant the process was very relaxed and the staff could check my application was in order before I submitted it. I think I was in the consulate for a grand-total of 30 minutes.

You'll also have to pay a visa fee. This isn't expensive for the Working Holiday visa and the current UK fee is about 19GBP.



Preparing for the adventure of a lifetime.

After submission, as long as there are no problems, your visa tends to come through to you quite quickly. I was preparing myself for a month at least, but it came back about a week later.

**Once issued, you have a year to use your visa to enter Japan. Once you enter Japan, you then have a full year (or 6 months + 1 year extension if you're Canadian, Australian etc) from the date that you set foot in the country.**

So, my visa was issued in October 2013. I entered Japan the following January and had a one year period of stay from January 2014-15 issued on my residence card.

*Just a side note, the Working Holiday visa is **single-entry!** If you are planning to leave Japan within the year (for a wedding, birthday back home, graduation etc.) and want to come back using the same visa, you will need to apply for either a *single re-entry permit*(3000JPY) or a *multiple re-entry permit* (6000JPY) before you start your travels.*

***Be warned: without a re-entry permit, your visa will automatically expire as you leave Japan and you will be unable to return on the same visa.***

# SO, I HAVE MY VISA. WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

So, you have your visa and passport in hand, and you're ready and set to get on your flight to Japan.

## You are a Working Holiday Japan superstar!

A few things to remember.

- ✓ **Book your flights.** Think about where you are wanting to start off on your Working Holiday and go from there. Remember that within Japan, it's relatively cheap and easy to fly domestically. For me, I was coming to Hokkaido, but it was a lot cheaper to fly into Tokyo and then take a domestic airline (I think I used JetStar) to get up to New Chitose Airport in Sapporo. Shop around!
- ✓ **Practice Japanese.** You don't need to be any kind of Japanese master, and I certainly wasn't, but it is a good idea to at least learn the basics before you come. I would recommend, at the very least, learning the *hiragana* and *katakana* writing scripts, and having some greetings and restaurant-ordering-lingo down before you come.

Do something magical on your year-long adventure!



- ✓ **Get Travel Insurance.** Once your registration in Japan is complete, you will be signed up for the mandatory National Health Insurance (*kokumin kenko hoken*). But, at least in the first instance, it's a good idea to have something to keep you healthy and covered in case of emergencies. I took out a month to begin with. The Japanese Health Insurance covers 70% of your medical costs and you then pay the remaining 30%. I've always found Japanese health care to be excellent and really reasonable, but if you are worried about the 30% then keep your travel insurance policy ongoing
- ✓ **Packing.** Pack light! Especially if you are staying in guest house or share house style accommodation. But, pack appropriately! If you are coming to Hokkaido in mid-winter, bring snow boots and a decent jacket. If you are landing in Osaka mid-summer, bring shorts and t-shirts and just buy sweaters when the weather turns cooler. Do your research and take what you need, but be sensible. Japan also runs its electrical network on 100 V/50 Hz so you'll need an adaptor from most countries. Remember that 100 V is low voltage so hair straighteners, hair dryers etc from countries of higher voltage (e.g. Europe uses 220-250 V) won't work in Japan, even when using an adaptor. Bringing them is a waste of suitcase space!
- ✓ **Getting Registered in Japan.** When you come through immigration at the airport you land in, you will be issued with your residence card (*zairyu card*). Within 14 days of moving into an address in Japan, you **must** apply for resident registration at your local government office (the *kuyakusho*, closest to where you are living). It's good to be prepared for this, as it can take some time, and English support is not always/often available. It's best to have your address and other details to hand on something easy to copy-from or if possible, have a Japanese speaker go with you.



Surprise encounters. Great food. The best kind of days.

Social Bus offers travel and tours throughout Hokkaido, so it's a great choice for you to combine part-time work and see the local sights at the same time!



## OTHER FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **You made it!**

You applied for your visa, booked your flights, set foot in Japan, and even managed to get yourself registered at the local town office.

### **What next?**

Well, you have a ton of options. There's so much to see and do in Japan, and even though a year seems like a long time, it will fly by. Our company, Social Bus, offer a full support service to Working Holiday staff joining us for part-time, seasonal or voluntary opportunities, so if that's you, then you don't need to worry as we can help every step of the way.

However, if you are going it alone, or based somewhere else before coming to Hokkaido, here are some answers that might help make your settling-in a little bit easier.

Please take a look, and get in touch if you have any other thoughts that I haven't covered.

Join our Working Holiday team.



## How do I open a bank account in Japan?

A walk down any local high-street will show you there are a ton of banks to choose from in Japan. I recommend Shinsei Bank for foreigners, purely because they offer English support and great internet banking services. You'll need to take your passport and residence card with you, along with some cash for the initial deposit.

When I first arrived in Japan, I **did not** go down this route. I took my non-Japanese speaking self off to my local Hokkaido Bank and we struggled through. I also had to get a *hanko* (identity stamp) made to open an account with them. The staff were amazing, and I have no complaints at all, but it wasn't the easiest process in the world!

A bank account with Japan Post is also a good option if you are planning on internationally transferring a lot. However, take someone who speaks Japanese with you!

## Can I use my credit card from back home in Japan?

Yes, but not everywhere. In terms of ATMs, not all Japanese branches will work with international cards. 7-11 convenience stores always do though and they have 24-7 banking options. Again, most larger department stores will now accept your credit card, but smaller stores and restaurants still prefer cash. Japan is still a very cash-based society!

## How much are living costs?

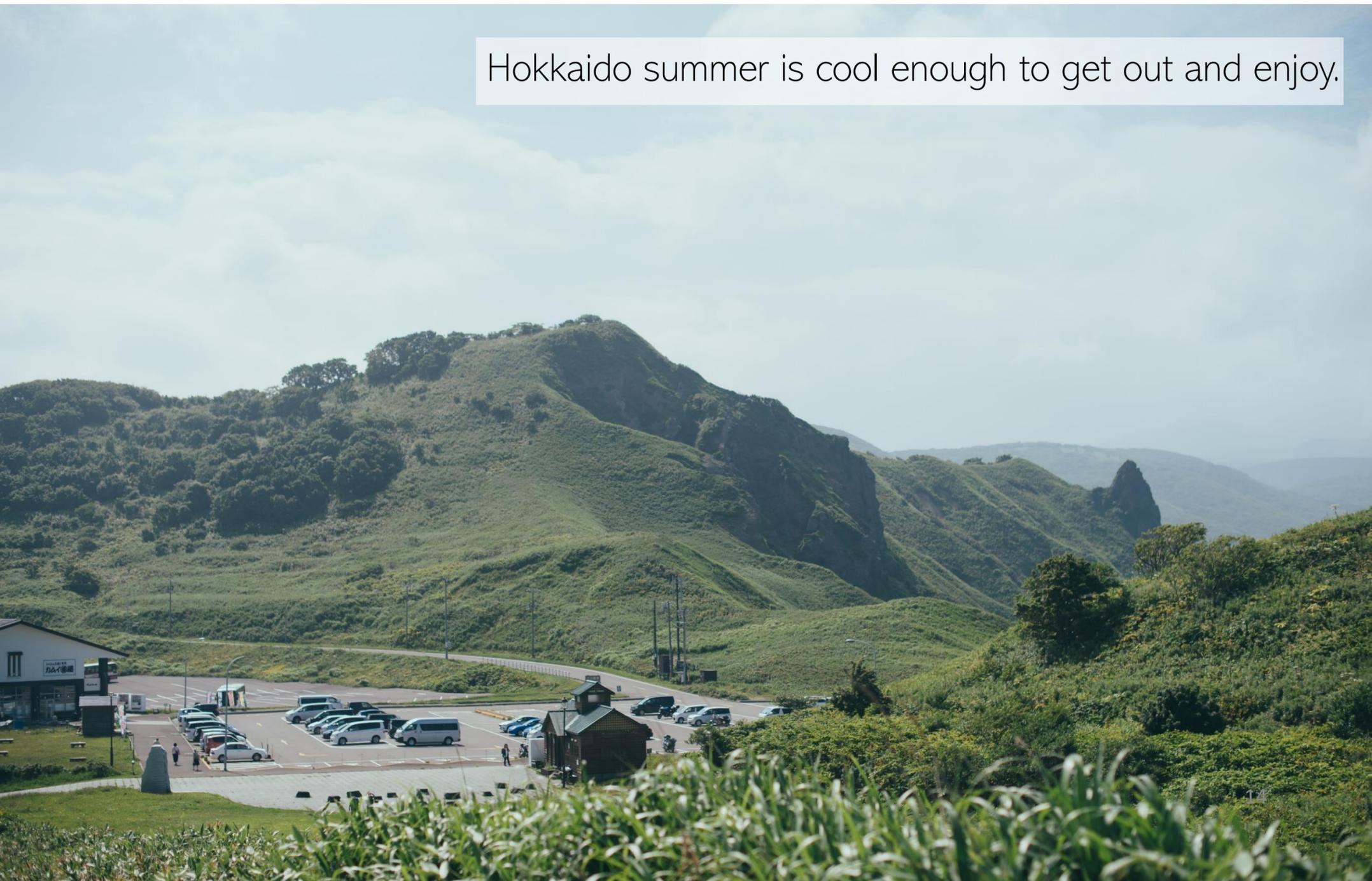
This honestly depends on where you are! Living in Hokkaido is a lot cheaper than other areas in Japan. Living in Tokyo is a lot more expensive.

However, if you're careful and working seasonally or part-time, it is definitely possible to do your Working Holiday on a budget.

Roughly speaking, you'll have the following outgoings to consider each month.

- ✓ **Accommodation.** Depending on where you're staying (see my next question), you are probably going to want to budget **50,000-70,000JPY** a month for accommodation. This would be looking at an option like a share house or guest house. If you are working in a resort for a season, or with a company like ourselves, accommodation is often included in the package though! This might mean your salary is a little lower, but overall you make a big saving!
- ✓ **Food.** Again, this is going to depend on you, your cooking habits and whether you want to eat out a lot. If would budget **40,000-55,000JPY** a month for food. This is going to cover some cheaper days of supermarket and convenience store food, but also give you enough to eat out with friends. Living in a guest house can save you money as people are often cooking together.
- ✓ **Other Expenses.** Travel, health insurance, heading to the cinema etc. - everything also adds up. I would set aside **40,000JPY** a month for everything else. You can save money on public transport by buying a second hand bike, and save money on outings and hobbies by taking part in free-options; but you do want to give yourself enough money to enjoy life in Japan.

Hokkaido summer is cool enough to get out and enjoy.



Finding places that make you come alive.



## What are my accommodation options?

For Working Holiday visa holders, there are some affordable and less affordable accommodation options.

- ✓ **Homestays.** Homestays are difficult to organise privately, but if you are looking at doing a short-term course at a Japanese language school, they can normally arrange this option for you. It is a good way to become immersed in Japanese culture, and food is often included in the fee. If you are looking for a Japanese short-term course with accommodation options in Hokkaido, get in touch and we can introduce you!
- ✓ **Apartments.** I don't recommend apartments for those on Working Holidays. A regular Japanese lease is 24 months minimum, which means that you are ruled out of most rentals just by the length of time of your visa. Apartments are also unfurnished with expensive deposits. It is possible to lease short-term apartment rentals, but these are often 50-70% more expensive, so it's often not affordable.
- ✓ **Share houses.** Now we're talking! Share houses are great options for those moving around a bit over the course of the year, and they are becoming increasingly popular in Japan. Smaller share houses tend to have 6 - 10 bedrooms, and larger ones up to 60. You have a private bedroom, but normally share bathroom, kitchen and living facilities. These are affordable, don't have crazy deposits and mean you can live in an international community with local Japanese and foreigners mixing together easily. Again, if you would like recommendations in Hokkaido, let me know!
- ✓ **Guest houses.** Typically known as hostels in any other part of the world, you can normally find a bed in a dorm for between 2500-3500JPY per night. A cheap and convenient option for short term whilst you get yourself set up with something more permanent. Most guest houses, like ours, also have staff accommodation options, where you share a room, but it doesn't cost you anything. This is a great choice if you are on a budget!

Hokkaido night skies are unbelievable!

## Can I bring medicine to Japan?

Yes, but be careful. Japan is very strict about bringing medicine into the country, and typically over-the-counter medicine here is not as strong as we are used to overseas. Bringing some lemsip or simple cold medicine is going to be fine, but make sure you have the required paperwork for any prescription medicines. Typically, if you need over a one month supply of medicine that is injected or containing particular ingredients, you need to apply for special certificate called a *yakkan shomei* to bring your medicine into Japan. If you have any doubts, check with your Japanese consulate before you come!

## I heard the garbage rules are strict in Japan?! Is this true?

Yes! In Japan, garbage must be sorted into the appropriate group for the day, and this varies from area to area. Normally, the minimum is according to whether it is burnable or unburnable. Garbage may be called *moeru/moenai gomi* or *moyaseru/moyasenai gomi*, depending on the area you live in (*gomi* = garbage).

In Sapporo we have specific yellow bags that have to be used for combustible waste, and these garbage days are Monday and Thursday. There's then a day for plastics, another for pet bottles and cans, another for garden waste, another for paper.... You get my drift. Make sure you read up on the pamphlets they give you. When I moved into my apartment the garbage guidance book was 30 pages long!

Take a step into a new world.

## How can I get a mobile phone/cellphone in Japan?

This is another common question, as standard Japanese contracts are 2 years long so not suitable. The easiest way is to bring an unlocked phone to Japan, and then just buy a Japanese SIM card. This means you can keep your current device and just arrange a monthly contract.

IJmio, LINE mobile and Rakuten mobile are all talked about pretty positively, but only the first company has English guidance.

## Are there any websites you recommend?

Yes! There are English resources about, and we also have some local recommendations for people coming to Hokkaido.

### For jobs.

*Social Bus.* If you'd like to work with us, get in touch at [www.social-bus.jp](http://www.social-bus.jp)

*Social Hostel 365.* You can also find our flagship guesthouse here at [www.socialhostel365.com/en/GaijinPot](http://www.socialhostel365.com/en/GaijinPot). If you are job searching throughout Japan then check out [www.gaijinpot.com](http://www.gaijinpot.com)

### For Japanese language schools.

*Hokkaido Japanese Language School.* This is one of our favourite local Japanese schools and you can study there for as little as one week. They also have a sister-school in Kyoto. [www.hokkaido-jals.com](http://www.hokkaido-jals.com)

### For banking.

*Shinsei Bank.* [www.shinseibank.com/english/](http://www.shinseibank.com/english/)

### For Japanese SIM cards.

*IJmio.* [www.ijmio.jp/hdd/visitors/](http://www.ijmio.jp/hdd/visitors/)

### For Japan news.

*The Japan Times.* [www.japantimes.co.jp](http://www.japantimes.co.jp)

### For postage.

*Japan Post English site.* [www.post.japanpost.jp/index\\_en.html](http://www.post.japanpost.jp/index_en.html)

Good luck with your Working Holiday in Japan!

Feel free to connect with us directly at [info@social-bus.jp](mailto:info@social-bus.jp)  
or at [www.facebook.com/socialbushokkaido](https://www.facebook.com/socialbushokkaido)

We'd love to hear from you!



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ADVENTURE WITH US

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