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Shopping for Food

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Shopping for Food



The discount hour at Esport Market

Shopping in Japan took some getting used to, but I have actually grown accustomed to its many wonderful aspects. I want to talk specifically about *food* shopping in this post, and shed some light on a few tips for future Japan travelers.

In Sagamihara, I primarily use 7-Eleven and a large grocery and home-goods store called Esport. The 7-Eleven's in Japan are unlike those in the United States in that they do not offer petrol and diesel fueling, and the stores act as a mini grocery store in every respect. You can buy anything from cooked chicken breast to ramen and everything in between, in addition to all the essential household items and toiletries.

Esport is for larger dry goods, advanced cosmetics, electronics... and nearly anything one could desire in setting up for study abroad or life in Japan. Esport also offers a wide selection of foods, comparable to a Safeway in size and product offerings. The selection of fresh foods is extensive given the high product turnover, and I would say that most Japanese people take to shopping once every day or two. Be cautious of fresh foods that have been brought in from afar, such as apples and bananas. They are typically expensive and last only a few days compared to US stock. Many foods in Japan are not treated with so many pesticides and preservatives, and this also impacts the shelf-life of foods. I have no complaints, though — maybe it is a placebo, but I feel much better eating Japanese food products compared to those purchased in the United States.

The photo included in this post depicts the “discount hour” as the Esport market is about to close. From 8pm-9pm, all fresh, cooked items are 50% off. This creates a daily frenzy at 8pm, as all the items are marked down with small stickers. You can find yakisoba, different salads, karage (fried chicken) sushi, and more at deep discounts, and I would encourage anyone traveling to Japan to experiment with their local grocery to find their fire-sale times. It will save you a significant amount of money you can use to partake in other activities.

One final piece of advice: make sure you are taking in enough calories while you are abroad. It is easy to miss meals when you are excited and exploring, but this can lead to weight loss (I've been a victim of this), illness and a lack of energy. The effects are exponentially more noticeable settling into life in another country. Overall, Japanese food quality has been wonderful and you will not be disappointed at the market offerings. Expect some challenges translating the labels, but important information such as expiration dates and prices are clearly interpretable.

Thank you for reading!
Andrew Hampson