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### **My thoughts on the problem of passive smoking in Japan**

Japan is an amazing country that has always captured my interest. Its unique, fascinating culture, which is built on a good mix of tradition and modernity, is what attracts me to visit and explore this country. I came to Japan as a college student 3 years ago, and since then I have been able to enjoy living my life here with vibrant experience of various aspects of Japanese culture. Travelling across the country between major and symbolic cities such as Osaka, Tokyo, Kyoto is my favorite activity during vacation, and it actually opens for me a lot of opportunities to explore Japanese culture as well as create something memorable about Japan for myself. Being a foreign student, budget and spending are matters that I always have to take into consideration when it comes to planning my trip. However, thanks to the abundant availability of cheap, affordable choices of accommodation in Japan, those kinds of matters have never got the chance to put me off setting up my travelling plan and enjoying my trips.

Specifically, I am very fond of the Internet Manga Cafe, which can be seen almost anywhere in major cities in Japan. With free drinks, shower, tons of manga and magazines available, as well as vending machines at disposal, the internet manga cafe is an ideal choice of accommodation for travelers who are low on budget and eager to experience something new on the go. Although it is meant to be in the low-cost business model, the staff there is humble, friendly and accommodating, which matches up to the typical expectation of Japanese top-notch customer service. Most of the time I am somewhat satisfied and have nothing to complain about when staying there for the night, except for one thing: the tobacco smoke-filled air. Although the cafe is divided into two areas for smokers and non-smokers, it is not really effective. Since the two areas are constructed in the form of open booths with no walls in between, the smoke from the smoking area can still make its way to the non-smoking one and permeate the room. To a non-smoker who is not comfortable with the smell of tobacco smoke, it is a rather unpleasant experience. However, expressing the discomfort to the one in charge and making a complaint are difficult, because technically the smokers enjoy their tobacco in the designated area and thus do not break the rules. I once expressed my concern about the tobacco smoke-filled air to the staff, although the staff was polite when addressing my concern, the only response I could get was a typical formal apology and the asking for my consideration.

Another type of accommodation that also captures my interest is the capsule hotel. It is comparatively cheap and affordable, and more importantly, it can add to the fun, exciting experience that deviates from the convention a person who travels in Japan might expect. I remember when I first stepped in the cabin seeing all the capsules lying neatly, the futuristic and unique setting of the cabin quickly took my breath away for a few seconds. I enjoyed most of my time there but again the uninviting tobacco smoke pretty much watered down my enjoyment. Although I booked a capsule in the non-smoking cabin, I still felt the presence of tobacco smoke in the air. It was not really strong, but the amount was enough to make me put on a mask so as to

alleviate the displeasure of breathing the unclean air. Nevertheless, it was not yet the worst experience until I came to the common space to have my meal. Eating and drinking was only allowed in this area, and there were vending machines, manga shelves, wifi access with a couple of computers to accommodate the customers. What particularly baffled me was that the place was not separated into non-smoking or smoking area, and both non-smokers and smokers had to share the same space. I found this very unpleasant, because I could not enjoy my meal by any means in the stuffy air filled with tobacco smoke. Moreover, I could not bear the thought of staying there to use the wifi or other commodities because of the smoke, which was utterly inconvenient and off-putting. I felt rather frustrated, due to the fact that the so-called common space for everyone was not accommodating at all to non-smokers. Whenever one person lit a cigarette, those who do not smoke had no other alternative but to leave the room. Otherwise, they would certainly fall victim to the second-hand smoke.

Internet manga cafe and capsule hotel are among many attractions that do justice to the uniqueness and originality of Japan. These types of accommodation have increasingly gained more popularity on the internet and have been recommended by many travelers and Japanese enthusiasts. They do not appeal only to only low-budget travellers, but also to those who seek something that is novel, fascinating and exclusive to Japan. Staying at these places is supposed to be an exciting, enjoyable experience without the fear of compromising their health because of exposure to passive smoking. Research has shown that passive smoking is even more harmful than active smoking, and those who involuntarily inhale the smoke from other smokers' cigarettes run a higher risk of getting cancer. It would be very regrettable that visitors could not enjoy themselves to the fullest due to the inconvenience brought about by the second-hand smoke. Consider the fact that the 2020 Olympic Game is around the corner, and that Japan is going to welcome a huge influx of tourists, the issue of passive smoking, especially in accommodation facilities, cannot be taken with a pinch of salt. The government should take more radical action in raising the awareness about this problem, and should come up with clear guidelines and policies on how to tackle it. Specifically, inspection and quality control of accommodation facilities need to be carried out with more emphasis on non-smoker friendly services and commodities. In addition, it is advisable that capsule hotel and internet manga cafe owners be more receptive and willing to hear what the customer has to say about tobacco smoke and air ventilation in order to improve the service quality. The cooperation of both the government and private sectors in maintaining a clean, smoke-free environment will reflect well on the image of Japan as a country which is conscious of the well-being of its citizen as well as visitors from abroad.

Japan is amazing in the way it offers authentic, quirky and fascinating cultural experience that sets itself apart from any Asian country. However, I believe that the prevalent presence of second-hand smoke in accommodation facilities or public places is not something that Japan prides itself on. Personally, staying in an internet manga cafe during my economical solo trips or indulging myself in futuristic theme once in awhile in a capsule hotel are what I would possibly never get fed up with, and second-hand smoke would be the last thing I need to make the most of such great experience.