

# Summer strategies to beat the heat

There is no escaping the fact that most of Japan has hot and sticky summers. The Japanese have found various ways to deal with the heat. If not actually lowering the temperature, there are several methods people have traditionally used to make the heat more bearable. Wind chimes, for example, have been used to trick the senses: the sound of its chime is said to make people feel cooler as they 'hear' a breeze in the air.

These traditional approaches are perhaps more important than usual in the 2011 Japanese summer as individuals and companies strive to save energy\* to ensure a stable supply of power while multiple nuclear power electricity plants remain offline.

Japanese homes were traditionally built with multiple sliding doors and walls, inside and outside, that allowed the house to be opened up during summer days to maximise the air flowing through the house. Reed blinds or *sudare* were hung to create shade but still allow the breezes in.

This type of traditional house is in the minority in modern Japan; even more

simply calls for people, especially office workers, to dress more appropriately for the weather. In Japan, businesspeople see wearing a suit and tie as proper manners, but this year more people are stepping out without suit jackets and sales of casual clothes are up.

It is easy to lose your appetite when the heat hits, but in a country where food plays such an important role

are often served hot. Grilled eel is a very tasty example and has been eaten at the height of summer for centuries. As in Australia, barbecues are popular in summer. The ever popular ramen noodle stores sell *hiyashi-chuka* at this time of year. Literally 'chilled Chinese noodles', they are an interesting cross between noodles and a salad.

If you are travelling to Japan in



so in cities where so many people live in apartments or in Western-style housing. While you will still often see *sudare* being used to shade windows, particularly on balconies, Japanese people have long relied on air conditioners to escape the heat.

But this summer, coolers are being run at higher temperatures, with thermostats being set as high as 28 degrees to save energy and avoid blackouts. So, lo-tech alternatives are again being sought. 'Green curtain' kits have proven popular—the idea is to plant fast growing *goya* gourd plants up simple trellises to shade buildings.

People are having to adapt. CoolBiz was a campaign first launched in 2005 but this year it has been relaunched as Super CoolBiz. This campaign

culturally, thought has always been given to not just what is eaten in summer but how food is presented.

Shaved ice with syrup called *kakigori* is a summer favourite, and watermelon almost becomes a staple food during this season! Tea drinking changes too as *mugi-cha*, chilled barley tea, becomes the tea of choice. Instead of being served in ceramic tea cups, glass tea cups are used, often placed on a woven reed or bamboo coaster. Glassware is used to serve many foods: sweets—jellies are common, fruit, salads and sashimi. All appear that little bit cooler resting on glass, often coloured blue or green to heighten the cooling effect.

To keep up energy levels, 'stamina' foods are popular even though they

summer it is best to keep in mind just how humid it can be and travelling from the southern winter can be especially draining. Keep your fluids up and try some of the summer foods and treats that Japanese enjoy at this time year. Think about sightseeing early, resting in the heat of the day and getting back outside in the late afternoon and evening. It's no coincidence that most summer festivals are held in the relative cool of the evening. It's really the only time to hold them!

\* The general aim is to reduce power usage by 15 percent. Government and private organisations are conducting energy audits and offering individuals advice on how to reduce energy consumption around the home. Lunch hours, shifts and holiday schedules are also being arranged with energy saving in mind.