

Audio and PDF versions of this article will be available on the Tomtom English homework page from 2<sup>nd</sup> July at <http://tomtom-english.com/homework.html>

## **Welcome to the toy cafe; no kids allowed**

There are a lot of cafes out there and Japan is no exception. An upstart cafe owner is always faced with the challenge of standing out in a crowd. Having good coffee and ambiance is a plus but with all the customers' faces buried in their smartphones and laptops they may just as easily go to the place up the street.

Enter Toique (a tongue-twisting portmanteau of “toy” and “unique”), a Tokyo-based cafe that offers up a plethora of international toys for its drinkers. Toique only has two policies that it enforces, no smoking and no one under 15 allowed.

Toique's owner, Mr Shimizu, wants to break the social taboo surrounding adults playing with toys by giving them a safe place to enjoy them. He also feels that adults can't truly enjoy a toy store with so many kids around, whereas adult “playgrounds” like restaurants and bars are also being infiltrated with more and more children.

With these goals in mind Mr Shimizu set-up this cafe, and the result is downright tranquil. With every drink you purchase you can stay for one hour and enjoy any of the toys hailing from Japan, Germany, and Switzerland.

Don't expect people playing Call of Duty, though. These are more traditional puzzle type games that are easy to pick up and understand. For example, there's the Swiss Naef Diamant which is a diamond-shaped set of 15 blocks that can be rearranged in a seemingly endless variety of combinations.

Shimizu also recommends Via-J (see photo below), which is a Japanese toy that can also double as a decorative piece for your home. It consists of an elegant looking set of transparent slides that you can roll multicolored balls down. It's a fine way to chill out and enjoy your drink.

One more featured toy is the German game Kubana. Kubana is just like Connect 4, only played in 3 dimensions. Meaning is you were to put four Connect 4 games back to back so you could win along any 4 places inside the cube. Pretty sneaky, Germans.

With only adults playing all these games the atmosphere is really serene. No one is yelling, crying, or fighting. In fact, hardly anyone is talking while immersed in their toys. Before you know it, your hour's up.

### Discussion Questions

1. What do you think about the new café "Toique"? Are you interested in going there?
2. Perhaps you are not so into playing toys. If so, what kind of café would you like to be created that would suit your interests?
3. What are some of the things that annoy you when you're out in a café or restaurant?
4. What's your favourite café? What's your favourite restaurant? Why?
5. If you could change or improve anything about your favourite café/restaurant, what would it be?
6. What are some of things that you're into doing recently for relaxation?
7. Are you an indoor person or an outdoor person? Why?
8. Have you played any of the games offered at Toique?
9. Do you play any other games? Which ones?
10. What games did you play when you were a child?
11. Are board games popular in Japan? Which ones?

Don't forget, you can follow us on twitter @tomtomenglish where we will post study tips, useful expressions and idioms, and party information.