

## Preview the first sentence

**(BBC)** --The Japanese like to use their money. Lola - or Rora - to give her a slightly more Japanese pronunciation - is a beauty and she knows it. Customers pay by the hour for her company. Usually they just want to stroke her, but as a special treat for favored clients, she will lie back in a chair, close her eyes and pose for photographs.

Lola is a Persian cat who works at the "Ja La La" Cafe in Tokyo's bustling Akihabara district. It is one of a growing number of Cat Cafes in the city which provide visitors with short but intimate encounters with professional pets. When I called, there were 12 felines and seven customers, mostly single men. One man, in his early 30s, was attempting to bond with an Oriental Longhair by means of a rubber mouse.

Yutsuke, is normally rather shy with people. He longs for a cat of his own but frequent business trips make that difficult. Besides, he lives alone, so the "Ja La La" is his solution to the problem. It costs about £8 (\$10) an hour to spend time in a Cat Cafe. If felines do not appeal, other establishments will rent you a rabbit, a ferret or even a beetle.

There are more than 150 companies in Tokyo which are licensed to hire out animals of various kinds. Dogs are very popular. First you pay a deposit and a hire fee. Then you are issued with a leash, some tissues and a plastic bag and given some advice on how to handle your new friend. Kaori is a pretty waitress who regularly spends her Sunday afternoons with a Labrador. They go for a walk in the park if the weather is fine, or if it is wet they just snuggle up in front of the TV in her apartment. "When I look into his eyes, I think he's my dog," Kaori told me. "But when I take him back to the shop, he runs away from me and starts wagging his tail when he sees the next customer. That's when I know he's only a rental dog."

