# FEATURE

# school yourself in china's online shopping

Ve Heart Sobaq

aobao is fantastic. That's a fact. Think about it: They have more registered users than the entire population of Russia, and that many people can't be wrong. This online shopping behemoth will deliver anything to your door – even some things you'd given up on finding in Beijing. There's just one catch: Taobao is a Chinese-language website, which means most expats are scared of it. So much so that an entire industry of "Taobao agents" has sprung up to deal with the hassle on your behalf, but they'll charge you a percentage – and anyway, what's there to be scared of? You made it to Beijing, didn't you? Take a deep breath and set off on an adventure that will revolutionize the way you shop. (And remember that resolution you made to improve your Chinese? Taobao will help with that too.) Class is now in session.

# What an expat wants

where surveyed our highly cosmopolitan staff to find out what products they always stock up on when they go home – commodities that are either unavailable or too expensive in Beijing. Here are a few of the treasures we found on Taobao:

#### SHOES IN BIG SIZES

of the world's shoes, but the large sizes are earmarked for export. That means women with feet over EUR 40 and men

with feet over EUR 45 often struggle to find shoes that fit. Taobao is filled with shoe producers who want to custom-tailor the pretty styles for your big floppy feet.

## PG TIPS/TETLEY/ YORKSHIRE TEABAGS

The suitcases of Brits returning to Beijing are filled with English tea. Teabag loyalty in the UK is as complicated

as India's caste system – lucky for us that Taobao has plenty of the most beloved brands on offer.

# "NORMAL-SIZE" JEANS

"I am NOT an XXXL!" is the anguished cry of the expat woman, who feels

judged and found monstrous by Asian clothes sizes. Sorry, nothing we can do about that. "I can't find jeans here that fit me!"Well, Taobao can do something about that. Vast selection means you needn't pay a premium for sizes that are rarer.

#### VEGEMITE



but never Vege te. It's the nation spread; argua you're not a pro Aussie if you d like it. Taobao

yeast-extract away yo nomesick blues. Just don't ask abo he new Cheesymite.

# MAILLE MUSTARD

Mustard is the king of condiments. When you're deprived of the brands that you grew up with, you die a little inside. Well, revive yourselves, French expats. Taobao sells Maille – even the whole-grain variety. That more than cuts the mustard.

## CELL PHONE RECHARGING

During Spring Festival, one of our ditors needed desperately to get in touch with her *ayi*, who had gone back to her village with a cell phone hat had run out of credit. Purchasing China Unicom phone credit on Taobac included instantaneous recharging of the specified number. A few minutes later, she was on the phone with he *ayi* and she never even had to leave the house. Emergency solved.

#### CAMERA FILM

Serious shutterbugs know all too well that certain types of film aren't sold in China (e.g. Fujifilm FP-3000B B/W, Fuji Provia 400X in medium format, etc). And bringing them back from abroad in your luggage is no solution, because the airport X-ray scanners will ruin the film. Taobao to the rescue!

#### **BREAKFAST CEREALS**



Lucky Charms, Coco Puffs Froot Loops, Apple Jacks Honey Smacks – it's all here Taobao comes into its owr as a money-saving operation when you buy cerea serially. Now, onto finding some real milk ...

#### HP SAUCE

As British as the Houses of Parliament that adorn the bottle, this brown sauce is one of the worst things to smash in a suitcase. Its availability on Taobao will prevent you from having to steal bottles when you occasionally see it in restaurants.

#### SNUS

r you are constantly nassling your tolks back in Scandinavia to mail you care backages filled with snuff, hassle no more. Your favorite brand of moist powder tobacco product can be *kuaidi*'d to your door.

VITAMIN E BODYLOTION

LOTION

ml (8.4 US FL OZ

#### **BODY SHOP**

Ethical toiletries come at a price in China and that price is a trip to Hong Kong. Now you can skip that sweatbox and remain guilt-free while looking like a self-righteous hippie.

#### MARKS & SPENCER



This British institution has been promising for years to open a store in Beijing. Until that day, Taobao is your only source for Marks & Sparks biscuits and confection. Unless you want to go to Shanghai, that is. Thought not.

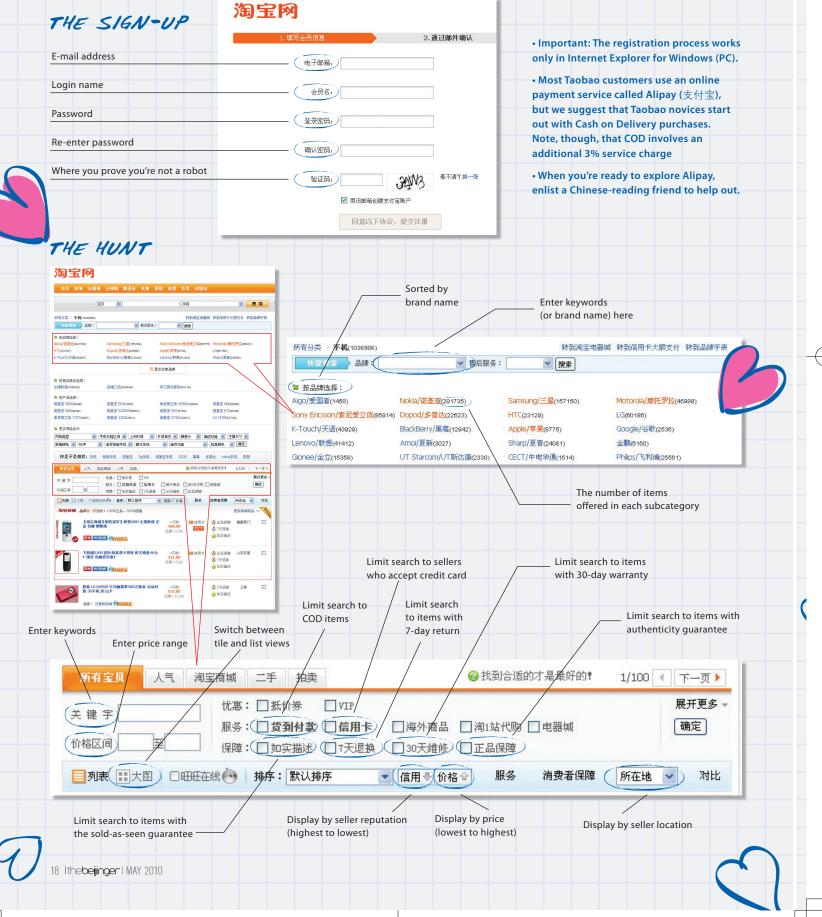
# ENGLISH-LANGUAGE MAGAZINES

You like magazines. (We know, because you're reading one now.) So you'll be pleased to hear that Taobao sellers offer individual hard copies or PDFs of many popular magazines: The New Yorker, Elle, House Beautiful, Cosmo, Scientific American, Esquire, Architectural Digest ... the list goes on.

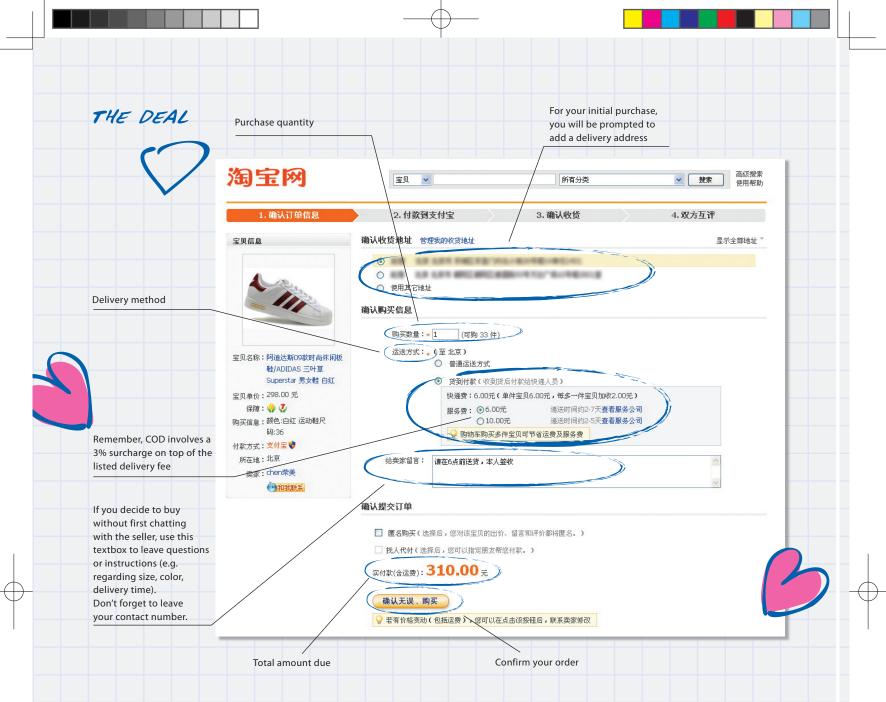
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irst of all, this is not meant to be an exhaustive guide to navigating Taobao. For that, you should turn to **Taobaofieldguide.com**, an invaluable resource that walks you through the entire process. What we've done is to supplement their guide with a few updated screenshots – and to offer some additional tips.







# THE HAND-OFF

Special note for COD deliveries: When the item is delivered, check the product in the courier's presence. If it's fine, pay the courier the delivery fee + 3% surcharge. If the product does not match the description, you can refuse to accept it by not signing for the item.

# CRIB SHEET: USEFUL PHRASES

你好,请问这款有现货么?

有什么尺码/颜色呢? What sizes/colors does it come in?

是什么料子的?是否会缩水? What material is it? Will it shrink?

如果尺寸不合适,可以调换么? can I exchange it?

有色差么? Is there a color discrepancy between the item and its photo? 我收到的产品会不会和照片一模一样? Will the item(s) you ship be exactly the same as shown in the photo?

已经拍下了,请修改邮费价格。 I have already ordered the items. Please adjust the delivery fee.

(All products are listed with a basic delivery fee. If you purchase two or more items from a single need to ask the seller about it after you have

请问我多久可以收到产品呢? How soon will the item(s) arrive?

有没有保修服务? Do you have a warranty policy?

还有什么需要先确认么? ls there anything else we need to

你好,产品已经收到。尺码不合适, 可以换XXX号么?

See www.thebeijinger.com for a cut-and-paste version of these phrases

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# The Shopping Challenge: Taobao V.S. Real World

e gave two staffers a shopping list – their assignment was to compare Taobao prices with those from the brick-and-mortar world. Lessons learned: Specific clothing designs can be tricky to find online (especially if they happen to be something only a tourist would wear). If your shoppping need is something as concrete and urgent as duplicating a key, it doesn't make sense to seek the service in the virtual realm (wait ... didn't we know that already?). And lastly, if you need a small turtle, best to purchase it face to face. You know, for the instant gratification.

HIIIII		TAOBAO PRICE (TOTAL W/ SHIPPING)	
	REAL WORLD PRICE (STORE)		OTAL W/ SHIPPING)
T-shirt with panda and the word "Beijing"	RMB 35 (Silk Market)	Х	N/A
Inflatable dinosaur	RMB 18 (Silk Market)	RMB 11.16	RMB 21.16
Replacement watch strap (rubber)	RMB 20 (Silk Market)	RMB 9.80	RMB 21.80
Car cigarette lighter phone charger	RMB 80 (Silk Market)	RMB 18	RMB 30
Shuttlecock (set of 6)	RMB 30 (Silk Market)	RMB 1.4	RMB 18.4
Snorkel	RMB 55 (Silk Market)	RMB 15	RMB 25
"Louis Vuitton" dog bag	RMB 150 (Silk Market)	RMB 75	RMB 85
Tommy Bahama shirt	RMB 100 (Silk Market)	RMB 48	RMB 60
2014 Olympics merchandise	x	RMB 5.90	RMB 12.90
Cell phone credit (100-yuan credit)	RMB 100 (Nüren Jie)	RMB 98.7	RMB 98.7
Pruning shears	RMB 25 (Laitai Flower Market)	RMB 22	RMB 31
Electrical tape	RMB 5 (hardware store)	RMB 3	RMB 11
George Foreman grill	X	RMB 199	RMB 223
Men's undershirt (pack of 2)	RMB 25.80 (Wal-Mart)	RMB 4	RMB 24
Small turtle	RMB 12.80 (Wal-Mart)	RMB 19.5	RMB 27.5
3m Ethernet cable	RMB 17.80 (Wal-Mart)	RMB 3	RMB 13
Board game (Monopoly)	RMB 99 (Wal-Mart)	RMB 18	RMB 28
Bubble wrap (10 meters)	RMB 50 (post office)	RMB 3.8	RMB 15.8
Кеу сору	RMB 3 (street vendor)	х	N/A
Lab coat	х	RMB 55	RMB 65

### **OFFLINE SHOPPING**

IUMBER OF ITEMS SUCCESSFULLY PURCHASED: 17 out of 20 OTAL TIME SPENT: 3 hours, 8 minutes OTAL TRANSPORTATION COSTS: RMB 24

# TAOBAO SHOPPING

NUMBER OF ITEMS SUCCESSFULLY PURCHASED: 18 out of 20 TOTAL TIME SPENT: 50 minutes

TOTAL SHIPPING COSTS: RMR 184

(Delivery usually takes 1-5 days, depending on seller location)

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# Stranger Than Fiction: Taobao's Oddest Buys

experiences that are experiences that are gives even Tokyo a run for its money, eBay sellers pioneered the trend by offering items such as a Braille *Playboy*, an ex-wife's wedding dress and someone's grandmother. It appears that Taobao is not far behind.

### AUSPICIOUS NAMES FOR YOUR BABY

Why go to the bother of choosing a name yourself when Taoist experts are standing by with their fancy numerology?

#### AYI SERVICES

dations? Size up these *ayi*s (complete with feedback ratings).

#### "RIPPED FROM THE RED CARPET" COUTURE

If you liked what Anne Hathaway wore to the Oscars, send in your measurements and these tailors will whip up the dress for you in a few days.



# "TOUCHED BY A BEAUTY" USED GOODS

Not quite as creepy as some of Tokyo's vending machines but odd nonetheless. All of the items in this niche (and there are *a lot*) have been at the least touched by a pretty girl. Some have even been owned by them.



#### NEWBORN-HAIR CALLIGRAPHY BRUSHES

Send in the clippings of your infant' first wisps and get them made into a handy (yet slightly disturbing calligraphy brush.

### STUD SERVICE FOR YOUR CAT

Dating in this town is littered with obstacles. Save your cat the bother and arrange her impregnation via Taobao.

### **DEAD MOSQUITO**

Literally, and we don't use the word lightly, a dead mosquito. Deceased. No more. We're still not sure what you'd want one for.



### PILLOW OF A BLOODY BEAR PAW

Why would anybody make a pillow in the shape of a bear paw used to maul children? The pictures speak a thousand words written in solitary confinement.

## **MMORPG POINTS**

Those Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games are serious business. That's why you can spend real money to buy virtual points needed for potions and whatnot. Just don't let the dungeonmaster find out.

Links to these items can be found at www.thebeijinger.com.

Faobao is the Jack of all trades, ere are some that are the master <sup>i</sup>one. It may not be easy to beat prices on Taobao – but these cialized shopping sites sure

#### www.keede.com Payment: COD and Alipay

A site for sore eyes, literally – they've got sunglasses, frames, contact lenses, and eye drops galore. Keede is easy to search, since the main page displays photos of the most popular items. Spend more than RMB 150 and get free shipping. Note, though, that the delivery time is usually several days longer than Taobao and other online shops.

#### www.sasa.com Payment: Paypal and Alipay, Visa Mastercard, etc.

Offers authentic cosmetics brands (including well-known European labels) at incredibly cheap prices. The best part about this Hong Kong-based beauty chain is that the website is in both English and Chinese. In addition, once you spend more than HKD\_75, you'll get free

# shipping. There's a 30-day return and exchange policy.

#### www.newegg.com.cn Payment: COD and Alipay

The one-stop shop for all of your elecrronic needs. Just type in the brand and product number in the search ield to find the item you're looking for. All electronic products come with a warranty.

#### www.kudipets.com Payment: COD

An online store devoted to pet food, nutrition, grooming products, toys, and other pet-related miscellany. Note: The text and photos on the page are really small, which can make searching for products a tricky task.

### www.wodexiangce.cn Payment: COD and Alipay

Upload your photos here and get them printed. RMB 0.35 per print – it doesn't get any cheaper than that. Shoppers can also personalize mugs, T-shirts, postcards, calendars, bags and paintings with their own photos and images.

# www.misnono.com Payment: COD and Alipay

Rival Schools

Browse and buy top-drawer lingerie – sheer and satiny pieces made of premium silk, chiffon, French lace, organic cotton and microfiber. Based in Beijing, they offer same-day delivery and a "try at home" service, where a personal shopper makes a house call with a selection of items, if you're into that.

Of course, there are other shopping websites that hope to challeng Taobao's supremacy as King of the One-Stop Shop ...

#### www.eachnet.com Payment: Anfutong; some sellers offer COD

Eachnet is Taobao's biggest competitor on certain items, it offers prices that are even cheaper than its counterpart. The two have many similarities including the search method but Eachnet has its very own payment tool, Anfutong Since most stores are run by individual sellers, the quality and authenticity of products can be a little dicey sometimes. Customers should care fully vet photos and product details before placing an order. We suggest customers choose products with both a return and cash-on-delivery policy.

#### www.dangdang.com Payment: COD and Alipay

Thousands of products including books, magazines, music, DVDs, software, clothing and skin care at competitive prices. Registration and searches are easy and straightforward. The site helps customers keep track of shipping with e-mails reporting the packages' delivery status. The delivery fee is RMB 5 and goods arrive in 1-2 days. Any order over RMB 29 earns free delivery.

#### www.amazon.cn Payment: COD and Alipay

The Chinese branch of the online shopping behemoth stocks a similar line of books, magazines, music, software and gadgetry. Once the order is confirmed, customers can track their order and its delivery status on the site. Typing in English keywords works when searching for English-language publications.

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