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New Ways Americans Save Money With Coupons

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Welcome to THIS IS AMERICA in VOA Special English. I'm Christopher Cruise.

FAITH LAPIDUS: And I'm Faith Lapidus. As the American economy continues to struggle, a growing number of people are seeking ways to save on household expenses. One way is collecting and redeeming coupons when they shop for goods and services. Coupons have been around for one hundred twenty-five years. This week, we take a look at the current trends in couponing in the United States. And later, we learn about an artist who carves eggshells, and also a popular kind of yoga that has people hanging upside down.

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Laura Harders does her family's grocery shopping on Fridays. She arrives at the store with a shopping list and coupons.

LAURA HARDERS - "I try to get my coupons up front that I know I am going to use."

Ms. Harders started using coupons about six years ago, when she was expecting her first baby. She was planning to quit her job and needed to find a way the family could live on one income.

LAURA HARDERS: "So instead of having to go back to work, I was able to stay at home and almost bring an income just by what I'm able to save. Fifty cents off any one corn flakes, I'm going to get that."

By using coupons, Ms. Harders is usually able to cut her grocery bill in half. But on this day, she saved even more.

LAURA HARDERS: "Before the sale price, before coupons, my total went up to eighty dollars. After coupons and the sale items, I brought it down to twenty dollars."

She collects coupons from different places.

LAURA HARDERS: "Most of my coupons I get from Sunday newspaper inserts. I also get a lot of coupons online. There's incredible sites such as coupons.com, smartsources.com and others as well as manufactures' web sites."

FAITH LAPIDUS: But not all shoppers use coupons. Mariam Sindy does not even like the idea.

MARIAM SINDY: "I really think it's really time consuming. And a lot of times I find that if I do find a coupon, for example if it comes with a cereal box, I leave it there, I forget it and when I remember, it's expired."

LAURA HARDERS: "Hopefully everybody in this room is interested in couponing or, at least, ready to save some money."

But clipping coupons does not have to be time consuming. Ms. Harders explains in the workshops she leads on coupon shopping.

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: The first coupons were given out in eighteen eighty-seven in Atlanta, Georgia. They were given out by a man who wanted to build excitement and influence customers to try a new beverage, Coca-Cola.

One hundred-twenty-five years later, that is still why businesses issue coupons. What has changed, says marketing consultant Ferris Kaplan, is the way they are issued.

FERRIS KAPLAN: "More young people are actually using coupons because it goes directly to their cell phones, then when they go to the store of their choice, they walk into the store, they automatically use while right there without a printer, without paper, without having to look at a newspaper."

FAITH LAPIDUS: The website Certifikid creates digital coupons for more than one thousand businesses, and e-mails them to about fifty-five thousand customers. Certifikid founder Jamie Ratner also profiles one of the businesses each day.

JAMIE RATNER: "You're the star of that one day in these people's e-mails. So they're reading about you, learning about your business, and then having the opportunity to purchase the coupon."

With more young people going online to find deals and save money in this tough economy, Jamie Ratner expects digital coupon services to expand in the future. You can see a video about couponing on our website, voaspecialenglish.com.

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: It is common to paint or dye eggs, especially during the Christian Easter observance, but few people have ever seen carved eggshells. These have no relationship to eggs that are painted or decorated with gems or other jewels, like Faberge's famous eggs, which were not actual eggs.

Carving and sculpting eggshells, with a dental drill and sanding disk, is not a job for the heavy handed. For Washington area artist Tina Kannapel, it is a passion.

TINA KANNAPEL: "Because an egg is a continuous arch, it has a lot of natural strength. You will see eggshells where I have taken out so much that it looks like lace. And the whole trick to that is having regular connections between the different pieces of the lace, so the eggshell stays intact."

FAITH LAPIDUS: Tina Kannapel carves, sculpts and sells about one thousand six hundred eggshells a year. She buys infertile eggs that have already been emptied -- from bird breeders.

TINA KANNAPEL: "The ostrich eggshell is very hard. It's like China."

She uses all kinds of eggs, including Emu, goose, pheasant and parrot eggs.

The process begins with designs printed on paper and then glued to the eggshell.

TINA KANNAPEL: "You need the paper to stabilize the face of the eggshell, so if you are going to have to carve through paper, you may as well have your design on the paper."

Eggshells have hard and soft spots. The paper reduces the chance of chipping.

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Ms. Kannapel has more than three hundred designs that include animals, portraits and geometric forms.

But whatever the design, carving always has to start at the most difficult part of it. So if the eggshell breaks, hours have not been lost.

TINA KANNAPEL: "When you are working with cats and dogs and human beings, the most difficult thing is the eyes so you always start with the eyes. Because if you mess up the eyes, you mess up the design."

As Ms. Kannapel works, her three Abyssinian cats keep her company.

TINA KANNAPEL: "They walk all around the carved eggshells and they don't bother them at all, in fact, he's loving them."

Once the carving is finished, the eggshell is cleaned - first in warm water to release the paper and then in bleach.

TINA KANNAPEL: "What the bleach does is it eats all of the organic material in the eggshell and when it is completely sterilized, there won't be any bubbles

coming up.”

FAITH LAPIDUS: In the historic town of Occoquan, near Washington DC, the Artists' Undertaking Gallery includes some of Ms. Kannapel's carved eggshells.

An egg with a heron on it looks painted. But there is no paint. The colors emerged during the carving.

TINA KANNAPEL: “This is an emu eggshell. It has three layers. The outside is such a dark green it looks black. The layer underneath that is teal or blue and the layer underneath that is a paper thin white and I carved between the three layers.”

Ms. Kannapel's eggshells cost between thirty and four hundred dollars apiece. Insurance against cracking is not included. You can watch Ms. Kannapel in action on our website, voaspecialenglish.com.

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: A growing number of health clubs around the world offer exercise that allows people to stretch and strengthen their bodies while hanging in the air, often upside down. It is called AntiGravity Yoga. VOA visited a workout studio in Los Angeles, California to see what the exercise is all about.

FAITH LAPIDUS: The image of students hanging upside down on hammocks made of silk cloth connected to the ceiling looks more like acrobatics than yoga. Marie Bice is a student of Antigravity Yoga.

MARIE BICE: “When I first saw people hanging upside down from hammocks and calling it yoga I thought they were crazy. But it ended up being a lot of fun and just swinging it felt very playful.”

Ms. Bice says AntiGravity Yoga is not all play. It is also hard work, with benefits.

MARIE BICE: “I don't have a lot of flexibility in my back and doing this work has really helped my back with that.”

Instructor Heather Blair says hanging upside down helps the body in a way that regular yoga does not offer.

HEATHER BLAIR: “You actually have spinal decompression so when you're upside down your vertebrae actually open up so the space in between the vertebrae opens naturally and gently.”

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Student Chris Meierhans has done traditional forms of yoga. But this is his first AntiGravity class.

CHRIS MEIERHANS: "I would like to increase flexibility. Of course, I'm a guy, a runner, so my hamstrings are very tight."

Ms. Blair says when Belief Fitness Studio first started offering AntiGravity classes over a year ago, people became interested very quickly.

HEATHER BLAIR: "You literally can be of any fitness level. You can have injuries. It doesn't matter how old you are -- anyone can take the class. So it's been a huge draw for us."

FAITH LAPIDUS: AntiGravity Yoga creator Christopher Harrison is a dancer, choreographer and gymnast.

CHRISTOPHER HARRISON: "I created it so even my mother can do it.

Mr. Harrison first created this form of yoga for athletes. He made some changes and started teaching it to the public in the United States in two thousand nine. Since then, it has gained international attention. Several countries, including China, Indonesia, Russia and Brazil, now offer AntiGravity Yoga classes.

HEATHER BLAIR: "AntiGravity Yoga is a combination of pilates, a little bit of yoga, aerial arts and suspension training so it's not just yoga."

The fusion of stretch and strengthening exercises allows students to achieve movements that traditional yoga does not have. They include flying while suspended on the hammock and using the hammock to hang like a bat. It is also more of a cardio-vascular workout than first time student Chris Meierhans expected.

CHRIS MEIERHANS: "I had no idea that it was that much work."

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: But creator Christopher Harrison says the yoga philosophy is still at the core of this workout.

CHRISTOPHER HARRISON: "You can expect still to be studying yoga because it is a practice of awareness, of body, mind and spirit."

Like traditional yoga, each class ends with meditation. But in AntiGravity Yoga, meditating means resting in the air while cocooned in a hammock.

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Our program was produced by Brianna Blake, with reporting by Faiza Elmasry, Zulima Palacio and Elizabeth Lee. I'm Christopher Cruise.

FAITH LAPIDUS: And I'm Faith Lapidus. You can find videos about today's program on our website, voaspecialenglish.com. You can also find transcripts and MP3s of our programs, along with podcasts and activities for learning English. Join us again next week for THIS IS AMERICA in VOA Special English.