

Tourism in Japan

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Overview:

During our nine-day trip to Japan, we have discovered and experienced different aspects of Japan first handed. In this report, we would like to investigate tourism in Japan; identify the characteristics of Japan's tourism spots, look into the facilities and people that operate in coordination with tourism, and compare our investigation with tourism in Hong Kong. In addition, we would also study the culture and customs of Japan that is reflected by tourism.

Our presentation can be roughly sorted into the following:

Sightseeing in Japan

- 1. Educational tourist sites**
- 2. Historic tourist sites**
- 3. Scenic Spots**

Other things that operate in coordination with tourism:

- 1. English standard**
- 2. transportation**
- 3. International Calls**
- 4. Hotel services/facilities**
- 5. Road Sign**
- 6. Shops**
- 7. people**

Sightseeing in Japan

We have visited a wide range of tourist spots in Japan. Based on their nature and functions, these tourist spots can be classified into several groups:

Educational tourist sites

The tourist spots that belong to this group can raise the awareness of tourists on certain issues (such as protection to the environment etc.). Tourist spots that belong to this group include Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution in Kobe (which gives tourists a clearer picture to the destruction caused by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake and restoration of life after the earthquake) and the Kobe City Resources Recycle Center (which brings tourists attention to the importance in protecting the environment by illustrating the ways to deal with wastes after they are thrown away).

Historic tourist sites

The tourist spots that belong to this group can allow tourists experience the history and culture of Japan. Tourist spots such as the Osaka Castle Museum, Oshima Tsumugi No Sato in Kagoshima (which demonstrates the production of Oshima Tsumugi silk) and the Sengan'en Garden (which gives tourists a new insight to traditional Japanese gardens and architecture) are classified into this group.

Scenic Spots

The tourist spots that belong to this group include the Tokyo Tower, Sakura-shima Observatory in Kagoshima and the Pearl Bridge in Kobe. This type of tourist spots allow visitors to get an overview of the city and observe special infrastructure or landscapes.



Tokyo Tower, a famous scenic spot

In addition to the types of tourist attractions mentioned above, Japan is also a famous shopping and gourmet paradise. Aeon Mall in Osaka, Kaminarimon in Tokyo and HAT Kobe are the shopping malls we have visited in Japan.

Characteristics of Japanese tourism

The tourists spots mentioned above reveal several qualities of tourism in Japan. They include the diversity of tourist sites, the emphasis on cultural and educational purposes of their tourist attractions, and the fusion of tourism into everyday lives.

1. Diversity of tourist attractions

From the brief description of the tourist spots that we have visited in Japan (listed above), we can see that Japan has a great diversity of tourist attractions. It covers different aspects, ranging from educational to historical to recreational etc., which can satisfy the diverse needs of different visitors: people who are interested in the traditional culture and customs of Japan can go to historical sites such as temples and shrines; families with children can go to amusement parks like the Disneyland and Universal Studio, nature lovers can visit Hokkaido or Mt Fuji etc. This may also be the reason why Japan can attract millions of tourists each year.

Conditions in Hong Kong

Comparatively, the types of tourist attractions in Hong Kong seem limited. Hong Kong is renowned as a shopping and gourmet paradise, many visitors love to come to Hong Kong for the enjoyable shopping and dining experience. However, the scope of tourist attractions is relatively narrow and even citizens in Hong Kong do not realize the diversity of tourist attractions that may attract visitors around the globe. As a result, tourists seldom stay in Hong Kong for a long time and long-distance travelers rarely revisit Hong Kong again. We believe Hong Kong can attract more tourists by developing new tourist sites and increasing the diversity of the tourist attractions. Although being a shopping and gourmet paradise is already very attractive for tourists, emphasis on other types of scenic spots, such as Yuen Yuen Institute (a collection of temples, pavilions, monasteries and prayer halls) and Chin Lin Nunnery (a nunnery renovated as a Tang architecture) may attract tourists who are looking for a cultural feast in addition to shopping and eating experiences in Hong Kong.

2. Stress on historical and educational elements

Not only does Japan present an impressive range of tourist attractions, the “depth” of their tourist spots is also worth mentioning. Through visiting the tourist spots in Japan, travelers can experience the history and culture of the nation. For example, our visit to Oshima Tsumugi No Sato allows us to know more about the production of Oshima Tsumugi silk, which reflects the customs and the ancient ways of life in Kagoshima. The Sengan'en Garden, where we had our lunch during our stay in Kagoshima, also showed visitors the fascinating architecture and gardens of Japan. The Osaka Castle Museum, on the other hand, does not only act as an observatory tower but also an exhibition hall that display ancient artworks. All these tourist attractions revealed the

enthusiasm of the Japanese in telling visitors around the globe their traditions and culture. Visitors like us definitely gain a deeper understanding towards the ancient sides of Japan after our visit.



The Osaka Castle Museum

On top of the Japanese emphasis on historical and cultural elements in their tourist attractions, they also put a lot of stress on the “educational purposes” of their tourist destinations. Many tourist attractions do not only provide entertainment to tourists, but also bring their attention to certain issues. The Kobe City Resources Recycle Center and the Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution are perfect examples of these kinds. In fact, museums and memorials play an important role in tourism of Japan, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, for example, is one of the favorite place for visitors who love history and would like to reflect upon the incidents happened during WWII.



(From left to right) Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution and the Kobe City Resources Recycle Center

Conditions in Hong Kong

Hong Kong also possesses museums that may allow visitors to learn about the history and culture of the city. San Tung Uk Museum (which shows tourists authentic and fascinating lifestyles of villagers) and Hong Kong Heritage Museum (which possess a collection of exhibits that reveals the traditional practices and customs in Hong Kong) are examples of museums that enable visitors to learn more about the past and the present of Hong Kong. Sadly, not a lot of attentions were being paid to the importance of museums as too many stresses are placed on the “entertainment level” of tourist attractions. Tourists may come and go without knowing the culture and customs of the city. It would be a pity for both tourists and citizens of Hong Kong for not realizing the fascinating history and culture of the city that they have visited or lived. I believe emphasizing what Hong Kong can offer on “cultural level” (just as what Japan did for decades) is necessary if Hong Kong would like to develop into an all rounded tourist destination.

3. Fusion of tourism into everyday lives

Another point we would like to note is the merge of tourism with everyday lives in Japan. The Kagoshima Summer Festival (which I have joined during my home stay), for example, is a festival that is celebrated by both the locals and tourists. It is not difficult to find other festivals or occasions that both the visitors and the locals enjoy. Tourist attractions and everyday lives of the Japanese seemed to be combined and developed into a win-win condition for both tourists and the locals. This is worth mentioning as there are cities which tourism and the every day lives of citizens come into conflicts. Venice, for example, is notorious for the tension between the locals and the visitors.



Both the locals and tourists are enjoying the “summer festival” in Kagoshima

During our visit, we also find that the locals play a very important role in tourism. Volunteers (which are mostly senior citizens that have retired) helped in various

tourist attractions. This is proved to be a win-win situation again as it does not only allow tourists to interact with the locals, but also enables retired volunteers to spend their time fruitfully in helping the society even after they have stopped working.

Conditions in Hong Kong

We believe that Hong Kong can follow Japan's example and allow senior citizens to participate actively in the tourism industry. The government may provide courses to the volunteers so as to equip them with the knowledge of the industry. After all the trainings and courses, the government can distribute the volunteers to various tourist attractions. In this case, the volunteers can play an active role in transforming Hong Kong to a true "tourist-friendly" city.

Conclusion

All in all, we can see that the Japanese tourism possesses quite a lot of qualities that Hong Kong should learn from. The variety of tourist attractions, the stress on cultural and educational tourist spots and the combination of everyday lives and tourism are the several qualities that can inspire and motivate us in renovating Hong Kong into a true paradise for tourists around the world.

Other things that operate in coordination with tourism:

1. English standard

English standard is very important in developing tourism, since it is used extensively as a second language and as an official language throughout the world, especially in Commonwealth countries and in many international organizations. However, the English standard of Japanese is still a bit below standard. In most of the area we visited, even if it is a tourist area, the people could not speak proper English. A lot of foreign tourists experienced difficulties when they were trying to buy things or ask for directions.

We think the English standard of Japanese can be explained partly by its geographical location. Japan is an island country and has been self sufficient for most of its history. Also, Japanese students do not have to learn English until they are in Junior High School. This reflects that Japanese are very persist in their own culture and own language.

2. Transportation

Transportation like railway, Subway and buses are important for tourists traveling alone to get around. In this trip, we only took the Shinkansen and JR railway. So the analysis will be based on these two railways. The railway system of Japan is extremely complicated, and frankly, comparing to the MTR, it is not as user friendly as in Hong Kong.



The signs on the platform are mostly in Japanese, so it is not convenient for tourists.



We took the railway from P02 to P08 to get to our hotel in Kobe. At first we thought we have to change lines in 中公園, but then we realized there are two train-lines in the same platform, and we didn't have to change lines.

The station signs in Japan are not electronic like in Hong Kong, and there is no announcement before approaching each station. In Hong Kong, the electronic station board in each train cart will show the station and when to transfer lines. Also, before approaching each station, there will be Cantonese, English and Chinese announcements.



The tickets are also in Japanese only.



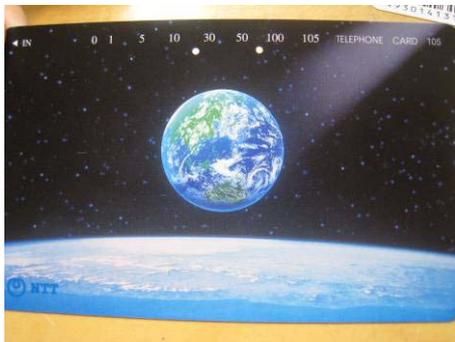
In Japan, Airports are for international and national flights. To Japanese, taking a plane to travel in the country is very common. In the airport, like any other in the world, it is filled with signs in English and the native language of the country, Japanese. So, for international travelers, it is quite convenient. Also, there are a lot of railways and buses that connect the airport to the city centres.



To sum up, it is not as convenient to travel on public transport in Japan as in Hong Kong for tourists. As discussed above, we think Japanese are somewhat persistent to their own culture, which can be an advantage as well as a disadvantage. The advantage is that they would be able to preserve their culture. The disadvantage is that tourists might feel a bit unwelcome in the country because most of the facilities like transportation are very inconvenient. However, one very strong advantage is that Japanese have a very high level of orderliness. This is the one aspect that Hong Kong might not be able to achieve in the near future. We see people lining up very straightly on the platform to wait for the train, and politely let others get off before getting on. We also see a tourist family traveling on that train, instead of lining up, they just stood casually on the platform and wait the train approaches, and they just walked towards the train ignoring the queue. This is an intriguing contrast of different culture and shows that the Japanese are straight when it comes to manners.

3. International Calls

For tourists, international calls are important because at some point during their journey, they would like to phone home and talk to their friends or relatives. There are usually three main methods: International Roaming Service, renting a local mobile phone and phone cards. I have tried to rent a mobile in the airport the last time I visit Japan. It was not easy since the plans are complicated and I can't really communicate with the store teller. In this trip, most of us chose to use phone cards because we thought that roaming service is a bit expensive. Take 3, one of the most popular telephone networks in Hong Kong as an example, using the roaming service to phone back HK cost \$13.8 HKD/minute and \$10.4HKD/minute for peak and non-peak hour respectively. The phone card costs 1050 yen for 10 minutes call, which is roughly \$7.5HKD/minute. However, it is a little bit complicated to use the phone cards.



Above is a type of insert phone cards of NTT. As you can see, even there is English on the phone card, there is no instruction or whatsoever on the card or near the vending machine to tell us how to use the phone cards. So we had to ask the hotel receptionist for help. Needless to say, that again, involved a lot of body language and puzzled looks. The next night, we moved to another hotel, and we realized we need to dial different codes before dialing 852+ phone numbers in different district of Japan.

Again, there are no instructions or help on the card, near the vending machine, or near the hotel telephone.



Above is another type of phone card. This type of card is better, because it has instruction on it. We dialed the number according to the card, the dial tone was in Japanese and we had no idea what it was saying, we were all puzzled and we all tried many times in the lobby on the first night to call home.



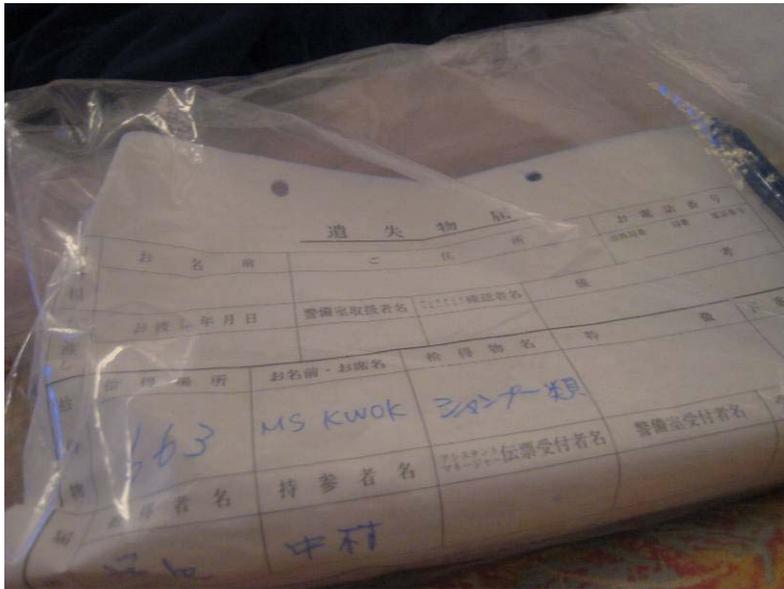
These are the public telephones commonly found in hotels. The words on the phone are all in Japanese, if you know 漢字 you can still guess the meaning, if not, all you can do is try. Some of the phones can dial international calls and some can't. However, there are no specific signs on the phones indicating that.

Overall, you would get a bit frustrated when trying to make international calls from Japan. I think these facilities have a lot of room for improvement. For example, phones in hotels and phone cards are mainly for tourists, so why is there no help/instructions in English or other languages offered?

4. Hotel services

The hotel services are overall satisfactory. The staff might not know much English, but they are very dedicated to help us out.

We stayed in the Prince Hotel in Tokyo for our first two nights. My roommate accidentally left her soaps in the bathroom when we left. A few days later, the hotel mailed the things we left in the room to our tour guide. This shows that Japanese are very devoted to providing the best service to their customers and attentive to details. Even if the things we left behind are not very valuable, they still try their best to get it delivered back to us.



Every hotel in Japan has a large variety of vending machines. You can buy drinks, snacks, cup noodles, cigarettes, other small necessities like band-aid etc. This also shows how Japanese are attentive to details.



There is a main difference between the Japanese and Hong Kong People in this aspect. Hong Kong people tend to let the little things slide, but Japanese people are often attentive to small details. Their attentiveness leads to the many new inventions that help improve small aspects of life, for example the motel for those who cannot get on the last train home. Yet, merely attentive to detail is not enough, Japanese are also persistent in achieving goals. Once they find out something wrong or could be improved, they persist to achieve the goal. That is why they could carry out such a comprehensive recycling programme.

5. Road Sign

The Road Sign and Traveling Signals are in both Japanese and English. So it is convenient for tourists.



However, to further enhance tourism, Japan could add signs and maps showing nearby famous sites to tourists just like in Hong Kong. That would provide a better sense of belonging for the tourists.

6. Shops

Most signs and price tags in the shops in Japan don't have English, most of the staff couldn't speak much English and all the product descriptions are in Japanese. That creates a problem for tourists even when they want to go shopping.



Price tag at local supermarket.



Products in a Jusco department store.

7. People

Although most of the Japanese cannot speak much English, we can still feel their passion and hospitality. They would try in every way to explain to us, using body language, writing, and dictionary. Their devotion can also be shown by their services and attention to our needs. In this aspect, Japan is a far more welcome place than Hong Kong for tourists to visit.

I think this reflects that although Japanese are persistent in preserving their own culture, they are prepared to learn from the world at anytime. They would be happily sharing their own experience with others and learn at the same time. This is a wonderful advantage because to progress, we have to learn, and not afraid to ask and learn from others.

All in all, Japan's advantages are its rich culture, people's hospitality and sensitivity, while Hong Kong is better prepared in terms of languages and its status of international city. People see Hong Kong as a place without its own culture, but they forget that Hong Kong's strength is the integration and coexistence of western and eastern culture. Because of being a colony and entrepot in the past, Hong Kong has one of the richest combinations of culture in the world. This is the selling point of Hong Kong. Japan, on the other hand, can preserve its own culture because it is on an isolated island for very long, they only started to bring in new ideas in the Meiji Modernization. What Hong Kong can learn from Japan, is its power of including different culture smoothly into its own AND THEN make it better. Hong Kong has all the equipment it needs; we just need to make use of them. There are pros and cons of every country, but those countries that can learn from others, are the countries that will shine brightly on the stage of the world.