

Overtourism Returns: Foreign Visitors Must Be Informed of Proper Etiquette

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The fact that the number of foreign visitors to Japan is increasing again is a welcome situation. However, it is not a good thing if the lives of local residents are disrupted by bad manners and excessive crowding. The government must **take measures** as soon as possible.

The number of overseas visitors to Japan, which plummeted amid the novel coronavirus pandemic, has been rising with the easing of border controls. About 2.15 million people visited Japan in August, marking a recovery to 85% of the level seen in August 2019 in the pre-pandemic era.

Attracting foreign tourists is a pillar of the government's growth strategy, and the annual number exceeded 30 million in 2019. A recovery in this area could serve as **a tailwind for** the nation's economy. However, it is worrying to once again see overtourism, a situation in which excessive numbers of tourists adversely affect the lives of local residents.

Some foreign visitors behave in an **inconsiderate** manner; such actions cannot be left unaddressed. For example, a crossing on the Enoshima Electric Railway, which runs along part of the Kanagawa Prefecture coastline, is considered a "sacred place" among fans of a popular manga. Many foreign visitors reportedly gather around the crossing to photograph the scenery, and some annoy local residents through such inconsiderate behavior as moving onto the road.

In Biei, Hokkaido, a town known for its beautiful vistas of fields, many foreign tourists enter the fields to take pictures of themselves, causing damage to the crops. In other tourist areas, more and more garbage can be spotted on streets and elsewhere, forcing local residents to clean up the mess.

The government has set up a panel of officials from **relevant** ministries and agencies to discuss measures against overtourism. It plans to compile concrete steps as early as October. It is hoped that the government will devise steps to ensure the smooth acceptance of overseas visitors.

Such tourists often do not seem to realize they are behaving **improperly**, due to language barriers and differences in lifestyle. It is essential to convey the appropriate etiquette to foreign visitors in an easy-to-understand way, such as by setting up signboards in multiple languages.

The Kyoto municipal government has been working with the Japan National Tourism Organization in asking travel agencies in China, Australia and elsewhere to inform their customers before their departure about etiquette they are encouraged to observe while sightseeing in Japan. It is important to strengthen efforts like this.

Many visitors to Japan find this nation's cleanliness and safety to be attractive. If they are well-informed, they will probably understand the need to follow proper etiquette. It is also important to ease excessive crowding at some sightseeing spots. In Kyoto and Kamakura, Kanagawa Prefecture, for example, local residents often encounter difficulties when using bus and train services. Such a situation not only inconveniences local communities, but also could make sightseeing less satisfactory for foreign visitors.

It is desirable to **disperse** visiting tourists to different parts of the nation. The central and local governments should make efforts to highlight tourism resources that are relatively unknown overseas and work even harder to **promote** such places.

Vocabulary

to take measures (phrase) – to take action; to do things to accomplish a purpose

a tailwind for (phrase) – 1. a wind having the same direction as a course of an aircraft, ship etc. 2. a force or influence that advances progress toward an improved condition

inconsiderate (adj.) – not giving enough thought to other people's feelings or needs

relevant (adj.) – closely connected or appropriate to what is being done or considered

improperly (adv.) – in a way that is not right or appropriate for the situation

to disperse (v.) – to distribute or spread over a wide area

to promote (v.) – to support or actively encourage a cause (e.g. tourism to certain places)

Discussion

1. Many problems because of overtourism have been reported. Make a list of the problems mentioned in this article and other problems that you have heard of or read about.
2. Discuss possible solutions to combat the problems of overtourism. Is it the government's responsibility to do something about it or should the villages and cities in question decide on the measures?
3. Miyajima Island in Hiroshima prefecture has started to collect 100 yen from visitors as "Miyajima Visitor Tax." Some other islands have started the same kind of system as well. Do you think it is a good idea? What should the money be used for?
4. What advice on proper etiquette in Japan would you give to foreigners?
5. What kind of less-known tourist attractions in Japan would you promote to tourists in order to avoid crowding?
6. What's a place in Japan you would like to visit yourself?