



Original Article

Gaps between International Tourists' Attitudes and Behaviours towards Japanese Heritage Tourism and Government Policymakers' Views - Opportunities for Tourism Innovation Post COVID-19

Nguyen Quynh Hoa^{1,*}, Vafadari Kazem²

¹*School of Economics and Management, Hanoi University of Science and Technology,
1 Dai Co Viet, Hai Ba Trung District, Hanoi, Vietnam*

²*School of Asia Pacific Studies, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Beppu, Oita Prefecture, Japan*

Received 28 December 2020

Revised 09 April 2021; Accepted 25 August 2021

Abstract: Around the world, people travel to explore natural beauty, different cultures and social traditions. Much of this involves heritage tourism and this has become an important motivation for international travelers and contributes huge economic benefits to many countries. Besides, it can also bring positive impacts to the society, culture, and environment conservation of the country involved. The Japan Tourism National Promotion Basic Law (2006) states that culture and heritage are “the most important components of Japan tourism” and that Japan will emphasize its abilities to attract more international travelers and support conservation of cultural heritage [1]. However, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Japanese tourism has been damaged significantly and is forecasted to take a long time to recover. The local government shows its concerns about how to reduce the pandemic impacts on the society and economy and encourage international visitors to return. The “new normal” situation requires an insight of the changes in international tourists’ attitudes, traveling behavior and motivations. The experience of Japan could provide a model which other countries in the Asia and Pacific area might study. The research was conducted through in-depth interviews with Japanese government tourism policymakers and a quantitative survey of 211 responses from 43 countries and territories which was conducted from July 2019 to June 2020. From the findings, some recommendations for Japanese tourism innovation are proposed.

Keywords: Japanese heritage tourism, international tourists, post-COVID 19, tourism innovation, tourism policy, tourist behavior and motivation.

* Corresponding author

Email address: hoa.nguyenquynh@hust.edu.vn

<https://doi.org/10.25073/2588-1108/vnueab.4606>

1. Introduction

Tourism is a huge business and has become one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world. According to the UNWTO (World Tourism Organization, 2016), “the business volume of tourism today equals or even surpasses that of oil exports, food products or automobiles” [2]. It was affected the most due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, there is no doubt that cultural attractions such as historical places, monuments, architecture, people, and art are important motivations to travel [3]. Many types of attractions fall into the heritage tourism sector, which accounts for a considerable portion of tourism in developed countries [4]. Cultural creativity and heritages are essential elements of community development and play a vital role for sustainable livelihoods [5]. Heritage helps establish individual, community and national identities which enable people to define who they are [6].

The aims of this study are to:

- i) Identify the international tourists’ motivations, awareness, and behaviours towards Japan heritage tourism,
- ii) Explore the international tourists’ barriers, challenges and demands during their trips to Japan heritage sites,
- iii) Understand the differences between government policy makers and international tourists’ points of view to find the gap between supply and demand of heritage tourism services,
- iv) Study the experiences from Japanese HT policy development and challenges which might be useful for other tourism-nations.

2. Literature review

2.1. Heritage tourists’ motivation and behaviours

Heritage tourists are motivated by a desire to enhance one’s own cultural self, to learn something new, to spend time with friends and family, to satisfy one’s curiosity or simply to use

up excess time [7]. Stebbins (1996) discussed those serious cultural tourists who may visit or participate in heritage places and cultural events as a hobby or because they want to learn something new or expand their personal skills, and they are enthusiastic about heritage [8]. On the other hand, casual heritage tourists are people who do not necessarily plan to visit a heritage site or museum while on vacation but decide to attend once they discover it, while in the destination for other purposes. They might be curious about the attraction but are not active seekers of heritage places and cultural experiences. In some cases, they might even have to be convinced to visit a historic environment or cultural setting by relatives or friends in the destination who drag them along. However, studies show that heritage tourists, regardless of whether they are serious or casual, tend to have more money and are more willing to spend it. This supports a trend toward less-vigorous, experiential kinds of activities.

Table 1: Heritage tourists’ motivations and behaviour dimensions in previous literature

Researchers	Heritage tourists’ motivations and behaviour
Chen (1998)	(1) Pursuit of knowledge: learning about culture and nature, new personal knowledge (2) Personal benefits: health benefits, relaxation, gaining spiritual reward, recreation activities and enjoying sightseeing
Timothy & Boyd (2003)	Learning dimension perception of a greater willingness
Confer & Kerstetter (2000)	Interest in culture, heritage or ethnicity
Poria, Butler & Airey (2004)	New experience and knowledge satisfying curiosity about unique and interesting places accompany friends and relatives relaxation and sightseeing connect to their work/business
Timothy (1997)	Religious purposes
Bruner (1994)	Effort to understand themselves Understanding the past

Source: Author’s own synthesis.

A 2009 study conducted for the US National Trust for Historic Preservation found that nearly 80% of all leisure travellers take part in a cultural heritage activity. It also revealed that cultural heritage tourists spend an average of \$994 per trip, compared to \$611 for the “general” traveller - almost 50% more. Heritage travellers also travel more often than generalists, taking about five trips per year compared to four by general travellers [9]. Researchers and site managers have conducted a great deal of research on the marketing characteristics of heritage tourists over the past decades and their findings are consistent and interesting. Table 1 shows the dimensions of heritage tourists’ motivations and behaviour in previous literature.

2.2. *Tourism policy in heritage tourism management and the role of public policymakers as tourism stakeholders*

Ho & McKercher (2004) proposed three scenarios that may lead to lack of success in heritage tourism management [16].

Scenario 1: Both sectors separately performed their own duties

Both the HS manager/entities and the tourism sector develop their own plans and strategy to access and serve their customers/ tourists, but without discussion or understanding the demands of each other, so that the plans conflict with each other and thus do not serve the tourists well.

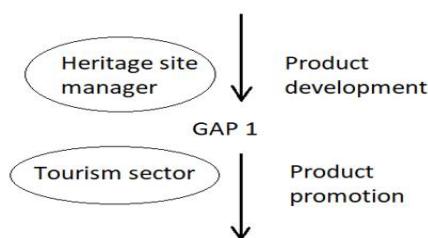


Figure 1: Scenario 1
Source: Ho & McKercher (2004) [16].

Scenario 2: Both parties did nothing for the tourists

Both the HS manager/entities and the tourism sector do not do anything to support or

instruct tourists about their behavior or responsibilities for sites and let tourism develop spontaneously. In this case, tourists and local community may not know each other’s demands and become dissatisfied with the tourism experience. There are some negative impacts to the sites if there are no control or regulations and which lead to unsustainable development.

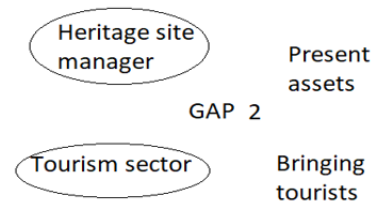


Figure 2: Scenario 2
Source: Ho & McKercher (2004) [16].

Scenario 3: “The HS managers grew tourism alone without consulting the tourism sector about the market demand, or tourist profile and behaviour”

In this scenario, the tourism sectors simply search for tourists and bring them to the tourism sites. The heritage site manager/entities do the promotion and serve tourists without consulting the tourism sectors. Therefore, the targets do not match, which may lead to the lack of education for tourists.

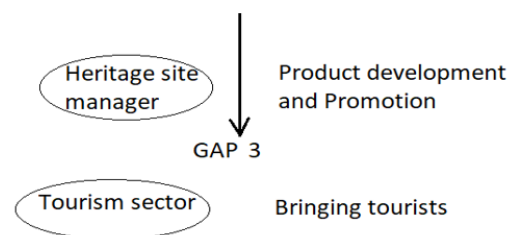


Figure 3: Scenario 3
Source: Ho & McKercher (2004) [16].

Italy, France, Greece, Spain, and some other countries which possess UNESCO World Heritage sites have all built sophisticated legal mechanisms for protecting them since the early 1900s [17, 18]. Their heritage policies highlight the importance of education and both

international and regional cooperation towards development of heritage tourism. Local government plays a key role in policy issuance and implementation across their territory, from town planning, economic development to environmental conservation and local infrastructure upgrading, which allows them to have a general vision of sustainable development and integration.

According to Bramwell & Lane (1999), Bramwell & Sharman (1999) and Timothy (2000), the key to successful tourism-based sustainable development involves collaboration and coordination among all tourism entities in public and private sectors: government, local government, NGOs, tourism businesses, academic people, tourists, and local communities [19-21]. However, because of benefit conflicts, these stakeholders may have different views of what sustainable tourism-based development is. Nilnoppakun et. al. (2015) indicated that the local communities' needs for communication with other tourism stakeholders are increasing, but their voices are not being heard. This is especially true in those developing countries which have crony capitalism and economic systems where power concentration is under the control of a few local elites [22]. This issue has hindered the government's attempts to implement the tourism policy to minimize the negative impacts on local people.

3. Background of Japan's tourism and international arrivals

Since 2006, understanding the importance of tourism, in Japan, many public policies from national to local government levels have been issued to preserve and promote the culture and heritage value for sustainable tourism development. The Tourism National Promotion Basic Law (2006) was announced to emphasize abilities to attract more international travelers and supports conservation of local culture and heritage, including natural beauty, historic monuments, *onsen* sites, ecosystems, and traditional handicrafts. This law defined culture

and heritage as “one of the most important components of tourism” to Japan [23].

In the year 2012, the Japan government released the Japan Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan - The 5-year period from fiscal 2012 to 2016 - to set out the goals: (1) increase in Domestic Consumption, (2) expansion/improvement of International Tourism, (3) increase the satisfaction of international visitors to Japan, (4) become the No. 1 conference-host country in Asia, (5) increase the number of Japanese travelers going overseas, (6) expansion/improvement of Domestic Tourism, and (7) improve traveler satisfaction in tourist areas.

Other laws and tourism policies in Japan were revised to adapt the Tourism Basic Law and Basic Plan. From central government to local government, more efforts were given to support the tourism development. Since 2012, Japan has experienced a significant jump in tourism growth, especially international tourist arrivals and tourism revenue (Figure 4 and 5).

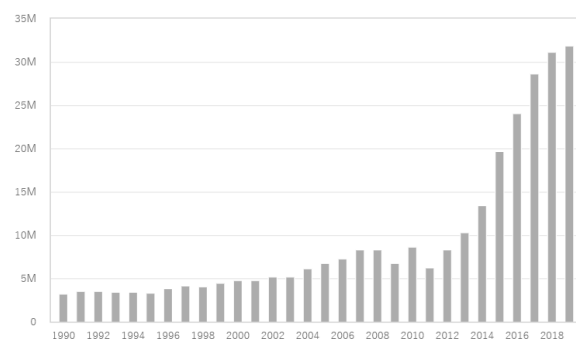


Figure 4: International tourist arrivals to Japan by year
Source: Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO, 2019) [23].

Tourism growth leads to the modernization of rural areas, accelerates the urbanization and modernization process, promotes free trade, and reduces border barriers. It also causes changes in the employment structure (e.g. people from agriculture sector move to service sector) and save by transportation time and costs due to the improvement of infrastructure and facilities [23].

The Japanese government identifies the following as basic policies:

- to develop internationally competitive and highly appealing tourism destinations,
- to enhance the international competitiveness of the tourism industry,
- to develop individuals who will contribute to the promotion of tourism,
- to promote international tourism, and
- to roll out measures needed to create an environment conducive to travel.

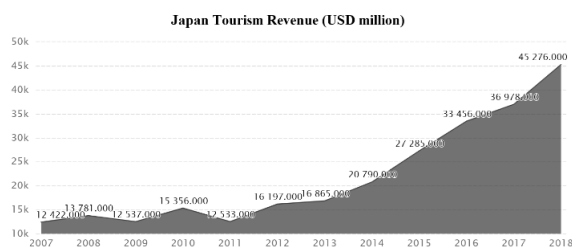


Figure 5: Japan Tourism Revenue by year
 Source: Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO, 2019) [23].

However, Table 2 shows the international tourist arrivals to Japan has dropped dramatically since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic by the end of January 2020. In the first half of 2020, this number has reduced by nearly 99.9% in comparison with the achievement in same time of the previous years.

Table 2: International visits to Japan through time

(Unit: 1000 arrivals)

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Jan	2295.7	2501.4	2689.3	2661.0
Feb	2035.7	2509.3	2604.3	1085.1
Mar	2205.6	2607.9	2760.1	193.6
Apr	2579.0	2900.7	2926.7	2.9
May	2294.7	2675.1	2773.1	1.7
Jun	2346.4	2704.6	2880.0	2.6

Source: Japan National Tourism Organization [23].

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only affecting Japan tourism industry, it also bars re-entry for many permanent and long-term residents, migrant labor and students that creates subsequently difficulties to this economy, the 3rd largest in the world. The report of Nomura

Research Institute in May 2020 estimated that the pandemic would result in the loss of 700,000 jobs, leaving nearly three quarters of million people without paychecks and their families insecure. One of the negative results was that the Japanese government decided to delay the Olympics 2020 to summer 2021 which caused them a loss of US\$6 billion [24].

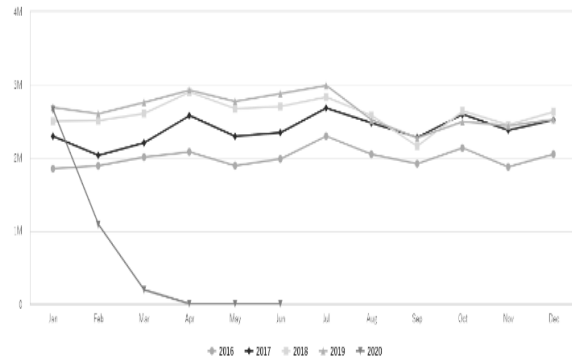


Figure 6: International tourist arrivals in recent years
 Source: Japan National Tourism Organization [23].

Therefore, the Japanese government officers have expressed their hope that the Olympics 2021 would be a “kick start” for Japan’s economy as it would help to attract international tourists to come back to Japan. However, due to the unpredictable situation of the coronavirus pandemic, international traveling may create further risks that affect the international tourists’ attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to answer these questions:

(1) What are the significant benefits and barriers of Japanese culture and heritage to international tourists?

(2) How would the international tourists’ attitudes, behaviors and motivations change among different groups of international tourists based on some demographic criteria? Is there any change in their attitudes and behaviors towards Japanese heritage tourism as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic?

(3) What are the gaps between the view of Japanese tourism policymakers and international tourists’ demand? Is there any chance to innovate the tourism policy, business services, and management to reduce these gaps?

4. Methodology

The study was conducted from both qualitative and quantitative methods.

4.1. Qualitative study

In-depth interviews with government officers of Japanese Ministry of Justice, Agency

of Cultural Affair (MEXT), local government authority and local community's leaders in some Japanese heritage sites and academic people were conducted from December 2018 to December 2019 during research field trips. Respondents were encouraged to express their ideas and views towards the heritage tourism development and its impacts on local communities.

Table 3: Interview schedule

Time	Place of interview	Interviewee	Content
Dec 2018	Heritage sites in Oita Prefecture: Ryuoai village, Usa, Kunisaki Peninsula	Local government and local community leaders	The local government and community leaders' role in development of tourism, heritage conservation and tourism impact in their places
12 th – 15 th Jul 2019	Kanazawa city and Shunran-no-Sato village, Ishikawa Prefecture	Local community leaders in Noto Peninsula, Prof. Koji Nakamura from Kanazawa University, senior staff working in tourism related area	Heritage tourism policy, tourism development policy for heritage sites, local community cooperation and management on tourism operation and management, and tourism impacts on sustainable development in their places
24 th – 28 th Nov 2019	Tokyo	Government officers of Japanese Ministry of Justice, and Agency of Cultural Affair (MEXT)	Japanese policy on tourism activities in heritage sites, tourist management and local community development
3 rd – 4 th Dec 2019	Tokyo	Assoc. Prof. Masataka Tamai from Tohoku University of Community Service and Science and Dr. Ninoos Y. Benjamin (Principal Economist of Mutual Capital Advisors)	Tourism impacts on socio-culture, economy development and environment in Japan.
12 th Dec 2019	Beppu city	Mr. Toshiyuki Fukuda – officer of JICE (Kyushu office), former officer of JTA (domestic department)	Tourism policy in Japan and its development strategy

Source: Author's own elaboration.

During the research field trips, direct observations were used to obtain a practical insight into how the tourism policies are applied in some heritage sites in Japan and how the international tourists obey the policies and

follow the instructions. It is helpful to understand the context in Japan and compare with the literature and other countries' implementation. Direct observation gives data that cannot be obtained from interviews or

questionnaires and reflect the real situation in each destination.

4.2. Quantitative study

A questionnaire was adopted from previous literature about international tourists' behaviors and modified to suit the Japan context based on the researcher's direct observations during the research trips.

The survey was conducted over two phases:

(1) On-site data collection: The participants were recruited on-site in several tourism destinations in Japan during the researchers' field trips from July 2019 to February 2020.

Table 4: Research schedule

Date and time	Place
12 th – 15 th July 2019	Kanazawa city and Shunran-no-Sato village, Noto Peninsula GIAHS, Ishikawa Prefecture Toyama Prefecture
1 st September 2019 – 30 th October 2019	Kunisaki GIAHS, Beppu, Oita Prefecture
	Saga Prefecture
	Fukuoka Prefecture
	Miyazaki Prefecture Yamaguchi Prefecture
24 th November 2019 – 6 th December 2019	Tokyo Metropolis Nikko in Tochigi Prefecture
20 th – 24 th February 2020	Okinawa Prefecture

Source: Author's own elaboration.

(2) Online data collection: The online survey link was posted on several international travel blogs and social media channels; Japanese travel blogs and forums which international tourists often use to search for Japan tourism information to ask if they have the intention/plan to visit Japan in the coming time.

The link was also sent to the researchers' academic and social networks to ask people in

targeted countries, who had visited Japan within the past three years, to answer and then forward it to other people in their networks, who had also visited Japan within three years, that they knew.

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this phase was divided into two periods:

(1) From September 2019 to January 2020 (before the existence of COVID-19); and

(2) From January 2020 to June 2020 (during COVID-19 in Japan).

The purpose of this division is to identify the effect of COVID-19 on the attitude of international tourists on traveling in/to Japan.

It was necessary to conduct two phases of the survey as it studies international tourists' attitudes and behaviors towards Japanese heritage tourism and considers their perceived motivations against the COVID-19 pandemic's risks. Therefore, those respondents already staying in Japan might consider the benefits higher than the risks. Hence, it is necessary to conduct the second phase to explore the attitudes, behaviors and motivation of the people who had visited Japan in the past three years or have plans to visit Japan in the future.

The questionnaire was designed such that international tourists were asked to rate their attitudes, behaviours and motivations on their visit to Japan. In this study, items chosen are widely used in international travel. A "7-point rating Likert scale" where "1 = strongly disagree, 4= neutral, and 7 = strongly agree" was applied to quantify the responses to the items. The questionnaire was written in English as it focused on international tourists.

According to the category of international tourists to Japan by country in 2018, the participants of the research were focused on Asia countries, especially China (Mainland), Hong Kong, and other Northeastern Asia countries as tourists from these countries contribute the most to the international tourists visiting Japan in recent years. The questionnaire was also sent to ASEAN tourists as the proportion of international tourists visiting Japan is increasing over the late few years according to the Japan Tourism Statistics. It was also sent to the

European, US, and Oceania residents as the Japan Tourism Vision Realization Program 2018 (Action Program for Realization of Tourism Vision 2018) indicated that Japan would focus on these markets in the coming years [23].

Participation in this study was voluntary. However, as the questionnaire was conducted in English, which is one of its limitations, only people who understand English would participate in the research. Therefore, the number of respondents in some countries such as China, S. Korea, Europe, etc. is not as high as expected. It is believed that all respondents answered the questionnaire honestly as it was anonymous and self-administered.

Questions requiring answers of categorical and quantitative value included specific purposes of trip, interests in Japanese culture and heritage sites, preferred activities, preferred tourism sites, respectfulness to local community and cultural heritage, cultural barriers to their Japan visit, tourists’ satisfaction and perceived benefits, and their concerns about the perceived risks while traveling in Japan as well as demographics such as region of origin, age, traveling group and number of visits to Japan.

A total of 211 questionnaires were collected by June 2020, and all of these are usable for coding and analysis.

Research results and discussion

4.1. Descriptive statistics

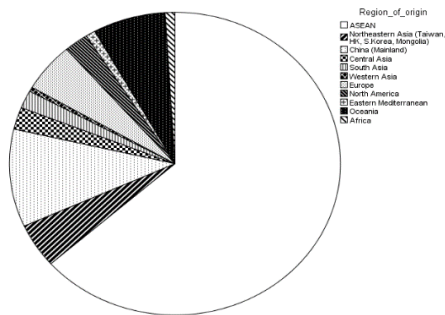


Figure 7: Percentage of international tourist based on their nationalities

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

According to frequency analyses on sociodemographic and travel-related profiles of respondents, most of them come from ASEAN region (63.5%), China (Mainland) (10.9%), Oceania (6.6%), Northeastern Asia (4.7%) and Europe (4.7%). Tourists from other regions are less than 4%. The interviewees are from 43 countries and territories; however, the researchers have grouped them into 11 main regions as below to conduct the t-test:

Table 5: Home regions

Region	Frequency	%
ASEAN	134	63.5
China (Mainland)	23	10.9
Oceania	14	6.6
Northeastern Asia (Taiwan, S.Korea, Mongolia, Hong Kong)	10	4.7
Europe	10	4.7
North America	5	2.4
Central Asia	5	2.4
South Asia	3	1.4
Africa	2	0.9
Eastern Mediterranean	2	0.9
Western Asia	1	0.5
United Kingdom	1	0.5
South America	1	0.5
Total	211	100.0

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

Most of the respondents were from 25 to 40 years of age (76.3%) while young tourists (under 25 years old) participated in this research were 17.1%. Only 4.3% of the respondents were from 40 to 60 years old. The remaining 2.4% was over 60 years old.

Table 6: Age breakdown

Group	Frequency	Percent
Under 25 years old	36	17.1
From 25 to 40 years old	161	76.3
From 40 to 60 years old	9	4.3
Over 60 years old	5	2.4
Total	211	100.0

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

Nearly half of the respondents travelled to Japan with a friend or a group of friends. The international tourists that came with their family or travelled alone reported at 28.9% and 20.9% respectively. However, only 3.8% of the interviewees used a travel agency to organize their visit with other tourists.

Table 7: Nature of tourist group

	Frequency	Percent
Go with family	61	28.9
Go with friend(s)	98	46.4
Go on tour	8	3.8
Alone	44	20.9
Total	211	100.0

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

In reference to the number of times visiting Japan, nearly half of the respondents reported that this was their first time, whilst more than one-third of them repeated they had travelled to Japan more than two times.

Table 8: Number of trips

	Frequency	Percent
First time	102	48.3
Second time	33	15.6
More than twice	76	36.0
Total	211	100.0

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

4.2. International tourists’ attitudes and behaviors towards Japan tourism in general:

Table 9 indicates the means and standard deviation values of 23 items. In general, most items get mean scores of higher than the neutral point of 4.

However, it is clear to see that COVID-19 really has a strong effect on the tourists’ attitudes and perception toward traveling during this time. Using the independent sample t-test for the group of respondents who participated in the survey before February 2020 and those who participated from February 2020 onward, there is no significant difference between the two groups on other items, except AT1. AT1 fell from the highest mean of 6.44 before the COVID-19 to 3.89 after the existence of the pandemic. However, the standard deviation became larger which indicates a higher variety of attitudes among different groups.

Continuing with one-way ANOVA for AT1, it is found that the people from Eastern Mediterranean, Africa, and ASEAN are worried the most for their safety due to COVID-19. Tourists from Europe, North America, and Asia (except ASEAN) have higher confidence about their safety during their trips to Japan.

Table 9 also indicates that people are worried about the language barrier during their trips in Japan. The items in BT category got mean scores lower than other items of the questionnaire. However, they are still above the neutral point meaning that there’s a proportion of international tourists with difficulties with information searching, language, communication, signboards, and other directional instruction during their trips in Japan. This result is different to Khumalo *et. al.* (2014) and Yankholmes (2010) which indicates that international tourists are concerned about perceived risks like crime, hostility and pollution while traveling in a foreign country, and therefore, they would rather participate in touristic activities in urban and suburban areas only [25, 26]. According to AT1, the international tourists in Japan realize highly that they are safe, and the thing that makes them most worried is the difficulty in understanding the Japanese language. Therefore, they are willing to travel to the heritage areas in rural and remote areas.

Table 9: Overview of attitudinal and behavioural characteristics

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitude to Japan tourism		
AT1- It is safe to travel in Japan	6.44	0.77
AT1*- It is safe to travel to Japan (with consideration of COVID-19 pandemic)	3.89	1.59
AT2- The infrastructure in Japan is convenient for my traveling	6.27	0.83
AT3- The services in Japan are convenient for my traveling	6.16	0.93
Japanese tourists' barriers to international tourists		
BT1- I can understand and follow the instruction, information leaflet, map, signboard,... in Japan	5.17	1.59
BT2- I can search for information that I need from a Japanese tourism/travel website	5.32	1.37
BT3- I can communicate with Japanese public officers/ employees	4.50	1.61
Behaviors toward Japanese cultural and heritage tourism		
TB1- I respect the lifestyle or customs of Japanese residents	6.23	1.02
TB2- I try to understand and follow Japanese culture	5.90	1.10
TB3- I would like to learn about Japanese history and culture	5.79	1.28
TB4- I would like to experience Japanese food and drink	6.14	1.22
TB5- I would recommend other people to try special food in Japan	6.07	1.08
TB6- I would like to experience native Japanese culture	6.11	1.06
TB7- I would like to participate in Japanese cultural activities	6.03	1.23
TB8- I would recommend other people to participate in cultural activities in Japan	5.94	1.15
TB9- I would like to visit or have visited some heritage sites	6.32	0.95
TB10- I would recommend other people to travel to some heritage sites in Japan	6.12	1.10
TB11- I will keep the natural environment and reduce the pollution	6.35	0.52
TB12- I will buy Japanese traditional handicraft as souvenir of my trip	5.78	0.98
Tourists' satisfaction with Japan tourism		
SA1- I am happy with my travelling in Japan	6.39	0.96
SA2- I would tell other people about my trip in Japan on my social media channel	5.56	1.58
SA3- I would share my experience about Japan on some traveling websites	4.81	1.77
SA4- I would like to return to Japan	6.30	1.05

Note: Likert 7-point scale: strongly disagree = 1, neutral = 4, strongly agree = 7.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

There are significant differences in the attitude of international tourists toward Japan tourism

based on the group of people they were going with. Table 9 shows that people who were going with

other tourists that they don't know on a tour to Japan have more concerns about their safety and convenience while traveling in Japan. However, they can understand and follow the instructions, map, signboard, etc. or search for information from a Japanese tourism website as good as other groups, as shown in the BT items result.

It is supposed that as these people were worried more about the risks, they chose to use the tour from a travel operator/agency instead of arranging the trip by themselves. And with the help of tour guide/tour operators, they could go over all the language and communication barriers during their trips.

Table 10: ANOVA test for AT and BT items among "Traveling group" groups

Items	Go with family (n = 61)	Go with friends (n = 98)	Go on tour (n = 8)	Go alone (n = 44)	F	Sig.
Attitude to Japan tourism						
AT1	6.64	6.34	5.25	6.61	10.31	.000
AT2	6.48	6.18	5.50	6.30	4.06	.008
AT3	6.30	6.03	5.25	6.40	4.98	.002
Japanese tourisms' barriers to international tourists						
BT1	4.90	5.08	5.25	5.73	2.54	.048
BT2	5.03	5.33	5.00	5.75	2.54	.047
BT3	4.44	4.20	5.00	5.14	3.82	.011

Source: Author's own elaboration.

According to Chen & Chen (2013), tourists/travel composition and travel size should be taken into account to obtain the insights into tourism experience [27]. In this study, the result shows that while the people decided to travel Japan alone had the best experience in dealing with these language and communication barriers, the people who were going with their family or friends had the most problems to understand and follow the signboards, instructions, maps, etc., search for information and communicate with Japanese public officers/ staff.

Three traveling instruction systems and communication channels that international tourists find the most difficult to use are "Japanese websites about tourism destination", tourism "information leaflets and/ or brochures", and "instruction at public places". And they also find the places where they often meet communication problems are transportation systems (stations, metro, bus stop, train, airport, etc.), restaurant, tourism sites, and other non-tourism places (trading centers, on streets, toilets, etc.). Therefore, to better help international tourists during their visit, and

encourage them to pursue heritage and nature conversation, the Japanese tourism authority should focus more on this issue to reduce the tourism barriers, especially people who are going with their family and friends.

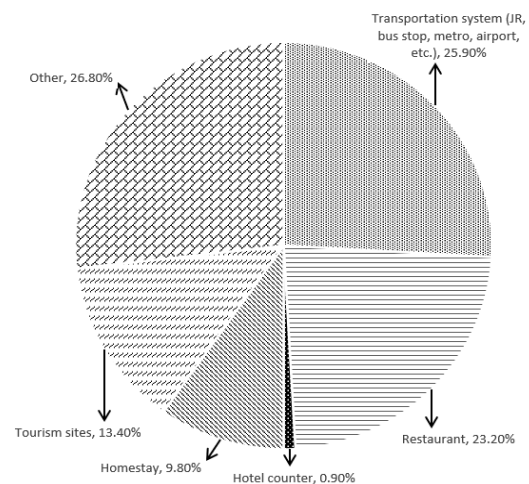


Figure 8: Difficulties in communication with Japanese public officers and/ or service staff Source: Author's own elaboration.

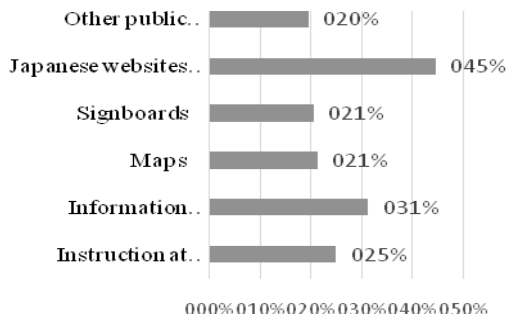


Figure 9: Difficulty in understanding and following public traveling instructions and information in Japan
 Source: Author’s own elaboration.

4.3. International tourists’ attitude and behaviors towards Japan heritage tourism:

According to Table 8, international tourists in this study showed their interests in Japanese culture and heritage. However, they prefer visiting heritage site, participating in cultural activities, and are willing to recommend their experience to other people through social media channels and other travelling websites.

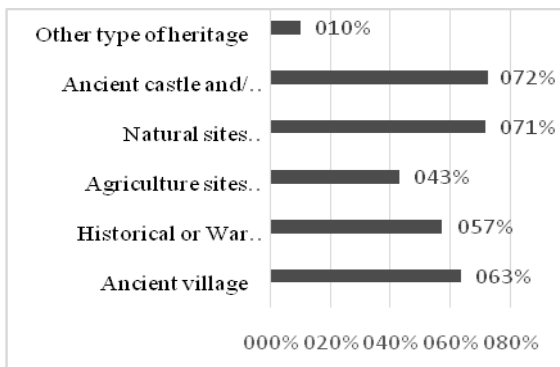


Figure 10: International tourists’ preferences in Japanese heritage sites
 Source: Author’s own elaboration.

During the Japan trips, international tourists spent their time on visiting some heritage sites which are indicated as World heritages or National heritages. Most of them spent their visits on ancient castles and/ or buildings, natural sites, and ancient villages.

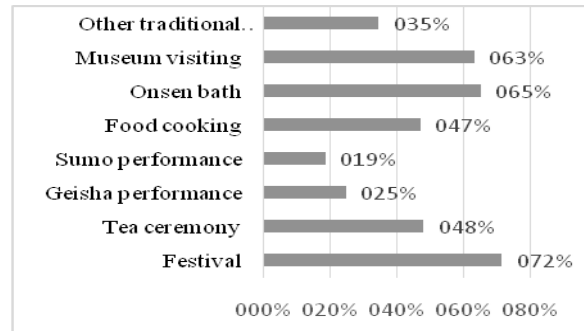


Figure 11: International tourists’ preferences in cultural activities
 Source: Author’s own elaboration.

Regarding cultural activities of international tourists’ preferences, the three most interesting activities to them are festivals, onsen bath, and museum visiting. About half of international tourists would like to experience Japanese food cooking or a tea ceremony. Not many international tourists spent their time on sumo and geisha performances. This finding is similar to some previous studies in heritage sites in Asia that international tourists agreed that they were attracted and interested in history and preservation of local tradition and culture [28, 29]. They would like to participate and experience special cultural events and festivals which are under intangible cultural heritage category.

Overall, the international tourists are happy with their trips in Japan (SA1 = 6.39), however, some of them are not willing to share their review or experience on travelling websites or they are not familiar with doing this (SA3 = 4.81). On the other hand, they are willing to share the informative experience with their friends on their own social media channels like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. (SA2 = 5.56). This finding also indicates that social media channels would be a more efficient route to reach the potential markets and promote the image of Japan heritage tourism. Comparing with the finding of Yankholmes (2010), that international tourists who visited Ghana preferred to search for information from travel websites, travel companies, books and Travel Guide on Ghana

[26], international tourists to Japan would rely more on recommendations from their friends and word-of-mouth on social media.

The respondents indicate that they are willing “to return to Japan” (SA4 = 6.30) and it was also reflected in Table 7 that half of the international tourists came to Japan on their “second trip” or “more than twice” trip. This result is somehow agreeable to the studies of Chen & Tsai (2007) and Chen & Chen (2013) [27, 30]. They found that the favourable experience that tourists get from their traveling will translate to a direct, positive influence on future behavioral intentions.

All the items in this domain (except TB1) (Table 11) get the p-value < 0.05 which means there are significant differences among groups of international tourists based on the number of

their visits. People who travelled to Japan for their first time and people who visits Japan more than twice show the highest interests in Japanese culture and heritage and they are most willing to participate into the cultural activities. They are also eager to recommend their experiences to other people. A study of Gaffar *et. al.* (2011) in heritage sites in Thailand and Indonesia also indicate that most visitors were attracted by the history and cultural value of heritage destinations and are eager to recommend them to other people [31]. Cultural activities and sightseeing are motivations to them. However, even though the tourists feel highly satisfied with the sites, the score of the revisit intention is quite low, which is different to the international tourists in Japan. The respondents in this study show their high intention to revisit Japan as SA4 at 6.30.

Table 11: ANOVA tests for TB items among “Number of visits” groups

Items	First time (n = 102)	Second time (n = 33)	More than twice (n = 76)	F value	Sig.
TB1	6.39	5.91	6.16	3.16	0.373
TB2	5.84	5.76	6.03	0.91	0.000
TB3	5.81	5.39	5.92	2.02	0.000
TB4	6.16	5.45	6.41	7.47	0.000
TB5	6.19	5.39	6.21	8.27	0.002
TB6	6.26	5.61	6.12	5.03	0.003
TB7	6.25	5.33	6.03	7.37	0.000
TB8	6.06	5.42	6.00	4.08	0.001
TB9	6.42	5.82	6.41	5.74	0.001
TB10	6.33	5.48	6.12	7.88	0.000
TB11	6.49	5.91	6.35	5.01	0.001
TB12	5.98	5.35	5.70	4.74	0.002

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

Regarding their ages, in general, all the four groups “Under 25 years old”, “From 25 to 40 years old”, “From 40 to 60 years old”, and “Over 60 years old” all show their interest in and respect for Japanese culture and heritage. Table 11 demonstrates the result of ANOVA analysis which generated a significant effect of age on TB1, TB3, TB4, TB7, and TB9 items ($p < 0.05$). This result shows that international tourists over

60 years old have less “respect to the lifestyle or customs of Japanese residents” and less interest in Japanese “history and culture”, “food and drink” than the younger groups. Hence, they (over 60 years of age) indicate the least interest in “participation in cultural activities” and “Japanese heritage sites” among the four groups of age. However, they are willing to recommend other people to “try Japanese special food”,

“participate in cultural activities” and “travel to heritage sites in Japan”.

This finding agrees with some previous studies in other heritage destinations such as Lee *et. al.* (2016) in Chinatown, Singapore and Yankholmes (2010) in Danish-Oso, Ghana that the younger visitors highlight a very profitable and active target segment, while the older focus on spending their appraisals [32, 26]. However, this may serve as a risk as modern amenities may dilute the traditional customs and general historical heritage of the destination.

This result suggests that the “over 60 years old” group are also interested in the activities like other groups, but they would not like to

participate in because of their physical abilities/ age. Therefore, traveling operators and managers should have more services and support for senior tourists to serve them better during their trips in Japan.

Although the respondents of this study indicated that they are happy with their trips in Japan (SA1) and would like to return (SA4), the behaviors of the people in each group according to some demographic criteria are not the same. Tables 12 and 13 show that there are significant differences in their satisfaction and future intention behavior due to their traveling experience and the group of people they were going with.

Table 12: ANOVA tests for TB items among “Age” groups

Items	<25 n=36	25 to 40 n=121	40 to 60 n=29	>60 n=25	F	Sig.
TB1	6.17	6.29	6.22	5.00	2.68	.014
TB2	5.92	5.92	5.44	5.80	0.54	.900
TB3	6.25	5.68	6.33	4.80	3.60	.006
TB4	6.61	6.06	6.11	5.40	2.72	.003
TB5	5.94	6.08	6.44	6.00	0.53	.716
TB6	6.33	6.09	5.67	5.80	1.23	.238
TB7	6.14	6.08	5.56	4.40	3.67	.013
TB8	5.72	6.00	5.89	5.94	0.72	.211
TB9	6.56	6.34	5.89	5.00	4.82	.000
TB10	6.28	6.12	5.56	6.00	1.06	.820
TB11	6.45	6.40	6.23	6.10	2.50	.760
TB12	5.90	5.85	5.49	5.60	3.10	.350

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

Table 13: ANOVA tests for SA items among “Traveling group” groups

Items	Go with family (n=61)	Go with friends (n= 98)	Go on tour (n= 8)	Go alone (n= 44)	F	Sig.
SA1	6.56	6.28	5.50	6.57	4.04	.008
SA2	5.98	5.60	5.50	4.89	4.37	.005
SA3	5.16	4.84	5.50	4.11	3.63	.014
SA4	6.38	6.23	5.75	6.45	1.30	.277

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

Table 14: ANOVA tests for SA items among “Number of visits” groups

	First time (n=102)	Second time (n=33)	More twice (n=76)	F	Sig.
SA1	6.62	5.94	6.28	7.45	.001
SA2	5.66	5.18	5.59	1.16	.316
SA3	4.95	4.06	4.93	3.56	.030
SA4	6.44	5.91	6.29	3.30	.039

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

People who visited Japan by a tour operator/agency have least satisfaction with their trip among the four groups, however, they are most willing to share their experience about Japan on some traveling websites. Understanding this behavior is important for the promotion and marketing activities of Japan tourism as travel websites is one of the prime channels of information that the potential tourists would look for.

Moreover, the people who visited Japan for the first time and more than twice have the highest score of satisfaction (SA1) and are most willing to share their experiences with other people on their personal social media channels and travel websites (SA2 and SA3). They also have higher intention of return to Japan (SA4).

4.4. Government tourism policymakers’ views towards the Japanese heritage tourism development opportunities

In Japan, the local government in each municipality or prefecture plays an important role in tourism policy and management. Central government and ministries only give out the general directions and support upon the request of local governments. However, they both agree about some threats to heritage tourism development in the coming time.

4.4.1. Aging population and cultural heritage fading

Japan has been experiencing the issue of aging population to an unprecedented degree. More than 20 percent of Japan’s population

is over 65 years old, the highest proportion in the world [33]. This not only affects economic growth, but also makes changes to family and social structures in the world’s third largest economy.

Recently, the aging problem is becoming more and more serious. In rural and remote areas, which retain many elements of Japanese cultural and natural heritage, it is mostly elderly people who are left behind after the young have moved to urban areas for schools and jobs.

According to the government officers in the Agency of Cultural Affairs (ACA), this is a problem to cultural heritage retention in Japan. Cultural heritage includes tangible and intangible heritage elements which are passed from generation to generation. Therefore, cultural heritage belongs to and lives within the local community, through the conservation of its people. As there is a little proportion of young people living in the rural and heritage sites, people have less chances to know or learn. There is a risk that some cultural heritage will disappear when this elderly generation passes away. In January 2017, 60 cultural events in 20 prefectures have been shelved due to falling populations and aging.

However, they all agree that tourism, especially heritage tourism, would be an ideal solution for heritage and culture conservation. As the people recognize the benefit from it, they would like to retain their heritage for the next generation. Therefore, despite the depopulation, the policymakers still want to push up the heritage tourism image and attract more international tourists to visit these sites to create more jobs and income for the local people. They wish to make more highways, *shinkansen* (high-speed train) routes, and tourism facilities to turn these heritage sites into tourism destinations. However, as it was revealed above, the problem to the international tourists were difficulties in communication, language barriers, and information searching. They did not find any problems or dissatisfaction with the public transportation and tourism facilities. Therefore, this is the first gap between the international

tourists' demand and the local government's view of tourism service development in heritage sites in Japan.

The second gap lies in how people consider the way to participate in traditional cultural activities. As this study and some other previous ones have found, most heritage tourists these days are young people (under 25 years old) and they prefer joining cultural activities and festivals as a type of recreation or life experience. They would be satisfied more if the cultural heritage can be combined with modern technologies to gain more experience. However, the Japan ACA has spent most of its heritage retaining funds to conserve the heritage sites and values as they were in the past.

4.4.2. Shortage of labour force in tourism industry

The aging population also leads to another problem for Japanese tourism, especially in rural areas. That is the shortage of labour force in tourism industry. The working-age population (15-64 years old) in Japan is decreasing significantly. Currently, in many rural areas in Japan, there are no children or young people. In some villages in remote areas, all the local people are over 60 years old, and many of them are over 70 years old. In Japanese urban areas, the ratios and numbers of seniors are also increasing.

This situation raises a concern about the shortage of labour, especially in the tourism industry. As the Japanese government plans to increase international tourist arrivals and turns Japan into a "tourism country" as per the declaration of the National Tourism Policy (2016), the lack of a tourism labour force would be a problem to the tourism authority [23]. According to the officers of the Ministry of Justice, they have planned to attract more international workers to work in Japan, especially in rural areas, however, the lack of working-age people still a big question to them, especially due to the situation of the COVID-19 around the world.

This is the third gap between the increasing in the number of visitors in Japan heritage sites in the recent years and the ability of tourism labor force that these sites can serve.

5. Recommendations for heritage tourism innovation and conclusion

The Japanese government declared their ambition to turn the country into a highly international competitive tourism nation. The Japan Tourism Vision Realization Program 2018 (Action Program for Realization of Tourism Vision 2018) announced at the 9th meeting of the "Ministerial Conference for the Promotion of Tourism" (June, 2018) that becoming a "tourism nation is a key task essential for economic development of the nation in the 21st century" in view of a declining birthrate and aging population and full-fledged development of international exchanges, together with promoting its culture and heritage value [23].

The most beneficial attributes of Japanese heritage tourism to international tourists are (1) visiting ancient castles and architecture, national heritage sites, ancient villages and museums, (2) participating in festivals, food cooking and the tea ceremony, and (3) enjoying onsen experience. Even though COVID-19 has raised a high concern in the attitude of the international tourists about the risk of travelling during this time, they are still keen on Japanese cultural activities and heritage experience. That would be an advantage to the Japanese tourism recovery after COVID-19 pandemic time.

According to the study, there are some gaps between the demand of the international tourists and the government policymakers' view towards the innovation of Japanese heritage tourism.

While tourists seek for more convenience in communication and services, the officers are concerned about creating more tourism access and facilities in rural sites. They wish to have more tourists to visit these heritage places to create more jobs so that young Japanese people will stay and retain their cultural heritage and traditions. However, the international travelers

are interested in festivals, food and drink, natural sites and architecture like castles, museums, temples, etc. rather than cultural knowledge and history.

From the insights of this study, there are some issues that need more innovation from the tourism enterprises and public policies to improve the satisfaction and experiences of international tourists:

(1) There should be more foreign language training for public staff, officers, and local people in the tourism/heritage sites. If they are working or living in a tourism site, the local government should help them communicate with and help international tourists to get familiar with the infrastructure and traffic system in their area.

(2) Besides Japanese, the public signboard, information leaflets, maps, traffic instructions, etc. should be written in English and other languages to help international tourists to find destinations more easily, and save time and cost for their travel, especially for people who are going with their family.

(3) The Japanese websites about tourism destinations need more upgrades and to be easier to understand to help international tourists understand better about the places they want to visit, as almost half of the respondents in this study found it is difficult to understand and follow these websites.

(4) According to this study, the people who visit Japan through a tourism agency or tour operator are less satisfied with their visit and less willing to return. The Japanese tourism authority should work more with these agencies and operators, train them how to serve their customers and help them to bring more cultural activities and experiences to tourists.

(5) Visitors of above 60 years old are less willing to participate in cultural activities, festivals or heritage sites visit, but they are eager to recommend these activities to other people. There should be more studies on this issue to understand more about this group of tourists' needs. They might find some difficulties due to their age and physical abilities and would need

more help from the tourism service staff than younger tourists.

(6) Heritage tourism product development: AI, 3D media, and other advanced technologies are the advantage of Japan; however, they are applied mainly in urban areas and prime tourism destinations. In rural and remoted areas, the application of these smart technologies is limited. They can provide the enjoyable experience and convenience to the tourists, and can partially help with language barrier problems and reduce the risk of COVID-19 and/or other pandemics. Smart technologies can be used as a tool to preserve cultural heritage and enhance the live experience to the visitors, especially for the young people, introducing some new methods of cultural performance and traditional knowledge education. It may earn more attention, and interests of international tourists in learning and participation into rare cultural heritage of local or ethnic communities.

Future research is necessary to investigate the attitude and behaviors of tourists visit Japan through a tourism agency or tour operator, and senior international tourists of above 60 years old to increase their satisfaction with and understanding about Japanese culture and heritage values.

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