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Tourism in Japan

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Tourism in Japan is a major industry and contributor to the Japanese economy. Foreigners visit Japan to see natural wonders, cities, historic landmarks, and entertainment venues. Japanese people seek similar attractions, as well as recreation and vacation areas.

In 2019, Japan attracted 31.88 million international tourists. Japan has 21 World Heritage Sites, including Himeji Castle, Historic Monuments of Ancient Kyoto and Nara. Popular attractions for foreigners include Tokyo and Osaka, Mount Fuji, ski resorts such as Niseko in Hokkaido, Okinawa, riding the Shinkansen and taking advantage of Japan's hotel and hotspring network.

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The 2017 **Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report** ranked Japan 4th out of 141 countries overall, which was the highest in Asia. Japan gained relatively high scores in almost all of the featured aspects, such as health and hygiene, safety and security, cultural resources and business travel. In the 2021 edition of the report, now called Travel and Tourism Development Index, Japan reached the 1st place.



Mount Fuji, as seen from Fujiyoshida, Yamanashi

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Crowds of tourists at a bamboo forest in Kyoto

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History

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Himeji Castle in Himeji

Following the Meiji Restoration and the building of a national railroad network, tourism became more of an affordable prospect for domestic citizens and visitors from foreign countries could enter Japan legally. As early as 1887, government officials recognized the need for an organized system of attracting foreign tourists; the *Kihinkai* (貴賓会), which aimed to coordinate the players in tourism, was established that year with Prime Minister Itō Hirobumi's blessing.

Its early leaders included Shibusawa Eiichi and Ekida Takashi. Another major milestone in the development of the tourism industry in Japan was the 1907 passage of the Hotel Development Law, as a result of which the Railways Ministry began to construct publicly owned hotels throughout Japan.

For much of post-war period, Japan has been an exceptionally unattractive tourist destination for its population and GDP size. According to the IMF, WTO, and OECD, from 1995 to 2014, it was by far the least visited country. As of 2013, Japan was one of the least visited countries in the OECD on a per capita basis. Within six years however, the number of international visitors has more than tripled, reaching a peak of 31.9 million visitors in 2019.

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Current status

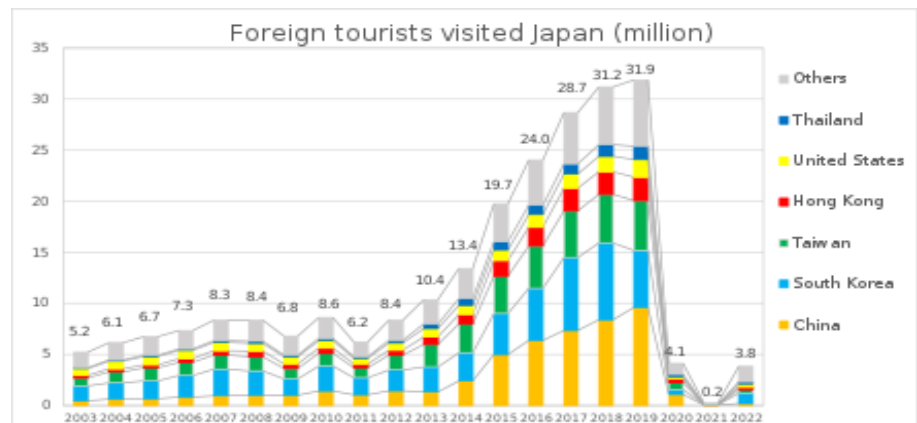
Tourists from South Korea have made up the largest number of inbound tourists several times in the past. In 2010, their 2.4 million arrivals made up 27% of the tourists visiting Japan. Travelers from China have been the highest spenders in Japan by country, spending an estimated 196.4 billion yen (US\$2.4 billion) in 2011, or almost a quarter of total expenditure by foreign visitors, according to data from the Japan Tourism Agency.

From 2016 to 2020, Japanese government hoped to receive 40 million foreign tourists every year by 2020. According to the Japan National Tourism Organization in 2017, 3 out of 4 foreign tourists came from other parts of East Asia, namely South Korea, Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Japanese film, TV, video game, and manga/anime industries, who lead a role in driving tourism to Japan. In surveys held by Statista between 2019 and 2020, 24.2% of tourists from the United States, said they were motivated to visit Japan because of Japanese popular culture.

⑤ Tourism statistics

Foreign tourists to Japan



These are the top 5 nationalities that visited Japan from 2017 to 2023.

Country/Territory	Total						
	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
South Korea	6,958,500	1,012,751	18,947	694,476	5,584,597	7,538,952	7,140,200
Taiwan	4,202,400	331,097	5,016	487,939	4,890,602	4,757,258	4,564,100
China (Mainland)	2,425,000	189,125	42,239	1,069,256	9,594,394	8,380,034	7,355,800
Hong Kong	2,114,400	269,285	1,252	346,020	2,290,792	2,207,804	2,231,500
United States	2,045,900	323,513	20,026	219,307	1,723,861	1,526,407	1,375,000

⑤ Major tourist destinations (Okinawa)

Okinawa Prefecture – Shuri Castle, Nakagusuku Castle, Nakijin Castle etc. They are parts of the Gusuku Sites and Related Properties of the Kingdom of Ryukyu. (WHS), Ishigaki Island, Miyako Island, Iriomote Island, Traditional Ryukyuan Houses in Taketomi Island.

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