

Interview with Prof. Honda

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Japanese domestic and outgoing tourism

Japan-ferien.ch GmbH (JF): *The tourism industry makes important contributions to value creation and job preservation throughout Switzerland. To ensure that this system survives without damage (after the Corona crisis), tourism is partially supported by the government.*

Question: In what condition is tourism after the Corona crisis in Japan, how can small travel agencies survive? Are tourist companies supported by the government? (As I know the Japanese government will support tourism with the Go To Campaign at the end of July)

Prof. Kazuhisa Honda (KH): Yes, tourism industry will be supported by local and national governments, including “Go To Travel Campaign.” Now Japanese government decided to allow international travellers on business of four countries (Thailand, Vietnam, Australia, and New Zealand) to visit Japan with some conditions such as PCR test at airport, the submission of their schedule, keeping their record where they go and who they meet, and so on. Though Japanese government wants wealthy tourists from other countries to come back and spend much money in Japan as they did before Covid-19 crisis, Japanese people in general will remain to be cautious of international travellers to avoid the risk of widespread infection.

On the other hand, the travel restrictions beyond prefectures for people (Japanese and international) living in Japan was lifted and Japanese government seemingly tries to encourage them to spend their money to stimulate national and local economy. Local governments will financially help accommodations to discount fees, though many areas are cautious of people from big cities where many cases of infection are reported.

JF: *Content marketing is suitable for the corona crisis to convey targeted information and messages that are now important. That's why companies use all of their channels, such as their own website, social media accounts, newsletters and messengers, to make their content accessible to a wide audience.*

Question: Is this kind of sales and information strategy also used in Japan?

KH: Almost all the tourism corporations, travel agencies, accommodations, hospitality industries, and so on, have their own websites and SNS (such as Facebook) to provide customers with information about their services. It is important to update their own websites with new information, but more effective strategy is to let their customers actively share their experiences and memory in tourist destinations on SNS and websites, which can motivate other potential customers to visit there and contribute to the advancement of tourism industry. In addition, it is necessary for tourism corporations to catch up with new preferences of tourists and consumers by interacting with them on their websites and SNS.

*French sociologist Maurice Halbachs’s concept “collective memory” explains well how tourists enjoy their experiences by posting and sharing their memories with others on SNS. Collective memory can be potentially constructed among viewers and be expected to motivate them to visit the destinations.

JF: *A new study in Switzerland confirms that the desire to travel internationally is currently quite low.*

Question: How is the situation in Japan?

KH: While Japanese people are still scared of the mass inflow of international tourists, some seemingly want to travel in and outside of Japan. Though international flights are not ready yet, famous tourist places such as Okinawa attracted many people from Tokyo just after the emergency declaration was lifted, which means potentially that some people will travel abroad after the government permits the international travelling for leisure. However, many Japanese people are afraid of social pressure: If they are infected in tourist destinations, in and outside of Japan, people will condemn them for their “reckless behaviour.”

JF: *After this crisis, will Japan have still the target of having 40 million people a year (as before the Corona crisis)? Or are there new ideas for more sustainable tourism in Japan yet?*

KH: Some people criticized the Japanese government for its failure to restrict the free entrance of international and Japanese tourists from January to March, which is said to have caused the national crisis of Covid-19. (In fact, the DNA sample of Corona virus shows that it came from Europe, maybe as a result of Japanese tourists coming back to Japan.) The government and industry had expected affluent high and middle class tourists from other countries to come, but a lot in

Japan, and stimulate Japanese economy, but now some commentators and experts on tourism start to point out that it is economically risky to be too dependent on international tourism. And others warn that diplomatic relations between Japan and neighbouring countries can affect tourism.

In this context, the Japanese government is hesitant to expand the scale of inbound tourism to 40 million for now. The Tourism Report 2020, recently published, avoided mentioning the numerical goal of 40 million tourists from other countries, and emphasized the importance to expand domestic market instead.

***JF:** Where do you see improvements in domestic tourism after the Corona crisis? Or are there no new opportunities?*

KH: For now, many places experience difficulties to invite tourists from other areas, especially big cities where many cases are reported. It seems that accommodations in rural areas hesitate to welcome tourists: A manager of a popular pension in the countryside explained that local people are watching each other, which is typical in traditional communities in Japan. He said that they would have to give up their business under strong social pressure of Gemeinschaft if their customers (Japanese or international) should be found to be infected by the virus. However, he is not pessimistic about the situation: They are preparing for the chance to welcome tourists while selling local food products online with their special YouTube movie of fish catching in the ocean, the process of manufacturing the products, and so on.

Other places are suddenly exposed to the large inflow of tourists from Tokyo after the restriction was lifted. People try to find good places for mental refreshment and then go to Okinawa, Kamakura, Karuizawa, and so on, but ironically these places attract too many people and local people are feeling frustrated with so-called overtourism.

***JF:** How do you see the situation of tourism during Corona crisis in Japan? If Japan will take the risk to invite foreign tourist or they will avoid the risk.*

KH: Some politicians, commentators, and experts are saying that we should not sacrifice economy in order to reduce the risk to the zero because it is impossible (and I support the idea that we have no alternative but to live with Corona virus). As is mentioned above, however, local people in the countryside are scared to start their business again for now.

As for international tourism, the central and local governments expect wealthy tourists from other countries like China to stimulate their economy, but Japanese people in general seemingly hesitate to accept them now.

Though local people in the countryside are still worried about the widespread of COVID-19, more and more restaurants in Tokyo and its neighbouring cities go back to business and customers start to come back after patiently staying and eating at home for two months. Most of them still wear surgical masks in public places, but they feel much safer now.

***JF:** Some Travel agencies are trying to offer new product which called digital tour or digital activities.*

Question: How do you see about digital tourism? Would it be one of good potential tourism element in the future?

KH: Digital tour can provide viewers with knowledge about destinations such as their cultures, history, traditions, geography, politics and economy, and so on. Namely the targets of virtual tourism in cyber space seem to be upper or middle class with high education and intellectual curiosity, not consumeristic mass tourists.

However, more important is to keep interaction between tourism industries and their customers. It is necessary to catch up with changing preferences of customers.

My greetings to our Swiss friends: Though Japanese people in general is still worried about the risk of Covid-19, Swiss people will be definitely welcome when the crisis is over and Japanese government decides to lift the restrictions on international flights. Some places in the countryside will probably hesitate to have tourists, Japanese people from Tokyo or international for a while, my friends Thomas, Yoshi, and Alan of japan-ferien.ch will find beautiful places with local cultures, traditions, rural lifestyle, nature, and so on, in and around Tokyo, for example. We are always keeping in touch and sharing information about changing situations in Japan. I hope to see you someday soon!

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